Learning Note 2: Working with reform and accountability allies to secure fiscal governance change

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1. Introduction

Our Strengthening Public Accountability for Results and Knowledge (SPARK) program works with grassroots movements that represent people directly affected by service delivery failures – such as lack of fresh water or healthcare. We support them in uncovering the fiscal governance causes of – and solutions to – those problems. Central to the SPARK model is the belief that grassroots groups cannot "go it alone" and that a range of actors and institutions need to be engaged to shift the balance of power and incentives to solve the problems at hand.

In a three-part learning series, we explore how SPARK has built the capabilities of grassroots groups to collectively engage with fiscal governance systems – the politics, institutions, policies, and processes that govern the use of public funds and how they are utilized and implemented accountably to provide services.

1.1 Purpose, focus, and methodology

In this note, we consider the ways in which we have supported grassroots groups – from smallholder women farmers to people with disabilities to women seeking better maternal health – to forge coalitions with civic groups that can broaden their expertise and base of support, and identify allies like government officials, auditors, legislators, the media, and others who may share their goal of strengthening accountability of public spending.

This note draws on documentation produced by the Learning with SPARK component of the program and our routine monitoring process. These are supported by internal IBP discussion and reflection, and individual and group discussions with country managers. The process has not involved direct engagement with SPARK country partners, government counterparts, or members of grassroots groups except insofar as these views are captured in country learning reports.

2. Clarity on concepts

SPARK uses the term **accountability ecosystem** to refer to the actors, processes, and relationships that constitute and influence government responsiveness and accountability, both positively and negatively, around public resources and fiscal governance. This includes formal accountability actors in the state, such as Supreme Audit Institutions or Ombudspersons, and informal or civil society accountability actors, including the media and CSOs. Actors in the ecosystem have roles and responsibilities, formal or informal relationships, and collectively contribute to outcomes around a budget process or sector (i.e., fisheries, healthcare, sanitation), but may or may not intentionally coordinate to undertake collective strategies. SPARK has engaged ecosystem actors with oversight power to make progress on or unblock opposition to a reform the group seeks.

In SPARK country programs, we engage many of the same actors in the ecosystem – such as Supreme Audit Institutions or legislatures – but depending on the service delivery issue we are addressing, we may target a different accountability actor or PFM process that can unlock change on that issue. Our partners may engage the accountability ecosystem at the national level, as well as the subnational level, particularly as they find champions that can deliver results. They are likely to engage more at the national level over time as we deepen our focus on addressing systemic causes of service failures, and solutions.

The term **reform coalition** is used in SPARK to refer to the actors in different institutions and organizations who are leaning in and championing SPARK campaign aims, and acting in a coordinated way with grassroots groups, IBP, and each other to pursue a common objective. Reform coalitions were expected to be made up of civic actors – NGOs, media actors, unions, or other membership-based groups – and possibly government actors who shared reform priorities. Coalitions vary in the formality of the relationships between them, and are sometimes formed around broad reform objectives, and sometimes around short-term windows of opportunity. Our current "reform coalitions" include a mix of actors, including IBP staff, who cluster around the grassroots partner and work together towards common ends, irrespective of whether these are funded by the SPARK program.

In all cases, the "reform coalition" includes an organization or two specializing in budget analysis (the 'budget partner') and in some cases it includes 'technical partners' specializing in other relevant areas. Some country programs distinguish between a core coalition of actors who are all or mainly funded by IBP (grassroots group, budget partner, other technical partners, and IBP itself); and a broader coalition that includes, on a constant basis, actors with aligned interests. Others distinguish, further, an 'outer group' that includes additional actors with whom the SPARK coalition joins forces with sporadically for time-bound actions or purposes. These sporadic episodes can consist of SPARK coalitions joining forces with other existing coalitions, rather than necessarily consisting of other actors joining a SPARK-centric coalition.

This note mines the wealth of diverse experiences working in coalition in our country programs to draw out lessons. It highlights some of the contradictions or tensions, including around terms such as: formal versus informal actors and relationships; tactical versus strategic moves; and prospects for coalition sustainability. Importantly, it examines the value of actors not funded by SPARK, yet vital to the workings of many SPARK coalitions: other civic actors; the media; frontline workers; and government actors in the accountability ecosystem, including oversight watchdogs.

At the core of both of these aspects of the SPARK approach – reform coalitions and accountability ecosystems – is an ambition to leverage the power of institutional actors and processes over PFM and service delivery decision-making, and channel that power in the service of grassroots interests and campaigns. This is attempted both directly and indirectly: directly, through trying to influence institutional decisionmakers themselves or the state oversight actors who perform checks and balances on them; and indirectly through non-institutional actors who can influence institutional actors via public opinion.

3. Coalition work and engaging the accountability ecosystem in SPARK: Four Examples

The following four examples show both the diversity as well as the common lessons that can be drawn from SPARK's coalition work. The development, scope, way of working, and achievement of each is shaped by the following factors in each country: the governance model, the nature of citizen-state relations and civil society, the political moment, the service delivery problem and its root causes in the PFM system, and the history and position of IBP in the country.

