



Ending FGM in Europe: From a limited-life campaign to a sustainable membership network

A STORY OF CHANGE

February 2019

At the end of Amnesty International Ireland's successful six-year advocacy campaign to fight the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Europe, participating grassroots organizations across the continent formed a new network to keep the movement's momentum. Before the original campaign's sole funder, Human Dignity Foundation, stepped away, it provided seed funding and technical assistance to the new End FGM European Network during a vulnerable transition period. This brief draws from stakeholder interviews and a review of historical documents to present useful lessons for donors interested in supporting nascent organizations or catalyzing a burgeoning ecosystem of influential activists.*

BACKGROUND

Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.”¹ It has been recognized across the globe as a manifestation of unequal gender relations and a gross violation of several human rights, including the rights to physical and mental integrity; the right to the highest attainable standard of health; and the right to freedom from violence, torture, and sex discrimination.² Today FGM affects an estimated 200 million girls and women worldwide.³ Large-scale surveys have shown that it is most highly concentrated in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, where the prevalence rate in some countries is greater than 75 percent. FGM is not limited to those regions of the world, however. Many women and girls living in diaspora communities across Europe, the Americas, and Australia have also survived this harmful practice or remain at risk.^{4,5} Their exact numbers are not known, but the European Parliament has estimated that approximately 500,000 women and girls in the European Union (EU) have survived FGM—and another 180,000 are at risk each year of being subjected to the practice.⁶

HUMAN DIGNITY FOUNDATION'S SUPPORT FOR ELIMINATING FGM IN EUROPE

To guarantee that children grow up safe from harmful practices like FGM and child sexual abuse, Human Dignity Foundation (HDF) has supported an array of efforts rooted in human rights and increased gender equality.^{7,8} After a 2007 grant supported an Amnesty International program in Sierra Leone that aimed to eliminate FGM by focusing on human rights and access to justice, the foundation's leaders wanted to bring attention across Europe to the fact that women and girls in the African diaspora, particularly in Europe, were undergoing—and living with the aftermath of—FGM. At the time, FGM was not yet a prominent topic in European policy circles, and when it was discussed, it was seen as a foreign policy issue.⁹ HDF helped catalyze a movement against FGM across the continent, initially as the sole funder of an advocacy campaign by Amnesty International's Ireland section, and later by supporting a new membership network organized by several of the grassroots groups that had participated in the campaign.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Hoping to inform and inspire other donors worldwide, HDF sought to understand whether and how its support

* Throughout this brief, we use the term “female genital mutilation” (FGM), the term used by the End FGM Campaign and End FGM European Network. They adopted the term “FGM” because it is used more frequently in European policies and legislation. However, some organizations, such as the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations International Children's Fund, use the term “female genital mutilation/cutting” (FGM/C).

for the new End FGM European Network (“the Network”) contributed to the growth and durability of this important new intermediary between grassroots activists and European policymakers. Specifically, the foundation sought to learn about the degree to which results the Network and its nongovernmental organization (NGO) members achieved could be traced to the foundation’s financial and nonfinancial support. Lessons from this experience may be useful to funders interested in a variety of endeavors, including spinning off temporary projects into new or separate entities; turning a loose collaboration of groups or individuals into a formal network; supporting a constellation of grassroots organizations that may be difficult to fund directly; and facilitating the sustainability of collaborative advocacy efforts.

Methodology

HDF engaged Mathematica Policy Research, an independent research organization, to learn about the results from HDF’s grant making and to share key findings. As part of this effort, Mathematica studied select grantees’ work, detailing key problems they set out to solve; the strategies and solutions they used to address the problems; their significant achievements; and the challenges they faced. We explored whether and how HDF’s support for its grantees contributed to the observed results, and by distilling our key findings, we harvested implications and lessons for other funders who may share some of HDF’s goals.

To trace HDF’s support for the campaign’s evolution into the Network, Mathematica conducted a thorough review of relevant historical documents and held semi-structured interviews with influential stakeholders involved in the program, including leaders and staff from the foundation, Amnesty Ireland, the End FGM European Network and its board, country-based network members, and other members of the Donors Working Group on FGM, such as a representative from the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (see Exhibit 1).

We drew on these data sources to conduct a qualitative analysis aimed at identifying *whether* and *how* HDF’s support played a role in helping the campaign transition into the Network, and what lessons could be gleaned for other donors wishing to support emerging membership organizations in priority sectors. Overall, we found that HDF’s support was crucial to the Network’s existence—the funding was modest but it arrived at precisely the right time. And while we repeatedly heard that “there would be no Network without HDF’s support,” much of that support was non-financial in nature—potentially offering a blueprint to other funders that may have limited means but the ability to offer other types of assistance.

This brief begins with a short history of the Amnesty campaign and the transition to the Network. It then summarizes key findings, and concludes with lessons and implications about how to effectively deploy or adapt a similar model to nurture an ecosystem of aligned organizations.

