



Strengthening country-based advocacy for maximum impact: **What will it take?**

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A report commissioned by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and written by Rachel Wilson and Jodi Keyserling at Catalysts for Change



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While many people contributed to the content in this report, the views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of any individual or represent the position of any particular organization.



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Forward

Achieving the ambitious new Sustainable Development Goals will require every country around the globe to make specific and measurable progress. For this reason, country-driven approaches to development are getting the attention they have long deserved. And strong, coordinated advocacy efforts—driven by local people and priorities—will be essential. But the chasm between the potential for country-driven advocacy to inform and influence progress and the reality of current advocacy capacity and practice is vast and, at times, daunting.

There needs to be a seismic shift in how we do business as donors, researchers, international institutions, technical assistance providers, and civil society organizations. We need to be willing to take risks and embrace failure, because some of the answers may be found in approaches never attempted before—approaches that may be expensive, long term, and difficult. The alternative is the status quo, where policy goals may eventually be reached, but advocacy takes longer, costs more, and continues to be driven by external priorities.

An investment in country-based leadership in advocacy and accountability is well worth making. Here are some initial questions for stakeholders to consider regarding their engagement with country-based advocacy.

Donors

- Are you working with country-based grantees as full and equal partners?
- Are you encouraging evaluation and sharing of what they have learned?
- Are you supporting the organizational strength and leadership they need to achieve mission-driven change?

International organizations

- Are you working with local partners to plan and develop proposals?
- Do you have mechanisms for anonymous feedback on your role as a technical assistance provider?

Local organizations

- Does your institutional strategy include advocacy priorities and budgets?
- Do you have advocacy experts on staff who are well-trained and supported?
- Do you document your successes and share them with funders and partners?

Researchers

- Are you asking the questions that the advocates need answered?
- Do you have mechanisms to hear and learn from them—and they from you?

As a first step in addressing some of the issues raised in the report, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation is partnering with Catalysts for Change and an expert advisory committee to launch an Advocacy Accelerator. The Advocacy Accelerator will strengthen advocacy capacity, alignment, and impact in the Global South by providing in-person and online platforms for advocates and their supporters to share experiences, evidence, and approaches. The success of the Advocacy Accelerator depends on strong partnership with all actors, so please join us! For more information and to help shape the Advocacy Accelerator, visit www.AdvocacyAccelerator.org. Together we can accelerate the change we seek.



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Executive Summary

Country-based advocacy plays a critical role in improving health and development in the Global South by ensuring that leaders support and implement the changes needed in their countries. However, there is minimal evaluation and information on what the most effective approaches are to maximizing country-based advocacy impact. To better understand the factors that contribute to and hinder country-based advocacy, Catalysts for Change interviewed 90 donors, advocates, and researchers.

This report outlines interviewee experiences and perspectives on the challenges and opportunities to strengthen country-based advocacy capacity and impact. It confirms that many innovative efforts are being implemented to inefficiencies and redundancies in advocacy planning and practices, leading to missed opportunities and delays that ultimately contribute to reduced impact.

In addition to outlining a series of recommendations, based on the ideas that emerged from the interviews, the report introduces the new Advocacy Accelerator. The Advocacy Accelerator is an emerging model being designed to meet the needs outlined in this report. As envisioned, the Advocacy Accelerator will provide in-person and online platforms for advocates and their supporters to share information, expertise, and approaches. More information about the Advocacy Accelerator can be found in the last section of this report.

Barriers to effective country-based advocacy

Advocacy approaches and strategies are **rarely documented, evaluated, or shared**

Insufficient organizational strength and resources inhibit local organizations from **attracting, maintaining, and effectively utilizing skilled advocates**

RESULT IN:

Inefficiencies • Redundancies • Reduced Impact

Competition between advocates **inhibits collaboration and alignment**

Globally-driven advocacy priorities reduce the potential for **local advocacy leadership and sustainability**

Findings

What is needed to strengthen country-based advocacy impact?

The most significant challenges and needs expressed by interviewees fall into four broad categories:



INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

- Clarity on advocacy definitions and goals
- Evaluation and sharing of advocacy capacity strengthening tools and approaches
- Supplementation of tools and trainings with mentoring and support
- Inclusion of policy implementation and accountability as advocacy skills
- Greater understanding of decision-making processes
- Better documentation of advocacy impact



ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH AND PRACTICES

- Stronger institutional capacity of organizations engaged in advocacy
- Inclusion of advocacy into organizational strategies and priorities



INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT

- Equal partnership between global and local players
- Greater alignment and collaboration among advocates
- More cross-sector engagement and exchange
- Greater opportunities for learning across regions
- Increased collaboration between researchers, implementers, and advocates
- Stronger donor coordination



ADVOCACY ECOSYSTEM

- Direct partnership by donors with local organizations
- Fewer laws and regulations restricting the rights of civil society to advocate
- Reduced stigma of advocacy
- Support for advocacy as a professional area of expertise

Recommendations

The findings point to a range of actions that can be taken to ensure that the needs outlined above are addressed effectively. The recommendations outlined below are based on analysis by the authors of the needs and suggestions expressed by interviewees, supplemented by a range of additional consultations with interviewees and other key stakeholders.



INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

› Document, evaluate, and share what works

Funders of advocacy capacity strengthening efforts should support evaluation, documentation, and sharing of the approaches developed and used by their grantees.

› Create and support regional technical assistance rosters

Donors and advocates should pool their knowledge of skilled advocacy, communications, and organizational development experts and mentors to create a referral roster that can be tapped by those who need support.



ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH AND PRACTICES

› Assess and support organizational strength in country-based advocacy grants

Organizational strength should become a measure of success in country-based advocacy efforts, alongside advocacy outcomes.



INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT

› Establish platforms for advocacy engagement and shared learning

A centralized mechanism for advocacy best practices, learning, and engagement across health and development sectors should be established.

› Put country-based stakeholders at the center of advocacy plans and strategies

Participatory models that put local players at the heart of strategy development should be used in the creation of advocacy agendas and initiatives.

› Pool and share policy analysis and mapping

Mechanisms should be implemented to collect and aggregate policy analysis and mapping and make it available to others to inform their advocacy strategies and plans.



ADVOCACY ECOSYSTEM

› Provide longer-term and more direct funding to local organizations

Donors must engage with one another to explore and adopt models that support greater direct funding to local organizations.

› Mainstream advocacy into educational institutions

Academic institutions in the Global South should be paired with northern institutions that teach advocacy as a practice area, so they can increasingly incorporate certificates and tracks on advocacy into their courses and curricula.



Background

Global health and development have seen many improvements over the last decade, in large part as a result of improved services made possible by advocacy for increased resources from bilateral and multilateral donors in the United States and Europe. However, in recent years, advocacy efforts have increasingly been focused in the countries where the services are needed most. As planning and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global initiatives shift to national and subnational levels in the Global South, the need for strong country-based advocacy to inform and influence domestic resources and policies becomes even more critical. Despite the clear need for strong country-based advocates, most face significant challenges that reduce their efficiency and effectiveness. Recognizing both the changing global context and the desire to contribute to long-term, sustainable change, donors and advocates alike are seeking ways to better address the barriers to strong country-based advocacy by identifying and supporting models and approaches with the greatest potential for impact.

This report outlines findings from interviews with a range of stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities related to strengthening country-based advocacy capacity. It also puts forth recommendations to address key barriers and expressed needs, including introducing the Advocacy Accelerator, an emerging model that will provide online and in-person platforms for advocates and their supporters to share experiences, evidence, and approaches. Its development has been shaped by these findings and is being informed by a broad community of users—advocates, technical assistance (TA) providers, and donors.

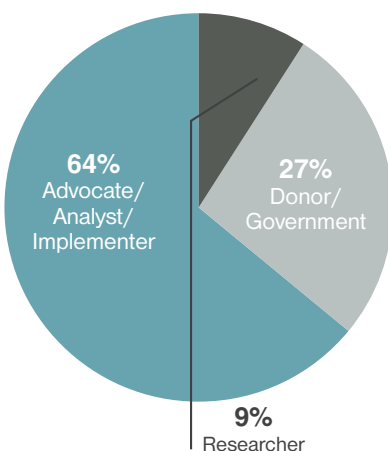
Methodology

Ninety key stakeholders were interviewed to better understand the landscape of country-based advocacy capacity strengthening, as well as the potential benefit and impact of regional platforms for shared learning to advance advocacy capacity strengthening. Interviewees represented government and foundation donors, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), local civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as global, regional, and country networks and platforms. Most institutions were engaged in health advocacy, with additional representation from institutions engaged in democracy and governance, organizational development, research and evaluation, women's rights, and communications. From a geographic perspective, interviews were conducted with stakeholders from seven northern countries and six sub-Saharan African countries, with nearly half of the interviewees reflecting perspectives from the Global South, primarily East Africa. A full list of interviewees can be found at the back of this report.

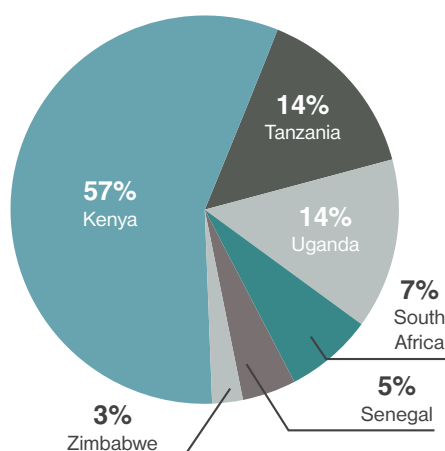
During the interviews, stakeholders were asked what they perceived to be:

- The greatest challenges and needs for effective country-based advocacy capacity and impact
- Trusted tools, models, and approaches to strengthen advocacy and organizational capacity
- The potential value of shared learning platforms to strengthen advocacy capacity

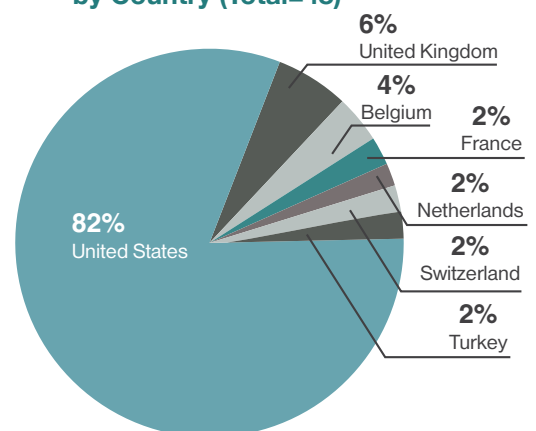
**Interviewees by Occupation
(Total=90)**



