TRANSPARENCY, PARTICIPATION, & ACCOUNTABILITY GRANTMAKING STRATEGY

THE WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION

DECEMBER 2015

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The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation helps people build measurably better lives, concentrating its resources on activities in education, the environment, global development and population, performing arts, and philanthropy, as well as grants to support disadvantaged communities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Hewlett Foundation's Global Development and Population Program works along two dimensions, each with broad benefits for individuals and the societies in which they live. The first of these emphasizes the role of women—a straightforward acknowledgment that addressing gender disparities and reproductive health problems plays a central role in combating poverty around the world. The second promotes transparency, participation and accountability in government and civic affairs, and the use of the best available evidence in policymaking.

*On the web: **www.hewlett.org***

(Cover Image) **AYALA, UGANDA:** Women from the self-help group Alita Kole, taking care of their crops that they own together as a group.
PHOTO BY : *Jonathan Torgovnik, Reportage by Getty Images.*

BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES *by* CONNECTING CITIZENS *to their* GOVERNMENTS

In too many places, the quality of health care, education, sanitation, and other government services is poor, especially for the people who need them most. The world has made remarkable progress in reducing extreme poverty, improving health, and educating many more children, yet low- and middle-income countries continue to face problems of limited access to social services, and poor quality. Some of these deficits are due to resource shortages or limited public sector capacity. But the most egregious problems have less to do with the amount of money invested than with weak mechanisms for accountability, beyond the very limited opportunity every few years to vote politicians in and out of power. The result? Money goes missing, teachers and healthcare workers are absent, services do not improve, and neither do health and education outcomes. For example, recent surveys have found that despite high levels of school enrollment, only one out of ten Ugandan children in third grade can read at the most basic second grade level, and fewer than one in five public school teachers show mastery of their own curriculum.

Economies are growing and budgets for social services increasing with them, yet governments all-too-often fail to address the needs of their citizens, especially the poorest ones.

International development efforts abound with a focus on increasing resources and strengthening the capacity of government agencies. Neither of these is a primary task of civil society. A complementary solution that does fall within the sphere of civil society is increasing the ability of citizens to understand what government does and to have a role in holding governments accountable at all levels. This need not always be adversarial. In some cases, citizens can be brought together to work collaboratively with public agencies to identify and address shortcomings in service delivery shortcomings.

Strengthening the ability of citizens to hold governments accountable is a tall order. Citizens typically have few avenues to communicate directly and effectively with government representatives. Government authorities and citizens respond to different incentives and operate on different timelines, and even basic information about the funds available for service delivery and the quality of services is often difficult to obtain and understand. When information is available, citizens and civil society organizations may not know how to use it as the basis for effective engagement with public sector decision makers.

In recent years, in part through the contributions of Hewlett Foundation grantees, some of the building blocks of accountability have been put into place. At the international level, many national governments have come together with civil society organizations to articulate expectations about what information public officials should share with citizens. Increasingly, the norms regarding transparency are being complemented by expectations about citizen participation and engagement. At the regional level, organizations exert pressure on member states to adhere to collectively agreed upon standards and practices. At the national level, formal institutions such as legislatures, auditing bodies, and other official accountability mechanisms are charged to uphold the government's "contract" with its citizens on these issues.

These commitments and oversight systems are necessary but insufficient. They presume that channels exist for affected citizens to act collectively and express informed views effectively. But these channels are often absent or under-developed and few countries have civil society organizations that are working together well enough to complement and counterbalance the state.

We therefore are modifying our transparency and accountability strategy going forward by adding a greater focus on participation, namely by using our grants and influence to increase the motivation and ability of citizens to work together and use information to hold governments accountable for the delivery of quality public services.

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II.
OUR STRATEGY

A. What We've Learned About Advancing Accountability and What's Next.

The Hewlett Foundation and its grantees have played a pivotal role in supporting the formation of the field of transparency and accountability, which has been a central theme of the foundation's work since the Global Development Program first launched. Most of our work, like that of others in the field, has focused on transparency—on getting governments to make information available. And our partners have made impressive gains at both the national and international levels in increasing access to information for citizens. Examples of progress include the Open Government Partnership, as well as the work on open budgets and transparency of information about aid flows and revenues from extractive industries.

Unfortunately, most in the field would agree that the promise of work on transparency has not yet been realized in significant improvements in service delivery.