EXHIBIT 1. METHODOLOGY AND INFORMATION SOURCES

-  **Review of Historical Documents**
Internal HDF strategy and grantmaking documents
-  Independent program evaluations of the End FGM Campaign and Network
-  Grantees’ progress report narratives
-  Policies and legal frameworks promulgated by the European Commission, European Parliament, Council of Europe, and other bodies
-  Media coverage of the campaign and Network’s activism
-  **Key Stakeholder Interviews**
Semi-structured interviews with eight expert stakeholders from HDF, Amnesty Ireland, End FGM Network, and the UK’s Department for International Development

THE END FGM CAMPAIGN CATCHES POLICYMAKERS’ ATTENTION

To capture and focus European policymakers’ attention, HDF approached Amnesty International, which— with its country-based national sections—had more than 30 years of experience developing and implementing programs aimed at combating FGM through a human rights framework.⁹ HDF saw Amnesty—which possesses deep subject matter and policy experience—as the ideal partner to implement an anti-FGM policy and advocacy campaign. In 2007, the Foundation awarded a five-year grant of approximately €2.2 million to Amnesty’s Ireland section, and after a preparatory phase work began in 2009.

The End FGM Campaign’s goal was to make relevant EU institutions and European Parliament members aware of the scope of the problem and to place the elimination of



The End FGM Campaign collaborated with artists and designers to turn thousands of signed paper rose petals into evocative pieces that attracted publicity and were auctioned off to support the movement.

FGM on Europe’s policy agenda. The campaign brought together 15 NGOs across 13 EU member states, typically grassroots groups dedicated to supporting vulnerable women by standing up for migrants’ rights and combating FGM in particular (see Exhibit 2 at right).

The campaign targeted the European Commission (EC), the European Parliament, the rotating European presidencies, and the Council of Europe, lobbying key decision makers for a set of practical measures to end the harmful practice and provide protection to the women and girls who flee their home countries to avoid it. Amnesty Ireland and its partners tailored their policy demands to shifting contexts and the priorities of each rotating European presidency. Meanwhile, during election seasons, the campaign worked with candidates for the European Parliament to encourage them to take a strong stand against FGM.

Complementary efforts focused on raising public awareness and encouraging members of the public to put pressure on their elected representatives to protect women and girls. Amnesty Ireland leveraged mass media through communications activities aimed at capturing public attention and channeling people’s outrage into concrete actions they could take. To garner positive media attention, the campaign helped women and girls—including FGM survivors—raise their voices and be heard by policymakers and the public.

Realizing that little progress could be made at the EU level without buy-in and commitment by national governments, the NGO partners applied pressure to their home-country governments, encouraging them to demonstrate their

support to EU-level policymakers. The NGO partners also collaborated on two transnational projects aimed at ending FGM practices and protecting at-risk women and girls: an e-learning tool on FGM for health and asylum professionals and an EU framework on engaging communities to end FGM.

EXHIBIT 2. END FGM CAMPAIGN AND NETWORK PARTICIPANTS



Shaded countries are home to at least one organization that participated in Amnesty Ireland’s End FGM Campaign or the End FGM European Network. Organizations marked with a single asterisk (*) participated solely in the campaign. Organizations with two asterisks (**) have joined the Network, but did not participate in the original campaign.

THE END FGM EUROPEAN NETWORK TAKES THE BATON

As the six-year campaign wound down in 2013 and 2014, the partner network of country-based NGOs wanted to continue working together. Despite concrete policy wins, they believed there was more work to be done to ensure that shifts in policy led to changes in country-level legislation and budget allocations. HDF saw an opportunity. By providing a new entity a small amount of funds at a pivotal time, they could keep the policy momentum going while developing an institution that would, as part of its mission, support a constellation of grassroots organizations working to end FGM and support women’s rights. The foundation made two additional grants to support the campaign’s transition into a sustainable independent network. Those grants, although modest relative to the original investment in the campaign, provided financial support for operations and programming during the inception period, coupled with

support for capacity building in core areas such as human resources; fundraising; monitoring, evaluation, and learning; information technology; governance; and financial accountability. As the timeline (Exhibit 3, on page 5 below) shows, HDF awarded the first transition grant, for approximately €200,000, to Amnesty International's European office, which continued the campaign's policy engagement efforts while overseeing the planning process for the new entity. The second—and final—transitional grant, for approximately €186,000, went directly to the new organization, the End FGM European Network.

Today the Network is an umbrella organization of 22 partners who share a vision of a world free of all forms of FGM, where women and girls are empowered and can fully enjoy their human rights.¹⁰ To ensure strong links across Europe and to the countries in Africa where many at-risk women live, the network encourages member organizations with aligned missions to join and work together toward shared aims.

The Network leads awareness campaigns in Europe that educate and mobilize policymakers, media, and the public to take action to end FGM. The Network and its partners work with member states by lobbying for new policy commitments or improved implementation of existing policies. Advocacy often takes the form of consulting on parliamentary reports and guidelines, making policy recommendations through position papers and briefings, and contributing to public debate and policy dialogues. And through its Ambassadors program, the Network offers a platform for women and girls who have survived FGM to engage directly with policymakers, the media, and the public.

