



Active Citizens and Accountable Governments: Learning Sub-Strategy

NOVEMBER 2017

GOAL

Under this sub-strategy, we will support learning that advocates, practitioners, and policymakers can use to increase transparency, participation, and accountability between governments and their citizens to improve the delivery of public services like water, health, and education. We're especially interested in learning from those we often hear from the least: research organizations based in the Global South, the perspectives of women and minorities, and researchers from non-English speaking regions. We seek to support learning that takes context into account, including history, power, and political dynamics¹, and prioritizes knowledge production from the field, especially in the Global South. We will support research and learning organizations engaged in one or more of the following dimensions of learning:

- Production and validation of actionable knowledge around issues that are relevant to the TPA field;
- Dissemination, deliberation, debate, and reflection of emerging evidence; and
- Implementation, iteration, and ongoing experimentation that leads to the production of more knowledge.

We are especially interested in supporting learning that helps answer the following questions:

- How do TPA policies and interventions affect women and men differently (e.g., access to information laws, participatory budgeting processes, etc.)?
- How is data created, collected, and made available through transparency initiatives (including citizen-generated data) and used to improve service delivery?
- What factors help citizens and civil society organizations work with government officials to improve service delivery?

Our grantmaking in this sub-strategy will be guided by the following values and priorities:

- Promote knowledge production and learning from the Global South and hear from voices that have been historically marginalized, particularly women.

¹ See WDR, p. 7

- Shrink the gap between academics and practitioners, particularly taking into consideration the importance of grassroots learning from the Global South.
- Include examples and lessons from Francophone Africa and Mexico.
- Support methodologically rigorous evaluations that are demand-driven or that are designed to generate practical, practitioner-relevant results.

LINK TO TPA STRATEGY AND SUB-STRATEGIES

As we wrote in December 2015² when we published our refreshed Transparency, Participation, and Accountability strategy:

Compared with just a decade ago, far more information about the government revenue sources, public budgets and expenditures is now routinely available. But for all the progress, we have to face a basic fact: greater transparency in most countries has not triggered many citizens to *use* the newly available information. Without citizens acting on this information to hold their leaders accountable, the problems of poor quality government services persist.

Throughout our grantmaking, a primary aim is to contribute knowledge to a dynamic field. Much of that learning will be undertaken by grantees themselves, and we'll look forward to having strong relationships with organizations that have demonstrated a commitment to learning, adapting, and sharing what they learn with others. We will also make specific investments in research, evaluation, and learning networks, with an emphasis on building or leveraging strong connections between academic and practitioner communities.

The sub-strategies on fiscal transparency, governance channels, and service delivery monitoring have established priority learning questions that we hope to answer through grantmaking in those portfolios. The learning sub-strategy aims to strengthen the capacities of research organizations and leverage the connections among researchers, practitioners, donors, and policymakers.

² <https://www.hewlett.org/making-transparency-matter-an-updated-strategy-to-engage-citizens-in-delivering-better-public-services/>

VALUES THAT WILL GUIDE OUR GRANTMAKING

We will support efforts that address power dynamics, inequities, and gaps in knowledge generation. With modest resources, we hope to increase the contribution of underrepresented scholars and perspectives in the discussion and uptake of evidence:

- **Who produces knowledge?** We want to promote knowledge production and learning from the Global South and hear from voices that have been historically marginalized from the process, particularly women.
- **Who uses it?** Many organizations in the Global South and citizen groups are simply seen as providers of information rather than participants in an ongoing and responsive process. We aim to support efforts that increase the use of and sharing of information in formats and languages accessible to underrepresented groups.³
- **How is it used?** Learning implies both being exposed to new information and acting on the new information with time and resources to reflect on the results (leading back to production). We will support learning opportunities that link the experience of Global South practitioners to the field. For example, supporting learning exchanges linking the experience of practitioners in Senegal with those in Mexico; research that is accountable to the subjects of study; capacity building of researchers and research institutions in the Global South.

Our current portfolio of grantees includes a combination of qualitative research that tests hypotheses about the effectiveness of TPA approaches to improving public service delivery, as well as support for experimental research on governance and institutions. A number of our grantees seek to shrink the gap between academics and practitioners, while elevating the importance of grassroots learning from the Global South.

We will support and commission research on issues that are relevant and crosscutting to all sub-strategies, including assumptions that are often embedded and untested, such as that citizens have (a) access to information, (b) knowledge of their rights, (c) civic space for organizing, and (d) equal access to participation channels. In reality, we find that citizens face challenges in all the above dimensions, which frequently depend on variables such as class, education, race, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location.

We aim to encourage learning *from and for* traditionally excluded voices in the TPA field. Often, research is extracted from the Global South and rarely is seen as a generator of knowledge. Language divides and an underinvestment in translation also contribute to uneven

³ The Hewlett Foundation aims to make the work we support as broadly available as possible. We encourage grantees who receive project funding to license nonsoftware copyrightable work products created with grant funds under the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY) to make products available to the public in a readily accessible format.

contribution and uptake of knowledge. This not only prevents many stakeholders in those regions from learning, but also excludes their experiences from informing the global field.⁴

We seek to learn as donors. Through grantmaking, collaboration, as well as internal practices, we seek to support different ways in which we can share and promote the uptake of research findings and other knowledge products with others in the field, including donors.

