

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FUND

Final Report

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INDEX

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS (RQS) AND METHODS	6
STRATEGIC GOALS & OUT-OF-THE-BOX APPROACHES (RQ1)	7
SOF GRANTEES UNDERTOOK APPROACHES TO IMPROVE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING THAT THEY HAD BEEN THINKING ABOUT FOR A LONG TIME, BUT LACKED SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENT	7
SOF FUNDING ENABLED GRANTEES TO DEEPEN THEIR WORK WITH ISPs, INCLUDING GAINING ACCESS TO ADDITIONAL CLOSED SETTINGS SUCH AS PRISONS AND SCHOOLS	8
SOF RESULTS (RQ2)	10
GRANTEE PROFILES: PARTNERS OUTCOMES	10
CARIBBEAN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES COALITION (CVC)	10
POSITIVE UNIVERSE, LED BY THE GLOBAL NETWORK OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS (GNP+)	11
INCLUSIVE AND AFFIRMING MINISTRIES (IAM)	11
HARM REDUCTION CONSORTIUM, LED BY THE INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY CONSORTIUM (IDPC)	12
SOUTHERN AFRICAN NETWORK OF PRISONS (SANOP)	13
NEW AND DEEPEENED PARTNERSHIPS WITH REGIONAL AND COUNTRY NETWORKS	13
FIELD-LEVEL CONNECTIONS THAT WERE RELEVANT FOR ADVOCACY AND ADVANCING PROGRAM WORK	14
CONNECTIONS WITH GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS, WHICH RESULTED IN CLOSER GOVERNMENT-CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONSHIPS	15
CAPACITY BUILDING MATERIALS TO SUPPORT THE WORK WERE DEVELOPED	16
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITH AFFECTED COMMUNITIES	17
SOF RESOURCES: SPENDING AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER FUNDING (RQ3)	18
THE MAJORITY OF SOF FUNDING (NEARLY 60%) WAS SPENT ON PROJECT ACTIVITIES; ONLY TWO SOF GRANTEES DISTRIBUTED FUNDS TO PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS	18
GRANTEES DESCRIBE A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CORE AND SOF FUNDING	22
SOF FUNDING WAS UNIQUE IN ITS FLEXIBILITY AND ENABLING OF EXPERIMENTATION	23
SUSTAINABILITY OF SOF WORK (RQ4)	24
SOF GRANTEES EXPERIENCE CONTINUED DEMAND FOR THE WORK STARTED WITH SUPPORT FROM RCF	24
SOF GRANTEES HAVE EXPERIENCED CHALLENGES RAISING FUNDS TO CONTINUE THE WORK; HOWEVER THE SOF FUNDING HELPED THEM OVERCOME STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO FUNDING	25
LESSONS LEARNED	27

DEDICATED FUNDING OUTSIDE OF CORE GRANTS HELPS ALIGN FUNDING WITH WORK BEING DONE ON THE GROUND; SUPPORT FROM NETWORKS AND CONSORTIA MADE THIS WORK POSSIBLE	27
SOF FUNDING ENCOURAGED LOCAL ADAPTATION, BUT NOT EVERYTHING GRANTEES TRIED WORKED	28
CONCLUSIONS	30

Executive Summary

In 2020, the Robert Carr Fund (RCF) launched a round of funding called the Strategic Opportunity Fund (SOF), which was intended to support networks and consortia to try new approaches to better support the health wellbeing and inclusion of inadequately served populations (ISPs) and creatively overcome strategic challenges that arise from difficult environments for ISPs, civil society and the HIV response. The SOF focused on three key areas: movement leadership, financial health and innovation, learning and partnership. Five grants were awarded to two consortia (Positive Universe, led by the Global Network of PLHIV and the Harm Reduction Consortium, led by the International Drug Policy Consortium) and three networks (Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition, Inclusive and Affirming Ministries and the South African Network of Prisons). SOF grantees were all current or former core grantees of RCF.

This final report is intended to document the outcomes of SOF funding, including the degree to which it encouraged out-of-the-box approaches, what was accomplished, how resources were used and the relationship with core funding and how grantees are able (or not able) to sustain the work. The executive summary summarizes key findings researchers learned about SOF funding that are described in detail in the report, as well as information about the outcomes of the SOF.

What We Learned About SOF Funding:

- SOF funding better aligned funding with what network and consortia partners are doing on the ground, both through **supporting unfunded ideas, as well as existing work that lacked adequate support**.
- SOF funding enabled networks and consortia to **deepen their engagement with ISPs**, including by expanding their work in closed settings such as prisons and schools.
- The majority of work done under the SOF matched what was proposed and **the majority of funds were spent on project activities** (as opposed to core spending). SOF activities encouraged local adaptation and enabled a high degree of flexibility that respected the local context. However, the scale of work completed was smaller than what was planned—**grantees worked in fewer countries and worked deeply with fewer partners** than anticipated. This reduction resulted from limitations related to COVID-19, but also the need to plan for new areas of work not necessarily working out for partners as they had originally planned.
- Almost half of the SOF's activity funds is invested in RCF's outcome area related to **institutionally stronger ISP and civil society networks**.

Key SOF Outcomes:

- **Deepened partnerships** were a key outcome of the SOF. Partnerships emerged with regional and country networks, field-level experts and coalitions and government stakeholders.
- **Capacity building materials** were developed with resources from the SOF—these materials continue to be used by funded and unfunded partners across multiple regions. They have also been valuable for SOF grantees in their efforts to raise additional funds to support this work. **Technical support** from networks and consortia made the work on the ground possible.
- SOF funding **generated demand** for more work from partners and consortia and networks feel pressure to raise additional funds to support the work. In some cases, they have been able to **leverage the work completed under SOF to obtain more funding**.

Introduction

The Robert Carr Fund is the world's leading international fund focused on funding regional and global networks led by and involving and serving inadequately served populations (ISPs).¹ In 2020, RCF launched a round of funding called the Strategic Opportunity Fund (SOF), which was intended to support networks and consortia to²:

- Try new approaches that could maximize their work to improve the health, wellbeing and social inclusion of inadequately served populations (ISPs);
- Exercise creativity and novel thinking to overcome strategic challenges arising from the increasingly difficult environments for civil society, ISPs and the HIV response.

The SOF was intended to support networks and consortia that already receive core funding from RCF, but the lead applicants could also include partners that have not received previous RCF support. The SOF focused on three areas: 1) **movement leadership**—to ensure stronger, continuous community-led and rights-based responses to HIV; 2) **financial health and resilience of ISP programs**—to ensure ISPs are not overlooked or left behind in the funding landscape; and 3) **innovation, learning and partnerships**—to ensure that the lessons networks learn can inform more effective approaches that are better adapted to the current environment. These priorities were identified through RCF's strategic planning process as areas that are critical to sustain and advance the role of civil society networks to support ISPs in the HIV response.

Two consortia (indicated with an “*” in the table below) and three single or regional networks were selected for SOF:

Grantee Name	Description	Funding Objective
Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVC)	The Caribbean's largest indigenous regional coalition of civil society leaders, actors and organizations, made up of over 60 community-based organizations working with marginalized populations especially vulnerable to HIV	To train and support community-based organizations to take on social entrepreneurship, which will contribute to them becoming self-sustaining and ensure this work as a permanent program within CVC

¹ Inadequately served populations (ISPs) are groups or persons that face a higher HIV risk, mortality and/or morbidity compared to the general population, and, at the same time, facing systematic human rights violations and barriers to information and services. ISPs include people living with HIV, gay men, bisexuals and other men who have sex with men, people who use drugs, people in prisons or other closed settings, sex workers, and transgender persons. Depending on the dynamic of the HIV epidemic and the legal status of these populations, ISPs may also include women and girls, youth, migrants and people living in rural areas.

² Robert Carr Fund, 2019 Strategic Opportunity Fund RfP.

