Q&A with HSG Board Election Candidates

July 1, 2024

This is a Zoom Q&A chat (unedited) from the July 1st session 'Meet the HSG Board Candidates'. To see the full discussion and HSG candidate answers to HSG member questions posed verbally, please watch the recording of the session.

1. **Kate Hawkins: Hi, I have been a member since the first conference in 2010. I co-founded the community health worker group and am a member of three others. During my engagement with HSG I have seen the organisation's waxing and waning commitment to gender equity (as expressed through conference themes, statements sessions and other public communications). How would you ensure that gender analysis is sustainably embedded into the organisation's action and theorising?**

    - Ahmad Firas Khalid: Hi Kate, thanks for the question. This is an important question. For me, this requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates gender equity into every aspect of the organization's operations and strategic planning. How do we do this? 1) Develop and implement a comprehensive gender equity policy that mandates gender analysis in all HSG activities, including research, conferences, publications, and communications. This policy should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect current best practices in gender equity. Example, establish a gender equity task force within HSG, composed of members from diverse backgrounds, to oversee the implementation of gender-focused initiatives and ensure compliance with the gender equity policy. 2) Require all research funded or endorsed by HSG to include a gender analysis component. Researchers should be provided with guidelines and training on how to incorporate gender perspectives into their work.
    - Barbara Profeta: Kate, thanks for your question. I have not seen a clear/explicit statement/positioning of HSG about gender and gender analysis. I would very much like to start by accompanying the board in elaborating a vision and a stand about gender issues and SOPs to apply them within the board and the society itself.
    - Shubha Nagesh: Hi Kate. Many thanks for bringing gender analysis into this conversation. Embedding gender analysis sustainably into an HSG's actions and theorising requires senior leadership to commit to gender equity as a core value of the organization; a commitment that should be visible in statements, policies, and resource allocation, develop explicit policies and guidelines that integrate gender analysis into all aspects of the organization's work, conduct regular training sessions for staff at all levels to increase awareness about gender issues, unconscious bias, and best practices for gender-sensitive approaches, collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data to monitor progress towards gender equity goals. And ensure that gender considerations are mainstreamed into all programs, projects, and activities.
    - Rosemary Morgan: I have so many ideas! I love what others have said so far and would absolutely support this. Conducting gender needs assessments, developing gender strategies and action plans would help us to strategically integrate gender across HSG, with consideration of how gender intersects with other stratifiers.
    - Kate Hawkins: Certainly, great to have an intersectional approach.

2. **Jill Olivier: I have also been an engaged member since Montreux. I would like to know if any candidates have specific (better/new) concrete ideas on how HSG can better profile the**

importance of HPSR as a field to global stakeholders (the field as a whole, not specific personal research agendas); and linked to that, ideas of how HSG can improve fundraising (for the symposia, for core HSG activities, but also more broadly pushing for more funding opportunities for all types of HPSR)

- Barbara Profeta: Hi Jill. Thanks for your question. On the fundraising front, I believe the HSG could take the opportunity of a challenging (fatigued?) solidarity-based funding environment to interrogate its business model. Being a membership society provides avenues to mobilize resources from within its membership and related networks. Differentiating and facilitating membership of national bodies, communities of practitioners and for-profit institutions (interested in the information, technical support, and learning opportunities they might want to buy for a fee if they see it as relevant to their work) based on a clear value proposition (see my answer above) could well complement more "classical fundraising".
- Shubha Nagesh: Thanks, Jill. Some of my insights would be around clearly articulating the impact of HPSR on health outcomes, health system performance, and population health. Showcase success stories and case studies that demonstrate how HPSR has led to tangible improvements in healthcare delivery and policy formulation. Advocate for increased investments in HPSR through policy briefs, advocacy campaigns, and participation in policy forums. Highlight the role of HPSR in achieving global health goals such as Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Explore diverse funding sources including public grants, private foundations, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and innovative financing mechanisms. Tailor funding proposals to match the interests and requirements of different donors.