3.1. SPRI, Indonesia

Serikat Perjuangan Rakyat Indonesia (SPRI) is a membership organization made up of marginalized urban people and supports its members' grassroots activism. SPRI is campaigning on the delivery of social protection programs, specifically the Family Hope Program, which provides social assistance to underserved families. Through SPARK, it joined with two CSOs: The Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency (FITRA), which has public finance and budget expertise; and the National Center for Indonesia Leadership (INISIATIF), which has expertise in social accountability and service delivery data collection. SPRI, FITRA, and INISIATIF are funded directly by SPARK and work together to improve and reform the Family Hope Program. SPARK managers say each partner has a "special piece" they bring to the campaign that the others need to succeed. For example, SPRI has contacts and support within one political party, whilst FITRA and IBP staff are better connected with senior officials and the finance ministry.

Kota Kita, another Indonesian CSO specializing in participatory governance, joined with IBP and the funded partners early in the campaign to form the Social Protection Reform Coalition. The coalition is an umbrella organization that represents the groups' views collectively and provides a clear focus on social protection reform, rather than all the other issues the coalition members work on separately.[1] Kota Kita sees SPRI as a potentially powerful partner with aligned aims on urban development and the needs of the urban disenfranchised. According to Kota Kita, they work together as social activists. What Kota Kita brings to the coalition is expertise in participatory urban planning and budgeting, its own networks that extend the coalition's reach, and specific campaign-relevant technical skills such as graphic design.[2]

Within the coalition, each partner plays to its strengths and uses its own connections to further the campaign. The coalition members coordinate their actions to support one another and reach a wider set of allies. Working together in this way is seen as a natural tactic in the context of Indonesian civil society – on the basis that "all campaigns need allies."

Sympathetic officials have proven to be allies of the reform coalition, for example those in the Department of Social Services in Jakarta. These officials are supportive of SPRI's aims to improve the targeting and distribution of social protection payments and increase the resources committed to the scheme. The government allies provide information and support that helps the partners independently monitor the delivery of the Family Hope program's social assistance. They have also backed up SPRI's advocacy and requests in meetings with other government actors, like the Vice-Governor of Jakarta.

However, some of these same officials are also advocacy targets to address problems the coalition has identified. For example, when SPRI had collected enough information on discrepancies and poor delivery of social protection payments, it felt that the Social Services department was slow to follow up with reforms and that this warranted increased pressure. SPRI engaged with the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) to help develop citizen journalism skills amongst its members and engage supportive journalists to generate media coverage of the social audit findings. The coalition also moved its engagement from one government actor to another, based on a "reading of the mapping of power within government." For instance, FITRA, with its government advocacy

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[2] Kota Kita had a connection to SPARK Indonesia from the outset because the consultant providing learning support to the program belongs to this organization.

expertise, suggested engaging with the Indonesian Anti-Corruption Commission (KPK), a powerful oversight actor with whom it has a good relationship. KPK has a specific unit for receiving complaints about social programs – which was established with the assistance of FITRA – and welcomed the well-organized data and evidence that SPRI provided. Bringing KPK into the campaign increased the pressure for reform when it began demanding answers from the responsible government departments and issuing instructions to deal with anomalies in the system. SPARK managers describe this as a tactical choice "to increase the tension and pressure" on the same department it had sought to engage. This action is assumed to have been important in the KPK's moves to [arrest the Minister for Social Affairs for corruption](#), and the decision by the subsequent minster to replace the food allowance program with a direct cash transfer that was less susceptible to misappropriation.

3.2. Asivikelane, South Africa

Asivikelane (Let's Protect One Another, in Zulu) is a coalition in South Africa that mobilizes informal settlement residents in major cities to monitor failures in the delivery of fresh water, clean toilets, and waste removal. It was initiated at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic by IBP South Africa (IBPSA) with some of its existing partners, Planact, the South African SDI Alliance, and Afesis-corplan.

IBPSA and its partners see working in coalition as the obvious way to go about advocacy work, but the founding of Asivikelane also responded to a particular challenge. In early 2020, the COVID pandemic halted the coalition members' usual work on mobilizing settlement residents to get improvements in government services. The pandemic also placed residents with inadequate and communal sanitation facilities at high risk for contracting the virus. IBPSA and partners refocused their strategy to launch the Asivikelane campaign, which monitors informal settlement hygiene facilities by asking participating residents three questions on a regular basis, publishing the results monthly, and sharing them with relevant government actors. These activities are the central component of ongoing advocacy designed to improve services by addressing the budgetary and PFM obstacles. Before this pandemic-induced pivot, IBPSA's manager reports that it worked in "several partnerships rather than one coalition."

The Asivikelane coalition grew rapidly and other organizations sought to join, driven by the pressing needs of communities and the momentum generated by the initial members. Since the campaign's expansion across the country, new coalition members include Development Action Group (DAG), Social Justice Initiative, Social Justice Coalition, Luthando OVC Care Center, Abahlali baseMjondolo, and 1to1. Each partner contributes by expanding the monitoring of services to different informal settlements and groups of residents with whom they have connections. The coalition partners are a mix of NGOs, movements, and social enterprises with the common goal of improving the living conditions of urban underserved populations.

The informal settlement community members themselves are central in the campaign. These include community facilitators who lead Asivikelane activities in their settlements and ordinary residents who participate in the campaign. Community facilitators receive a small monthly stipend, while residents who participate in the survey are rewarded with a small amount of mobile phone data.