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

The stakeholders we interviewed reported that over the last decade, the Amnesty Ireland-led campaign and the new Network organization have achieved a number of their intended objectives, and there have been some unintended positive outcomes as well. In this section, we highlight key accomplishments the interviewees raised, as well as some that appeared in independent evaluations of both the campaign and Network which were conducted in 2013, 2015, and 2016 and which suggested a strong link between advocates' activities and changes in relevant policy.

Increasing awareness that FGM is a problem in Europe, not just the developing world. Before the campaign, if

European policymakers and the general public considered FGM a pressing concern at all, they regarded it as “a development issue,” something that was a problem elsewhere and could be addressed through the foreign aid budget. But the reality is that hundreds of thousands of women and girls living in Europe, largely part of the African diaspora, have been affected by FGM. The campaign's passionate advocates began by explaining what FGM was and why it was relevant in Europe, presenting statistics showing the scope of the problem. By the end of the campaign, the discussion had progressed toward concrete actions that policymakers could—and did—take (see the timeline in Exhibit 3 and contributions to policy victories on page 6 below).

Disrupting a taboo and fostering an open discussion.

The campaign and Network helped bring about a dialogue on FGM, a sensitive subject that had been uncomfortable to explore and easy to ignore. Over time, it became a topic that could be discussed more openly. Believing that “language is an essential and powerful tool in ending this harmful practice,” both the campaign and Network played important roles in developing, sharing, and disseminating language and terminology aimed at avoiding stigmatization and promoting empowerment.² With its “How to Talk about FGM” position paper, the Network ensured that media and professionals in contact with FGM survivors and FGM-affected communities could use the vocabulary preferred by survivors.

Interviewees also credited the campaign with an innovative tactic—the use of a creative art medium to help women and girls discuss a difficult subject. Through its “rose petal campaign,” artists and clothing designers created multimedia works of art and fashion pieces using 42,000 paper rose petals signed by concerned individuals across Europe. As the art toured Europe, the rose petal petition raised awareness by helping people talk and “creating something beautiful and evocative—not normally associated with talking about FGM, which people usually see as such a dark [subject].”

EXHIBIT 3. FROM CAMPAIGN TO NETWORK: A TIMELINE

Campaign and Network Milestones

2007–2008
HDF makes the original €2.2M grant to Amnesty Ireland to combat FGM in Europe

2009
The End FGM Campaign begins, led by Amnesty International’s Ireland section in partnership with 15 national organizations across 13 EU member states

2010–2011
The campaign’s Rose Petal Action petition gathers 42,000 signatures

MARCH 2012
The campaign’s “Art for Action” awareness-raising tour begins in Nicosia, Cyprus (aligned with the impending Cypriot presidency of the EU), featuring original works of art developed from the petition’s signed rose petals

MARCH 2013
The campaign launches a free FGM e-learning tool for health, asylum, and social work professionals

JANUARY 2014
HDF awards a second grant, this time to Amnesty International’s European Institutions office, to continue the campaign and plan for the new Network organization (€280,000)

MARCH 2014
The End FGM European Network is legally incorporated, with 11 founding members from 10 countries

JANUARY 2015
HDF supports the new Network organization with a grant of approximately €186,000

2015
The Network leverages HDF’s support to receive additional funding from the EC and Wallace Global Fund, amounting to approximately €1 million from 2015 to 2018

OCTOBER 2015
The Network hires its first executive director

2016
The Network receives approximately €100,000 in additional funding for two other EC projects

MARCH 2017
HDF’s financial support for the Network concludes

2017
The Network successfully establishes a framework partnership agreement with the EC which provides annual operating grants through 2022 (and potentially beyond)

SEPTEMBER 2018
Orchid Project and UNAF join the Network, bringing the total number of members to 22

Contributions to European Policy Changes

MAY 2009
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issues detailed guidelines for treating claims for refugee status related to FGM

MAY 2011
The Council of Europe adopts the Istanbul Convention, ensuring that victims of gender-based physical and psychological violence—including FGM—have access to equal rights, protections, and resources

2012
European Institute for Gender Equality maps the landscape of FGM in the EU with input from the campaign

JUNE 2012
The European Parliament, with intensive involvement from the campaign, passes a resolution calling for an end to FGM in Europe and abroad

OCTOBER 2012
European Commission’s (EC) Victims’ Rights Directive integrates the issue of gender-based violence – including FGM – and provides for appropriate training of professionals

MARCH 2013
UNHCR publishes “Too Much Pain: Female Genital Mutilation and Asylum” report, with a statistical overview of different aspects of FGM and asylum in EU member states

NOVEMBER 2013
The EC releases a communication on eliminating FGM, an action plan calling for more data, better training of health and legal professionals, funding for civil society, exchange of good practices within the EU and more

AUGUST 2014
The Istanbul Convention goes into force (becomes legally binding) after ratification by 10 countries

FEBRUARY 2016
The European Parliament adopts a report on the situation of women refugees and asylum seekers in the EU, noting that increasing numbers of women seek protection from war and gender-based violence, including FGM

JUNE 2017
The EU signs the Istanbul Convention, taking the initial step in the process of “acceding” to the Convention and establishing a coherent European legal framework for eradicating violence against women

FEBRUARY 2018
The European Parliament adopts a Resolution on Zero Tolerance for FGM, reflecting the Network’s vision and recognizing it as the key interlocutor on FGM in Europe

Note: The sources for this timeline are references 11, 12, 13, and 14.