Some tactical approaches—such as school report cards, social audits, and mobile phone apps to report bribes and broken pipes—have yielded small-scale success, but few have made a difference at a national or larger scale. Like it or not, access to better information has not translated into citizen action, much less true government accountability.

We and others active in the field are therefore placing greater attention on a challenging frontier: finding ways to increase the ability of citizens to engage meaningfully with government. This is reflected in the name of our strategy, which has become "transparency, participation, and accountability," or TPA.

We expect to work in two broad areas, which are represented in Our New Approach.

OUR NEW APPROACH.

Through our Transparency, Participation, and Accountability grantmaking we strive to support organizations that inform and empower citizens to engage with governments to improve public services.

ACTIVITIES

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

ORGANIZED CITIZENS + RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT

Create and reinforce norms and standards that enable greater transparency and participation.

Ensure information on resources and service quality is available and can be used *(and in some cases generated)* by citizens.

Strengthen citizens' ability to speak and act collectively around service delivery challenges.

Build and strengthen channels that provide citizens constructive ways to engage with all levels of government.

Learn about how and under what conditions a more favorable enabling environment for transparency and participation leads to effective action to improve service delivery.

Learn about how and under what conditions citizen action can influence government responsiveness.

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME

Transparency, participation, and accountability approaches increase government responsiveness so that public services better meet the needs of citizens.

ULTIMATE OUTCOME

Citizens receive high-quality public services leading to better outcomes.

First, we will continue to support work on transparency, albeit with a smaller portion of our grants budget. This work remains essential if we are to establish a favorable **enabling environment**. It includes continuing to (1) advance global and regional norms, (2) strengthen mechanisms for nation-to-nation peer pressure, and (3) support action at the national level.

Second, we will increase efforts to foster **better organized and more effective citizen groups**, capable of engendering more responsive governments. We will invest in strengthening the capacity of citizens to press for better public services. This includes supporting promising efforts by international, regional, and national civil society groups to find creative ways for citizens to communicate with public officials. We expect these initiatives to span a range of approaches, from tried-and-true to experimental. Given the importance we place on field-building, we will invest in significant ways in learning from these experiences and sharing new knowledge with the broader community of funders, practitioners and researchers.

B. Areas for Grantmaking.

Our revised TPA strategy deepens, extends, and reorients our past investments without departing from our core path. To provide a clearer picture, we describe five areas for grantmaking under our new approach. These should be understood as rough guidelines more than independent categories, as they often overlap, with many of our current and potential grantees working within several of them simultaneously.

1. CREATE AND REINFORCE NORMS AND STANDARDS THAT ENABLE GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATION.

2. ENSURE THAT INFORMATION ABOUT RESOURCES AND SERVICE QUALITY IS COLLECTED AND CAN BE USED *(and in some cases generated)* BY CITIZENS.

3. STRENGTHEN CITIZENS' ABILITY TO SPEAK AND ACT COLLECTIVELY AROUND SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES.

4. BUILD AND STRENGTHEN CHANNELS THAT PROVIDE CITIZENS CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT.

5. ENHANCE THE HEWLETT FOUNDATION'S IMPACT THROUGH ACTIVE COLLABORATION ACROSS PORTFOLIOS.

1. CREATE AND REINFORCE NORMS AND STANDARDS THAT ENABLE GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATION.

We remain committed to the promotion of global norms—as well as related efforts at the regional level—that create the conditions for citizen participation by setting expectations about the disclosure of information about government activities, and particularly financial flows (everything from revenue generation to how public money is spent). Such norms have demonstrated their value as a means for citizens to pressure governments to be more open.

Most grants in this category involve consolidating gains already made. However, we expect to explore some new initiatives. Shifts in development and aid over the past decade, together with evidence highlighting the importance of resources beyond aid (including domestic resources), challenge the transparency community to think and act differently. For example, a surprising wave of activist pressure, bolstered by reinvigorated international political will, has opened a window of opportunity to tackle the illicit out-flow of money from developing countries. And, together with peer funders, we expect to pursue opportunities to support new global norms on both tax policy and public contracting processes.

