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CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION: LESSONS FROM APC'S SUBGRANTING EXPERIENCE

Alan Finlay



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1. Introduction

“We are absolutely not a grantmaker,” says veteran internet rights activist Karen Banks, now the Association for Progressive Communications’ (APC) financial director, and who for nearly 30 years has dedicated herself to the organisation. Her resistance to the suggestion hints at the risk APC might face from those looking in from the outside – and how APC, an organisation started in 1990, with a current membership of some 61 organisations working on social justice and internet rights, sees itself. “This is a crucial point,” says Banks. “Sometimes people might see you as that, but we have to work hard at dispelling the idea that we are just handing out money.”

“When you talk about the difference between a donor and what we do,” adds Chat Garcia Ramilo, APC’s executive director, “you need to remember we are a membership organisation. The work is built around the strategic plan, which we develop with the members. Subgranting is a way for APC’s members to contribute to the strategic plan, while allowing broadness and flexibility.”

“But the strategic plan creates the boundaries,” she says. “It defines the basis of unity of the members. We are not the only ones determining how you define and how you get to the issues – that is as valuable.”

Subgranting – when a donor allocates a substantial amount of money to a credible organisation for further disbursement to other organisations – is becoming more common as a strategy by large donors to make sure that funding is reaching the right people. It reduces the administrative burden for donors on working individually with organisations on relatively small projects, and the uncertainty they might feel about worthy or convincing projects or organisations to support. Organisations like APC serve as intermediaries to these funds – they are strategically situated to provide the kinds of guarantees needed by donors that their money will be disbursed well.

Subgranting is not without its detractors; for some it limits the ability of organisations to approach mainstream funders for the first time, and curtails their access to funding. This places an additional responsibility on organisations like APC to make sure they are doing their job of subgranting well and being transparent and fair in how they share the funds.

Since 2016, APC has run a subgranting programme funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), disbursing over USD 1.2 million to 35 organisations over the period. The programme has an annual competitive open call for project grants, and a rolling small grant fund that is available to members throughout the year. It has funded diverse projects, mostly in the global South, in

countries such as Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon in Africa, Argentina and Colombia in Latin America, and Bangladesh, India and the Philippines in Asia. A discretionary fund in the organisation made up from members fees, called the Solidarity Fund, has meant organisations in the United States, and other so-called “developed countries” such as Spain and South Korea, have also received support as part of the programme.

“Being a new APC member, we felt it was important to partner with it. It is different to work with donors, where the process is normally longer with endless requirements. More disturbing is the fact that sometimes donors want to twist the idea, assuming to understand the context better than local actors.” – *Dorothy Mukasa, Unwanted Witness (Uganda)*

APC is not entirely new to subgranting, at least as far as disbursing funds amongst member organisations with a collective goal in mind goes. Its earliest experience of this, Banks says, were the ICT Policy Monitors, cross-border projects

that were part of APC’s earliest internet rights work in Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa, funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Open Society Initiative (OSI) and Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED) in the early 2000s. The policy monitors were websites where members published regional ICT policy content using APC’s open source automated publishing tool, Action Apps. “There were about 12 members participating in the policy monitors,” says Banks. “They followed important policy advocacy issues and trends in their countries. That’s where we intentionally conceptualised a project we wanted to work together with members on – that was a priority in our strategic plan at the time.”

Subgranting has also been an advocacy strategy for several projects at APC, including GenARDIS,¹ EROTICS and the Take Back the Tech! Fund,² run by the organisation’s Women’s Rights Programme (WRP). More recently, subgranting is being used in its Sida-funded “Connecting the Unconnected” project³ on local access and community networks in the global South, has been tested in WRP’s Feminist Tech Exchange, and now forms an important part of its EU-funded Challenge project,⁴ just launched in Asia, which is advocating at the intersection of freedom of expression and religious intolerance.

All of these have worked with APC members as well as non-members. In contrast, APC’s Sida-funded subgranting programme, as well as its Member Exchange and Travel Fund (METF),⁵ which allows organisations to participate in events and in member exchanges, is only available to members.

As Garcia Ramilo points out, to understand APC’s Sida-funded subgranting programme – or its “core” subgranting work – one first needs to appreciate that the organisation’s strategic plan and priorities are developed in collaboration with its members. These provide the broader context for the disbursement of funds. Project proposals need to show how they are linked to the key result areas (KRAs), and how they will contribute to achieving them. However, organisations decide what they want to do, and how.

1. <https://www.apc.org/en/project/genardis>; <https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/books/genardis-2002-2010-small-grants-made-big-changes-w>
2. <https://www.apc.org/en/project/mdg3-take-back-tech-fund>
3. <https://www.apc.org/en/project/connecting-unconnected-supporting-community-networks-and-other-community-based-connectivity>
4. <https://www.apc.org/en/project/challenge>
5. <https://www.apc.org/en/project/member-exchange-and-travel-fund>

The process is, in effect, symbiotic: while the organisations self-define their advocacy needs, they do this to realise the organisation's strategic priorities that they themselves have already helped to table.

Because project and small grant proposals are not thematically constrained, other than the need to speak to APC's KRAs, the range of initiatives funded by APC's subgranting programme is impressive, and even pushes the organisation outside of its usual focus on "the internet". Grant recipients have held feminist festivals with poetry, theatre, storytelling, exhibitions and film screenings; they have developed radio programmes on online gender-based violence, produced documentaries, worked with writers and film-makers, and even used funds to print Pillku, a magazine focusing on "bodies, genders and identities on the internet", which was circulated in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, joining a long tradition of feminist print magazines in the region.

A number of organisations have used the funds for research and advocacy – mapping spaces to shed new light on actors working in areas such as feminist politics, to unlock policy bottlenecks, or to build an advocacy argument when taking on technology giants like Facebook and Google in Palestine. Sometimes this work has put researchers at risk, forcing a change in plans. Many of these threats were experienced in Asia, whether investigating the plight of informal woman e-waste recyclers in Mumbai and Selampul, revealing the use of hashtags to influence political discourse in Pakistan, or mapping extrajudicial murders in Duarte's anti-drug pogrom in the Philippines. Funds have also been used for what members have considered ground-breaking research, such as research by Point of View⁶ reconceptualising the notion of data, privacy and the liminality of bodies – offering fresh insight into how to think about privacy and data in a new age of ubiquitous artificial intelligence.

Significant work has been done on fighting online gender-based violence by members working in all regions in the global South, including an interesting initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina to build the digital security protocols of safe houses for women, and to develop the digital business skills of victims of abuse. Projects have pushed for open governance and transparency, sought to raise awareness of advocacy instruments such as the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms,⁷ and the Feminist Principles of the Internet,⁸ and worked with journalists – most notably in Pakistan, where Media Matters for Democracy⁹ has built the capacity of journalists on a range of issues, in a media environment it describes as "deliberately regressive".

6. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/point-view>

7. <https://africaninternetrights.org/>

8. <https://feministinternet.org/>

9. <https://www.apc.org/en/members/media-matters-democracy-mmfd>

Practical, hands-on projects have also been funded, including a start-up project making computer cables in Nigeria, the ground-work for an e-waste recycling project in Argentina, digital libraries or "technical and cultural repositories" in communities with poor

connectivity, and even the development of an app to “automate and collate collective responses” by feminists in Asia to online gender-based violence.

What these projects suggest is that subgranting can be a creative and exciting adventure into “grassroots” advocacy for APC, what APC member May First Movement Technology¹⁰ calls “direct activism”, bringing it closer to the important work that its members do.

But if subgranting is to grow as an advocacy mechanism for APC, what are the opportunities and challenges that it faces, given its commitment to building a network that is collaborative, and works towards realising shared ideals and concerns? What can we learn from APC’s subgranting experience, and what can its own experience tell it about how to move forward strategically, and coherently, as a membership-led organisation focused on human rights, social justice and the internet?

“The problem is that we have become extremely powerful,” says Banks. “So the way we do it is important.”

This discussion has been developed through a series of 11 interviews with APC members who were grant recipients of its core subgranting programme, as well as staff working on subgranting in the organisation. It includes a review of project reports, and a survey sent to all grant recipients, as well as those who have been the recipients of subgrants as part of the “Connecting the Unconnected” project.

It suggests that subgranting is a powerful way to catalyse change on the ground, to raise the profiles of an organisation’s work and to help it break new ground on issues that are often left unattended. It can strengthen and grow advocacy networks.

But it also comes with risks: it can place enormous strain on the administrative capacity of the disbursing organisation, and it needs to be actively and sensitively managed to be successful. As Pavitra Ramanujam, until recently the coordinator of APC’s subgranting programme, puts it, subgranting is a “continuing conversation”.

10. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/may-first-movement-technology>

Promoting the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms

Several organisations have used subgrant funding to raise awareness of the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms, and to promote the adoption of its principles on the continent. These include PROTEGE QV, who conducted research and advocacy in Cameroon, assessing the extent to which the key principles of the Declaration were reflected in internet rights in their country, and organising what it called “Impact Talks” on the theme; CIPESA, whose campaign in Uganda and Ghana aimed to improve the capacity of African digital rights organisations, including several APC members, to strategically use the Declaration to influence internet regulation and policy-making processes; and Rudi International, who hosted HakiConf2019, a conference on human rights in the digital age in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Expanding rights: Using the Feminist Principles of the Internet

The Feminist Principles of the Internet (FPIs) were promoted in several projects over the four-year grant-making period. In 2017, MMfD used the FPIs to orientate its team of developers working on an app to facilitate a collective response to the online harassment of women. In 2018, with support from a small grant, One World Platform sought to connect the FPIs with the lived experiences and reality of feminists, women’s rights, sexual rights and digital rights activists from the western Balkans. They did this by, amongst other things, producing in-depth articles on a feminist internet in regional languages, and a guide to the FPIs. In 2019, Point of View used the FPIs to “imagine a feminist internet” in South Asia. “We wanted to understand and interrogate normative practices that restrict women’s access to, use of and participation in digital spaces,” it said. In another interesting initiative in 2019, with the support of another project grant, MMfD set out to encourage journalists to write on women’s internet rights issues beyond the usual framing of “harassment” and “economic empowerment”, commissioning 10 feature-length articles on topics including online dating, inclusion of transgender communities in online spaces, and access to credible information. The project also produced a 10-episode podcast – localising the FPIs in the home languages of women and gender minorities – that explored various reasons that contribute to the wide digital gender divide in Pakistan, and suggested steps to bridge it.

2. Working in context: Perspectives from organisations who have benefited from APC's subgranting programme

2.1. Getting off the ground

"Making a mark in digital rights"

Media Matters for Democracy (MMfD) is a young organisation that started working at the intersection of media capacity, digital rights and development in Pakistan five years ago. Two of its three co-founders are former journalists, in an industry the organisation's director Sadaf Khan describes as "deliberately regressive" – lacking focus on digital news business models and showing little interest in internet rights. "We could see and sense very easily that our industry was going to be in crises," says Khan.

"What makes APC subgrants different is that the procedures and processes are credible and genuine; the templates are user-friendly compared to other donors. The subgrant gives feedback to the applicants even when the proposed project/initiative has not been considered. Then usually the APC team is available in case applicants need more clarification and if there are complications with submission. WOUGNET, through the different projects funded by APC, has been able to bring on board different stakeholders such as policy makers, civil society organisations, the media, the different communities to develop a deeper understanding of issues related to women's access and usage of internet, gender-based violence online, and legal frameworks around gender and ICTs."

– Peace Oliver Amuge, WOUGNET (Uganda)

APC's subgranting programme allowed MMfD to get off the ground; it was the first bit of funding the fledgling organisation received, and it is one of the organisations that has received project grant or small grant funding each year since 2016, allowing it to confront burning issues such as online harassment of women journalists, and campaigning against restrictive cybercrime legislation. "We had people working in a voluntary capacity

before that," says Khan, adding, "Having support helped us work in a more focused manner."

This focus raised its profile in the sector quickly: "The first set of grants we received enabled us to make our mark in digital rights, such as our campaigning around cybercrime legislation. We were able to strengthen our advocacy tools by engaging and creating public pressure, reaching out to allies. It was a critical time for activism in Pakistan. It helped establish our own direction," she says.

One of MMfD's most successful projects funded through the subgrant programme is its Digital Rights Monitor. It is the only website on internet rights from a journalistic perspective in Pakistan. "We started the Digital Rights Monitor as a pretty small-scale project with an APC grant. This was useful to us

because APC is not the EU or USAID, who will bind us to a political agenda. APC has never interfered editorially in our work, which I fear I might be getting from any state-based entity. So in that sense APC was the perfect partner and support to launch something like this,” says Khan.

