

ADVOCACY IN CONTEXT

Stories from South Sudan, Nigeria, Burundi,
Central African Republic and Afghanistan



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Cover image: A peace drawing by an orphaned boy in Afghanistan.

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Introduction

There are many manuals about advocacy. Most of these center on general principles. In the context of development, many policy documents and reports about advocacy are also available. Most of these provide broad and general discussions about programs and their achievements. Usually, little light is shed on the actual nature of the advocacy work. In this book, we seek to do just that. Advocates working on improving relations between the government and society and on social cohesion in the South Sudan, Nigeria, Burundi, Central African Republic and Afghanistan, tell stories about some of their achievements and the strategizing involved. While the countries are diverse, they are commonly called ‘fragile’, and organizations strategize and carry out their work, closely engaging with the conditions and possibilities of their contexts. With these stories, their capacities, strategies and achievements become more visible and understandable.

The stories indicate that the development sector needs to consider more closely what it takes to achieve change in different contexts, like those of the stories in this book. What kinds of strategies come into play, and why? What can work given specific conditions? While the five stories in this book offer only a snapshot, they do provide the insight that the context matters for strategizing, and that specific context-relevant strategies should be identified and implemented.

With this book, we hope to facilitate conversation, mutual recognition and learning for Cordaid and its partners. We also hope that this book can inspire other collaborations that bring together partners from different contexts in transnational advocacy programs. Sharing this first example, we encourage such collaborative groups to engage in conversation on what it means to do advocacy in different contexts, through stories like those in this book or otherwise. Partners can learn more about the nature, challenges and opportunities for advocacy in different contexts and this in turn may help build working relations that are rooted in mutual understanding. We furthermore encourage acting upon the understandings of advocacy that may emerge from sharing experiences and stories.

Box 1 – Capacitating Change: Empowering People in Fragile Contexts

The stories in this book show a small subset of the achievements and advocacy trajectories in the Cordaid-administered Strategic Partnership program, ‘Capacitating Change: Empowering people in Fragile Contexts’ (2016-2020). In this program (hereinafter referred to as the ‘strategic partnership’ or ‘partnership’), Cordaid and its partners worked to strengthen the social contract and social cohesion in fragile contexts. The partnership defines the social contract as an implicit agreement among the members of a society, or between a community and decision-makers, to cooperate for social benefits. The partnership defines social cohesion as the capacity of a society to ensure the wellbeing of all of its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding polarization. While there is no internationally agreed definition of the term ‘fragile states’, or ‘fragility’, most development agencies recognize those regions where the formal state is unable to perform the functions necessary to meet citizens’ basic needs and expectations as fragile. Fragile states are commonly described as incapable of assuring basic security, maintaining rule of law and justice, or providing basic services and economic opportunities for their citizens. While the specificities of fragility and its implications vary depending per context, countries identified as fragile either have weak institutions or, in some cases, strong but unaccountable and abusive institutions. They may be unable to meet the aspirations of their citizens for equitable and inclusive development, and face heightened risk of experiencing a crisis. Historical, political and social factors, often including a weak social contract and a lack of capacity to respond to shocks and stresses, can mean that the chances of a future political, social or humanitarian failure are high.

This Strategic Partnership has sought to strengthen the social contract in fragile contexts in three interconnected areas: 1) security and access to justice for all; 2) accountable and responsive services; 3) inclusive and sustainable economic growth. These three areas represent points through which civil society may strengthen the social contract, by influencing policies, systems and practices to become responsive and accountable to citizens.

The partnership has sought to contribute to strengthening the social contract and enhancing social cohesion more specifically by: 1) strengthening CSO capacity to legitimately engage in influencing power holders, 2) contributing to the creation of an enabling environment for civil society towards, 3) inclusive civil society engagement in and influence on policy processes.

Advocacy requires careful maneuvering and strategies that are based on an in-depth knowledge of a given context. Civil society organizations (CSOs) working in fragile contexts deal with unstable and, at times, unsafe environments. Key people and institutions may come and go and the central state may not be able to provide rule of law over their entire territory. The authority and control of that state may be actively contested from both within and outside of it. There may also be active conflict in some areas, where advocates and those they support could be personally targeted. In addition, both financial and political constraints may be imposed on civil society. These and related challenges require that advocates have very sensitive antennas, so they are able to read and interpret signs that may be invisible to an outsider. This enables them to have a constantly evolving understanding of their context and to work at a deep level, where they can rely on their relations and use levers that make sense locally.

In this book, we shine the light on a few advocacy trajectories from the work of organizations active in different fragile contexts. CSOs and allies share their stories, zooming in on change processes in which the partnership has been successful. These are stories that are rarely shared beyond teams working in the countries. They offer a

rare glimpse of the nature of the achievements as well as the work, knowledge and capacities that have made them possible.

The Cordaid Global Office identified the topics and countries and commissioned this book. The making of the book was made possible by the kind cooperation of dozens of staff members of the CSOs involved – all with the aim of helping to raise the awareness and appreciation of the work carried out in such challenging conditions. While these few stories cannot truly do justice to the complex and dynamic nature of the work the interviewees do, we hope they convey some sense of its complexity and, through that, their potential.

Methodology: Narrative Assessment

The stories are constructed from 18 interviews with staff members of partner organizations, and five interviews with allies. Given the coronavirus crisis, all interviews were done remotely. The methodology we used is Narrative Assessment, which is a new methodology for advocacy monitoring, evaluation, learning and communication.¹ This methodology starts from the advocates and the stories they tell from their experiences of having been in the middle of the action. Narrative Assessment encourages advocates to present their own perspectives on their own terms. As such, Narrative Assessment may be able to detect the strategizing of advocates within complex, dynamic contexts, and the knowledge and capacities behind it. More information about Narrative Assessment can be found here: <https://edepot.wur.nl/471634>.

The stories in this book are based as closely as possible on the direct accounts of the interviewees. Each country story is synthesized from the different interviews in a manner that highlights the strategies used and the worlds within which they make sense. In several cases, sensitive information about people and strategies has been deleted or adjusted in a manner that still conveys the nature of strategizing. Interviewees have also validated these stories.

The stories

Organizations and their allies in **South Sudan** recount their interlocking, multi-level strategies that contributed to the first transfer of a part of oil revenues to communities that was promised at the birth of South Sudan.

Organizations working in **Nigeria** tell about their multi-pronged struggle to make the government agency that was responsible for the cleanup of Ogoniland engage with the people affected by the oil pollution there, and to make this agency accountable to the people.

Organizations working in **Burundi** share their experience of making a first step towards setting up legal aid, through the development of a network of paralegals that are able to provide free and accessible legal services at the local level.

Organizations and their allies in the **Central African Republic** relate the flexible approach that was used to develop a school curriculum on gender-based violence, and to introduce this teaching program in several pilot schools in the capital of Bangui.

Organizations in **Afghanistan** share a few of the strategies they used to bring together diverse and often competing stakeholders in the justice sector to jointly consider problems that Afghan citizens raised, and to collectively develop strategies and hold each other to account publicly on them.

¹ Van Wessel and Ho 2018; Van Wessel 2018

Structure of this book

Following this introduction, each chapter presents a story. In a concluding chapter, we identify lessons learned and recommendations for CSOs and donors involved with advocacy in different contexts.

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South Sudan

Treading war and oil cesspools – change in an emerging country



Oil installation on the road from Bentiu to Yida, South Sudan. Photo: Shannon Orcutt 2012

“Before, the oil was there and the government was getting a lot of money from it, but we did not see the change in people’s livelihoods, the infrastructure, education, and health. So, when we separated from Sudan, we had dreams about what we were to achieve as an independent country. Our aspiration was that when we have our own country, we will be able to better govern the oil industry, which will be reflected in people’s lives. (a Parliamentarian)

South Sudan is the world’s newest nation. After it gained its independence on July 9th 2011, the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (as amended) and the Petroleum Act of 2012 stipulated that resources beneath the land are to be owned by the government, but the counties or communities² who own the land are supposed to benefit from those resources. This was later concretized in the Petroleum Revenue Management Act of 2013, which stipulated that 5% of net oil revenues should be allocated in the budget annually for the oil producing states and communities. Of this,

² South Sudan is administratively divided in states that themselves are made up of counties. A payam is the unit below the county, and this is further divided into villages or bomas. The interviewees often refer to counties as communities. South Sudan has three oil producing states.

2% should be transferred to the states and 3% to the communities.³ The latter amount is supposed to be managed by the Community Development Committees (CDC)⁴. CDC members are nominated by the County Commissioner, and approved and overseen by the County Legislative Council, to ensure the delivery of development services to the communities. These local councilors also establish and oversee the CDC's Coordination Forum. Knowing about their rights and having transparency about the funds was assumed to be a deterrence to anybody who wanted to misuse the money.⁵

In January 2016, a number of civil society organizations (CSOs) came together with the support of Cordaid to work in partnership on the issue of extractives. The objective was to work towards 'a peaceful and stable South Sudan with transparent and sustainable resource management for the benefit of all citizens.'⁶ The learning questions formulated at the time were:

1. Can CSOs still work on sensitive matters without the clearance from the higher authorities?
2. Will authorities still give permission for CSOs to work on sensitive matters?

The story that follows not only shines light on the achievements of the partnership in South Sudan, but it also shows how – in a context of volatility and insecurity – organizations strategize and maneuver to tread multiple potentially dangerous pitfalls. The story makes clear how difficult it is to distill the complexities of working in these situations from reports, and to provide 'best practice' answers to the learning questions. Part of the difficulty is due to the fact that oil is a very sensitive issue in South Sudan, resulting in an understandable hesitance to expose carefully built relations or to admit certain maneuvers in writing. This is another important aspect resulting from the intricate strategizing and delicate treading that is difficult to piece together in conventional reporting.

This story is composed of stories based on four interviews with one parliamentarian and key staff members of three organizations, that is: The Sudd Institute (Sudd), Upper Nile Youth Development Association (UNYDA), and Assistance Mission for Africa (AMA).⁷ These organizations are part of the Strategic Partnership in South Sudan. All three organizations are based in the capital, Juba, but, except for Sudd, also have field offices in different counties including in the oil producing states.

An important achievement

Out of the 5% net oil revenues, supposedly 3% should be allocated to the communities. No transfer was made until January 2020. About USD 7 million was transferred to oil producing states and communities for the first time.

³ More precisely, 'that the shares of the Petroleum Revenue are paid out of the consolidated fund to the Petroleum Producing States and Local Communities, as follows:

- The Petroleum Producing States shall receive 2% from the Net Petroleum Revenue; this is to benefit the State's development programs approved by the State Legislative Assembly.
- The Local Communities in the Petroleum Producing States shall receive 3% of the Net Petroleum Revenue. This is to finance the community development projects approved by the County's Legislative Council. The 3% given to local communities shall be allocated proportionately to the counties in the petroleum producing states according to the following ratios:
 - 55% to Petroleum-producing counties in the State
 - 45% to other Non-Petroleum Producing Counties in the State.

⁴ According to the 2009 Local Government Act, elected commissioners are for the counties while the mayors are for the municipalities and towns and cities. Due to the current turbulent political situation, elections seem to have been supplanted by appointments.

⁵ Section 30(1) of the Petroleum Revenue Management Act states that 'the management of the Petroleum Revenue Account and the Petroleum Revenue Savings Funds and any related duty of any relevant party, must be carried out in an open and transparent manner.'

⁶ Cordaid Strategic Partnership, 'Restoring the social contract in fragile contexts', Annex 6: South Sudan.

⁷ To avoid compromising the safety of interviewees to the extent possible, interviewee names are not mentioned in the stories.

How was this made possible? From the individual stories nested in the overarching story about the transfer of 5% in January 2020, we note the many interlinking steps taken by different organizations over a number of years, at different levels, and with a range of stakeholders. Throughout, a simmering personal drive is palpable, of working in a nascent country, with resources, that started with promises to its people.

Playing chess with a pigeon

In an emergent country such as South Sudan, the creation and institutional embedding of laws, procedures, job profiles, mandates and relationships is still being negotiated with the many local, national and international stakeholders. Contrary to chess, where rules are accepted and arbiters wield power and authority, in South Sudan, formal and informal rules are being hammered out, hashed over and retracted. Operating in such a context is like ‘playing chess with a pigeon’, which describes a situation where the rules are not equally understood or applied by the players. The organizations have to follow rules, both formal and informal, while at the same time also contributing to their (re)creation or renegotiation so as to enable those rules to contribute to fulfilling South Sudan’s promises to its people. This demands not only a well-developed antenna for political dynamics and sensitivities, but also a clever negotiation of situations and actors.

To bring out their skillful handling, we start with key stories at the national level. One major contribution comes from the use of research on a well-chosen topic that led to a high-profile national-level conference in 2019 and the subsequent transfer of around USD \$7 million to the oil producing states and communities in January 2020, among others things. The story starts with an account by a senior researcher from the Sudd Institute on identifying the research topic about the lack of transparency around the fulfillment of promises made at the birth of South Sudan. He then goes on to detail the careful strategizing that ensued in preparation for the conference.