We also plan to promote partnership between organizations working at the international level and those at the regional, national, and local levels. This could take a range of forms – for example, providing fellowships for local champions of transparency and account-ability to permit them to spend time within international organizations, or support-ing international organizations that are establishing national chapters that can connect national and global priorities. We are also interested in supporting regional and national groups that are seeking to monitor the national implementation of global commitments.

As part of our commitment to learning, we seek to deepen our understanding of the interaction among global norms, regional efforts, and national practices. We also hope to learn about the relative effectiveness of different tactics used by civil society to foster constructive government responses.

2. ENSURE THAT INFORMATION ABOUT RESOURCES AND SERVICE QUALITY IS COLLECTED AND CAN BE USED *(and in some cases generated)* BY CITIZENS.

Access to information remains a fundamental enabler of citizen participation. Open and relevant information about public monies, real-time data about people's experiences at the point of service, and information about outcomes can strengthen citizens' efforts to improve where money is spent and the quality of services it pays for. Withholding such information from citizens makes it easier for governments to ignore their demands.

Not all information is equal or equally useful. The quality and content of what government shares thus matters a great deal. To advance participation and accountability, information must be what users need and must come in a form they can digest and act on—concerns that will inform our future grants.

While we are interested in understanding how a range of types of information across multiple sectors can be made more accessible and relevant to citizens, we expect to build on two existing areas of strength. The first is around public finance, where we can extend and enhance our past support to transparency in the areas of extractive industries revenues, aid flows, and government budgeting and expenditure. The second is in the area of education outcomes, a legacy of the Quality Education in Developing Countries Initiative. To the extent resources permit, we expect to continue to support citizen-led, household-based assessments of learning as a means of exploring the connections between citizen-generated information and impact at policy and service delivery levels.

Through this work, we also expect to make important contributions to knowledge in the TPA field. We expect to learn such things as how information generated from citizen-led assessments can be used to catalyze local action among parents, teachers, local officials, and other community leaders; which ways of presenting information are most likely to encourage citizen action; or what to couple with assessment information to increase the likelihood that action is taken.

SAHRE BOCAR, SENEGAL: With support from the Quality Education in Developing Countries Initiative, Tostan's Community Empowerment Program organized and educated women's groups about their families' rights to quality health and education services and freedom from all forms of violence. With more information about their rights, women in the community organized to express their priorities and began to plan solutions with Tostan's support.

PHOTO BY : *Jonathan Torgovnik*
Reportage by Getty Images.

3. STRENGTHEN CITIZENS' ABILITY TO SPEAK AND ACT COLLECTIVELY AROUND SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES.

Information may be necessary, but if experience teaches anything, it is that information alone is not enough. One of the field's core challenges is figuring out how to motivate and enable citizens to work together to demand public sector responsiveness around service delivery challenges.

In our future grantmaking, we will emphasize support to organizations strengthening their ability to define and implement strategies that permit citizens to work together – to pressure government to fulfill stated commitments around service delivery, and/or to constructively engage in joint problem-solving. Our objective is to empower, connect, and mobilize individuals and citizen groups to engage with policymakers and service providers around specific improvements to public services.

While we are unable to provide support directly to small, local citizen groups, we will look for opportunities to enable the work of regional and national organizations/coalitions that have strong connections to and legitimacy among local groups. We will pay special attention to ensuring that partnerships we foster between smaller and larger organizations are open and productive and based on mutual respect, trust, and learning.

There is a significant learning agenda for this work. We want to understand how best to support subnational groups, such as teachers' and parents' associations, youth groups, women's organizations, and school management committees; how to avoid having such groups captured by elites; and how these groups are (or are not) engaging in useful ways with national-level civil society organizations.

4. BUILD AND STRENGTHEN CHANNELS THAT PROVIDE CITIZENS CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT.

Putting useful information in the hands of engaged citizens still may not be enough for government accountability—not if the channels for citizens to engage government representatives are weak or limited. Officials may have limited capacity, resources, and incentives to engage with citizens; specific mechanisms for citizens to seek redress or make suggestions may not exist or may exist in name only; and appropriate enforcement mechanisms may be absent, leaving officials free to ignore citizen requests or demands.

Citizens cannot use their voice to contribute to improved service delivery unless they have open, consultative, and responsive channels to communicate with government.

Feedback—data that sheds light on government performance in service delivery, or on citizens' perceptions of the quality of services—must be assembled, shared, and collectively interpreted. Public sector institutions must be involved, especially those with the power to translate feedback into actual changes to improve the governance and quality of essential services.