This freedom was felt in other ways, including in the process of conceptualising the project and applying for the subgrant. “We apply to a lot of donors,” says Khan, “but we find that APC’s subgranting programme is more transparent. When we received feedback on our applications, it has been pretty clear. I never felt I was forced to do anything that was suggested. Recommendations were presented as recommendations. I was free to do a back and forth if the suggestions were not responsive to the context that I was working in.”

“For us the subgrant funding has enabled us to implement activities that are critical to our work but that otherwise would require a long wait and uncertainty – they would need to be self-funded from contributions from our members or be funded by external funders. The activity supported by APC [municipal systems for the reuse and recycling of second-hand technology] has not only local impact, but also contributes to the visibility of APC, and has benefits to other APC member organisations. Our visibility in the local and global scope, in terms of environmental impact of ICTs, is clearly improved, and in specific terms, it has expanded the number and quality of our activities and partnerships.” – *Leandro Navarro, Pangea (Spain). Like May First in the US, Pangea received funding from APC’s Solidarity Fund as part of its subgrant programme. It has worked with Nodo Tau on environmental sustainability.*

While MMfD is a relatively new APC member, Khan is no stranger to APC. She worked on its IMPACT¹¹ project, and conducted research for the organisation before starting MMfD.

She emphasises how critical the seed funding from the subgranting programme has been. Besides carving out a voice for the organisation in the media sector in Pakistan, it has, like other subgrant recipients, allowed MMfD to approach donors for addition-

al support, something that would have been difficult without a “proof of concept” to build on. Without this, she expresses some doubt that the organisation’s work would have been possible at all: “Because MMfD was very new, these subgrants from APC have been very, very important for us. They have let us do things and experiment with methodologies which might have been difficult for us as a new organisation venturing into the development area for the first time.”

“Developing a research space”

7amleh,¹² a Palestinian digital rights organisation, also started primarily as a volunteer-driven organisation in 2013, growing to eight staffers in six years. It has done critical work on highlighting what it calls the “digital occupation” of Palestine.

Its research, funded by APC’s subgrants, has enabled it to carve out a space of its own in the internet rights field: “The work has enabled us to develop our research capacity, which forms the base of our advocacy work and our resource development work,” says Alison Carmel, in charge of international relations in the organisation.

11. <https://www.apc.org/en/project/advocacy-change-through-technology-india-malaysia-and-pakistan>

12. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/7amleh-arab-center-social-media-advancement>

She says, “In the case of Palestine, there has been very little research conducted in this area. However, our early research has contributed to a change and has inspired others. There is new research being undertaken by several organisations, academics and students. It has also created an evidence base for our advocacy and campaigning work and enabled us to contribute to international research and advocacy efforts.”

While Carmel says there is scope to improve APC’s communications with members, she says even when 7amleh did not get support from the subgranting fund, “we did have a conversation about why not, and it was helpful.”

“You have different types of donors, but the work with APC really does feel like a partnership. When we are attending global conferences, we get invitations to higher-level meetings and introductions to important decision makers and power holders. We do feel that APC is the champion of our work and pretty much always available and supporting us,” she says.

“Getting rooted in communities”

The Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD),¹³ an organisation working on ICTs for development and governance in Nigeria, is also a relatively new APC member, having joined the network in 2015. Its executive director, Y.Z. Ya’u, says it did not know about the subgranting programme before it joined. Instead it saw in APC “an organisation that was working on issues that we are passionate about, and we saw an opportunity to leverage solidarity.”

CITAD has received a number of subgrants since 2016, including for producing a 13-part radio programme on online gender-based violence as part of a capacity building programme where it trained around 500 women and girls in preventing digital violence. “Women listen to the radio – it has a certain credibility, and it also reaches those without internet access,” explains Ya’u, when I ask him why the campaign was not put online instead.

In 2019, through small grant funding support, CITAD set out assessing the facilities, initiatives and policies for the digital inclusion of people with disabilities in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria.

“This is a work in progress,” Ya’u says. “We have found that students living with disabilities, in higher education, are generally left out digitally. There are very few institutions that have special facilities for people with disabilities. There are very few libraries where they can have access to e-books, for example. So students with disabilities, such as visual impairment or hearing difficulties, are pushed into special education. Even if they wanted to study law and engineering, they would be pushed to study in special education, because that is where they have facilities.”

13. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/centre-information-technology-and-development-citad>

“To get into normal higher institutions for learning, they firstly needed to be IT literate to pass the entrance examination. Because there are very few centres where they can sit for examinations, a lot of people are shut out automatically. They can’t even get admission, never mind getting in and crossing the next hurdles,” Ya’u says.

He says that CITAD found that many institutions also do not have policies for teachers on how to help people with disabilities in the classroom. “You have a situation where visually impaired students will use a recorder to record, but because there are no policies some lecturers will chastise them in front of the class,” he says.

Ya’u sees subgranting as an important part of APC, allowing members to do work that they ordinarily would not be able to do without funding. “It has allowed members to gain more experience, in a way to get rooted in their own communities.” This is strategically important for CITAD, he says, and allows the organisations to be more responsive to the immediate context of its work. He adds, “The advantage is that when it takes long, as is the case with other grants, sometimes conditions will change and assumptions change; with APC subgranting the time is very short, so things do not get to change dramatically. This means you can move ahead with the same set of assumptions.”

“We feel this small grants programme provides lots of flexibility compared to others that require us to work in a more structured proposal. It also gives a wider frame to propose an idea, allowing us to be creative and also keep connected with moving local contexts and needs given the short term of execution. The programme’s funds obtained this year allowed us to dedicate specific funds to adapting a website we already had, and dedicate some staff time to producing information and activating our networks around the topic, thus complementing our ongoing work and leveraging our existent network by allowing us to advance on a specific issue in a timely manner. Because of the programme’s flexibility both in topics and possible activities, the delimited framework that allows us to have the funds in a short period of time and start working and finishing the project help us to keep focus on the project and to respond to specific situations on time, all in alignment with APC priorities of action that matched our own in the region.” – *Paula Jaramillo, Derechos Digitales (Chile)*

Subgranting, he says, creates visibility for APC members locally, which is then amplified through the network. “We create a voice on local issues. When we speak locally, APC provides a platform to get our voices out into a wider space. In a way subgranting brings its voice to local contexts, and takes our own voice into global space. It was a space to learn about new ways of doing things and about a new subject,” he says.

Ya’u says CITAD has found the process of subgranting “transparent and efficient”. Furthermore, “It is not a cumbersome process; once you make the request, all the particular documents are available and the funds are released.”

Like a number of other members, the APC grants have created an opportunity for CITAD to apply for funding on the same topic elsewhere, suggesting how subgranting, although funding a short-term intervention, can contribute meaningfully to long-term organisational sustainability.

Subgranting has also allowed CITAD to work more closely with the other APC member in Nigeria, Fantsuam Foundation.¹⁴ “We have them involved in training and capacity building in three of the subgrants that we have done,” says Ya’u, adding, “Because of that we have involved them in other work that we do. We knew them before, but we had not worked with them in a very sustained way.”

“It gave us experience in what’s possible”

“It gave us experience in what’s possible,” says Bob Aston from the Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN),¹⁵ an NGO that works on information and knowledge exchange in rural communities in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

With support from a subgrant in 2018, ALIN built a digital library to collect, manage, index and distribute digital items to communities around the Ng’arua Maarifa Centre in Laikipia county in Kenya.

Despite its experience (ALIN has been a member of APC since 2003), this was something new for the organisation, and an attempt to redress what it calls “weak communities of practice” in rural areas, the result of a lack of access to reliable information. The digital library, set up at the Ng’arua Maarifa Centre in the village, includes videos and multimedia information on agriculture, climate change and indigenous technical knowledge.

“It’s a remote place,” explains Aston, adding, “They can’t access the internet. We wanted to share knowledge of best practices on things like farming, and also to educate the community about climate change. We hoped that these best practices would be further shared in the area, and adopted by others over time.”

This work proved invaluable in helping ALIN develop a second proposal – this time on strengthening access to information held by Meru county government, also in Kenya – which it successfully presented to a donor.

“We lacked funds to implement the Ng’arua project,” says Aston. “We did not have enough funds, so this would not have been possible if we did not receive the grant.”

2.2. Speaking the same language

“The creative space to explain”

One World Platform (OWP)¹⁶ is the only organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina working consistently on online gender-based violence.

This leaves it in a precarious and isolated position: “In my country we don’t have demonstrations, we don’t go to the

14. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/fantsuam-foundation>

15. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/arid-lands-information-network>

16. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/one-world-platform>

street and protest. It would be nice, but the mentality and history itself is not working for us. The topic of online violence against women and girls, it is still 'new'. We have been talking about it for at least five years, and although some organisations are beginning to explore it, we are still the only organisation with a core mission to address online gender-based violence," says Valida Hromadzic, the director of programmes in the organisation.

"It is much more agile to apply for the APC grant to the extent that the proposal to be sent is more concrete and the documentation requirements are lower. The fact that the proposal format requested by APC is so concrete allows to focus well on the objectives, activities, products and results, not only in accordance with the interests of the organisation but also with the strategic lines of APC." – *Julián Casasbuenas G., Colnodo (Colombia)*

She adds, "Without APC and other members, I would ask myself, 'What the hell am I doing? Why am I doing this?'"

OWP previously received funding to work on Take Back the Tech! campaigns,¹⁷ but more recently they were the recipient of subgrants to build

the capacity for digital security in safe houses for women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to train the survivors of domestic violence in digital business skills.

As the only organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina working on the issues of online digital security and violence against women, they say that APC's subgrants have been critical to the work they do. "We have never been funded by any governmental organisation in my country. So basically APC is the only organisation so far that has recognised that the issue is important, and were willing to fund it," says Hromadzic.

Furthermore, "We applied with a similar project as our safe houses project, but on a bigger scale, to international organisations focusing on women, and still we never received the funds. People do not see the work we do with the victims as economic empowerment, they don't see creating websites as a way of earning money. The only way they see it is making a cake."

Like other members interviewed for this publication, OWP finds the process for applying for a subgrant "easy", although Hromadzic does admit that the financial reporting was a lot of work, including "scanning all the documents", an effort that she assesses in a refreshingly practical way: "That's necessity. It is not designed to make it harder, it is simply necessity, and financial stuff is financial stuff, so that is fine."

While projects such as APC's Feminist Tech Exchange are asking hard questions about indicators, and how to find creative new ways to report on a project's success, OWP says that they found the reporting requirements for the APC subgrant reasonable. Hromadzic nevertheless sympathises with the "problem of indicators" – an often superficial and disconnected attempt to measure a project's impact for reporting purposes – and says she confronted some of these challenges when reporting for the Take Back The Tech! subgrant. "For the last campaign we

17. <https://www.apc.org/en/project/take-back-tech>

produced content for blind people, and the same content on video for deaf people. There were a lot of indicators, but our way of campaigning did not have those indicators," she says.

What is important for Hromadzic, however, is that APC's sub-granting work allows for the organisation's project ideas to be heard: "The process is easy, when you compare it with other organisations. It is created in a way that I can deliver my idea in the best possible way and not to lose myself in some ridiculous segments that are so not important. With APC I have the idea and have the creative space to explain it."

Language is at the heart of this "space to explain" a project idea, and working in a second language in an environment often dominated by English can increase a sense of isolation. "APC's receptiveness to my use of English – this totally has an impact," says Hromadzic. "When I am with APC members, I was always amazed how the language was never a problem. That is so beautiful. Because you don't get that often; because wherever you go everyone expects you to speak English. Everywhere you go you have to apologise for your English. In APC spaces you forget about the language and relax, and think: maybe I didn't deliver the idea properly, but people are so patient."

While internally APC might make the necessary bureaucratic and operational distinctions between subgranting and other funding opportunities, such as those that are accessible through the "Connecting the Unconnected" project, Take Back the Tech! or even its METF, for many members looking in from the outside, these opportunities are fluid, a seamless part of the APC experience of being a member.

It is difficult to overstate how, for small organisations like OWP, these opportunities provide a vital sense of belonging, even something as simple as drawing on the travel fund: "As a small organisation we are geographically part of Europe; but no one will fund you to go to the Internet Governance Forum, nobody," Hromadzic says.

"I perceive APC as a really, really nice uncle or aunt who is there for you all the time," she says. "It is not like just one thing. They are always thinking of how to incorporate different aspects. They have the whole picture and aware of the whole possibilities. Through this money we empowered ourselves: we are not experts, but we are at a certain position in our country that nobody else is."

