



SYNTHESIS

Brief 2

Coalition-building and multi level connections

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Box 1

Overview of case studies and synthesis briefs (SoAW action learning process)

Case studies		
	<i>The value of civil society alliances in realising women and girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights</i>	IPPF Africa Region
	<i>YWCA advocacy towards the eradication of Female Genital Mutilation in Kenya</i>	YWCA Kenya
	<i>Journalists networked across Africa for increased SRHR coverage in the media</i>	IPPF Africa Region
	<i>Faith leadership of civil society collaboration towards adoption of the EAC SRHR Bill</i>	Faith to Action Network
	<i>How African First Ladies spearheaded the successful launch of a continent-wide campaign to prevent HIV and AIDS in childhood</i>	OAFLAD
	<i>Institutional change towards the integration of population and development issues in the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)</i>	All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and Faith to Action Network
Synthesis briefs		
	<i>Progressing on the unfinished business</i>	KIT Royal Tropical Institute
	<i>Coalition-building and multilevel connections</i>	KIT Royal Tropical Institute

Coalition-building and multi level connections

Health and bodily integrity lie at the heart of well-being for all. Women and girls’ sexual and reproductive health and rights are critical elements of health and bodily integrity. The State of African Women campaign advocated for progressing on the unfinished business on women’s health and bodily integrity. The main objective of the State of African Women (SoAW) campaign is to contribute to securing, realizing and extending women’s rights enshrined in African Union (AU) policies in African countries. The campaign seeks to influence both legal and social norms change towards women and girls’ rights in SRHR, at continental, regional, national and sub-national levels, through a stronger voice and meaningful participation of civil society in decision-making. This synthesis brief reflects on the strategies pursued by this campaign to advance women and girls’ rights through coalition-building and advocacy for legal and social norms change and better implementation of policy commitments at multiple levels.

The synthesis brief is based on six case studies that were formulated as part of an action learning process with the consortium partners.¹ The case studies are prepared by: IPPF Africa Region, YWCA Kenya, Faith to Action Network and the OAFLAD (see Box 1, overview of case studies). The case studies form the basis of two synthesis briefs: one on ‘Progressing on the unfinished business’, and another one on ‘Coalition-building and multilevel connections’. Both synthesis briefs seek to pull out strategies and joint learning across the diverse advocacy processes that are presented in the six case studies.

¹ Between 2018 and 2020 KIT facilitated an action-learning trajectory with the SOAWC partners. The aim of the trajectory was to 1) build capacities of consortium partners, CSOs and champions to critically interrogate their advocacy actions, and reflect on achievements and challenges; 2) to recalibrate advocacy activities, and 3) to document experiences and lessons learned from advocacy initiatives. The trajectory consisted of four phases: 1) an action learning skills building workshop (2018); 2) an action learning planning workshop (2018); 3) the implementation of action learning plans through data collection, reflection and documentation (2019) and 4) a writeshop to prepare case studies (2019). Throughout the trajectory, collective learning questions and recurrent themes were identified that formed the basis for two synthesis briefs. The process of developing the synthesis briefs during 2020 has been inductive and interactive, and involved both researchers, advocacy officers and staff from participating CSOs. As a result of the action learning trajectory 6 case studies were produced and 2 synthesis briefs.

Coalition-building and multilevel connections

The SoAW partnership was set up recognizing the need to approach women and girls' rights from multiple perspectives. A unique coalition of youth-serving organizations, faith organizations, feminist groups and SRHR activists joined to shape the SoAW campaign at the global, regional, national and local level. The assumption was that their combined strength would create a more united CSO voice, reach large and diverse constituencies and amplify the coalitions' ability to leverage change at scale. The diverse coalition was the foundation of the State of African Women consortium itself but it was also clearly visible in the coalitions that were formed around specific advocacy goals, as presented in the case studies.

Especially in the field of women and girls' rights in SRHR, CSOs operate in a diversified and constantly changing civic arena where backlashes happen and at the same time, different forms of activism emerge. Anticipating of, and responding to resistance as well as opportunities for activism requires a flexible and strategic approach to advocacy in which the building and diversification of coalitions is crucial. CSOs in a coalition have different constituents, political, financial and intellectual resources and therefore gain leverage through different strategies, towards different targets. Diversity of CSOs in a coalition provides credibility and legitimacy, and the opportunity to navigate power relations and to act collectively.