We will support work to identify, construct, and learn how to activate and use conduits for constructive interaction and feedback between citizens and public sector institutions. This may mean supporting the creation of new platforms in addition to strengthening existing ones. Some organizations we work with will press to strengthen formal institutions, such as those responsible for requests for information or for overseeing audits. Other grantees may pursue more informal routes to constructive citizen-government engagement.

Here we want to learn how and under what conditions citizen groups and social movements can influence government responsiveness. We are also seeking to learn how to increase the effectiveness of initiatives that use information as an entry point to citizen participation (for example, must diagnosis of a deficiency in service delivery be paired with a solution to the problem). Other questions include: Which citizen-government interfaces are most effective, and why? Do gender barriers affect citizen participation, and, if so, how can they be overcome? Finally, given the complex nature of politics, how do we know when an effort to improve accountability is worth continuing and when it is so unlikely to gain traction that we should abandon it?

ACCRA, GHANA: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global action, research policy network comprised of more than 30 membership-based organizations. WIEGO seeks to increase the voice of the working poor by getting these membership organizations a seat at the policy table while also conducting policy-relevant research and improving official statistics to make visible the work of informal workers. Pictured here is the Informal Workers Makola Market Association in one of its meetings, led by Juliana Brown Afari.

PHOTO BY : *Jonathan Torgovnik*
Reportage by Getty Images.

5. ENHANCE THE HEWLETT FOUNDATION'S IMPACT THROUGH ACTIVE COLLABORATION ACROSS PORTFOLIOS.

Transparency, Participation and Accountability is one of two subcomponents in the "Amplifying Voices" component of the Global Development and Population Program. The second subcomponent is Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIP). The two subcomponents have related but distinct roles.

In simple terms, TPA grantmaking focuses primarily on ensuring that citizens have the information, capacity, and channels needed to hold their government accountable for improved social service delivery. EIP grantmaking, in contrast, is focused primarily on ensuring that government officials have the information, ability, and incentives necessary to make good decisions on the policies and programs best able to serve citizen needs. As the Hewlett Foundation is not well-positioned to work directly with either citizens or government officials in the developing world, both TPA and EIP aim to strengthen and improve the environment in which these actors operate.

There is considerable interaction and complementarity between TPA and EIP, including some shared grantmaking. We will continually look for ways to protect and ensure this complementarity, both in our global work and regionally in East and West Africa.

III.

RISKS AND MITIGATION

Our work on transparency, participation and accountability faces two broad threats. First, space for civic action is shrinking around the world, and restrictions on civil society organizations are increasing. Some of this political tension results from technological and institutional developments that make information more widely available without appropriate mechanisms to translate that information into government accountability—making the information and activities of those who would use it threatening to incumbent governments. This has contributed to political instability in some countries, including threats of physical harm to those engaged in TPA activities (lawyers, grassroots activists, journalists exposing government wrongdoing, etc.), that jeopardizes all efforts to increase transparency, participation, and accountability.

This is a serious matter that we will attend to closely, consulting with partners and keeping an eye on the implications of this issue for our work. It may be possible to partner with other experienced donors, such as the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundations, to protect those currently engaged in TPA efforts and to encourage more open space for civil society action. We may also test alternative channels or mechanisms for citizens to act where civic space remains restricted. We will, finally, strongly encourage the global initiatives we support to consider how this issue affects—or should affect—their membership and governance practices, and urge them to take principled stands in response.

The second challenge comes from uncertainty about whether and to what extent lessons garnered from one setting at one time can be used to inform decisions in another setting at another time—i.e., the question of external validity. This is a pervasive question in social science, impossible to answer ex ante, the answer to which will determine whether our investments produce only local improvements or yield broader benefits. It is a considerable challenge for a field-building enterprise.

With this in mind, we want to ensure that any research is useful for the setting in which it is conducted—i.e., that it improves the particular program or organizational approach in question and so provides benefits for local communities. We hope that it yields lessons that are useful for other settings, but we recognize that this will not always be the case. By insisting that any research be rigorous, we should be able to identify the core mechanisms that drive certain outcomes, isolating them from other contextual or circumstantial factors. This, in turn, should enable us to ascertain what merits replication, from which we and others can figure out how to ask the right questions and dig deeper to learn what really works.