Evaluation of the Hewlett Foundation's Sub-Strategy to Support Local Family Planning and Reproductive Health Advocacy in Sub-Saharan Africa

Final Report

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Introduction

In 2016, the Hewlett Foundation launched its [international reproductive health strategy to support local advocacy in sub-Saharan Africa](). This strategy continued the foundation's focus on ensuring that women can decide whether and when to have children. **The strategy had an ambitious goal:** A vibrant sector of local civil society organizations (CSOs) in sub-Saharan Africa that can capably and positively influence the family planning and reproductive health (FPRH) policies and funding decisions of their own national governments and of international donors. To contribute towards this goal, the strategy was grounded in **five principles** that the foundation expected would inform its own practices as well as the practices of grantees and their CSO partners:

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

The foundation commissioned a five-year developmental evaluation to identify and share emergent lessons about this "principles-based approach" throughout the process of strategy implementation. In this report, we summarize key findings, lessons, and recommendations from the final data collection period of this learning and evaluation process (September 2020 - July 2021). Our analysis draws on interviews with the foundation's grantees and their CSO partners, foundation staff, civil society leaders in Africa, and peer funders, as well as a "context review" of trends and developments in the broader philanthropic and international development field in which the strategy was situated.

The strategy's grantmaking approach and portfolio

INGO Intermediary Grantees: The strategy's primary grantmaking approach was an intermediary model in which the foundation's support for local advocacy was channeled through organizations (mostly international non-governmental organizations, or INGOs) who provided grants and other forms of capacity support to CSO partners.

Advocacy Partners received five-year grants to provide funding and other forms of capacity support to African CSOs:

- *Equilibres et Populations*
- *Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung (DSW)[1]*
- *International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)*
- *PAI*

Opportunistic Engagement grantees received grants to support African CSO advocacy and capacity in diverse ways:

- *Center for Reproductive Rights*
- *IntraHealth/Civil Society for Family Planning in West Africa Project (CS4FP)*
- *Johns Hopkins University/Advance Family Planning (AFP)*
- *Mannion Daniels/AmplifyChange,*
- *International Planned Parenthood Federation Africa Regional Office*
- *World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD)*

Direct CSO Grantees: Beginning in 2019, the foundation introduced a direct grantmaking model to the strategy. These grants provided general operating support to a small set of well-established African-led CSOs with a demonstrated record of strong advocacy work on FPRH issues:

- *Center for Health, Human Rights and Development (CEHURD)*
- *Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE)*
- *Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH).*

The Advocacy Accelerator: The foundation established the Advocacy Accelerator, a new Africa-based and African-led platform to support advocacy capacity through shared learning and exchange. The Accelerator was supported through a grant to Amref Health Africa, which served as the host organization for "incubating" the new platform.

Theory of Change

The foundation expected its principle-based approach to contribute to two main short-term outcomes:

1. The **advocacy and organizational capacity** of local CSOs is strengthened; and
2. In capacity support partnerships, **power is shifted** away from the funder and towards the local CSO.[2]

These outcomes were anchored in the premise that principle-aligned practices – and power sharing – among strategy actors would yield more effective capacity support to CSOs. Over the longer term, the foundation expected that strengthened capacity and greater power sharing would contribute to CSOs' effectiveness as advocates and their organizational sustainability – which, in turn, would contribute to the overarching goal of a vibrant CSO sector. The foundation also hoped that grantees, CSO partners, peer funders, and other actors in the field would perceive the value and effectiveness of principle-aligned practices, supporting the uptake and upkeep of these practices over the long term.

The Context

The strategy unfolded within a dynamic context that in some ways facilitated (or even surpassed) the kinds of changes that the foundation aimed to advance, and in other ways reinforced barriers to those same changes.

Facilitators of change

Conversations about power, inequity, and the colonial and racist roots of current practices are shining a different light on funder-grantee dynamics and creating pressure to demonstrate receptivity to sharing power. Renewed and emboldened discourse around power dynamics and capacity strengthening practices in funder-INGO-CSO relationships is calling out harmful practices that perpetuate power imbalances and racism. That discourse is also documenting equitable alternatives, including those rooted in feminist, anti-racist, and decolonializing values. Some funders are changing practices to redress power imbalances, contributing to peer pressure for other funders to "share" or "shift" power towards CSOs they support directly or via intermediaries. Our interviews with CSOs suggest that these broader conversations – as well as some evidence of improved funder practices – have helped embolden CSOs to question, challenge, and demand more equitable treatment by funders and intermediaries.

Barriers to change

Practices perpetuating power imbalances and ineffective capacity support continue to be the norm among most funders and INGOs. Bilateral and multilateral entities often disburse funds through layers of international and national intermediaries who each take a cut, leaving a disproportionately small proportion of money for CSOs. Deeply rooted racist and colonial power dynamics manifest in donors' bias towards funding white-led organizations, persistent devaluation of African CSOs' expertise and qualifications, and a mindset of development "for" rather than "with" Africans. This limits CSOs' ownership and flexibility in charting their own capacity strengthening and advocacy work. COVID-19 promoted some power-sharing practices, such as more flexible funding. But practices may revert to prior norms once the global health crisis appears less acute.

Resource scarcity reinforces power imbalances between CSOs and INGOs. Under-staffed and under-resourced CSOs face an unequal fundraising field – especially when responding to complex funding criteria set by Northern donors. INGOs, including those who "localize" their operations in African countries, draw on their larger staff and home office fundraising operations to win funding. INGOs cement this competitive advantage by recruiting experienced African staff away from CSOs and failing to acknowledge CSO partners' contributions in reports to funders. CSOs do not call out these problematic practices for fear of losing funding.

Supporting CSOs through Grants to INGO Intermediaries

The foundation's standard approach to supporting FPRH advocacy organizations in sub-Saharan Africa has been to fund INGO intermediaries. These INGOs in turn channel financial resources to clusters of CSO sub-grantees and support the efforts by those CSOs to strengthen advocacy practices and organizational capacity. The intermediaries are expected to manage sub-grants and to provide high-quality training, coaching, connections, and support to their CSO partners, helping them develop as organizations and advocates. At the same time, the strategy aimed to disrupt intermediary practices like short-term project-specific grants that gave CSOs limited control over advocacy and capacity strengthening priorities. The foundation encouraged INGO grantees to align their practices with the principles, based on the expectation that this would help advance the desired outcomes of power sharing and capacity strengthening. Below we summarize key findings and lessons about grantee practices that contributed towards – or inhibited – these two outcomes.

