



## Midterm Report:

### Early Lessons from the Hewlett Foundation's Principled Approach to Supporting Local Advocacy

Prepared by the Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program  
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# Five Principles for Shifting Power and Strengthening Capacity

In 2016, the Hewlett Foundation launched a [new grant-making strategy](#) to support local family planning and reproductive health (FPRH) advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa. The strategy is grounded in a set of five principles aimed at shifting agency and authority towards civil society organizations (CSOs) advocating for greater access to sexual and reproductive health and rights in Sub-Saharan Africa:

- Support local advocacy while seeking opportunities to connect these to global advocacy efforts.
- Strengthen and provide more hands-on and sustained technical assistance tailored to each organization.
- Support longer-term advocacy partnerships that strengthen and support local advocacy capacity.
- Encourage mutual accountability among all parties: funders, intermediaries, and local partners.
- Measure progress, document, adapt, and share what is learned.

The strategy's goal: a vibrant local CSO sector in sub-Saharan Africa that can capably and positively influence the family planning and reproductive health policies and funding decisions of their own national governments and of international donors. From the strategy's establishment in late 2016 through 2018, the foundation has supported twelve grantees and over a hundred local CSOs who partner with these grantees.

The Aspen Institute's Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program (APEP) is serving as the foundation's evaluation partner for the first five years of the strategy's implementation. The evaluative approach is intentionally aligned with the strategy's principles, allowing for learning and adjustments as the strategy has unfolded. The purpose of this developmental approach to evaluation: help the foundation, its grantees, and associated CSOs learn, improve, make timely adjustments to strategy implementation, and share lessons with others.

## The Portfolio\*

### Advocacy Partners

Three international non-governmental organizations (INGO) received five-year grants to provide local CSO sub-grantees with funding and capacity support aimed at advancing the sub-grantees' advocacy agendas.

- *Equilibres et Populations*
- *International Women's Health Coalition*
- *Population Action International*

### Opportunistic Engagement Grantees

Eight INGOs encompassing organizations and multi-donor efforts at the country and regional levels support CSOs' capacity and advocacy strategies in diverse ways.

- *Center for Reproductive Rights*
- *Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung (DSW)*
- *IntraHealth*
- *Johns Hopkins University/Advance Family Planning*
- *Mannion Daniels/AmplifyChange*
- *International Planned Parenthood Federation Africa Regional Office*
- *Partners for Population and Development Africa Regional Office*
- *World Faiths Development Dialogue*

### Advocacy Accelerator

Supported through a grant to Amref Health Africa, the Accelerator is an online and in-person platform that aims to strengthen advocacy capacity and support knowledge exchange among CSOs and other stakeholders working on health and development in Africa.

\*Note: In late 2018, DSW became an Advocacy Partner; in 2019, FOWODE and CEHURD became Opportunistic Engagement Grantees.

This report summarizes key findings and recommendations, based on evaluation activities conducted in 2017 and 2018.

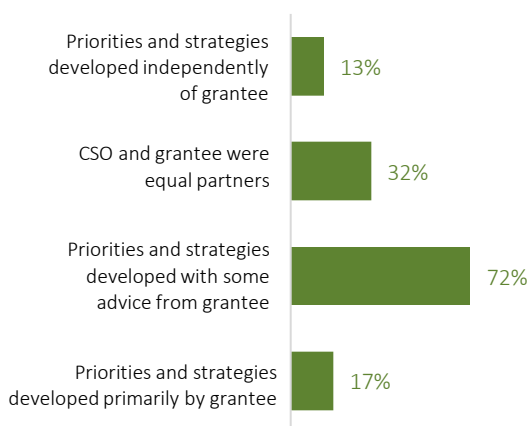
Locally  
driven policy  
advocacy  
priorities

## Principle One: Support local advocacy while seeking opportunities to connect these to global advocacy efforts

The strategy and its core principles encourage a shift in decision-making authority away from the foundation and its grantees and towards local organizations, reducing the perceived tendency of funders and intermediary organizations to drive CSOs' decisions about policy advocacy priorities. Our surveys asked CSOs and grantees to comment on how advocacy priorities are determined.

**Responses from CSOs suggest that most feel that they have a "say" in developing advocacy priorities and strategies.** Moreover, 94% of CSO survey respondents in 2018 indicated that the advocacy activities they pursue with support from grantees were "very consistent" with the CSOs' overall objectives.

**Figure 1. Most CSO survey respondents report that they play a substantive role in developing their advocacy priorities and strategies**



Note: Percentages total to more than 100 because some respondents selected more than one response option. Source: 2018 CSO survey.

**But CSOs' advocacy priorities may sometimes be guided by or even constrained by the overarching frameworks that shape the work of the INGO intermediaries.** Examples include the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Ouagadougou Partnership, the Maputo Protocol and Action Plan, FP2020, and the funding priorities of the Hewlett Foundation, the Gates Foundation, and other funders. These frameworks may be national, regional, or even global in scope. We heard little evidence that CSOs felt compelled to pursue objectives that they would not have chosen; but this merits further exploration.



### Recommendations

- ▶▶ Grantees should continue and deepen their respect for CSOs' level of autonomy when collaborating on defining advocacy agendas, managing their own privilege and power, and prioritizing CSO perspectives and ways of working.
- ▶▶ APEP should delve more specifically into the degree of CSO autonomy in setting their policy advocacy targets.
- ▶▶ Beginning in 2019, the foundation will provide core funding that includes direct capacity strengthening support to two local CSOs, FOWODE and CEHURD, as part of this strategy. This is different from the model relying on INGOs as intermediaries who strengthen CSO capacity. The foundation should work with APEP to identify how the strategy principles apply to this direct capacity strengthening relationship between the foundation and local CSOs.