**Global South Interviewees
by Country (Total=42)**



**Global North Interviewees
by Country (Total=48)**



Findings

Advocacy challenges and needs

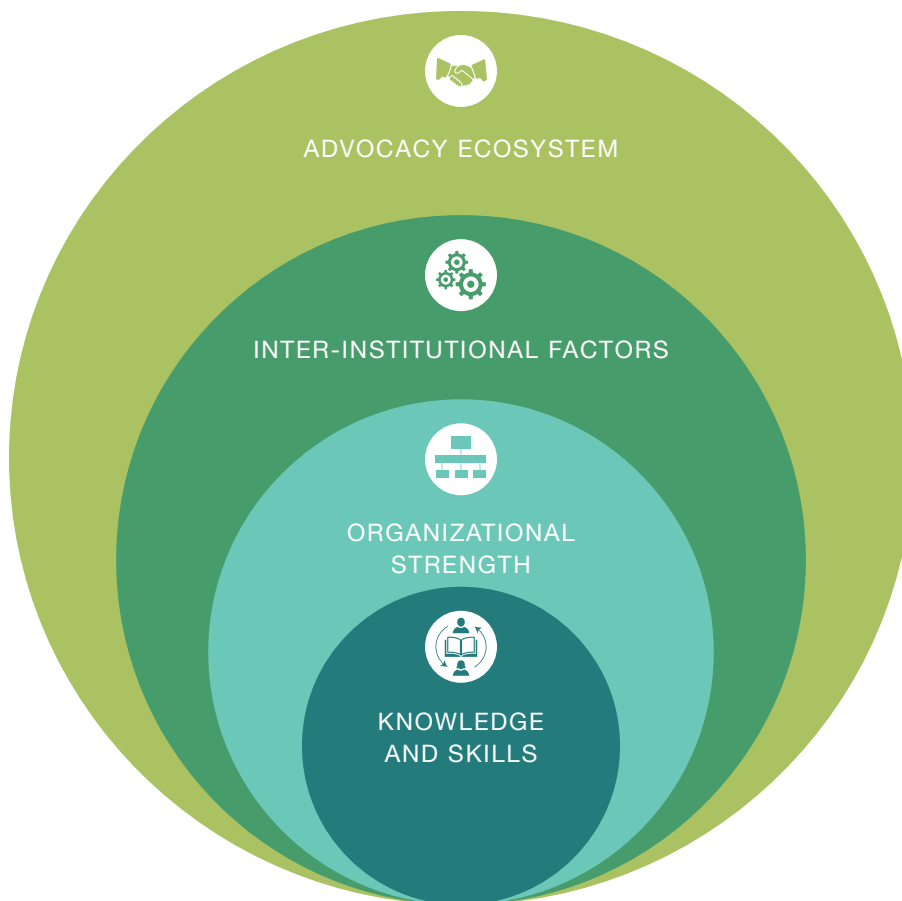
There are many challenges and needs that must be addressed to ensure stronger country-based advocacy capacity. The most commonly cited challenges and needs are explored in more detail below, under the following broad categories:

- Individual knowledge and skills
- Organizational strength and practices
- Inter-institutional collaboration and alignment
- Advocacy ecosystem

Direct quotes are used throughout the findings to share the voices of interviewees. The quotes are not attributed to a specific person or organization to ensure the anonymity of the respondent. Where quotes are absent, the findings represent summaries of interviewee responses.

Many tools, models, and approaches to advocacy capacity-strengthening were described by interviewees. Brief descriptions of several illustrative examples are included in the findings and **a full list of resources provided can be found at www.AdvocacyAccelerator.org.**

Given the lack of robust evaluation and documentation of many of the capacity-strengthening approaches described by interviewees, the examples provided are not intended to indicate a prioritization or selection of one approach over another. Rather, they are indicative of some of the practices that are currently being used by advocates working in the field of advocacy capacity-strengthening.





INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Clarity on advocacy definitions and goals

Lack of clarity among advocates about the definition of advocacy was consistently noted as a challenge. Some view advocacy as synonymous with behavior change communications or awareness raising, while others misperceive advocacy as focusing solely on activism. This lack of clarity in definition is often compounded by an equally unclear sense of what specific policy changes advocates are seeking to influence and how to develop a strategy to achieve the change. Many organizations also lack the skills and resources to engage in the policy analysis necessary to inform such strategy development.

Example: Online strategy development tools

Numerous groups have created interactive, online tools that walk the user through the process of creating or evaluating components of an advocacy strategy. For example, advocates can use Spitfire Strategy's [SMART Chart](#) to develop a communications strategy specifically to advance advocacy goals. The Aspen Institute's [Advocacy Progress Planner](#), an online "logic model builder," can be used by advocates who want to start thinking about planning and evaluation.

Evaluation and sharing of advocacy capacity strengthening tools and approaches

Many northern-based interviewees remarked on the plethora of advocacy tools that exist and lamented the competitive nature and desire of organizations to develop and brand even more new advocacy tools. Nevertheless, many southern-based interviewees reported that tools are not readily available and regret that "there is currently no formal, centralized management of information for advocacy capacity building." In some areas, such as joint institutional and advocacy assessments, some of the most highly used resources are proprietary in nature and not accessible to most advocates.

*"There is currently no formal, centralized management of information for advocacy capacity building."
Africa-based INGO*

Example: Shared learning through knowledge management platforms

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) has developed the [GPSA Knowledge Platform](#) to support learning, sharing, networking, and knowledge exchange for organizations working on social accountability in the Global South. The Platform is an interactive, dynamic networking and knowledge exchange platform with more than 2,000 members representing more than 130 countries. The managers of the Platform have documented and shared their [lessons learned](#) so others can benefit from their experience.



INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Supplementation of tools and trainings with mentoring and support

Most TA providers interviewed reiterated that, while tools and trainings are an important component of advocacy capacity-strengthening, they are only one part of the solution. Each regional, cultural, and political context is unique and the capacity-strengthening support provided needs to be tailored to be most effective. Without follow-on resources, mentoring, and support, sustained learning and impact from static tools and one-off trainings are unlikely.