Power sharing in INGO-CSO partnerships

General operating support – which affords CSOs the most decision-making power – was relatively rare. Providing general operating support to CSOs may provide the most authentic way of shifting decision-making power. It puts CSOs in charge of planning at the outset of the grant and allows them to decide whether and how to realign their expenditures during the grant period. Our interviews yielded only a handful of general operating support sub-grants to CSOs, suggesting this remains an uncommon practice among INGO grantees.

Most CSOs reported exercising substantial decision-making power in their partnerships with INGO grantees. But certain grantee practices still limit their control over decisions. Most CSOs felt they were able to exercise considerable decision-making power in their partnerships with the INGO grantees: they largely or entirely determined their own priorities and activities and they had flexibility to adjust during the grant period – albeit with varying degrees of permission required from grantees. But CSOs also reported grantee practices that constrained their decision-making power, such as planning frameworks that curtailed CSOs' control over program design, stringent reporting demands, and unwillingness to relinquish control over budget allocation decisions.

"We developed a sense of inferiority complex and felt like beggars. We know the best approach to our work and there is need for ownership of what we do, yet here we were under the instruction of others over what to do. "

– CSO partner

One factor that can limit sharing of decision-making power: INGOs' organizational structures or processes designed to meet the more restrictive reporting and assessment requirements of other funders. Funder-driven criteria for selecting CSO sub-grantees can exclude less-established organizations. Inflexible sub-grant contracting language can make mid-course adjustments more difficult.[3] A few INGO grantees qualified their support for power sharing because they believed that some CSOs don't have the capacity to independently manage a large grant or advocate effectively without the INGO's technical support. INGO interviewees told us they felt that they "know what would work best for the CSO" or that they need to play a role in "making sure that the partner can execute plans." These attitudes are consistent with the dominant international development model that activists, scholars, and CSO leaders have criticized for decades as colonialist and consciously or unconsciously racist.[4]

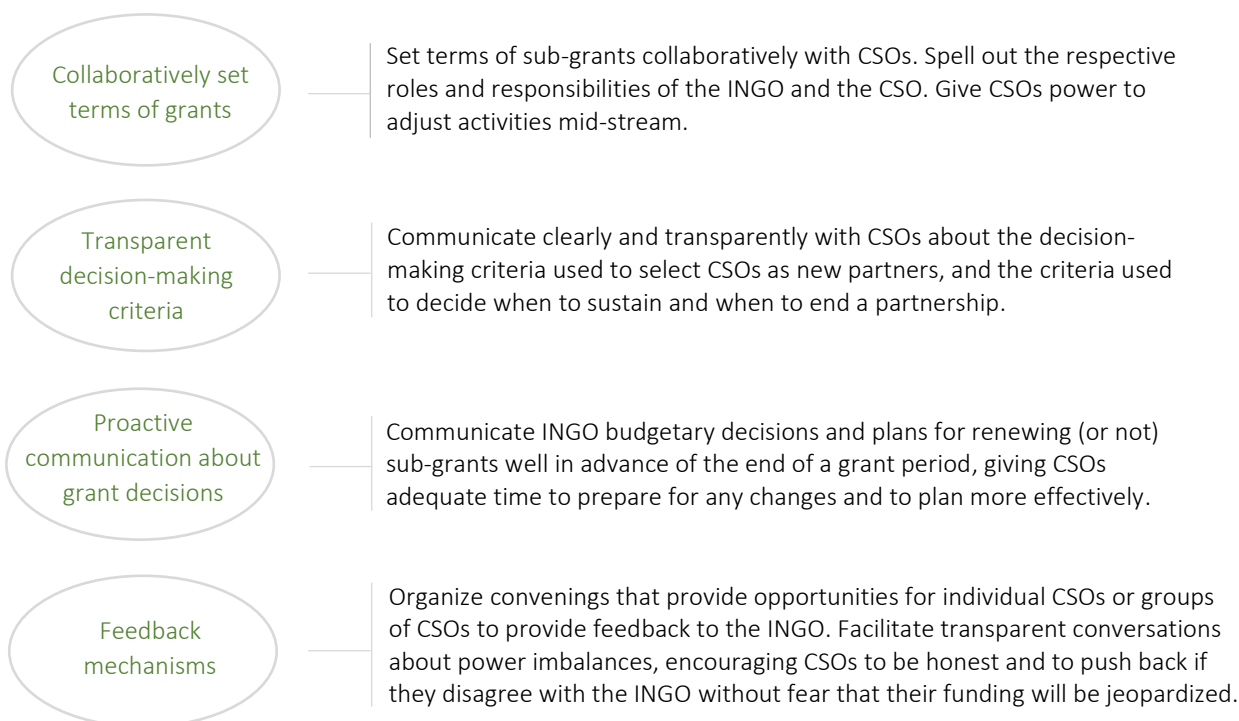**Long-term sub-grants to CSOs are critical to sharing power – but remain relatively uncommon.** The foundation expected its INGO grantees to shift towards longer-term sub-grant agreements with CSO partners. Such support enables longer-term planning for advocacy and capacity strengthening. It helps stabilize

a CSO's ability to cover operational costs and provide job security for CSO staff. It also supports mutual accountability: CSOs are able to be more honest and transparent when they know their funding will not be jeopardized in the short term. But many CSOs – including some associated with INGO grantees who received five-year grants from the foundation – reported their agreements were only 6 to 15 months long. A smaller subset of CSOs reported that their current agreements are somewhat longer (two years) – and in some of these cases, this represented a shift from earlier shorter-term grants. But we did not consistently observe movement towards longer grant agreements across the INGO grantees.

Improved mutual accountability practices contributed to greater transparency and power sharing, but many CSOs still find it difficult to hold INGO grantees accountable. Interviews yielded some promising examples of mutual accountability practices that improved the power balance between the INGOs and CSOs. This included more formal and informal opportunities for CSOs to provide honest feedback and to have transparent conversations about power imbalances – made possible in part by the trusting relationships that grantees and CSOs built over time.

However, mutual accountability remains difficult to operationalize. Fearful of losing funding, CSOs felt they could not challenge INGO grantee behavior or hold them accountable for delivering on their commitments. One CSO indicated that it is "not African" to ask for transparency about how much money the Hewlett Foundation had given the INGO grantee – a reminder of how these relationships may be informed by patterns of deference to local leaders common in many African cultures and reinforced by acculturated power dynamics reflecting a long colonial history. An additional complication in these power dynamics: "local" offices of INGOs may advocate in competition with local CSOs rather than in collaboration – potentially undermining the kind of trust that supports mutual accountability. The figure below summarizes INGO practices that CSOs suggested should be implemented to better support mutual accountability.