“Our approach is that we first identify the issue. After identifying the issue, we do the study on it looking at the budgetary allocation and transfers over years. We were able to find out that these funds were not sent to the beneficiaries. I wanted to know and I also wanted the society, the communities, to know that they are not benefitting. For me, knowing was the first step for the communities to be able to advocate on the basis of knowledge. So, after we wrote the paper, we called a public lecture where we did a presentation, with a panel composed of experts, because we wanted to make sure that what we’re producing is accurate. What we also did with the high-level event, is that we asked a high-level person to preside over the event.

For this public lecture where we presented our research on the 5% share of net oil revenue, we had the presidential advisor of the economy (who was the former minister of finance) moderate the event. And we advertised it. We invited interesting people for our panel, such as the Dean of School of Social and Economic studies of the University of Juba, a former deputy minister of finance and an MP from the area, so it was not like a one-sided thing. We invited people who were stakeholders with interests in this subject matter. And they were already engaged in this process; for example, some of them were interviewed for the study and were already looking forward to the findings. For the High Level Conference, we invited the minister of petroleum, who is in charge of petroleum resources. We also invited the minister of finance, who manages and allocates the finances. Both are very important to ensuring this law is implemented. In fact, they are the ones who could be blamed for not implementing the law. We invited members of Parliament, the Parliamentary committees responsible for finance and the economy, for public accountability, for petroleum and energy. We invited the MPs from the oil producing areas, and also the civil society organizations that have interests in the oil and gas sector. And of course, apart from specific invitations to these

categories, we also sent invitations to a mailing list that has over 1,000 people.

From there, interested people from the public attended. They were asking very critical questions which were very, very good. Of course, we also brought in the media. So, at some point we even had live coverage of the presentation by Eye Radio and other radio channels. This is, basically, what we did to build the momentum for the issue and also to educate the public. The fact that the money was transferred this year did not just come about because of what happened this year. It also came because of what was done earlier, a series of events, building the public's knowledge of this issue, building momentum, talking about it in the media and involving other actors to also talk about it. There was more: we had allies also talk about it. In 2019, we also presented to the Steering Committee of National Dialogue where it was really well received. We were not only talking about this issue of the 5%, but also about, for example, environmental pollution. So, that all brought us to where we are now."

What the above shows is that for research to contribute to change, more is needed than merely identifying a topic of importance and carrying out the research. In the story, research is craftily combined with other strategies such as: turning a conference into an event that cannot be ignored and by having a moderator who wields authority over advocacy targets; strengthening public support by raising public awareness and building knowledge; building up momentum by having national media coverage, using social media as a tool for pressure and advocacy, and engaging other allies to add their voices.

There is another strategy hidden behind the ones described that made it a winning combination: national-level leveraging to influence state-level actors, as the Sudd Institute's researcher explains:

"For example, when we held that high-level conference on 5% in September 2019, we invited the governors. Protocol-wise, we had no capacity to invite the state governors to come all the way to Juba. The Council of States supervises the states and can therefore summon the governors to come as part of their national duties. So, we proposed to work in collaboration with the Council to hold that high-level workshop. We initiated this idea of working together with the Parliament, because we know that it will not be easy to just invite the governors to come all the way to attend this CSO gathering. They would of course not do that. They may be interested but they would just overlook us. We sat here to strategize and we decided that we would use the allies in Parliament to get to talk to the speaker. We wrote a concept note about the conference and presented it to an MP from the area who happened to be an advocate for the transparency and accountability on the 5% of net oil revenues.

We proposed that we should bring the governors from the oil producing states and community leaders and the Ministry of Petroleum and the Ministry of Finance with actors into one room to discuss the evidence that the 5% fund had not been transferred since 2011. In the concept note, we asked them to play their role in the Parliament, which includes inviting the governors. After we presented the concept note to them, they held their leadership meeting to discuss the concept note and they found it within their mandate to supervise the national entities like the states. In fact, the law stipulates that they should be notified when the money is transferred. They actually endorsed the concept note with some changes, and the final concept note was used as the basis for convening the high-level conference. When the Council of States sent the letters to the governors, they even attached the concept note with it. So, we worked on the technical part of the event, and they, as an arm of the government, did the policy part. Moreover, the person who was the moderator of the high-level workshop was a presidential advisor on Education, Science and

Technology, who, in terms of protocol, is more senior than the governors. Also, the speakers of the two houses were there to open and close the meeting, and some of them even sat through the proceedings. They were listening, and later on they gave their speeches on the basis of what had been said.

It wasn't an easy thing to be done and sometimes it took a while for us to be able to do something, but we could plan and use that as a strategy to bring these people together. And when it was done, it was very tangible and has had a huge impact."

What furthermore contributed to the winning mixture was the creation of spaces for dialogue between actors at the different levels. Bringing together those views, knowledge and needs, and infusing it with information from the research and about the petroleum laws, helps to complete an otherwise fractured and incomplete picture of the situation. This in turn makes it possible to identify gaps where actors can step in to add their weight to achieving the desired change. A Parliamentarian narrates:

"In this conference that was organized in collaboration with the Sudd Institute, we summoned the governors, and we brought all the communities, the stakeholders, and members of the civil society together, because we also believe in their advocacy role. So, when they were there, people talked about some challenges. What is wrong, why are those Community Development Committees not formed? And why don't they have separate accounts, because we knew that from the communities that are receiving funds, some have their accounts, but sometimes the money is going to the government accounts. Then they talked. There are some gaps in the Petroleum Revenue Management Act; for example, we in Parliament are not notified when those transfers take place. The Act is also silent about what is to be done if the allocations are not paid to the beneficiaries, and also if the transfers are done on time as per the law. So, we said that we need to address these gaps by maybe coming up with some amendments also."

Overcoming fear

So far, the stories focused on exciting developments at the national level. However, it is important to understand that these did not happen in isolation. Strategizing at the state and community levels, sometimes done by the same actors, complemented and bolstered those efforts at the national level. But before we present stories about that, we will first look at something that happened at the community level, as a member of a CSO tells:

"What happened on August 29, 2020 was that Meluth County communities were forcing themselves into one square close to the oil producing areas. Then they just stayed there in the open space, saying that they were not going home if their claims were not responded to. They were not only demanding services and cleanup of the pollution, but also asking for the disclosure of information on the use of the allocated 3%, that had been transferred to the Community Development Committees in their area. That was the only demonstration in South Sudan that was successful. Whenever you demonstrate at the national level, security may come and disperse you before you can even articulate whatever you're demanding. This demonstration took place at the local level.

And the communities were ready to take the risk of demonstrating , because they were fed up with all the unmet expectations and demands from authorities. So, they went to that square, and stayed there without going home. After five days of demonstration, a high-level government committee with representatives from the oil companies went to negotiate with the community. The government agreed to disclose information

about the 3%, provide the required development services, and also ensure that non-functioning service oil companies be fired.”

The magnitude of the transformation that was needed to allow this to take place can be gleaned from the reports about violence and security issues surrounding oil production in South Sudan. This is also reflected in the following account by UNYDA’s staff:

“We have challenges with civic space. At the Juba level, we have the National Security Services from whom you need to seek permission every time, whatever you want to do. They are controlling information and activities at the Juba level, including trainings, putting up a poster on the street or at any rally. It is not common to demonstrate in South Sudan, whether peaceful or not. There are many restrictions especially within the oil areas that we are operating. Security at the local level is different from the national level.

At the local level, oil companies have their own security specialized in protecting their operations. It is their security guards that communities fear. The communities fear to talk, and raise their voices around their rights/ claims. Whenever we do a training with them and try to take pictures, for example, to post in the newspaper, some members of the communities will refuse for fear of reprisal.. With the first series of trainings and engagements, the communities refused to have their pictures appear in newspapers or to write a petition. We had to convince them that it does not affect them to post claims for their rights in national newspapers.”⁸

The effective mix of enhancing awareness, knowledge and capacity development

To diminish this very real fear of communities and to help them negotiate the entrenched unequal relations that surround oil production, the organizations used a combination of community-level strategies of awareness raising and providing access to information and knowledge. For example, they organized the translation of legal sources into local languages that are otherwise unintelligible to communities. This strategy was accompanied by capacity development, to enable communities to peacefully organize themselves and to develop procedures and mechanisms for managing those revenues together with the government. From a staff member of AMA, we hear:

“According to us, the first thing for those communities to know is what is in the law, because if they don’t know what the facts about their rights are, how can they ask for it? And the laws are always written in a legal language. So, the first thing we did, was to make it as simple, as plain as possible for any person who has no legal background, to understand. We simplified the language first, and then we translated that into the languages of the communities where the oil is coming from. We asked whether people were aware of this law and found out that even some of the authorities in the counties, in the payam administrative units, and at the state level, had not seen a copy of the Petroleum Revenue Management Act. The communities didn’t know the law that protects them, and that gives them the right to access some basic services. And once the communities knew their rights, they formed some structures, committees,

⁸ It should be noted that international companies historically have owned the majority of shares in the oil producing joint ventures. Some of these companies are state-owned. See also: ‘South Sudan, Activities of Oil Companies’ <https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/south-sudan-activities-oil-companies> (downloaded 03 November 2020)

to pass information or to raise questions with the local authorities, who in turn shared those upwards, with the local Parliament or state ministry, who then asked for an audience with the ministry of the national government.”

And, as an UNYDA staff member narrates:

“So, we worked on awareness raising of the communities about the Petroleum Revenue Management Act of South Sudan and its provisions that stipulate their rights. The Act also stipulates that Community Development Committees have to be formed to administer the 3% share for the communities. Another issue we worked on is for the communities to see non-violent ways for how they can claim their rights. When the CDCs were formed, we trained them on their roles and responsibilities regarding the process of administering the 3% share, and how those funds can be used for developmental activities.”

Work at the community level is amplified by support to the state authorities to assume their roles as the level in between their communities and the national authorities; for example, by strengthening their knowledge of the Petroleum laws. We have seen in one national-level story how state governors were summoned to participate in a national-level conference. Organizations worked to interlink actions at the local, state and national levels to synergize their strategies, also investing in building and strengthening relations between them, as the below story shows. Overall, their multi-level strategizing that brings together and leverages the actors with mandate and power at the different levels, links to the described transformation at the community level and achieves the transfer of the 5% net oil revenue in 2020. As a Parliamentarian recounts:

“Before, when we called the minister of finance, he said that the state governors are receiving the 2%. Because I know the governors, we talked to them, telling them, ‘look here, this is what the minister of finance is saying, that you are receiving the 2%. It’s supposed to be for the state government. But this 2%, where is it, where are the roads for the states? Where is the clean water at the state level? We are not seeing the schools.’ So, they will say no, we have not received the funds, and I will say okay, then come let’s sit together, and you tell the minister of finance that you’re not receiving the money, that it is not true that you have received it. This is why they accepted to come and to sit and talk with the communities, where they will be heard by the public. This was a strategy beyond speaking only in Parliament. We need also to engage the public because if the civic population is engaged, they will add, they will magnify our voices outside the Parliament.”

This story points to some of the organizations’ interweaving of strategies at the different levels. For example, research shared at the national level was shared by CSOs at local level through awareness workshops. Messages from the communities were brought to Juba and shared with national-level decision-makers. This led to intertwining achievements: pressure at the national level leads to change at the local level and vice versa. Adding to the waves already created and building on the momentum of the mentioned national conference, another surprising national-level achievement helped to turn the tide, as we hear from the Parliamentarian:

“Some of my motions were not even presented. I collected signatures and endorsement from members of the Parliament, so the minister was summoned. I lobbied, including the party and the executive, and I was telling them the only way to save the country from this wrong is to bring it to the Parliament and then to revoke it. But that motion died somewhere; it didn’t happen. Then when we were in the discussions about the national budget of 2019-2020, I summoned the minister of finance because we cannot discuss any new budget, without knowing first where the 5% is, that is the 2% for the states and the 3% for the oil producing

communities. The minister received the summons a week ahead, and he sent confirmation to the Council of States that he would come on the indicated time, which was the day before he was to discuss his new budget in the Parliament. Budgets are normally discussed before the legislature, that is, in the two houses. And the Council of States has to be part of the budget discussion, otherwise it cannot be presented. So, he said that he would come, but he did not come, and he did not send an apology at all.

So, I mobilized the members of the Council of States to tell them, this is an abuse of the whole institution. If he did not come, we are also not attending the submission of the budget. So, the whole Council did not attend the meeting, we boycotted. And then when they asked what happened, where is the Council of States, we said, well you were summoned and you did not go. The same day, the minister called us saying, 'I'm coming now'. And when he came, I presented the motion that we need a report on last year's 5%. And I think he responded positively, reporting verbally that the governors of the oil producing states receive the 2%, but the 3% of the communities is saved by the government in the Central Bank of South Sudan. The Council of States directed him, as the finance minister, to submit a written report to the Council after the adoption of the 2019-2020 national budget."

To be able to fully understand the described achievements, one at the national level, and one at the community level, it is important to see how they took place within the context of South Sudan. The stories tell how the organizations strategized within that context, leveraging sensitivities, widening cracks that the environment still offered. The following story provides an example of one such crack.

"The people at the grassroots, they also need empowerment because, if they are the ones to speak like right now, definitely the government will feel the risk and they will listen and adhere to their demands. Because, for the safety of the oil operations, it's also about if the people are happy, then the operations will be okay. But if they are not happy, then seriously - the industry will be at risk."