Scoring a set of significant policy victories.

An independent evaluation conducted in 2013 found the campaign was “extremely effective” in achieving several of its policy goals by using “a number of strategies: media, public campaigns, advocacy and lobbying.”⁹ After working closely with the campaign’s policy staff, concerned policymakers incorporated language on FGM into a set of EU directives and policies intended to uphold women’s rights. For example, after direct lobbying by the campaign, the EC’s vice president, Viviane Reding, became a champion of the cause and a close collaborator. She called for legislation on FGM during a European Parliament hearing, and then started the process by announcing the publication of a “green paper” in 2011. A policy on FGM was included in the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (commonly known as the “Istanbul Convention”); the 2012 Victims’ Rights Directive; and the 2013 EU Communication on Ending FGM, among other pieces of key legislation passed during this period (see Exhibits 3 and 4 for details on these policies). In several cases, due to Amnesty Ireland’s advocacy, the campaign’s preferred language and amendments were included in the policies, enabling committed NGOs to apply for new funding streams to support their work against FGM.

EXHIBIT 4. THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

As the first piece of legislation for preventing and combating violence against women and girls that is legally binding at a regional European level, this treaty recognizes that FGM exists in Europe and that it needs to be systematically addressed. It has a strong focus on ensuring its signatory governments step up preventive measures, provide victims with protection and support, update legal frameworks, and prosecute offenders in a manner that respects victims’ rights.^{11, 12}

After the Istanbul Convention passed, becoming a critical policy tool for preventing and combating violence against women (see Exhibit 4), the campaign lobbied for all Council of Europe member states and the European Union to sign, ratify, and implement it. It also called for NGOs and individuals to use it to lobby for change and to attract new sources of funding. These efforts contributed to its ratification three years later.

The EU’s 2013 Communication on Ending FGM is not a law (member states are not legally obliged to enforce it), but is one of the campaign’s most notable policy achievements

because of its explicit focus on encouraging individual countries to work to end FGM. So with new EU-level policy in place, change has begun to trickle down to member states, where grassroots organizations and network members rely on the communication to mobilize domestic policymakers.

Moreover, to help policymakers make future decisions, the campaign successfully advocated for increased, standardized, and disaggregated data collection on the prevalence of FGM in Europe. The campaign’s call for better standard data on FGM was included in the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention and the EC’s 2013 Communication. Key stakeholders for the campaign served as advisors for a notable 2012 study by the European Institute for Gender Equality that mapped FGM prevalence and trends across the EU, with country-level estimates of FGM risk and policy recommendations for decision makers.

Increasing capacity across the spectrum of institutions and individuals working to end FGM in Europe.

The End FGM Campaign, and subsequently the Network, helped build the knowledge and skills of an array of stakeholders—from policymakers and the departments they represent, to local champions and the professionals who interact with FGM survivors while doing their jobs—through a series of publications, tools, and training materials.

EU and country governments. The campaign and Network became trusted sources of technical assistance when government agencies needed expertise on FGM, particularly how to implement and interpret relevant policies. For example, with FGM included as one of the criteria for being granted asylum in the EU, the asylum support office needed assistance with understanding the scope of the problem; recognizing asylum claims based on acts of FGM-related persecution; ensuring officials are properly trained and maintain confidentiality; and ensuring that asylum procedures support those affected by FGM.¹⁵ At the national level, the Network and its partners provide advice on how to operationalize new EU FGM policies, specifically how to interpret the Istanbul Convention.

Influencers and activists. Both the Amnesty-managed campaign and the independent Network put the voices of affected women at the forefront of their advocacy. One interviewee reported that the idea was to “give voice to the diaspora to speak about the issues they are facing, to give space to people who have had these experiences—

policymakers need to hear them.” By training and supporting a group of survivors (referred to as “strong voices” during the campaign and later “ambassadors” by the Network) to directly advocate for change, the message was delivered more powerfully. Several of the strong voices and ambassadors were activists, artists, and authors in their own right, but the campaign and Network provided media training, assisted with preparation for public speaking engagements, helped them start new projects, and connected them with wider audiences. With increased capacity and empowerment, several of these activists transitioned from their role as the public face of the movement toward more strategic engagement in the design and implementation of programming, augmenting the movement’s legitimacy in survivors’ eyes.