INGO Practices that Support Mutual Accountability

Collaboratively set terms of grants	Set terms of sub-grants collaboratively with CSOs. Spell out the respective roles and responsibilities of the INGO and the CSO. Give CSOs power to adjust activities mid-stream.
Transparent decision-making criteria	Communicate clearly and transparently with CSOs about the decision-making criteria used to select CSOs as new partners, and the criteria used to decide when to sustain and when to end a partnership.
Proactive communication about grant decisions	Communicate INGO budgetary decisions and plans for renewing (or not) sub-grants well in advance of the end of a grant period, giving CSOs adequate time to prepare for any changes and to plan more effectively.
Feedback mechanisms	Organize convenings that provide opportunities for individual CSOs or groups of CSOs to provide feedback to the INGO. Facilitate transparent conversations about power imbalances, encouraging CSOs to be honest and to push back if they disagree with the INGO without fear that their funding will be jeopardized.

Strengthening CSO organizational and advocacy capacity

CSOs strongly value support that strengthens their financial security and resource stability. CSOs consistently prioritized – and sought more support for – capacity strengthening in resource mobilization and fundraising. In this area, CSOs valued modes of capacity support including: assistance developing internal policies and financial systems that meet the accountability requirements of major funders; and intentional efforts to open doors to other funders – not just by sharing links to funding opportunities, but by writing letters of support and leveraging the INGO's reputation to help CSOs build the trust of funders.

INGOs' support in connecting CSOs with one another encouraged peer-to-peer capacity strengthening. CSOs emphasized the value of opportunities to share learning with their peers through in-person gatherings, WhatsApp, or webinars. CSOs often make these connections for themselves. INGOs can help, as one major node in larger networks, in creating the opportunity for CSOs – sometimes in different countries – to develop relationships they might otherwise not have. By removing the INGO as the "technical expert" and centering the expertise of the CSOs, this peer-to-peer model can contribute to power sharing. It stands in contrast to hierarchical "one-way" capacity strengthening models in which the INGO is positioned as filling the "deficits" of CSOs.

Mentoring, accompaniment, and hands-on experience can be particularly helpful in deepening CSOs' skill sets. CSOs highlighted the value of a mentoring or accompaniment approach tailored to their needs, where CSO staff can strengthen their skills, knowledge, and experience while on-the-job. This is consistent with the strategy's second principle on tailored technical assistance.

Capacity review processes are more effective when they prioritize CSO learning rather than assuaging funder concerns. Capacity reviews are used to hold CSOs accountable as well as to facilitate CSO-driven capacity development. Our analysis suggests that capacity reviews can be helpful when they: (a) focus on capacities that the CSOs view as relevant to their work or organizational growth; (b) are supported by resources to address the needs that CSO identify; and (c) include follow-up reviews so that CSOs can document and reflect on their progress.[5]

Gaps in mutual accountability undermine the effectiveness of INGO grantees' capacity support to CSOs. Problematic practices like delayed disbursements and poor communication about an INGO's grant renewal plans made it difficult for some CSOs to pay and retain staff. Poor transparency around an INGO's overall grant amount also made it difficult for CSOs to push back when the INGO said there was no money to cover a capacity strengthening priority the CSO had identified.

Flexible funding and longer grant agreements contribute towards CSO capacity over the long term. Flexible funding and longer grant agreements are not solely about power sharing: interviewees also saw these practices as key ingredients of effective capacity support. Flexible funding allows CSOs to direct resources towards capacity needs as they evolve and invest in staff who carry forward the "built" capacity. Longer-term agreements better position CSOs to retain staff and to plan and grow, giving them room to think about succession planning and strategic investments. These practices contribute to a holistic view of capacity support, focusing on organizational sustainability rather than shorter-term gains in discrete capacity areas.

Examining the strategy's assumptions

Assumption: Giving CSOs control over the process of strengthening their capacity and shaping their advocacy work will lead to more effective capacity strengthening.

Our findings suggest support for this assumption. Practices that shift decision-making power towards CSOs – including long-term agreements, flexible funding, and mutual accountability mechanisms – can contribute to more effective capacity support.

We might nuance the assumption: it is not just about "giving CSOs control" – it is also about recognizing how power dynamics surface in the various ways that intermediaries interact with CSOs, whether in managing the sub-grant or offering technical support.

Supporting CSOs through Direct Grants

Starting in 2019, the foundation introduced a direct grantmaking model to complement its funding via INGO intermediaries. It provided grants to two CSOs based in Uganda in 2019 and added a third Kenya-based CSO grantee in 2020. All three organizations are relatively large and have significant histories of using reproductive health advocacy as a core organizational strategy. We examined how these direct grants contributed to organizational and advocacy capacity as well as power sharing.

Hewlett's flexible general operating support and organizational effectiveness grants enabled CSO grantees to develop more effective advocacy and organizational strategies on a longer time horizon. All three CSO grantees attributed their organizations' increased stability and strengthened practices to their general operating support grant from the Hewlett Foundation. Grantees also recognized the value of separate organizational effectiveness grants. General operating support allowed the CSO grantees to better integrate their advocacy strategies and programs, "joining up" advocacy efforts that can be siloed and separated by grants restricted to specific projects. General operating support permitted recipients to develop integrated and comprehensive advocacy strategies aligned with organizational priorities. Longer-term, flexible support was also invaluable as they adjusted to COVID-19 disruptions. The foundation's support helped the CSOs mitigate other effects of more restricted, project-focused funding from other sources by stabilizing personnel budgets and allowing longer-term planning.

The foundation ceded power to these direct CSO grantees and engaged responsively with them. The foundation created the structures to share power through longer-term, operational grants. More important, it operationalized its commitment to power sharing in the way it engaged with grantees. The three grantees felt that the foundation publicly made it clear that it wanted to be held accountable. Hewlett staff reinforced these statements in their interactions with the new direct grantees. Two grantees cited the grant process as reinforcing a sense that the foundation trusted their expertise in determining priorities and gave them time and space to formulate their proposal. The behaviors grantees cited as extraordinary — listening, sharing information, being responsive — suggest as much about the shortcomings of conventional funder-grantee dynamics as they do about the value of the Hewlett Foundation's approach. As one grantee said of its experience with the foundation: "I have never [before] been part of a funding partnership where people listen."

> *"When power relationships are at play, I feel that the party with more power mostly has to be the one that's willing to give some of the power away and be open about it."*
>
> *– CSO grantee*

The dominant characteristic of direct CSO grantees' relationships with other CSOs is collaboration. The grantees recognize the need for power sharing and mutual accountability practices to mitigate power differentials that arise when they step into a funding role. All three of the foundation's direct CSO grantees collaborate with a constellation of other organizations in their countries and regions based on shared missions and priorities. The grantees reported that their relationships with other CSOs in coalitions or alliances were already aligned with some of the principles, even before they had learned about the foundation's strategy – or that they were striving towards better alignment now. But when CSOs take on a re-granting role, this changes power dynamics in their partnerships: all three grantees cited the challenge of maintaining good relationships with their peers after taking on re-granting responsibilities. The grant conditions that other funders impose can worsen that power imbalance, forcing the CSO to pass along requirements that limit partners' decision-making power. Applying the same arrangements and expectations that have been in place with INGO intermediaries can risk replicating the asymmetrical power that the Hewlett strategy has been working to correct.

