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My New Role, I-MAK's Same Vision

After 17 years of co-directing I-MAK with my co-founder Priti Krishtel, this month I stepped into the role of CEO. As I reflect on the work we have to do going forward, it brings me back to thinking about where we started.

I-MAK is, and always has been, dedicated to changing the structural power dynamics that allow health and economic inequality to persist, whether domestically or globally. That's been consistent for over 17 years now.

I didn't come to this work as an access-to-medicines advocate. I came to it as an intellectual property lawyer, in fact one who had mostly worked for private industry. My expertise wasn't in medicines access. It was in power, specifically in how power is shaped and wielded through legal systems to maintain a comparative advantage for those who already have it.

When Priti Krishtel and I began building I-MAK on the back of a napkin in Bangalore (true story), our goal was to build an organisation that would expose the power imbalances in our global medicines system and ensure those most affected are represented in how policy is made. I-MAK's next chapter is an acceleration of that work.

And what a moment to be doing it. Not only is momentum for drug patent reform surging in the U.S., but there is a growing understanding that reimagining our intellectual property regime is fundamental to building a more just global knowledge economy that serves everyone. Simultaneously, people are seeing that the only way to get there is with more open and inclusive policymaking structures. In just the last two months, I've sat in rooms in D.C., conventions in Nashville, and convenings in Rio and seen this in action: an intersectional, unified wave of voices committed to the work of democratising power.

That's exactly what I-MAK is here to do. We're addressing the overpatenting at the root of America's drug pricing crisis by opening up data that the pharmaceutical industry has held secret and driving real solutions to address inequities in the patent system. Braided into this work is our vision of a future where global knowledge systems are tools of progress rather than weapons of power.

The two pictures here – a photo I took at a protest in Bangalore against a proposed patent law and a shot of our small team in 2005 gathering around a table figuring out our (successful) challenge of one of Abbott/AbbVie's patents for the HIV drug Kaletra – take me back to I-MAK's origins. Right now, I couldn't be more excited for I-MAK's future.

Onwards,

Tahir