This example of how the organizations help widen cracks by employing the pressure that communities can wield is intertwined with stories of how they are navigating and mitigating risks. This is done, among others, by strengthening the knowledge of communities about legal issues, as we see in the next section.

Walking the tightrope between cloaking and invisibility

Notwithstanding advances and potential openings, the organizations needed to constantly be on their guard, since stable ground can turn into a potentially explosive minefield. An in-depth knowledge of the context helps with walking the tightrope between cleverly seizing potential openings and carefully treading volatility and insecurity. At all mentioned levels, we therefore observe that the strategizing not only consists of weaving together strands of actions, levels and actors, but also entails a skillful negotiation of the situation. Each of the next three stories tell about one strategy that was used to navigate difficulties.

When you are visible, use the protection of the law

A staff member of AMA shares the following:

“Most of the country is operating in a war situation where we have been since 2013 and the sector we are working in, the Natural Resources Management, especially the oil, is considered to be a security matter. Not everyone is supposed to talk about oil because the government is definitely taking it as a security issue. So, for us to venture into that, we needed to be very cautious and we needed to be well aware that we are playing in a delicate situation. We are trying to balance between the community and what the government is saying, not working against the government.

That is why you have to use the available resources that are already there. One of them is the petroleum law that has been endorsed by the government. So, we are doing nothing outside of the laws that are available to me. If you are questioning me, this is your own law; it is the government that says that there should be an amount of 3% net oil revenues allocated to the communities in the oil producing areas. And for the communities, they need to know the law and they need to go with the provisions that are already in place. And one of these provisions is that you should have a committee and that committee should be alert and aware of what they are supposed to do. So, when they are facing the authority, they are facing them from an informed base that is based on the law. This is how we went about it.”

Knowing when to cloak

The AMA staff member continues:

“So, we thought as an organization, we will not be on the frontline to ask the government, where the allocated funds are or why this is not working, because we will appear to be agitating. And in a context of the war in South Sudan, where NGOs can be perceived as agents of the West, an agent of foreign bodies, we try to distance ourselves, while at the same time putting the right people like the community on the frontline. Our role becomes like a consultant with whom the communities liaise, consult, and seek advice and interpretation. For example, we come in if it comes to hiring a lawyer to work with them and to formulate their complaints, but we don't come in on the frontline.

Recently, we had an issue, where the community demonstrated peacefully against the oil company, because it was not providing them with services they needed even while it was getting a lot of money from the oil business. We are not there even though we have helped prepare the groundwork. Since they were the community and they know their rights, there was no way for the government and the oil company to avoid talking to them. Now this has become like a warning to the other oil companies. With the recent flooding, they have proactively taken the initiative to deliver some emergency materials and food to the people that are affected by floods in their operating area.”

Knowing which fight to pick

From an UNYDA staff member, we hear:

“It helps our cause to know when not to be confrontational. The most important way to diminish harassment is to ignore minor incidents. When the harassment becomes bigger, then we inform people like the ministry, minister or undersecretary that this is going on. But if the harassment

dies like that, then we ignore it and we continue our normal kind of relationship and engagements.”

Test of endurance

Despite the positive signs, in the fluid situation of South Sudan, each hard-won celebration is trailed by a next challenge, a next threat that can delay or even potentially undermine hard-fought achievements, as UNYDA’s staff member recounts:

“We think our role was quite a bottom-up approach in which we empowered communities. We engaged the local authorities around the 3% and, later, those communities were able to know their rights and articulate their issues, and claim for them in a peaceful manner. And now they have got the results, as it was disclosed that a huge amount of USD \$1,000,070 has been transferred to the communities in Meluth county. We need to continue monitoring and really backing up the process.”

And the Sudd Institute’s researcher shares:

“We have a new peace agreement since 2018,⁹ but only from January 2020 did they start implementing and forming the (coalition) government. So far, the cabinet has been formed, but the Parliament has not been reconstituted which is required by the agreement. As I said earlier, we were working together with the MPs, who share similar objectives with us and who, because of their status as people’s representatives, were able to invite the governors and other high-level stakeholders. They’re not able to do that now because the Parliament has not been reconstituted, and the MPs are not yet seen as legitimate. So, we are delayed with our follow up, because we need the Parliament to be reconstituted to be able to bring the same number of participants as we did last year.”

Also, even when decision-makers reluctantly cede, hawk eyes are needed to analyze or guard that achievement, as UNYDA’s staff member tells us:

“At the national level, we tried to engage with the Ministry of Petroleum about the 3% share. We, who were in the extractive trajectory (the organizations in the Strategic Partnership), and the Civil Society Coalition of Natural Resources were meeting with the minister and another official within the Ministry of Petroleum. So, in January 2020, the first transfer was made by the Ministry of Finance with facilitation by the Ministry of Petroleum. Although that was a very good signal, the level of disclosure of information was not, as the Ministry of Finance did not disclose the actual calculation from which the percentages was derived, but only informed about the 3% part of the oil revenues.”

And the Parliamentarian narrates:

“I normally don’t celebrate that I summoned a minister. Sometimes we summon them, they will come, especially when there are crises, like issues to do with a pipeline burst. I do not see it as a solution because, they will come, speak nicely, go back again, continue with the oil production and nothing is done at all.”

Through the different accounts, this story brings to light the collaborative efforts of organizations who share the dream for a transparent, accountable and prosperous South Sudan. The story highlights how they have managed the clever, yet delicate,

⁹ The South Sudanese Civil War took place from 15 December 2013 until 22 February 2020. In August 2018, a new power sharing agreement was signed.

interweaving of strategies at different levels. They reach out to multiple actors and continue their challenging tightrope walking, guided by their values as drivers for their hope and perseverance.

As this story comes to an end, the peoples' struggles for a better life, free of pollution and fear, go on. Bringing change in an emerging country is a test of endurance. As someone says:

“We celebrate, but it is not a victory.”

Nigeria

Working for a clean Ogoniland



Niger Delta oil disaster. Photo: Sosialitisk Ungdom, 2010.

In Nigeria, the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) is the government agency that has been set up to assume the task of cleaning up oil pollution in Ogoniland and to support the people living there in the face of the many adverse consequences of the pollution. At the time of its foundation, there was a lack of clarity of what was needed to make it a functioning agency, and several issues – including its governance, relations with different stakeholders and funding – needed to be sorted out. Seven partners and Cordaid came together, sometimes with the help of allies, to help make sure that this happens in an effective way and with the needs of the people as the priority. The partnership has worked towards building connections between HYPREP and the people, giving space for the exchange of views and knowledge for policy influencing, and for making HYPREP accountable to the people. In this story, some of the organizations involved share how they worked and how that made a difference, in particular considering relations between HYPREP and society. While it is clear that progress in the cleanup is slow and there are many challenges, there is satisfaction among partners about many steps forward.

As a project officer of the Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD) shared:

“When we started in 2016, HYPREP was working in isolation and just giving out information without a mechanism for feedback. We got them to realize that it is a community project so they needed to be accountable to stakeholders. People needed to know step by step, at every time what they are doing, and that community voices and participation are very

necessary in the cleanup process. Now we can see that HYPREP is making more effort, engaging the media to let people know what they are doing and intend to do in the next one or two months. They actually have a radio program now that airs once a week to feedback to the public on their activities. They have also started engaging communities directly and have opened their space more to the communities and other stakeholders.”

A leading staff member of Kebetkache, a women’s rights organization shared the following:

“To me, the greatest achievement of the strategic partnership is that the people in the Ogoni communities are well mobilized and are aware of their rights to participate, to ask questions, to tell HYPREP they are not doing the right thing. In addition, through different interactions like town hall meetings, community dialogues and policy dialogues, the space has been opened for other community members, apart from the chief, to engage with HYPREP and to have that dialogue and that interaction in a better way, to ensure an inclusive cleanup process.”

Others point to the access that they, and other members of the partnership, now have to HYPREP and other government agencies. It has created many opportunities for partners to take part in policy processes, but also for others to do so. As a leader of an external CSO ally Ogoni Solidarity Forum-Nigeria said, referring to two member organizations of the Strategic Partnership:

“Before, organizations would send invitations to HYPREP for meetings but they would not even respond or send a representative. Now you see that even the number one boss attended a civil society meeting. That was made possible by the engagement of the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) and the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD).”

So how did the partnership help achieve these things? It did so by making effective use of diverse strategies, and targeting different groups and organizations for different purposes. In this, they complemented and supported each other, each working from their own capacities, while regularly coming together as a partnership to connect, reflect and look ahead.

Building connections between HYPREP and the people of Ogoniland

One important strategy that organizations deployed was building connections between the people of Ogoniland and HYPREP. As a senior project officer of CEHRD told:

“So how did we work to help make this happen? For CERHD, this project started with a scoping mission in Ogoniland. We met with the locals including their chiefs and told them about the Cordaid program and about HYPREP, and her mandate. We found out that most of them did not know what the cleanup was all about and had never heard of HYPREP before the engagement. We also visited all the local governments in Ogoniland to have sensitization meetings. We discussed with their chiefs, women and youth and sensitized them on what the cleanup is all about and what should be expected from HYPREP.

One recurring issue was that communities expect HYPREP to pay compensation, since that is what happened in the past with an impacted community in Ogoniland. We had to clarify that HYPREP’s mandate is to clean up their environment and restore their livelihoods and not to share money as compensation with the impacted communities. We also trained communities on how to advocate peacefully to HYPREP and other relevant stakeholders because here in the Niger Delta, communities

organize protests that sometimes turn violent. So we told them that for the cleanup to go on peacefully and to be successful, they need to know the appropriate ways they can channel their grievances to HYPREP and the relevant stakeholders. In furtherance to this, we had to engage HYPREP on the need to manage community expectations. One of the strategies we proffered was going down to the grassroots and engaging them directly. Also, we emphasized the need to get in touch with the grassroots rather than their local government traditional leaders because they are the ones that experience the direct impact from the oil spills.”

The senior project officer also explained how CEHRD’s capacities and ways of working contributed:

“Something that really helped us in influencing HYPREP, was the fact that CERHD was already a known name in the Niger Delta on environmental issues. We have done many studies, so our advocacies have been evidence-based. Another strategy that worked best for us is building community trust. Many studies we conducted were done by Ogoni youth as the data collectors. Community members open up more to their own sons and daughters, to tell their stories. We also have what we call local monitors at the community level, these are youth from Ogoni, who we have trained to identify oil spills and report them using audiovisual data applications with mobile phones that we gave them. HYPREP also knows we are talking from experience, from our engagements with communities. HYPREP saw that communities trust us so they opened their doors to us. We also created awareness around the Cordaid partnership in Nigeria and how the partnership will want to provide support to HYPREP and make their work easier.”

The capacity strengthening of CEHRD through the Strategic Partnership helped her project officers to further strengthen their work:

“For me, the Cordaid Strategic Partnership in Nigeria provided the platform for me to attend a masterclass on integrating human rights in impact assessments and it built my capacity on how to integrate human rights issues when conducting impact assessments. Because, taking the Ogoniland into context, they have a right to clean drinking water, a right to breathe in fresh air, and those are human rights violations. In addition, the lobby and advocacy training strengthened the strategic partnership. We conducted several joint lobby and advocacy activities together and it also built our capacity to know how to engage and lobby policymakers.”

Looking at Nigeria and the Ogoni cleanup:

“One of the major challenges the cleanup is facing is the lack of collaboration between the federal government of Nigeria and the Rivers state government where Ogoni is situated. This is due to the different political parties at the top of affairs in both governments. This has slowed down the implementation of some of the cleanup activities because the state government sees the project as a federal government project. For instance, if the governments were working together, the state government would have supported the cleanup process with the provision of potable drinking water in Ogoniland, which is one of the emergency measures recommended by the UNEP Report to the Nigerian government. So we need that cooperation from both levels of government. The training on lobbying and advocacy strengthened our capacity to maneuver this and get the work done.”

Part of building connections was also creating relations in which people could hold HYPREP accountable. A leader of Kebetkache emphasized this:

“When we started in 2016, we first brought women together from different states in the Niger Delta to discuss the 2011 UNEP report that serves as the basis of the cleanup program. We found out that knowledge

and understanding varied greatly among women. While some were fairly informed, others knew little and many did not know about the critical issues or implications. So we created that awareness, promoting in-depth knowledge and understanding among women on the UNEP report and then building that solidarity and linkages with critical stakeholders in the implementation of the UNEP report. We identified members of the Governing Council and members of the Board of Trustees of HYPREP and then we went with a cross-section of the women to visit these people and discuss with them the importance of running an inclusive cleanup process. So we created that platform for community women in Ogoni and other Niger Delta communities to engage with HYPREP. That resulted in many interactions between women and HYPREP in past years.”

Such interactions help to put pressure on HYPREP to take people’s needs seriously, as she explained:

“Part of the emergency measures is that there should be provision of access to clean drinking water. But HYPREP was jumping to the remediation process by mobilizing contractors to the site, without implementing the emergency measures. Women are now in a position to draw attention to that, in the forums in which they take part.”