3. **Jeff Knezovich: Although there have been various efforts, HSG has struggled to go beyond hosting biennial symposia, hindering the development of a stronger HPSR community. Additionally, the society faces a challenging funding environment. What steps will you take as a Board member to ensure the society's long-term sustainability and that it contributes to a thriving and dynamic HPSR community?**

- Ahmad Firas Khalid: We as a board should implement a multi-faceted strategy focused on diversifying funding, enhancing member engagement, and strengthening capacity building. Explicitly, we should seek grants from organizations like WHO and the Gates Foundation, initiate partnerships with private sector companies, and launch targeted crowdfunding campaigns for specific HPSR projects. To keep the community engaged beyond biennial symposia, we should establish an online platform for continuous interaction and organize regular virtual events such as webinars and Q&A sessions with HPSR experts. Additionally, we should develop mentorship programs and accredited training courses in partnership with universities to build a pipeline of skilled HPSR professionals. We are already doing many of those things and we can leverage existing strengths of previous efforts and supplement them with new ideas that have clearly defined objectives of strengthening HSG to improve fundraising, and better profile the importance of HSPR as a field.
- Rosemary Morgan: This is an important question! Having global reach and being visible is so important to increasing the profile of HPSR and securing funding. One way to do this is to develop regional hubs with regional leads, focusing on HPSR topics important to their regions. Regular virtual events, including capacity building events, would also help to strengthen the community and help members network.

- Ahmad Firas Khalid: As a former Board Member of Doctors Without Borders Canada, we continuously looked at new funding models and we learned over the years that one of our best fundraising activities has been fueled by active members who see added value in HSG and as such contribute financially to it. As a board, I believe that we should also be looking at our members for that level of support - tapping into the power of the cohort in mobilizing funding and securing funding through individual members who value HSG's role in pushing the field forward. Another option is to partner with other organizations to share costs associated with some of the activities of HSG, especially the symposium and providing scholarships to enable early and mid-career researchers from the global south.
- Maia Uchaneishvili: Let me also contribute and agree with you that some intermediate actions are needed, as one of the leads of HSG Europe regional working group I have initiated a regional pre-conference which is the first attempt in the region and regional fundraising has been actively applied and will be happy to share experience and lessons learnt. In addition, I do suggest HSG to facilitate Policy Dialogues and Knowledge Sharing Platforms: HSG can organize regular policy dialogues, roundtable discussions, and knowledge-sharing events that bring together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to exchange insights, best practices, and innovative solutions based on cutting-edge HPSR findings. Here are some specific and action-oriented strategies I would propose to diversify and expand funding sources for HPSR: I would advocate for HSG to actively engage with global health financing platforms, such as the Global Fund, Gavi, and the World Bank, to secure dedicated funding streams for HPSR. By positioning HPSR as a critical component of effective health system strengthening, we can tap into existing global health funding mechanisms to support research and innovation in this field. I would promote collaboration and coordination among traditional HPSR funders, such as governmental agencies, foundations, and multilateral organizations, to pool resources and leverage collective funding for larger-scale HPSR initiatives. By forming donor consortia, we can maximize impact, reduce duplication, and attract sustained funding for priority HPSR areas.

4. **Kuhika Seth: Hi, I am a fairly new member of the HSG, and I would love to understand HSG's commitment and focus on youth representation especially those from marginalized and minority groups so that it is more concrete and consistent.**

- Ahmad Firas Khalid: Hi Kuhika, welcome to HSG 😊 excited to have you part of this thriving community. I want to highlight first some of the great things HSG has been doing in this area of focusing on youth representation. First, there is the emerging voices program that I am part of which focuses on strengthening youth representation, including early and mid-career researchers in the field and policymakers (great network with extensive engagement in the alumni cohort). Second, the thematic working group such as the one I am co-chairing, evidence to action network, has an explicit focus on supporting the youth through a mentorship program of pairing youth, early and mid-career researchers with seasoned researchers who can support them navigate new knowledge areas in the field to research, and to link their questions to real-world health systems problems that need added focus. More work can be done in this area of increasing youth representation, especially from marginalized communities - exploring co-funding models to support their participation in the symposium but also beyond the symposium. For example, we can explore pairing youth, early and mid-career HSG members ahead of the symposium so that they have a "buddy" helping them navigate active participation at the HSR symposium and beyond. A very

important area for me as I am an avid believer in the increasing participation of youth in HSG.

- Ahmad Firas Khalid: Absolutely! I love that you brought up evaluation - at the TWG E2A group, we are considering an evaluation to assess strengths and barriers for better engagement - the same should be done across other initiatives at HSG. Strengthening the Youth is a must for HSG - as they represent the current and future of this field. Keep advocating Kuhika, your voice is needed and is definitely heard by me and many others.

