"Operational Research: Central to Shaping MSF's Voice, Actions, and Vision"

Operational research must be at the heart of shaping MSF's operations, advocacy, and accountability, aligning with our vision of what we want to be.

What is Operational Research and why is it critical for MSF?

Operational research is the science of improving performance—essentially, 'doing better.' It drives smarter medical humanitarian operations and generates strong evidence for *témoignage* (advocacy and witnessing). For over two decades, it has been central to MSF's ability to deliver impactful humanitarian assistance. By learning from successes and failures, it fosters accountability to patients, donors, and staff, driving continuous improvement and enabling better care in the face of new challenges.

Illustrative examples.

Example 1. Two decades ago in Mali, MSF clinicians received repeated complaints from patients about chloroquine's ineffectiveness. Initial reluctance for research - "We are too busy with operations"- gave way to studies that revealed a staggering 95% failure rate in treating *Plasmodium falciparum* malaria. The finding exposed a stark reality that while operationally busy, we were providing ineffective and useless treatment.

The research drove a critical shift to effective treatments, saving countless lives. Without operational research, it would have been 'business as usual'. This example highlights the indispensable role of operational research in ensuring the relevance and impact of our interventions.

Example 2. In the 2000s, sub-Saharan Africa faced a devastating HIV/AIDS crisis. Over 25 million were infected, and 17 million—including many MSF staff—had already died. Amid the despair, Andrew Natsios, then head of USAID, dismissed providing antiretroviral therapy (ART) in Africa, his words were a stunning indictment of both the people and the possibilities:

"The problems extend to the Africans themselves. They do not know what watches and clocks are... they don't know what Western time is and won't take these (AIDS) drugs correctly."

This defeatist rhetoric ignited MSF's determination to prove otherwise. Through Operational research MSF demonstrating that universal ART access was not only possible, but life-saving. Frail patients like Phiri from Malawi, once at the brink of death, experienced the transformative "Lazarus effect", regaining health and hope. This example underscores how operational research dismantled prejudices, silenced skeptics, and revolutionized the fight against HIV/AIDS forever. MSF's success became a global beacon of hope, saving millions and driving lasting change.

Example 3. In 2015 and early 2016, over one million migrants and refugees, fleeing conflict and clinging to hope, journeyed on foot through the Balkans to Europe. Their aspirations met razor-wire fences, sealed borders, and violence as European nations turned their backs with harsh and inhumane policies. MSF exposed the brutal truth: nearly one in three migrants

treated in its clinics had suffered violence, with state authorities—including European officials—responsible for more than half of these acts. Declaring a "crisis of protection and safe passage," MSF refused to stay silent, using operational research evidence to demand respect for international human rights and refugee law. The resolute advocacy sparked global attention and spurred debates and action including within the European Parliament contributing to a significant decline in violence against migrants.

Operational Research: A Necessity, Not a Luxury

Decades of success show that operational research is essential, not optional. It is now high-time for MSF to embed it deeper into its core activities, making it a cornerstone of our mission to amplify impact and reinforce our humanitarian identity.

We contend that operational research should be embedded in MSF's core vision to:

1. **Improve Effectiveness:** Optimize resources to deliver high-quality care with maximum impact for patients and communities.
2. **Support Evidence-Based Decision-Making:** Provide data-driven insights to shape policies and operations rooted in reality.
3. **Strengthen Accountability:** Build trust and promote continuous learning through rigorous analysis and transparency.
4. **Enhance advocacy:** Provide robust evidence to advocate for policy changes and spotlight challenges faced by vulnerable populations.

Vision for Operational Research Units.

We envision a new, proactive role for MSF's Operational Research units— positioning them as pivotal leaders in our humanitarian mission through two key roles:

1) **Actionable science:** Generating practical, evidence-based insights that serve as the eyes, heart and voice, to inform, guide, and strengthen our actions and *témoignage*.
2) **Real-time Research:** Conducting real-time operational research, with timely analysis, providing information to shape and adapt ongoing activities especially in emergencies.

To fulfil these roles, we ask that these units receive stable and sustained support. They must be prioritized as essential drivers of MSF's mission to provide high-quality, accessible care, in line with *The MSF We Want to Be.*

Motion: "Operational Research: Central to Shaping MSF's Voice, Actions, and Vision"

We call on the IGA to affirm that operational research must become a central element in shaping MSF's operations, advocacy, and accountability, in alignment with the MSF we want to be.

This motion seeks:

- **A fundamental shift:** Embedding Operational Research early and more deeply in MSF's social mission to help inform and drive our humanitarian operations and reinforce our commitments to patients and donors.
- **Strategic utilization:** Leveraging operational research to advance MSF's mandate, guide policies, and achieve measurable improvements in access to care, quality or care and our human resources. These efforts aim to enhance humanitarian outcomes in alignment with *the MSF we want to be*
- **Enhanced functionality:** Strengthening operational research units with improved structures, processes, and resources. This includes building real-time research capabilities to generate timely information that guides our actions in emergencies, for hard-to-reach populations, and in situations involving humanitarian dilemmas.