Tailored and  
sustained  
technical  
assistance

## Principle Two: Strengthen and provide more hands-on and sustained technical assistance tailored to each organization

### How do grantees assess the technical assistance needs of CSOs?

**INGO grantees reported varied approaches to identifying CSO partners' technical assistance needs, some more structured or formal than others.** In most cases, these processes are either bi-directional (with both the grantee and CSO identifying capacity needs) or CSO-driven, with the CSO playing the primary role in identifying needs through self-assessment processes. Grantees report that this information, in turn, informs the kinds of capacity support that they provide.

Two Advocacy Partners relied primarily on the [Advocacy Capacity Review](#) (ACR) developed by the APEP team. This facilitated self-assessment became the grantees' formal, structured process to determine capacity strengthening priorities to be supported by grant resources and integrated into grant plans. The ACR is intended to help CSOs identify short-term advocacy capacity needs and broader, long-term organizational effectiveness needs.

Other grantees relied entirely on self-assessments with varying emphasis on specific advocacy tactical capacities versus longer-term organizational needs. Still others used a needs assessment process, built into their review of CSO requests for capacity development or funding.

The Advocacy Accelerator uses a combination of approaches to assess CSO capacity needs, including post-webinar surveys, a broader survey of advocates, and needs assessment surveys prior to in-person trainings.

### What approaches do grantees use to help CSOs strengthen their capacity?

Capacity support was delivered in many forms, including connections to other organizations and learning opportunities, one-on-one guidance, and trainings and workshops.



**57% of CSO survey respondents in 2018 reported that they had participated in an online or in-person training offered by a grantee.**

Examples varied widely, ranging from AFP's SMART advocacy workshop to a webinar on the Global Gag Rule to a training on how to use a newly installed accounting software. In some cases, the trainings appeared to be designed broadly for use with various CSOs. While less "tailored," such trainings can address commonly identified needs.



**CSOs report that grantee visits or check-in calls offer opportunities for responsive, "real-time" assessments of evolving capacity needs.**

This approach can helpfully address needs, challenges, and questions that emerge during joint implementation of advocacy projects. It can keep the advocacy work moving, and it can focus on concrete issues and solutions.



**CSOs value the advice of peer CSOs, as well as support from grantees for convening CSOs working in the same field in different countries.**

CSOs also value funding to support their participation in international meetings and conferences.



**Capacity development often includes ongoing forms of support, such as regular communication to help problem-solve or offer advice.**

Ongoing communication and technical assistance provision can also be part of an iterative process to help CSOs develop a specific capacity over time. Activities like these can be aligned with the principle of providing sustained capacity support to CSO. But time spent during check-in calls on grant management activities such as proposal planning or accounting review may do little to build capacity.

*“The SMART advocacy training was conducted in a participatory way where [grantee] provided the technical guidance while we were learning by doing. The process was very effective because it enabled us to quickly master the skill.”*

– CSO

**The evidence suggests that grantee practices in technical assistance provision are generally aligned with the strategy's principles.**

They include some level of needs assessment and tailored capacity support that responds to stated needs; they generally offer some longer-term, sustained attention to organizational development as well as short-term, responsive interventions that may be more “project-focused” in support of an advocacy objective. But we caution: support that is tightly focused on meeting needs related to a specific advocacy project can undercut the strategy's more ambitious vision for sustained, long-term organizational development.

The Foundation chose Advocacy Partner grantees and some Opportunistic Engagement grantees that were already inclined to honor CSOs' advocacy and organizational development priorities. The principles encourage this respectful behavior and can contribute to less “project-focused” support for tactical advocacy capacity and more focus on organizational development – an aspect of shifting power towards the local level.

Which capacities did CSOs most frequently prioritize?

- ➔ Advocacy strategy formulation
- ➔ Networking and coalition building
- ➔ Use of evidence and research
- ➔ Messaging and communications
- ➔ Learning and evaluation
- ➔ Organizational development:
  - Financial resource base
  - Staff retention
  - Data and personnel security

What progress did CSOs make in strengthening their priority capacities?

- ➔ **CSOs' assessments of progress were relatively optimistic**  
77% of CSO survey respondents reported that they made a lot of progress on one or more of their capacity strengthening priorities.
- ➔ **CSOs were more likely to perceive a lot of progress on:**
  - Advocacy strategy formulation
  - Networking and coalition building
  - Messaging and communications
- ➔ **CSOs tended to report mixed or weaker progress on:**
  - Resource mobilization/fundraising
  - Learning and evaluation
  - Use of evidence and research in advocacy

We are cautiously optimistic that such shifts in authority are taking place in some cases. But we are wary that INGOs can still influence policy priorities to align with broader global frameworks like FP2020, perhaps at the expense of more localized priorities. This can influence a focus on capacity building priorities that are tactical rather than those that contribute to enduring organizational strength.

## How does grantee support contribute to strengthened capacity?

**The support that grantees provide is often part of a broader range of assets, experiences, and external resources that CSOs draw on to develop their organizational and advocacy capacities.**

Some CSOs in our sample call on a breadth of external funders, technical assistance providers, and advisors; networks within and across countries; research or resources from other expert groups; and connections within local, sub-national, or national governments and agencies. Hewlett grantees do not supply all of the capacity assistance that CSOs require. CSOs are, by necessity or choice, resourceful about finding other sources of support – some of which may be supplied deliberately as part of a grantee's capacity-building plan, while others are approached more opportunistically through other contacts and resources.