Grantee Name	Grantee Description	Funding Objective
Positive Universe ³ , led by the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+)*	GNP+ is a global network and a political organization for people living with HIV, run by people living with HIV (PLHIV); GNP+ leads Positive Universe, a coalition of four independent networks that advocates for PLHIV in regions where health systems and the sociopolitical environment are not supportive of ISPs	To increase the financial health and resilience of ISP programs and promote innovation, learning, and partnerships by hosting a series of bootcamps that aim to improve the capacity of PLHIV to advocate around universal healthcare (UHC) and HIV services
Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM)	A regional network that seeks to address religious fundamentalism through faith and civil society partnerships by raising awareness, creating spaces for dialogue and empowering change agents to take concrete action	To create safer and more inclusive schools by linking schools across Eastern and Southern Africa to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) support services through dialogue and participatory convenings
Harm Reduction Consortium ⁴ , led by the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC)*	IDPC is a global network with more than 190 members focused on drug policy reform; IDPC leads the Harm Reduction Consortium, a group of six regional networks that collaborate with a research institution (Swansea University) and global advocacy organization (Harm Reduction International) to produce relevant, country-specific research on drug policy and ensure the information is used for advocacy	To develop a Global Drug Policy Index (GDPI), a metric that can be used to bolster advocacy by assessing and measuring government responses to and spending on the lives, rights, and health of people who use drugs (PWUD)
Southern African Network of Prisons (SANOP)	A regional network of at least 53 organizations that supports the health and human rights of prisoners and ex-inmates in Southern Africa, including Eswatini, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe	To strengthen and/or develop youth-led clubs for youth in prison or who are ex-inmates, as well as conduct citizen-led monitoring in prisons to improve conditions for inmates

³ Positive Universe members included: the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+) (lead), the Network of African People Living with HIV West Africa (NAP+WA), the Network of People Living with HIV in Indonesia (JIP) and The All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV.

⁴ Harm Reduction Consortium members for the SOF project included: International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) (lead), Harm Reduction International (HRI), Youth RISE, Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN), Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHR), European Network of People Who Use Drugs (EuroNPUD), The Global Drug Policy Observatory (GDPO) at Swansea University, Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs (ENPUD) and the West Africa Drug Policy Network (WADPN).

Grants were \$500,000 over eighteen months. Grants were provided in addition to core funding, with the intention to enable networks and consortia to take on creative areas of work beyond what would be possible with their core funding from RCF.

Research Questions (RQs) and Methods

Strength in Numbers, a research and evaluation group that focuses on balancing rigorous methods and community participation, was commissioned to document the achievements and collect learnings for the SOF in 2022. Strength in Numbers' approach focused on understanding how the RCF strategy was understood by grantees and documenting the outcomes and impact of the funding on the consortia and networks that received it. Specifically researchers asked the following research questions:

RQ1: How did the SOF meet the strategic goals as articulated in the request for proposals (RfP) (i.e.: trying new approaches to advance the health, wellbeing and social inclusion of ISPs)? Did the SOF accomplish its goal to encourage creative and out-of-box approaches to the HIV response? If so, how?

RQ2: What resulted from the SOF funding?

RQ3: How were SOF resources spent, including what proportion went to activities versus core expenses and to what extent did SOF grantees distribute resources to partners? How does SOF funding compare to the core support networks and consortia receive from RCF or support they receive from other donors?

RQ4: How is the SOF work being sustained after the grants have concluded?

Researchers completed five 75 minute interviews, one with the focal point(s) from each network or consortium that received SOF funding. Nine staff from grantee organizations participated in interviews (i.e.: Four grantees elected to have two participants, while one grantee had one participant). Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol that aligned with the research questions. Protocols were customized based on the applications and reports received from each grantee to avoid grantees being asked to repeat information they submitted through RCF reporting processes.

SOF grantees were also offered the opportunity to refer researchers to individual networks, regional networks or other consortia partners, many of whom are also RCF grantees, that could speak to the work being done at all levels of project implementation. SANOP (3 interviews), IAM (2 interviewees) and CVC (1 interviewee) recommended in-country partners that were included in the evaluation. A semi-structured protocol for in-country partners was developed to gather information about the impact of the SOF resources in country, how networks and consortia are supporting partners in-country, how ISPs were impacted by grant activities and how/whether the work has been able to continue once the grant had ended.

The final report seeks to answer the research questions drawing from the written materials submitted by SOF grantees, as well as qualitative quotes from their evaluation interviews. Research questions are answered at the level of the grant initiative, with examples drawn from different grantees to identify trends and patterns, as well as point out outliers. The report concludes with lessons learned and conclusions sections, some of which also gesture to principles RCF could continue or newly adopt based on lessons learned from the SOF.

Strategic Goals & Out-of-the-Box Approaches (RQ1)

SOF grantees undertook approaches to improve health and well-being that they had been thinking about for a long time, but lacked support to implement

Three of the five SOF grantees spoke about how the ideas they proposed for SOF funding came from work they were already doing without funding or work they had wanted to do, but had been unable to raise funds to support. While the SOF originally intended to support “new approaches to advance health”, in practice, SOF funding better aligned funding with what networks and consortia were already doing on the ground.

For example, a member of the consortium Positive Universe spoke about how they came to work on universal health care (UHC) and health financing from a position of understanding how important it is to build activists’ capacity in a technical field like health financing,

From an organizational perspective there was at first, the desire to involve other networks within our community to think through health financing...We felt that any proposal, any opportunity, any call for proposal that came along that would allow us to take that thinking forward within the networks and to build more people, who are literate around the issue of health financing and could speak to UHC, is critical because there is such a small elite, group of people who could understand it without being intimidated. That was the backdrop. Even before this came along, we had that strong organizational desire.

Interviewees spoke about how the work was on a technical topic where they had difficulty identifying donors to support it. Positive Universe spoke about how the SOF funding opportunity was exciting to them as they felt it was a good fit to continue work they were already doing with partners at the regional and country levels,

I think just to add that one thing we struggled with organizationally was really finding someone who would fund this piece of work because it’s quite niche, and...not a lot of donors wanted to fund it. When this came out, this was actually perfect. It fit exactly what we wanted. I think the idea of working with the networks that we specifically worked with, which was a regional network in West Africa, and then Indonesia and Ukraine, was to really get networks that were versed in different levels of UHC, so they could learn from each other.

CVC expressed a similar sentiment, describing how their work on social enterprises was something they were already doing in the Dominican Republic, but without funding. The work had already been well-established in one country, but funding from SOF allowed them to

expand the work to other countries, as well as hire skilled staff in this area and build out a systematic approach to capacity building and technical assistance.

Well, we saw this as a really great opportunity to get some more substantial funding for some work that we'd been doing previously without receiving very much funding, so really this work with social enterprises began with some work in the Dominican Republic that we've been doing, I think, for about seven years now.

In the case of CVC, SOF funding helped them align funding with work that was already in-progress and came out of a desire to ensure sustainable funding for nonprofits with an activist mission who may not be eligible for government funding.

IDPC also proposed an idea for SOF funding that they had been thinking about for some time. In this case, interviewees described already having an academic partner in mind for collaboration. They had spoken with other donors about supporting the work, but had been unable to gain traction. An IDPC interviewee said,

It was an idea that has actually been around for some time to have a composite index of this kind when it came to drug policy that scored governments in terms of their drug policy on the basis of health, HIV, human rights, and development outcomes. It's something that actually we had been discussing for a long time with the group that became the academic partner in the project at Swansea University, the Global Drug Policy Observatory, and thinking about how to devise the index, but also places where we could get funding for the work.

While SOF funding did not necessarily support new or novel projects or approaches to improve health and well-being, it did provide needed support for areas of work that were underappreciated by other donors. As a result, SOF grantees were able to build out program areas and partnerships to do work they saw as critical, but were unable to raise funds to do.

[SOF funding enabled grantees to deepen their work with ISPs, including gaining access to additional closed settings such as prisons and schools](#)

Two grantees described how SOF funding enabled them to deepen their engagement in closed settings. SANOP described training people in prisons and prison officials on citizen-led monitoring, creating skills and demand for prisoners to negotiate for improved service provision. With support from SOF, they expanded their work in women's prisons. They were also able to digitize some of their monitoring processes, ensuring activities could continue during the covid pandemic, as well as support peer educators that work with prisoners, prison officials and people recently released from prison. SANOP described the challenges of gaining access to people who were currently incarcerated, as well as their efforts to improve conditions in facilities with support from SOF. One interviewee said,

The doors are beginning to open. It's not easy, but they are beginning to open. They have allowed us to do surveys within the facilities. We have done many of them. The data is going to come out, and we are hoping that this can be able to change the mindsets of partners going forward.

This interviewee went on to describe the process of building relationships with prison officials that helped them gain access to people in prisons,

The prison officials, or the prison communities, or those who are responsible for our prisons and correctional in Southern Africa and the areas of the program—Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, and Eswatini—I think it's because of the relationship that we have built over time. Prisons generally are guarded-in-security, sensitive areas. You build the relationship over time. The moment you have that trusting relationship, it's something that is strategic to you; that you've got at all costs.

SANOP also described forming partnerships with prison officials to make a computer available to inmates, where they could complete community monitoring surveys about their experiences in the prison. As the computer was also helpful to facility administration, the project helped encourage dialogue between staff and prisoners about facility conditions. These partnerships were ultimately the basis for SANOP being able to support prisoners more directly, both during their incarceration period, as well as after their release,

For the first time the prisons, where we're programming, allowed us to buy them laptops and computers to be able to digitize this process to allow this data to be available on a portal not only for their own benefit to have, but also for us to also be able to access and be able to improve together the conditions within the facilities where these inmates are.