For Hromadzic, being part of APC means being able to interact with people in a human way. "I feel human beings on the other side," she says, adding, "Some people I have never met, but still I don't have that anxiety I usually have with donors. With APC you do it for the call and you do it for the people, and I am so blessed to be part of this journey."

Securing safe houses for women in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Through a project grant in 2017, One World Platform (OWP) set out to develop the online safety skills of people working at four safe houses for women in Bosnia and Herzegovina through training and other forms of support. There are eight safe houses in the country, with 70% of the women seeking refuge in the shelters between 25 and 35 years of age, unemployed and economically dependent on their partners. "Besides our workshops, we produced an educational handbook which can serve our partnering organisations, but others as well, with basic steps to protect themselves online. It also contains information about online violence that they can share with the users of safe houses," the organisation said.

OWP also discovered a surprising reluctance amongst people working at the safe houses to participate in their training, and it was an effort to convince them of its importance. "At the beginning of each workshop, we could see the lack of willingness to participate and even to be present. There was a noticeable disapproval and resistance to the content of the workshop, which we attributed to the topic and the lack of knowledge about it. In one instance the participants openly showed dissatisfaction with the fact that they were attending the workshop, as if it was a waste of time, since they had more important obligations and work to do. But usually we could notice a shift in their mood and the interest growing." By the end of the project, all four of the partner organisations had developed their own digital integrity and security policy, even though OWP recognises that it may take some time for the policies to be properly implemented, given the change in behaviour it requires amongst the safe house employees.

In 2019, OWP did a follow-up project with safe houses, this time looking to empower women seeking refuge at safe houses in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar using ICTs. "We wanted to teach them how to make wedding invitations, posters, banners, logos, etc. using both paid-for and open source design programmes," said OWP. "Then we want them to be able to create a website, and put their designs online. The aim of the project is to empower the women to become self-employed or employable, given their vulnerable situation." Digital security and privacy, and online violence against women, were also part of the training.

“When you work with beneficiaries, then you realise, ‘My salary is not big, but it is worth it’ – that is the APC experience. I think because that is the connection that they are trying to maintain through everyone in APC. You really feel that you are part of something. Maybe that is because of the people, and their individuality that they bring in APC, and the way they communicate with us. It is totally different and more human than donors,” she says.

“Telling our ideas, our vision, our desires”

Nodo Tau’s¹⁸ first “big” subgrant was for its e-waste recycling project in Rosario, Argentina. “We had already set up a workshop,” says Florencia Roveri, who works on policy and communication at the organisation, “but wanted to build on this.” The subgrant, she says, helped Nodo Tau “concretise” its work, helping to develop its knowledge of the e-waste recycling process, and to research the e-waste market in Argentina and the region. It also allowed it to lobby for a comprehensive e-waste recycling system in the city, which had met with some resistance from the municipality.

“Now we have six people recycling in our project, five men and a woman, and there are three tutors,” she says, adding that the project has become sustainable.

Roveri is positive about the contribution subgranting has made to Nodo Tau’s work, and attributes this to the organisational culture in APC: “Subgranting offers freedom and flexibility, but also this fact of telling our ideas, our vision, our desires to people who understand the field in which we are working,” she says. “From our perspective, it is really a different experience – in a sense we speak the same language.”

Nodo Tau has also drawn on APC’s METF to travel to Barcelona and meet with Pangea, an APC member that has an ongoing interest in e-waste recycling. In an organisation like APC, subgranting does not happen in isolation. The different resources available to members should be seen as interconnected, offering organisations a “palette” of opportunities to support their work.

Like other organisations, Roveri describes the administrative side to the subgranting programme as “easy and practical”. “The form is really easy to follow; there are some questions that may be a challenge to answer in a sense, so we have to think a little more deeper about the project, defining aims, outcomes, and impact,” she says.

“We also find the process transparent. Our project on digital territories was rejected, but we found the information for this decision clear,” she adds.

18. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/nodo-tau>

Particularly useful were progress reports required by APC in the 2019 subgranting cycle, a tactic that “Connecting the

"I would say that the immediacy of funding is really important in a rapidly changing political and technical context. The APC subgrant submitting process is not complicated, which means that it is more accessible to smaller and new organisations. Since we are an APC member, we are more aligned with its goals, something really helpful in order to submit proposals that respond to the funding call. We certainly could not have implemented the project without the APC grant. The project that we presented, Smart Citizenship, was an attempt to open a new area of work, spreading crypto parties and data protection local bills all over Brazil. The subgrant funding not only helped us to fund the initiative, but gave us the courage and legitimacy to go ahead and discuss the initiative with partners. We approached APC because we understood that the subgrant was an opportunity to start an initiative that we were not very experienced in. Additionally, we were really encouraged by the fact that APC does understand the value to be in smaller cities, and work with and support different communities with decentralised discussions and debates regarding human rights and technology. The initiative had a huge impact on the organisation's work and in different communities around Brazil. The strategy to spread the discussion about data protection and the right to privacy by organising crypto parties is now absorbed by all members of our association and has been effective in supporting our work with local communities all over Brazil." – *Marina Pita, Intervozes (Brazil)*

Unconnected" has used to track progress, build capacity and encourage a realignment of projects if necessary. She says, "They asked us for a preview report a month before the project was finished. This was very useful. In the process of developing the project we are overwhelmed with working on the project. For us, or with small organisations, the process of reporting and financial reporting is a particularly difficult aspect we have to develop. This preview report helps us order that situation. It wasn't only a need for APC in terms of process, but also helpful for us."

Roveri says members are empowered during the subgranting processes, even when things go wrong. "There was one instance where the

selection of the projects was delayed, and this resulted in an interchange between members on the list, because some members were waiting for the decision on funding. APC responded to this. I think this situation would not occur with donors. It has a particular dynamic because we all know each other, and know who to ask about the delay. This is particular to the relationship we share in the network," she says.

"Getting to the idea behind the English"

PROTEGE QV¹⁹ has used the subgrant funds to popularise the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms in West Africa, and to advocate for better internet access in Cameroon. This is a process that included training 20 advocacy "ambassadors" and organising what it calls "Impact Talks" on internet rights.

Sylvie Siyam, the organisation's director, and currently an APC board member, describes APC's subgranting programme as a "unique opportunity", an opportunity she ascribes to the efficiency of the programme: "There is good reaction when you ask for funds, they are speedy in the response," she says. "That is very important when you have a small activity with a lot of impact."

Equally important to PROTEGE QV is how the administrative side of the grant making process is facilitated. "We received templates for technical and financial reports, so it is easy. For one of the grants, we even received a tool to follow our

19. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/protege-qv>

expenses day-by-day," she says, adding that APC should consider using this financial tool in the future.

As other APC members have found, the subgrant acts as a "seed fund", allowing the organisation to approach donors based on the work they have done using grant money. "We want to develop an African index that tracks the implementation of the African Declaration," she says. "We benefited from the APC grant to elaborate this index idea for our country. I also asked APC to prepare a letter of support to get funds from Access Now and Karen [Banks] did it. So the grant acts in that case as a seed fund for access to bigger funds."

With French as her first language, Siyam says that APC's approach to second-language English speakers amongst its members is an important part of the accessibility of its subgranting programme: "I have found APC are really generous. Even when you don't speak a very good English language, they try to understand what you mean; even if you don't write a good English, they try to understand what is behind the English, what is your idea. I never felt put aside because of the language."

"Even when I speak French they try to understand what we say," she adds.

2.3. Creating space to move

"The sugar on the cake"

Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF)²⁰ is a big organisation. According to its director Osama Manzar, who is also an APC board member, it provides an estuary to about the same amount of funding each year as APC, and has a staff component of roughly twice the size. DEF has benefited from several APC subgrants – including a grant to support its work on community networks that it has been doing for the past 10 years. In 2018, it received funds to work with women rag pickers in Mumbai, Muradabad in Uttar Pradesh, and Seelampur in Delhi, in an effort to raise awareness about the health harms of informal e-waste recycling.

"Women rag pickers are absolutely at the lowest rungs of society, and e-waste dismantling is a subsistence means of livelihood," says Anulekha Nandi, from the research and advocacy division in the organisation. Because of the "complicated networks" that make up informal recycling in India – and past experiences where NGO research into informal recycling had been followed by police raids – their work was difficult, and even at times dangerous: "Most of the e-waste dismantling happened at night. At night these areas are very risky to go to given informal e-waste dismantling networks flowing into the grey market. Fieldworkers said that when they tried to create

20. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/digital-empowerment-foundation-def-1>

access, they tended to run up against people who warned them that they should not be asking questions.”

She adds that the complexity of the informal recycling grey market, and the dependence of communities on hazardous recycling practices, makes it “morally difficult” terrain to navigate from a policy perspective: “In the case of Seelampur, there is a whole community whose livelihood depends on it. If you don’t have discarded technology there, I find it difficult to see how these communities could survive. Change needs to be incremental rather than outright abolishment of hazardous recycling practices.”

“That’s where I find it necessary to be contextually sensitive,” she adds.

Despite its size, APC’s subgranting programme has proved very useful to DEF. In order for a large organisation to be strategically coherent, like many others in the sector, it works according to fixed strategy objectives each year. Manzar says the subgranting programme allows DEF to do two things: firstly, to supplement work it is already doing, which he calls the “sugar coating on the cake you make”, and secondly, to deviate from this path, to take short-term risks, on burning issues that are not necessarily a part of its annual objectives.

For Nandi this translates into “providing ways to scale up work beyond practice, and translate it into policy, and scale.”

Manzar elaborates on his sugar-coating analogy: “When you have done everything, and cooked everything, how do you make the finishing touch? Those missing elements that are missing from the main grant of the project.”

“This small grant helps you do all those things that you miss out doing,” he says. “Things like developing marketing collateral, doing advocacy, consolidating the work that you have done, creating outreach material, canvassing, campaigns, things like that. Usually you will see that any grant you get, you get funding for mainstream work, but not for communication design and advocacy. Those are very necessary, because when you do a project you can create bigger impact,” he says.

“Not heavyweight, but lightweight”

Point of View²¹ is an organisation started some 20 years ago, working on issues to do with gender and sexual rights in India. Like other organisations, it has found that the subgrants have helped it to amplify the impact of its work.

In 2016, through a small grant, Point of View worked with writers in India to create what it called “meaningful, topical conversations” on the intersection between sexuality and technology. It wanted to provide a supportive space for women and trans people to think, write and develop strong analyses around

21. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/point-view>

issues that directly affect them. Topics included women and mobile phone gaming, a trans woman's journey through porn, India's asexuality networks, a day in the life of a sex worker, and disability and technology.

"We wanted to start a new online publication called Deep Dives: Sexing the Interwebs, and to use long-form narratives to really explore the intersection of gender, sexualities and digital technology," says Bishakha Datta, executive director of Point of View.

"Things are now moving fast," she says. "It takes academic research a while to catch up, so we felt a good way to produce knowledge was to do something more than short-form journalism, to fill the space in between that and academic articles." The project went on to win awards, and a number of its articles have been republished by major news outlets.

Two years later, again through a small grant, Point of View applied a feminist lens to its research on data protection and privacy in India, developing what it considered a ground-breaking feminist contribution to policy debates on the governance of data. "We need to start to think through anew what it means to protect our human rights at a time where data has become part of the boundaries of our bodies," says Datta.

The research, which was carried out by the Internet Democracy Project, amongst other things argued that the "restrictive expectations of privacy" and the "burden of 'staying private'" in an age of widespread surveillance, are the kinds of restrictions predominantly associated with the oppression of women in the past.

Datta, who currently serves on APC's board as chairperson, says Point of View's work with APC started in 2011, when WRP was looking for an Indian partner. It received a subgrant through its EROTICS programme.

She describes the subgranting process as "flexible and transparent" – it is "not heavyweight, but lightweight" – and suggests that the flexibility is very useful for organisations, allowing them to determine the specific needs relevant to their work. This is different, for example, to a more thematically structured subgranting programme. "The subgrant is good for testing seed ideas," she says.

Like DEF, Point of View has found that subgrants are also useful for strengthening the impact of projects where funding has already been secured. Datta gives the example of organising the 2019 project, *Imagine A Feminist Internet: South Asia*. "We had the main grant from another donor, but that could support only 20 people. We wanted to get more people, especially from outside India. We were able to get an additional 15-20 practitioners and researchers through this subgrant. That kind of flexibility is very useful to us," she says.