The Respective Roles of the Intermediary vs. Direct Grantmaking Models

A central assumption of the Hewlett strategy is that INGO grantees have the capacity to effectively support the advocacy and organizational capacity of CSO partners. Based on our analysis of comments from CSOs, grantees, and civil society leaders, we distilled **five valued roles that INGO grantees can play** in supporting CSOs to be more effective advocates and more sustainable organizations, when they are working in ways that share power and enable mutual accountability.

1. INGO intermediary grantees provide sub-grants that enable CSOs to receive at least some Hewlett foundation **funding** that may otherwise be inaccessible to them given the limitations imposed by the foundation's lean staffing model and location.

2. INGOs can help CSOs **access funders and decision-making tables**, including at the international level, which helps CSOs fundraise and enables them to contribute to key policymaking forums and discussions.

3. INGO grantees create opportunities for **peer-to-peer learning**, sharing, and collaborations among CSOs, especially across countries. Sub-grant resources can also permit CSOs to hire appropriate capacity strengthening support.

4. INGO staff themselves can in rare cases provide appropriate **technical support** that meets certain CSO capacity needs, such as helping CSOs strengthen their advocacy strategy, specific advocacy skills, or organizational capacities.

5. There are certain circumstances in which it may be helpful for INGOs to play **advocacy roles**, such as engaging in international advocacy to put pressure on African governments, especially when CSOs cannot risk doing so. But this should occur only at the request of CSOs. Several interviewees argued that INGOs should *not* lead local advocacy, noting that CSOs are uniquely suited to undertake advocacy at the community level because they are the legitimate constituency to pressure their leaders and are closer to the context culturally, linguistically, and politically.

> Examining the strategy's assumptions
>
> **Assumption:** INGO grantees have the capacity (skills, resources, structures, relationships) to effectively support the advocacy and organizational capacity of CSO partners.
>
> Our findings provide some support for this assumption, suggesting the constructive roles INGOs *can* play when building on their comparative advantages, resources, and relationships. But the findings do not fully confirm that INGO intermediaries have the technical skills and capacity needed to effectively address CSOs' wide-ranging advocacy and organizational capacity needs.

INGOs may feel an existential pressure to demonstrate their value by continuously proposing to "build" the capacity of their sub-grantees. But international development advocates and researchers highlight longstanding frustration with a process of capacity strengthening that somehow never results in "enough" capacity.[6] CSOs do not wish to be stuck indefinitely in the "receiver" role while INGOs retain their "giver" or "expert" status. What specific capacity threshold do they need to reach to demonstrate to funders that they no longer need INGOs' technical support? What criteria does the Hewlett Foundation use to determine CSO eligibility for direct general operating support? Hewlett's lean staffing model cannot accommodate large numbers of CSO grantees. Does the re-granting role of intermediaries remain necessary even if CSOs no longer want or need INGOs' technical support? These questions require further clarification in the foundation's strategy.

Interviewees offered suggestions for how the foundation can better align the intermediary and direct grantmaking models with the strategy's principles in ways that contribute towards power sharing and capacity strengthening:

De-coupled roles

De-couple INGOs' capacity support and re-granting roles. INGOs can serve in their technical support roles without serving as re-granters. One CSO described its experience receiving direct funding from a UN agency to conduct activities in communities, while the same agency supported an INGO to provide capacity development and accompaniment to the CSO. By removing the financial power that comes with a re-granting role, this de-coupled approach can help reduce the power imbalance between INGOs and CSOs while also broadening CSOs' access to capacity support from sources other than their INGO funder.

Demand-driven support

Adopt a demand-driven model of capacity support. This idea is consistent with shifting decision-making power to CSOs, putting the CSO in the driver's seat with the authority to select (or not) an INGO as an appropriate technical support partner. A demand-driven model could also encourage greater flexibility for CSOs to select African technical support providers, rather than positioning the INGO intermediary as the starting point for discussing how to best support a CSO's capacity needs.

African intermediaries

Consider African organizations as potential intermediaries. Some civil society leaders suggested that the foundation and other donors consider supporting national or regional grantmaking organizations that can sub-grant to local CSOs. The foundation might also consider supporting large national CSOs to serve as intermediaries. But supporting African organizations as intermediaries may just replicate current problematic structures and power dynamics. The foundation will need to exercise the same careful due diligence and evaluation of African organizations that they have for their INGO intermediaries to assess their alignment with the principles (or willingness to align in the future). The foundation will also need to closely examine how an African intermediary's practices may be shaped by other funders who dictate that grant restrictions or requirements be passed along to CSOs.

The Advocacy Accelerator

The foundation established the Accelerator to fill a perceived gap in the advocacy capacity landscape, addressing the need for a common, Africa- based and African-led platform through which advocates, researchers, technical assistance providers, and donors could share and learn from one another. Although intended in part to serve as a source of capacity support for CSOs who partner with Hewlett grantees, the Accelerator has a much broader mandate and vision: to provide Africa-focused resources and support for health and development advocacy in Africa. As a new initiative established in 2017 with start-up and core support from the Hewlett Foundation, the Advocacy Accelerator is distinct from the other grantees in the strategy's portfolio. We reported separately to the foundation on the Accelerator's role as part of this strategy.

The Role of the Hewlett Foundation

From the earliest stages of developing the strategy, the Hewlett Foundation stated its intention to hold itself accountable to the same principles it expected the grantees to follow. The foundation also recognized its role in encouraging strategy actors as well as peer funders to align their practices with the principles. We summarized key lessons about the role that the foundation played – or should have played – in helping its grantees, CSO partners, and other funders understand and take up principle-aligned practices.

Promoting principle-aligned practices among strategy actors

Clear and direct communication about the principles and practices is crucial to their uptake. The strategy's theory of change posited that strategy actors would define, develop, and implement principle-aligned practices and continuously learn, share, and adapt. This developmental learning and evaluation process, as well as the three grantee convenings Hewlett organized, contributed towards some progress in developing a shared understanding of the principles and aligned practices. But our interviews revealed that more needed to be done to clarify how to translate the principles into practice. Moreover, to encourage uptake of principle-aligned practices, the foundation could have been more explicit in encouraging or even requiring grantees to implement certain practices. Doing so would have helped grantees better understand which practices Hewlett expected to see, while also giving CSO partners leverage to hold grantees accountable for engaging in those practices – consistent with the principle of mutual accountability.