One-on-one mentoring and peer-to-peer learning models were posed as some of the most effective ways to maximize capacity, but these remain largely unevaluated. As one person explained, “We rely on INGOs [to provide TA]. We would like to be able to access local technical expertise to strengthen local networks and civil society organizations,” but have difficulty finding country-based support.

Example: Supporting advocacy grantees

The [Bloomberg Philanthropies Advocacy Incubator](#) supports their grantees to identify promising individuals and organizations to serve as advocates for public health, focusing on proven population-based public health interventions. The Advocacy Incubator provides training on how to identify opportunities for policy change, conduct high-impact advocacy campaigns, develop and execute successful campaign strategies, and draft new legislation. It also compiles and shares lessons learned, spinning off quality, new, or strengthened organizations, and trains journalists to improve reporting on key issues.

*“We rely on INGOs [to provide TA]. We would like to be able to access local technical expertise to strengthen local networks and civil society organizations.”
Northern-based network*

Inclusion of policy implementation and accountability as advocacy skills

There is strong sentiment, particularly among Global South advocates, that, “There are lots of good policies. We need to move to policy implementation and then to systems and accountability mechanisms.” Policies and standards are often not enforced or met and funds that are allocated are too often not spent. Southern advocates also noted the gap between advocacy and services, stressing the importance of engaging programmatic and technical experts in advocacy for policy implementation.

Example: Country-based accountability expertise

CARE Malawi has established a [local consulting group](#) to provide TA on the use of CARE’s Community Score Card, a participatory governance approach for improving the implementation of quality services.

*“There are lots of good policies. We need to move to policy implementation and then to systems and accountability mechanisms.”
Southern CSO*



INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Greater understanding of decision-making processes

Southern interviewees often spoke of insufficient knowledge of the people and processes that are needed to advance policy change and the fact that, “Advocates are challenged with finding real-time analysis as changes occur.” Specific areas identified as in need of attention include: budgeting processes, parliamentary processes, and operations of decentralized governments—as well as policy analysis and updated structures and political contacts. Many southern advocates noted that government officials also need to be educated about these processes, because their ability to navigate the political system is a prerequisite for change.

“Advocates are challenged with finding real-time analysis as changes occur.”
Southern CSO

Better documentation of advocacy impact

Documentation of advocacy processes and impact are critical to credibility, improved learning, and the ability to attract organizational resources. The challenges posed by lack of documentation of country-based experiences was most often expressed by donors, one of whom asked, “What is the value of advocacy in achieving change? A lot of people don’t understand it. They [advocates] need to show the role and impact it played in getting to the ultimate outcome,” so they can get the understanding and resources they need.

“What is the value of advocacy in achieving change?... They [advocates] need to show the role and impact it played in getting to the ultimate outcome.”
Southern-based donor



ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH AND PRACTICES

Stronger institutional capacity of organizations engaged in advocacy

An organization that is not healthy and stable will not be able to engage in effective, long-term, mission-driven advocacy. But many country-based organizations lack the infrastructure, budgets, and institutional commitment to lead sustained advocacy efforts. Challenges obtaining long-term financial support, attracting and retaining qualified staff, and the model of reliance primarily on one strong individual leader, were common concerns. One southern-based donor expressed the problem stating, “You seldom get organizations that live beyond a funding cycle. After the funder goes, they crumble.”

*“You seldom get organizations that live beyond a funding cycle. After the funder goes, they crumble.”
Southern-based donor*

Example: Assessing organizational health

The FANIKISHA Institutional Strengthening Project used a participatory model called the [Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool](#) (OCAT) to assist national CSOs in Kenya to identify the areas where they require institutional support and to provide a baseline to measure progress.

Inclusion of advocacy into organizational strategies and priorities

Organizational support for advocacy includes the reflection of advocacy functions and priorities in an organization’s strategy, budget, and goals, as well as dedicated staff with advocacy expertise. Organizations also need to understand the implications of pursuing an advocacy agenda, addressing issues of risk tolerance, advocacy leadership, and positioning with partners and policymakers. Effective institutional advocacy requires support from the highest levels of the organization, without which long-term sustainability is virtually impossible. However, for many organizations advocacy is treated as “an afterthought, an add-on to other work.” This can result in limited availability of properly trained staff and a lack of dedicated resources to support advocacy efforts, thus inhibiting the potential for sustained advocacy impact.

*“Advocacy is a long-term investment. But advocacy is often an afterthought, an add-on to other work.”
Southern CSO*

Example: Assessing organizational advocacy capacity

Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Advocacy for Better Health project, [PATH](#) and [Initiatives, Inc.](#) have jointly developed the Organizational Advocacy Capacity Assessment tool for assessing and fostering both organizational and advocacy capacity-development. The tool is a facilitated self-assessment that enables organizations to identify capacity gaps and develop customized plans to improve organizational systems, practices, and tools to achieve advocacy priorities. It is being used annually in Uganda to assess progress in capacity development of advocacy organizations to inform the appropriate type and level of advocacy and organizational support needed.



INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT

Equal partnership between global and local players

The development of advocacy strategies, goals, and indicators is often top-down and not driven or sufficiently informed by country-based advocates. More often, country-based advocates are deployed through short-term, project-driven sub-grants to fulfill the goals of global initiatives. As a southern CSO explained, “We are told, our priorities are *this* and so we need you to do *this*.” This model of engagement and support inhibits the ability of organizations to actively inform global advocacy agendas or pursue longer-term advocacy goals. It also limits their ability to invest the time needed to strengthen the trust and relationships critical for advocacy success. Donors explained that the outcome-driven nature of their support is often due to the need to show advocacy results in a relatively short period of time. While donors may understand that local capacity strengthening requires longer-term investments and partnership, it may be challenging for them to make the case internally.