At the same time, SANOP was able to use their access to facilities to collect data, as well as work to resolve rights violations and poor conditions inside prison facilities.

IAM described starting work in schools, a setting that was new to them—their prior experience was working with faith leaders, but they recognized the need to reach young people, their parents and teachers in school setting. An IAM interviewee said,

...in 2019, we had a strategic regional network moral consultation, and it was a collective space where we could identify some of the areas that we experience as gaps, but never received funding for it, and so out of that, I mean, this was always on our agenda, but was kind of parked, and then we saw this opportunity, and we both—we grabbed it with both hands, and it started out as specifically the school side of it is completely new to the network, although we have had encounters with schools, but it was never really a project focused, and so this opportunity gave us an open door to say, if it's possible, and if we're successful, let's see what we can do...

The idea and demand for working in schools came from IAM's network, but the SOF enabled them to build out a project to support the work. Ultimately, IAM would like to add a program to their organization focused on work with schools, in large part as a result of the experience they had implementing the SOF grant,

We don't have experts working in schools at the moment, so our expertise lies in activist civil society work and in faith work. It's not in schools, so the long-term dream for me as a programs

manager...is to have not just these two programs, but a third program that sort of works specifically within schools.

IAM went on to describe how SOF funding enabled them to do intersectional work in schools, developing partners with LGBTQ organizations to address issues of race, rurality and discrimination based on sexual orientation,

The intersectional work that we do in schools is critical because in South Africa for instance, we realize that the work that we're doing is also race work, especially in South Africa because the access that learners have to sexual reproductive health rights in a—in one school is very different to what learners have in rural schools, schools in neighborhoods that don't have the same access to—that's in a different class. This is intersectional work, so it's a lot bigger than we even imagined.

SOF funding enabled access to organizations to take risks to reach ISPs in new settings and build partnerships and do work in ways that addressed intersectional identities, such as LGBTQ+ youth.

SOF Results (RQ2)

This section of the report delves into the specific achievements of SOF grantees, including the consortia or network name, project name, main partners, funding objective and the main outcomes. Outcomes included activities completed, internal capacities built, new and deepened partnerships, tools developed, media attention garnered, policies changed, improved implementation of policies and programs and sustainable funding raised. It also highlights some of the trends in grantee achievements identified by researchers, including but not limited to, new and deepened partnerships with regional and country networks and government stakeholders, field-level connections to advance advocacy and program work, as well as the development of capacity building tools that support their work.

Grantee Profiles: Partners Outcomes

Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVC)

Project Name: *Building Capacity for Sustainability through Innovative Resourcing Strategies among ISP Service Organizations in the Caribbean*

Main Partners: *More than 40 community-based organizations (CBOs) in the Caribbean*

Funding Objective: To train and support community-based organizations to take on social entrepreneurship, which will contribute to them becoming self-sustaining and ensure this work as a permanent program within CVC.

Main Outcomes:

- Expansion of CVC's social enterprise work beyond the Dominican Republic to other countries in the Caribbean; 29 organizations received seed funding based on their business plans and/or evaluations of their social enterprise work (see: [CVC news](#) for more information about their incubation and acceleration of social enterprise projects)
- CVC's internal capacity to support CBOs to do social enterprise work has been built; CVC gained skills in helping organizations identify the resources and skills they have and how

those could be brought to bear on starting social enterprises (see: [course offerings](#) for more information about how CVC has institutionalized social enterprise work as a part of the network's core activities)

- New partnerships between CBOs and the private sector were established, including with the tourism and hospitality industries
- Several Caribbean organizations started businesses that are profitable and contribute to the sustainability of their nonprofit's work
- CVC has leveraged funding from the Global Fund to support social enterprise work as a result of the demand generated and skills developed with SOF funding

Positive Universe, led by the Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (GNP+)

Project Name: *Last Mile First: PLHIV-Led Advocacy for Universal Health Coverage (UHC)*

Main Partners: *Network of People Living with HIV in West Africa (NAP+WA), The Positive Indonesia Network (JIP) and The All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV*

Funding Objective: To increase the financial health and resilience of ISP programs and promote innovation, learning, and partnerships by hosting a series of bootcamps that aim to improve the capacity of PLHIV to advocate around universal healthcare (UHC) and HIV services.

Main Outcomes:

- Five networks of PLHIV in West Africa received training on domestic UHC financing mechanisms, national health budgets and budget advocacy strategies
- Indonesian organizations from eight cities and six provinces received training on UHC and national implementation; ultimately community representatives participated in a Community Coordination Platform meeting on national UHC implementation and a multi-sector dialogue meeting on UHC implementation that included national health policymakers and UNAIDS, resulting in specific recommendations for improvement
- In Ukraine, activists from the organization 100% Life were engaged as consultants in the development of a public health program in the city of Kiev; they also developed a [video](#) on UHC for use by other organizations in the region
- A [tool](#) on how to use national Stigma Index data for UHC advocacy was developed, tested in training, and made available in English, French and Russian
- Activists across all three countries joined new health coalitions, including those focused on non-communicable diseases
- GNP+ secured additional funding to continue UHC work from Aidsfonds, through a five year program called the Love Alliance; this work will further build on the tools and experience developed with support from SOF.

Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM)

Project Name: *Regional School Project*

Main Partners: *Human Science Research Council (HSRC) and Gender Dynamix and organizations working in Southern Africa*

Funding Objective: To create safer and more inclusive schools by linking schools across Eastern and Southern Africa to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) support services through dialogue and participatory convenings.

Main Outcomes:

- IAM supported partners in eight countries to initiate work on SRH in schools, with teachers, parents, social workers and in some cases learners; the work particularly took hold in South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana (see: [project reflections](#) for more information about the work in each country, as well as the project's [YouTube channel](#))
- In-country partners were trained in LGBTQ issues by Gender Dynamix, as well as how to use data for advocacy by the Human Science Research Council
- IAM started country-specific LGBTQ youth-led steering committees that provided substantive guidance on the project
- 30 participants from throughout Southern Africa were trained in financial management
- IAM partners in the Western Cape developed a new relationship with the Department of Education, where they have been able to push for the implementation of an existing comprehensive sexuality education curriculum, which was not being implemented
- IAM has submitted a proposal to the Arcus Foundation to continue the work they started with support from the SOF

Harm Reduction Consortium, led by the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC)

Project Name: *The Global Drug Policy Index: A Bold New Approach to Improve Policies, Harm Reduction Funding and the Lives of People Who Use Drugs (PWUDs)*

Main Partners: *European Network of People Who Use Drugs (EuroPUD), Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA), Eurasian Network of People Who Use Drugs (ENPUD), Global Drug Policy Observatory (GDPO)/Swansea University, Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHR), West African Drug Policy Network (WADPN), Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN), Youth RISE, University of New South Wales, University of Nottingham, Dejusticia, Harm Reduction International (HRI), Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS), University of Toronto and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime*

Funding Objective: To develop a Global Drug Policy Index (GDPI), a metric that can be used to bolster advocacy by assessing and measuring government responses to and spending on the lives, rights, and health of people who use drugs (PWUD).

Main Outcomes:

- The first-ever [Global Drug Policy Index \(GDPI\)](#) was developed and launched in November 2021 with support from SOF, which included data from 30 countries
- Two global launch events (in five languages) that received international media attention, including from The Guardian/Observer (UK), The Lancet and the Global Times (China), as well as national media attention in 26 countries
- A journal article describing the index methodology and data is forthcoming in the International Journal of Drug Policy
- 12 “Index Preparedness” events were hosted by Consortium partners to equip activists for the launch and support their use of the Index for national advocacy
- Several ISP-led partners secured staff placements within key advocacy targets, including UN Women and the Pompidou Group, among others

- The GDPI spurred national advocacy in multiple countries. For example, in Thailand, discussions about the index coincided with amendments to drug policies, including new sentencing guidelines that emphasize rehabilitation
- The GDPI won the [Fast Company 2022 Innovation by Design Award](#), an accolade that recognizes efforts to trade short-term solutions for long-term, considered thinking
- A high level of demand for GDPI research in other countries, with many requests for inclusion in the next round of data collection
- IDPC has identified a few donors that may be interested in continuing the GDPI work, now that a solid methodology has been established with support from SOF

Southern African Network of Prisons (SANOP)

***Project Name:** Promoting Human Rights, Quality Health and Well-Being for Youth Prison Populations in Southern Africa*

***Main Partners:** SANOP chapters in Malawi, Eswatini, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and 13 prisons in these countries*

***Funding Objective:** To strengthen and/or develop youth-led clubs for youth in prison or who are ex-inmates, as well as conduct citizen-led monitoring in prisons to improve conditions for inmates.*