The coalition puts community members front and center in all its activities, including in meetings with government actors. Asivikelane acknowledges that its wide reach is the source of its legitimacy with the government and the reason the campaign solicits strong responses. While this helps

Asivikelane gain access to government actors, so does IBPSA's longstanding relationships with key PFM actors at national and subnational levels.

IBPSA has no doubt that the organizations are driven to participate and persist by their own strategic vision, not by the funding. While IBPSA has formal funding agreements with each coalition member, the coalition itself is described by IBPSA as operating fairly informally. IBPSA meets monthly with each partner and periodically convenes all members to learning events but describes the relationship as "more hub and spokes than spider's web." Each core partner is focused on undertaking data gathering and advocacy in its Metro, with relatively few engagements that bring people together across the whole coalition. There are points in the campaign's calendar when all partners interact intensely around the monthly release of new data. As an experimental spinoff, the new Asivikelane Western Cape branch will be a formal partnership between IBPSA, its partner DAG, the provincial Treasury, and informal settlements in the province. It will be an experiment in co-operating with provincial government to combine bottom-up pressure from citizens for better services and top-down support from the provincial level.

At the national level, most coalition members engage with IBP rather than with each other. IBPSA is central in engaging national government actors – the Auditor General as an oversight actor, and technical actors with some political clout in the Department of Water and Sanitation, Department of Human Settlements, Treasury, and Presidency. At the subnational level, the partners lead engagement with government (Metro) officials through regular meetings. The subnational government actors with whom partners engage are technicians (middle managers in the Department of Water and Sanitation, Finance, and Treasury) and elected officials (for instance ward councilors, or the Speaker's office).

IBPSA attributes Asivikelane's achievements to two things: First, IBPSA and coalition partners' in-depth PFM knowledge, which permits forensically precise diagnosis, strategizing, and targeting of advocacy efforts. And second, its relationships with technical actors – middle management in service delivery departments – who are more useful to the campaign's success than politicians are. The coalition regards government actors not as coalition members, but as allies and advocacy targets: "When there's alignment of interests, we go for it together. At other times, we're targeting them to change something. They appreciate that these flips in our relationship have to happen."

IBPSA acknowledges that the Auditor General is an important advocacy target because it has nationwide reach and is moving in a positive direction, but finds its movement too slow. Regarding other oversight institutions, IBPSA questions whether, after years of "hollowing-out" of central government institutions under the former government of Jacob Zuma, there are any institutions strong enough to deliver more accountable services and public participation. In this context, where national government has rapidly lost political backing and power compared to Metro governments, national government actors find that their relationship with the campaign and IBPSA can grant them useful access or leverage with Metro governments. Metro governments, motivated by the data releases, use these internally as levers to improve their own performance.

3.3. SWOFON, Nigeria

Small-scale Women Farmers Organization in Nigeria (SWOFON) – a membership association of smallholder women farmers in Nigeria – is working through SPARK to shift the dial on access to the kinds of agricultural and public finance support that their members need. SWOFON has many assets at its disposal – a large and committed membership, political connections, and a history of raising its voice. With our support, SWOFON has brought in others to complement these strengths and

organize several successful campaigns. At the core of the coalition, alongside SWOFON, are organizations that SPARK has brought in and supported financially to add technical expertise on public finance. These organizations, specifically the Center for Social Justice and BudgIT, worked to sharpen SWOFON's demands from government and identify potential points of leverage in the PFM system. Together with IBP, these organizations undertake the diagnostics that help SWOFON define the right targets for advocacy and bolster the evidence for how policies impact smallholder women farmers. From this starting point and core set of partners, SWOFON's approach to finding and working with allies has been tactical and ad hoc, "testing out" potentially helpful allies as the campaign progressed. The coalition they have formed around the campaign is united around mutual interests and a desire to be part of successful advocacy for women farmers and fueled by the momentum they have found in working together.

SWOFON's campaigns have blended back-room negotiation and advocacy; public statements and press coverage; and mass mobilizations. During rallies, SWOFON has engaged beyond its core campaign partners to gain the support of other farmers' organizations, such as the All Farmers Association of Nigeria. By drawing in other actors to lend their voices and back up their demands, SWOFON increased the number of people calling for change during public advocacy moments.
To raise the public profile of its campaign and create external pressure for reform, SWOFON also developed an effective partnership with the International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) in Nigeria. This partnership first developed as a tactical response to restrictions on freedom of movement during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which journalists were amongst the few able to travel freely. The collaboration with ICIR proved pivotal to SWOFON's efforts to highlight the plight of women farmers during the pandemic. The journalists valued the access SWOFON gave them to hard-to-reach, human interest stories. Once armed with the stories of women farmers, and feeling moved to share these, the journalists quickly became allies and vocal advocates for SWOFON's cause. Their coverage "humanized" the campaign, and increased pressure on governance – "heating the cord" – by raising public awareness around the obstacles women farmers were facing. One well-positioned journalist managed to secure and follow up on several commitments from one state governor.