Connecting with government at different levels

CISLAC and Centre LSD are partners that are well-connected at the federal government level in Abuja. They have regular interactions with HYPREP and other government agencies. An important starting point making such interactions possible is trust, and working in a constructive yet strategic manner through personal relations, for example with policymakers in government agencies. As the partnership coordinator of Cordaid Nigeria shared:

“There was a sense by some of the stakeholders that the Strategic Partnership could be trusted and so it was easier for us to not only convey our messages but to also get them to honestly engage with. So we had a number of individuals that had access within the group and those that had access also had information that was valid or verifiable, authentic, and so when they had discussions with power brokers it was easy for them to gain their confidence and to make them act. I’ll give an example. When I talk to one such key contact, for instance, I bring conversations that have come from partners. When he goes to try and verify, he finds that it’s true and so he can relay our message. The fact that there was an authentic flow of information and the fact that we had gained some trust of organizations or people that were very close to the levers of power, or individuals that were close levers of power, helped us significantly.

I’ll illustrate: we came to hear that a top-level government official was interested in the process. From what we heard from people who were in the room and had conversations, he kept asking questions. He said, ‘This story on Ogoni and the agitation is always in the newspapers, is always on social media and it is hurting the government because of all of the violence that was going on in the Niger Delta preventing the government from being able to export as much as possible.’ So he needed to solve that problem. Having conversations, providing information from authentic sources about what needed to be done, was helpful. Also, having direct access to conversations around the Ogoni cleanup was an asset to our advocacy. In terms of getting those key actors to change and move their positions or act in certain ways.”

This connecting with government happens at the federal level as well as at the state and local levels. It is based on an understanding of how different levels of government can be engaged, and for what purposes. A leader of CISLAC illustrates this:

“We felt that it was very important to engage community governance structures, which had been absent in the interventions that we have done or we have seen happening. We felt that engaging strategically at the national level will not use the powers of people directly involved. Those who should actually be doing the talking. If we do the talking, that might not get the same kind of traction. We felt we should relate to local Parliamentarians, councilors representing the local governments, at the ward level. They can represent the local communities and can have a strategic role. So we met with the umbrella body of all the 100 wards in the entire Ogoni. We told them things that were happening within HYPREP, but they were very detached. They had been kept out of this whole discussion from the beginning. And for them, because the governor was also not a participant in the decisions around HYPREP, they initially kept their distance and were not interested. But I did a presentation to councilors and told them how the pollution is affecting life expectancy in the region and particularly their area. We framed it with messages around life expectancy having dropped 11 years below the national average in their area, and showing how the pollution has been a huge challenge to livelihoods and to people. This actually stimulated their interest. So, advocacy, with framing of messages, helped a lot. We also provided them with information, and trained their conflict sensitivity, since we felt that would make a lot of difference in the interaction they would develop. We did this from our own capacity, but also involved CEHRD, academics and other authorities, people from the Ministry of Environment.

After we engaged these people, HYPREP became a little bit uncomfortable. The very next day and the day after, however, they quickly mobilized and requested to have a meeting with the councilors from Ogoni. The councilors also spoke with various ministries across the state and those now begin to coordinate themselves, putting together efforts that help to respond to some of the emergencies. And we begin to see that in the annual budget of the Ministry of Environment, for instance, there are pockets of initiatives meant to respond to some emergencies in the region. For us, it is a key insight that we have been able to get ministries that are not charged with responsibility for the cleanup, to get involved with interventions. This was partly due to our work at the local, state and federal levels, which has improved coordination and relations across levels.”

Critical engagement

This does not mean that all interactions happen through dialogue. As the Cordaid Strategic Partnership coordinator shared:

“This year, CISLAC developed a scorecard for HYPREP. To say, look, despite all that you have been given, what have you achieved based on the mandate that you’re supposed to have? The release of that scorecard immediately caused the project coordinator of HYPREP to call for a meeting of the partners.

Protest also happens. It is part of the mixture of activities, with the diversity of partners that we have, even as I think it is best to be constructive. The Strategic Partnership had invited a minister to our summit, and the day before that summit was the day that Centre LSD went to do a protest and then the minister didn’t come the next day. So the entire Strategic Partnership now went to his office and had a conversation with him to say, ‘We did that on purpose,’ just owning it, just so that we can put our subject matter in your face and for you to act and we kind of, you know, ‘kissed and made up’.

The next time we had a summit, we made protest part of the strategy. The protestors got to the ministry. The minister himself came out to address

them and still sent a representative to the event for the following day. And this time around, he actually addressed the protestors himself and answered all the questions in public. We recorded those, to capture sound bites to use in advocacy.”

Centre LSD also mobilized and organized journalists to help hold HYPREP accountable through their reporting:

“We realized at some point that media people were not reporting the cleanup. So we went to the different media organizations and developed collaborations. We assembled journalists and trained them on the UNEP report, and that led to the formation of Journalists Against Delay in Ogoni Cleanup (JADOC). They have been putting HYPREP on their toes, ensuring that all of these issues remained on the front burner, using different radio and television stations. We also had JADOC support all the partners and we engage media people if partners have information to share so that they have on-the-spot knowledge of what is happening with respect to the cleanup.”

Partners opening doors for each other

Indeed, partners commonly stress the usefulness of being in a diverse partnership in which organizations complement each other. As a leader of Kebetkache said:

“It has helped to be part of a partnership with CISLAC. They are located in Abuja and have very good access to HYPREP officials and other government institutions at the federal level. They take part in many activities that CISLAC organizes. We also work with the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP).

There are some strategic stakeholders in Ogoni that Kebetkache cannot easily access, but it is easy for MOSOP to create that access and engage those stakeholders. For example, we did a livelihood needs assessment with Ogoni women. Legborsi Saro Pyagbara, who is an important MOSOP leader, is part of the Governing Council of HYPREP. We invited him for the women to interact with on the outcomes of the women’s livelihoods assessment process and Legborsi directly took what the women presented to the Governing Council.

So far, we are not getting a response from HYPREP though. We are now trying to seek out other programs and we are trying to get a bank to engage with women to see how they can benefit from facilities that banks can offer to advance their livelihoods.”

Collaborating across levels

With partners working at the local, state and federal levels, there are regular opportunities for sharing information and mutual support. For example, organizations working at the federal level can share important information about what is happening at the federal government level that matters to partners working in Ogoniland. As a leader of Centre LSD said:

“We also share information. ‘This is what the Federal Ministry of Environment is doing. This is what NOSDRA is doing.’ NOSDRA is the Nigeria Oil Spill Detection Regulatory Agency; they are described as the police of the environment. We also engage them because, from time to time, NOSDRA goes back to the field to assess, to take soil samples, to know what has been done. So we take all of this information back to those at the local level, so that they can also engage them at that level.”

In turn, information from the local and state levels can reach organizations working at the federal level through the partnership. As the Cordaid Strategic Partnership coordinator told:

“If something is happening in the creeks, we've got eyes on the ground through organizations like MOSOP, Kebetkache and CERHD. They can pick up on such a development in real time and share it with organizations that have access at the national level, and these ones can amplify it directly to key stakeholders. For example, Centre LSD had this hashtag called clean up Niger delta now, that was such a popular hashtag on Twitter that you could just see how things had progressed with the cleanup.

For instance, if a partner was holding a town hall meeting in the creeks in Ogoni you could real time pictures tweeted straight out of Centre LSD and people could verify that that thing is happening right now and they could get their information correctly.

For example, MOSOP has been providing real-time information from the communities. It is the umbrella organization for the Ogonis. Community level groups that were able to tell partners, for instance, when HYPREP showed up in communities, if there were agitations in certain communities regarding HYPREP's handling of issues like water or choice of communities where they were doing scoping missions to ascertain the baseline of pollution at the time. These communities had people that were connected to MOSOP that provided information that were then transferred into the wider pool of knowledge that members of the Strategic Partnership had for engaging stakeholders in policy dialogues.”

A leader of MOSOP explained how the organization was able to do that:

“MOSOP is a rally organization for the Ogoni community, because where most of the organization cannot go, MOSOP can go. MOSOP has chapters in all of the more than 200 Ogoni communities and over 10 affiliates that deal with different structures of the Ogoni society. For example, we have what they call the 'Council of Ogoni Traditional Rulers (COTRA) that is made up of all the traditional rulers of the Ogoni communities. we have the National Youth Council of the Ogoni people. Their main activity is to mobilize the Ogoni youth for any action that MOSOP embarks on.

Then we have the federation of Ogoni women association, which has branches in all the villages in Ogoni, and their role is to mobilize Ogoni women for activities of MOSOP. We also have the Ogoni Council of Churches. The churches have become the ground where MOSOP creates or carries out its campaigns. Most of the Ogoni people go to churches. With that structure, it is easy to communicate MOSOP messages to the grassroots communities. Because we have what we call the MOSOP congresses, which are held every quarter. And in that congress, representatives of all the Ogoni communities and affiliates are always there. This guarantees a far reach in the Ogoni communities and their effective participation in the process.

We in turn rely on the support of the others in the Strategic Partnership with their different specialties and different expertise. And that support has been there, with the organization of town hall meetings, the training of monitors on the ground and also training people in lobbying and advocacy.”

The struggle for a clean Ogoniland is far from over. Members see many challenges that need continued attention. Bureaucracy keeps slowing the process. Political competition between the federal and state levels still hampers state commitment. Urgent needs like clean water and livelihoods are still not met. With the strategic partnership ending, the partners are considering continuing as a coalition to keep going on stronger together, to stay a part of the policy process, to draw attention to issues, and to make HYPREP accountable to the people.

Burundi

A first step towards better access to legal aid



Palais des Arts during 16 Days of Activism. Photo: UN Women, 2015.

In Burundi, the strategic partnership initiated strategies that contributed to improving access to justice for all. Access to justice in Burundi is constrained by many challenges, including poor access to legal aid. In this context, the Strategic Partnership program supported the establishment of several mechanisms that contribute to better access to legal aid. Among these mechanisms is the setting up of a network of paralegals that was piloted in several localities, called 'hills' in the Burundian context, across different provinces of the country.

Paralegals are leaders at the community level who are trained on basic law, including the code of persons and the family, civil and criminal procedure codes, as well as on peaceful conflict resolution. Once trained, paralegals can then guide reconciliation processes within communities. Paralegals therefore contribute to conflict management at the community level. They deal with everyday civil cases, such as inheritance disputes, and can accompany complainants on a day-to-day basis by offering free and accessible services for communities at the hill level.

Although the setting up of a network of paralegals as well as ensuring its sustainability is not without difficulties, the project partners note the important advances this represents for access to justice in Burundi.

One of the partner organizations, for example, points out:

'More than a thousand people have already used this service, some have been restored their rights thanks to this contribution from paralegals. If a person needs legal advice, guidance, that person can now rely on these structures that are functional at the community level. These are people who are close to them, saving them from having to travel far.'

For cases that require legal action, paralegals accompany the beneficiaries in their pre-jurisdictional proceedings. In some instances, paralegals have also accompanied complainants in their court cases with the magistrates or oriented them to the judicial aid commissions by assisting in the drafting and monitoring of the record, a service much appreciated by the beneficiaries in a context where illiteracy is common and which shows the considerable contribution of paralegals:

'Paralegals deal with civil, not criminal cases. But if there is a person, a relative of someone who is being imprisoned, who has exceeded the deadline or who is not legally imprisoned, a person can go and consult the paralegals. Even if the paralegals do not engage substantively, they may seek information related to the detainee and if the judicial police officers see that the person has turned to people who are informed, who know the law, there are times when the detainees have then been released.'

To achieve these results, Cordaid relied on a civil society organization, the Observatoire de l'Action Gouvernementale (OAG) and a professional organization of lawyers, the Bujumbura Bar. Although the notion of paralegals is not new in Burundi, the strategies put in place here show a will to formalize and sustain legal aid structures. For this, it was essential to work closely with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior, but also to include provincial, communal and community authorities at each stage of the project being set up, starting with the establishment of a legal framework.

Putting in place a legal framework for access to legal aid

One of the first strategies of the Strategic Partnership was to advocate for the setup of a legal framework that plans for legal aid since there were no structures in place:

'Legal aid is not systematic in Burundi; there are not really state structures that guarantee free access to legal aid. The envelope provided by the State's general budget is insufficient to finance legal aid. More than 80% of the cases are supported by civil society organizations working in the field of justice as well as international non-governmental organizations. Moreover, non-governmental organizations do not really work in a coordinated way.'

However, there are entry points...

'There were several opportunities which made it possible to start advocating in this area. First, legal aid is a priority. It was maintained as a priority in the sectoral policy of the Ministry of Justice and the National Development Plan. It is also understood as a constitutional right because it is in the Constitution of 2005 and the recent constitution of 2018, which mentions equal rights, and the protection of the law for all citizens, which includes access to judicial institutions for the recognition of rights. Burundi had also ratified international conventions that planned for legal and judicial assistance.'

And in particular, a document that recommended the setting up of paralegals:

‘The opportunity we were able to start with was that there is a document on legal aid, the national legal aid strategy, which was there but had not been signed. The document had been developed by all stakeholders in the field of legal aid. If the document is not signed, it cannot be used. So we started our advocacy by pushing for this document to be really signed and popularized with stakeholders and in particular by sharing the recommendations with the relevant department within the Ministry of Justice.

We advocated with this document by popularizing its content and organizing discussions with key players involved in the field of legal aid but also with Parliamentary committees responsible for justice and human rights issues.