“It allows us to do what we want”

The Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA),²² a long-standing APC member based in the Philippines, also finds that the sub-granting fund allows it to respond to unexpected issues that emerge during the year. It has worked with several other organisations on subgranting projects, a number of them focused on a fixed theme, at once throwing the oppositional benefits of themed and open call subgrant programmes into relief. While one allows strategic collaborations between multiple organisations working towards the same goal, typically across borders and jurisdictions, the other allows the local organisation to respond to its context, “on the fly”.

“The APC grant has been very useful to implement projects that we wanted to implement, but that we had not found suitable options to achieve, in key issues such as gender and community networks or prevention of violence against women in digital spaces. The fund has allowed complementing and adding important components to projects that we already have in place, which allows the strengthening of these initiatives, adding value to them and increasing the impact both with the communities and in terms of articulating alliances. It would have been very difficult to find resources for actions such as the Take Back the Tech!, the En Mi Idioma platform or the project on community networks with a gender approach. They are topics that are part of the mission and interest of Colnodo, but as part of long-term initiatives underway, it is difficult to find funding. Most donors do not usually approve proposals to strengthen initiatives already underway, which is key to continue working to generate sustainability. It is a great opportunity for APC to present proposals for the strengthening of initiatives underway, which promotes social impact and policy impact. Our work in the field has been strengthened with diverse communities and also with allies. It has also allowed continuity in processes of impact on policies on issues such as community networks or violence against women in digital spaces. One issue to highlight is that participating in the APC grants has allowed Colnodo’s work to be strengthened with other APC members who also receive grants and with whom experiences, recommendations, achievements and lessons learned have been shared.” - Julián Casasbuenas G., Colnodo (Colombia). Colnodo has been a recipient of APC’s core subgranting programme, and is a member of the “Connecting the Unconnected” network.

“These projects are considered special projects for the organisation. These do not fall within the regular programmes and activities of FMA, but it is good that there are funds that we can draw on,” says Lisa Garcia, FMA’s executive director.

She elaborates, “The data mapping of drug-related deaths project that we did – it wasn’t planned, but we thought we had to do it. There was a technology component and connection to human rights.”

In 2017, FMA set out to map drug-related extrajudicial killings under the Duterte administration, which is notorious for its brutal approach in dealing with both drug users and dealers in its so-called “War on Drugs”. Recognising that many rights groups, including the media itself, had mapped the number of killings that were the result of Duterte’s pogrom, FMA saw the need to

include rehabilitation centres and services in its online mapping exercise to help drug addicts who needed somewhere to turn. “While many organisations have been documenting victims, we noticed that no collation and documentation of efforts and services existed,” says Garcia.

Drawing on media reports and other sources, it documented nearly 3,400 extrajudicial killings, while also mapping the location of these support services. “The project was able to provide

22. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/foundation-media-alternatives>

a resource tool for organisations and families of victims seeking information and assistance, as well as to researchers looking for data," she says.

Garcia says the fact that the organisation is a member of APC is a clear advantage compared to approaching a new donor for the first time – and it is this relationship that is part of the usefulness of APC's subgranting programme: "The process is not difficult for us, because we know APC, and we are familiar with its requirements. You are not bound by a specific theme. If we have questions, it is easy for us to ask."

"The openness," she says, "allows us to do what we want."

2.4. Building collaborations

While a subgranting programme based on an open call allows an organisation to do the important work of setting the agenda and focus of a project, and in this way be responsive to a local context that is fluid, there is a benefit to working collaboratively towards common advocacy goals.

A step in this direction was taken in 2019 when APC for the first time invited joint applications from members for its core subgranting programme. Three proposals were received, including one from FMA and EMPOWER,²³ an organisation based in Malaysia. Their aim is to hold an Imagine the Feminist Internet workshop, a meeting of feminist activists in Southeast Asia, the first in the region. While FMA and EMPOWER had already met each other through the APC member network, they had not worked together before. This demonstrates how subgranting can be used to stimulate working collaborations between members, and strengthen these relationships beyond annual member meetings and online interactions and peer support.

Bridging the "digital separation" of APC members

Khan says this is a good development, and that she is curious to see the outcomes of these collaborations between members. MMfD, like organisations such as PROTEGE QV, CITAD, 7amleh and May First, see an advocacy opportunity in a more focused, collective approach. "I think essentially the subgranting process is great because it is flexible, responding to the political context we are in," says Khan. "But if the objective is to develop coherence around member work, the way would be to limit the call to certain kinds of projects, so there is much more similarity in the applications that come in, and then to create cross-border projects."

She, however, does have her reservations about collaborative, cross-border work: "I am not sure it would always be effective, because the situations are different in each country. But I am sure there are some things that can be very easily done." She

23. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/empower-malaysia>

gives MMfD's Digital Rights Monitor as an example of the kind of project that is flexible enough – responsive to the different needs of each country – to be implemented in the region. “An Asia Digital Rights Monitor is something that can be done through APC,” she says. “It would not bind members to produce specific content, so if a collective was formed with members from across Asia, it could work,” she says.

7amleh is a young organisation and relatively new APC member. This, together with the unique focus of its work in one of the few occupied territories in the world, has created what it feels is a sense of separation from other APC members in the network. Carmel does, however, feel that collaborative projects driven by APC's subgranting programme could go some way to unlocking the isolation it experiences when it comes to its particular advocacy concerns. “The next stage of our work will involve looking at digital occupation in other contexts,” she says. “I will approach APC on this, as a global issue. This is an opportunity for other members to get involved.”

“Amplifying impact”

Despite being an APC member since 2006, the Cameroon-based PROTEGE QV has yet to work with other APC members on a joint project. “I think maybe we should use the grant to help in having more regional interaction,” says Siyam, who refers to the regions as “branches” and “chapters”. “If I take for example the African branch of APC, or the European branch, why don't we use the grant to try to have more contact between them? Apart from the regional meetings, we don't have enough contact between us. If people just meet during regional meetings, can you say it is a chapter?” she asks.

“We have to re-evaluate how the chapters work; to evaluate the quality of the relationship between members of the same chapters. Subgranting could be used to encourage and stimulate interaction,” she says.

Siyam says their proposal to develop an African index for the African Declaration is an example of how to stimulate this interaction, and that subgranting could be used to fund this. “If five to six members in different countries in Africa work on the same project, if we discuss this with APC, and APC gives a grant to each of these members, it can be something that amplifies the impact of the grant,” she says.

“Because when you receive USD 10,000, you can have a campaign, but you cannot do really great research, you can't do important research. But if you receive USD 10,000 or 20,000 per member for the same research, but done in different countries, it can give you an important result.”

Building solidarity: “Why not only the global South matters”

May First is a small organisation with members in the United States and Mexico. With the United States falling outside of the Sida criteria of countries eligible for funding, it cannot be funded with Sida money from APC's core subgrants programme. However, APC drew on its Solidarity Fund – which is made up of membership fees – to help fund the collective analysis of what May First calls the “Technology and Revolution” sessions, held in 2017.

These sessions involved a series of brainstorming workshops with left-wing activists in the US and Mexico, “with the prospect of talking about the intersection of technology and social change,” says Alfredo Lopez, a co-founder of the organisation who is now a board member and outreach coordinator.

He emphasises the collective approach to the project. “We asked participants to describe the world they want to see, in just a few words. We would end up with four to five whiteboards of statements, just one or two words, such as “Freedom”. When we stepped back and looked at the boards, we said, ‘This is actually possible, you can have this society that you envision here. We have the technology that makes it possible, all we need to do is get control of this technology and democratise it.’ The thing is to talk about that, and come up with the points that make it possible,” he says.

With support from its long-standing partner Media Justice, and the contribution from APC's Solidarity Fund, which was easy to access (“Just an email,” May First says), the organisation was able to distill these brainstorming sessions to just eight or nine key points through a further set of discussions with activists in five cities. From this, its “left platform on technology”²⁴ was born. “What we did is considered historic and ground-changing in the US and to some extent in Mexico,” says Lopez. “People refer to it all the time. It is probably amongst the most important contributions May First has made to the left wing movement in the US,” he says.

One of the reasons the Solidarity Fund was so easy to access, says Lopez, is that as a member May First is known to APC, and has credibility. It was not necessary to validate or verify the organisation, much as ALIN found with having what it calls “an account” with APC. “We are the principal APC member in the US; we have been around for a long time, we are pretty well known,” Lopez says. “APC didn't have to do much evaluation of what this was all about; there is a certain credibility involved. They know us, they know we do a lot of this. I wrote a page explaining and they said ‘go’.” He says he found the process even easier than accessing APC's METF, which needed some projection of the financial considerations that the organisation found hard.

24. <https://techandrev.org/>

This cuts out the usual paperwork necessary when working with a donor, and both point out that a donor would never make funds available to them with the kind of flexible approach of APC. Lopez pushes this point further: “We do sometimes get the impression that donors shy away from us. May First does work that foundations do not necessarily agree with, or that foundations do not want to fund. The Technology and Revolution thing is something that foundations never fund.”

“APC’s subgrants funding programme has helped us a lot to continue making a contribution to collective efforts in our areas of focus which is critical in our advocacy work. These grants have helped us sustain components of our work that would not be possible without funding for research, dissemination and production of knowledge material. Having this continuity helps keep us up to date on emerging issues in our areas of focus and helps in sustaining engagements and relationships with key stakeholders, particularly government, whose positive response and action is significant in achieving our goal. These sustained relationships are also important as they present us with opportunities to be part of policy spaces that would be or are usually closed to civil society. This funding helps us greatly where we are not able to raise larger sums through other fundraising channels in the sense that we are able to implement or lay a foundation for future implementation of activities we think are key in progressing our advocacy work. We find that it is always an opportunity to build up and continue the work we do in generally advocating for women’s rights online, specifically policy advocacy, enabling access to information, online safety for women, digital skilling, among others, whose results continue to be an advantage for our target beneficiaries. By enabling the implementation of our project activities, we have been able to continually identify new areas that may impact our work, to explore and identify new knowledge opportunity fronts that have helped us to expand on research, stakeholder reach and engagement in our advocacy. It has also helped us realise opportunities where we have been able to build organisational capacity to engage leaders, women and girls in discussion forums aimed at instigating discussions that inform policy processes.” – *Susan Atim, WOUGNET (Uganda)*

“If the work is visionary, if it is something people normally are not doing, nine times out of ten a foundation will not support,” he adds.

May First agrees that there is important work to be done in APC expanding its role as a subgranter, to support what it calls “direct activism”. While APC is seen as doing excellent work on the global policy stage, it is on the ground where it needs to engage its members.

It also has strong views on what it considers an imbalanced view of organisations working in the North, and the insistence on the North and global South divide. When noted that it is interesting that, in effect, organisations from the global South are helping organisations from developed countries through the Solidarity Fund, they point out that many organisations from the South are much better

funded than them, and that the global flows of money in the non-profit sector are more complex.

This relates, Lopez feels, to a view of organisations from developed countries that is biased and not accurate: “APC has to some extent been ignorant of the left in the US,” he says. “One of the things it does is to focus on the global South, under the impression that the US is heavily funded. First of all the left in the US has shifted over the last 20 years; for the most part it is led by people of colour. The majority of the social justice organisations are led by women, with a large portion of these LGBT persons. This is the majority of leadership of the movement. These people come out of the communities that are very different to the perceived privileged communities.”

“When people say we are tired of the US calling the shots here and there, the left in the US also feel that way,” he says. “May First is one of the few organisations focused on technology run primarily by people of colour and women. We are oppressed by the system in the country,” he says.

Although APC’s Solidarity Fund tries to remedy the country limitations imposed by donor agencies, May First suggests there is more introspection necessary. “Often the major countries – the imperialist countries – are excluded. I think this idea is outdated and has to be addressed. There has to be an adjustment made there,” Lopez says.

May First also sees a role for APC in coordinating cross-country campaigns between members, something that subgranting could be used to catalyse. “APC has spent a long time doing very, very valuable work through thinking, research, writing, speaking at conferences, going before the UN. That is really critical work. If it weren’t for APC I don’t think we would be nearly at the situation we are now,” Lopez says.

“At the same time APC has to start morphing somewhat to support direct activism, not just in countries, but across borders. That has to include money, skills and the all-important area of inter-continental communication and coordination. APC is in a position where it can facilitate and coordinate between organisations and continents on major campaigns. If you can do a cross-border campaign on any one issue it will be powerful, but you have to have a coordinating authority,” he says.

2.5. Working with power

While subgranting has clear benefits for organisations working on the ground, even members who have drawn on the fund to do important work express some uncertainty about subgranting as a funding mechanism. FMA, for example, is critical of donors who elect to pass on large amounts of funds to regional and international organisations, feeling that this deprives smaller organisations who actually implement the projects on the ground of administration and other potential sources of revenue.