With SPARK support and introductions, SWOFON also engaged with a wider coalition of civil society organizations advocating around national budget issues. Joining with this broader coalition was part of SWOFON's specific and successful attempts to protect the budgets allocated to the agricultural sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SWOFON also developed and deepened relationships with specific government officials. It focused on politicians and officials in the Ministry of Agriculture, which subsequently invited SWOFON to participate on its Budget Working Group. Recognizing the need to work across many levers, SWOFON also built a trusted relationship and had private and public engagements with the Senate Committee on Agriculture, a parliamentary oversight body. The relationship proved instrumental when SWOFON campaigned to protect the agriculture budget from proposed cuts. It worked with the Senate Committee on Agriculture to challenge the plans of the Executive and stop the budget cuts.

3.4. FSAPH, Senegal

The Senegalese Federation of Associations of People with Disabilities (FSAPH) focused its first SPARK campaign on urging the government to re-start the production of Equal Opportunity Cards (EOCs) – a benefit for people with disabilities that offers them cheaper or free access to services and healthcare. Although mandated more than 10 years ago, the production and distribution of the

cards had stopped. FSAPH has long campaigned for better policies for people with disabilities in Senegal and has been influential in winning policy commitments. However, getting those commitments to translate into action – like getting more EOCs in the hands of those who need them – is an ongoing struggle. We found that other CSOs with a better understanding of fiscal governance and the inner workings of government could help FSAPH gain more influence and target the levers of power that could address these implementation problems. The reform coalition grew organically as relationships developed and support grew from government, the media, and other allies.

ONG-3D, which specializes in budget analysis and advocacy, assisted FSAPH to understand the bottlenecks in the EOC system – for example that otherwise-willing bureaucrats were hamstrung because they lacked a budget to provide assistance. Another partner, the Observatory for Monitoring Economic Development Indicators in Africa (OSIDEA), was approached due to its expertise in government advocacy and aligned interests in monitoring service delivery. OSIDEA used its existing resources to become an important part of the campaign, motivated mainly by shared values. OSIDEA is led by a former MP, which helped open doors for FSAPH. For example, OSIDEA used its connections to arrange a private dinner between disability advocates and members of the National Assembly oversight committee on health. Our team saw this as an innovative approach, because Senegalese NGOs had not typically targeted the oversight committee on health, and it proved to be an instrumental move. Members of the committee became FSAPH allies, successfully putting pressure on the government to allocate additional funds and on the Ministry of Health and Social Action to resume production of EOCs through parliamentary procedure. Other allies within government also emerged through careful relationship-building with politicians and officials as FSAPH's campaigns developed.

FSAPH also forged relationships with sympathetic journalists to reach a broader audience. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the coalition worked with journalists to highlight the pandemic's impact on people with disabilities and the exclusions they faced to ensure they were not forgotten in a crowded government agenda.

4. Lessons on engaging coalitions and ecosystems for fiscal governance change

Lesson 1: Grassroots groups can lead effective budget coalitions with support and backing

- *Successful SPARK advocacy outcomes have situated grassroots community actors at the forefront of coalitions pursuing goals on specific service delivery and public subsidy issues. As the campaign moves into policy and budget processes to tackle the root causes, the centrality of grassroots organizations remains crucial for two reasons: First, it helps deliver on PFM and service delivery objectives; and second, it supports the aim of building lasting grassroots collective agency.*

Grassroots actors — and specific public services, goods, or transfers that a marginalized group has entitlements or rights — are the nucleus around which SPARK coalitions are built. SPARK teams begin by establishing funded partnerships with grassroots groups and budget partners. Allies in positions of relative power within bureaucracies, political parties, government, or media also

contribute through their networks and connections, while IBP adds to this social and political capital. In the words of one country manager, "relationships open doors that arguments cannot." Potential new partners and allies need to support the centrality of grassroots partners and be politically connected without being a political risk to the campaign.

In SPARK coalitions, grassroots groups retain a crucial front-facing role. They bring the numbers and have the lived experience to illustrate how public finance decisions translate into what is delivered for real people on the ground. In other words, grassroots groups "own" the issue and country teams have ensured the coalition-building retains focus on this ownership.

SPARK coalitions grow organically and interact with a specific set of actors, in line with their focus on a single issue and its root causes. When building a coalition, the SPARK approach first assesses each partner's strengths, weaknesses, expertise, connections, and structure. From there, it decides which allies are needed to fill in the gaps.

Coalition members with longstanding access to decision-making and PFM spaces have been vital to the campaigns. However, SPARK has not positioned these members as spokespeople with government, but as enablers for marginalized people to have a voice. Achieving this structure involved careful relationship-building between grassroots groups and others over the first year or more of the program. It is crucial to establish trust between the grassroots groups and outside actors—to reassure the grassroots actors that others will not make decisions on their behalf or seek to advance their own agenda. Although the budget groups were longstanding IBP partners in all cases, they were not used to aligning themselves around a grassroots group as the central actor, and in some cases required almost as much negotiation and brokerage to take up a suitable role in a SPARK-type coalition as if they had never worked with IBP.

In this process, budget specialist organizations like ONG3D in Senegal and the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development (Center LSD) in Nigeria have learnt that grassroots organizations have valuable knowledge and experience to contribute to discussions about service delivery. Finding national and technical organizations that value this and the opportunities SPARK provides is a vital part of continued efforts to build effective coalitions. This approach is different from capacity-building of grassroots organizations by partners engaged for their technical expertise. Coalition members with different resources, assets, and skills to the grassroots groups often act together with them in public ways instead of simply transferring skills. The diverse coalition members use their combined social and political capital in joint action.