Grantees needed Hewlett to provide greater clarity regarding the "end goal" of capacity support provided under this strategy. This observation implicates the principles on sustained technical assistance and longer-term advocacy partnerships. CSO interviews confirmed the value of long-term agreements and sustained capacity support partnerships. But how long is "sustained" and "longer-term" – and when has capacity support gone on long enough? For those CSOs who have requested capacity strengthening, when have they reached the stage where they no longer need capacity support from an INGO – and who makes that judgment? At what point does "long-term capacity support" begin to contradict the goal of CSO sustainability? As one interviewee observed, a CSO can't be autonomous if it stays in perpetual need of technical assistance. There's a risk of creating dependency among INGOs on CSOs' perpetual lack of "capacity" – which serves to maintain the power imbalance between the INGO "giver" of technical expertise and funding and the CSO "recipient" of those resources. Clarifying the answers to these questions can help the foundation better explain how principle-aligned practices ultimately contribute to more sustainable and effective CSOs.
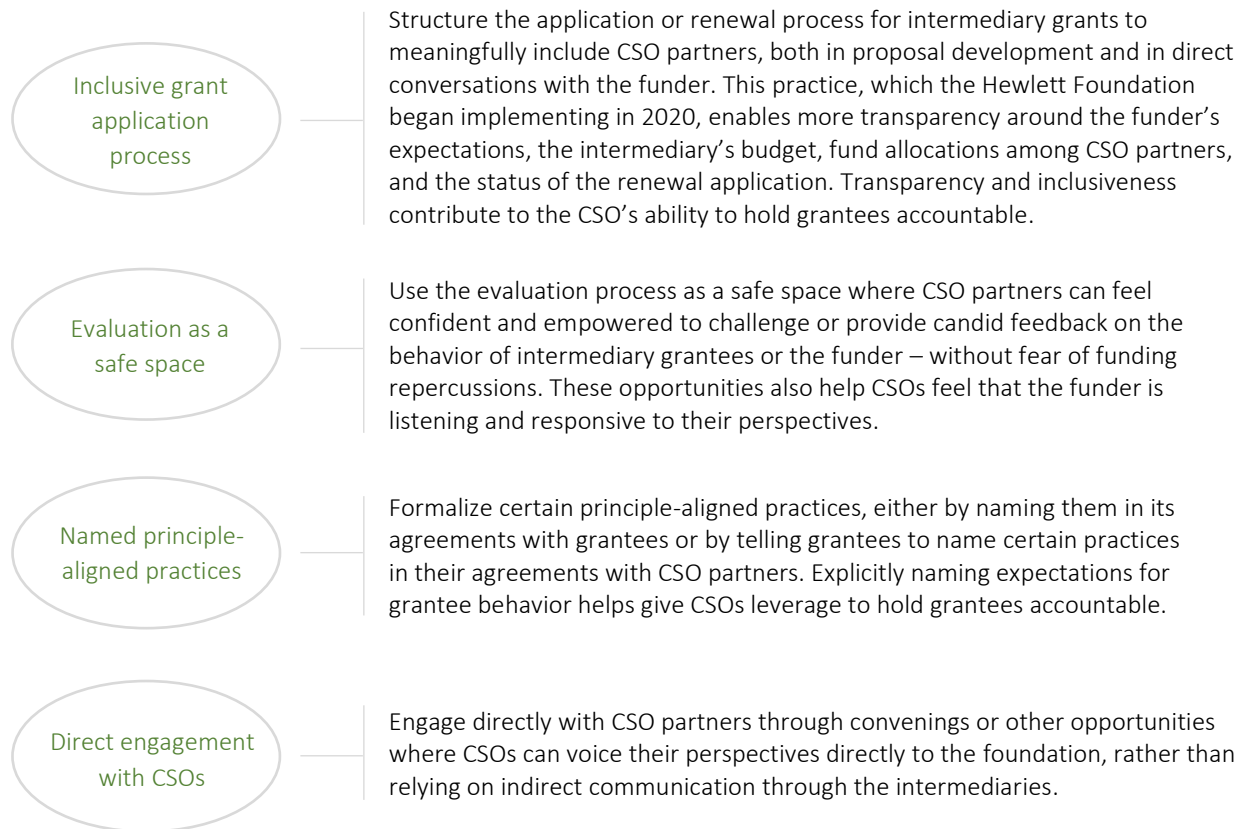
Examining the strategy's assumptions

Assumption: The Hewlett Foundation can shift power towards its grantees while simultaneously using its power to encourage principle-aligned practices among those grantees and their CSO partners.

There is inherent tension in this assumption. Providing broad flexibility with project grants to its INGO intermediaries – and its five-year grants to Advocacy Partners in particular – represents a significant foundation commitment to sharing power. Being more directive about the specific principle-aligned practices that the foundation expects to see in its grantees' partnerships with CSOs arguably takes away some of that power from grantees. But we note that this doesn't necessarily mean the foundation is taking the power back for itself; rather, it may serve as more of an exercise in "power redistribution" if it helps give CSO partners more power to hold grantees accountable.

Funder Practices that Support Mutual Accountability in the Intermediary Grantmaking Model

Inclusive grant application process	Structure the application or renewal process for intermediary grants to meaningfully include CSO partners, both in proposal development and in direct conversations with the funder. This practice, which the Hewlett Foundation began implementing in 2020, enables more transparency around the funder's expectations, the intermediary's budget, fund allocations among CSO partners, and the status of the renewal application. Transparency and inclusiveness contribute to the CSO's ability to hold grantees accountable.
Evaluation as a safe space	Use the evaluation process as a safe space where CSO partners can feel confident and empowered to challenge or provide candid feedback on the behavior of intermediary grantees or the funder – without fear of funding repercussions. These opportunities also help CSOs feel that the funder is listening and responsive to their perspectives.
Named principle-aligned practices	Formalize certain principle-aligned practices, either by naming them in its agreements with grantees or by telling grantees to name certain practices in their agreements with CSO partners. Explicitly naming expectations for grantee behavior helps give CSOs leverage to hold grantees accountable.
Direct engagement with CSOs	Engage directly with CSO partners through convenings or other opportunities where CSOs can voice their perspectives directly to the foundation, rather than relying on indirect communication through the intermediaries.

Promoting principle-aligned practices among peer funders

Lack of a formal communications strategy limited the foundation's ability to raise awareness of its principle-based approach among external audiences. The theory of change reflects the foundation's hope that external audiences like peer funders would perceive the value of the principles and use lessons learned from the strategy. Hewlett staff periodically shared evaluation products and lessons learned with colleagues both within and outside of the foundation, but staff acknowledged that the foundation developed no formal communications strategy to share lessons externally. This limited the potential to raise awareness among peer funders.