Main Outcomes:

- SANOP established 14 clubs within prisons, as well as 14 clubs for people recently released from prison, where they could access vocational skills training; participation in SANOP's work resulted formerly incarcerated people productively contributing to society, as well as lower rates of recidivism
- SANOP expanded and deepened their partnerships with prisons in 5 countries in East and Southern Africa, including engaging in citizen-led monitoring processes in these facilities, a process wherein affected communities advocate for increased accountability in public service delivery (see: [VSO's blog](#) about SANOP partner's work in Zimbabwe)
- As a result of engaging in citizen-led monitoring processes, young people were able to advocate for access to needed health services, as well as improved living conditions
- SANOP's Zambia chapter developed a peer educational manual with the Zambia Correctional Service about the work they did related to citizen-led monitoring in prisons (see: [SANOP's description](#) of this work)
- Social accountability tools were digitized and adapted for use online during COVID
- SANOP developed a regional input data tracking tool for prison management to help activists tailor trainings for prison officials on regional commitments related to human rights in prisons

New and deepened partnerships with regional and country networks

SOF funding led to new and deepened partnerships for grantees with regional and in-country networks. This occurred in part because of the opportunity to develop a specific project or program to work on jointly. For example, IAM spoke about their relationships with regional networks and how those relationships deepen when there's an opportunity to submit a joint proposal,

I think somehow the networks sees us like as a mother, and are just grateful for this opportunity that we continue to include them in our proposals, and in our [regional] network, so it definitely strengthens the relationship and the network. It has definitely helped the organizations in their countries to deepen their relationships with their partners, their country partners...

IDPC expressed a similar sentiment, describing how developing a proposal from scratch with SOF partners advanced individual and organizational relationships,

I think with the core consortium, which is nine organizations now, the SOF was just another great opportunity to work with them; develop a project from scratch with them, which we haven't really done that often. Normally it's about continuing existing work and, you know, everyone has their own work stream. This was a different conversation. It was a really enjoyable process.

IDPC went on to describe how through the SOF funding, they were able to subgrant to a regional network they had not worked with before,

We also worked more closely with the Middle East & North African Network of People Who Use Drugs, MENANPUD. They were able to join us, and that was the first time that we'd ever sub-granted formally to them.

In several cases, there was also deeper engagement and peer learning that happened between SOF implementing partners. GNP+ described doing an in-person training with country partners that were at different levels of understanding and work on universal health care,

We did a face-to-face training with them [5 West African groups] in English and French. It was amazing because the Ghanaians were very far ahead in thinking about UHC and what it meant. Even though it was a new concept, the country was already talking about universal healthcare and primary healthcare, so they could already understand it. Senegal, as well. They had a system that they were piloting nationally, and the network had been part of it, particularly in light of COVID. Then the Côte d'Ivoire was further behind; they had never heard of any of it.

Interviewees from GNP+ described the productive exchange that happened between countries and their consortium, and how they were able to learn from one another.

[Field-level connections that were relevant for advocacy and advancing program work](#)
SOF grantees spoke about how they were able to establish field-level connections that were relevant for advocacy and advancing program work as a result of SOF funding. GNP+ gave the example of new coalitions their partners joined, where they could gain access to broader discussions about health rights, such as those related to non-communicable diseases. By sitting in these spaces, the capacity of in-country partners is built, but also GNP+ was no longer the sole representative in these broader non-HIV-focused spaces,

I think a couple of the countries joined new coalitions. Like they joined new health coalitions; that they hadn't been, you know, part of. I think in particular in Ghana and Senegal they, rather than us sitting in our HIV space and being kings and queens of our HIV spaces, our little bubbles, they went and joined broader health coalitions and were like a tiny partner in a bigger

space...They even organized meetings with groups like those who work on NCD, non-communicable diseases. Just like branch out a little bit...Like steps to get outside of our bubbles.

IDPC also spoke about how the SOF funding enabled their members to develop individual capacity and connections through a funded initiative to second individuals to UN and/or policymaking agencies,

The building leadership, building strong, independent leadership particularly for the communities—one partner that we managed to build into the project was for some of the community networks but a part of the consortium to have funded secondments, or internships, at some of the UN agencies or some of the big policymaking agencies. Like a real opportunity for leadership within those networks to really get to understand how those organizations work.

IDPC is confident that the knowledge and connections instilled in interns and/or seconded staff will ultimately result in field-level connections that will advance their consortium's advocacy and program work. IDPC also recounted how the SOF funding enabled them to connect with sector experts and form an advisory group that guided their work on the Global Drug Policy Index,

...we ended up engaging more than 100 people; whereas maybe before it would have been 20 or 30. We were able to reach out to academics, to leading experts, people who worked on other indexes in other sectors, and just feed off them and get their intel. You know? A lot of those academics followed us through the whole project. We formed something called the "Scientific Advisory Group," and a few of them are even authoring the academic paper that is being published as we speak.

Although the academic paper was not a planned outcome of the SOF funding, the connections to academics that were built with SOF support has led to this additional outcome that will reach new and different audiences.

Connections with government stakeholders, which resulted in closer government-civil society relationships

SOF grantees also described how funding helped them to connect with relevant government stakeholders, and in several cases, resulted in new government-civil society partnerships. IAM described using the SOF opportunity as a way to navigate government agencies to identify a relevant stakeholder that could help them gain access to schools in the Western Cape,

In the Western Cape, it's so interesting for us because one of the significant partnerships that we formed with someone who works for the department has come from our faith partnerships because she was part of one of the faith partnerships programs, and then when we started working in schools, she said, but I'm actually the person that you're supposed to be talking to...

In addition to developing new partnerships with relevant government stakeholders, both SANOP and GNP+ described how their in-country partners have been drawn into advisory roles for government. SANOP gave the example of work in Zambia where their partners are

developing a manual with government stakeholders that describes the citizen-led monitoring and peer education work they're doing,

Zambia Correctional Service said, "Listen. We like this model. We are going to develop this particular document. We want this to be rolled out in all our facilities. We want it to be a standard." Of course, all of the facilities, of course, we have seen that it works. Because of that...work that we have done in Zambia in some of their facilities they've been agreed to develop this manual together with us, so we're getting some of the resources we've been using. [we've] also we supported them in being able to print this manual and to be able to distribute it as well in some of the facilities.

GNP+ described how their partner in Ukraine was invited to advise on the universal healthcare strategy for the country,

In the Ukraine as well, 100% LIFE, our network partner, was invited to help write the UHC strategy for the country. That was a really big deal, and we helped them pull together the kind of concept that they shared with their government in terms of what they could include in it, et cetera. I've just looked up the email just to see. These were the things that they had put in the concept. It was basically about guiding the national government and how to reach UHC and setting, yeah, a common definition for you. It's like real leadership at country level.

Capacity building materials to support the work were developed

SOF grantees also described developing materials that supported their work that they could make available to their partners. In the case of CVC, this was capacity strengthening materials related to social enterprises, a gap they saw in the field that they were able to address with SOF funding,

One of the things that was very helpful was the timing of the Carr funding was in terms of some of the material that we were developing for the capacity building. There's obviously a ton of material out there in terms of social enterprises, but really very little of it was directed specifically at community-based organizations and looking at what it would take to transform organizations that were set up to be CBOs into entities that could generate income to a social venture. Little of the material were actually was targeting that particular audience...I believe that there wasn't very much in the literature specifically to assist transforming grassroots organizations into model and enable them to generate some income through a social enterprise venture, so there were legal questions in being able to operate.

For CVC, developing customized materials for the Caribbean was particularly relevant, given contextual regulations around operating a business. SOF funding enabled them to research and document these regulations so they could work with partners from different countries in the region from a place of deep knowledge about their local context.

GNP+ also described how they have developed a training manual on universal health care that has helped them to engage a broader range of their members on this topic.

I think one of the big things that actually came out of this project was we developed a UHC manual, a training manual that anyone can pick up and really train community members around what UHC is, and that way building champions. I think, well, it was used in all countries.

GNP+ gave an example of how the manual has been used beyond what they are even able to track. For example, they describe discovering that their Ukrainian partner had trained a group in Lithuania that is now doing their own set of local trainings using the materials.

SANOP also spoke about developing a manual with standardized guidance for training and working with incarcerated populations,

Because of those groupings [we started to ask] how then can we try to standardize the training of peer education? It is one thing that I think...we are really proud of, in training them, and then trying to develop a start-up manual, and then getting the input from technical persons...How you from the basic perspective, how can you manage various ailments, drug treatment, drug adherence, common STI's, sexually transmitted infections and the likes. It was a very good manual that even a peer educator can quickly use it as a resource manual to get to know about the information, and then can easily then disseminate...