“It is like this: subgrants are helpful for us small organisations because sometimes it is difficult for us to get grants,” says Garcia. “But there are donors that only give to regional and international organisations that do subgranting funds. This means the small organisation that actually implements the programme gets a smaller slice of the pie, because there is an intermediary. It is easier for donors to work through the intermediaries.”

“But is power really distributed?” she asks.

“Another level of politics”

A second concern raised is how subgranting might affect the internal dynamics of APC’s efforts to build a membership network based on peer-to-peer recognition, solidarity and horizontal decision making.

Working with filmmakers in Myanmar

In 2018, EngageMedia²⁵ worked in Myanmar with filmmakers with the aim of increasing the impact of the Myanmar digital rights movement through film. Even though Yangon has a robust independent film scene, not many filmmakers explore digital rights as a subject. The film *It’s Time to Talk* and the animation *Are You Ready* deal with some of the most pressing digital rights issues in Myanmar — online harassment and article 66D of the Myanmar Telecommunications Law. According to the organisation, *Are You Ready* highlights the harshness of the telecommunications law and how it tramples the right to freedom of expression. “Many journalists, bloggers and common people are imprisoned, and their cases cannot be discussed openly yet, as it may impact the results of the hearings.” *It’s Time to Talk* humanises the issue of online harassment through stories of everyday Myanmar people, and the interplay of race, gender and sexuality issues in their lives. Both films are licensed under Creative Commons and are available for download online.

It is an issue that troubles APC’s member and knowledge-sharing coordinator, Karel Novotný, who has been working on developing APC as a collective network for the last 10 years. “Internally I see conflict around this,” he says. “On the one hand I am aware that it is a sort of lifeline for some members in difficult situations, and it also enables members to do what they consider important but can’t find other funding for. This aspect makes the granting programme very valuable.”

But Novotný, who also manages APC’s METF, feels that there is a tension between this positive

outcome of APC’s granting programme and the risk that APC begins to be seen as a donor by those on the “outside”, and that member applications become driven by organisations who want money, but who are not necessarily committed to the work that APC does. He sees the desire to access funding as a legitimate motive, but insists that it should not be the main motive behind joining the APC network. “I think APC should be careful about being known as the ‘money-giver’, being approached as a money-giver, because it will change the value that APC gives, and it might eventually change the network in ways that I don’t think are desirable,” he says.

A key concern for Novotný is that redistribution of significant funds might impact on the relationships in the network. “Naturally, APC has changed since the purely horizontal partnership model of how it was initially established as a small network of a few organisations. I think we care for, and invest a lot in maintaining horizontal relationships, and an openness in governance, as well as relationships in the network in general. So we should be careful not to let financial flows undermine this effort and this ‘culture’ of our network,” he says.

Subgranting, he says, can introduce “another level of politics”: “As someone who works with members, I care for this profile of APC not being a ‘service organisation and its users’. I care about the network being a real network of humans that are related because of their passion.”

25. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/engagemedia>

“An opportunity that needs to be taken”

The members I spoke to had mixed reactions to the question of power and subgranting, with some sharing these concerns, and others taking a pragmatic approach to the issue. All organisations I spoke to, however, felt that APC needed to pursue the potential of subgranting as an advocacy mechanism.

May First believes that APC should grow its subgranting work, but feels that some attention needs to be given to how decisions about disbursements are made. “It is important that the people from the majority of the world, the global majority, be able to make the kinds of policy decisions that bring about change,” says Jamie McClelland, who with Lopez started the organisation, and is now a board member and director of technology. “That means that in APC we have to think about who makes decisions about that kind of money, particularly as the pot grows. And we at May First think it should be the case; it is one area of support that APC must grow. But a small group of leaders or staff deciding on how to disburse funds may not be the best way of doing it. It may cause tensions and difficulties, particularly because APC is so complex, each member working in different conditions. That is part of the Association’s challenge,” he says.

ALIN feels that any power relationship implicit in subgranting has been handled well by APC. “On our part we feel it handled well in APC. There is a lot of fundraising that goes on, and we as members appreciate this. They have been communicating to members a lot in terms of how much they have, how much is available. You appreciate that, because you know there are limited resources. On our part we feel that they are actually trying,” says Aston.

“I understand the logic of the worry,” says Roveri. “As a member we have been thinking about this, locally, for lots of years. APC has been very important help for us, because we have managed to sustain several projects closely related to the help of APC.”

If the relationship is dependent, then it becomes a problem, she says: “I think if an organisation sustains projects only through the help of APC, maybe that is a problem.”

Siyam responds pragmatically to the question of power: “We don’t see a problem with subgranting being an APC priority,” she says. “I don’t think it should be an issue, because the subgrants help members realise the strategic plan of APC. Why should it be an issue? The process of being awarded a grant is clear enough for me.”

Similarly, 7amleh does not see inherent issues of power becoming a problem for APC if it expands its subgranting programme. “Transparency on why people receive grants is im-

portant and opportunities need to be circulated to everyone," Carmel says. "But we don't see problems with power. It is just part of working."

"Cooperation, not competition"

Serving on APC's board, DEF's Osama Manzar is aware of the increase in subgranting as an APC strategy to catalyse change compared to five years ago. "It shows that APC has reliable and active members," he says, adding that APC's experience in the sector, which allows big donors to put their faith in the organisation as a subgranter, is an opportunity that needs to be taken.

"Would it be good for APC to scale-up its subgranting profile? Or would this be too disruptive, challenging its management skills, and its ability to manage its members as a horizontal network of organisations with shared concerns?" he asks. Would it create, as he puts it, "power games, and raise issues of geographic domination? I would say the third aspect is important to mull over, discuss and work forward," Manzar says.

As one of APC's largest member organisations, he is well aware of the different levels of influence member organisations have in the network. But this, he points out, is not necessarily related to the size of an organisation: "Not all APC members are equal," he says. "But sometimes the bigger player can be a small player because of the area of expertise, and sometimes even a small area can be big because of their work."

What is important, Manzar says, is that APC takes these different potentials for collaboration between members into consideration when awarding grants in order to strengthen synergies between organisations, and the networks members have on the ground. Subgranting needs to be approached from the perspective of "cooperation", not competition between members, he says. This may require careful consideration in how the subgrant resources are shared amongst members in order to create the context where this collaboration can unfold. It is a "members first" approach, which he suggests networks expect.

Mapping the “digital occupation” in Palestine

The core mission of 7amleh – The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media is to advocate for Palestinian digital rights. They have received several project and small grants through the subgranting programme to strengthen their work in Palestine, the first in 2017, when they mapped digital rights and threats in Palestine. In an interesting initiative called “Map Palestine” the following year, they set out to lobby Google to recognise the state of Palestine, which is not listed as a country on Google Maps. “Our research also showed that unrecognised Palestinian villages are marked on maps in different layers, and require zooming in a lot to make them visible, whereas the villages in the Naqab are named by tribes,” 7amleh said. Google’s complicity in what it calls the “digital occupation” of Palestine went further: recommended routes often took users through Israeli settlements, which were unsafe for Palestinians. “We wanted to end Google’s prioritisation of Israeli settlements and challenge Google’s pro-Israeli bias on its maps,” the organisation said.

Through small grant support, 7amleh also took on Facebook’s discriminatory policy towards Palestinians. Through a powerful social media campaign, it wanted to raise public awareness of Facebook’s biased content moderation of Palestinians, and exert pressure on Facebook’s senior policy representatives to become more responsive and transparent about censorship in Palestine through civil society mobilisation.

“Through the wide reach of this campaign, together with the discussions started on social media platforms – with Facebook tagged in all posts for greater visibility – we hoped to create pressure on Facebook’s management to address issues of discrimination,” 7amleh said. Ironically, it quickly found that its online campaign fell foul of Facebook’s own policies: “Problematic with the social media campaign on Facebook was the until then unknown practice of stopping the ‘boosting’ of posts in order to reach a wider audience, apparently because they relate to Facebook. Therefore, the posts, including the video, of the campaign could not be boosted.” A joint letter from 88 human rights organisations was submitted to Facebook to increase the visibility of the campaign and make Facebook accountable for their actions.

In 2019, 7amleh launched two new initiatives drawing on the project and small grants funds.

As an extension of its earlier work with tech giants, the first project aimed to support the development of the organisation’s global advocacy strategy, particularly focusing on work at the Human Rights Council in cooperation with APC. “We wanted to ensure that local and international governments and social media companies’ policies are in line with human rights law,” the organisation said. “Recent years have witnessed a sharp rise in shrinking space for freedom of expression due to government legislation and proposed legislation and increased content moderation and cooperation with governments by social media companies,” it said. “Online platforms, particularly social media platforms, have become a new arena of political confrontation for the [Palestinian] conflict as well as a place to discuss internal issues within the Palestinian community,” 7amleh reported, adding that it is crucial that the UN conventions and human rights law are upheld in Palestine.

In the second project, 7amleh set out to research obstacles to Palestinians accessing e-commerce sites: “One of the major challenges Palestinians face to access digital markets is a result of their lack of access to digital payment systems, in particular PayPal, who for years has had a near monopoly as an electronic payment provider. In addition, there are often restrictions on registration for Palestinians, but we are still trying to find out the reasons for this,” it said.

3. A Feminist Tech Exchange

APC's Women's Rights Programme has spent some time mulling over issues of money and power from a feminist perspective. Subgranting is not new to WRP – it has been used successfully in GenARDIS, the Take Back the Tech! campaign, the EROTICS programme, which focused on sexuality online, and in the Feminist Internet Research Network (FIRN).²⁶ Most recently, the Feminist Tech Exchange (FTX)²⁷ network awarded small grants to feminist digital safety trainers for local actions.

WRP managed to raise a small amount of money from the Open Society Foundation for subgranting. “We were given USD 25,000, and only some of this was for disbursement,” says Jennifer Radloff, the FTX network's coordinator. “So we decided with the network members to form a sub-committee and run a small subgranting project with the money.”

“Our terms of reference were very loose,” she adds. “The projects proposed simply had to have something to do with a feminist approach to digital safety in local contexts.”

Working collectively

The unique approach of the FTX subgrants – which have all been small grants given the amount of money that was available to disperse – was the network collectively deciding which proposals would receive funding, even though WRP had not worked with some of the network members before. “For me, this was one of the big things that made it stand apart from what APC had done in subgranting before,” says Radloff.

“Our initial impetus was to try get the FTX network to use the digital safety training modules we had developed, and to test those – but that went out the window. You can't be too prescriptive on what the grant is used for, because if you are going to ask the network members to be part of selection process, you have to be open.”

By then the network was made up of 19 members, comprising organisations and what WRP calls “free radicals” – committed feminists who do not belong to any organisation. Although FTX envisages several other areas of intervention, including digital storytelling, it quickly found that digital safety was a pressing concern driving many of the network participants. Moreover, as APC members who have received grants from the organisation's core subgranting programme have pointed out, context is everything. This, Radloff says, is central to feminist thinking: that different contexts are critical to determining needs, even while the broad umbrella idea, such as digital safety, can be agreed on: “It is impossible for APC to understand all the needs of the members,” says Radloff.

26. <https://www.apc.org/en/project/firn-feminist-internet-research-network>

27. <https://www.apc.org/en/project/feminist-tech-exchange>

Volunteers from the FTX network formed a sub-committee and did an analysis of the proposals, which were then circulated to the network. Only four proposals were received, so the initial experiment in subgranting for the network, and the collective approach to decision making, was easy, admits Radloff. "It may become more complicated as we scale up the subgranting in the future," she says. "But it is setting the precedent of the approach that is important to us."

"Acknowledging the power of money"

It is a collective approach that allowed WRP to embed feminist practice in its network in a concrete way. But as Radloff points out, it is not as simple as sending an email to a list and saying "send a proposal". APC's position of power in the network was also something that needed to be deconstructed first.

"What we are slightly apprehensive about is we don't want APC to be seen as a donor – we have pots of money that we want to give away – but it's not like that," says Radloff, echoing the concern expressed by others in the organisation.

Before putting out the small grants call to the FTX network, WRP spent some time discussing how to orientate the process from an ethical perspective, including issues such as what it means to distribute money in that way, notions of what it calls "feminist currency", the power that APC has, and how this could be divested to the network. "We also discussed if money is the only currency," says Radloff. "What about skills? We are finding that when we sub-contract work, sometimes people donate two days of solidarity labour as part of their contract. This is a good trend."

"We acknowledge the power of money," she says. "We don't want something that disrupts APC, and puts it in a power position."

