



From Crisis to Catalyst: Rethinking Philanthropy's Role in global health and the UN

Public Event and Online on Webex

Date: Tuesday, December 2, 2025

Time: 12:15 -14:00 with reception following

Venue: Geneva Graduate Institute, Chem. Eugène-Rigot 2,

Maison de la Paix, Pétale 2, Auditorium A2

Registration is required: limited places available for an *in person* participation

For registration please visit the IHEID - event website:

<https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/events/crisis-catalyst-rethinking-philanthropys-role-global-health-and-un>

This Event is organised by the International Relations / Political Science Department, Geneva Graduate Institute (IHEID) and co-hosted by the University of Warsaw, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies.

Concept note:

The current structural and financial crisis in the UN has not only raised questions about the effectiveness of the entire global governance system, but has also shown that the governance logic of this institution - established in 1945 - may no longer be viable. Over time - especially over the last two or three decades - the role and influence at the UN of non-state actors such as philanthropic foundations have increased, particularly in the WHO and area of global health. Their impact, however, should not be seen only in financial terms, but in multiple dimensions - including structural, legal and normative ones.

The current withdrawal of the United States from its financial obligations and leadership role in global health has caused a domino effect in global affairs, and has forced the UN and WHO to look for different partnerships, including with the philanthropic and private sectors, which raises the question of how that alliance will be shaped in the future.

This seminar will bring various perspectives and areas of expertise together to discuss how the current crisis can be used to strengthen the role of philanthropy at the UN. The aim is to spark a wider debate about the future conditions of the partnership between the UN and philanthropic foundations, with the primary focus on global health and the World Health Organization (WHO) - a UN Specialized Agency.

The debate will address questions such as:

1. How has the current crisis reshaped how philanthropy is perceived in global health and how the UN/WHO and the philanthropic sector cooperate?

2. How can both - the UN/WHO and foundations - adapt to this new situation in order to make existing cooperation mechanisms more effective? What have we learned so far, and how can these alliances be improved?
3. How can the UN and the WHO better engage with philanthropy and the private sector in order to turn the ongoing crisis into an opportunity?

Programme:

Opening remarks:

Ravinder Bhavnani, Professor, Head of the International Relations/Political Science Department, Geneva Graduate Institute

Setting the stage:

"Make the WHO great again?" Global context, philanthropy and the future of the UN/WHO

Anita Budziszewska, Postdoctoral researcher at the University of Warsaw and at the International Relations / Political Science Department and Global Health Centre, IHEID

Roundtable discussion:

Speakers:

Mahnaz Vahedi, Scientist/Researcher, Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, World Health Organization

Catarina Mastellaro, Head of Strategic Engagement at the WHO Foundation

Nadya Wells, Senior Research Adviser, Global Health Centre, Geneva Graduate Institute

Raymond Saner, Professor, University of Basel, co-founder of CSEND, a Geneva-based NGRDO with ECOSOC accreditation and consultative status

Lichia Saner - Yiu, Professor, President and co-founder of CSEND, a Geneva-based NGRDO with ECOSOC accreditation and consultative status

Moderator:

Annabelle Litzo- Monnet, Professor, International Relations/Political Science Department, Geneva Graduate Institute

Timetable - overview:

12:15-12:30 Registration

12:30-12:33 (3 mins.) Opening remarks: Ravinder Bhavnani

12:33-12:43 (10 mins.) Setting the Stage: Anita Budziszewska

12:45-13:35 (50 mins.) Panel discussion

13:35-13:55 (20 mins.) Audience Q&A

13:55-14:00 Closing Remarks (5 mins.) Ravinder Bhavnani/Anita Budziszewska

Réception

Seminar will be hosted by the International Relations/Political Science Department, Geneva Graduate Institute and co-sponsored by the University of Warsaw, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies (IDUB programme) as part of an ongoing research project "Philanthropic Foundations and International Organisations" conducted by Anita Budziszewska at the International Relations/Political Science Department, Geneva Graduate Institute, in 2025/2026.

*Organisation: [Anita Budziszewska](#) and [Stéphanie Schweitzer](#), Department Manager at the International Relations/Political Science Department, Geneva Graduate Institute.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Opening/Closing Remarks

Ravinder Bhavnani

Professor, Head of the International Relations/Political Science Department, Geneva Graduate Institute



Ravi Bhavnani is Professor and Head of the Political Science & International Relations Department at the Geneva Graduate Institute (IHEID). Bhavnani's research explores the micro-foundations of violence using data-driven modelling. More specifically, his work examines the endogenous relationships among: (i) the characteristics, beliefs, and interests of relevant actors; (ii) social mechanisms and emergent social structures that shape attitudes, decision-making and behaviour; and (iii) patterns of violence. His articles have appeared in *American Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Politics*, *Complexity*, *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of*

Peace Research, *Journal of Politics*, *Nature Humanities and Social Science Communications*, *Political Research Quarterly* and *Political Psychology*, among others. His recent research explores the drivers of acute child malnutrition in conflict settings, as well as use of AI-enhanced techniques to measure, report and predict undernutrition in these hard-to-access areas.

