**PMAC Speaker Session** **PL3 "Decolonizing Global Health**

**Expanding Practice-Based Evidence to Advance Gender Equality in Health Programmes: Insights from a Decolonial Feminist Partnership**

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Significant progress has been made in global health and gender equality over the past 50 years. Ground-breaking technological advancements, improvements in service delivery, an ever-growing evidence base, and global commitments have contributed to marked reductions in child and maternal mortality, increased access to health services, and increased life expectancy worldwide​. While these achievements are notable, health inequities and gender inequalities persist and are widening, largely linked to the effects of economic instability, climate change, conflicts, rising authoritarianism, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the global backlash against gender and human rights. While we acknowledge the achievements made thus far, it is vital to recognise the urgency of the work that lies ahead in tackling gender inequalities and health inequities. This begs the question: why have our global efforts and commitments stalled? Where can we improve, and how do our current practices and structures reinforce and sustain the inequalities we are trying to address?

I begin this session by recognising that the status quo, in terms of approaches, institutions, structures and systems, is not effectively leading us towards the desired outcomes of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and beyond. To help us stretch our imaginations and deconstruct many of the assumptions that uphold harmful systems and patterns of discrimination, I want to begin by focusing on power. Fundamentally, the misuse and abuse of power lie at the heart of existing health inequities and gender inequality.

Decolonial feminist ways of working are underpinned by sharing power, moving beyond hierarchical and extractive ways of working to collective action for social justice. It recognizes that the personal is political – striving to practice on a personal level, what we are striving to change in the world outside. All too often well-intentioned research seeking to advance gender equality, in the health arena and beyond, intentionally or unintentionally falls prey to ubiquitous patriarchal and neo-colonial norms which are often internalized and reproduced in research projects.

In this session, I will discuss how the United Nations University’s International Institute of Global Health (UNU-IIGH), the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) and the University of the Western Cape, South Africa (SOPH-UWC) intentionally adopted a decolonial and feminist approach to build a reflexive south-to-south collaborative research project to analyse real-life practice-based lessons and key factors facilitating and sustaining the integration of gender in government health programmes across Africa, South Asia, and South-East Asia. The session will create space to share reflections on this process and the added value of a decolonial and feminist approach to research findings.