Development of training and resource materials helped SOF grantees to expand the scope of their work and manage support to partners in multiple countries/regions. Flexible resources enabled the documentation of how work has been done and how it could be done by others. These documents both helped to streamline the work, as well as provide a basis for future fundraising support for work that was new and/or previously unfunded.

[Leadership Development with Affected Communities](#)

Another outcome of SOF funding was the development of community leadership, particularly among those directly impacted by HIV. For example, by promoting citizen-led monitoring in prisons, SANOP was able to establish and strengthen youth-led networks. SANOP described this leadership development process as starting with people identifying with one another and seeing that they have a common need or goal,

...this movement leadership approach or model is really a grouping of like-minded inmates, for example, inside correctional facilities who are eager to improve the conditions that they are living in within the facilities... They come together. They not only talk about and encourage [each other] around being able to adhere to good health practices, or adhering to antiretroviral treatment, but also enable [each other] to move together to be able to advocate for improved service provision.

With citizen-led trainings with these youth-led groups and associations, SANOP facilitated the cultivation of movement leadership, highlighting that self-advocacy can take place, even within spaces where affected communities lack control over other fundamental issues in their lives,

[It was also trying] to also show them the changes that have been adequate in spaces that we usually relate to stigma, discrimination, and the likes so that not only do we improve the aspect of the community re-entry and the successful reintegration, but also in the general movement in the [prison] communities. This ... will also lead in the demand for increased access to services.

The SOF funding also provided IAM with resources to start a set of LGBTI youth-led steering committees to guide their work in schools,

I think what was also helpful is the youth leadership steering committee that we for the first we had to now intentionally on the advice of [this group]...Each of the partners could...[recommend] two youth, LGBTI youth onboard to have their input.

These groups guided the project implementation, providing alternate perspectives to IAM and network partners.

SOF funding engaged affected communities in multiple ways—through awareness of common oppression and space to come together, the generation of demand for quality services and opportunities to guide and advise program implementation and positions where they could gain access to information and social capital that would enable their full participation in decision-making.

SOF Resources: Spending and the Relationship to Other Funding (RQ3)

RCF was particularly interested in how grantees experienced support from the SOF in the context of their core funding. Four of the five SOF grantees were receiving a core grant and a SOF grant simultaneously. While GNP+ had received a core grant from RCF in the past, they were not receiving a core grant in 2019-2021 as a single network, but only as a member of a consortium. Grantees were asked to report on their spending for the SOF grant against the budgets originally submitted. SOF budgets included both core and activity expenses.

The majority of SOF funding (nearly 60%) was spent on project activities; only two SOF grantees distributed funds to partner organizations

Researchers used these data to do some analyses to describe core versus activity spending for SOF grantees to be able to describe how resources were spent. The majority of SOF funding (nearly 60%) was spent on project activities.

The median **activity spending** among the grantees (CVC, IAM, IDPC, GNP+, and SANOP) was about \$290,133 (58.0% of the SOF grant). These included money that went towards supporting advocacy, and hosting workshops, meetings, and trainings. Activity spending ranged \$182,012 to \$423,450. CVC spent the largest portion (84.7%) of the grant on activities, while IAM spent the smallest portion (41.0%) of the grant on activities.

Median **core spending** (e.g., human resources, financial management, and operations) among the five was about \$209,755 (42.0% of the grant). Core spending ranged \$76,364 to \$306,787.

Researchers also looked at SOF funding that was distributed to network and consortia partners in-country. Among the grantees, the two consortia (IDPC and GNP+) reported distributing funds to partner organizations.⁵

Over two-thirds (70.1%; \$350,307) of **IDPC's** SOF grant was distributed in the form of subgrants to IDPC's partners. Much of this manifested in the form of "action grants," which supported consortium members in applying the findings of the Global Drug Policy Index (GDPI) to practice policy advocacy in their respective countries. These funds also contributed to partners' core spending (i.e., human resources and financial management).

GNP+'s partner spending, like IDPC's, also supported human resources costs. A sizeable portion (more than one-quarter) also contributed to local trainings on universal healthcare (UHC) and budget advocacy. These trainings were attended by people living with HIV (PLHIV). After the trainings, partners received small grants to support the PLHIV attendees to advocate for UHC in their countries.

Figure 1 below shows the proportion of SOF grantees expenditures that went towards activity

