



ORGANIC COALITION GROWTH AFTER A “FUNDER-RESPONSIVE” START: COMPASS, THE TANZANIA KVP FORUM AND DSD-UT TANZANIA

SUMMARY

Funding opportunities can have positive or negative impacts—bringing much-needed resources to critical work or diverting energy from core activities to donor-driven priorities, enabling new networks or fracturing fragile alliances along fault-lines of who receives (and does not receive) resources. Civil society activism and advocacy is fundamental to sustained change in societal, governmental and global landscapes. It is essential, therefore, to understand how funding for activist and advocacy work can be structured in ways that support bold, innovative activism. This case study of the COMPASS coalition in Tanzania shows an approach to introducing new resources for activism and advocacy into the national civil society ecosystem that led to strong, well-informed and cohesive civil society coalition work in highly, highly challenging circumstances.

The foundation for this successful approach was a North-South coalition model that:

- Created a mechanism for Tanzanian groups to collaborate with each other and remain connected;
- Set and executed coordinated, data-informed strategies based on Tanzania- and non-Tanzania-based partners working together in real time with clear roles and mutual trust; and
- Structured work around core principles and ways of working, rather than a specific set of deliverables.

This approach has implications for coalition-focused funding including the need to:

- Incorporate transnational allies into “domestic” investments in countries where the landscape is shaped by external donors;
- Fund strategic approaches, not static outcomes within a framework that holds partners accountable for their actions;
- Clearly delineate sets of activities that are frequently lumped together as “advocacy”: activities undertaken by civil society that directly support uptake and correct use of medical strategies on the one hand (e.g. peer supporters, implementers of “demand creation” activities who may or may not have created the messages) from activities that seek to hold funders, governments and implementers accountable for funding and implementing health services that meet people’s needs.

The funding space for the latter form of advocacy is even smaller, which makes it all the more important that these investments are well-structured.

Civil society advocates can use the lessons learned in this experience to build or strengthen their ongoing work by applying strategic expansion of the range (and location) of partners involved in a given issue; adaptation of intra-civil society accountability approaches to establishing and holding to a core set of values for collaborative work; and use of community-gathered evidence and data to drive change and demonstrate the contribution and power of new civil society coalitions.

BACKGROUND

In 2017, COMPASS Africa, a North-South coalition focused on supporting data-driven activism and advocacy for impact, began working in Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Unlike in Malawi and Zimbabwe, where there were pre-existing coalitions, the Tanzanian groups that joined COMPASS had not worked together as a coalition in the past. The Tanzanian groups that joined COMPASS reflected a range of organizational sizes and focal areas; they undertook, at the beginning, to implement independent work plans and, at the same time, to identify areas for coordinated work.

As in other COMPASS countries, in Tanzania civil society groups and partners from the global North work together to gather, analyze, and use evidence and data to drive strategic advocacy campaigns and change policy. Using the data analytical skills developed through COMPASS, Tanzanian COMPASS partners developed and refined advocacy agendas that helped shift policy and programs in the Tanzanian context. The initial COMPASS partners evolved their coalition structures and focal areas as a result of, and in response to, these agendas. Additional COMPASS partners joined the Tanzanian Coalition after the completion of this case study, and are further advancing this work. For a full list, see www.avac.org/compass.

A MECHANISM FOR TANZANIAN GROUPS TO COLLABORATE WITH EACH OTHER AND REMAIN CONNECTED

After an initial in-person inception meeting in Zimbabwe in 2017, COMPASS partners continued to collaborate virtually through emails, phone calls, monthly all-COMPASS calls and WhatsApp. Tanzanian COMPASS partners were the most active country-based partners in both the full COMPASS WhatsApp group and in several smaller topic- and issue-specific groups that often emerged in real time, i.e. at a meeting where the Tanzanian government and PEPFAR were setting size estimates for key and vulnerable populations. When specific issues emerged within the Tanzanian group—most frequently regarding inclusion and exclusion of the most marginalized groups in key meetings and processes—Tanzanian COMPASS partners brought these to the full WhatsApp group, where COMPASS allies affirmed and stated core principles of activist organizing without singling out or blaming any individual organization. When tensions ran high within the country, all of the partners continued their work with non-country-based allies; the broader coalition structure “held” the Tanzanian partners together as they worked through issues of alignment, solidarity, and coalition versus autonomous work in country. Had the resources been solely to Tanzanian partners for coalition work, the tensions and growing pains that would likely have slowed or halted activity. From 2017 to mid-2019, the transnational COMPASS coalition served as the umbrella for a loose affiliation of Tanzanian groups, all of whom were working with non-Tanzanian partners to refine and deploy specific strategies and tactics. This grouping used the term “coalition” to refer to the set of groups that had joined COMPASS at the outset—a configuration that was developed in response to the opportunity, rather than a pre-existing alliance. In mid-2019, when an unprecedented

opportunity arose to establish an autonomous civil society forum led by and for Tanzanian Key and Vulnerable Population representatives, COMPASS members played core leadership roles in establishing a coalition encompassing more than 30 groups. This “organic” coalition emerged out of a funder-responsive grouping because of the way the initial funding was structured as a “big tent” for values-aligned activists, with an emphasis on approach and impact, not deliverables.