“We are told, our priorities are this and so we need you to do this.”
Southern CSO

Example: Shifting donor strategies

The [Hewlett Foundation](#) revised its international women’s reproductive health strategy to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of advocacy in sub-Saharan Africa. The approach includes TA, longer-term advocacy partnerships, increased mutual accountability, and stronger evaluation and sharing. The [Civil Society Innovation Initiative \(CSII\)](#)—a project supported by [USAID](#) and the [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(Sida\)](#)—is working to create a network of regional hubs to connect and support civil society, using a participatory process of co-creation to inform its design. They have hosted a series of co-design workshops around the world with regional and national CSO leaders, coupled with stakeholder analysis that has mapped civil society’s needs, existing networks, and regions in each area.



INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT

Greater alignment and collaboration among advocates

Many southern advocates described poor coordination within and between advocacy efforts as a significant challenge in their countries. One southern CSO stated a common refrain that, “There is a need for coordination among INGOs. There are lots of them with similar messages and similar capacity-building. They are not coordinated and need alignment.” Competition, lack of trust in having one organization take the lead on advocacy coordination, insufficient time and capacity to coordinate, and lack of understanding of the value of such collaboration were most often cited as the barriers to better coordination. But this was balanced by significant enthusiasm for more sharing, collaboration, joint planning, and networking. The reality that collaboration takes time and resources was discussed by many, as was the need for donors to incentivize (or at minimum not disincentivize) collaboration by grantees.

“There is a need for coordination among INGOs. There are lots of them with similar messages and similar capacity-building. They are not coordinated and need alignment.”
Southern CSO

Example: Fostering donor, NGO, and CSO collaboration

The [Social Impact Incubator](#) in Burundi was established by the Segal Family Foundation to serve as a common space for local organizations, INGOs, and donors to connect and work together. The goal of the Incubator was to foster collaboration and trust between local organizations; provide linkages for indigenous NGOs to access capacity building resources, tools, and trainings; encourage donors to work collaboratively with Burundian grassroots NGOs; and attract new funding to Burundian NGOs. [Note: The Incubator is currently in the process of moving to Malawi due to political unrest in Burundi.]

More cross-sector engagement and exchange

Advocates do not want to abandon their topic-specific advocacy efforts, but most expressed a desire to increasingly engage with and learn from other sectors. Particularly given the cross-cutting nature of the SDGs, advocates are seeking ways to position their issues in the broader policy ecosystem. While there was a small minority of interviewees who feared the impact of diluted efforts, most expressed, “Need to challenge the ‘it’s too difficult, it’s too specialized’ perspective to cross-sectoral efforts.”

“We need to challenge the ‘it’s too difficult’, ‘it’s too specialized’ perspective to cross-sectoral efforts.”
Northern-based INGO

Greater opportunities for learning across regions

There is a strong desire by advocates to learn from the experiences of those from other countries and regions. East Africans want to learn from Indians, West Africans want to learn from East Africans, and Latin Americans want to engage with their African colleagues. There is also a need to better leverage the relationships and learnings between northern and southern organizations and initiatives. Southern advocates warned against isolating country advocates from regional and global advocacy as they seek to strengthen country impact. They reiterated the need to ensure that local advocates are informing global agendas and vice versa, in order to have the greatest strategic impact.

Example: Cross-regional exchange

[Pathfinder International in Tanzania](#) is working to replicate a model shared by [Planned Parenthood Global in Latin America](#) of a network of activists, researchers, suppliers, and health service professionals working to promote access to information, create opportunities for exchange, and strengthen actions aimed at reducing unsafe abortion.



INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT

Increased collaboration between researchers, implementers, and advocates

Interviewees discussed many challenges and opportunities for strengthening the evidence-base used for advocacy. Advocates often face challenges in accessing and utilizing evidence to support advocacy efforts; implementers may lack understanding of why and how to engage in the advocacy process; and researchers are rarely trained in what data are most needed to influence policymaker's decisions. There is a, "Need to link researchers better with the community and advocates to help shape the questions and evidence-base for advocacy, so the data are useful."

Advocates can also play a critical role in promoting more compelling reporting of data by journalists, linking them to local stories and examples of the realities and consequences of inaction. Greater collaboration is also needed between implementers and advocates, particularly in the area of accountability for policy implementation.

Example: Bridging the research-advocacy divide

As one of its primary activities, [Fahamu](#), a Pan-African organization that supports social movement building, works to bridge theory and practice through a participatory research process that engages academics and communities (when feasible) in research design and conceptualization. By "co-creating" the knowledge with research participants, Fahamu hopes to strengthen the link between knowledge and action.

"We need to link the researchers better with the community and advocates to help shape the questions and evidence-base for advocacy, so the data are useful."

Northern-based INGO

Stronger donor coordination

Since it can be unclear who is funding what advocacy work in each country, advocacy efforts can sometimes be working at cross-purposes. A common sentiment was that, "Competing donor priorities make it hard to have a primary agenda. They promote different interventions, competing and continually changing priorities. It is a challenge to create one primary, unified voice or platform." Greater transparency and alignment of donor efforts in each country was expressed as an important goal to pursue, particularly by country-based interviewees. But donors also expressed a desire for more coordination among themselves, particularly in efforts to improve their ability to support strong country-based advocacy.