Responding to immediate needs

As a number of APC subgrant recipients have said, the flexibility of subgranting means that it can be responsive to an organisation's immediate needs without being encumbered by the usual bureaucratic processes faced when dealing with donors. As FTX found, in times of crisis it enables a "rapid response". One of the four proposals received by FTX was from a Brazilian transfeminist network. It needed to quickly build the capacity for digital safety amongst its members after the election of the right-wing Bolsonaro government, and the rise of right-wing attacks on the LGBTIQ community in that country. "The work they did was very useful," says Radloff, "and people could see that."

Securing the network

Feminist activists often work in highly volatile and threatening contexts – the very reason for the need for digital security training in the first place. While digital security such as email encryption is part of the network's practice, it also meant changes to its subgranting processes. For example, in the case of the contract with the Brazilian transfeminist network, the terms of reference were vague: "It simply said something like 'Training women on using computers in Brazil,'" says Radloff. "It was deliberately open – we didn't want it to implicate anyone."

This also means that WRP needs to work with the expectations of donors providing the funding for disbursement. Radloff says subgranting needs to adapt to the needs of grant recipients, such as project reporting. "One organisation who received an FTX small grant said to us, 'We can't share a participant list. We can't report the way we want to, or are expected to. We can't give the enemy the strategies we use,'" Radloff explains.

As she puts it, this means "a lot of the amazing stuff the project does is invisible." Because no report was asked for from the Brazilian activists, only two proper project reports were delivered. "We need to be more creative with reporting requirements," says Radloff, echoing a frustration expressed by other subgrant recipients in APC. "In the end, a document is nothing, really."

But, she concedes, this will take a lot of work and thought – how to satisfy the needs of both donors and the network's security and other concerns. "We need to build something along the way," she says, "something better; a more creative way to interpret project results."

"The revenue of Jinbonet is mainly based on membership dues, so we don't have much experience in applying for funding from donors. Also, there are not many foundations supporting social movements in South Korea and it is even harder for us to get support from overseas ones. Since South Korea is an OECD country, we are not often eligible to apply to some support programmes, so we lack experience or resources to seek funding. So, the APC subgrants funding programme has actually been the only source for Jinbonet to get funded from overseas donors. With subgrants funding, we can focus on how to implement our ideas without having to worry about finances any more." – *Byoung-il Oh, Jinbonet*²⁸ (South Korea). *Jinbonet received funds from APC's Solidarity Fund as part of the subgranting programme.*

28. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/korean-progressive-network-jinbonet>

Staging Festival Perempuan in Malaysia

In 2018, with help from a small grant, EMPOWER staged the Festival Perempuan (or “Women’s Festival”) in Malaysia. The aim of the festival was to provide a stage for “missing and invisible women’s voices by bringing their lived realities in public and political spaces.” The festival included spoken-word poets, transwomen- and women-led bands, storytellers, an exhibition on gender-based violence, tweetchats and forum discussions, and five film screenings. “All of the performers we engaged with are women and queers – they are mostly small-timers, even though they have extensive work and produced quality music and poetry,” the organisation said, adding that it had used the opportunity to introduce the performers to the Feminist Principles of the Internet beforehand, as well as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. For a number of the performers, the festival was transformative: “Some of the women-fronted music bands and singer-songwriters that we engaged started their own feminist platforms in the local music scene,” the organisation reported, while others went from performing “in their bedroom” to gigging live with others they met at the festival. “The festival succeeded in bringing feminist messages to the ground. Human rights and feminist languages are jargon and concept-heavy, so having the messages and principles presented in various forms of art is a refreshing view, and more palatable to crowds who are new to our work,” EMPOWER reported.

Going online for safety: On the main festival weekend, the organisers needed to shift the festival online, due to security fears because of a rally organised by a local right-wing extremist movement just a few kilometres away from the venue. “People were afraid. They are violent,” it said. “Due to this situation, some of our content makers, especially the storytellers, and some of the volunteers opted out from the Festival, and we were forced to move the Festival online for the day of their rally.” Another unexpected form of silencing of feminist voices came from a movie distributor, who at the last minute claimed copyright on one of the films due to be screened, preventing the organisers from showing the film, despite them explaining that the festival was a non-profit event. The issue led the participants to discuss the possibility of setting up a non-profit feminist movie club.

4. “Connecting the Unconnected”: Building a grassroots movement through subgranting

“Connecting the Unconnected” is a project started by APC and Rhizomatica in 2017 with funds from the IDRC. It is dedicated to strengthening community networks in Latin America, Asia and Africa, and supports both APC members and non-members, or community networks that it is working with for the first time. In 2019 the project was boosted by a grant from Sida, which significantly strengthened its staffing component, and included a subgranting component. However, the project faced a challenge: the subgranting money needed to be disbursed in a short period of time. “We effectively only had six months,” says Carlos Rey-Moreno, the project’s local access policy and regulation coordinator.

“Ideally you want a longer period to implement these kinds of subgrants as a strategy – working in a short time frame puts a lot of pressure on the project, and on the grantees to deliver,” he explains.

“It is very often difficult to have the usual funding. Usually most of the donors who have worked for several years in humanitarian programmes in our country – such as natural disasters, Ebola, sexual violence, the fight against diseases like tuberculosis – do not want to finance the other urgent ones. Most are not interested in the theme of technology and the promotion of community networks. But also, most of the projects here in Congo are made with the ideas of donors in mind, and local organisations are forced to align themselves with the wishes of the donors to get the funds without considering the real need of the local community. The opposite is true with the ‘Connecting the Unconnected’ project, which helps and supports the ideas of local communities. We really liked this approach.” – *Patrick Byamungo, Pamoja Net (Democratic Republic of Congo)*

As an APC project, “Connecting the Unconnected” falls under the “Access” KRA of the organisation. Its subgranting work aims both to develop the project’s network as a whole and to build capacity in individual community networks to make them sustainable.

Unlike APC’s core subgranting programme, the project also works with organisations it sometimes knows very little about. But this, Rey-Moreno says, does not amount to a “shotgun” approach to sub-

granting – of simply handing out money to random initiatives, in the hope that some will survive. The project’s approach, he points out, is more integrated. “We’re not just giving money away. We’re doing much, much more,” he says.

“It’s about articulating a movement, yes, about knowledge exchange; but it’s also about strengthening processes. We are doing institutional strengthening to help with sustainability. We are doing that process with all of them as well.”

“Connecting the Unconnected” has five different types of subgrants available, which focus on what the project calls “cross-learning”, internal capacity building, and innovation:

- **Learning grants:** These were disbursed to 24 representatives from 12 community networks. They promoted cross-learning by allowing the representatives to travel to each others’ community networks to learn from and help each other, supported by an ongoing online dialogue.
- **Peer grants:** These emerged from what the project calls the “mango tree” approach. Following a meeting of the learning grantees in Nairobi, the project realised that there were activities and processes that could easily be strengthened in community networks – what they identified as the “low-hanging fruit”. The result was the peer grants, which, according to Carlos, allow the community networks to “go to the next level in terms of sustainability.” Twelve peer grants have been awarded.
- **Travel fund:** Community networks can apply to the travel fund if they wish to attend relevant regional or international meetings or conferences, such as the Internet Governance Forum. Fifteen travel fellowships were issued in 2019.
- **Catalytic grants:** Catalytic grants focus on innovation at the community network level – on “trying something different, looking for other methods of intervention.” Eleven catalytic grants have been disbursed.
- **APC Labs:** APC Labs is an APC project that is still in the incubation phase which seeks to foster technical innovation. “Connecting the Unconnected” is piloting the project, and has provided technicians to assist with software engineering and the distribution of prototype technologies. Nine of the catalytic projects that had a component of tech development had further financial support with APC Labs funding.

Transparency and the need to communicate clearly

Transparency is key to the “Connecting the Unconnected” subgranting process. Potential grantees need to know how decisions were reached, who was funded, and why. Setting up systems to ensure this transparency – such as incorporating regional perspectives and the advice from “outsiders” in decision-making processes – is important.

The project coordinator, Kathleen Diga, describes the project’s process of subgranting as “decentralised”. The panel set up for reviewing the project’s subgranting applications is robust: it includes the 13-person project team, APC non-project staff, APC board members, external experts on community networks, and a representative from each of the three regions the network works in. “We had about 20 people involved in each of the subgranting calls,” says Diga. “People were divided up on expertise and on where they were based, and each met separately to analyse the proposals in their region. It was difficult, but we needed to get the regional perspective.”

“If someone has vested interests, they excuse themselves from the committee,” Rey-Moreno adds, giving the example of when the Zenzeleni community network, which he founded, applied for a grant.

But Rey-Moreno points out that it is not just the selection process that needs to be accountable – the process and the decisions reached need to be communicated clearly to the network. Like APC’s core grant-making programme, the “Connecting the Unconnected” project sometimes gets feedback from network members who question why one project was funded and not another. “We had a situation where our website was set up a bit late, and this created the impression that there was something funny going on,” he says. “One or two people from the network approached me. It shows how important clear communication is in this process.”

APC’s historical standing as an accountable organisation is also important, as is what Rey-Moreno calls the “street cred” of the people involved in the project. “APC as an institution is respected as transparent,” he says, “and the people involved in ‘Connecting the Unconnected’ are known amongst community networks, as are the principles of what they are trying to do here in building community networks.”

Setting a feminist agenda in community networks

While the “Connecting the Unconnected” project responds to APC’s KRA on Access, its work overlaps with several other KRAs, such as governance and gender rights – including APC’s work on building a feminist internet. “We want to explore the possibilities of building a feminist internet at the local level, and we are testing what it means to bring visibility to gender and to attempt to frame a feminist approach within our projects,” Diga says.

This is not just a “nice to have” as so often happens with gender issues, but is integral to the orientation of the project’s work: the project has appointed a gender and women’s engagement coordinator to its 13-person team, and its project proposal terms of reference are specific when it comes to addressing imbalances in gender, sexual and LGBTIQ rights in communities.

“We could not have even got to first base without the ‘Connecting the Unconnected’ grant. There was no sense of being judged as we learn. All this is really really important to people working in very challenging contexts without many local experts. Also as a woman in tech, although all my tech supporters were men, they don’t make me embarrassed to ask questions. The value of non-judgmental peer support cannot be underestimated.” – *Nic Bidwell, formerly part of the “Connecting the Unconnected” project team, who started a community network in Windhoek.*

As Diga suggests, through subgranting it is possible to make specific targets a structural requirement of any funded project process, showing that subgrantees are able to set the conditions of disbursement in a way that favours the strategic goals of the project, such as the visibility of women in community networks. One could,

for example, address environmental sustainability in a similar way. “In our subgrants we wanted to ensure that for each peer grant, where two people were selected, one was a woman,” she notes. “I think it has made a difference – it has given us an

opportunity to work with women in community networks to bring visibility and build their confidence.”

But even with this requirement, promoting a feminist agenda has not been easy. “A group of community network women met in Nairobi as part of a women’s circle – it brought out the huge challenges of working in rural areas,” she says, adding that community networks are typically male-dominated spaces. While ensuring women are empowered in community networks is one thing, promoting ideas such as “feminism” or using terms like “queer” in some contexts can be even more challenging, and sometimes might require mediation.

“A feminist lens or queer lens have not been well explored or brought into awareness within community network spaces,” says Diga. “That is why we specifically appointed a gender and women’s engagement coordinator: to help us work through what can be done in order to address the fundamental issue happening in the community network space – on how to be proactive in achieving APC’s vision of creating a more just world.”

“No! We could not have started this without the ‘Connecting the Unconnected’ grant. We conceptualised UmozaNet in 2018 and the first support that we got for UmozaNet was from the peer grant. Getting financial support from ‘Connecting the Unconnected’ was special because of the sense of mutual partnership. Grantees are looked at as partners, removing the supremacy that is demonstrated by other funders. This fostered collaboration and a positive working relationship between grantees and the ‘Connecting the Unconnected’ team. The most exciting part of the work that we did was conducting the needs offer assessment, trying to understand the services that the network can provide. It was so exciting to get to hear the views of the community through a process of co-designing. We are very happy because the funds have enabled us to embark on work that is so dear to our hearts. Each day is so inspiring because we are learning more about community networks, especially on how we can improve our work.” – *James Gondwe, UmozaNet (Malawi)*

Taking “small steps”

Capacity building is a core part of the “Connecting the Unconnected” project, including in its subgranting work. “It was implicit that there would be institutional strengthening in the project,” says Diga. “We certainly have been working closely with each and every grantee – specifically because the timeline was so short – so the team had to be really hands-on to ensure that projects would complete in the time period.”