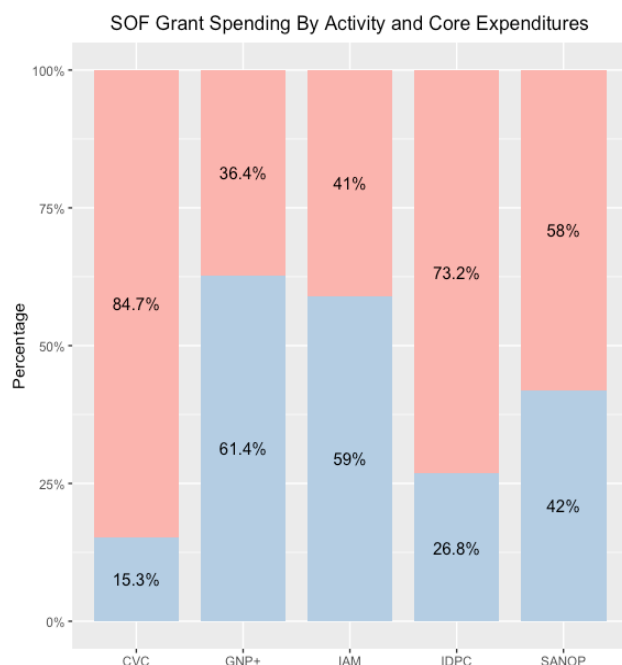


Figure 1

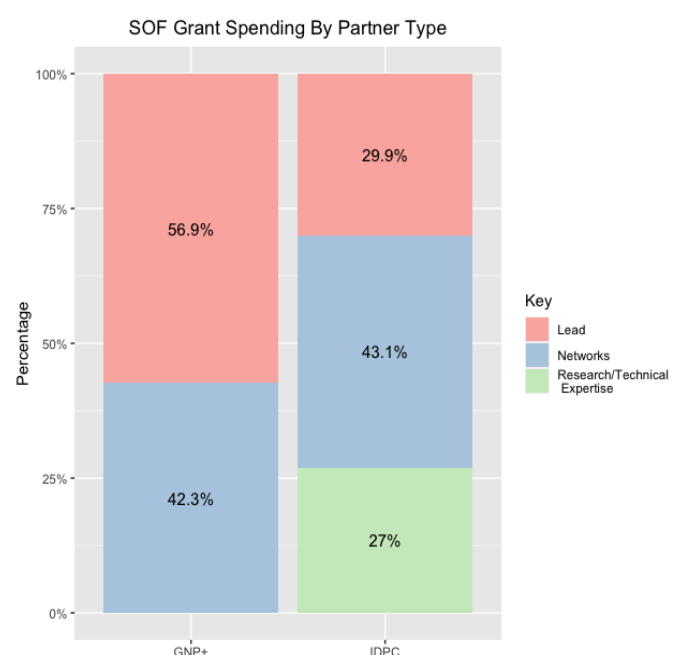


Figure 2

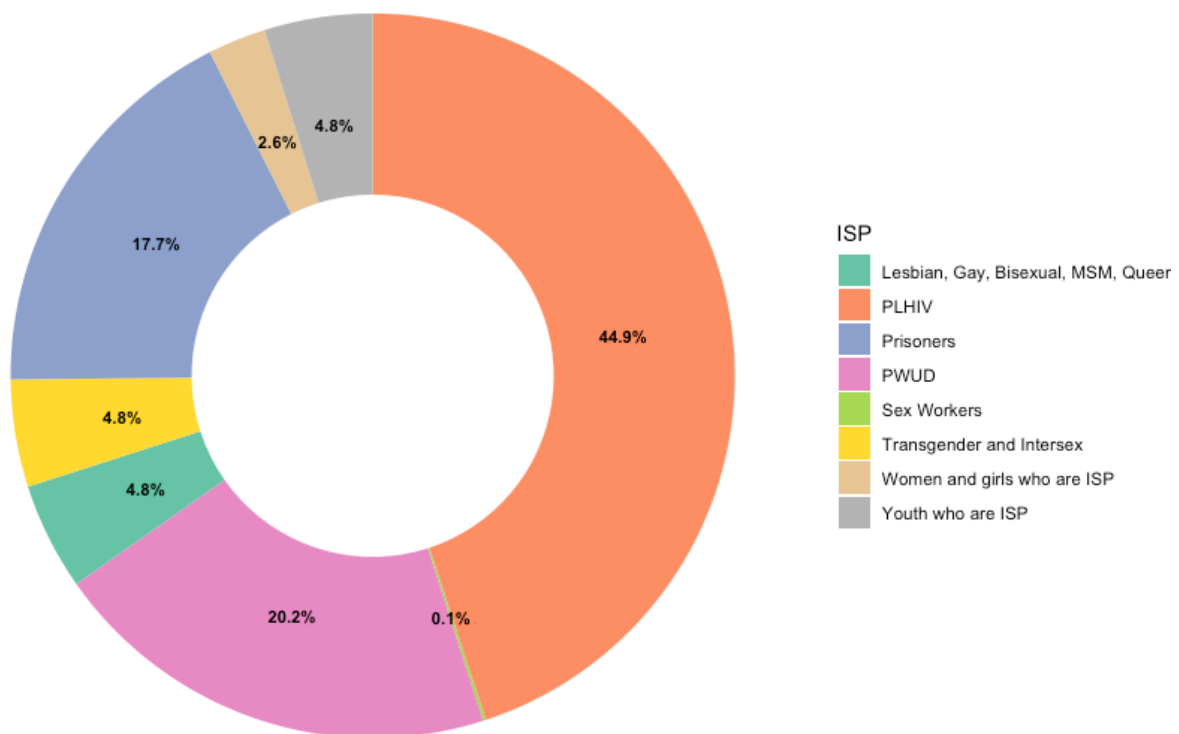
versus

⁵ Other grantees' budget sheets indicated that all funds went to the consortia's lead partner (the grantee); however, grantees like IAM and SANOP had regional partners which were considered local chapters of the lead partners and would not be recorded as independent consortium partners as in the budget sheets of GNP+ and IDPC.

core expenses. Figure 2 shows the distribution of SOF resources between the lead partner of the consortium, partner networks and research/technical partners (i.e.: those that provide training or technical assistance on a particular topic area and/or conduct research on behalf of the consortium).

Figures 3-5 below divide SOF spending by ISP, region and outcome area. Figure 3 shows grantee activity expenditure by ISP. ISPs most likely to benefit from SOF funding included people living with HIV (PLHIV) (44.9%), people who use drugs (PWUD) (20.2%) and prisoners (17.7%). Sex workers received the smallest proportion of SOF funding (0.1%).

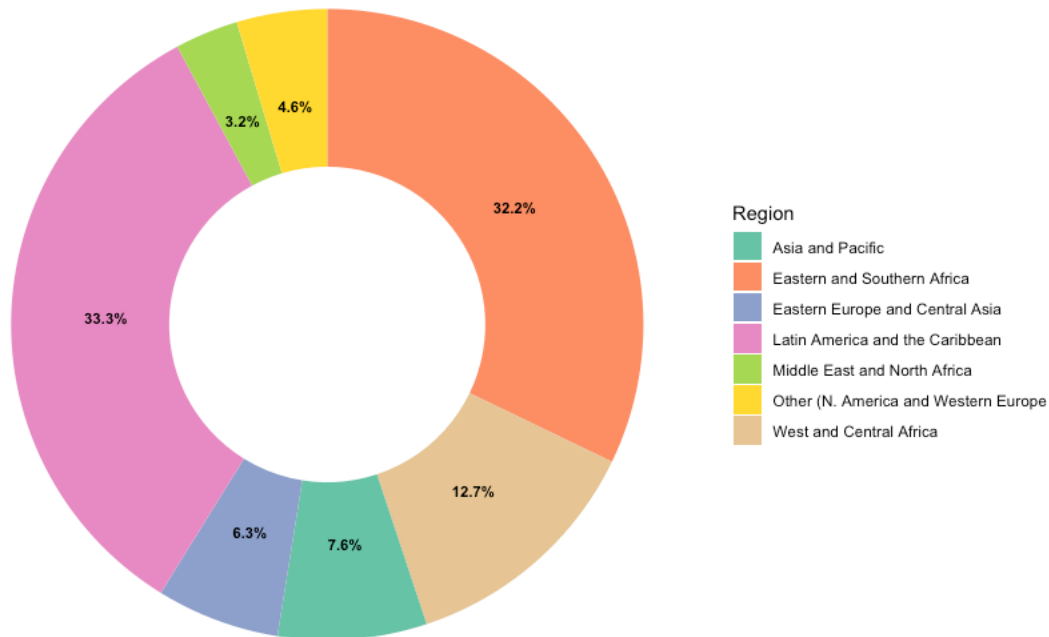
Figure 3. SOF Grantee Activity Expenditure per ISP (\$1.46 million)



RCF SOF Grantee Activity Expenditure per ISP												
	PLHIV	Sex Workers	PWUD	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, MSM, Queer	Transgender and Intersex	Prisoners	Women and girls who are ISP	Youth who are ISP	Migrants who are ISP	People living in rural areas	Other	Total
CVC	\$423,450	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$423,450
IDPC	\$0	\$0	\$293,921	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$35,977	\$35,977	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$365,874
SANOP	\$29,972	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$260,161	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$290,133
IAM	\$33,634	\$0	\$0	\$68,254	\$68,254	\$0	\$0	\$34,620	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$204,763
GNP	\$171,834	\$1,985	\$1,985	\$1,985	\$1,985	\$0	\$1,985	\$251	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$182,012
Total Expenditure (\$)	\$658,891	\$1,985	\$295,906	\$70,240	\$70,240	\$260,161	\$37,962	\$70,849	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,466,232
Total Expenditure (%)	44.9%	0.1%	20%	5%	5%	18%	3%	5%	0%	0%	0%	100%

Figure 4 shows grantee activity expenditure by region. Regions most likely to benefit from SOF funding included Latin America and the Caribbean (33.3%), East and Southern Africa (32.2%) and West and Central Africa (12.7%). The Middle East and North Africa received the smallest proportion of SOF funding (3.2%).

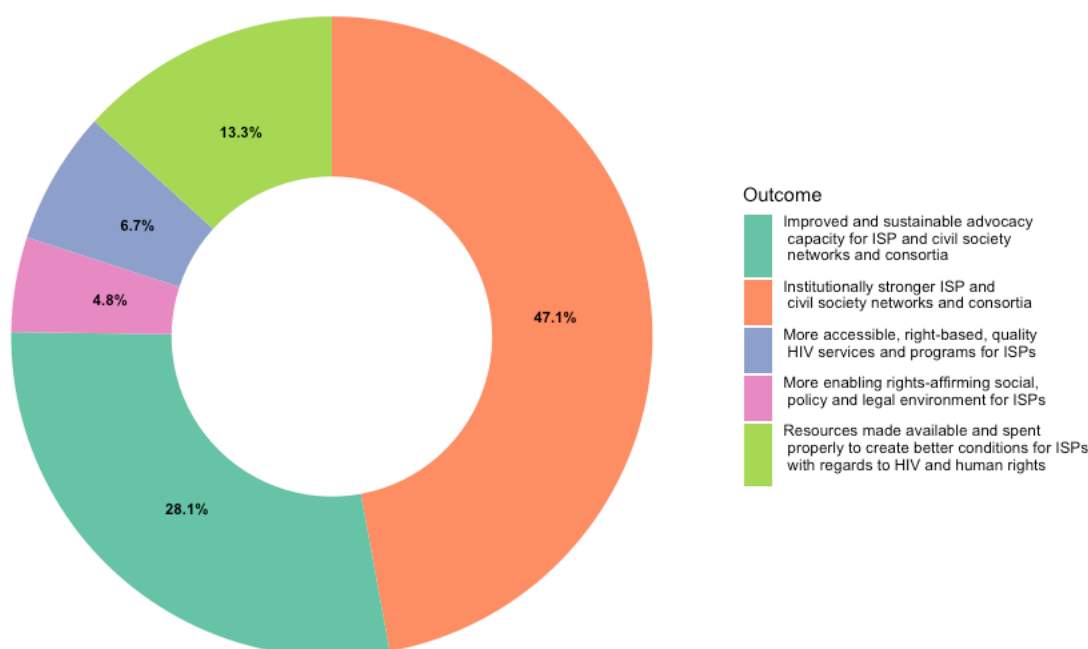
Figure 4. SOF Grantee Activity per Region (\$1.46 million)



RCF SOF Grantee Activity Expenditure per Region								
	Eastern and Southern Africa	West and Central Africa	Asia and Pacific	Eastern Europe and Central Asia	Latin America and the Caribbean	Middle East and North Africa	Other (N. America / Western Europe)	Total
CVC	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$423,450	\$0	\$0	\$423,450
IDPC	\$47,586	\$47,586	\$47,586	\$45,681	\$64,924	\$47,586	\$64,924	\$365,874
SANOP	\$290,133	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$290,133
IAM	\$102,382	\$102,382	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$204,763
GNP	\$31,438	\$36,934	\$64,027	\$46,766	\$0	\$0	\$2,846	\$182,012
Total Expenditure (\$)	\$471,539	\$186,902	\$111,613	\$92,448	\$488,374	\$47,586	\$67,770	\$1,466,233
Total Expenditure (%)	32%	13%	8%	6%	33%	3%	5%	100%

Figure 5 shows grantee activity expenditure by RCF SOF outcome area. Outcome areas that received the greatest proportion of SOF funding included, “institutionally strong ISP and civil society networks and consortia” (47.1%) and “improved and sustainable advocacy capacity for ISP and civil society networks and consortia” (28.1%). The outcome area “more enabling, rights-affirming social, policy and legal environment for ISPs” received the smallest proportion of SOF funding (4.8%).