"Competing donor priorities make it hard to have a primary agenda. They promote different interventions, competing and continually changing priorities. It is a challenge to create one primary, unified voice or platform."

Southern-based INGO



ADVOCACY ECOSYSTEM

Direct partnership by donors with local organizations

A common frustration expressed by southern-based CSOs is the lack of donors willing to fund and partner with them on advocacy directly. Many northern donors described the lack of administrative capacity, institutional expertise, and risk tolerance for their organizations to fund local NGOs directly, as well as the lack of support institutionally to invest in longer term operational and capacity strengthening efforts. The inability of many local organizations to comply with the complex and diverse requirements of larger donors was also stated as a barrier.

Many worried that the lack of direct support to local organizations could continue to subordinate local agendas in advocacy priority-setting and thwart the local leadership that is critical to ultimate (and sustainable) advocacy success. Some also fear that, “The need to stay with reliable institutions impacts donor ability to support emerging and innovative movements and voices.” The lack of resources available to country-based organizations to offer long-term salaries and job security also contribute to the serious challenge of loss of trained staff leaving to go to organizations that can pay better or provide more stability.

Example: Direct funding to local organizations

The [Segal Family Foundation](#) has piloted a model of funding for indigenous organizations that gives them the resources to allocate to TA providers to provide support in the areas they feel are most critical.

“The need to stay with reliable institutions impacts donor ability to support emerging and innovative movements and voices.”

Southern-based donor

Fewer laws and regulations restricting the rights of civil society to advocate

In a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the space for political discourse and action has or is at risk of narrowing significantly, thus reducing the ability of civil society—and the INGOs that support them—to operate effectively. For example, in Tanzania (at the time of the interview), “Increasingly stringent laws and regulations are being introduced...a statistics bill would control what data can be used; NGOs might not be able to do work in the districts without getting government permission; and the media information act would dictate how they can share their findings.” Despite the impact these laws could have on their ability to advocate effectively, few health advocates are joining their democracy and governance colleagues to address or change them, in large part because they see it as outside their scope of work.

“Increasingly stringent laws and regulations are being introduced.”
Southern CSO



ADVOCACY ECOSYSTEM

Reduced stigma of advocacy

In some countries, activism and agitation are increasingly equated with advocacy when in reality advocacy can include a wide range of approaches. Advocates report, “Increased tension between government and civil society. Less trust, which limits space for engagement.” This negative perception also inhibits others—researchers, policymakers, implementers—from partnering with advocates to improve government policies and may deter individuals from going into the field of advocacy.

“There is increased tension between government and civil society. Less trust, which limits space for engagement.”
Southern-based donor

Support for advocacy as a professional area of expertise

As one interviewee explained, “There is not a strong professional culture around advocacy and a limited idea of advocacy as a ‘field’.” Organizations often do not recognize advocacy as an area of expertise that requires specific skills and strategies. Even organizations that do value advocacy can face significant challenges in finding and retaining well-qualified staff. One interviewee—a master’s degree student in Kenya—noted that few opportunities exist for people exploring careers in related fields to gain specific professional training in advocacy.

“There is not a strong professional culture around advocacy and a limited idea of advocacy as a ‘field’.”
Northern-based donor



Recommendations

The findings point to a range of possible actions that can be taken to ensure that the needs outlined above can be addressed effectively. The recommendations outlined below are based on analysis of interviewee inputs, supplemented by a range of additional consultations with interviewees and other key stakeholders.



INDIVIDUAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

› Document, evaluate, and share what works

Funders of advocacy capacity-strengthening efforts should support evaluation, documentation, and sharing of the advocacy approaches developed and used by their grantees. Such evaluations should be inclusive of advocacy, accountability, organizational development, and communications capacity-strengthening (where relevant). Evaluation must extend beyond tools and trainings to also assess interactive and longer-term approaches such as mentoring, peer exchanges, and twinning. It is equally critical that evaluation and learning continue throughout the life cycle of advocacy endeavors, so support evolves as organizations learn and grow. Donors too should pilot, document, and share their approaches to engaging and supporting country-based advocacy with each other.

“Capacity-strengthening methodologies are all across the board. Nothing is evaluated. We need to ask more about what works and what doesn’t.”
Northern-based donor

› Create and support regional technical assistance rosters

Donors and advocates should pool their knowledge of skilled advocacy, communications, and organizational development experts and mentors to create a referral roster that can be tapped by those who need support. Participating TA providers should be kept abreast of and supported in the use of new and proven tools, methodologies, and approaches, and have opportunities to learn from one another. Lessons can be learned from similar regional TA models, such as the [Friends Africa TA Hub](#) created by Friends of The Global Fund Africa in partnership with PAI, which hosted a database of more than 150 indigenous consultants with specific areas of expertise to support development of proposals to The Global Fund.

“We need to invest in the local capacitors—local nationals, expats who are there for the long term. We need a place for local consultants in country to come together and strengthen their own capacities and ties with one another.”
Northern-based donor



ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH AND PRACTICES

› Assess and support organizational strength in country-based advocacy grants

Organizational strength should become a measure of success in country-based advocacy efforts, alongside advocacy outcomes. Organizational assessments should be used to identify, address, and measure advances and gaps in an organization’s capacity to support advocacy efforts. Assessments should be carried out at baseline and throughout the life of country-based advocacy projects. The results should be used to inform and tailor the TA support provided, evolving based on the organization’s gaps and needs. Experiences with different organizational assessments, processes, and tools should be documented and shared.



INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION AND ALIGNMENT

› Establish platforms for advocacy engagement and shared learning

A centralized mechanism for sharing advocacy best practices and learning—promoting engagement across health and development sectors—should be established. Advocates, TA providers, and donors will use these platforms to find and connect with the resources, expertise, and partners they need to have the greatest impact. The platform should provide both physical and virtual spaces for engagement. For example, such a platform could provide opportunities for advocates to engage with researchers and implementers, and for governance and health groups to come together to address restrictive laws and regulations that pose threats to advocacy. See the next section of this report for information on the Advocacy Accelerator, an emerging model being created to operationalize this recommendation in East Africa.

“We need a people-centered platform that provides interactive ways for people to come together. Posing questions, exchanging ideas. Real time engagement. Hands-on practical exchange.”
Northern INGO

› Put country-based stakeholders at the center of advocacy plans and strategies

Those tasked with creating advocacy strategies for donors, global bodies, and their own organizations should engage country-based advocates as full and equal partners at the stages of inception, creation, implementation, and evaluation. Facilitators trained in participatory models that put local players at the heart of strategy development should lead such processes. This will require a shift in the practices of global advocacy movements, as well as current proposal solicitation and development processes and timelines, in order to engage local stakeholders from the beginning and throughout the project cycle.

“How do we design around the client? We need to talk to advocates about what motivates them, what makes them tick. How can we build something that responds to them?”
Northern INGO

› Pool and share policy analysis and mapping

Donors and advocates often engage in policy analysis and mapping at great expense in terms of time and resources. However, systems to share such information are rarely in place, resulting in duplication of effort and wasted resources. Mechanisms should be implemented to collect and aggregate this information and make it available to others to inform their advocacy strategies and plans. The greatest challenge rests in the fact that organizations have no incentive to share such information with other “competing” advocates and TA providers. Therefore, the support and leadership of donors in encouraging their grantees to pool such information will be critical.



ADVOCACY ECOSYSTEM

› **Provide longer-term and more direct funding to local organizations**

To achieve the lasting impact desired by donors and advocates alike, more advocacy funding needs to be granted directly to country-based organizations. It will require innovation, persistence, and collaboration amongst donors to test and evolve funding models that will allow for this transition to take place successfully; yet the power dynamics inherent in current funding models will not adequately support the capacity and leadership of the future cadre of country-based advocates that is needed. Donors who support this shift to a longer-term, more sustainable model of true local leadership will be challenged to accept the potential risk, but will benefit from the collaborative learning, strengthening of partnerships, and long-term sustainability that can be expected to result from these approaches.

› **Mainstream advocacy into educational institutions**

The inclusion of advocacy courses and tracks in academic centers would expose new potential advocates to a field they might not otherwise consider or of which they have misperceptions. It would also contribute to the recognition of advocacy as a professional area of expertise, helping to combat the negative stigma advocacy often receives. Academic institutions in the Global South should be paired with northern institutions that teach advocacy as a practice area, so they can increasingly incorporate certificates and tracks on advocacy into their courses and curricula. Research on advocacy methodologies could be conducted by academic institutions and published in peer-reviewed journals, elevating the function of advocacy to an area of analytic expertise.

A Way Forward: the Advocacy Accelerator

A platform for shared learning and engagement

In addition to answering questions about challenges, needs, and opportunities, interviewees were asked whether and how platforms that support shared learning and exchange would be of value and contribute to strengthened advocacy capacity and impact. The expressed need for such a function was significant—by both advocates and donors alike—and informed the recommendation to create such a platform. The enthusiasm for this concept prompted the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to provide seed funding to further assess and inform its development. An Advisory Committee comprised of diverse representation from CSOs, INGOs, and donors from across the globe is informing the functions and structure of what is now known as the Advocacy Accelerator. In its initial conceptualization, the Advocacy Accelerator will serve as a platform for advocates, donors, and TA providers to share experiences, evidence, and approaches to strengthen advocacy impact.

As envisioned, the platforms supported by the Advocacy Accelerator will help new advocates learn from more experienced ones, allow advocates to engage with researchers and implementers, support donors to learn from one another, and bridge the divide between models and practices used by different sectors and geographies. The interactive engagement of people with one another will help facilitate trust and contribute to increased coordination, streamlined resources, improved practices, and strategies that are increasingly informed by the perspectives of country-based stakeholders. The Advocacy Accelerator will be based initially in East Africa, supporting a global online advocacy platform and in-person engagement in the region.

Vision: A world where strong, coordinated, country-based advocacy is a driving force for improvements in health and development.

The Advocacy Accelerator will...

Collect and link advocates to information, expertise, and support by:

- Hosting an online community for advocates to pose questions, share information, and learn about professional development and support opportunities
- Providing information and evaluations of trusted and emerging tools, models, and approaches
- Serve as a “matchmaker,” linking advocates to the resources and expertise they need
- Providing expert perspectives and opinions on advocacy capacity strengthening

Provide interactive in-person and virtual spaces that foster and promote learning within and across sectors and regions by:

- Hosting “advocacy exchanges” where advocates can share practices and approaches that have been most effective in their country or region
- Providing facilitation and space to utilize engagement models that put local stakeholders at the center of planning and strategy development
- Convening donors with one another and with country-based advocates to explore promising models and approaches for their support

Connect advocates to organizational development expertise and experience by:

- Providing access to experts, resources, tools, and training opportunities to strengthen the organizational skills that serve as a foundation for sustainable advocacy efforts

Gather and aggregate data, research, and lessons learned across the field of advocacy by:

- Collecting, pooling, and disseminating policy analysis and mapping from select countries
- Supporting and sharing case studies and evaluations

advocacy 
accelerator

The Advocacy Accelerator is still in the inception stages. Its success depends on strong partnerships with a broad community of advocates, donors, and TA providers to source and shape it. To join this effort, visit www.AdvocacyAccelerator.org