From a methodological standpoint, this range of resources that CSOs draw on makes it difficult to trace the through-line between the capacity needs that CSOs identify and the support that they ultimately receive from Hewlett grantees. But the breadth of potential sources of funding and capacity building support is one of the enabling factors that supports capacity development. Exposure to other capacity support providers in some cases led to new ways of thinking about advocacy strategy and tactics.

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*“The important thing is that [INGO grantee] does not tell you what to do. They are very flexible. They will look at your ideas and come back with some more advice. The technical piece is where they will look at things for you and help connect you with other organizations.”*

– CSO

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**Overall, the data point to broad satisfaction with the quality and relevance of assistance that CSOs received from their Hewlett grantee partners.** And we observe several cases where CSOs explicitly note

that the assistance responded to a need they had identified. For example, CSOs reported specific instances in which grantees offered support for broader organizational effectiveness. This included advice about board governance and management processes, improved technology, and capacity to employ technology effectively. Some CSOs also credited grantee capacity support in part for improved capacity to fundraise effectively, at least in the form of introductions to other funders.

But we also observe some divergence between what CSOs report as capacity development priorities and the assistance that grantees report they have offered. In a small number of cases, CSOs identified failures to deliver on promised technical assistance or incomplete follow-up. In other cases, inconsistency between stated priorities and the capacity support offered may reflect change over time in what CSOs identify as “the” top priority capacities.

**A challenge: APEP's consultants in Dakar and Nairobi believe that CSOs are reluctant to offer any criticism of grantees.**

In some cases, they report, CSOs simply cannot imagine having the authority to question the kind of capacity support they receive from Hewlett grantees or perhaps from INGOs in general. This is an important caveat on the positive reports from CSOs concerning the quality and utility of that support.

With regard to the Advocacy Accelerator's role in strengthening CSO capacity: the Accelerator's mandate to provide resources and support for CSO health and development advocacy in Africa is significantly broader than its role in supporting the foundation's grantees and their CSO partners. Our evaluation of its role within the “Hewlett ecosystem” does not represent a full assessment of its success in fulfilling that mandate. That said, our evaluation data suggest that there is potential for the Advocacy Accelerator to play a stronger role in complementing Hewlett grantees' efforts and approaches to strengthening the capacity of their CSO partners.

## What factors inhibit capacity strengthening?

Survey and interview responses from grantees as well as CSOs, along with our own observations, reveal some potentially formidable inhibitors to developing and applying organizational capacities.

**There are gaps in information sharing and knowledge about capacity strengthening resources.** We heard little evidence that the INGO grantees share information among themselves about the services and support they provide to CSOs – though we have not asked them about this directly. CSOs and INGO grantees lack detailed knowledge about the availability and quality of technical assistance providers locally or regionally.

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*“We would love there to be a directory of TA providers... including a Yelp-like tool that we could potentially use. We recommend that the Accelerator talk to bigger network grantees who could recommend TA providers.”*

– Grantee

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**Resource constraints, coupled with political and policy conditions, can inhibit capacity strengthening.** CSO advocates and their capacity development providers are constrained by changing political and policy contexts, including the increased application of the Global Gag Rule. Limited financial resources also limit CSOs' efforts to strengthen their priority capacities.

**Some INGO grantees and CSOs experience this evaluation process itself as an inhibiting factor.** The grantees who gathered in Kigali during the International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP) asked that the APEP evaluation team improve its communication with them and with the CSOs they serve, both about the information they will be asked to provide and the timeline for evaluation activities. ACR meetings, follow-up interviews, and the surveys sent to CSOs and grantees all consume valuable time.



## Recommendations

►► CSOs should request, and grantees should offer, both longer-term organizational development support and assistance that responds to specific advocacy strategies, contexts, or ongoing developments.

►► Perhaps as part of the next convening for strategy grantees and CSO partners, participants should reach a shared understanding of “what counts” as organizational strengthening and explore ways to gather more precise information on how different kinds of capacity development contribute to longer-term organizational effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

►► APEP should gather more data that help us understand how new capacities make a difference or are applied; this could include a typology to help interpret trends and themes in how capacities are built and the difference these new capacities make in strengthening CSOs' work and sustainability.

►► APEP should explore the relative role of Hewlett grantees and other sources of support in addressing capacity development needs identified by CSOs. How does the support that CSOs receive from grantees complement support they receive from other sources? How do grantees take into consideration what other resources CSOs are drawing on? Do the grantees know about that complementary support? To what extent are CSOs able to strategically coordinate the different kinds of support they draw for their organizations?

►► APEP should work with the foundation to better anticipate our evaluation calendar and keep to that schedule.

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<sup>1</sup> The Foundation organizes annual convenings for strategy grantees and a selection of their CSO partners to encourage mutual learning and sharing around the strategy and lessons learned as it is being implemented.



Longer-term  
advocacy  
partnerships

## Principle Three: Support longer-term advocacy partnerships that strengthen and support local advocacy capacity

As part of this strategy, the Hewlett Foundation committed to five-year grants to the INGOs serving as Advocacy Partners. This represents a longer grant period than the foundation typically offers. It reflects the foundation's emphasis on ensuring that its own behavior as a grantmaker reflects the principles. And in turn, the foundation particularly expects to see Advocacy Partners' technical assistance or sub-grant agreements with CSOs reflect this same commitment to longer-term advocacy partnerships.

To help assess whether INGO grantees reflect the strategy's principle of longer-term partnerships, we asked all the Advocacy Partner and Opportunistic Engagement grantees for information about the duration of technical assistance or sub-grant agreements.