After the dissemination of the national legal aid strategy, some recommendations enabled the operationalization of the document. Among these key recommendations was the implementation of legal assistance at the community level so that communities at the hills level could have someone to confide in.’

The national legal aid strategy for Burundi (2018-2022) therefore provides a new and solid basis as it details strategic measures of intervention and modalities of implementation, including the setting up of a network of paralegals.

‘This text is an improvement in the sense of working together. We are popularizing the content and explaining it as much as possible in all our engagements, in all the exchanges that we have. We are working with all stakeholders to ensure that this text is recognized at the local level and that all local authorities feel an obligation to contribute to the setting up of all that is provided for in this text.’

In order to strengthen the legal framework for implementation, the Strategic Partnership has also contributed to the development of key texts to support the process further:

‘We continued our efforts to put in place basic texts to guide the setting up of a paralegal network. For example, as part of this project, we were able to put in place the paralegals’ operating guide. It is a document that details the method of identification of potential paralegals, their mandate, and the profile of those who are supposed to be paralegals. At a minimum, they must be able to read and write, they must have a minimum level of study. Inclusion criteria were also put forward to ensure a certain representation: women, young people. It also has to be people who are already settled in the community, who are recognized in the community as having certain thinking abilities. So now, the plus is that there is a way of designation that is more or less clear, that is more or less defined.’

In order to develop these guiding texts, it was essential for the partners to involve the authorities at different levels.

Emphasizing the added value of paralegals

In a context such as that of Burundi and especially in a pre-electoral period leading up to the national elections in May 2020, it was necessary to go through the administration and local authorities to set up this project. The Strategic Partnership’s strategy was therefore to involve the authorities from the beginning by organizing meetings with the various stakeholders.

This preliminary work required in-depth knowledge of the context:

‘There were exchanges with representatives of the administration, representatives of religious denominations, representatives of the

Department of Justice to try to agree. This is very important because paralegals are people who live in the community. ‘

Besides, it was important to highlight the added value of paralegals who, by being mediators of everyday civil cases, help to reduce the number of conflicts that arrive in front of magistrates and other institutions of formal justice:

‘Through continuous exchanges with different partners, we could see the different challenges and the different sensitivities. We have tried to obtain a consensus with all the different stakeholders. The emphasis was on the added value that paralegals will bring. Paralegals are people who can help solve some conflict directly at the grassroots level such as minor community conflicts. They can therefore contribute to the maintenance of public order and be the relay of the administration when there are latent conflicts. At the paralegal level, it is above all conciliation, reaching an agreement between parties, that is put forward. This can prevent some conflicts and ultimately reduce the workload of magistrates and police officers.’

This consultative process enabled Cordaid's partners to gain the support of the authorities and the development of the paralegals' operating guide as well as its presentation and validation:

‘The paralegals' operating guide has been developed and validated by all those involved in the field of legal aid. Gradually, we assessed the needs through meetings with elected officials and local authorities and then we proceeded to develop the paralegal guide. We organized a workshop for all legal aid stakeholders, mainly staff of organizations working on the topic of legal aid. We did a three-day retreat where we tried to think about the content, the form, in sum everything about the paralegals. This also included the themes that will be discussed during the paralegals' training. A first draft of the document was then made, which the consultant that we hired, finalized, and presented to the authorities of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior to validate it. The document was validated and is currently being used.’

After this first successful step, the Strategic Partnership turned to the selection of paralegals.

Involving the administration and local authorities in selection of paralegals

In this process as well, including the administration and local authorities was a necessity, as one official from the Ministry of Interior explains:

‘You know at the moment, organizations have to go through the Ministry of the Interior to reach people at the local level. This department permits civil society organizations to go and conduct the activities on the ground. In the past, some organizations went on their own without going through the administration. Yet, the administration has to monitor the activities of these paralegals on a day-to-day basis to make an impact in the locations where they operate. The administration must be involved in this activity and it is not possible if the organizations do not properly involve the authorities.’

For this project, the preliminary work was, first of all, a team effort to think about how to set up this network of paralegals – how to identify them in municipalities and provinces, but also the choice of pilot hills. Office work and then some fieldwork, and always in collaboration with the various stakeholders already active and in place, including the provincial administration, the municipal administration, and the local administration. We thought that without the support of the

administration at the local level, this project was not going to succeed. That is why we involved not only people working in the judicial administration, but also the respective local authorities of the communities involved in this project.'

One of the lobbying and advocacy strategies was therefore to involve local authorities in the paralegal selection process:

'After the preliminary consultations, the administration was also fully involved in identifying the paralegals. We first disseminated the paralegal guide through workshops where different people seen as potential candidates were invited to be elected as paralegals, of course working within the means of the project. So we explained to them what it is all about, the paralegals, how they are going to get elected, and then we organized the elections, freely. Elections were held at the hill level in the hills that were chosen as pilots of the project. Moreover, some paralegals represent the local government, for example people who usually carried out these kinds of activities, settling conflicts amicably within the communities and who were then elected to be paralegals in the various hills targeted for intervention. We targeted various organizations, be it from the civil society, be it from the Bashingantahe, a traditional council of dignitaries. We advised all these groups to elect an average of seven people per intervention hill. It was a way of appropriating the activity of paralegals to the administration.'

The partners explain that the presence of departmental representatives was also key:

'We invited the key stakeholders in the field of legal aid, so from the structures responsible for managing conflicts at the community level. They came and we discussed, and they were able to choose for themselves the people they consider to be leaders and who will be trained to be paralegals. The list of paralegals was approved by the Ministry of Justice because, at the time of the election, both the Ministries of Justice and Interior were present.'

Once the list of paralegals was compiled, it was then a matter of organizing their training:

'Once the lists of paralegals were completed, we contacted the department of the Ministry of Justice which is responsible for capacity building of the actors intervening in the justice sector. We talked about our ambitions to build the capacity of paralegals. They tried to make modules adapted to the realities on the ground. That is to say, to build modules that are not academic modules but based on practical cases that paralegals are likely to encounter in their everyday work. We then explained their mission to the paralegals; they know that they have the right to lead a conciliation between complainants but that those who use their services also have the right to take the matter to other judicial structures and to go to court if they are not happy.'

'After being strengthened on the basic notions of law, paralegals were presented to the municipal authorities who also provided information to the communities by informing people that these are the people who have been strengthened on the basic notions of law and who can manage everyday civil cases, who are, therefore 'experts in the topic.'

It is this training in law in particular that differentiates the paralegals from other community actors who traditionally resolved conflicts according to an official from the Ministry of Interior:

'One peculiarity for paralegals is that they had a few days of training in basic notions of law and peaceful conflict resolution while for most other

actors active at the community level, they have not really received formal training. That is the added value of the paralegal.'

But this knowledge of the law remains limited...this prompted the Strategic Partnership to develop a strategy to ensure the continuity of the system and the continuing training of paralegals:

'We could see that even if they have been strengthened on the basic notions of the law, they are not able to resolve all disputes at the community level. So they were advised to refer cases they find difficult to other structures or to act collegially with other structures at the community level. Then, to ensure the sustainability of this structure, very recently we have initiated the paralegals' supervisors. They are the judges of the courts of residence. We were able to choose two judges per court so that, if necessary, a paralegal who needs additional support, who needs clarification on one aspect, can go to see this supervisor and the latter can provide guidance.'

Ensuring representation for better access to legal aid for all

During the selection and setting up of the network of paralegals, some difficulties related to representation were noted. The initial paralegal selection strategy laid out several selection criteria for the identification of paralegals, including having a good reputation within the localities and the ability to read and write. Additional criteria included being in a certain age group and ensuring that women were represented among the paralegals. Some of these criteria have not always been met, including the representation of women among paralegals. This can restrict access to legal aid for beneficiaries, for instance since women prefer to confide in a woman and not a man on certain topics but they do not always have this opportunity. One of the partners on this project explains the difficulties associated with the designation of female paralegals:

'Inclusiveness is an effort we make, but we are in a context where women are not presenting themselves in large numbers for various socio-cultural reasons. They are encouraged but we are also in a society that is still traditional, especially at the local level, in which through a popular vote, people are not yet very spontaneous in appointing women in large numbers.'

'There are other difficulties because you see, in a traditional environment, it is the woman who takes care of all the housework, etc. Even when she wants to make herself available one or two days a week, to come and take on this work as a paralegal, often it is not possible, especially to leave the children behind. There is a lot of outreach work to do.'

Ensuring continuity in a changing environment

As the network of paralegals was set up, the work turned to analyzing the cases that were handled by paralegals to adapt the advocacy strategies in consequence, as a partner notes:

'Generally, at the end of each quarter, the paralegals report on the activities they have done and talk about the cases they have worked on. We can see the trends in the types of cases addressed. We can say that in this locality, this hill, the most frequent conflict was related to family affairs or civil debts. So we can see some trends. Moreover, the paralegals can make recommendations on the initiatives they have taken, including a person who has been unlawfully imprisoned and to whom they have been able to persuade the authorities so that the person was released. They are reporting on everything they have been able to do in the three months.'

We try to consult these reports and analyze them so that we can see the trends and be able to adapt our advocacy strategies to this situation in the community. Whether it is recommendations to the municipalities, or whether it is recommendations to the courts of residence, we are trying to communicate the findings to get feedback from the people concerned. But, in general, it is to be able to adapt our advocacy strategies further.'

In addition, following the 2020 elections, most of those sensitized within the administrations have changed, as one official from the Ministry of Interior notes:

'The next step is to reach out further to the administrative staff, to push them to take more ownership of the project. We have newly elected officials, so we have new teams in place. The governors of the provinces are newly appointed, and the municipal administrators for the most part new. Even the elected officials at the hills level, they are new. If the means were there, new exchange sessions would be held to explain the role of these paralegals in order to continue the activity.'

Building on this successful pilot, the network of paralegals now needs to be expanded so that other communities in other provinces could benefit from the services of paralegals. A new step to consider is also the current direction taken by the Burundian government to institutionalize the traditional Council of Dignitaries. To upscale, one must then think further on how to integrate paralegals into these new structures and how to further institutionalize the role in order to expand their areas of influence.

Central African Republic

**Raising awareness of gender-based violence
among schoolchildren**



Pedagogical sheets developed for the programme. CAR 2020.

“The future of the country is its youth.”

The Central African Republic has been shaken by military-political crises for several years with several rebel factions competing for power. In 2013, the conflict escalated sharply and led to months of unprecedented inter-communal violence. More than 200,000 people were displaced during the crisis, which was particularly brutal in Bangui, the country's capital. Although peace has been slowly returning, many parts of the country are prone to recurrent conflicts.

It is in this context of peacebuilding and recovery in the Central African Republic since the 2013/2014 violence that the strategic partnership began a plea for the introduction of a curriculum on gender-based violence in schools. The partnership's advocacy efforts have notably led to the signing of a ministerial decree resulting in few things. A national task team was created to combat gender-based violence in schools, the Ministry of National Education designed and validated educational sheets on gender-based violence, and several primary schools and secondary schools in Bangui are piloting lessons for the first time since 2018. But to talk about gender-based violence in the Central African Republic, one needs to take into account a sensitive context where violence has been trivialized, as one educator involved in the project explains:

'The fight against gender-based violence comes at a time when large numbers of children have been left to fend for themselves and there are many cases of violence in the country, especially against girls and women. There is some physical violence, and there are some verbal abuses. These are common things, they are commonly experienced. As an educator, it must be noted that when a child witnesses certain violence that is then trivialized, the child loses his bearings, and it can also lead to new violent behaviors. We found that children no longer know what is called civicism and, above all, the so-called right to citizenship. Children's rights are also being violated. In schools, some teachers use their position to demand sex in exchange for good grades. So there are plenty of reasons to call on teachers and to draw their attention to this kind of violence. After the events, it took a lot of work to get the children to know their rights and to behave as citizens, to behave in a civic manner.'

This means expanding the focus to address different forms of violence that are experienced on a daily basis and not focusing only on gender-based violence. The Central African Republic's experience in advocating for the introduction of a curriculum on gender-based violence shows us that the most important advocacy strategy in a context such as it, is not the drafting of technical documents. The most important is having repeated discussions with many stakeholders that can reach 'all social strata', as explained by a representative of the main partner organization:

'The fact that we have been able to initiate a teaching on gender-based violence in the school curriculum is an achievement. We put the emphasis on violence occurring in schools and universities. We seized every opportunity to go and advocate and then teach, especially in relation to the fight against gender-based violence, because we realized that no one is spared; everyone is concerned.'

The story below brings together several testimonies that highlight the difficulties and the seized opportunities, as well as the strategies deployed to institutionalize the teaching of gender-based violence and to set up a pilot implementation of the curriculum in several schools in Bangui. Cordaid-supported civil society organization, the Cercle des Théologues de Centrafrique (CERCLE), relies on a flexible and didactic approach that adapts to its audience and builds on its knowledge of the national education sector. The different strategies used show us how – in a difficult context weakened by the crisis of 2013/2014 – it is possible to open a space for discussion focusing on youth education, which is part of a sustainable strategy to restore the social contract.

Capitalizing on ministerial priorities

Cordaid's main partner, CERCLE, capitalized on its long experience working in the education sector and its pre-established contacts with the Ministry of National Education. As explained by the coordinator of the organization below, the CERCLE has had a partnership agreement with the Ministry of National Education since 2011.