In the roll-out of the SoAW campaign, CSOs were exposed to a range of opportunities for collaboration at local, national and international levels, with a range of types of CSOs. Drawing from six case studies, in which CSOs have contributed to significant policy changes, this synthesis brief will engage with, and bring fresh insights to the relevance of collaboration and coalition-building among CSOs. Looking across the cases, we ask:

1. How can CSOs with different constituencies, worldviews, histories, political and financial resources, and operating style work together to achieve a common goal?
2. Which structure or coalition of actors is well placed and capacitated to facilitate this collaboration? How do you convene, broker, facilitate such coalitions?
3. How do effective linkages between different levels work (grassroots – national – international – regional-continental)?

Overview and features of the coalitions in the case studies

The SoAW campaign focused on four priority rights areas: gender-based violence against women (GVAW), harmful practices (in particular child marriage and female genital mutilation), reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health (RR and SRH) and HIV and AIDS. The six case studies that this synthesis speaks to seek to make progress in one of these areas in different ways through different forms of coalitions and advocacy at different levels. The CSO collaborations in our case studies are variously called coalition, steering committee or group, regional taskforce, network or partnership. Table 1 provides an overview of the coalitions, their advocacy goals and levels of intervention.

The coalitions reviewed were diverse in terms of their membership. The Anti-FGM coalition in Kenya, the ICPD+25/ AADPD+5 CSO steering group, the journalist network, and the AACC-Faith to Action Network partnership were mainly CSO based. The EAC steering committee of the regional taskforce on the SRHR bill included faith-based, rights-based, technical and development organizations and the Free to Shine campaign steering committee also included donors.

Table 1.
Six advocacy coalitions in SoAW

Name of coalition	Advocacy goal(s)	Level(s) of campaign
1. Anti-FGM coalition	Eradication of FGM in families and communities; adoption of a consistent FGM act; approval of national FGM policy.	National and local
2. SRHR bill – Steering committee of Civil Society Task Force for Enactment of Regional Legislation on SRHR in East Africa	Re-tabling, re-drafting and adoption of the EAC SRHR Bill and its passage into law by EALA.	Regional and national
3. Free to Shine campaign – steering committee	PMTCT on the national agendas Alignment of agendas AU + OAFILAD + donors	Continental and national
4. ICPD+25/ AADPD+5 CSO steering group	Common CSO agenda (position paper)	International, continental, national
5. Journalist network	Improve the quality, accuracy and intensity of SRHR reporting to influence policymakers and decisions on reforms	Local, national, continental
6. AACC and F2A partnership	Institutional change in faith institutions and strengthen voice of faith leaders in continental platforms on SRHR	Local, national, continental

Strategies

To advance their advocacy goals, coalitions used a range of strategies to build a common agenda and advocacy strategy and to join forces in advocacy campaigns. These are:

Strategy 1: Diversity in coalitions and strategic leadership

Most coalitions in the case studies were formed for the specific purpose of the campaign but they draw on longer-term experience and relationships. They all seek to **establish or strengthen a diverse membership** for a number of reasons:

- **Changes in context** prompting the broadening of the coalition. The Anti-FGM coalition consisted of an initial core group of leading activists and CSOs but its membership was expanded in response to a the threat of the reversal of the Anti-FGM law. Legal advocacy organizations joined the group to prepare evidence and a counter response against a retrogressive pro-FGM court case.
- **Broadening the reach of the general public and support base.** In the journalist network, among 40 members, different types of media producers (print, social media, radio, television) were represented as to broaden the reach of audiences.
- **Ensure complementarity in expertise and capacities.** The coalitions in the case studies sought to mobilize different types of expertise and capacity to advance their advocacy campaigns. Together, the coalition members combined political, technical, research, communication, diplomatic and social capacities that lead to a clear **division of labour**.
 - This was particularly evident when it concerns the building of the evidence for advocacy by **combining legal evidence and evidence on lived realities of women and girls**. In both the anti-FGM case study and the EALA case study, legal analysts and auditors were called upon to collect and present evidence regarding progress and gaps in legal documents, policy reforms and frameworks. In the anti-FGM case this resulted in the development of a counter response to the Anti-FGM court case and a roadmap for advocacy. At the same time, in the Anti-FGM coalition, YWCA Kenya brought in real life testimonies and evidence from the counties on rights violations to strengthen the evidence base. In the EALA case study, the Civil Society Task Force for Enactment of Regional Legislation on SRHR in East Africa (RTF) was re-activated and its membership expanded to include faith voices, and parliamentarians and the taskforce leveraged more legal expertise through the inclusion of the East Africa Law Society.

- Diversity in coalitions and strategic leadership (strategy 1)
- Multi-level advocacy (strategy 2)

- Within coalitions, some partners were also called upon their specific **capacity strengthening and training expertise**. Capacity strengthening of coalition members and allies was a core strategy in most coalitions, often in preparation for advocacy actions. They ranged from light breakfast orientations with EALA parliamentarians (EALA case study) to large-scale campaign launches that were combined with sensitization sessions (OAFILAD case study). Continental summits and global conferences, such as the ICPD+25 Nairobi Summit in 2019, were used by coalition leads to organize pre-assemblies (ICPD faith pre-summit in the EALA case study) or side-events to strengthen understanding of rights issues, build advocacy skills and arrive at the formulation of joint statements.