Peer funders are at different places in their "journeys" towards more equitable funding and power shifting practices – which can affect their openness to peer influence. The foundation and the evaluation team did not deeply explore how best to tailor products or dissemination strategies to the potential learning priorities of peer funders. These learning priorities vary widely, depending on whether a funder is on the leading edge of shifting power and decolonizing philanthropy, or just beginning their journey towards more equitable and inclusive grantmaking. Recognizing this variation – and situating lessons from the strategy within the evolving context of the funder landscape – may help refine future efforts to influence peer funders.

Reflections on the Principles

One of the defining characteristics of this strategy is its principle-based approach. The five principles – named explicitly in the strategy document and emphasized by the foundation throughout the five-year period – have served as a core reference point for implementing and evaluating the strategy. We observed general support for the principles among interviewees, confirming their value in advancing capacity strengthening and power sharing. Interviewees also surfaced key questions to prompt deeper thinking around the principles, encouraging us to consider how refinements to the principles may better guide future grantmaking strategies that support local advocacy in sub-Saharan Africa.

Principles	Reflections on the principles	Questions to inform future efforts
Principle 1: Support local advocacy priorities while seeking opportunities to connect these to global advocacy efforts	Determining advocacy priorities locally resonates strongly with interviewees – and aligns with broader conversations about recognizing the cultural, linguistic, and political expertise that CSOs bring to advocacy.[7] But as one CSO pointed out, CSOs themselves need to demonstrate that they conduct community consultation in setting advocacy priorities. CSOs should not assume that they already know enough about local communities. Interviewees also expressed concerns about "phony localization" of INGOs that establish offices in Africa and claim NGO status under local law, crowding out "genuinely" local CSOs.	• What is "local"? • Who represents "local"?
Principle 2: Strengthen and provide more hands-on and sustained technical assistance tailored to each organization	This principle reflects Hewlett's interest in supporting more effective capacity support for CSOs, with the assumption that hands-on, sustained, and tailored technical assistance was a key ingredient. Our findings suggest that CSOs do value these qualities of capacity support. But we have also seen that the concept of "capacity support" is much broader than this principle perhaps envisioned. Effective capacity support can take other forms beyond technical assistance to address long-term organizational capacity needs such as staff retention, succession planning, and the development of young leaders.	• What capacities are valued. By whom? Why? • Are funders and INGOs promoting "capacities" that replicate models (e.g., for evaluation and reporting) from their own national cultures and systems? • Does endorsement of those models come at the expense of CSOs' own missions?
Principle 3: Support longer-term advocacy partnerships that strengthen and support local advocacy capacity	This principle reflects the foundation's expectation that its intermediary grantees would develop longer-term grant agreements with their CSO partners. But the principle raises questions about "how long is long term" – and how to determine when it is appropriate to sustain versus end a partnership. The appropriate length of different kinds of capacity support relationships may vary.	• How long should "long-term" be in the context of complex policy change processes? • How long does it take to "build" capacity?

Principles	Reflections on the principles	Questions to inform future efforts
Principle 4: Encourage mutual accountability among all parties: funders, intermediaries, and local partners	Throughout our five-year learning and evaluation process, grantees and CSO partners have endorsed this principle "in principle" while also questioning how to put it into practice. Over time, the foundation evolved towards explicitly naming power sharing and power shifting as fundamental to mutual accountability. But questions remain about whether it is possible to achieve meaningful mutual accountability given the inherent power imbalance in funding relationships.	• Who can hold funders accountable? • How can mutual accountability be framed as an expression of "reciprocity," grounding power in the value attached to the work done in communities, not just the value attached to funding?
Principle 5: Measure progress, document, adapt and share what is learned	Hewlett commissioned this five-year learning and evaluation process as one way it would practice this principle. It encouraged its intermediary grantees and their CSO partners to adapt their practices based on what they learned from this evaluation and their broader experiences. But as one peer funder commented, foundation-led efforts to "measure progress" can come to resemble policing the grantees unless they are framed as part of a more genuinely "mutual" accountability process where the funder's performance is assessed along with the grantees.	• Is evaluation an expression of the funder's power to determine "what counts?" • How do evaluators reinforce power imbalances?

Over the course of the five-year period, the foundation and the evaluation team came to understand power shifting and power sharing as fundamental to the foundation's objectives for this strategy. But this was not as clearly stated in the strategy paper. Nor does the word "power" appear in the principles. Naming power more explicitly could be a helpful refinement to the principles. However, we note that power shifting is a complex – and sometimes contested – concept. For example, power shifting may be understood as posing an existential challenge to INGOs if the language of power shifting is interpreted to mean a complete transfer of power from funders or INGOs to CSOs. Power sharing admits a broader range of collaborative relationships. But one civil society leader pointed out how vital it is to consider *who* has *what kind* of power: a feminist approach recognizes that communities have their own power. A funder can enable and support people to work together, "but we can't say that we are shifting power and giving it to a community." This observation encourages reflection on how multiple definitions of "power" can inform what it means for funders to support local advocacy in sub-Saharan Africa.

"Being a funder and giving money does not mean that you carry people's power. You carry your own power. So you cannot shift your own power and give it to communities; they have got with their own power… You can unlock what is already there so that they can do much more."

— Civil society leader

Recommendations

We offer recommendations that could shape the foundation's own grantmaking practices, those of other advocacy funders, and those of any intermediaries it chooses to support, operationalizing some of our findings and lessons learned.

Structuring grantmaking in ways that help address power imbalances

Grantmaking inherently involves an imbalance of power that can challenge even well-established, trusting relationships among organizations. Here are steps that the foundation and other funders can take to address the power imbalances embedded in funding relationships:

1. **Make power analysis an explicit part of grantmaking practice.**

   Encourage grant-seekers to engage in power analysis as part of their proposals and advocacy approaches. Funders themselves should challenge unjust power structures, including those they create.[8]

2. **Use simpler, more flexible, and more inclusive application and reporting processes.**

   Funders can improve their application and reporting processes by making them simpler, paying for the cost of translation or interpretation across multiple languages, and experimenting with more flexible reporting options such as oral formats.

3. **Establish, communicate, and adhere to clear grant terms and procedures.**

   Recipients need clarity about grant duration, payment schedules, reporting requirements, and prospects for continued funding.

4. **Promote mutual accountability from the beginning.**

   Grant negotiations should delineate each party's responsibilities to the other and affirm the recipients' right to prompt and respectful responses from the funder. The foundation and other funders should use an inclusive grant application and grant renewal process that ensures transparency among all parties about expectations and funding allocations.