Conclusion

Country-based advocacy is emerging as a critical driver of improvements in health and development in the Global South. But more can and must be done to accelerate those advances in order to have greater impact. The actions recommended in this paper will not be easily implemented, particularly given the landscape of siloed funding and competition for information and resources. Organizations may hesitate to share their policy landscaping or proprietary tools. Donors may feel pressure to continue to focus only on short-term advocacy gains and their systems may strain against the challenges inherent in making smaller and more complex grants to local organizations. Finally, time to engage, to learn, and to collaborate with others may be the most challenging commodity to obtain. Global health and development practitioners—advocates, donors, and TA providers—are encouraged to discuss these challenges openly, critically assess the recommendations, and work together to find solutions.



Interviewees

Onyema Afulukwe

Center for Reproductive Rights–Africa
United States

Selome Argaw

Center for Reproductive Rights–Africa
United States

Suleiman Asman

Evidence for Action/Innovations for Poverty Action
Kenya

Sara Bandali

Evidence for Action
United Kingdom

Leo Bryant

Marie Stopes Tanzania
Tanzania

Jarret Cassaniti

K4Health
United States

Manju Chatani

AVAC
United States

Lucia Chebett

DSW
Kenya

Helena Choi

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
United States

Sarah Clark

Futures Group
United States

Monica Aleman Cunningham

Ford Foundation
Kenya

Peter da Costa

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
Kenya

Lana Dakin

Packard Foundation
United States

Jen Daves

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
United States

David Devlin-Foltz

Aspen Institute
United States

Elisha Dunn-Georgiou

PAI
United States

Suzanne Ehlers

PAI
United States

Cynthia Eyakuze

Open Society Foundations
United States

Margot Fahnestock

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
United States

Romano Fernandes

East, Central, and Southern Africa Health Community
Tanzania

Beth Frederick

Advance Family Planning
United States

Francoise Girard

International Women's Health Coalition
United States

Jay Gribble

Futures Group
United States

Kristen Grimm

Spitfire Strategies
United States

Marielle Hart

International HIV/AIDS Alliance
United States

Joshua Haynes

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
United States

Margaret Hempel

Ford Foundation
United States

Pauline Irungu

PATH
Kenya

Chimaraoke Izugbara

African Population and Health Research Center
(APHRC)
Kenya

Sherine Jayawickrama

Independent Consultant
Turkey

Wanjiku Kamau

International HIV/AIDS Alliance
Belgium

Rolla Khadduri

Amplify Change
United Kingdom

William Kidega

PATH
Uganda

Patrick Kinemo

Sikika
Tanzania

Mosi Kisare

EASUN
Tanzania

Barbara Klugman

Independent Consultant
South Africa

Albert Kombo

Planned Parenthood Global (PP Global)–Africa
Kenya

Bakary Kone

The African Capacity Building Foundation
Zimbabwe

Mustafa Kudrati

Pathfinder International
Tanzania

Caroline Kwamboka

International Planned Parenthood Federation–Africa
Kenya

Catherine Kyobutungi

APHRC
Kenya

Jason Lakin

International Budget Partnership
Kenya

Annie Lipsitz

PAI
United States

Charles Lwanga-Ntale

Development Initiatives
Kenya

Sheila N. Macharia

USAID Kenya
Kenya

Jason Maglaughlin

CIVICUS
South Africa

Fredrick Makumbi

Makerere School of Public Health
Uganda

Latanya Mapp-Frett

PP Global
United States

Mercedes Mas de Xaxas

PAI
United States

Peninah Masibo

APHRC
Kenya

Jaki Mbogo

Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa
Kenya

Heidi McAnnally-Linz

Evidence for Action/Innovations for Poverty Action
Kenya

Betsy McCallon
White Ribbon Alliance
United States

Manisha Mehta
Wellspring Advisors
United States

Grace Mihesa
USAID East Africa
Kenya

Kevin Moorhead
Aga Khan Foundation
Kenya

Stephen Muchiri
Health Policy Project
Kenya

Rosemarie Muganda
PATH
Kenya

Ulla Muller
Marie Stopes Tanzania
Tanzania

Jotham Musinguzi
Partners in Population Development
Uganda

Hasifa Naluyiga
PATH
Uganda

Rodrigue Ngouana
Ouagadougou Partnership
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Peter Nguire
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Kenya

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United Kingdom

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Johnpaul Omollo
HENNET
Kenya

Caroline Poirrier
Results for Development
United States

Sam Polk
Results for Development
United States

Patrizia Pompili
EuroNGOs
Belgium

Neena Prasad
Bloomberg Philanthropies
United States

Nicolas Rainaud
Equipop
France

Dee Redwine
PP Global–Latin America
United States

Yolanda Richardson
Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids
United States

Ash Rogers
Segal Family Foundation
Uganda

Bess Rothenberg
Ford Foundation
United States

Rinn Self
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
United States

Lillian Sepulveda
Center for Reproductive Rights
United States

Edwyn Shiell
Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN)
Movement
Switzerland

Sara Stratton
IntraHealth
United States

Fatimata Sy
Ouagadougou Partnership
Senegal

Javid Syed
American Jewish World Service
United States

Courtney Tolmie
Results for Development
United States

Carmen Tull
USAID
United States

Wendy Turnbull
PAI
United States

Jagdish Upadhyay
UNFPA
United States

Mieke Vogels
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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Makerere School of Public Health
Uganda

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Ford Foundation
South Africa

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African Institute for Development
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