'We started our work in the education sector by setting up 'intermediary schools', an education system from kindergarten to level three of the primary school, that responds to a need for proximity in a context where public schools are often remote and inaccessible to young students. Presenting middle schools as an aid against school dropout, we began to advocate with the Ministry of National Education, notably by advocating with the district academic inspectors for the recognition of these schools and their activities. We then mobilized with our partners to obtain a small funding for the master parents who teach in these intermediary schools.

These results at the community level have opened doors as these interventions have been recognized as satisfactory and beneficial by the ministry. With the trust established, we can go back to the department, show what we have done and argue that we could do more, including addressing another problem that increases school dropout, which is gender-based violence. As a non-governmental organization, many girls regularly come to us to report sexual harassment and violence, sometimes from teachers who use their position to blackmail them. The partnership program with Cordaid has allowed us to focus our work on this and to begin lobbying and advocacy activities around these topics.'

The CERCLE's strategy was to build on a national study conducted in 2014 that reported a large amount of gender-based violence in schools. The CERCLE also capitalizes on the sectoral priorities highlighted in the government's Plan for Peacebuilding and Recovery in the Central African Republic, the RCPCA¹⁰:

'The first strategy was to take data generated through a national study of gender-based violence which was conducted in 2014, analyze this data and highlight the numbers on gender-based violence in schools. At the level of the Ministry of National Education, when you have to talk about such a sensitive subject, you have to be able to gain approval at the higher level, which is the minister.

So we started by asking to meet with the Minister of Education and then with the director of the department concerned who organized a large meeting with the department staff. This opportunity allowed us to make visible the data collected during the 2014 study on gender-based violence in schools. Although there has always been a lot of violence in schools, the facts are not often documented, and people defend themselves on both sides. With the results of the investigation, there was evidence and, with that evidence, something had to be done to change the situation.

Added to this is the fact that in the plan that the government put in place in relation to the recovery and consolidation of peace in the Central African Republic, there is a framework document – the RCPCA – which has several lines of intervention. At the Pillar 1 level, the emphasis is on reducing violence, because we were a country that was coming out of conflicts and in which there are still areas of conflict. Pillar 2 talks about access to basic social services, which includes education. In particular, there is a part mentioning the need to reduce all forms of violence in schools. This was a plus which added to the data from the study and allowed us to emphasize the partnership activity as a support towards the reduction of gender-based violence existing in schools and a support

¹⁰ In French: *Republique Centrafricaine: Plan National de Relèvement et de Consolidation de la Paix.*

towards the implementation of the strategic axes of the Ministry of National Education.

The minister then signed a decree to appoint a few senior officials from the department who then followed up and worked with us. These are focal points that are part of a task team to fight gender-based violence in schools. The task team inscribed the fight against gender-based violence into the attributions of the ministry, in the organizational chart, forming part of the responsibilities of the inspector general, the directorates-general as well as of the academic inspectors. With this task team, we started the work. It is a way to ensure sustainability since the fight against gender-based violence is now integrated into the attributions of the ministry. From now on, we no longer need to go to the level of the minister when setting up activities, we communicate directly with the heads of the task team. It is these officials who come to open our workshop sessions and they too have validated the pedagogical sheets. So, we were able to start doing training.'

After obtaining an agreement from the ministry, work could begin. But, who to turn to and how to present these sensitive topics?

Adapting strategy due to limited resources and the security context

Several constraints presented themselves during the process of selecting target participants, firstly the Central African Republic's context where it is difficult to move outside Bangui, as explained by the treasurer of the CERCLE:

'We have put a lot more emphasis on Bangui because of the insecurity in the provinces. Afterwards, we tried to reach beyond by going to a province outside Bangui. In that case, we worked not only with the teachers, but also with the heads of the sectors and of the district. We introduced them to our organization and then introduced the work we have done on the fight against gender-based violence in schools.'

But also due to limited means:

'The difficulties were also in financial terms. We started here in the capital, but we could not go to other academic inspections. In Bangui, only a few pilot schools were selected to do this work. The idea was also that they would help spread the teaching to other schools later, working as teachers of teachers.'

The partnership's strategy was then to train all of the school directors of Bangui. After the selection of pilot schools, teachers from those institutions were trained:

'So what we have done...in Bangui, there are many schools, so we have worked with all the primary and secondary school directors. It means a block of 18 schools in Bangui. So for the directors, we trained everyone but now for the teachers, as there are many, we chose several pilot schools, both primary and secondary schools. It was the teachers that we trained from those schools who we worked with afterwards.'

The partnership has then identified several primary and secondary schools for the setting up of the project. But the selection of schools is not random and is also indicative of the context, as one of the people involved in the project explains:

'Some of the pilot schools selected were schools that housed people who fled during the 2013/2014 crisis. They were refugees, people who fled violence in the provinces, but also some had fled violence within Bangui itself. They had housed them in those schools. To help them, we had to first call the school directors and talk to them. I worked with women in particular and I was the national director of Christian women. I was

compelled to ask the members of the organization to collect something to give to these children, victims of violence, and who had fled their villages and who had taken refuge in these schools. We started by collecting little things, soap, rice, and then sharing with the refugees. We found that there were a lot of school-age children, so we then negotiated with the school directors to accept the students even though the schools could not function too well during that period. After the crisis, when slowly the peace had returned, the children left with the family members who accompanied them for those who still had living relatives. This is how we already had selected schools and contacts with some school directors because of the support we had offered at that time.'

After identifying these institutions, the CERCLE organized visits to meet with the teaching teams. Several teachers from each pilot school were chosen for their initial interest in doing this work, but also because of the subject matter they teach. Then they attended training sessions on gender-based violence and subsequently contributed to the development of pedagogical sheets in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education.

Generating interest, not rejection

As the coordinator of the CERCLE explains, after selecting the participants, it was important to tailor the approach and to generate interest by discussing familiar situations:

'There must be no brakes on communication. When you are with women, you speak a certain language. With rural women, it is not the same as with women in the city. When you are with young people, it is not the same as with adults. And when you are with religious people, you also speak their language. We do not speak with the religious as we speak with a secular crowd, as we say. With the religious, we use the biblical or Koranic verses. The art of communication must be mastered so that advocacy is not hindered by barriers to communication.'

'When we do the training, we focus not only on the fight against gender-based violence in schools, but also on violence that affects other settings such as in public settings, or within couples or in the family environment. People get together and are interested because they are not just teachers, they are also in a relationship, they are a father or mother. We take the opportunity to popularize the legal protection texts, for example the family code, and it allows people to discover what they do not know. They are told that some usually trivialized practices or behaviors are violence.'

The strategy was also to adapt the topics leading to a broader consideration of what constitutes violence in schools, even if the focus remained on gender-based violence:

'There are many cases of violence in our country, especially against women, young boys and girls, etc. At and outside school, and there is sexual harassment in schools. That is a form of violence. There are also other forms of violence. For example, there are children who go to school and they are called illegal children because they have no money to register. They stay like that in class, they cannot receive a school report and they cannot progress. So this is also a form of violence at the school level called denial of opportunity. There are also children who go to school with guns in their pockets, so we need some substantive work on violence.'

In addition, the CERCLE's strategy focused on explaining and educating to raise awareness without blaming, while the presence of lawyers stressed that tolerance would no longer be the order of the day:

'We are primarily in the prevention framework. We avoid people seeing us thinking that we are policemen who come to condemn them. We are people who come to make them realize that there is such a thing that is

done and it is not good...it will be better to do it this way because there are provisions in place to punish these bad practices. They are encouraged to change.'

The partnership also highlighted the need to renew the social contract through civic education:

'During the training sessions, we focused on citizenship and civicism and, above all, what is called the right to citizenship. Because the future of the country is its youth. It is a discourse that also comes back a lot from the Ministry of Education, it is often this introductory discourse that is noticeable when we start the training sessions with references to the citizens of tomorrow who are the children. It is said that the first society is the family and the second society is the school. So it is the school that has to teach the child how to become a good citizen of tomorrow.'

The aim was to open up the space for discussion about violence within the school setting, including by educating on the law and focusing on gender-based violence. A school director from one of Bangui's selected pilot schools testifies:

'I was approached by the non-governmental organization, CERCLE, who invited me to a three-day training on gender-based violence. I was particularly interested because we knew that with the crisis that the Central African Republic went through in 2013/2014, there was too much violence against women, girls were being raped and there were no consequences for the perpetrators. There are always a lot of people who do not understand that it constitutes violence and act like nothing happened. It has an impact on children and their families. The training detailed the various forms of violence that are not only physical, by involving lawyers to educate about what the law says and hearing from doctors who have intervened and who teach about the medical and psychological aspects of gender-based violence.'

The training followed a specific format:

'To do this training work and then design the pedagogical sheets, the Ministry of Education's educational training center was called upon. The training lasted two days, first we presented our project, our organization and then we went into more detail about gender-based violence.'

Subsequently, we prepared the pedagogical sheets in agreement with the Ministry of National Education, including the educational training center team and the Bangui academic inspection. At the primary level, that is, Fundamental 1, the pedagogical sheets must enable teachers to introduce the subject through civic education. Regarding Fundamental 2 in secondary schools, we also prepared pedagogical sheets for French and pedagogical sheets for the teaching of History-Geography.'

The strategy remained to generate interest among teachers so that they could take ownership of the curriculum, as the coordinator of the CERCLE points out:

'It is the teachers themselves who incorporate the lessons on gender-based violence into the curriculum. For example, in history, it is the teachers who have searched for stories through which one can make the pedagogical sheets accessible. In French class, they sought appropriate texts on the themes of gender-based violence, for instance a truly moving text on female genital mutilation. They do a text-based study on this and they examine it to get the keywords out and the important information in relation to gender-based violence.'

While continuing to align with the ministry's priorities:

'Once the pedagogical sheets had been prepared, they had to be validated and presented to the ministry in the presence of academic inspectors and

members of the General Inspectorate of National Education. This was done at a meeting with the team that made the pedagogical sheets, including the teachers in the schools selected for the pilot and the people in the department who had to approve. The department was receptive because it comes from the department officials and aligns with their priorities. It is a contribution that is part of an 'innovation' that revitalizes civic education. A lot of work has been done with the Innovation Directorate of the Ministry of National Education.'

During the preparatory phase of the setting up of the partnership project, the CERCLE realized that a particular group of people, the female teachers, could be key allies in the fight against gender-based violence in schools.

Targeting women: Setting up the Women's Teachers' Association of CentraAfrique (AFECA)

The idea of focusing more on female teachers came in response to several findings. First, the fact that there are more women educators than men in the Central African Republic, as the CERCLE notes:

'As time went on, when we worked, we realized that there are a lot of women. In schools, there are more female teachers, especially at the primary level. It is also one of the consequences of what was called the Structural Adjustment Program, where a lot of teachers were sent out on assisted voluntary leave because there were too many public servants. As a result, the student-teacher ratio has dropped. Over time, we have been able to catch up a little with the intermediary school system by using what are called parent teachers. Among these, there is a large majority of women but sometimes the level is not what it takes. There are weaknesses in the quality of teaching.'

But there was also the realization that female teachers are particularly affected and receptive to approaches that target gender-based violence. Here, as well, the strategy was to mobilize interest by addressing several settings and not just the school environment:

'There are also a lot of complaints from female teachers who are victims of violence. As women in the workplace, they are too exposed to violence from the authorities and colleagues. AFECA's establishment allows them to be together and support each other. All these teachers, they are first of all the head of the family, they are in relationships, so we address these issues at the school's level but we must also address the professional environment, the family environment, the couple environment. It is also an opportunity for the teachers involved to discuss their experiences and denounce certain things they are not used to saying. It also makes some suffering visible. As a mother, they are also more receptive to the fight against gender-based violence which affects young girls.'

'AFECA is therefore an opportunity not only to enable female teachers to stand together in the face of violence in their professional environment, but also to build capacity in teaching, particularly for the implementation of the gender-based violence curriculum. That way, at least even if the project is finished, we can still come as trainers to continue working with these structures to help them move forward. It will enable some kind of scaling and work towards ensuring sustainability for the fight against gender-based violence.'

The idea also came during the annual women's day celebrations organized in Bangui schools, as explained by the current president of AFECA. She is herself a headmaster of a women's secondary school in Bangui that was chosen as one of the pilot schools:

'When we met with the CERCLE coordinator at the celebration organized on March 8th for International Women's Day, we talked a lot about the violent behaviors we see in schools and what is being done with women. The idea took root during this celebration. We thought that an approach that targets female teachers might yield benefits. As mothers, they are also responsible for educating children much more at home.'

Building on this process, the idea progressively came into place:

'Afterwards, we agreed to convene a general assembly and at that general assembly we set up a directing team to run that association. We started to draft the internal regulation texts and then the status of the association. The choice was made for me to be the president.'

'During the meetings, we invite the education authorities. If the minister does not come, he sends his representative. There are also the academic sections that send representatives and then we also invite the authorities who are in charge of the promotion of women and then many other personalities of the sector. And of course, there are the teachers themselves from the selected schools. We are also gradually trying to identify other institutions.'