**On average, the agreements span one to two-and-a-half years. However, data about the duration of sub-grants or capacity development partnerships under this specific grant may not accurately reflect the grantee's commitment to a specific CSO.** Several of the INGO grantees have been working in Sub-Saharan Africa for many years, and experience with the CSOs in some cases extends years prior to the foundation's funding.

Some INGO grantees have maintained long-term partnerships with CSOs, with agreements renewed one year at a time or more, depending on their funding. At perhaps the extreme, one grantee has maintained a 15-year relationship with four CSOs.

Another grantee mentioned the longtime relationship between its veteran staff members and CSO leadership as a source of trust and mutual accountability in their interactions. Still another makes shorter grants, on average, but reported that it tends to continue funding the same CSOs year after year. It credited the foundation's support with allowing it to make larger commitments to its sub-grantees. Four INGO grantees are putting somewhat longer-term grants in place.

Investment in building long-term relationships with local organizations can help address historical power imbalances by recognizing the value of local expertise and shifting decision making power to local organizations.



### Recommendations

- ▶▶ CSOs associated with Hewlett Foundation grantees – especially sub-grantees of Advocacy Partners – can and should ask for longer-term funding and capacity development agreements.
- ▶▶ APEP and the foundation should refine their efforts to collect data on the amount and duration of sub-grantee funding.





Mutual  
accountability  
for funders,  
grantees, and  
CSOs

## Principle Four: Encourage mutual accountability among all parties: funders, intermediaries, and local partners

The Foundation intends that structures of mutual accountability would be part of efforts to shift power from the foundation to grantees, and from grantees to CSOs. In principle, these structures might help CSOs feel more empowered to ask for what they need from grantees, and help grantees feel similarly emboldened to ask for changes in the foundation's behavior.

### Mutual accountability between grantees and CSOs

#### **CSO respondents offered few comments about specific mechanisms or agreements that they understood to be part of mutual accountability.**

Though the data are limited, CSO survey and interview responses suggest that few CSOs (beyond some of those present at the 2018 grantee and CSO convening) have modified their expectations of the grantees. Most CSOs found it difficult to answer questions about mutual accountability without clear explanations of its meaning. This may partly reflect confusion about what mutual accountability can or should mean.

**For the most part, grantees have not discussed mutual accountability, or its implications, with their CSOs partners.** One of the exceptions: an Advocacy Partner who has specifically discussed mutual accountability with its CSO partners and identified several characteristics as central to successful relationships. Other grantees and CSOs described elements that contribute, in their view, to relationships of mutual accountability: trust, honesty, clarity, flexibility, patience, and humility. But as we heard during the 2018 convening, these

positive elements exist in somewhat uneasy balance for some grantees with the financial and fiduciary diligence for which they are responsible as grantees and sub-grant administrators.

The principle of mutual accountability may be expressed in other ways. All three Advocacy Partners, and a few Opportunistic Engagement grantees, have processes that offer some form of structured, systematic needs assessment. Such processes can create opportunities to enhance mutual accountability by helping to set expectations about the extent and nature of available capacity development. When done correctly, the CSO's interests are clear, as are the grantee's commitments to respond. Most grantees cited specific ways in which they respond to CSO complaints or suggestions.

Grantees differ in the extent to which they believe that a formal agreement is necessary to ensure more truly accountable relationships with their CSO sub-grantees and partners. These agreements implicitly or explicitly acknowledge the imbalance of power between the actors.

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*“Mutual accountability is not a new idea, but it needs to be explained very carefully... What makes it real is the dialogue to build a common understanding or expression of the idea.”*

– Grantee

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One Opportunistic Engagement grantee is re-examining its relationships explicitly as a response to the imbalance of power between itself and its CSO partners. Another grantee noted that its accountability to its CSO sub-grantees includes confidential interviews with sub-grantee staff as part of the performance review of the INGO staff members with whom the CSO works.

The activities outlined above align broadly with the principle of mutual accountability. But research about relationships of mutual accountability suggests that it should include a component of bi-directional “enforceability.”<sup>2</sup> Survey and interview data, along with discussions during the 2018 convening, suggest that CSOs question whether their agreements are enforceable towards the more powerful INGO grantees. As noted earlier, our consultants in the region question whether CSOs feel that they can ask for more accountability, autonomy, or funds from grantees.

## Mutual accountability between grantees and the foundation

To explore how the principle of mutual accountability manifests in the foundation's partnerships with grantees, we asked grantees to comment on their respective relationship on a not-for-attribution basis.

**Overall, the foundation has a positive reputation for its flexibility as a grantmaker – but grantees' understanding of the foundation's accountability to them is perhaps inevitably limited by the imbalance in power.** Two grantees mentioned that they were grateful that their perspectives were heard and incorporated in the development of the foundation's international reproductive health strategy. As we have heard consistently during the first two and half years of the strategy, grantees praise the foundation's flexibility and commitment to learning with grantees about changes in the political and policy context.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, “[Mutual Accountability in Practice: The Case of Mozambique](#),” Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation (2012), “[Domestic and Mutual Accountability for Aid](#),” Overseas Development Institute (2009).

But grantees also expressed the need for more and deeper communication with the foundation about its intentions and expectations from this strategy. Four grantees mentioned that they were accustomed to more frequent and timely communications or check-in conversations with their Hewlett Foundation program officers in the past. One grantee said that this had resulted in confusion about the timeline for a renewal process, creating some financial stress. In much the same way that CSOs remarked that they don't feel that they can enforce agreements with grantees when grantees fall short of their commitments, some grantees question whether it is realistic to seek to “enforce” agreements with the foundation in cases where they feel it is not fulfilling its commitments to grantees.