Setting the Stage

Anita Budziszewska

Postdoctoral researcher, the University of Warsaw and International Relations/Political Science Department, and Global Health Centre, Geneva Graduate Institute



Anita Budziszewska (Ph.D) is a postdoctoral researcher at IHEID, International Relations/Political Science Department and Global Health Center. She works at the University of Warsaw, Department of Diplomacy and International Institutions. She is also a research fellow at the Centre for Philanthropic Studies, University of Basel. Before joining IHEID, she conducted research on "Philanthropy and International Relations" at the Geneva Center for Philanthropy at the University of Geneva, funded within the Swiss Government Excellence Programme. She was also a stipendist of the Swiss-based Anneliese und Mieczyslaw Kocwin Stiftung. Her current project at IHEID: "Philanthropic Foundations and International Organizations" focuses on business models of

cooperation between selected UN Specialized Agencies and the philanthropic sector, as well as on the political, normative, regulatory, axiological and financial processes taking place within the UN and its Agencies, particularly the WHO, with regard to the evolving presence of philanthropic foundations in the structures and programs of UN/WHO/UN Agencies.

Speakers

Mahnaz Vahedi

Scientist/Researcher, Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, World Health Organization



Dr Mahnaz Vahedi is a Scientist at TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, hosted by the World Health Organization. She leads TDR's health research leadership initiatives, including the Clinical Research Leadership Programme—a philanthropic effort supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and implemented in collaboration with pharmaceutical companies, product development partnerships (PDPs) and research institutions. Dr Vahedi also oversees TDR's Postgraduate Training Scheme, a network of eight universities across the Global South focused on advancing health systems and implementing research in four priority areas: diseases of poverty, climate change and health, epidemics and outbreaks, and antimicrobial resistance. Since joining TDR in 2004, she has coordinated multi-country clinical trials on tuberculosis and HIV co-infection, and led operational research on antiretroviral therapy scale-up in several African countries. Her background as an Iranian woman, combined with her early career as a clinician and researcher in both urban and rural Australia, have given her a deep appreciation for diverse public health systems. Dr Vahedi holds a medical degree and a Master's in International Health from the University of Sydney. Her work reflects a broader shift in global health philanthropy—from traditional aid models to strategic investments in locally led capacity-building and research equity. At the intersection of health diplomacy and philanthropic strategy, she champions inclusive partnerships, evidence-informed policymaking and leadership development as essential drivers of sustainable global health progress.

Catarina Mastellaro

Head of Strategic Engagement, WHO Foundation



Catarina Mastellaro is a global public health and development professional with over 15 years of experience in strategy, partnerships, and grant management. She has worked across global organizations including the Global Fund, McKinsey, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the United Nations. In her current role as Head of Strategic Engagement at the WHO Foundation, Catarina works hand in hand with WHO and partners to identify synergies and advance collaboration, with a focus on increasing financing and scaling access to healthcare globally. She holds a Master's degree in Development Studies from the Graduate Institute and Bachelor's degree in International Relations from the University of Sao Paulo.

Nadya Wells

Senior Research Adviser, Global Health Centre, Geneva Graduate Institute



Nadya Wells is a researcher and experienced finance and investment professional whose passion is building bridges to facilitate increased financing for global health. Her current research focuses on challenges in the antibiotic investment ecosystem which preclude research, development, production and access to appropriate antibiotics. Her work on failed commercialisation of novel antibiotics and antibiotic supply chain collapse has garnered considerable attention from policy makers. Most recently she worked on the FINPHARM project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, exploring the impact of Financialisation on Global Health through a series of pharmaceutical case studies where she

led the work on anti-microbial resistance (AMR). Prior to joining the Global Health Centre, Nadya spent over 20 years as a long-term investor and corporate governance specialist. Since 2014, she has pursued a plural career combining non-executive board roles in the financial sector in multiple countries with her academic work in Global Health. She holds a PhD in Biomedical Sciences from the University of Geneva, an MBA from INSEAD, and an MA in Modern History and Modern Languages from the University of Oxford.

Raymond Saner

Professor, the University of Basel and co - founder of CSEND, Geneva



Raymond Saner (Ph.D) is Titular Professor at the University of Basel and Director of Diplomacy Dialogue based in Geneva. He has taught in the MPA programme of Sciences Po in Paris, is engaged in the 2030 Agenda, and contributes to UNDESA and UNOSD as a researcher, speaker and author on Sustainable Development. He is a former ICRC delegate and an evaluator of the Geneva Initiative. His current research focuses on the role of Philanthropic Organizations within the UN system and the complexity of Blended Finance options for infrastructure investments in Developing Countries.

Lichia Saner-Yiu

Professor, President and co-founder of CSEND, Geneva



Professor Lichia Saner-Yiu is President and co-founder of CSEND, a Geneva-based NGO with ECOSOC special consultative status. A former Post-Doctoral Fellow at Columbia University, she holds an Ed.D. from Indiana University. She has authored over 80 publications, co-convened the SD Learning Module (2015 HLPF), curated the UNOSD Executive Training Course (2021–2024), co-authored *Public Goods, Sustainable Development and the Contributions of Business* (2021), and has written on other topics related to organizational behaviour and stakeholder engagement.

She contributed to The WHO on Motivation of Health Workers (1985), Reorientation for Primary Health Care (1985), Intersectoral Action for Health (1986), and the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (2016).

She currently represents the Geneva Global Health Hub at the IGWG meeting on Pathogen Access and Benefits Sharing.

Moderator

Annabelle Littoz- Monnet

Professor, International Relations/Political Science Department, Geneva Graduate Institute



Annabelle Littoz-Monnet is Professor of International Relations/Political Science at the Geneva Graduate Institute and former Director of the Global Governance Centre. Her research is at the intersection of global governance, privatisation dynamics and the politics of knowledge. Her articles have appeared in journals such as the *International Studies Quarterly*, *European Journal of Political Research*, *Governance* and *Journal of Common Market Studies*. Her book *Governing through Expertise. The Politics of Bioethics* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2020. She is currently the principal investigator of a project on Deblackboxing Expertise in Global Governance, funded by the Swiss

National Scientific Fund.