Professionals. The Network has also developed an online knowledge platform and set of tools to train a variety of professionals—including doctors, nurses, midwives, gynecologists, social workers, lawyers, journalists, police, and child protection officers—on a range of FGM-related scenarios they might encounter on the job. They learn how to recognize girls who may be at risk of FGM, how they can help prevent FGM, and how to communicate sensitively with women and girls affected by FGM, including how to conduct interviews with them and the proper terminology to use when engaging with survivors.

Partners/members. The campaign and the Network have provided value to member organizations in several ways, including by strengthening their technical and advocacy capacity after carefully assessing their needs and offering trainings on specific policies, such as the Victims’ Rights Directive and FGM and asylum. They have also provided more general tools and trainings on media engagement, gender, and FGM (for generalist member organizations that lacked this expertise).¹⁶ Today, Network staff ensure that information, data, and knowledge are widely shared by collecting and disseminating good practices, legal and policy developments, news, resources, and information about events and conferences. Strengthening and helping to elevate the profile of member organizations (as well as individual ambassadors) was seen as something that set the End FGM work apart from similar efforts. “HDF gets to the grassroots more than anyone I have ever seen,” said one interviewee. One illustration of the Network’s value to its members is its growing size. The Network now has 22 member organizations, an increase from the original 15 organizations that partnered on the Amnesty campaign.

TRANSITION TOWARD A NEW, SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION: KEY CHALLENGES

Despite a rich track record of contributing to important changes in public policy and public opinion, the nascent Network experienced substantial challenges related to financial, staffing, and operational issues. In hindsight, stakeholders recognize the Network’s board and HDF handled the transition well, but they also revealed some missed opportunities. Further, some external challenges also made its work difficult during the grant period—and beyond. In this section, we discuss the key challenges of the transition phase.

START-UP WOES

Severe financial limitations and uncertainty hampered effectiveness. Resource constraints led to the team missing opportunities to present, network, and engage at forums across Europe and beyond. Because European funds may be spent only in Europe, it was more difficult to link with the broader movement, such as in the United States or in the African countries where many of the FGM survivors come from. These factors contributed to what one critic called “next to no visibility” for the Network—though she acknowledged that much of the advocacy and outreach work happens “behind the scenes.”

A leadership vacuum took years to fill. Several interviewees attributed many of the original campaign’s successes to the dynamism and dedication with which Dr. Christine Loudes managed the effort. Interviewees praised her as a “brilliant leader,” with the ability to set a strategic vision, manage complex relationships with a diverse array of partners, and communicate with policymakers and the general public on “a really difficult issue.” Without Dr. Loudes, or any leader at all, the Network struggled for a substantial period. With uncertain revenue streams, the board was reluctant to hire a director who would be laid off if anticipated funding did not materialize. The long period without a leader left the organization somewhat adrift, with board members—spread across Europe—struggling to establish the organization as well as tend to their demanding jobs. It is possible that HDF, as the nascent organization’s core sponsor, could have gotten more deeply involved with human resources and staffing matters to help the organization find its rudder earlier.

Staffing shortages led to unrealistic demands being placed on staff and appear to have contributed to staff turnover. The leadership vacuum in the first year contributed to what several interviewees described an incredibly difficult initial year of operations, when an “unsustainable workload” led to staff and board members feeling “completely overburdened”. The unmanageable level of work led to demoralization and the loss of institutional memory when the staff member departed despite great and enduring passion for the work.

In recruiting for the secretariat, the Network had to navigate the fine line between credibility and the right skill-set. Some of the stakeholders interviewed believe that it is important that the End FGM EU secretariat reflect the survivor community to give the organization greater credibility with policymakers and with the survivor community itself. Aware of this, the End FGM EU board sought out candidates with: subject matter expertise on FGM and gender justice; credibility in the FGM community and the ability to communicate sensitively with member NGOs and FGM survivors; in depth knowledge of how the various EU institutions work; and keen strategy and advocacy skills—all at a feasible salary. The leadership candidates ultimately chosen by the board have not been FGM survivors as it did not identify such a candidate who also had the EU policy and advocacy expertise required.

Beyond the secretariat level, interviewees credited the campaign and Network with having done an excellent job of ensuring diversity among the board and its membership, which is crucial for mainstreaming its priorities.

CONTEXTUAL HEADWINDS

The Network had to navigate a political climate in Europe that is, at times, openly hostile to migrant communities. Several Network staff and stakeholders stated they must “walk a tightrope” so that their passion for ending the harmful practice of FGM does not feed into what they perceive as growing xenophobia across the continent. They have to carefully calibrate their messaging to call out the practice while avoiding stereotyping and stigmatizing entire communities or providing talking points to political movements against immigrant communities. And whenever the political dialogue turns to criminalization of FGM as a “quick-fix, low-cost solution,” the campaign and Network have emphasized a more holistic approach that focuses on prevention and providing services to survivors.⁹

Change actually happens at the local, not European, level. Interviewees indicated that favorable changes in EU policy have not necessarily translated into changes in public budgets at the national or local levels. Ending FGM is “on the agenda,” one said, but some “institutions feel they’ve done their part, [they] can then sit back.” National governments have proven “difficult to reach,” and unlike EU-level advocacy, when momentum shifts to the individual countries, there is not a single target. Instead, “there are so many different bodies in so many countries,” requiring a strong strategy and deft coordination.