Foundation staff offered examples of how it seeks to demonstrate or encourage its own accountability. One significant way: program staff are subject to performance reviews that include anonymous interviews with grantees in their respective portfolio. The Foundation also notes that program staff subject to the foundation's term limits are likely to be wary of alienating colleagues in the field to which they will be returning as job-seekers. And Foundation staff do not want to harm the foundation's reputation in the field, mindful that senior staff and trustees are paying close attention to that reputation.

**Within the context of this strategy, Foundation staff have leveraged several opportunities to solicit and respond to feedback from grantees and CSOs.** These include the annual convenings, a grantees-only gathering organized during the 2018 International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP), a set of webinars for grantees and CSOs in 2019, and ongoing conversations with grantees.

## Evaluation as a mechanism for supporting mutual accountability

This evaluation helps hold strategy actors (including the foundation) accountable. The evaluation is amassing a large quantity of data, surfacing lessons that help grantees, CSOs, and the foundation strengthen their work. This

underscores that APEP is accountable to strategy actors to help translate the data into lessons learned that are accessible and actionable. The Foundation, too, is accountable for creating spaces to discuss and respond to lessons learned.



## Recommendations

▶▶ The Foundation should clarify its expectations regarding how mutual accountability can and should be reflected in relationships among the foundation, INGO grantees, and CSOs.

▶▶ The Foundation and its grantees should share and explain the strategy's principles, including mutual accountability, with their CSO partners. This would help clarify CSO expectations about the kind of support they should expect to receive.

▶▶ More frequent check-in's with grantees and other improvements in the foundation's communications with grantees would enhance current understanding of its expectations and further strengthen relationships with grantees.

▶▶ APEP should gather more data that help us explore CSOs' and grantees' understanding, perspectives, and experiences regarding mutual accountability.

Measure  
progress,  
adapt, and  
share learning

## Principle Five: Measure progress, document, adapt, and share what is learned

**Grantees offered varying examples of adjustments they have made to their practices or strategy based on lessons learned.** This includes lessons learned through monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), as well as insights gathered through implementation of their sub-granting and capacity development work. Several grantees described changes they made specifically in response to CSO feedback (gathered through focus groups, CSO gatherings, site visits, sub-grantee reports, and other interactions or processes). The Advocacy Accelerator team has used various mechanisms – such as usability testing, focus groups, post-webinar surveys, and post-training evaluation forms – to help gather information about how it can strengthen its online and in-person capacity building offerings.

A few grantees also adjusted the roles they play in supporting CSOs. One noted that experience over the past year informed adjustments it made in its

proposal to the foundation. These changes included extending the mentoring phase for sub-grantees and involving them more in project planning. Another reported that it sped up the disbursement process and made other changes to its processes in response to CSO feedback. Another sought to save sub-grantees time by reducing paperwork and reporting in its grant renewal process; it is encouraging CSOs to more deeply reflect on their work during the renewal process – a shift in emphasis that the grantee hopes will help build sub-grantees' analytic capacities.

Other examples spoke to broader strategy-level changes. For example, in response to sub-grantees' requests for more general operating support grants, one INGO reported that it doubled the number of general support grants between 2017 and 2018: from 10 to 20 grants. Another INGO's Organization Development fund emerged partly as a result of CSO feedback.

**CSOs described a mix of examples of how lessons learned have informed adjustments to their advocacy work.** Several CSOs specifically credited their MEL system with revealing insights that led to strategic or tactical adjustments. For example, focus groups and interviews helped some CSOs decide how to adjust their messaging, messengers, or advocacy targets. A few other CSOs offered examples of how they adjusted their approach based on lessons learned through implementing advocacy activities.

**The Hewlett Foundation has emphasized the particular role it sees itself playing in implementing the principle of measuring progress, documenting, adjusting, and sharing lessons learned.** This evaluation is one expression of that intention. Through APEP's annual reports as well as extensive conversations with the evaluation team, the foundation is gathering and sharing insights into whether and how the strategy is being implemented – and what is or is not working for different stakeholders. As noted earlier, the foundation has also directly solicited feedback from grantees and CSOs through a variety of mechanisms.

One outcome of these processes: The Foundation learned it needs to be more explicit about its focus on assessing the extent to which power is shared with and shifted to CSOs at the local level. Another key insight that emerged: many CSO partners did not appear to be aware of the strategy. Moreover, responses to APEP's surveys in 2017 and 2018 offered little evidence that CSOs perceived a change in the nature of their support from grantees under this strategy. Grantees were not uniformly clear about their responsibility to communicate about the strategy to the CSOs.

In response, the foundation has clarified its expectations that grantees discuss the strategy with their CSO partners. And it is working with APEP to develop a set of products – including this report, webinars, briefs, and videos – that are intended to strengthen CSOs' understanding of the strategy and lessons learned thus far.

The Foundation has shared specific lessons learned with other foundations through one-on-one meetings and gatherings. Other funders in the reproductive health and women's rights fields are interested in opportunities to shift power towards the local level, and in the challenges of assessing capacity change.

## Factors that facilitate or inhibit learning, adapting, and sharing



**Grantees and CSOs underscored the value of opportunities to share among themselves.**

Among grantees, this included gatherings like the foundation's annual grantee and CSO convenings and the grantee gathering at ICFP. They suggested adding meetings to help facilitate coordination among the grantees. Grantees also facilitated CSO partner gatherings intended to support sharing and learning – which CSOs independently confirmed were valuable.