BUILDING POWER THROUGH COLLABORATION

Many COMPASS partners had achieved significant results in the context of the annual PEPFAR Regional Planning Meetings where Country Operational Plans (COPs) are developed and approved. These included changes in targets, funding, policy and service delivery approaches by PEPFAR, country governments and the GFATM. COMPASS began in late 2017 and all of the partners worked together going into the COP 2018 planning cycle. One of the Tanzanian COMPASS partners was able to send a representative to the in-person planning meetings in Johannesburg where COMPASS partners from the US and Uganda joined Tanzanians as part of that country’s civil society delegation. The Tanzanian partners created a WhatsApp group to share, in real time, core developments with CSOs “at home” and proceeded to advance a powerful in-person campaign for more progressive policies for community-based ART, self-test, provision of PrEP, expansion of DREAMS programs, transparency around investments in human resources for health (HRH), increase in voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC) targets and key and vulnerable population (KVP) engagement in a planned Integrated Biobehavioral Survey (IBBS). Several of these demands (VMMC, HRH transparency, KVP investment) were met; others were not, in spite of strong support from WHO, UNAIDS and PEPFAR. The demands were developed on site by COMPASS partners working together, sharing experiences and strategies and supporting one another to take and share risks (e.g. speaking openly and critically about government policies) in the room.

This collaboration continued on return to Tanzania. KVP representatives were invited to be part of the review of the IBBS protocol. COMPASS partners worked together to develop research literacy, review the protocol and suggest changes to the data collection tool. Through this and subsequent work on KVP size estimates, PEPFAR’s POART data review and the 2019 RPM, the COMPASS partners established modes of working that drew on individual groups’ unique strengths, while centering Tanzanian civil society priorities and leadership.

SHIFTING RESOURCES TO AN UNANTICIPATED OPPORTUNITY

COMPASS’s core commitment is to “business unusual” tactics that seek to use evidence to drive shifts in policy, budget, program implementation, leading to a comprehensive HIV response. Every piece of COMPASS work starts with a rigorous exploration of the issue and the target—what are you trying to change and who has the power to make that change? Activities like “raising awareness” or “sensitizing” or even meeting with elected officials are interrogated—in what way is this going to lead to the change you’re seeking? What commitments will you look for, what will you do next (how will you escalate?) if the answer is “no”?

For the COMPASS partners focused on expanding investments in high-quality, rights-based services for Tanzanian KVP, the notion of a “KVP Forum” that would engage directly with the government and PEPFAR around policy and program issues was not a part of any initial work plan. The concept emerged and was

refined in the context of multi-stakeholder pressure on Government of Tanzania (GoT) to clearly articulate the illegality of forced anal exams performed on people suspected of homosexuality. As GoT demurred on this policy ask, civil society advanced the demand for an autonomous body that could review the updated policy and be a formal partner with PEPFAR. PEPFAR and GoT agreed and COMPASS partners pivoted into work to develop and convene the KVP Forum (KVP-F), which has become a go-to body for both PEPFAR and GoT for inputs on the anal exam circular and advocacy on programming for KVP groups, including PrEP roll-out and index testing. At its inception, COMPASS didn't anticipate the development of such a group in Tanzania, but its funding and structure are such that resources followed opportunity. The full transnational coalition is now working to supply legal, scientific and rights-based support to the KVP-F in this highly-sensitive work.

BUILDING ON “WINS” WITH CONCRETE NEXT STEPS: MAKING SURE KVP-F IS NOT JUST CONSULTED BUT CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

Almost as soon as the KVP-F was convened and recognized by USG and GoT, members began to be drawn in to various national processes to advise and inform. This type of inclusion has benefits and can put advocates in forums where they're able to drive change. The KVP-F, working with COMPASS partners, has devised a strategy to ensure that it is establishing its identity and priorities beyond responding to questions and commenting on other partners' planned work. Having identified PrEP roll-out as a key issue for Tanzanian KVP, and noting continued delays in PrEP implementation, the KVP-F decided to convene a “PrEP Summit,” inviting GoT, PEPFAR and implementers from the ongoing pilot project to share updates and receive input from PrEP users and advocates. Exercising convening power, securing commitments and holding key stakeholders accountable for these commitments will help KVP-F establish itself as a proactive, powerful civil society body.

KEY LEARNINGS:

- A coalition formed in response to a specific funding and program opportunity experienced a particular constellation of the growing pains common to many coalitions: competition, mistrust, negotiation of power, authority and access (to funders, government, etc.). Some of these challenges emerged as a direct result of coalition success—groups understood the benefits of participation, and that both built interest and exacerbated tensions.
- A North-South coalition model based on horizontal collaboration—not North-South “capacity building” but rather shared problem solving—helped overcome some of the initial challenges. Membership in the broader COMPASS coalition offered the nascent country-based group a broader sense of affiliation (beyond the single country context), allowed for specific relationships and forms of support to emerge (no single model or approach was imposed or required) and provided a community within which core principles of collaborative movement-building work could be articulated, sometimes by non-Tanzania based partners.
- The types of information that representatives of communities have about the communities they claim to represent are often discounted by funders and the government. The use of government, PEPFAR or GFATM-produced data to advance arguments and demands can legitimize these groups. This is problematic insofar as it is cooperative with structures that diminish the value of community-based

knowledge; however, many civil society groups, including those in COMPASS, are now working with both the “official” data and with their own community-derived evidence. It need not be one or the other. COMPASS allows groups to practice a “both/and” approach to data-informed advocacy.

- The impossible is possible. Government of Tanzania recognition of a self-organized KVP Forum seemed unlikely during the worst of the crackdowns and even during the period when the coalition was being formed. However, the support of key stakeholders in PEPFAR, UNAIDS, WHO and the international advocacy community along with the profound bravery and commitment of the KVP-F members enabled consensus on the need for and composition of this group in a way that did not involve major compromises by any stakeholder. Civil society can successfully redistribute power in the most challenging contexts. In fact, this is when the work is most important.
- Responsive coalitions can become “real” coalitions over time. The KVP-F did not replace DSD-UT. It opened up new avenues for collaboration between groups, and provided an opportunity for sharpening the mission and remit of each collective.