HDF’S ROLE IN THE TRANSITION: KEY FINDINGS

Based on our document review and interviews with stakeholders, we have identified several ways in which HDF’s vision and support—specifically the two transitional grants it made several years after the campaign grant—proved pivotal in helping the nascent organization take flight. Moreover, HDF’s support during this period helped cultivate an entire ecosystem of grassroots organizations working toward the same mission.

The findings in this section contain several lessons that donors and philanthropists who are interested in helping to support an ecosystem approach to policy and advocacy work can apply. And while several of the foundation’s deliberate practices can be adopted or adapted, stakeholders’ reflections also revealed some areas where different decisions may have led to even greater results, or a smoother pathway toward achieving stability for the Network.

The foundation offered support at the key moment in time. Interviewees reported that HDF provided financial support to the budding Network at precisely the right time, while it awaited funding from the EC. Said one stakeholder: “They really were instrumental. We really couldn’t have done it without them.” Providing funding at this precarious moment allowed the organization to retain an advocacy and communications staff member—who served as interim director—maintaining institutional memory and keeping momentum until it could diversify its revenue. The move was not without risk: “They took a chance on us,” said one interviewee. The gamble paid off when the EC awarded a substantial grant.

HDF's strategically structured its support to help the Network leverage significant resources from other donors. HDF offered critical co-funding needed to leverage approximately €540,000 in EC funding from 2015 to 2017 under the Daphne Programme, part of the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers. Daphne requires that grantees achieve a 20 percent match in funds—a maximum of 80 percent of an organization's budget can come from Daphne's support.¹⁷ Thus, the Network had to find other revenue sources—immediately. HDF's idea was to “keep [the Network] alive long enough to wait for the Daphne money to come through,” one of the interviewees said. It worked. Then in 2017, the Network successfully established a framework partnership agreement with the EC that provides operating grants of variable size through 2022 (and potentially beyond).

“ ***It needed to float [on its own] or die ... we felt that was a critical course to take if the Network was to become sustainable and if the message around HDF funding coming to end was to be really believed and understood and imbibed, and then we had to hold a hard line.*** ”

HDF's willingness to walk away created a powerful incentive that helped set the new organization on a sustainable course. By clearly signaling its desire to step back and wind down its involvement after a short transitional period, HDF helped the Network's members take ownership over the new organization and its direction. During the campaign phase, the partner organizations had little autonomy—the campaign was managed and directed by Amnesty Ireland. HDF realized that, to become stewards of their own network, the members would need to make decisions autonomously and become capable of raising other funds to sustain Network operations. In interviews, the foundation characterized its stance as “deliberate signaling” to the Network that it did not plan to continue funding the work at the same level, but was “willing to support the transition into something else” as it helped the Network access and mobilize other money in the short term. The goal was to elicit “commitment from ... the members that [they] truly wanted to sustain the Network, rather than simply access a grant.” From the vantage point of 2019, the strategy appears to have worked. Not only did the End FGM European Network access an operating grant from the EC, it successfully applied for several other EC project grants,

such as €74,000 for the United to End Female Genital Mutilation European Knowledge Platform and €22,000 for CHANGE PLUS, a project aimed at promoting behavior change toward abandoning the FGM practice across the EU. The Sigrid Rausing Trust and the Wallace Global Fund also awarded the Network substantial grants.

HDF offered valuable flexibility when few others would. HDF's approach to grant making provided the young organization a critical degree of flexibility with how the funds could be allocated, particularly relative to the organization's primary sources of funding, the operating and project support grants from the EC. Stakeholders noted that the EC's support is a vital lifeline for the organization, but it sometimes arrives later than expected, has accounting requirements and restrictions, and requires new approvals each year. And because there is little leeway to deviate from EC project plans, they noted that HDF's more flexible funds offered the network the critical ability to change course based on lessons learned and an ever-evolving landscape.

HDF's nonfinancial support was nearly as critical as the grant funds. While offering a small grant, particularly relative to its support for the original campaign, HDF provided substantial in-kind support in the form of expertise and guidance.

Advice and guidance. HDF's executive director served as a “sounding board [for ideas] at critical junctures,” according to key stakeholders involved with the transition. HDF joined early board meetings and offered guidance on a scenario-planning exercise for stakeholders to plan for a range of potential circumstances. Interviewees reported that foundation staff were generous with their time, acting as consultants to the Network's board and leaders and arranging training on resource development. And by avoiding the “limelight” and not demanding credit for progress, HDF helped the new network establish itself as *the* European authority on FGM.