**Organizations need sufficient capacity to gather and translate MEL insights into strategic or tactical adjustments.**

One Advocacy Partner described an increasingly robust culture of learning internally. A CSO highlighted its staff members' willingness to discuss both what works and what is not working well. But limited time or capacity can serve as a factor inhibiting more systematic or formalized opportunities to surface lessons and apply them to strategic adjustments. Our ACR process revealed that MEL was consistently rated as a priority for capacity development.

Broader CSO surveys told a similar story. This suggests gap that can limit CSOs' ability to learn and adjust. Limited MEL capacity is a particularly significant constraint on strategic development for small, typically under-resourced CSOs. But it also applies to larger organizations like Hewlett grantees and even to the foundation itself.



### **Anxiety about sharing shortcomings with funders can inhibit learning.**

The foundation generally received high marks for its willingness to learn from and with grantees, but we heard some evidence that this anxiety persists. More emphasis from the foundation on encouraging stories of lessons learned from failures or missed objectives could encourage a similar commitment from grantees towards CSOs.



## Recommendations

▶▶ Grantees should share an overview of the strategy with CSO partners and discuss with their partners ways that the strategy should affect the nature of the relationships between grantees and CSOs.

▶▶ APEP, grantees, and the foundation can all share lessons around capacity strengthening and discuss its potential links to power sharing, perhaps as topics of discussion in future grantee and CSO convenings and other gatherings they facilitate or fund.

▶▶ Grantees should consider offering capacity development on monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

▶▶ The Foundation and grantees should encourage participants to feel comfortable sharing lessons around what did *not* work well or ways they had to adjust in order to address challenges.

▶▶ APEP should organize and deliver findings in formats appropriate to diverse audiences: notably to grantees, CSOs, the foundation, and other funders.



## Conclusion: How do these principles contribute to the strategy's impact?

The strategy is in part an experiment to test certain assumptions about how a more “principled” approach to capacity strengthening via intermediary organizations like INGOs might produce better outcomes. In the nearer term, these outcomes include shifts in power towards local CSOs and growth in their organizational and advocacy capacity, with longer-term outcomes of increased advocacy effectiveness and impact on the reproductive health policy and funding infrastructure. Based on reflection and learning, the foundation has recognized that these longer-term outcomes would be achieved beyond the first five years of the strategy's implementation. The test of the strategy is not a simple pass-fail exercise; rather, this evaluation is best approached

as multiple learning exercises. APEP and the foundation should resist *attributing* policy changes to the strategy when a closer read of the facts would instead point to multiple contributors to specific policy changes. We doubt that we can or will find definitive evidence that the principles, or the behaviors associated with enacting them, are alone responsible for reproductive health advocacy wins.

We have documented evidence of practices that are aligned with one or more of the strategy's core principles. It is somewhat more difficult to determine the extent to which the strategy motivated *changes* in these practices – as opposed to reinforcing existing practices. The Advocacy

Partner grantees all characterized the strategy as an extension in some measure of their prior approach to capacity strengthening. The core focus on shifting power and building capacity was, they said, nothing new. And to varying extents, the Opportunistic Engagement grantees and the Advocacy Accelerator team can also point to elements in their relationships with CSOs that embody the principles.

But we observe some evidence that the strategy has contributed to stronger partnerships by reinforcing positive practices. For example, one INGO recognized that the Advocacy Partner grant under this strategy allowed it to offer longer-term and unrestricted advocacy funding to its CSO partners, essentially permitting this INGO to do what it had been doing before – but more generously. The strategy may have helped encourage another Advocacy Partner to develop its Organization Development Fund, a step consistent with the strategy's emphasis on building stronger, more effective advocacy organizations. Demonstrating one of the more subtle contributions of the strategy, an Opportunistic Engagement grantee commented that the foundation's encouragement to discuss the principles with other grantees and with CSO partners has been "helpful for opening lines of communication or lessons that weren't necessarily as visible as before."

Alignment between the principles and grantee practices may in part reflect some of the foundation's criteria for selecting its grantees: the foundation selected INGOs whose practices already reflected some of the ideas and values codified in the strategy principles. The INGOs, in turn, are likely to select CSO partners who are capable of demonstrating progress in building their organizational capacity to conduct advocacy.

For its part, APEP considers the ACR process, with its emphasis on a CSO-led process of identifying priorities for capacity strengthening, to be an expression of the strategy's focus on shifting decision-making power towards CSOs. In some cases, this process appears to have helped reinforce the grantees' ability to reflect the principles in their needs assessment.

During the first two and a half years of the strategy, APEP gathered an immense amount of largely qualitative data, allowing us to explore the many nuances of the partnerships between grantees and CSOs and between the grantees and the foundation. As a result, we now have a stronger understanding of how the strategy is being implemented across a diverse array of actors – and what factors enable or inhibit practices or outcomes that are aligned with the strategy's intentions. We have also gained new insights into the challenges of evaluating this principles-based approach.

In 2019-2020, the foundation has asked APEP to more deeply investigate two interrelated questions:

- To what extent and how is power shifting from the foundation towards its grantees, and from its grantees towards CSOs?
- How does capacity strengthening occur?