5. **Encourage evaluation, learning, and feedback.**

   Create "safe spaces" for intermediaries and CSOs to provide feedback to one another – and to the foundation. Build in evaluation approaches that offer multiple opportunities for CSOs to provide confidential feedback.

6. **Trust but verify.**

   The principles of trust-based philanthropy are appealing. But trust can be misplaced. Evaluation and learning processes can offer a check on misuse of power.

7. **Encourage whistle blowing – and protect whistle blowers.**

   Those who receive funds are understandably reluctant to call out abusive, inequitable, or corrupt behavior. The foundation and other funders could support efforts by African philanthropies or other civil society bodies to create structures for anonymous reporting and further investigation of alleged behaviors.

Questioning "capacity" and "capacity strengthening" definitions and models

The strategy set out to promote significant changes in capacity strengthening through its principles. Interviewees suggested directions for deeper exploration:

1.   **Put CSOs at the center of the process.**

CSOs were more satisfied with capacity strengthening efforts when they had greater freedom to determine the nature, source, and timing of that support. CSOs are the appropriate judge of what "capacity" they need, and of how much is "enough."

2.   **Consider separating sub-granting from capacity strengthening.**

Funders can assess each intermediary for its capacity to provide the support partners need, rather than expecting them to have the needed expertise to both manage sub-grants and provide appropriate capacity strengthening assistance.

3.   **Long-term planning for succession and investment.**

Funders could support endowments to provide stable, long-term revenues for CSOs. CSOs can explore alternative revenue sources including community-led, small-donor contributions, and offering services for reasonable fees. Funders can help CSO leaders develop plans to mentor and transfer leadership to younger generations.

4.   **Understand the diverse nature of "capacity."**

Different types of organizational and advocacy capacity require support in different ways from different sources:

a.   **Organizational structures, systems, and norms:** Basic governance structures or administrative systems can benefit from organizational effectiveness grants that permit the CSO to engage appropriate technical experts and deepen the organizational norms and values aligned with the principles. Managing a sub-granting role requires specific structures and systems that funders can help new intermediary partners develop and refine.

b.   **Staffing:** Donors should fund competitive salaries and benefits and provide longer, general operating support to allow organizations to attract and retain talented staff. This can help break the pattern of individuals hired to perform one function under one short-term project grant. This facilitates personnel development and succession planning.

c.   **Issue experience and subject-matter expertise**: Funders and intermediaries can facilitate opportunities for learning from peer organizations and from individuals working at the regional and global level.

d.   **Tactical experience and knowledge**: CSOs typically learn best by experimenting with and adapting advocacy tactics that others are using. Funders, intermediaries, and resource banks like the Advocacy Accelerator can offer access to training, workshops, and tools. They can also facilitate access to peer CSOs and others who can support the CSO's process of adapting the tools to their context.

e.   **Collaborative problem-solving:** CSO interviewees and funders noted the value of "accompaniment," which often takes the form of coaching, conversations, and other forms of collaborative problem solving. These practices are typically enabled by relationships and trust developed over many years.

5.   **Hold all "capacity builders" accountable for effective delivery of support.**

Funders tend to assess only the CSO's performance and capacity. We suggest focusing as well on the performance of the organizations offering capacity strengthening.

Exploring additional opportunities to advance funders' power-sharing practices

The Hewlett Foundation can consider other ways to strengthen its contributions to power sharing:

1.   **Have reliable advisors in Africa, closer to the organizations that the foundation funds.**

The Hewlett Foundation has historically preferred to maintain a lean staffing model which discourages it from hiring enough staff members or consultants to manage multiple small grants in Africa. But engaging local observers and advisors who are familiar with the countries and issues where it expects to be active can help the foundation support its power-sharing objectives. For example, local observers assessing success and hearing concerns – especially those expressed by CSO sub-grantees – can provide early indicators of progress or warnings of emerging power imbalances. Another possibility: establishing a formal local advisory group who identify candidates for foundation support and listen for evidence of progress or concerns that merit program staff's attention. Such a group could help diversify the perspectives and networks available to the foundation.

2.   **Engage in philanthropic advocacy.**

The foundation can advocate to its peers for more intentional power-sharing and power-shifting practices. The foundation, along with other funders, can encourage more equitable, inclusive, and even transformative grantmaking practices and bolster support for such practices among African philanthropies, including "community-led" philanthropies. The foundation's support can contribute to African funders' efforts to strengthen their sector and discourage practices that would replicate current power imbalances.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix

Evaluation Questions Guiding the Final Evaluation Report

1. To what extent and how well has the foundation's principle-based grantmaking approach contributed to the intended **short-term outcomes of power sharing and more effective capacity strengthening**? How have principle-aligned practices by the foundation, its grantees, and CSO partners contributed (or not) to gains in CSOs' advocacy and organizational capacity? Has the principle-based approach contributed to any unexpected positive or negative outcomes?

2. How do **different grantmaking models** embedded within the strategy (i.e., the intermediary model, direct grantmaking model, and the Advocacy Accelerator grant) contribute in complementary or competing ways to intended outcomes – and to the overall goal of a more vibrant CSO sector? What roles can and should the foundation, its grantees, and CSO partners play in advancing the goal? What else is needed (e.g., other actors, additional elements of capacity support, further adjustments in practices or roles) to effectively and sustainably progress towards the strategy's goal?

3. How have **broader contextual factors** facilitated or inhibited strategy actors' ability to put the principles into practice and effectively strengthen capacity and shift power? For example, how do competition for resources and the dominant cultures of the funder-driven development landscape affect strategy actors and what they are able to achieve? How, if at all, has the principled approach influenced funder-grantee-CSO interactions in the context of COVID-19? What lessons can we draw about the ways in which the principles are present or absent in responses to a global crisis?

4. To what extent and how has the foundation's strategy influenced **other funders and INGOs** who support FPRH advocacy in sub-Saharan Africa? How do other funder and INGO approaches align (or not) with the strategy principles? How do their approaches reflect (or diverge from) the strategy's emphasis on power sharing? What factors have facilitated or inhibited the scope of the strategy's influence?

5. What lessons can be drawn regarding **the foundation's assumptions** about how to shift power, support effective capacity strengthening, and contribute towards a more vibrant CSO sector in sub-Saharan Africa.

Methodological Approach

The evaluation supported an ongoing process of learning, sharing, and adapting by using a developmental approach that generated feedback and lessons annually. The evaluation design was responsive to changes in learning priorities as strategy actors' understanding of the principles and aligned practices evolved over time. Shifts in the evaluation design also reflected the evaluation team's deepening understanding of how to gather meaningful data on sensitive and complex topics such as power dynamics and effective capacity support.