Over time, the focus of a SPARK campaign shifts from the service delivery problem itself – the "symptom" – to its root causes within the PFM system. As advocacy increasingly focuses on these root causes, the campaign calls for greater technical (budgetary) knowledge and more confident interaction with professionals and experts. However, in the SPARK coalitions profiled here, representatives of grassroots groups remained front and center even as the campaigns became technically complex and the advocacy targets changed. This advances SPARK's objective of strengthening collective agency and deepens the campaign's legitimacy in the eyes of key decision-makers, both of which raise the chances of governments becoming more responsive.

As campaigns developed new needs, tactical and instrumental choices to find and bring on board particular allies happened organically and incrementally. In Nigeria, the country team realized that grassroots partner Community Empowerment Network (COMEN) required a budget partner that was well connected to the politics, PFM systems, and decision-making of Anambra state, rather than

technical support from the Abuja-based Center LSD. They subsequently incorporated a new organization, Civil Rights Concern, which had those skills and connections.

The Senegal country team found that OSIDEA proved to be more useful and closely aligned with UrbaSen's agenda when it came to local campaigning and more granular service delivery problems. On the other hand, budget partner ONG3D provided more suitable support for grassroots partner Urbasen on national budget allocation. At times, the incorporation of new actors is a way to test out allies and potential coalition members, which then leads to longer-term collaboration. In Indonesia, the inclusion of the urban governance CSO Kota Kita in the SPRI reform coalition started with support for one activity and grew into a deeper partnership.

Some coalition members open doors and help frame advocacy based on their close relationships with insiders in PFM systems. Others, such as media partners or wider coalitions of marginalized people, add more voices or public pressure. The grassroots group's voice and presence in the campaign is paramount and ensures that campaigns address their needs.

In some cases, tactical choices have been made to give SPARK coalitions or campaigns their own name that a number of partners can get behind, and to help them speak with one voice in their advocacy – but these too put grassroot actors in the lead. In Ogun State in Nigeria, for example, activists supported by SPARK in monitoring maternal health services decided it would be more powerful to have a collective "banner name to hold on to" in their advocacy. They labelled this 'Ogun Women for Maternal Health' – with the name emphasizing that women were monitoring the services that they were entitled to from the state.

Working in coalitions takes time. Building and servicing coalition relationships and ways of working is painstaking work and a key aspect of SPARK's strategic accompaniment of grassroots groups. A great deal of work has taken place behind the scenes, including by IBP and SPARK country teams, to "stitch together" coalitions and help organizations work collaboratively. This has involved overcoming suspicion and initial mistrust in some cases. It has also involved IBP staff using their own relationships, brokering others, and using informal contacts to sound out potential allies, identify openings, and work out where doors are firmly closed. In fact, IBP country teams play a pivotal role in maintaining informal ways of working because they take on a great deal of relationship management. The level of effort, skill, and political know-how on the part of country teams is a key point to retain in the next iteration of SPARK.

Lesson 2: Coalitions do not have to be formalized to be effective; unity can be sustained through aligned interests

- *The SPARK approach to coalitions is described by country managers as largely informal, which is seen as an asset, in that it avoids effort-intensive processes and procedures that characterize formalized coalitions. Informal ways of working suit the fluid, opportunistic way in which coalition members need to operate and relate to each other. Even though some coalition actors are funded by IBP, country staff see coalition members' shared interest, reciprocal benefits, and mutual accountabilities as more important than the money in bringing and*

holding coalitions together. Importantly, avoiding formalization is expected to help SPARK coalitions remain sustainable after program funding ends.

SPARK country managers have consciously avoided formalizing the ways in which coalitions work because they or their partners have had negative experiences of formal coalitions. The drawbacks include the time it takes to negotiate and maintain precise roles, procedures, and sharing of resources and credit; and problems associated with sustaining formal coalitions when donor funding runs out. Rather than focusing on these kinds of coalition agreements and structures, each SPARK campaign has a core of ongoing partners – largely but not solely funded by SPARK – that brings on board other actors in peripheral roles thanks to their position in the accountability ecosystem, connections, or technical insights. These core partners draw on their personal and institutional relationships across civil society and government to gain informal access to government allies or others in positions of power.

For country managers, the formal/informal distinction is about how coalition partners interact with each other, no matter the funding dimension of their relationship. The coalition relationships and alliances include a mix of strategic (including the core funded partners and in a few cases other core non-funded partners) and tactical (actors they engage at specific times and for particular purposes). The tactical alliances tend to be more episodic than continuous, although not necessarily short-term: episodic engagements may turn out to be repeated over extended periods of time as SPARK continues to unfold.

The informal nature of the relationship between IBP and core coalition partners means that partners act autonomously, each with relationships and funding sources outside of SPARK. They do not behave as grantees under IBP's guidance, providing detailed workplans and frequent activity reports. Coalition partners and IBP relate to each other horizontally, each as an active coalition member playing its own role. For instance, IBP staff conduct budget analysis when necessary and a budget partner actively facilitates advocacy by opening doors to contacts in government.