She elaborates: “Our coordinators were highly involved in supporting the processes of writing proposals, particularly with the peer grants. Once the learning grantees were selected, they had to go through the process of identifying low-hanging fruit – activities that were achievable in the short period of six months – and then write these up into a proposal. This process was followed thoroughly by regional coordinators and the team from Rhizomatica [Peter Bloom and Nils Brock] and me.”

Diga says each proposal was circulated to the decision-making committee for feedback – a process she describes as “highly intensive”. Part of the project’s capacity building also involved APC’s financial team running webinars on financial reporting with grantees. “We try to provide templates that are easy to

work with, and run the financial webinars, but it [requires] a lot of back and forth with partners to ensure they meet APC's financial policy."

"I am empowered by this grant, got a lot of experiences and knowledge and strongly believe that building community networks in Myanmar and our neighbouring countries is my duty and my responsibility, not only to get the internet connectivity but also to inspire and empower each and everyone in the community for their development by themselves. Now, I clearly understand and accept that the ultimate principle of building a community network is just not the technology, the internet connectivity, but it is about working with the community, building trust, providing support and sharing skills for sustainable development. We are now combining more deeply with more communities including women, kids and youth, because we got the idea how to work collectively in different focus areas on the same platform towards the same vision."
– Pum Suan Hang (*Michael Suantak*), ASORCOM & SAVORY Social Enterprise (Myanmar)

It is here that Diga raises an interesting point about donor requirements when it comes to project reporting in a project like "Connecting the Unconnected" – one that works with grassroots engineers doing vital work connecting their communities, but who might have little experience or interest in paperwork. It is a similar point that Radloff raised about the difficulties of responding to the needs of privacy and security when reporting to donors on feminist interventions: "The issue," Diga says, "is can we ask donors to

be flexible on their reporting requirements knowing that people have strengths in technical skills, but do not have strengths in terms of administration? We are asking them to do administrative work when that is not their strength."

One way to mitigate this inexperience, and to ensure that a project's objectives are being met, is to work with grant recipients in what Diga calls "small steps".

"It's not just a 'final report' requirement," she says. She gives an example of how the catalytic grantees are managed: "The coordinators have been very good having monthly meetings with the grantees; they have a checklist, and ask them: are you meeting your goals? If the answer is 'no', they try identify why this is the case, and ask how they can help them. That has been quite helpful," she says.

The "Connecting the Unconnected" experience has also shown that capacity building needs to happen even before any proposals are written – and that projects should not assume that there are shared meanings in any network on issues, even if the network is made up of organisations with aligned concerns. Terms of reference for calls for proposals need to be clear, and even more so when you are working with a multilingual network. This helps to streamline project processes by avoiding applications that are off-point, making sure deliverables are concrete and understood, and that confusion is avoided. In the end, this kind of clarity is equally important for transparency. "We learned that more preparation of the potential grantees for the catalytic grants was necessary," Rey-Moreno explains. "There was some confusion on what we meant by a 'catalytic

idea’,” he says, adding that in future the project would hold a webinar session ahead of the proposal writing so a clear idea of what was needed from community networks could be developed.

“It’s about people”

Growing a network like this, especially when it involves the disbursement of funds to community initiatives that might have little track record, or are not APC members, implies some measure of risk. But it was a risk the project was willing to take: “We put a lot of stress on people in this project,” says Rey-Moreno.

One of the benefits of this outreach is that it not only has built the “Connecting the Unconnected” network, but it has helped to strengthen APC’s membership base. “When APC has members who are well known in the community network space as stars, others want the opportunity to work with members in that space,” Diga says. “Community networks have told me that they wanted to be part of the bigger space that is APC.”

But one can’t help feeling that the real beneficiary in the project’s subgranting process has been APC. Working at the grassroots, and bringing the energy from committed people rooted in communities into the “APC space”, has clearly been invigorating for the organisation.

“There is something about people who are behind these initiatives; they care for something that is bigger than themselves,” Rey-Moreno explains. “I don’t know how to say it. I met with the Asian peer grantees and did a workshop around policy. I didn’t know anything about three of the four. The quality of the humans that were there was unbelievable. There is something that is caring about the collective; their own collective they are doing in their daily lives as well as the collective that we are nurturing. It was very humbling.”

“We have been very lucky. This creation would not have been possible without people who care,” he says.

“Getting our solar infrastructure up and running has been the most exciting achievement for us. We were rather ambitious in our objectives for this grant but were advised to scale it down due to the amount of grant available. Without the grant we could not have renewed our critical infrastructure of an alternative source of power and engaged in the wide-ranging advocacy to our regulator that we achieved. The various advocacy efforts are taking time to yield the desired results, but we accept that this is a long-distance run, not a sprint.” – *John Dada, Fantsuam Foundation (Nigeria)*

"I find the responsiveness from APC to changes in the project very important. Dealing with grassroots movements, there are always unexpected/uncontrollable issues that arise and the focus on learning and dealing with issues as they emerge – and building value around solving those issues – is very useful. Another aspect I really appreciate is APC's understanding and support of human capacity building and support of core activities. With small organisations, every project has an impact on the team or organisation as a whole, if there is no support for this it is difficult to undertake the project. Supporting and funding people's work, not only new equipment or a project activity, is something that is super valuable, and really impacts on the health of the organisation and the impact of the project. Other donors are more outcomes based, which leads to lower positive impact on the project as there is no flexibility to meet the needs as they arise. It is important to understand that the usual scenario is that implementation can be six to 12 months after the proposal is written. In one year things in the organisation and its environment can change a lot. If you cannot adapt to the scenario as it is in the implementation phase, you are constantly fighting between meeting the donor needs and the real needs. Many donors require much heavier administrative processes; this is a barrier for many grassroots initiatives. We have really been able to deepen our human capacity and relationships between community members and experts. For us this is the most important aspect of what we do, and the most difficult to do, as experts and communities are often in different locations and have to deal with very different realities." – Soledad Luca de Tena, Zenzeleni Networks (South Africa)

5. From the inside

Roxana Bassi now heads up APC's tech programme. She started coordinating APC's core subgranting programme in 2017, before handing the reins to Ramanujam. It was her job to develop the internal systems to run the subgranting programme efficiently – which, up until then, had been lacking.

"I had to set it up online, standardise the form and selection process," she says. Formalising the subgranting process included producing a detailed, step-by-step procedure manual, from putting out calls, checking on the status of members, validating proposals (are the budgets and project time frames within the expected range?), and setting up the review committee with the right expertise. It was about making the process easy to follow and as efficient as possible.

As APC has found, for any subgranting programme these systems and structures are important: they minimise the administrative burden on a subgranting organisation, ensure consistency and continuity, and help to make the process easy to understand for grant recipients, thereby also contributing to transparency.

The need for internal capacity

Subgranting places pressure on the internal capacity of an organisation – and all APC subgranting projects agree, this is particularly the case when it comes to the financial administration of the grants. Subgranting strains an organisation's financial department, and project coordinators expressed dismay at the extent to which this is the case. There is a need, APC has found, to balance the financial administrative capacity of an organisation with the administrative needs of subgranting, which can have its own special requirements.

While structures and systems are important, it is also important for subgranting organisations to remain alert to funding cycles, planning for the new subgranting cycle while they are still busy wrapping up the reporting on the current year. "What is important is to plan ahead for the following year's cycle," says Ramanujam, who took over from Bassi as coordinator of APC's core subgranting programme, and is now coordinator of APC's Challenge project in Asia. She says APC now puts out the call for the project grants in November of each year, so that come January, a shortlist for selection is available.

This forward planning minimises the strain of the process on the internal capacity of the subgranting organisation, and gives the projects themselves more time to implement their initiatives, which all work on a tight timeline of one year or less in duration in APC's core subgranting programme, even if, as Ramanujam says, the flexibility of the grant-making process allows project extensions to be given.

According to Bassi, it is a half-time job to coordinate APC's core subgranting programme, making it, as she says, "an effective strategy when it comes to the internal capacity needs of an organisation."

Working in higher education

CITAD is not the only organisation to do work on digital rights in higher education. In 2018, through a project grant, Sula Batsu²⁹ worked towards developing a code of good practices for digital technology universities in Costa Rica. It said sexist behaviour at IT universities and the "habits and practices" of instructors, classmates and university staff result in women's intelligence, capacities and roles being questioned. The result is that "women represent only 20% of the people who develop the digital technology that moves the world," the organisation said.

In 2019, through small grant support, Rudi International worked with first-year women university students in the Democratic Republic of Congo to encourage them to develop purposeful social media messaging, focusing on Facebook and Instagram. "This is the generation that uses these platforms the most, but they are not using them meaningfully," the organisation said. "We have found that social media, if used with a purpose, is a great tool of advocacy for women's rights."

But this is the minimum. As Ramanujam points out, there is a lot of additional work that flows from the projects funded, and more time is needed by the coordinator to follow these leads. For example, more work could be done in ensuring that the project experiences effectively flow back into the network, so that knowledge is built horizontally and members are strengthened by each other's work. Hands-on capacity building and support with processes such as research and campaigning could also be possible – requiring much more time and additional skills and staff.

Subgranting, in the end, needs to be scaled to how far an organisation wants to take the processes. "There is room to do more capacity building with members," says Ramanujam, "such as supporting them in events. We have started to do this with AfriSIG [the African School on Internet Governance]³⁰ and Coconet [the Southeast Asia digital rights camp],³¹ because we recognised it is important – but this takes time. And then, as with projects of this nature, there is a need to focus on the outputs of the projects, and how these can be taken forward," she says.

But running an efficient and responsive subgranting programme is not just the responsibility of the subgranting organisation. Grant recipients also have a hand in how streamlined, and effective, a subgranting programme can be. For example, one challenge felt across APC's subgranting initiatives is encouraging some organisations to report their outputs properly. "Just sending a link to a news report with photographs is not enough," says Ramanujam. "So we have to go backwards and forwards with organisations when that happens."

"Financial training is necessary for grant recipients," states Radloff firmly, echoing the experience of other subgrant coordinators in APC.

"Proposal writing can also be deceptive," she adds. "Sometimes you misunderstand a context, and when you follow up with the organisation, you see it was something entirely different."

29. <https://www.apc.org/en/member/cooperativa-sula-batsu>

30. <https://afrisig.org>

31. <https://coconet.social/camps>

And there are limits to the kind of support APC can offer. It does not, for example, help an organisation build its internal capacity to implement a project, whether it is research, event organising, or campaigning.

"It's no problem working with organisations when they are sincere," says Bassi. But she warns there is a danger for any organisation doing subgranting that others may see it as "easy money" and overestimate their own internal capacity, or may not be able to build the capacity to meet the formal requirements of the programme. "Sometimes organisations want to do research, but they don't know how to do research," she says. "In those cases it is our job to advise them that they need to bring researchers into their project to make it effective, but we can't do that for them."

Building the capacity of organisations to raise funds

Where APC does build capacity in its core subgranting programme is in guiding organisations that need the help in developing their proposals. "Some organisations have never written proposals before," Bassi says. "This puts them at a disadvantage."

Unlike the small grants fund, project grants are competitive – and these first-time organisations are coming up against APC members who have developed fundraising skills over many years. "When we wrote to organisations saying that their proposal had not been successful, we gave them advice and feedback from the evaluating committee on why this was the case," she says.

In the next round of calls for project proposals, Bassi worked with these organisations to improve their proposal writing. "I didn't give them tips on how to succeed," she notes, "but I could tell them things like if their budget made sense, and help them with that. So those that fail were given extra support – to help them correct their previous mistakes," she explains.

"Members say the feedback we give them is very helpful and has helped them prepare better proposals," says Ramanujam.

While subgranting allows organisations to test project ideas, and based on this experience, raise long-term funding elsewhere, it also develops the capacity of organisations to fund-raise more effectively. "What we hope is that this process shows them how to write an effective proposal," says Bassi. "It is a good way for them to start. Here, they can grow their confidence in applying for funding, being successful at receiving funds, going through the process of reporting and so on, and then approach donors."

"That's the real value that we offer organisations that don't have access to funding," she says.

Dealing with disappointment – and a need for transparency

The competitive nature of the project grants means that APC has to inevitably deal with disappointment amongst those organisations who do not have their projects selected.

“We receive some comments that the same organisations are receiving money all the time,” says Ramanujam, who adds that the only way to effectively deal with this is to be transparent in the decision-making process.