The coalitions in the case studies started with a core group of CSOs; membership expanded and diversified for different reasons. However, the expansion not only concerned the core groups but included a strategy to **build alliances with champions** around the coalition. Across all coalitions, there were targeted efforts to broaden the reach of the coalition by engaging with allies who are not direct members of the coalition but who are influential for the roll-out of the campaigns. This engagement concerned awareness raising and capacity strengthening activities. In the **Anti-FGM coalition**, YWCA Kenya trained CSOs and young women champions on the issues and contestations around the FGM law and policy and on advocacy messaging. In the **AAPDP+5 and ICPD+25** process, the core team organized capacity strengthening workshops targeting civil society organisations, parliamentarians and journalists on policy and negotiation processes, the functioning of decision-making institutions and platforms. In the **EALA case study**, targeted efforts were made to mobilise regional parliamentarians and staff. Members of Parliament of the EALA supportive of the Bill, EALA staff who know the EALA calendar and decision-making processes, and EAC staff, who provide links between EALA the EAC secretariat and the governments of partner states. collaboration and partnerships between CSOs, faith leadership, members of parliament, and technical (government) staff at national and EAC levels was a condition to move the SRHR Bill forward. In the **journalist network case study**, IPPFAR has developed strategies to sensitize journalist champions and provide them with guidance on how to report objectively and on diverse SRHR topics. In most case studies, the use of social media worked to sensitize the public and call people to action in an effort to expand the SRHR movement beyond coalitions and allies.

The case studies underline the importance of **strategic leadership** in convening coalition members and bringing together the diverse coalition members around a common agenda or roadmap. In the AACC, EALA and OAFILAD case study, a **co-leadership** was established between two institutions, building on existing relations and shared purpose but also strategic considerations.

- In the **EALA case study**, Faith to Action Network and EANNASO co-chaired the steering committee of the civil society taskforce. Faith to Action Network was well positioned to mobilize positive faith voices whereas EANNASSO is a strong leading organisation among CSOs working on health rights.
- In the **OAFILAD case study**, the Free to Shine campaign was co-lead by OAFILAD and the African Union Commission (AUC) who speak to different constituents and can leverage different **sources of authority**. OAFILAD secretariat could leverage the moral authority and high-level leadership of African First Ladies, at both national levels and in international fora, including around AU Summits. OAFILAD, through its General Assemblies, was also able to expand the number of African First Ladies adhering to the campaign through facilitating experience sharing between First Ladies. The AUC provided the political authority to mobilize member states; its’ formal note verbal to member states accelerated the roll-out of the campaign.

- In the **AACC case study**, the co-leads (AACC and Faith to Action Network) of the campaign for strengthened faith voices in SRHR issues, also complemented each other in terms of ambitions, strategic positioning and linkages to members at the grassroots. Both have long-term engagement with justice and development issues and both are membership organizations who had gained the trust of their members in representing faith interests. Whereas AACC has observer status at the AU, the Faith to Action Network is a member of the UN Taskforce on Religion and SRHR, each leveraging access to different policy processes and decision-making spaces.

Strategic leadership also entails the identification of, and reaction to, **windows of opportunity** that arise. Given that moments for actual policy change often come and go as political, social and economic contexts change, coalitions need to use and create windows of opportunity. Coalition members may perceive and have access to different opportunities, and if well-coordinated, this provides “readiness” and flexibility of coalitions to respond. A court case against the criminalization of FGM in Kenya provided a momentum for the **Anti-FGM coalition** to prepare a counter response through the active membership of a CSO experienced in litigation. It also provided a strong incentive to strengthen legal literacy at the grassroots level. In the **EALA case study**, the coalition worked with a roadmap that was continuously adapted to respond to new realities and opportunities. One of the co-leads, Faith to Action Network, was well positioned to navigate policy processes by being present and **engaging in different advocacy processes simultaneously**. Faith to Action Network contributed to policy development at subnational and national levels on youth development and at regional level on gender-based violence and FGM. The presence and contributions of faith leaders at these levels leveraged the voice of faith leaders in the SRHR Bill process. At the same time, the visibility and constructive support of faith leaders built the legitimacy of the Network, generating trust among faith actors and building rapport with government ministries, the EALA and EAC actors, allowing for well-informed advocacy strategy and actions.