What is the 'glue' that holds SPARK coalitions together? All recognize the strategic benefits of working collectively where their objectives overlap, and some coalition members have assets others need (knowledge, relationships, access) for building their own collective agency or carrying out their other activities outside the issue-specific SPARK coalition. Country managers say that funding from SPARK has been used strategically to support specific inputs, rather than serving as the main incentive to work together. Although SPARK has ongoing granting relationships with grassroots, budget, and technical partners, and has funded some of the activities of other coalition members on occasion, country managers stress that core members of reform coalitions are working with SPARK because their incentives align, not because they depend on the grant funding. Some peripheral coalition members are attracted by wanting to be part of the high-profile and successful campaigns that SPARK has initiated. Other partners simply "feel moved to be part of a success story" – in the words of one country manager – as a result of the momentum SPARK has generated.

In some coalitions featuring well-organized and vocal grassroots community members, mutual accountabilities are a further aspect of 'glue.' Community members hold their leadership and other coalition members to account and are accountable to them for mobilizing or data-gathering activities at the grassroots.

The alignment of interests looks different for different coalition members and allies:

- Nationally focused, (often) capital-city-based NGOs are motivated to work in SPARK coalitions because they give them a direct link to lived experience, grassroots knowledge, and credibility that they are sometimes criticized for lacking. For example, ONG3D in Senegal now has direct relationships with representatives of informal settlements, which bolsters its own legitimacy. Working with SPARK gave ONG3D evidence on the 'applicability' and real-life consequences of its quantitative budget analysis.

- Some NGOs and CSOs – such as OSIDEA in Senegal or some local CSOs involved in Justice, Development, and Peace Commission (JDPC) activity in Nigeria – have other funding sources for work that is helpful to SPARK campaigns. In these cases, SPARK gives them an opportunity to undertake their activities as part of a wider campaign that might gain more traction, and in alliance with marginalized groups.

- Government insiders sometimes see political opportunities to gain popular support, for example the Vice-Governor of Jakarta in engagements with SPRI, or ministry officials in the case of the Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana's campaigns.

- Bureaucrats and officials, especially at a local level, sometimes see allying with SPARK actors as furthering their careers through greater technical knowledge, for example county-level sanitation technicians that the Center for Enhancing Democracy and Good Governance engages with in Kenya.

- For journalists, working with SPARK has benefits in giving them access to material and prominent stories, and allowing them to pursue high-quality public interest journalism. The example of this that stands out is the SWOFON campaign in Nigeria.

This shows that in SPARK contexts there is energy and interest among different groups that can be 'crowded in' in support of campaigns for marginalized people and for fiscal governance solutions. Strategic use of funding has backed up this latent potential, with non-grant funding used to cover or mitigate some of the expenses arising from coalition work.

As campaigns are dynamic, evolving as incremental successes are achieved or the institutional, political, or social context changes, it cannot be assumed that what works as 'glue' at one point in time will endure throughout. Some coalition members may be more interested in resolving the short-term tangible demands and others more invested in the longer-term systemic changes needed, which may lead to some fluctuation in the prominence of different coalition members or in coalition membership itself. Country managers have seen that the incentives to join a coalition may be different from reasons for staying in a coalition, and that members may leave once their priority interest has been met or because it is not met fast enough. The principle of keeping the grassroots group front and center and gradually developing their mastery of the PFM problems underlying their service delivery problem, discussed in Lesson 1 above, is a way of mitigating this.

It is hard to determine exactly how big a role funding plays in bringing and holding coalitions together relative to other factors, since all key SPARK coalitions have so far always included several SPARK-funded actors. But in support of their conviction that funding is not the most important 'glue', country managers point to several non-SPARK-funded activities that members carry out for the benefit of the coalition or campaign, as well as cases of SPARK-funded partners extending

SPARK approaches – without SPARK funding – to other geographic areas beyond the scope of their SPARK support.

Lesson 3: Through careful and strategic relationship management, coalitions can engage and leverage accountability ecosystem actors and their oversight powers

- *Sensitive yet strategically vital relationships with official actors within the ecosystem – including legislative, executive, and oversight bodies – need to be actively managed, particularly when campaign strategy calls for exposing actors who count as allies.*

SPARK coalitions coalesce around the grassroots group and spread across the accountability ecosystem. The accountability space is constantly in flux and requires continuous analysis as power dynamics shift and events such as elections and pandemics generate opportunities and changed incentives.

While SPARK managers generally do not count government insiders as coalition members, campaigns have engaged various government entities based on where they feel they have aligned interests. They are a mix of oversight actors (including those institutions of the state traditionally called horizontal accountability actors – auditors general, anti-corruption commissions, parliamentary committees), policy implementors, and budget executors (sector ministries, ministries of finance, county, or municipal governments). Coalitions choose their targets in the accountability ecosystem strategically based on the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of each country's governance and oversight institutions. In identifying oversight allies, the coalition for people with disabilities in Senegal, for example, deepened its relationship with the National Assembly, which they found to be more transparent than the Supreme Audit Office.

Sometimes coalitions have had to shift between collaborating and applying pressure to the actors and institutions from which they are seeking reforms. And sometimes these shifts have activated internal accountabilities. For instance, in Ghana, the communities represented by SPARK partner Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining started out directing their frustration at the Mineral Development Fund (MDF) until they discovered the fund was just as frustrated itself with other parts of government. The MDF subsequently became an important ally in efforts to get other parts of government to improve the timeliness of disbursements of funds to mining communities.