Sensitized female teachers become resources in their respective institutions and can raise awareness among other educators:

'The key contribution of this association is that after we meet and debate the themes, women teachers go back to their schools and are required to introduce the topic to other teachers. Regarding gender-based violence, we did several training sessions with the help of CERCLE. After the training sessions, a supporting document on gender-based violence is always provided, and trained teachers are now considered focal points.'

But ensuring the ongoing commitment of the teachers was not without difficulty. And AFECA faces the same financial and logistical constraints as the CERCLE, even though Cordaid's financial and logistical support was decisive in order to organize the general assembly and training:

'Of course, there are difficulties in implementing this teaching and in the setting up and on-going work of AFECA. The problem of financial resources is a hindrance for the organization, teachers often ask for help for means of transport for example. I encourage them to see the training aspect, the education aspect, which will really change the behavior of our children and encourage the voice of dialogue.'

'Nor can we train delegations at the moment, and then send them to the regions to train the institutions that are in the provinces.'

Fostering ownership of the curriculum in pilot schools

Following the training and the partnership's approach to raising awareness from the top, the implementation of the curriculum was based on the heads of schools as well as on teachers trained in the pilot schools. This has led each school to take ownership of the curriculum, as these testimonies of pilot school directors suggest:

'In my school, a women's vocational secondary school that was targeted in relation to the project. The teachers who were trained by the CERCLE then held a meeting with the student delegates of each class. We considered the delegates of each class as the focal points of each class. When a teacher is not there during off-peak hours, the student delegate is required to stay with the students and then open the discussion on violence.'

For the initiation of the lessons on gender-based violence, we tried to touch on everything, but we would also like to see how we can use other means of communication for this teaching, like visualization, rather than just talk about it.

A primary school director in Bangui adds:

'We were first trained by the CERCLE and then I brought together all the teachers from the Basic 1 classes together, from the third to the fifth grade, several afternoons after class to plan those lessons. Most of my teachers have also been involved in training sessions and in the workshops to make the pedagogical sheets.

Gradually, the teaching started. For smaller classes, teaching is more implicit. For example, the teachers had the idea of setting up theatrical scenes. We found that it allows students to learn quickly and that the images stay with them. The level of teachers is sometimes uneven, so I myself attended the lessons given on gender-based violence in order to realize not only how different teachers deal with the subject but also of the reception and reaction of the students. The progress made and the difficulties encountered during these lessons are also discussed during the monthly classroom teaching councils. I also sometimes contact the CERCLE for advice, for example when students ask questions that we do not have the answer to.'

An impact beyond the school gate...but which brings new responsibilities and new topics

The fight against gender-based violence through education has not stopped at the school gate. The start of the discussions in the classroom has led to effects outside the classrooms, as this testimony of a primary school director shows:

'We have seen impacts at three levels: children, teachers and their families. After explaining the different kinds of gender-based violence in the school and community, we found that many children come to us to report cases of violence against a girl or woman in the neighborhood. We are talking about it.

At the family level, there is also a real taboo in the Central African Republic around gender-based violence but also around sexual relations, which is a problem. When the kids started talking about this outside of school, there were parents who came to me and said, 'Director, there is this, but how do you discuss it with the kids?' It is an opportunity to talk to the child's parents, to explain what gender-based violence is, but also on how to educate children about sexuality. It leads to a better understanding from the parents. We also see now some parents who distrust their children because they know those who know the different forms of violence and children do not remain silent. The same goes for teachers, in the different neighborhoods in which they are located, teachers are also sometimes called upon to intervene to fight gender-based violence.

One of the difficulties, however, is the care of students who are victims. We can provide psychological help and sometimes bring them to a health specialist, but there is currently no material or financial care. This was discussed during the training, but the responsibility lies much more with the school director since it is the school director who is constantly with the students. When there are cases that occur, the strategy is to intervene psychologically and see the parents to address the subject and educate them, and also the local authorities, especially the neighborhood leaders, the group leaders, etc.'

One of the cases another school director reported to the CERCLE is that of the surprise reaction of a father accustomed to beating his wife, whose daughter told him that he was facing prison. In secondary school, education is also seen as an aid to prevent school dropout, as the headmistress of a high school in Bangui notes:

'We also always remind these teachers to see the positive side of things, for example, helping some students who are young mothers to assert their right to go to school and not to be beaten by their partners. Every year there are students who dropped out and the reason was that 'the husband does not want me to go and sometimes he hits me'. When we started raising awareness, we saw the positive impact on attendance of our students who know their rights and know that there is support at the school level. We encourage a dialogue.'

But this openness of speech on gender-based violence outside the school and within the family environment, but also in the neighborhood, comes with new responsibilities and topics on which to educate for the teaching team of the pilot schools.

The needs are many, which leads the CERCLE to multiply its attempts to seize upon any opportunities that arise. In particular, the CERCLE has intervened in other circles on these issues, notably by entering the religious space as a para-ecclesiastical association to address Christian youth and Muslim youth. The CERCLE has also begun to work with the Bangui Association of Students with Disabilities after realizing that they are particularly vulnerable to violence.

These strategies call for flexibility and a constant adaptation of advocacy and lobbying discourse on the fight against gender-based violence.

Afghanistan

Unlikely gatherings: Bringing together formal and informal stakeholders to strengthen justice



Social awareness banner in Afghanistan. Photo: Cordaid, 2020.

“Through these coordination meetings, the bridge of mutual trust is being built between the people and justice institutions.”

Western donors have been trying to strengthen the ability of the Afghan state to deliver public services, such as justice, to the Afghan population for many years. The belief behind these efforts has been that Afghans will say the state is legitimate when it delivers services, which will, in turn, reduce support for insurgents. Afghans get services from many different institutions, only some of which are part of the Afghan state. There are long-standing locally rooted institutions that deliver services, like chiefs, local consultative councils (e.g. Jirgas) and the people who communities elect to distribute irrigation water (i.e. Mirabs). In addition, there are long-standing religious institutions that deliver services to people, like Mullahs.

These locally rooted institutions now coexist with the institutions brought by insurgents, the formal institutions of state, such as police and courts, and warlords.

The authority of these institutions comes from different sources, the codes they follow vary, they deal with different sorts of problems and they are unevenly spread around the country. For example, civil law, which is exercised by formal state institutions, is patterned on the European model, considers criminal conduct and is only effective in areas controlled by the formal state. Sharia law, which is also recognized in the constitution of Afghanistan, is exercised in a diversity of ways by local institutions, is attributed to Islam, considers family affairs, and also functions in areas controlled by insurgents. Making things even more complicated, these institutions suffer from various degrees of corruption and there are areas that are not well served at all. In addition, they sometimes compete with each other, and the population they are supposed to serve is often very poorly informed. Moreover, in some areas, ideologies limit access, particularly for women, to already scarce services such as education and justice.

As stated by one person who shared their experience of strengthening justice institutions, four years ago...

'In many parts of Afghanistan, getting access to justice was a real problem for a lot of people. Even more than that, many people did not even know what rights they had either in the formal justice system (civil) or in the traditional justice systems (Sharia), there are multiple institutions that handle disputes, there was very little connection particularly between the formal justice sector and people in the communities, and everywhere people talk of corruption in the courts.'

One of Cordaid's contributions in Afghanistan has been to use Dutch funds to support a partnership of respected Afghan non-governmental organizations' efforts to improve access to justice for Afghans. Each of the CSOs who is part of this national access to justice partnership has an independent track record of both successfully working with justice sector institutions in the national capital and of strengthening access to justice in some of the provinces of Afghanistan. By working together as a partnership, they are able both to cooperate with each other in the national capital and cover far more provinces than any one partnership member could individually.

The three interviews upon which this story is based regards only one of the five provinces where coordination committees were set up. All of the people interviewed were staff members of Afghan CSOs that Cordaid supported. The province was chosen for both its complexity and success. Interviewees were chosen who were personally familiar with different aspects of their activities. While the interviewees' accounts emphasize different aspects of their joint work, they both overlapped and were perfectly mutually compatible. For confidentiality reasons, and given the compatibility of accounts, the positions of interviewees have been removed and the story does not make distinctions between different interviewees. Also for confidentiality reasons, the name of the province and some details have been modified in order to make sure accounts cannot directly be linked to specific instances.

In each of the provinces where they are active, the partnership member responsible for the area has brought a diversity of regional stakeholders together for monthly coordination meetings. These stakeholders include formal justice sector institutions, traditional authorities, other civil society organizations, regional media, and representatives from religious communities. As indicated by their name, the role of monthly coordination meetings is to improve coordination between stakeholders in the justice sector. Imperfect coordination, even within branches of the formal government, may have drastic consequences. For example, if a woman files a report of an assault with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry does not promptly forward that complaint to the police, the resulting delay in apprehending the accused may put the victim at risk of further harm.

Similarly, poor coordination between the prisons and the courts may lengthen pre-trial detentions. The harm to accused people caused by these simple delays may be compounded by errors, such as in referring an assault case (e.g. domestic assault) to a traditional justice institution that does consider family matters, but does not consider assault of any variety. It may also be compounded by corruption, where bribes may be paid to shorten the pre-trial detention period, for instance. Furthermore, the lack of appropriate content in local media or education curricula may create situations where citizens do not know their rights, do not know which institutions are present, do not know which institutions address what kinds of violations, do not know how to make use of those institutions, and/or do not know how to raise complaints. The partnership's approach in the monthly coordination meetings has been to bring local justice stakeholders together and then to support the consultative identification of and response to challenges brought before them – both by each other and by civil society stakeholders such as the CSO partnership members that Cordaid funded.

The members who attend these monthly coordination meetings come from a diversity of institutions and each brings with them agenda items for the committee to discuss.

'These monthly coordination meetings are happening mostly between justice and judicial institution representatives, members from the community, and representatives from civil society organizations and the media. They bring up and discuss the gaps and the challenges that exist among the justice and judicial organs in regards to justice or access to justice or human rights issues, and they consult to find a solution. And once these judges or these representatives from the different organizations go back to their organization, they try to solve the matter or issue.'

Select accomplishments

In order to provide some context for the discussion about how partnership members went about their work, the next section sketches a few results attributed to coordination committees' efforts. While attempting to show the diversity of meaningful contributions made to achieve change, what is presented by no means reflects the full diversity or significance of the partnership's work.

Live TV

When representatives from justice institutions speak in public, they often state that they are doing very well, that they have nothing to hide. Further, these institutions really want people to know about them and what they do so that they can be perceived as doing their job. In at least one province, the coordination committee¹¹ found an innovative way to capitalize on these two interests.

'We have live television programs where people can call a hotline number to ask about their cases. So a person, whether they are from an NGO or a government department, comes and sits in front of a live camera and answers the questions and concerns of local communities. This is a big, big thing. And it was a very big challenge because there are a lot of things happening in these institutions and they are not answerable for that.'

These live TV programs help strengthen access to justice in a number of ways. First, when answering questions, panelists inform the public. Second, the very act of being on TV makes normally invisible actors, individuals who are normally hidden behind institutional veils, personally visible. Third, when panelists are presented on TV with failures that they first hear and then share what they have done to address it on a later show, they are demonstrating that it is possible for members of the public to hold

¹¹ Created by the national partnership that Cordaid funded.

these institutions publicly to account and that the challenges they raise will be answered.

Public complaint boxes

A frequent criticism about the operation of the Afghan state's justice sector institutions is that they lack local accountability. One challenge that the coordination committee took up in a province was to find means by which individuals can comment on the operations of justice sector institutions.

'We have installed complaint boxes in some of the Afghan state justice institutions. We open these complaint boxes every month in front of the committee. And then, whatever complaint is there, we follow up and report the results in front of their own representatives.'

The contents of the complaint boxes are picked up by a civil society member of the coordination committee and brought to the committee meeting where they are opened in front of everybody. In addition to providing anonymous means so that individuals may raise complaints, which improves accountability, the manner in which they are handled matters for two reasons. One, they are read before the committee, so it is not possible to bury complaints and, two, justice sector stakeholders in the meeting accept the role of civil society in securely bringing these anonymous complaints before them and holding them to account.

Women's employment

In many parts of Afghanistan, there are customs that limit women in the public sphere. These restrictions may interact in ways that compound the challenges faced by women. For example, there are customs that limit women's access to education. This makes it less likely that women who are suffering harm know their rights and how to exercise them. There are also customs that dictate that women may not talk to men outside of their family without a male family member present. In addition to somehow getting a male family member to accompany them in public when their purpose is to file a complaint against a family member, once they are there they must speak to a female employee. The accommodation strategy adopted by a provincial coordinating committee was both simple and challenging.

'A provincial coordination committee decided that there should be female employees in formal justice sector institutions. After they advocated for that, many times, the authorities recruited female employees here.'

As a result of the decision to employ women:

'...now women, when they have a case or problem, they can come and explain their problem or when they face some violence, they explain their violence there because there are female employees in the provinces. Sometimes, these women, they are illiterate people. They cannot write sometimes. Now they come and they explain their problem and the female employee can write down their cases. And then they refer their cases to the correct department.'

Office space

The women who were hired by justice institutions are covered by the same traditions as the women who may approach them with complaints. While they may secure a job, they may not enter a mixed workplace or talk to male colleagues without a male family member present. Furthermore, women entering the building would not be able to talk to them if they were in a mixed workplace. This custom created a challenge for justice institutions who were convinced by the coordination committee to employ women. The offices of these institutions did not have separate spaces for women. These institutions responded by creating new physical spaces in their offices for their women employees.