Over the next phase of our evaluation activities, we aim to deepen the foundation's understanding of whether and how the strategy's principles are contributing to desired outcomes, with special attention to how the strategy is contributing to increases in the power and capacity of CSOs carrying out the vital work of family planning and reproductive health advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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## Appendix 1: Evaluation Questions

### Evaluation Questions in 2017

1. How (and how well) are the grants to Advocacy Partners being implemented? In particular, are advocacy priorities and strategies being developed collaboratively? How well do they reflect local policy priorities and context?
2. How well aligned are Opportunistic Engagement grants to the portfolio strategy? In particular, are advocacy priorities and strategies being developed collaboratively? How well do they reflect local policy priorities and context?
3. How and why do structures of mutual accountability and partnership work well? Where do they fall short?
4. Do the local advocacy organizations (CSOs who are sub-grantees or technical assistance recipients) feel that these structures help address power imbalances? If not, why not?
5. How do the local organizations experience the technical assistance they receive from grantees? Do local organizations feel they are treated fairly and with respect?
6. How well does the technical assistance match the local organizations' longer-term organizational needs? How well equipped are the grantees to provide the needed capacity support?
7. How well did Hewlett and its partners facilitate advocacy capacity through co-funding mechanisms to support regional advocacy priorities? Were these strategically positioned to reinforce other advocacy investments?
8. How well do the in-person and on-line platforms for the Advocacy Accelerator facilitate the sharing of advocacy resources or lessons?
9. What other information-sharing mechanisms or platforms do local organizations value? What factors enable or inhibit information-sharing?
10. Can we identify enabling or inhibiting factors that help or hurt local advocacy organizations' adaptation of improved practices?

## Evaluation questions in 2018

1. **Local Ownership:** How are grantees and CSOs implementing the strategy's principle of supporting locally driven policy advocacy priorities while seeking opportunities to connect these to global advocacy efforts? In particular, how well do advocacy priorities and strategies reflect local policy priorities and context? How are they informed by and contributing to regional or global advocacy efforts?
2. **Mutual Accountability:** How, why, and for whom do structures of mutual accountability work well? How, why, and for whom do they fall short? Do grantees, CSOs, and the foundation feel that these structures help address power imbalances? If so, how so? If not, why not and what might need to change? Do successful structures of mutual accountability contribute to more effective advocacy? If so, how?
3. **Capacity Support and Technical Assistance Provision:** To what extent does the capacity support provided to CSOs reflect Hewlett's principled strategy – i.e., appropriate and sustained technical assistance, and multi-year advocacy partnerships? What enabling or inhibiting factors influence the effectiveness of the capacity support?
4. **The Role of the Advocacy Accelerator:** To what extent is the Advocacy Accelerator serving as a platform for sharing, learning, and exchange among Hewlett Foundation grantees and CSOs? To what extent is the Advocacy Accelerator helping strengthen their advocacy capacity? To what extent and why do CSOs and grantees value these functions of the Accelerator? What factors facilitate or undermine the Accelerator's ability to fulfill these roles?
5. **Progress Towards Strengthening CSO Capacity:** To what extent and how are local CSOs developing capacities needed to be more effective organizations and/or more effective advocates? What are the enabling or inhibiting factors?
6. **Measuring Progress, Sharing Lessons, and Adjusting Strategy:** How are the foundation, grantees – including the Advocacy Accelerator – and CSOs measuring progress, sharing lessons learned, and making appropriate adjustments to strategy? What are the enabling or inhibiting factors?
7. **Evaluating the Outcomes of the Strategy:** How and to what extent does the strategy's principle-based approach contribute to greater advocacy impact? Is this approach producing any unexpected positive or negative outcomes?

## Appendix 2: Evaluative Methods

APEP has applied a mixed methods approach to this evaluation, incorporating surveys, interviews, and the facilitated Advocacy Capacity Review (ACR) self-assessment process.

In both 2017 and 2018, all twelve grantees responded to a survey asking notably about their practices as technical assistance providers and their approach to establishing relationships of

mutual accountability between themselves and the CSOs with which they work. Grantees were also asked, on a not-for-attribution basis, whether they felt that their relationship with the Hewlett Foundation was aligned with the principle of mutual accountability. APEP also interviewed leaders or staff responsible for Hewlett-funded activities under this strategy at all 12 grantees in 2017 and 2018.



In 2017 and 2018, APEP sent a survey to grantees' CSO partners asking primarily about their experience seeking and receiving technical assistance from the Hewlett grantees. In 2017, a total of 21 CSOs responded, primarily those associated with Advocacy Partner grantees. In 2018, we achieved a higher volume of responses, totaling 53 CSOs across 25 countries. 2018 survey respondents included CSO partners associated with each of the Advocacy Partners and all but one of the Opportunistic Engagement grantees. APEP supplemented CSO survey responses with a small number of interviews with CSOs.

In 2017 and 2018, APEP consultants from Senegal and Kenya facilitated ACRs with CSOs associated with the Advocacy Partner grantees. In total, 29 CSOs divided into two cohorts (one in 2017, one in 2018) have participated in the ACR process. In 2018, we conducted follow-up interviews with 13 CSOs who participated in the ACR process in 2017. An additional four CSOs in the 2017 cohort responded to an online form summarizing their progress in pursuing priorities they identified in their 2017 ACR.

APEP has presented evaluation findings and gathered feedback from grantee and CSO participants at the annual convenings for strategy stakeholders in 2017 and 2018.

## Limitations

Mindful of the need for more representative data than we were able to include in 2017, APEP sought to gather a wider range of perspectives and experiences in 2018 – and especially to expand the list of CSOs with whom we have engaged at least once through our evaluation activities. Our focus on greater CSO participation also responded to a shared concern about equity and inclusion consistent with the foundation's values and our own. Nonetheless, we encountered challenges in obtaining broad CSO participation in CSO interviews and in ACRs, especially in Francophone West Africa.