Legislative, executive, or oversight government actors are engaged in different capacities:

- As 'targets' – those in a position to make the changes the coalition seeks,
- As allies who can provide some small but significant assistance to the campaign, and
- As part of a reform coalition or ecosystem that can help nudge other advocacy targets.

SPARK coalitions use relationships within the accountability ecosystem to apply pressure on multiple points. This takes place through intentionally lobbying, providing information to officials, and activating internal accountabilities with political leaders. For instance, in Senegal, Urbasen's lobbying resulted in a significant shift when previously dismissive bureaucrats in the Ministry of Finance were instructed to engage with informal settlement residents and lend political support.

In some cases, SPARK learns about the inner workings of an ecosystem through unintended consequences. IBP South Africa, for example, learned that senior Metro managers use Asivikelane's

data to hold more junior officials to account. In Senegal, the UrbaSen coalition originally targeted mayors, assuming they could deliver the services. The coalition shifted to using the spaces provided by elected municipal authorities after concluding that mayors were not as informed about entitlements as the coalition was. The coalition proceeded to demand information from central government bodies but did so with the mayors as allies.

The engagement of one ecosystem actor to activate another can be risky. This is true when such engagement leads to individuals or agencies being publicly embarrassed or exposed as corrupt, inefficient, or negligent. There are several examples of this in action, including SPRI's decision to take its audit findings to the Anti-Corruption Commission when its key ally – the Department of Social Affairs – was slow to respond. Another example is Asivikelane's monthly releases, which can embarrass specific Metros and possibly damage relationships with key actors whose good will is critical to the campaign.

In these cases, the coalition provides cover in the sense that it is a collective rather than an individual actor taking the risk. The coalition member who is least at risk or enjoys most social capital with the government actor in question can "stick their neck out" on behalf of the others. To move the campaign forward without damaging relationships with key ecosystem actors along the way, SPARK advocates need to be able to exert pressure without causing confrontation. They need to be able to balance targeting and allying with these official actors, which requires skilful navigation.

To keep key relationships viable, SPARK actors have found it helpful to give the "heads-up" to the official actor who is about to be embarrassed or exposed by an advocacy action. This requires intimate knowledge of political-cultural context and careful monitoring of relationships and dynamics to recognize when and how to give the "heads-up." Not all members of a reform coalition possess the right attributes or enjoy the right positioning to navigate these switches with care. Those who do, need to be able to devote considerable attention to the matter.

Lesson 4: Media actors enrich coalitions by contributing to oversight and pressure for change

- *The media has played a wide range of roles in SPARK coalitions, attuned to dealing with the coalition's needs and the resolution of the service delivery obstacles and underlying PFM problems. Fine-grained analysis of exactly how media actors can be most useful at certain points of the campaign or in certain contexts can maximize value to the coalition.*

At the outset of SPARK, there was a sense that the media could perform important non-official, public-facing oversight roles. With hindsight, we can see that traditional and online media actors have contributed to oversight both by drawing public and government attention to the problem and keeping it there by actively monitoring the problem or its resolution themselves, as critical watchdogs. These contributions have been made through a range of specific competences that traditional and social media have brought to SPARK coalitions, involving activities as diverse as straightforward reporting, data gathering and processing, and training SPARK grassroots actors:

(i)   Capacity development: Media actors have shared specific journalism skills with other coalition members that make their advocacy sharper, more visible and hard-hitting, and

more likely to get into the media. Here, their engagement consists of direct support to other coalition members.

(ii)   Bearing public witness: Traditional and social media journalists have amplified and disseminated social audit findings or service monitoring data produced by SPARK actors. They have also made the general population more aware of core issues, which makes the responsible government actors unable to credibly claim they are unaware of the scale or intensity of the problem. This, in turn, increases public and political pressure to address the problem. In contexts where media coverage is costly, SPARK country teams value the free coverage of social media. Here, media actors' engagement is directly with coalition members but also with the public from a position of alignment with the coalition, and indirectly with government advocacy targets.

(iii)   Behavioral influencers: the media has helped SPARK coalitions build and keep positive relationships with government by helping transmit public health messages promoted by the coalition (particularly during COVID) and educating the public on how to use services to keep them functional. Here, the media's engagement is with the public on behalf of the coalition.

(iv)   Watchdog: Involvement in or with SPARK coalitions has allowed journalists to deepen their own investigative work, through access to SPARK grassroots actors and situations. They become additional monitors or watchdogs alongside SPARK partners, holding up another critical mirror to government on the SPARK entry point issue. Here the media actors' engagement is directly with government advocacy targets – sometimes through media channels, but also through participation in seminars and conferences alongside SPARK partners' parallel efforts.

(v)   Mobilizer: Media engagement in some SPARK campaigns has raised the awareness of affected parties about the core service delivery or public subsidy issue, its root causes, or their entitlements to it. This helps mobilize those affected by broadening the active constituency around the issue and reinforcing the collective agency that SPARK is seeking to build. Here the media actors' engagement is with SPARK coalition partners and their actual or potential constituencies at the grassroots.