5. **Sreytouch Vong: Hi, I have been a member of HSG since 2014. I wish to hear more from HSG candidates on how HSG can promote more equitable participation of junior researchers from LMICs in HSR and other HSG's agendas?**

   - Ahmad Firas Khalid: To promote more equitable participation of junior researchers from LMICs in HSR and other HSG agendas, HSG can build on existing successful initiatives and introduce new strategies. Firstly, programs like the Emerging Voices and thematic working groups, such as the Evidence to Action Network, have already shown the importance of mentorship and networking. Expanding these initiatives to include more researchers from LMICs is crucial. This can be achieved by offering targeted scholarships and grants to ensure these researchers can attend and actively participate in HSG events. Additionally, HSG should organize more virtual events and webinars, reducing financial and logistical barriers. Creating a dedicated fund to support research projects led by junior researchers from LMICs will also provide them with the resources needed to pursue innovative research. Establishing online platforms for continuous interaction and forming international research collaborations will help build a robust support network for these researchers. Moreover, HSG can implement a "buddy" system, pairing junior researchers from LMICs with experienced members before symposia to guide them through the event and beyond. Co-funding models can further support their participation, making it financially feasible for them to engage fully. Lastly, advocating for the inclusion of these researchers in global health policy discussions and ensuring diverse representation in HSG leadership will help integrate their perspectives and contributions, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic HSR community.
   - Rosemary Morgan: Hi Sreytouch! Great question and something which is important for HSG to focus on and prioritize. Regional structures might help with this, as it would allow more people to get involved. Sometimes junior researchers also need to be actively invited to participate. I'd also love to see more Town Halls - regional and global - focused on key issues like this one.

6. **Jill Olivier: If you had to choose as a strategy, would you all suggest we focus on consolidating (and 'redrawing in') the existing HSG network - or focus on growth in all directions?**

   - Ahmad Firas Khalid: As a board, we should adopt a balanced approach that consolidates and strengthens the existing HSG network while also pursuing strategic growth in all directions. Consolidating our current network will involve deepening engagement with existing members through enhanced communication, targeted capacity-building initiatives, and creating more opportunities for collaboration. For example, establishing specialized working groups and regional chapters can foster closer connections and support among members. Simultaneously, we should focus on growth by expanding our outreach to new members, particularly in underrepresented regions and disciplines. This can be achieved by leveraging

digital platforms for global engagement, hosting inclusive events, and forming partnerships with organizations that align with our mission.

- Shubha Nagesh: Jill, ultimately, the choice between consolidating/redrawing in versus growth in all directions depends on HSG's current and future strategic priorities, resources, and desired outcomes for expanding its influence and impact within the global health systems community. Consolidating and redrawing in the existing HSG Network could allow enhanced collaboration, resource efficiency, and a cohesive identity. Focusing on Growth in All Directions could lead to the expansion of influence, diverse perspectives, and resource mobilization. We could consider a balanced approach that combines elements of both strategies and involve current members in decision-making processes regarding network consolidation or growth to ensure alignment with their needs and aspirations.

7. **Jill Olivier: And a final question - how would you suggest we handle 'network-fatigue' of members? For example, for those with roles in HSG (whether that is in TWGs or Board or other) - would you suggest we handle it directly (i.e., monitor engagement, have difficult conversations), or just accept we are all volunteers and enthusiasm sometimes ebbs and flows?**

   - Ahmad Firas Khalid: Regularly monitor engagement through surveys and check-ins to identify signs of fatigue early, and offer flexible role management to allow members to take breaks or switch roles as needed. Recognize and appreciate contributions through awards and public acknowledgments, fostering a culture of appreciation. Encourage open communication about workload and support work-life balance initiatives to prevent over-commitment. By offering meaningful engagement opportunities and accepting natural ebbs and flows in enthusiasm, HSG can maintain a dynamic and supportive community without risking burnout.
   - Sara Ardila: Hi Jill. I think that part of the fatigue is related to asking unstructured requests. It is better to ask for small and concrete tasks and have clear agreements about the time needed to do something. Being realistic when asking for something. And I will add, say thank you at the end of the work, have good closures when someone leaves a given position. This is not done often, in my experience.
   - Barbara Profeta: Jill, this is a great question! I would definitely support hard conversations because a membership society without its members cannot sustain itself even with the best of intentions from its managing body. Where does fatigue come from is something we ought to understand, in order to adapt the value proposition to a possibly new demand (is HSG in 2024 serving the same community as in 2010?) or "let go". Membership to a society is rarely a lifetime commitment and one must be realistic at that... keeping "old friends" might not be the end goal; instead, I would encourage and accompany the board in defining strategies for smart and meaningful "replenishment".