We are unable to estimate the extent of positive response bias in our surveys and interviews of grantees and CSO. Our consultant colleagues in sub-Saharan Africa are particularly mindful of this risk. They believe that CSO reluctance to offer criticism of the capacity support or funding they receive is an indication, as noted in this report, that CSOs may simply not believe they have the power or authority to question what is offered. This is, in turn, an expression of the perceived imbalance of power between CSOs and INGOs that may tilt our findings in a more positive direction than a more candid assessment would suggest.

## Appendix 3: Advocacy Capacity Review (ACR)

Drawing on an extensive body of thinking and action, APEP brought together elements of current research on organizational capacity development and on the nature of effective advocacy practices to identify 20 elements of advocacy capacity relevant to FPRH. These elements form the basis of the Advocacy Capacity Review (ACR), a survey that CSOs are invited to complete through an in-person process facilitated by a consultant from APEP's evaluation team.

The ACR process encourages a candid self-assessment aimed at helping each CSO identify for itself its advocacy strengths as well as areas for growth. Through this facilitated process, the CSO participants, typically including the CSO's leadership team, identify a small set of capacity development priorities and tentative plans for addressing those priorities. The chart below provides an overview of the advocacy and organizational capacity categories, outcomes, and components. A [comprehensive guide](#) to using the ACR is available on the Aspen Institute's website.

Category	Outcome	Components
 <p><b>Advocacy strategy and implementation</b></p>	<p>Organizations apply commitment, skills and organizational resources to develop and advance short- and long-term strategies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Strategy formulation:</b> Organization develops advocacy strategies with specific goals, objectives and evidence base.</li> <li>▪ <b>Advocacy planning:</b> Advocacy strategies are supported by clear but adaptable implementation plans.</li> <li>▪ <b>Learning and evaluation:</b> Internal self-reflection processes and learning efforts, monitoring and evaluation (M&amp;E) systems and application of learning and data.</li> <li>▪ <b>Adaptation:</b> Organization makes changes to advocacy strategies or plans in response to developments or new information.</li> <li>▪ <b>Coalition planning:</b> Coalition members jointly develop plans with respective roles and coordination points.*</li> <li>▪ <b>Coalition coordination:</b> Coalition members coordinate implementation of plans, share information about results, and collaborate on decision-making to optimize complementarity and outcomes.*</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Tactical skills</b></p>	<p>Organizations have expertise or access to support to develop and implement appropriate tactics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Advocacy tactic selection:</b> Range of advocacy tactics employed by the organization and consideration of relative strategic merits.</li> <li>▪ <b>Skills related to core advocacy tactics:</b> Use of common advocacy tactics, below.</li> <li>▪ <b>Networking and Coalition building:</b> Coordination and collaboration with other actors (individuals, organizations, platforms, coalitions) to pursue common advocacy objectives.<sup>3</sup></li> <li>▪ <b>Messaging and communications:</b> Identification of advocacy audiences, development and consistent use of targeted messages, and outreach strategies, such as messengers, for each distinct audience.</li> <li>▪ <b>Media:</b> Use of traditional and social media to engage key advocacy audiences.</li> <li>▪ <b>Policy development processes:</b> Understanding and use of policy development processes to propose or inform policy solutions.</li> <li>▪ <b>Use of research and evidence:</b> Use of research and evidence to identify problems, analyze existing policy, and develop proposals for policy and service solutions.</li> <li>▪ <b>Government or policymaker relations:</b> Engagement of institutions and actors whose decisions are critical to advancing advocacy objectives, directly and/or through key individuals with access and influence.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Commitment</b></p>	<p>Organizations initiate and maintain continuous commitment to FPRH issues and engagement with FPRH sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Mission alignment with FPRH and advocacy:</b> Relations between organization mission and FPRH issues and advocacy.</li> <li>▪ <b>Organizational values:</b> Organization traditions, constituents, history and other determinants of support for organization's engagement in FPRH issues and advocacy.</li> <li>▪ <b>Sector engagement:</b> Connection and collaboration with other actors, such as civil society organizations, coalitions, researchers, and service providers at relevant country, regional and/or international levels.</li> <li>▪ <b>Constituent connections:</b> Relationships and feedback loops with communities or groups of individuals the organization's FPRH advocacy efforts are intended to serve.</li> <li>▪ <b>Coalition engagement:</b> Coalition members have a shared sense of purpose and clear perception of the added value to advocacy effectiveness, of working in coalition and jointly assume the responsibility for coalition-based advocacy.*</li> <li>▪ <b>Coalition organization:</b> Clear allocation of roles, responsibilities, and tasks based on comparative advantages of each coalition member.*</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> For coalitions organized by Hewlett grantees, this element refers to networking with organizations outside the coalition.



### Operations and Management

Organizations have the institutional experience, positioning, sustainability and security to engage in and sustain FPRH advocacy.

- **Leadership involvement:** Engagement of organization's leadership in FPRH advocacy.
- **Financial resource base:** Availability and use of resources to support FPRH advocacy.
- **Human resources:** Availability and engagement of staff and consultants to support FPRH advocacy.
- **Reputation and profile:** Organization's positioning in FPRH or related sectors as an FPRH advocacy influencer.
- **Security:** Safeguards for personnel and data security to protect against threats generated by advocacy and/or FPRH involvement.
- **Administrative systems:** Availability of systems to manage funds, documents, data, appointments, and other supports for advocacy efforts.
- **Value of coalition to members:** Sense of additive value of coalition participation for the participating organizations in terms of advancing organizations' operations, enhancing technical skills, greater advocacy effectiveness, and other benefits in balance with costs.\*

*Elements or items specific to coalitions are marked with an asterisk (\*).*