GRANTMAKING FOCAL AREAS

The learning sub-strategy prioritizes three areas of research that are described in greater detail below:

- We aim to support evidence of whether and how TPA policies and interventions to improve service delivery affect women and men differently?
- We want to learn more about how is data created and made available through transparency initiatives is used to improve service delivery?
- We aim to support evidence about the factors that create a positive enabling environment for collective action by citizens and/or civil society organizations to improve service delivery.

The TPA learning sub-strategy will support research to help us understand specifically how women experience TPA mechanisms, how they are included/excluded, to what extent they are able to express their views and feel heard, and whether they are fully engaged in decision making.⁵

The learning sub-strategy will encourage evidence across all other sub-strategies on **data use**⁶. Over the past ten years, we have prioritized the disclosure of information with the assumption that increased transparency would lead to incentives for governments to be more responsive, as well as for citizens to demand greater accountability. The evidence so far is mixed and often dependent on contextual factors. We are keen to learn more about the pathways that connect transparency to accountability. Do citizens respond more to certain types of information (say, about whether a clinic has the medicine inventory it is supposed to vs. information about the budget earmarked for that very same line item)? What role do infomediaries play? Can actors such as investigative journalists, campaigners, data scientists, and others translate complex information into data that is relevant to citizens? What source do citizens trust most? Is it

⁴ For more see [this](#) blog post by Rachel Strohm on African research centers

⁵ This includes effective ways to encourage women's participation, an issue highlighted in USAID's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance [Learning Agenda](#)

⁶ Unlike a gender perspective in TPA, data use is a question that has been substantially tackled by researchers in the TPA field. There are many examples in research of grantees like Open Knowledge Foundation, mySociety, GovLab, and others.

more likely that citizens will demand accountability as a result of information generated by their own government or generated by citizens themselves?

This leads to the third crosscutting research area, which is focused on **collective action** and **political economy**. As a global program we face the challenge of being distant from where transparency and accountability meets individuals' everyday lives. However, we are keen to learn the why and how of three priority issues:

- Which mechanisms allow people to be more involved in decisions that affect their lives, especially traditionally excluded people;
- Whether and how citizen participation leads to changes/improvements in service delivery and how; and,
- What makes these initiatives more or less successful in different political and economic contexts.⁷

Peer Learning

Knowledge can be demand-driven, practical, and inclusive and still not lead to learning. Learning is a constant process that requires ongoing exposure to knowledge and the space and resources to reflect on it. We are interested in promoting learning that is hands-on, experiential, and contextually relevant.

We are currently supporting a pilot in Mexico working on peer-to-peer learning events. Through the learning sub-strategy we will encourage more horizontal learning opportunities across our portfolios and geographies, including South-to-South learning events linking our in-country work in Mexico and East and West Africa to the global level. We want to encourage grantees to share their experience, lessons, and challenges, prioritizing the voices of Global South practitioners. Opportunities for peer learning include workshops, conferences, webinars, platforms, translation (journalists, campaigners, social movements), and practitioner learning networks.

WHAT WE WILL NOT SUPPORT

- Academic research that is divorced from practitioners, or has no clear plan for uptake in the field.
- Organizations and institutions that do not foster co-creation and co-ownership of knowledge with experts and practitioners in the Global South.⁸
- Individual research studies that are not part of a coherent program of research.

⁷ For more on the issue of external validity see EGAP's Metaketa Initiative: <http://egap.org/metaketa>

⁸ By inclusiveness we mean a broad set of standards that could include: collection of disaggregated data (by gender, race, ethnicity, religion); clear processes to jointly co-create and co-own knowledge production with the Global South; translation of work products, and others.

- Individual travel sponsorships for conferences, workshops or other convenings.
- Academic scholarships for individual researchers.

WHAT WILL ALL THIS LOOK LIKE IN FIVE YEARS?

In five years, we hope to see new research and evidence on the following:

- How transparency, participation, and accountability mechanisms affect women and men differently;
- How transparency, participation, and accountability mechanisms promote gender-responsive public services that take into account the different biases and constraints women face with service access;⁹
- Ways to improve feedback loops between academics and practitioners; and
- Ways transparency and accountability mechanisms can improve service delivery.

We also hope to see work in these areas:

- More research organizations in the Global South;
- More and better collaboration, networking, and partnership among our grantees;
- Grantees learning, documenting, and sharing their experiences with others in the field;
- Grantees sharing what they learn in their grantee reports (changes in projects, theories of change, activities, etc.); and
- Our own program staff learning from our grantees responding to feedback, and adapting our strategy.

⁹ For examples of what gender-responsive public services can look like see <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2011/6/promoting-women-s-access-to-public-services-2011-gender-responsive-public-service-awards>

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