This report draws on what we have learned throughout the five-year process, but with a particular emphasis on data from 63 confidential interviews conducted in the final phase of this evaluation, primarily from January through May of 2021. This includes interviews with 12 of Hewlett's intermediary and direct CSO grantees, as well as two-hour in-depth interviews with 30 of the grantees' CSO partners (see Table A1 below). CSO interviewees encompassed 12 African countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia), with seven of the interviews conducted in French and four conducted in Swahili.

To ground our work in a broader understanding of the CSO sector and the current practices of other funders, INGOs, and CSOs, we also conducted 12 interviews with 14 individual civil society leaders, including a range of

voices from across the continent (Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe) and across different kinds of organizations, including research institutions, funding organizations, and CSOs. We also conducted interviews with staff of six peer funders who support capacity strengthening and FPRH advocacy in sub-Saharan Africa, seeking interviewees with diverse approaches to funding CSOs via intermediary organizations. Finally, our interviews included three Hewlett staff members who have been deeply involved in the strategy and evaluation process.

Table A1. Phase 4 Interview Categories

Interview Categories	Number of interviews	Number of individual participants in interviews
Grantees	12	23
Civil Society Organizations	30	42
Civil Society Leaders	12	14
Peer SRHR Funders	6	7
Hewlett Foundation	3	3
Total	63	89

To help situate our findings within some of the broader trends and developments unfolding in the field, we drew on a set of context review activities led by Tian Johnson and Maaza Seyoum of the African Alliance in collaboration with evaluation team member Rhonda Schlangen. This review included assembling a rich compendium of current resources relevant to understanding the landscape of funder, INGO, and CSO practices, experiences, and perspectives on topics relevant to the strategy principles. Key insights and resources from this context review process informed this report.

Limitations

Our Phase 4 evaluation design purposefully focused on interviews as the primary methodology. This reflects methodological lessons learned during prior phases of the evaluation, which suggested that we were able to gather clearer, more reliable, and more nuanced information via interviews (as opposed to surveys). The interview format allowed us to build rapport, clarify our questions when needed, and ask follow-up questions to further probe interviewees' responses. This was particularly important given the sensitivity and complexity of the topics we explored in the interviews: capacity strengthening and power dynamics (including racial dynamics). However, one trade-off is that we were unable to engage as many CSO partners as we have in prior phases. This limited our ability to generalize our findings to all CSO partners under this strategy.

We also capped the number of interviews with civil society leaders and peer funders at 18, which again constrains the generalizability of our findings to the broader set of actors who fall into these categories. We recognize that "civil society leader" is a broad term and may be defined in different ways. For our purposes, we sought to identify individuals who could speak from their long-time experience supporting and/or advancing African civil society. But we recognize that our interviewees were predominantly based at large organizations with a well-established national and/or international presence. Our interviews did not include other examples of civil society leaders, including many individuals and/or organizations operating at a sub-national level.

Endnotes

1 DSW transitioned from an Opportunistic Engagement grantee to an Advocacy Partner in 2018. Because this transition occurred partway through the five-year strategy implementation period, DSW received a 38-month long grant to roughly align with when the other Advocacy Partner grants would end. The other three Advocacy Partners (Equipop, IWHC, and PAI) each received a five-year grant at the start of the strategy implementation period.

2 The Hewlett Foundation, our interviewees, and this report use the terms "power shifting" and "power sharing" somewhat inconsistently. When citing sources, we follow their use of the terms. CSO interviewees note that power is rarely "shifted" entirely to them in ways that offer full autonomy in making decisions. General operating support from a funder may come closest to achieving a shift in power, in this sense. CSOs offered examples more readily of how power is "shared," as represented by respectful processes of consultation with a funder about advocacy priorities and strategies or about the CSO's use of budgeted funds. As we note on page 13, these terms remain the topic of wide discussion.

3 This is a useful reminder of a broader challenge in changing practices: the contextual factors we outlined earlier – particularly widespread funder practices that perpetuate power imbalances – can influence INGO grantees' ability to align their practices with the foundation's principles.

4 See, for example, #PhilanthropySoWhite, A Panel Discussion Hosted by Edgar Villanueva, Decolonizing Wealth Project, February 19, 2021. Open Democracy (by 146 local organizations), "An Open Letter to International NGOs Who Are Looking to 'Localise' Their Operations," March 8, 2020. Anna Feuchtwang, "Broken promises: why handing over power to local NGOs is empty rhetoric," The Guardian, 2014. Tindyebwa Agaba, "We need to talk about racism in the aid sector," Open Democracy, December 7, 2018. West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and Rights CoLab, "Fostering Equitable North-South Civil Society Partnerships: Voices from the South" (WACSI, February 23, 2021). Epic-Africa, "The State of African CSOs" (EPIC-Africa, 2019).

5 See, for example, Zenda Ofir, "Snippet: Judging 'Success'. The Example of Capacity Development," EVALUATION FOR DEVELOPMENT (blog), February 8, 2018. Kathy Reich, "Reflections on the first year of BUILD," November 28, 2018. David Guy, "Aid Workers Talk Endlessly about Capacity Building - but What Does It Really Mean?" The Guardian, 2016. Amit Chandra and Pritha Venkatachalam, "Why Is There a Collective Silence around Capacity Building?" (IDR, June 26, 2019). Jon Harle, "Doing Capacity Development Well | From Poverty to Power," From Poverty to Power (blog), August 8, 2017. Niels Keijzer et al., "Bringing the Invisible into Perspective: Reference Document for Using the 5Cs Framework to Plan, Monitor and Evaluate Capacity and Results of Capacity Development Processes" (Maastricht, The Netherlands: European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2011).

6 See, for example, Arbie Baguios, Stephanie Kimou, Marie-Rose Romain Murphy, and Naomi Tulay-Solanke, "How to Be Anti-Racist in Aid," Aid Re-imagined (blog), June 17, 2020. Jimmy Awany, "International Development Frameworks Force Civil Society to Mimic Western NGOs," Africa at London School of Economics (blog), 2020. Lisa Denney, "$15bn is spent every year on training, with disappointing results. Why the aid industry needs to rethink 'capacity building'," From Poverty to Power (blog), July 6, 2017.

7 Jennifer Chapman, Almir Pereira Junior, Sarah Okwaare, Laya Prasad Uprety, and Valerie Miller, Critical Webs of Power and Change: Resource Pack for Planning, Reflection and Learning in People-Centered Advocacy (Action Aid, November 2005). Vibrant Hawaii, Data Justice Talk Story (Video), August 7, 2020. Arbie Baguos, "It's Time to Decolonise Project Management in the Aid Sector," Aid Re-Imagined (blog), February 18, 2020.

8 Powercube offers practical tools for power analysis at https://www.powercube.net/; Clarissa Rile Hayward provides a more comprehensive guide in De-Facing Power (Cambridge University Press, 2000).