Opening up key venues and making connections. HDF participated in the Donors Working Group on FGM, which UNICEF convenes in partnership with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Department of State, DFID, and other bilateral and multilateral donors. By introducing End FGM to this forum, HDF made key connections to other potential donors. For example, HDF was “completely responsible for bridging the relationship” with Wallace Global Fund, a member of the group, which

went on to become one of the Network's important revenue sources, providing a total of approximately €125,000 from 2015 through 2018.

Providing inspiration. Interviewees also credited HDF with providing encouragement and a morale boost during challenging times. HDF helped build confidence among the new organization's staff. As one team member put it, "The message was, 'We believe enough in you to keep going with you.' This made us feel like we should be doing this [work], it's right to be doing this, we have backing, we have support." This vote of confidence was what kept the physically and psychologically exhausted staff and board going during the Network's early days, when they laid the groundwork for an enduring movement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDERS

Regardless of the sectors in which they operate, other donors who wish to support grassroots organizations, build sustainable membership networks, spur transcontinental movements, or even wind down relationships with longtime partners after years of successful collaboration may wish to consider the following set of reflections gleaned from our review of grant, policy, and evaluation documents as well as from interviews with stakeholders.

Be open to emergent opportunities for sustained influence. HDF initially intended to support a temporary advocacy campaign, but later saw a strong new investment opportunity when the group of partner organizations wished to join together to form a membership organization dedicated to keeping the movement going. The foundation correctly recognized that even a small grant would have outside influence if delivered at the right time and designed as matching funds. HDF seized a chance to move the global FGM movement forward with a small amount of flexible funds invested at a time that was critical to sustain and deepen the influence the campaign had already achieved.

Offer the gift of flexibility. Foundations and individual donors have a niche role to play relative to government funding, which is often restricted to a specific project or difficult to re-allocate across budget lines. HDF engaged with the Network to ensure that its grant funds could be used to pay for core costs not supported by other donors. To help set new organizations on a sustainable path, donors should consider supporting core costs related to salaries, information technology, administration, human resources, and infrastructure.

“ *A lot of funders don't see the value in funding the core costs of a network ... they want to fund initiatives that the network will undertake, but they don't see the value in, or the need for, core staff or resources to hold it together, the glue that enables the projects to be undertaken in the first place.* ”

Consider offering a range of nonfinancial support.

HDF's thought partnership on strategic and technical issues, moral support, and ability to introduce network leaders to other donors were immensely valued by the network stakeholders. During the grant period—and beyond—linking grantees with other donors and thought leaders is among the best things a funder can do to support a new organization. Resource-constrained donors may be able to offer such support to fledgling organizations, and even after the grant period ends, there may be ways to continue nonfinancial support, such as through convenings, conferences, email connections, and so on.

To avoid leadership vacuums, engage deeply on plans to staff new organizations.

Navigating a transition period without a leader can leave an organization rudderless while overburdening the board and key staff. Finding the right leader is challenging—but can result in increased stability, reduced turnover, and retained institutional knowledge. HDF had endorsed the board's view that hiring a director before EC funds had been secured would not be prudent, but one of the most salient ideas that emerged from key stakeholder interviews was the importance of encouraging grantees to get a strategic leader in place quickly—despite the higher risk.

When necessary, exit gracefully.

Donors that wish to end a longstanding partnership should carefully and strategically wind down their engagement with grantees, particularly those that play a key role in their ecosystems. As they prepare to finish a relationship, funders will likely consider whether or not to make a final grant, but they should not lose sight of other critical factors—notably, the grant's size, its timing, and its duration. Each decision creates a set of incentives for the grantee and affects the ways in which they carry out their work. When HDF carefully limited the amount of funding it offered the new Network (with the amount allocated toward transitioning and establishing the organization coming to about 20 percent of original Amnesty campaign's budget), it created a strong fundraising imperative. HDF was "acutely aware that we didn't want to be setting up something that may

“ *[We] were so used to thinking short-term that it became difficult to think long-term or create a strategic vision. That never really happened.* ”

not fly,” which gave the new organization a strong incentive to find other funding quickly. But the grant’s small size and short initial time frame contributed to a hectic, understaffed initial year of work that led to staff burnout and loss of institutional knowledge.

Offer a substantial funding “runway” to help a new organization thrive. HDF’s laser focus on sustainability was one important catalyst of the Network’s success, relieving critical pressure and offering a lifeline to the nascent organization. After a six-year advocacy campaign, HDF’s much shorter period of support to the stand-alone organization was enough to help it survive, albeit with great difficulty getting started. But this approach risked missing opportunities, and had a cost: committed, knowledgeable staff left the organization. A firm end date a few additional years on the horizon could have given the new organization time to secure funding from other sources down the line, while offering staff some security and helping them think beyond narrow, short-term priorities. Due to delays associated with the EC funding, the HDF grant was eventually extended into early 2017. Offering this degree of financial certainty earlier could have enhanced the organization’s ability to plan.