(vi)   Eyes and ears: In one case (SWOFON) the media proved a strategic ally at the critical moment when pandemic-related restrictions on movement were imposed. Journalists were permitted to travel around the country while others were not. Using the access to small-scale farmers afforded by SWOFON, journalists gathered data on the pandemic's effects on women small-scale farmers and the gaps in COVID relief efforts, thus filling in blind spots for both the SWOFON coalition and the government. Here the journalists' engagement was directly with coalition members and the membership of the grassroots group, as well as indirectly with government and the broad public.

While it is notoriously difficult to evaluate how far media influence on public opinion or government positions contributed to specific changes in policy or practice, SPARK country teams

stress how vital media partners have been in many SPARK coalitions both because of their assumed contributions to these changes, and because of the various other roles they play as outlined below.

Lesson 5: Through careful negotiation, frontline workers can be valuable coalition members

- *In SPARK campaigns where frontline workers are involved in delivering the service (particularly health campaigns), they were originally perceived as part of the problem but have come to be part of the solution as members or crucial allies of campaigns. While this has often come about through tense and painstaking negotiation, country teams feel these costs have been worthwhile because frontline workers' insights, data, and knowledge are so strategically valuable to the campaign.*

In cases where the service delivery issue brings them into contact with frontline workers, SPARK coalitions have sometimes started off perceiving frontline workers as adversaries or advocacy targets but later shifted to working with them as allies. The most prominent cases of this from SPARK relate to campaigns to improve health services, including Support for Advocacy and Training to Health Initiatives in India; Community Empowerment and Development Centre in Kenya, and JDPC/COMEN in Nigeria.

Through their research and service monitoring activities it became clear to SPARK actors that the frontline workers are not the decision-makers or responsible for many of the service delivery failures. In fact, they are often also victims of dysfunctional public finance systems and immensely unhappy with the status quo. A case that stands out is the Accredited Social Heath Activist community health workers in India, whose financial allowances were often stuck in the system, so they were not being paid for their work. Other examples relate to under-resourcing, budget inflexibility, unrealistic expectations of frontline workers, and poor conditions of service.

In several SPARK campaigns, frontline workers were involved early on as part of the problem analysis that informed campaigns. This relationship continued, with these workers playing a key role in giving inside information to grassroots groups to assist them in their advocacy efforts. Service monitoring often took place collaboratively and relationships were also developed with organizations representing frontline workers in both India and Nigeria, with SPARK campaigns taking up issues that were of shared importance.

Working with frontline workers as part of the reform coalition has improved the targeting of campaigns, the information available through detailed insider knowledge of the system, and the legitimacy of claims made by SPARK grassroots actors. In Nigeria, frontline workers have been more "invisible" allies, but in India their active engagement – and SPARK activities that increase their voice with local authorities – has added numerical strength to campaigns. In both cases, their engagement has been important in campaigns that increased the resources available at the local level, and in India the release of payments owed to the workers.

However, engaging frontline workers as part of the reform coalition has also brought complications. In some cases, new, more trusting, and empathetic relationships needed to be built between community members who saw frontline workers as the source of problems, and the workers who

felt unjustly criticized by the community. Tensions have arisen when problems identified by service users or would-be users are things that the frontline workers – however mistreated and under-resourced they may be – could and should address, such as absenteeism or poor treatment of patients. As a result, working to maintain frontline workers as allies has involved difficult conversations and even trade-offs in terms of campaign aims.

3. Conclusion

SPARK's commitment to building collective agency, and specifically collective budget agency, is an end goal as well as a means to improve service delivery and create more inclusive fiscal governance processes. The collective agency of reform coalitions, as well as of SPARK grassroots partners within these coalitions, is proving important in achieving progress both on service delivery and fiscal governance objectives, as well as on grassroots partners' cohesion, capacity, and effectiveness. It could also be part of the legacy of SPARK.

Advancing incremental fiscal governance change over the medium term, as SPARK hopes to do, will require ongoing engagement from across these coalitions. Enabling and facilitating this – keeping members engaged and connected to campaigns to challenge the ways that fiscal governance systems cause exclusion – will be a priority during the remainder of the program.

Additionally, the fact that many SPARK coalitions are composed primarily of SPARK-funded partners calls for reflection on the financial sustainability of the agency-building work SPARK is doing and consequently on the service delivery and fiscal governance improvements it achieves through building collective agency. Advocacy history includes examples of coalitions that collapse when external funding is withdrawn, and legendary coalitions that live on in adapted forms or turn their energies and skills to new issues.

For SPARK coalitions to be sustainable after program funding ends, we need to focus on building leadership qualities and competences; nurturing active, critical citizenship skills; and changing government attitudes about civil society.

There are several strategic questions for SPARK management and country teams to consider about coalition sustainability:

1. What will keep SPARK coalition members engaged in campaigns, when they move from securing quicker improvements in service delivery to addressing issues in the PFM system that will take longer to reform? How can coalitions keep grassroots actors engaged and central for as long as it takes to bring systemic change?

2. How can SPARK limit financial dependence by actively building out from the core coalition over time? How can SPARK connect the grassroots group with allies who are not funded from the same sources and help it consolidate relationships not mediated by funding?

3. Should SPARK's strategic accompaniment focus on building the coalitions or on building the capacities of grassroots groups so they can move forward after SPARK and join and leave coalitions as circumstances dictate?

These are key questions that have come into focus through exploring SPARK's ways of working in coalition. They deserve increasing attention over the lifespan of a program in which building collective agency and bolstering reform coalitions is central.