Figure 5. SOF Grantee Activity per Outcome Area (\$1.46 million)



RCF SOF Grantee Activity Expenditure per Outcome Area						
Grantee	Institutionally stronger ISP and civil society networks and consortia	Improved and sustainable advocacy capacity for ISP and civil society networks and consortia	More enabling rights-affirming social, policy and legal environment for ISPs	More accessible, right-based, quality HIV services and programs for ISPs	Resources made available and spent properly to create better conditions for ISPs with regards to HIV and human rights	Total
CVC	\$273,450	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$150,000	\$423,450
IDPC	\$102,356	\$185,944	\$21,493	\$21,493	\$34,587	\$365,874
SANOP	\$170,204	\$95,737	\$0	\$24,192	\$0	\$290,133
IAM	\$121,838	\$30,066	\$0	\$52,859	\$0	\$204,763
GNP	\$22,896	\$100,436	\$48,838	\$0	\$9,843	\$182,012
Total Expenditure (\$)	\$690,744	\$412,183	\$70,331	\$98,544	\$194,430	\$1,466,233
Total Expenditure (%)	47%	28%	5%	7%	13%	100%

Grantees describe a symbiotic relationships between core and SOF funding

Grantees described the distinctions they saw between core funding from RCF and the SOF. Several interviewees spoke to seeing the core grant as a strong foundation to build new ideas and approaches with support from the SOF. One interviewee spoke about the importance of having everyday operating expenses, such as bank fees covered, so they could consider novel approaches to their work,

...the beauty of the SOF is that all of that was already covered by the core grant. All of these networks, they didn't have to worry about including in their budgets banking fees and financial

training and all of these other core things that Robert Carr Fund is brilliant because it allows us to do it. Because all of that was covered by the core grant, we were able to focus most of the attention in the SOF on the activity and on new ideas. I think that was really important because if we didn't have the core grant, you wouldn't be able to do that. That really allowed us to not have to worry about covering that stuff, but actually just be a bit creative and think about what new things we could do.

Another grantee spoke about the SOF as an opportunity to fund new activities that were only possible because of the capacity they were able to build through the core grant,

That, for us, is the distinction between these, is that the Carr grant, of course, does set up the conducive environment—you know, the systems and so forth—to allow us to be able to work. Then the Strategic Opportunity Fund, for us, was really more on the ensuring that, you know, now that we have programs we have set up, you know, in a way this space is how do we now have activities now to improve the capacity that we have built? That, for us, is the distinction between core funds and the strategic funds.

Grantees also spoke about how RCF's core grants don't really allow for expansion once you've reached the maximum. As a result, they said the SOF grant was an opportunity to think beyond the confines of the core grant,

...because the core grant, it is what it says it is. It is a core grant to fund your day-to-day stuff. Obviously we do put new ideas in there, but the kind of big-big thinking, the idea of just being able to come up with a whole new \$500,000 project that would never be possible within the confines of the core grant.

SOF funding was unique in its flexibility and enabling of experimentation

Grantees also experienced the SOF grant as a unique funding opportunity because it explicitly invited experimentation and afforded grantees the opportunity to change and adjust their activities based on what they learn. Several grantees mentioned how this degree of flexibility is not possible with funding from government or multilateral sources, where grant requirements are stricter. Grantees described feeling that RCF was giving them permission to try something new and to not be afraid of failing,

Try something new and don't be afraid that it might not work because that's okay." You know? It was all about trying something new and not being too risk-adverse. Again that was so refreshing to hear that from a donor. Like we work with lots of other donors, and they're all so indicator-and-results-focused. You know? Unless you tick every box after 18 months you failed. You know? I think that, for me personally, that came out really loud and clear.

This interviewee also reflected on experiences with other donors that are very focused on progress on specific indicators or achievement of the results as conceived; they found interacting with RCF to be both encouraging and supportive. Another grantee spoke about how when trying something new, you're not entirely sure what it will look like, and how that can be challenging to propose to a donor, where you want to preserve the relationship and appear competent,

I think that level of flexibility and that level of trust just allowed us to do this. It was even more important to the SOF because they wanted new projects and new ideas. By definition, that means you don't quite know what it's gonna look like.

Another grantee spoke about the relationship between the projects they took on under the SOF grant and how this was compatible with the core funding, where RCF had already expressed confidence in their work, and how that enabled them to take a risk with the SOF funding,

...new risky ventures that the strategic opportunities fund is focused on, the core funding really helped prepare the grant, so I think in that sense, the timing was ideal.

Grantees felt that this sense of trust and confidence from a donor was rare, and they directly connected their ability to take risks and try new things with the trust and confidence they felt from RCF.

Sustainability of SOF Work (RQ4)

SOF grantees experience continued demand for the work started with support from RCF. SOF grantees report continued demand for the work they started with support from RCF. The SOF grant gave them the opportunity to begin the work, to establish a proof of concept and to get partners on board for implementation. Several SOF grantees spoke about how partners are continuing the work, regardless of whether they have been able to raise new funds. For example, IDPC spoke about how they heard from both activist and government stakeholders about a desire to be included in their Global Drug Policy Index. As they were only able to include thirty countries in the first round, many countries expressed a strong desire to be included in subsequent rounds,

...everyone was complaining about why their country wasn't included; everyone wanted to be included. Because with the resources available one of the hardest things we had to decide quite early on was we couldn't do the indexing, all 192 countries.

IAM spoke about the need to continue the work they started in schools, where relationships had formed between activists, teachers, parents and learners. They shared that their partners have continued this work even after the SOF support ended.

All the partners are doing some kind of following up implementation, having conversations with parents, teachers, principals, again, on different levels. Some are engaging with their educational departments in their regions, and it's a continuation of the process in accompaniment, helping them to if it's policy change or whatever the case might be in their specific context, it's an ongoing process of, yeah, of trying to find a safer space for young people, assisting the teachers, and yeah, building on the work that we started, and actually, it's growing. I don't think that we thought it was such a big project, but it is an enormous project, and it's evolving as we go, as we move forward.

SOF grantees have experienced challenges raising funds to continue the work; however the SOF funding helped them overcome structural barriers to funding

IAM also shared a sense of urgency around raising other funds to support this work. The SOF project enabled them to start working with a set of partners, and many of those partners would benefit from future support. Since the SOF support ended, they've also gotten interest from new partners in starting similar work in schools. An IAM interviewee said,

Our work is always collaborative, and what this fund has helped us to do is to expand those collaboration partners, and I think a very critical thing that [name omitted] and I talk about constantly is to get more funding for this because we're at the point now where we have identified more collaboration partners, and now this is actually the time where the work needs to be done.

IDPC is in a similar position; SOF funding enabled them to put in place a solid methodology and partners with capacity to do data collection for this new area of work, but they have yet to be able to raise funds to support future work.

We now have the methodology, so with a few tweaks we don't have to reinvent the wheel. It's really just about funding for things like the data collection, the capacity, the civil society on the ground. All of those kind of things.

IDPC shared some of the work they have done to raise funds, including identifying other prospective donors and working to establish relationships with them. However, they have not yet been able to secure support to continue the work.

Even though we've got the methodology, it's a big project that we're gonna have to fundraise for. We're gonna see how the Wellcome Trust receive it, but also we can't put all our eggs in that basket, so we also need to keep looking. As things stand we don't have anything confirmed. You know? We don't have anything set in stone and we're just gonna have to, yeah, keep trying and keep pounding away.

IDPC felt pressure from to fundraise to continue the work, as they've seen the value of the first round in the work they've done and also feel a demand from the field, particularly countries who were not included in the first round,

...we feel the pressure of that a bit on our shoulders because we are naturally taking the lead on that fundraising part, and it's gonna be interesting to see what we manage to pull together for this.

SANOP shared that one of their key fundraising challenges is that UNAIDS and other multi-lateral and bilateral donors may not recognize prisoners as a key population, which excludes them from several sizeable funding opportunities. This has made it challenging for them to raise funds to support their work. A SANOP interviewee shared,

We have approached UNAIDS funds...Some of the feedback we have received is that, you know, some of them don't consider the prison folk as a key pop'. Yeah. Those are some of the challenges. Increasingly I think we need to educate the partners to say the prison population is a key population, and it is really also inadequately served.