Strategies

In this section, we report the strategies that partnership members and their local partners have pursued in securing the unlikely cooperation of justice institutions within the few centers where they have been able to bring justice stakeholders together in monthly coordination meetings.

The CSOs pursued two complementary but very different strategies to secure the cooperation of both formal and informal justice institutions in monthly coordination meetings. One of these involved the sorts of efforts that are perhaps more traditionally associated with advocacy within Western states, while the second equally necessary strategy depended heavily on pathways that are rooted in the Afghan contexts – and perhaps uncommon in formal reports of activities given to donors.

Formal institutions

The first strategy was applied primarily in Kabul, the national capital, where the CSOs set about securing formal cooperation agreements (memoranda of understanding) with the national offices of the civil government.

‘The first challenge that we had in setting up these committees was signing memoranda of understanding with the government departments. For example, when we were approaching the one government department in the provinces they rightfully said, “where is your memorandum of understanding? If we don’t have a memorandum of understanding, no, we are not obliged to attend these meetings.” And they were right because we didn’t have a memorandum of understanding. So we had to go up; we had to go to the provincial level. And we had to go to the ministerial level in Kabul. And it was very difficult. We had to meet the minister and the deputy minister, and all those high-profile people. With the department, it took us a few weeks to get an appointment. And after meeting the minister, we explained our objectives to him. He thanked us, and he accepted our ideas. He also asked his colleague, the deputy minister, to make a draft of the memorandum of understanding, to check it, and to put it in the monthly meeting of the ministry to discuss whether or not they would sign it or not.’

Personal relationships

In addition to pursuing the official channels by which civil society organizations often report their attempts to influence the operation of state institutions, CSOs also used strategies that relied heavily on their own personal resources.

‘We had to use all the connections we had. We talked to people who had relatives in Parliament and they approached the ministers we needed. All of this just to make sure that we got the memorandum of understanding signed. But at the end of the day, we were able to get most of the memoranda signed. That was a major accomplishment. This took us months of hard work to solve it, not weeks.’

With memoranda of understanding signed at the national level in Kabul, the CSOs were able to go to provincial offices and secure the participation of those offices in their monthly coordination meetings.

‘Once we had the memorandum signed at the national level, we could easily have the representative from the departments at the provincial level as part of our network for justice. The provincial staff member did what the national memorandum said. So that really provided us a chance to start solving the problems.’

Local trust

Despite their sustained efforts in Kabul, the CSOs were not able to sign a memorandum of understanding with a key organization: the Supreme Court. Without

this memorandum, the project would not be able to secure the participation of representatives from the courts in the province, and their participation was crucial. In at least one province, the partner CSO was able to secure the participation of the courts in their monthly coordination meetings contrary to the Supreme Court's stated concern about maintaining their independence. This partial success required a new definition of civil society.

'We used many, many networks to try and get the Supreme Court to sign a memorandum but we failed. However, we could sign a MOU at the province level. They are reporting to the central level court, but we were able to do it because of our focal point in one of our provincial offices. He's actually kind of a community leader in the province. And he's a very influential person. So, these courts, court people, court judges and the people who are working in the court system, they were not cooperating with us like in a normal situation. We asked our focal point, this community leader, to use his own personal networks and to somehow persuade them to come and take part in our coordination meetings and to cooperate with us. So, our focal point was able to do this through his own channel or network or through his own influence.'

In order to be locally influential, the CSOs hired a very senior and deeply respected community leader to be their focal point for their operations in that province. While this person was formally an employee, it would be better to recognize their relationship as one that the partnership made possible, given the CSO's longstanding presence in and credibility within the community where the leader lives.

The provincial focal points were people hired from the community precisely because of the extent to which they were trusted and respected within that community. The focal points relied on this trust and respect to bring the disparate stakeholders together for initially quite 'noisy' meetings.

'Well, actually, at the very beginning no one had a clue where we were going, and how that would be, and what was on the agenda to be discussed. So, at the very beginning, we had a lot of problems with these justice institutions and organizations having problems and difficulties with each other not showing up. Sometimes when they came to the meetings, there were huge debates between the institutions, organizations, civil societies. They were always blaming each other.'

In addition to relying on the focal points' trust from the community to set up the initial meetings, these focal points continued to encourage stakeholders to show up for and, eventually, participate productively in those coordination meetings. In at least one province, the results of the local leader's sustained efforts proved fruitful.

'They have now understood that this meeting is not for blaming and shaming each other, but rather, to establish a better network of access to justice or to ease people's access to justice. So maybe people cannot directly come to a court or to a lawyer or to an attorney saying that you are doing this wrong or this is a mistake, or you shouldn't do this because they don't have this courage, or they don't have this opportunity to express their feelings, or say what they wanted want to say even if they are they're absolutely right. But this coordination committee is a system through which people can raise their voices, through which people can deliver their points of criticism to these institutional judicial representatives. And these points could build up the capacity of those institutions, build their experience and improve their working abilities in their organizations.'

Office peers

The Afghan CSOs that Cordaid contracted were working on a number of projects for a range of funders. When these CSOs were faced with a challenge that could not be

resolved by formal means, and the person who was responsible did not have the personal connections required to make things work, they looked for help from people in the organization who were hired to work on other funded projects.

'One of our staff, who was working on another unrelated project for us, had a sibling who is a member of Parliament. This sibling used their own networks to take our proposal to the head of one of the departments that was being slow in signing our memorandum of understanding. Using the networks of a sibling of one of our employees working on another project, we were able to reach that person. So these were kind of personal networks outside of the project scope that enabled us to better implement the project.'

While there may be a bias in reporting in favor of formal mechanisms, those interviewed were very clear that much of their success depended on resources and pathways other than those anticipated in most funding documents.

'...if I would give a percentage to the staff that has contributed towards the success of this project I would say that up to 30% or maybe 40% of the project would have failed if these options were not available, or if the personal networks of the partners were not available at the regional level or at the central level.'

In our discussions, respondents made it clear that the support they received from Cordaid was very important. Quite apart from the salaries that made their efforts possible, the capacity building provided by the CSOs was reported as contributing to the involvement of justice institutions in their monthly meetings.

'The strategy was not a one-way road. What I'm saying is that we were also providing benefits to these institutions. So what are those benefits? The first and most important benefit was that we were providing them with capacity building workshops each year. And those capacity building workshops were designed by us around the themes set by the institutions themselves. Apart from that, we were not providing them any other compensation.'

Looking forward

Though committee members appear to recognize the committees' contributions, and many committee members have agreed to continue their meetings after funding, the future of the program is not clear.

'Committee members are asking that this project extend, that these activities extend to other districts, to other villages, that it would be good for people in both formal and informal justice sectors to receive their workshops, so that they understand how to resolve their cases by considering the gender-based violence, by considering the other laws. They are asking for that, but the formal justice institutions are not willing to pay for it...they want donors to pay for it. They don't have that much salary...that is why the corruption is going on in some institutions, because they don't have that much salary so of course they cannot pay for it.'

Lessons learned and recommendations

The organizations in the stories, their ways of working and their contexts are highly diverse. However, we also find that there are some important commonalities having to do with their work in specific contexts that are in some way ‘fragile’. Analyzing the stories, we find there are lessons to draw on advocacy achievements, strategies and capacities.

Lessons learned

Achievements

When it comes to achievements, the few presented here are a small subset of those realized and they are not representative of the full range of achievements, the organizations involved or the program overall. However, these diverse achievements do share some characteristics.

First, they illustrate different ways in which advocacy can help to strengthen the social contract and social cohesion in fragile contexts. Voices and capacities were strengthened, and communications and relations between state agencies and citizens were enhanced. Networks were created that form the foundations of pilots and models, showing innovative ways to provide services such as access to justice, that is also adapted to contexts.

Second, they show how organizations and their achievements face limits, at least partially connected to the nature of the contexts. In several instances, initiatives are thus far small-scale and restricted to safer parts of the country.

Third, we see that, as with the states in which the organizations are working, successes are often partial and contingent on unpredictably shifting conditions. They require constant tending and reinforcing, otherwise they face the risk of falling apart.

Strategies

When it comes to strategies, we see important roles for generally acknowledged strategies such as evidence-based advocacy, public campaigning and lobbying. However, the stories provide two fresh insights on strategizing. A first insight is that advocacy strategies are often part of organizations’ wider involvement with change, involving a range of stakeholders in a societal domain rather than mainly decision-makers or the public. Piloting and modelling innovative practices and involving multiple state and non-state actors, are key strategies in three of the stories. In the two others, mobilization for policy change and implementation involves engagement with many diverse stakeholders in coordinated efforts of mobilization, collaboration and coordination.

In all the stories, we see that organizations seek to engage and convince state agencies, but also to mobilize and harness the power of informal authorities such as that of religious and community leaders. And we see that they engage other diverse societal groups, such as youth organizations and relevant professional groups, such as teachers. While each single strategy, such as awareness raising of communities or developing a research report, may not be innovative in itself, the carefully and dynamically crafted combinations of strategic actor engagement are. Each combination is made to fit its context, creating momentum and the opportunity for leveraging beyond what individual organizations or strategies could achieve.

A second insight is that strategic engagement with different actors is developed from a close and continually updated analysis of what approach can work where and with whom, creatively testing ways to move forward, while often seeking to overcome or circumvent challenging contextual factors. Importantly, these also involve ways to reduce or spread risks; for example, by reducing own visibility, liaising with actors with authority, or also undertaking non-threatening interventions that may play to the ear of power-holders. While this type of close context-reading was commonly found, the diversity of context led CSOs to develop diverse strategies.

Capacities

Advocacy training manuals and related publications often stress similar capacities, namely: the ability to cultivate individual and organizational reputation and relations; the ability to convince others of representing a constituency; the ability to monitor political and policymaking arenas, to recognize and act on opportunities and adapt when necessary; the ability to develop evidence to support claims; the ability to plan and execute advocacy strategies including, e.g. formulating concrete strategic objectives, mobilizing of constituencies and allies, and producing persuasive advocacy materials.¹² Such generally acknowledged capacities do appear in our stories. However, they are accompanied by capacities that are not mentioned in such materials. These are capacities that enable an actionable understanding of the conditions of the context and how to work with these. They demonstrate how it is possible to identify and use context-specific possibilities to bring about change.

An initial insight on capacities is that reading the context requires extraordinarily sensitive antennas and a locally appropriate interpretation. These are essential to be able to engage with the ever-changing presence and relevance of unpredictable, diverse contextual factors and to find ways forward. It is from this continually refreshed reading that advocates know, for example, how to gain the support of state authorities at different levels while pushing the limits of their operational space, and to understand who matters in a change process and to what degree.

Second, the organizations' advocacy often cannot be seen separately from their capacity development and policy implementation activities. Their work involves a much broader and fluid approach to advocacy than the influencing of decision-makers and the public. Organizations are often participants in change as much as influencers. This requires capacities to engage actors in diverse capacities and to take up roles that address different dimensions of change processes.

Third, combining different strategies, employing them at various levels and engaging multiple and different types of actors, requires strong capacities. They are necessary for building and sustaining relations across a range of organizations and stakeholders.

Fourth, the richness of the stories suggests that commonly used evaluation methods, like Outcome Harvesting, that focus on achievements rather than the work of advocacy, may easily under-represent the context-specific capacities of advocates behind the achievements.

¹² See e.g. Barrett et al. 2016; Elbers and Kamstra 2020.

Recommendations

The insights from the five stories in this book lead us to recommend the following to donors and civil society organizations:

1. Identify, acknowledge and support context-specific strategies as inherent to effective advocacy

Organizations developing and supporting advocacy programs should explore how differences in context alter what strategies are effective. We advise them to draw on the expertise of advocates with experience in these contexts to develop perspectives on context-specific strategizing and on how they may effectively support and understand the strategizing of in-country partners.

2. Acknowledge and support contextually relevant capacities and capacity strengthening

Organizations developing and supporting advocacy programs should recognize that the capacities and assets required for successful advocacy vary by context. Recognizing the relevance and extent of partner organizations' context-specific capacities and assets and increasing their ability to build and draw on those capacities, may strengthen mutual respect, collaboration and the programming.

3. Consider contextual conditions in assessing achievements

The stories underline that in order to properly interpret advocacy achievements, contextualization is essential. In certain contexts, a minor step forward can be an important achievement, or a major step forward, a minor one. The level of the achievement depends on a range of contextual conditions like political support, societal agendas or civic space.

4. Advance context-relevant learning through South-South exchange

We recommend enhanced South-South exchange that begins with the sharing of individual stories in a manner that encourages participants to identify commonalities and differences. In this manner, civil society organizations in different contexts can articulate and share their experiences and lessons learnt to support mutual learning and recognition of their capacities and practices as advocates. This may also strengthen their engagement with donors and partners in the Global North from their own strengths.

5. Adopt longer-term perspectives on change

The stories indicate that for a significant part, key advocacy capacities and assets like the local staff members' various political, community and other pivotal relations, had already been developed prior to the program. The stories also show that the shifting sands of fragile contexts means that all gains achieved have to be carefully maintained. Finally, we see that a continuity of relationships and activity is required to be able to scale over the long term. These conditions must be taken into consideration in programming, ideally from an early stage.

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