8. **Taufique Joarder: What strategies can be implemented to enhance the recognition of health policy and systems research as a distinct (albeit cross-cutting) field or discipline? Additionally, how can awareness of Health Systems Global be increased among health policy and systems researchers and other relevant researchers?**

   - Karen Grepin: Health systems classically have been under-appreciated and neglected and thus it is not surprising that it is a challenge to secure funding to support HPSR and capacity development in this area. I think HSG has done a great job over the past decade+ to

establish itself as THE institution that supports HPSR globally and as such, I think the key is to further strengthen this reputation and to leverage it to build more funding to support these activities. I think this can be done with greater collaboration with other institutions and organizations. So, it is both about consolidating efforts around HPSR but at the same time finding select opportunities to collaborate with others to advance the HSG agenda and to secure sustainable financing flows.

9. **Pragati Hebbar: What are the 2-3 key priorities for HSG in terms of engaging and supporting its members? Can I request all candidates to reply in the thread to this question in bullet points to get a sense of the direction in which we might be going in the coming years?**

- Barbara Profeta: Improving value proposition of the society and accountability (if it does not come out clearly to members of a membership society how they can benefit from the society, the latter has an accountability problem). Evaluate the current members' demand for the society.
- Ahmad Firas Khalid: An area worth engaging in discussion on is how do we connect better with Policymakers (a key priority area for HSG as per the strategic plan) - I do not believe we do enough to connect with policymakers. As a policymaker myself working in government, I can tell you that policymakers are not well engaged with HSG - more needs to be done here.
- Rosemary Morgan: Having stronger communication and engagement with members through welcoming them, introducing people to the community, town halls for new members to meet the board, networking opportunities, etc. Make people want to join HSG – think about what the incentives are for different people (not just academics), how we can really make this a community of people.
- Karen Grepin: Developing new opportunities for our members to go beyond attending symposium to engage in meaningful research and capacity development activities. Develop HSG branded knowledge products (e.g., training programmes, case studies, journals, research networks) to provide sustainable financing and advance our mission. Strengthen our regional networks to bring the HSG from the Global down to the National Levels.
- Maia Uchaneishvili: My suggestions are a couple: On an individual level, we can continue support with the needs-tailored capacity-building activities, such as mentorship and even scale up to the different forms such as fellowships, etc. On an organizational level, we can support twinning arrangements/cross-organizational networks to share experiences and set research agendas. In addition, HSG can work with national governments and key stakeholders to establish dedicated HPSR units within health ministries or institutions or outside as independent organizations depending on the context. These units can serve as hubs for synthesizing research findings, conducting policy analysis, and disseminating evidence to inform policy decisions effectively.
- Ana Amaya: We need to create more opportunities for engagement, whether that is through webinars on specific topics or even thinking about some networking opportunities within regions. This is crucially important to really create community and have a space to discuss ideas, get advice, and even form research collaborations. I think there is a lot that can be explored within the countries so we're not just meeting each other every four years but on a more regular basis. We need to support and increase the participation of underrepresented researchers who may not be based in a university or think tank but that nonetheless are generating really important and impactful research. For this, we should think about creating a mentorship program focused on early-career and underrepresented researchers. This can include how to get published, as well as skills for networking and outreach to support the

impact of their work. Improving our communication with the membership. I don't think it's always clear what the board does and how this impacts the society. The importance of doing this is so we can get more feedback from the membership about what they need in terms of support and for them to be aware of some of the Society's constraints which explains the decisions we need to make. I think clearer communication and more opportunities to interact would go a long way in building belonging within HSG.

- Rosemary Morgan: Strengthening regional networks is important!
- Barbara Profeta: Promote operational participatory research and better recognition of empirical evidence within the scientific and policy-making communities.
- Karen Grepin: I think a lot of people see the symposium as a way to present our work from completed projects - more of an endpoint. Instead, I think we should spend more time at the symposium to allow people to start new projects and activities - a kick-off rather than a culmination event.
- Renzo Guinto: To add: showcasing the amazing work of our individual members through the website, social media, etc.
- Barbara Profeta: I also think we should facilitate participation in HSG events to non-members to leverage "voices from reality", which often go unheard when discussing health systems get too theoretical.
- Priya Balasubramaniam: Strengthening regional membership - make HSG attractive for regional priorities.
- Ayat Abu-Agla: As a member of HSG since 2014 and co-chair for TWG T&L, may I suggest to better HSG: 1-Regional stewardship in leading/coordinating TWG and HPSR efforts; 2-Support TWGs both non/financial.