Structural barriers to funding also impacted CVC, who spoke about how many countries in the Caribbean are not considered low income enough to qualify for certain funding related to development aid, such as the Global Fund. A CVC interviewee said,

...Because although it's not related to HIV, per se, it very much is tied in with continuity of the services and the ability for the organizations to be sustainable in the long run, because the reality is that most of the organizations in the Caribbean are no longer really eligible for funding because there was this whole bank classification.

However, CVC shared how the SOF funding enabled them to secure continued support for the work they started from the Global Fund. That happened in part because they were able to hire specialized staff with skills and knowledge of social enterprises and work with them to establish a proof of concept for their work.

...one of the benefits, again, that came from the Robert Carr Network Fund is that it enabled us to put in place a team at CVC that is dedicated to the social enterprise as a way of generating income. We were able to have that in-house capacity and with the expertise of specifically helping grassroots organizations and NGOs working with key populations. So far, we've been able to maintain that to the Global Fund Grants that we now have that will be kicking in. The first one has already kicked in, and we certainly intend to knock on other doors. One of the funders that have expressed an interest is the Interamerican Foundation, so we'll definitely be writing a proposal to them to further this work because it's definitely something where CVC feels is a fundamental part of our work.

CVC was able to include a social enterprise component in two upcoming Global Fund grants. The groundwork for this was laid when during COVID they had some additional funds remaining from a prior Global Fund grant, and they were able to socialize the global fund to the social enterprise work they started with support from SOF. The Global Fund became familiar with the work and approved the use of the remaining grant funds to support it. When it came time to submit future applications for Global Fund support, they were already familiar with the social enterprise work and willing to include it up front in subsequent proposals.

...we've got two new Global Fund Grants starting up. One is starting up—one has started up just last month, and one is gonna be starting up at the end of this year, the big one, the one for big countries, and we've managed to have a social enterprise component in Global Fund Grants, in both those grants.

CVC felt that the support from RCF's SOF was critically important for them to be able to get buy-in from donors like the Global Fund.

Particularly the first year of the Robert Carr Network Fund was instrumental in terms of getting us to getting buy-in from other donors like the Global Fund.

The CVC interviewee also shared that these negotiations have not been easy, but would likely have not been possible at all without the SOF grant support.

Lessons Learned

As described in the findings, SOF grantees were able to take on work they had been thinking about for a long time, but either lacked support to implement or were implementing without dedicated support. Activities proposed through the SOF were distinct from those supported with RCF core support. In several cases, grantees were able to deepen the implementation of their work with ISPs or branch out into closed settings that require dedicated effort and relationship-building to access. As a result, grantees strengthened partnerships at all levels—regional and country networks, government stakeholders and field-level experts. Simultaneously, networks and consortia developed training and capacity building materials, internal expertise in new areas and some were able to raise dedicated funds to support the work started with support from the SOF. Upon reflection, activities completed with SOF support better aligned the work of national and regional networks and consortia with the needs of ISPs on the ground, as well as provided space for adaptations that made sense for the local context.

Dedicated funding outside of core grants helps align funding with work being done on the ground; support from networks and consortia made this work possible

The SOF provided an opportunity for consortia and networks to obtain funding for ideas they had that had not been funded and/or work they had been doing without support. In several cases grantees were able to respond from demands from network members to support collaborations or presence on the ground in a way that had they had not been able to previously. For example, CVC hired staff with skills and experience in social enterprise, while SANOP expanded the presence of peer educators in women's prisons. When researchers spoke with partners on the ground, we heard about how useful this support was, especially coming from global, regional and national networks. For example, a CVC country partner spoke about how the support they received through SOF helped them gain skills in financial management and confidence to pursue an entrepreneurial venture,

For us, just I have been receiving support that we started getting, but the support that came from them was not financial support...They walked us through. They helped us out with the business plan, [helped us] look at your profits and loss...the weaknesses, the challenge, look at it from head to toes, everything.

This interviewee went on to describe how her CVC coach provided 1:1 support after group trainings in a way that helped her progress in starting a business that would support the activities of her community-based organization.

A SANOP country chapter said something similar about how critical the support from the network was for the work being done on the ground by ensuring their organization had the

capacity to provide training in income-generating activities to inmates, skills that country staff may not have had in-house,

SANOP, it had a very big impact in our community system, strengthening a pillar or project of our organization when it comes through working with associations of ex-inmates living with HIV in our communities, so what SANOP was doing was to train the associations of people living with HIV, ex-inmates, in communities. They were trained in leadership. They were trained in the business skills running successful livelihoods and income-generating activities.

While the core funding provided infrastructure support for network partners, the SOF funding enabled grantees to take on specific programs and services and work more closely with partners at the regional and country-level. As a result, activities were better able to respond to the needs that emerged from partner organizations, both financial as well as those related to technical assistance and training. This was further supported by the development of resource materials that could be used by network partners.

[SOF funding encouraged local adaptation, but not everything grantees tried worked](#)

SOF grantees described a high degree of local adaptation in project implementation. The flexibility of the SOF grant allowed networks and consortia to support a wide variety of initiatives proposed by local partners, ensuring that approaches were locally relevant. For example, IDPC described a wide variety of projects that were undertaken to use their Global Drug Policy Index for advocacy,

Beyond that we left it entirely up to them to decide what they wanted to do. In some places they did a workshop; some places did media outreach or a radio spot; some did seminars; others did expert meetings where they gathered policymakers together; and others actually went to their parliament and presented this to parliament, or got MPs to present it on their behalf.

At the same time, this low barrier for entry resulted in project sites where the work did not gain traction. CVC described how the trainings and coaching they did for nonprofits to develop social enterprises resulted in few organizations that were able to launch successful businesses,

Particularly as the intensity of the work escalated, we had a number of those organizations that had to drop out, but what was interesting for me was that many of them said we've not felt it in a waste of time. It's just that we've realized that this moment in time, they're not in a position to dedicate the staff to doing the exercises, to develop a business plan, to do everything that's required in order to get the funding.

Even though the number of organizations that successfully started a business was small, CVC spoke about the importance of self-reflection about alternative income streams was useful, even if it did not result in immediate action.

IAM also spoke about how they initially hoped to work in eight countries, but ultimately the work took off in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Ghana, with fewer activities in Botswana and other

target countries. IAM attributed their ability to work in fewer countries to COVID-19 and SOF's short grant period, it's also possible that they were too ambitious to take on work in schools, a new setting for them, in so many countries.

The SOF was intended to support new and experimental work. While much of the work SOF supported did not end up being "new ideas", it did support unfunded work on the ground, as well as novel ideas that other funders had dismissed. The SOF also provided networks with the opportunity to reconsider how they're reaching ISPs, and in some cases, deepen and/or expand their work in closed settings, such as prisons and schools.

The structure of SOF funding encouraged a high level of ambition in terms of the number of countries reached and partners doing implementation. However, as the work had experimental elements, networks and consortia often had to reduce the number of countries of focus, paying particular attention to where there was interest.

Conclusions

Researchers identified the following conclusions as a result of a thorough document review and interviews with SOF grantees and partners:

- SOF funding better aligned funding with what network and consortia partners are doing on the ground, both through **supporting unfunded ideas, as well as existing work that lacked adequate support**.
- SOF funding enabled networks and consortia to **deepen their engagement with ISPs**, including by expanding their work in closed settings such as prisons and schools.
- The majority of work done under the SOF matched what was proposed and **the majority of funds were spent on project activities** (as opposed to core spending). SOF activities encouraged local adaptation and enabled a high degree of flexibility that respected the local context. However, the scale of work completed was smaller than what was planned—**grantees worked in fewer countries and worked deeply with fewer partners** than anticipated. This reduction resulted from limitations related to COVID-19, but also the need to plan for new areas of work not necessarily working out for partners as they had originally planned.
- Almost half of the SOF's activity funds is invested in RCF's outcome area related to **institutionally stronger ISP and civil society networks**.
- **Deepened partnerships** were a key outcome of the SOF. Partnerships emerged with regional and country networks, field-level experts and coalitions and government stakeholders.
- **Capacity building materials** were developed with resources from the SOF—these materials continue to be used by funded and unfunded partners across multiple regions. They have also been valuable for SOF grantees in their efforts to raise additional funds to support this work. **Technical support** from networks and consortia made the work on the ground possible.
- SOF funding **generated demand** for more work from partners and consortia and networks feel pressure to raise additional funds to support the work. In some cases, they have been able to **leverage the work completed under SOF to obtain more funding**.