CONCLUSION

This brief has highlighted the array of the End FGM Campaign and End FGM European Network’s enduring achievements, while noting several challenges that remain today. A decade ago, HDF was the only funder that aimed to put FGM in Europe on policymakers’ radar. Together, HDF,

Amnesty Ireland, and the network of grassroots partners helped catalyze a powerful movement across the continent.

One of the most significant successes has been the creation of a stable organization out of a temporary campaign. As 2019 dawns, nearly two years have passed since the Network has relied upon any support from Human Dignity Foundation. Today the Network continues to strengthen a movement across Europe to end FGM, building bridges between member NGOs and policymakers while advocating for a child-focused, rights-based approach to ending this harmful practice through policy, legislation, and budgets.

Looking to the future, the framework agreement with the EC provides substantial operational stability over the next several years. But the Commission’s 20 percent matching funds requirement remains in place—and most of the Network’s stakeholders we interviewed see fundraising as the organization’s top challenge and threat to sustainability over time. But even though tight public and private donor budgets mean the Network’s future remains uncertain—and none of HDF’s past support guarantees that the Network’s finances will be sustained over time—the foundation certainly helped the new organization achieve a measure of stability while it diversified its base of support.

From using matching funds to leverage co-funding from government, to offering a range of in-kind support and thought partnership, understanding several of the mechanisms through which HDF supported the campaign’s transition into a stand-alone organization may offer other donors insight into how they can provide their own grantees similar assistance and catalyze influential global movements.

REFERENCES

1. "Female Genital Mutilation." World Health Organization Fact Sheet. February 2016. Available at <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>.
2. "How to Talk About FGM." End FGM European Network. Position paper. December 2016. Available at http://www.endfgm.eu/editor/files/2017/05/How_to_Talk_about_FGM_FINAL_position_paper_v4_2.pdf.
3. Shell-Duncan, B., R. Naik, and C. Feldman-Jacobs. "A State-of-the-Art Synthesis of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: What Do We Know? Evidence to End FGM: Research to Help Women Thrive". New York: Population Council. 2016.
4. UNICEF. "A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents." New York, New York: UNICEF, Division of Data, Research and Policy. 2017.
5. European Institute for Gender Equality. "Estimation of Girls at Risk of Female Genital Mutilation in the European Union." 2015. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/estimation-girls-risk-female-genital-mutilation-european-union-report>.
6. European Parliament Resolution of 24 March 2009 on Combating Female Genital Mutilation in the EU (2008/2071(INI)). Available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0161+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>.
7. Human Dignity Foundation. "HDF Strategy 2011–2021." Initial discussion paper. Basel, Switzerland: Human Dignity Foundation. 2010.
8. Human Dignity Foundation. "Strategic Framework 2011–2021." Basel, Switzerland: Human Dignity Foundation. 2011.
9. Cooke, Sarah, and Pamela Montgomery. "Evaluation Report: End FGM Campaign 2009–2013." 2013, p. 10.
10. End FGM EU Network website. "Who We Are." Available at <http://www.endfgm.eu/who-we-are/>.
11. "EU Accession to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women ('Istanbul Convention')." Legislative Train Schedule, Website of European Parliament. Available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-area-of-justice-and-fundamental-rights/file-eu-accession-to-the-istanbul-convention>. 2019.
12. "The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence." Council of Europe – Amnesty International. November 2014. Available at http://www.endfgm.eu/editor/files/2016/01/IstanbulConventionFGMguide_FINAL_ENGLISH.pdf.
13. "Directive 2012/29/EE of the European Parliament and of the Council." Document 32012L0029. EUR-Lex. 25 October 2012. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1421925131614&uri=CELEX:32012L0029>.
14. "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council towards the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation." European Commission. Document 52013DC0833. EUR-Lex. 2013. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2013:0833:FIN>.
15. "FGM in EU Asylum Directives on Qualification, Procedures, and Receptive Conditions: END FGM Network Guidelines for Civil Society." End FGM Network. 2016. Available at http://www.endfgm.eu/editor/files/2017/03/End_FGM_Asymlum_Guide.pdf. Accessed 1 February 2019.
16. Katrien Van der Heyden. "Evaluation of the END FGM Network Annual Programme 2016." Mortsel. Nesma Consulting. 2016.
17. "Daphne III Funding program." Directorate-General for Justice. European Commission. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/programmes-2007-2013/daphne/index_en.htm.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This brief was prepared by Jeremy Paley and Camila Fernandez of Mathematica Policy Research with input and feedback from Swetha Sridharan. The authors are grateful to current and former leaders and staff at Human Dignity Foundation, Amnesty International's Ireland Section, the End FGM European Network, DFID, FORWARD UK, and AIDOS, who shared their experiences and reflections, including Mary Healy, Kasia Pilat, Noeleen Hartigan, Fiona Coyle, Natalie Kontoulis, Naana Otoo-Oyortney, Clara Caldera, and Beth Scott. We thank Sharon Peters for her editorial contributions and Josh Meuth Alldredge for assistance with design and formatting. Photographs courtesy of End FGM European Network.