Strategy 2: Multilevel work

Coalitions at national (Anti-FGM case study), regional (EALA case study) and continental (AACC case study, Journalist network case study, OAFIAD case study, AAPDP+5 and ICPD+25 case study) levels are the groups that lead the articulation of claims and that are present in political spaces. Their agendas, however, are derived directly or indirectly, from needs, experiences and rights held by women and girls in communities and at the local levels of governance. These “grassroots” take diverse organizational forms ranging from community-level young women’s groups (Anti-FGM case study), faith-based groups and youth groups (EALA case study), and women’s right champions (all case studies).

The cases represent a spectrum in respect of how central the connection with grassroots groups and women and girls at the local level was established and how national, regional and continental coalitions relate to them. At one end of the spectrum would be the national **Anti-FGM coalition** in which one member, YWCA, uses multiple strategies at the local level, from consultations and engagement of women with lived experiences. It has as an explicit objective to enhance linkages between national level processes and grassroots movement to achieve social and policy norm change regarding the practice of FGM. It mobilizes young women champions and peer educators to discuss the negative impact of FGM on women and girls at community level and in schools and at bringing young women’s voices into county-level Gender Technical Working groups, that constitute coalitions at the local level. Input and evidence from the county level is brought up to the national anti-FGM taskforce. Inversely, YWCA translates knowledge and information from the national to the local level.

At the other end would be the **Free to Shine campaign** that started as a continental campaign, engaging policymakers and international partners in designing and endorsing the campaign, down to the national level, engaging ministers to adopt the campaign and First Ladies to engage with the larger public. In the **EALA case study**, formal processes of citizen voice were created through national level public hearings of which results were transferred to national EALA MPs. The national hearings revealed contestations that informed the CSO agenda. In the **AAPDP+5 and ICPD+25** case study a bottom-up process from the local to the continental level was designed to provide input from the grassroots to the advocacy process. The journalists in the **journalist network** function as intermediaries between grassroots organisations (IPPF member associations) and continental (such as Gender is My Agenda) and social media platforms where they share stories from the field on issues such as gender-based violence, FGM and unsafe abortion.

Lessons learned

In conclusion, this brief highlights four lessons learned in relation to the learning questions it posed on building coalitions and working at multiple levels to achieve advocacy goals.

Capacity strengthening as a condition to develop common ground

Most cases included capacity strengthening of CSO members on advocacy tactics, the political, social and legal aspects around women and girls’ rights in SRHR. Whereas campaign leads have learned and enhanced their abilities to lead, adapt, and manage relations in a coalition, members have accessed new data and knowledge. Capacity strengthening has proven an important strategy to build common ground as well as to enhance the effectiveness of advocacy coalitions.

Stronger and diversified coalitions as intermediate outcome of advocacy

The building of a strong(er) or broad(er) coalition was one of the core objectives of the advocacy campaigns. Coalition-building is a process and an outcome in itself and an intermediate step towards enhanced advocacy impact. In addition, in all the cases, it has resulted in the advocacy capacity strengthening of members, individuals and organizations. For example, coalition-building resulted in a **stronger journalist network** that has become a sustainable community of practice with a mutual support structure, peer review and joint media coverage of SRHR stories. This encourages individual members to speak out and deepen and sustain their role as advocates, and it enables them to cope with challenges that individual members face. The other coalitions have been able to diversify their membership, bring on board new expertise, new constituencies or champions and other allies.

Linking with organizations, champions and leaders at the grassroots

The grassroots organizations involved in advocacy work in the case-studies are organized around different identities, activities or themes. They harbor a legitimacy because they emerge from their members’ (e.g. youth, faith groups, young women) needs or rights claims, and they bring to the coalition their convening and mobilizing power. We have seen in the case studies that apart from bringing in the evidence and voice of women and girls’ in subnational or national advocacy, grassroots mobilization in itself can change the public discourse and social norms and practices needed to sustain the higher-level policy change aspired by national coalitions.

Investing in identifying complementarities and potential conflict

The process of coalition-building can consume time, especially when political circumstances change and enthusiasm or commitment fades in allies and partners. Diversity in a coalition can be seen as a barrier for creating a unified agenda or voice, while the push to develop a common agenda may push valuable diversities to the background. The case studies showed that strong (co-)leadership is crucial to facilitate discussions between organizations and individuals with different worldviews and opinions and keep members on board. However, most coalitions in the case studies could have made **more use of complementarities and synergies through a more conscious mapping of organizations and collaborations**. Such maps can show where and how members will add value, whether some members’ strategies unintentionally work in opposition and it can identify potential points of conflict. The map could indicate how a particular member is contributing to the collective goal and hence inform the division of labour, but it could also identify how coalition membership can strengthen individual members’ strategic positioning, impact and operational power.



COLOPHON
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