The organisation’s core subgranting programme works with a more centralised process than the FTX subgranting experiment, or compared to the “Connecting the Unconnected” project’s decentralised model. About eight people form the proposal evaluation team, depending on the region dealt with in the proposal, the member involved and the theme – a committee set up according to the expertise needed to properly assess the proposal. Besides staff members, this team would include a board member, an APC member not applying for a subgrant that year, as well as an external evaluator. “We would be very firm about the weaknesses and strengths of any proposed project,” says Bassi.

“This is crucial for transparency,” says Ramanujam, who followed essentially the same process as Bassi, drawing on the detailed procedure manual she developed.

As “Connecting the Unconnected” has also found, central to transparency in any subgranting process is communicating effectively and clearly with grantees – including why a project was not successful, or even why it was. “This is the only way to deal properly with the disappointment that organisations might inevitably feel,” says Ramanujam.

Transparency includes not only knowing who was funded, but how much money they received, which she says is available on project links on APC’s website. “One of the good things about APC is that we are transparent about where our money comes from and what we are using it for,” she says.

But Ramanujam points out that feedback, or clear communication, does not always work. “Some members take the feedback and don’t do anything about it, and that’s okay.”

What’s most important, she says, is learning to say “no” – something that is not that easy when you are working with a network that you are a part of, and want to build and encourage. “Subgranting is constant learning, internally,” she says. “We are getting better at saying ‘no’. That’s an important part of the process.”

Research and risk

Initiatives funded by APC through the subgranting programme showed how provocative project agendas can expose activists to sometimes unanticipated real-life risks. As the Festival Perempuan in Malaysia showed (see insert above), simply organising a celebration of feminist rights with storytelling, music and poetry provoked a backlash from reactionary groups, forcing the festival to seek refuge online and demonstrating why the festival was so important in the first place. Less predictable is when research agendas might expose researchers to risk, forcing them to change their strategies, or modify their approach – even when, on the face of it, this research might not be controversial.

This was the case when FMA mapped drug rehabilitation centres and support services online, as part of a campaign against extrajudicial drug-related killings in the Philippines. “We received intelligence reports from some of our partners saying the police are monitoring our website,” says Lisa Garcia, FMA’s director. “Organisations we have listed are then being tagged as ‘enemies of government’. We had to remove from the public-facing platform the names of organisations providing help. People now need to ask us for permission before they can access that information.”

As DEF found in India, trying to help female rag pickers and educate them about the dangers of processing e-waste exposed fieldworkers to threats from local “dismantler networks and overseers” when collecting data in Seelampur and Saki Naka in Mumbai, forcing it to hold group discussions with dismantlers in Mooradabad instead.

In 2018, MMfD mapped the manipulation of online political debates and discussions through the use of what it called “human-bots” and fake hashtags. Its research received strong media attention, and included televised interviews dealing with the increase of digital violence against journalists critical of state policies.

“We kind of bit on more than we could chew,” says the MMfD’s Sadaf Khan. “The main problem we ran into was completely political. Our work attracted a lot of surveillance, and made things difficult in that sense. Even though we still have a lot of data collected that we wanted to publish, we had to limit publication.”

“We didn’t feel secure doing that – it was a very volatile time,” she adds.

All of these examples show an ability of groups – whether their interests are money or political influence and control – to silence and limit civil society research activities, and are also indicators of how important the investigations funded through the subgranting programme have been.

6. Conclusion: “Going in with eyes open”

“I see subgranting as a huge potential growth area for APC, and we need to think about it in that way,” says Banks.

Garcia Ramilo agrees. “When we first started the subgranting programme the focus was to set up the mechanism that could help us to coordinate and manage it. In the first few years the aim was to sort out the mechanism. It is all we had time for. Now we need to look at growing it further,” she says.

“If we grow subgranting as a fundraising strategy, if we have the capacity and the experience, then we can go to donors, and ask them to contribute,” she notes.

Banks says one way to do this is to set up a specific subgranting “unit” to take on the unique administrative and financial tasks required. The unit’s job would not just be administrative. It would help APC orientate itself properly as a subgranter, bringing it closer to members, and strengthening member interaction in the network.

“We need additional capacity to do it – it is a whole engine, and we need to go into it with eyes open,” she says.

While APC’s core subgranting programme has proved effective in empowering organisations to achieve their goals, Banks also points to the projects such as “Connecting the Unconnected” or FTX, which have a more focused, thematic subgranting agenda: “We don’t have anything like that in our core subgranting programme at the moment. They have more of an intentional way of drawing together organisations to work together,” she says.

Increasing APC’s subgranting work would mean a more hands-on capacity building approach from APC, including more staff support to member projects, similar to the way that “Connecting the Unconnected” is managing to integrate capacity building in its disbursement of funds to community networks.

“One of the things we have wanted to do is get people together for capacity building,” says Garcia Ramilo. “We want to work more directly with members. There is a potential for something more focused, and to bring people together around something they are doing already.”

Banks gives an example of APC’s environmental KRA, which was identified as a critical area of work by its members. “From the outset we knew we were going to need to raise money for environmental sustainability,” she says. “But we can use the money to shape our venture in a different way. For example, we can

ask 10 members to work on environmental sustainability, with APC staff involved.”

For Garcia Ramilo, the aim is to offer a more meaningful flexibility to projects. “We can also decide whether a project is more suitable for one year or two years, so members don’t need to go through this yearly cycle. Then there can also be more opportunities to see how there are cross-connections between projects.”

The work, she says, involves “bringing APC and members closer – to achieve a sense of cohesion.”

For Datta, this cohesion is important, since subgranting needs to make sense in terms of the values embedded in APC: “If APC does more subgranting, there has to be a balance,” she says. “APC needs to keep in mind the value of being a member-driven network. I don’t think it wants to increase its subgrants to a point where the main value to being an APC member is to get a grant.”

“There is real value in being a network and APC does it really well,” she adds. “This is not a funding network. For us that is not why we joined.”

As projects like “Connecting the Unconnected” and FTX have found, subgranting allows APC to reach out to new potential partners, and to extend its network and influence on the ground. This approach has also been adopted by Challenge. “We’re hoping to grow our community in Asia,” says Ramanujam, “so we have made subgranting a significant portion of the project.”

“Some people find working with non-members worrisome,” she adds, “but our underlying philosophy, our commitment to transparency, to openness, remains the same. It is important to leverage the position APC has as an intermediary.”

“I think we need to talk about it when it comes to the core subgranting programme,” says Banks. “We also need to work with organisations that might not become members, to build the network.”

What does seem important is the way in which APC opens up the network to new influences and energy. Garcia Ramilo places a strong emphasis on process, which she suggests is central to a successful subgranting programme. “How do we improve the process so there is much more conversation, better capacity building, more integration of learning – how do we develop these processes?” she asks.

It is, Rey-Moreno suggests, about trusting the people you work with. “It’s about the people,” he says.

“We took the risk, and we were proved right.”

Working with journalists on digital rights in Africa, Latin America and Asia

Journalists have been essential to a number of the subgrant campaigns launched by APC members, including building their capacity and understanding of internet rights, and empowering female journalists at risk. In 2016, CIPESA built the capacity of 11 journalists in Uganda who worked on gender-related issues, developing their know-how and skills to request and access public information online. In the same year, in a small grants initiative, Nodo Tau used APC's Internet Rights Charter to train activists, journalists and local government representatives on internet rights in Argentina.

In 2017, Bangladesh Friendship Education Society (BFES) set out to understand the types of online violence faced by women journalists in Bangladesh, to collect stories of online threats, and to raise awareness of the issue. Its research showed that that woman journalists in Bangladesh face the threat of both online and offline violence, and feel unsafe in their newsrooms, but that there is a culture of silence surrounding these threats. "We found that the journalists would rather adapt to the violence, so they can save their jobs," the organisation reported. "While women journalists have access to the internet, they have to deal with online abuse. Rather than getting any kind of support, the journalists are advised to stay away from social media," it said. The journalists BFES spoke to were also hesitant to speak out. "During the interviews some female journalists were not comfortable to share their stories with us. After assuring them that their name and personal information would be concealed, only half of them agreed to continue the interview." The project developed a small booklet with stories on online violence against female journalists, sharing this with the journalist community in Bangladesh, and with APC's Take Back the Tech! campaign.

A significant part of this work with journalists has been done by MMfD in Pakistan. In 2016, the organisation applied for a small grant to build coalitions of journalists and students to strengthen critical debate around the impact on human rights of the new electronic crimes bill in that country. "Our aim was to create a stronger resistance by engaging students and media in the debate on how internet and human rights and principles will suffer from the enactment of the bill." It worked. Just days before the National Assembly passed the bill, all parliamentary reporters staged a walkout from the press gallery, led by the parliamentary reporters' association.

In 2019, MMfD also set out to investigate and document digital violence targeted at women journalists who work online in that country. The research also investigates some of the hate campaigns against popular women journalists to try to determine who was behind the campaigns. In many cases, the organisation found that online violence and sustained hate campaigns result in women journalists withdrawing, which in turn has a direct impact on access and rights. It now runs a Women in Media Alliance, which includes filmmakers and documentary producers, because, the organisation's director Sadaf Khan says, "approaches to gender and narratives around gender, pop music and soap operas are regressive." The network, she says, builds on the work that it has managed to do through APC's subgranting programme.

7. Key lessons from APC's subgranting work

APC's subgranting work suggests several learning experiences and considerations for a membership-driven organisation dedicated to social justice and human rights:

- Subgranting is a readily accessible source of short- to medium-term financial support for organisations. It offers a flexibility in disbursing funds that is not often found in donors. It catalyses change in organisations. It can serve as “seed funding”, allowing new organisations to become known in an advocacy space. It allows for experimentation, innovation, and unpredictability. It allows organisations to strengthen the work they are already doing, and empowers them to seek funding elsewhere based on new experiences and knowledge.
- Transparency in deciding how funds are disbursed is essential. APC has tried different models for subgranting, including a centralised decision-making model, which offers autonomy for member organisations to decide on a project's focus within a broad framework of shared objectives; a decentralised model with a thematic focus, working with members and new partners; and a collective decision-making model, that is issue based, working with a network of like-minded activists. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and the most appropriate mechanisms for transparency might depend on the size of the project or initiative, and the overall objectives of the subgranting work.
- Clear communication is necessary for meeting concrete deliverables, for growing a community or network, and for transparency. Make sure meanings are aligned and shared, even in like-minded networks. This streamlines the process, avoids disappointment, and ensures clearer outcomes.
- Subgranting can be used effectively for outreach to meet and work with new organisations at the local level, growing a network or membership base, and increasing the profile of an organisation at the grassroots level.
- Thematically focused or issue-based subgranting programmes can encourage a greater level of interaction between organisations, and allow cross-border advocacy with the potential of amplifying advocacy impact. However, collaboration needs to be created – it does not happen on its own. It requires processes and specific considerations, such as the type of decision-making structure to follow, that create the context for cooperation to happen.
- To do subgranting properly, the administrative side of the work needs to be structured and simplified. Capacity

building is likely to be necessary, both for developing proposals and in financial reporting. Templates for proposal development and for financial reporting are useful and effective. The process of deciding on successful proposals can be highly intensive and hands-on.

- Subgranting places strain on an organisation's financial systems that should not be underestimated. An organisation contemplating subgranting needs to assess its financial administrative capacity properly, make adjustments where necessary, and try to streamline the project and financial reporting as much as possible, including through developing templates, and running capacity building webinars with grantees.
- Subgranting can be used to build internal capacity in organisations that have little experience to fundraise.
- Subgranting might require organisations to negotiate project reporting requirements with donors. It can offer a creative space for new models of project reporting to emerge.
- Subgranting empowers the intermediary. Subgranting organisations have an opportunity to make issues such as sexual and gender rights or environmental sustainability a "structural requirement" of the subgranting process. This allows significant scope for the subgranting organisation to influence local advocacy in a way that it cannot when funds are disbursed by a donor.
- Subgranting organisations also benefit from the process. They are invigorated by work being done on the ground, expanding their own advocacy agendas and networks in the process.
- Subgrants can be used to address the isolation experienced by members of a network. Sometimes organisations are the only ones working on a certain issue in their country, and their advocacy work can feel lonely. This isolation includes donors not being willing to fund issues that are not seen as important locally. The connection to a wider community is crucial to their sense of belonging, and to the energy they feel in doing their work. Their sense of digital separation – being connected, yet disconnected – can be addressed through cross-border projects that stimulate closer relationships.
- A subgranting programme in an organisation like APC should not be considered in isolation. It is part of a palette of support for members, including travel funds, other granting opportunities in projects, and member meetings. It should be seen as part of the wider organisational "space", with opportunities as interconnected.

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