

**17-18 NOVEMBER 2020****Refers to  
agenda item 3.4****Agenda Item 3.4****Stimulating MA Governance reform****Summary**

Challenges at the MA governance level are diverse and complex. Individualized support and firm compliances are necessary. This demands tough decision making and diplomatic management from RDs with support and oversight of the Board of Trustees. Ranging from need to control to lack of trust on management to an extreme of having vested interests – both MA management and Regional Offices are managing the issues of the MA boards and aims to achieve a Federation wide governance reform.

With support from the decisions at Delhi General Assembly, ten MAs have been awarded support for governance reform and are on their path of bringing about the same. A strong leadership and engagement from Board of Trustee is requested to influence the fellow volunteer leaders from MA governance particularly in regions where being on board is seen as prestige rather than as responsibilities such as South Asia and Africa.

It is critical to acknowledge that if the governance will not match the modern service delivery and ideology of transparency and objectivity, the quality of work will start getting impacted in many countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Tanzania and Guinea.

**Action Required**

BOT **to note** the progress on the MA governance strengthening initiative and **to lead** governance reform across the federation.

## **Stimulating MA Governance Reform**

### **Purpose**

It is critical that as the leaders of the organization, the current Board not only be cognizant of the issues faced within Member Associations regarding governance interference and/or ineffectiveness and be the force to bring about the change. Multiple layers of decision making; vested interests and power dynamics were the most obvious threats that were controlled by the governance reform brought in through the General Assembly decision within IPPF. Post the governance reform at the IPPF, charged with commitment shown by donors and ambition reflected in the dialogue in Delhi, IPPF launched the MAs Governance strengthening program in April 2020 following the IPPF Governance Reform.

But in order for the Board to be the partners in change and support the regional offices, it is important to share some of the challenges faced by Regional Offices while dealing with governance particularly in regions where traditionally “being in board” is seen more as prestige and less as responsibility – namely South Asia and Africa.

### **Issues**

As trustees, many of you are already familiar with challenges in governance space, but it is critical to review some of them to demonstrate the challenges and thereby appreciate the action taken and needed.

Often crisis in some of IPPF MAs emanates due to volunteer factional fights and for power struggle in the Associations. Sometimes, we see staff in collusion with volunteers in these struggles.

But one of the most difficult areas has been volunteers not willing to pass on the baton of leadership at board’s level. IPPF’s board rotation policy and 15-year tenure cap is often not appreciated and implemented in some of the known large MAs with otherwise strong leadership and management. Accreditation is an effective tool though which has been handy to deal with this on the surface, but often there is a situation where organisations have to let go opportunities - the challenge led to Bhutan stepping down from Associate member to collaborative member. Or sometimes a shadow leader who operates from behind the scenes – the situation of “founder-syndrome” that we right now have in Iran – as a result almost crippling the current leadership. The changed IPPF is dealing with these issues strongly, Bhutan is keen to now be Associate Member and we are supporting them to revamp the board and for Iran the process of accreditation has just started which we hope will through some options on moving forward.

Another set of issues are around complex governance structure built around the membership derived from locations where the MA operates. National board membership through an electoral process appoints board hence the elected are often not necessarily very impactful or influential at national level and vulnerable to groupism and politics. Added to that there is lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities or accepting the complementarity of roles, leading to conflicts with management. For example, in Bangladesh, it is a struggle to explain to the board the difference between oversight and management where the governance wants to set up committees such as recruitment, travel oversight, procurement etc. Again the online training helped a lot but it had to take a direct address of the Regional Director to the Board Meeting not only to keep them away from day to day management but

to not stop the progress critical deliverables such implementation of improved salary structure, appointment of staff below senior management team by the management etc.

The worst situations happen in two scenarios where it might become very critical for the Regional Office to take some bold decisions. Particularly in these situations – either when there are issues of safeguarding such as in Kenya and Tanzania or when the Board members become too political internally and also might bring country party politics within the governance of MA such as in Nepal. It is so difficult in Nepal that there are legal cases against each other in court of law and the governance has come to stand still. The board has requested to get an Administrator appointed (since they don't have an ED), but the Regional Office is keen to get a commitment of governance reform beyond this stage. This is a repetitive situation for the country, and it is critical that IPPF takes a firm decision, particularly because FPAN is the largest, most efficient and most known organization in the country. Therefore, the Regional Office is trying to push a commitment of governance change before committing to appointment of administrator or any support on management and governance.

Finally, there are issues of quality of membership. Strong and capable individuals might not find membership attractive since eminent and highly influential people do not want to contest elections which are usually highly political. The membership base is often diverse but not necessarily skill-based or experienced enough to lead strong national organisations. Such as again for most members in Nepal, Guinea and Senegal.

Therefore, it is hoped that IPPF Board of Trustees will champion the reform and push the fellow board members to commit to governance reform to make all the MA boards relevant and resilient; engaged and energized; and committed and grounded. This will be a fulfilment of the commitment made in November 2019 in Delhi.

### **Update on the current project**

The project's aim is to support 10 MAs with two phases: the first phase focuses on the SWOT analysis of the governance structures, systems and processes while the second phase focuses on the implementation of the recommendations. A Governance Secretariat support team was appointed to coordinate the project. 22 MAs applied for the first phase of this initiative. 10 MAs were selected through a competitive process that included geographical diversity, the size and structures of MAs. With the separation with WHRO, one MA left the project, and the on-going phase continues with nine.

While it has been a challenge to get the MAs with most challenging governance to apply for the initiative it is our hope that once the process starts and the results are visible there will be more MAs that will realize its importance. There are donors who are keen to see that the governance is aligned with the mission more firmly and are ready to support the process. Meanwhile, ROs are engaging with MAs through accreditation processes and through their governance challenges, encouraging them to initiate governance reform process – locally owned and globally supported. This is not always easy, but often an important agenda to pick up at every opportunity that RD would face with MA governance, particularly in regions such as South Asia and Africa.

### **The learning**

The secretariat support team supported MAs in selecting local consultants to carry out the work. Most MAs are in the process of contracting the consultants and the first phase of the project is expected to be completed by December 2020.

A few specific lessons for the secretariat to follow can be mentioned:

- The response rate to the call for application was low. This was however attributed to the COVID 19 crisis. It could have been a lack of clarity or adequate communications on the MA reform process.
- Full MA ownership was identified as critical for the success of the project. It led ROs to have conversations with each MAs to address their concerns and fears.
- A proactive approach from the Secretariat to “unpack” the initiative, ensure full understanding, clarity on the purpose of the project helped the pro
- Close coordination among and within the governance reform team for consistency and experience-sharing as the project moves on.
- The initiative is a rich opportunity to collectively reflect different governance models amongst MAs of the federation

The second round of MA governance reform should be built on the lessons learnt mentioned above to motivate other MAs in the federation. It would also be critical to develop MAs ‘confidence in new governance processes to ensure the success of the second round. Clear communications and a Frequently asked questions paper should be developed to support MAs understanding. We should ensure that from the initiative are shared and used by MAs and inform other processes such as the IPPF Leadership Fund, Women’s leadership training institute and the upcoming accreditation review cycle.

### **Expectation from the Board**

It is expected that this will be as one of the key deliverables for the Secretariat but a key initiative for the board to carry the baton from New Delhi to ensure that the mission and model are aligned. The Trustees might need to invite their fellow trustees at the MA level and encourage a governance reform across the federation. The organization that changes By Choice For Choice must start from the governance and leadership who takes bold decisions not only to ensure effective services but also effective organization systems and firm governance processes.