**Portfolio Review: Right to Information, 2015 April**

**Portfolio Parameters**

This portfolio review assesses the Human Rights Initiative’s efforts to promote the right to information as a tool to defend other rights across the globe. This portfolio was launched in 2009 and was in place until 2014 when an integrated Human Rights Initiative strategy was developed that integrated the lessons learned from the right to information work to date. While for this portfolio we are reviewing the 110 grants made during the period 2012-2014 on five continents and in more than 40 countries, many of the reflections below draw on experience from the entire period, covering 185 grants totaling $12,088,731 plus an additional $8,788,509 in co-funding from within the Open Society Foundations.

**Context**

When the Human Rights Initiative started to fund right to information work in 2009, most donors, including other OSF programs, were supporting the adoption and general implementation of right to information laws, the supply side of the right to information. This isolated the right to information movement from other rights movements and created a challenge in demonstrating the usefulness of these laws in practice, and their impact in people’s lives.

The right to information movement has exploded since 1990, with 90 of the total of 103 right to information laws worldwide put in place in the last 25 years. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, former authoritarian countries in Central and Eastern Europe were eager to prove they belonged with the rest of Europe and in the 1990s adopted progressive laws, including on the right to information. After 2000, access to information laws were adopted across Latin America and then in the last decade in growing number of Asian and African countries. The Open Society Foundations has been a leading donor organization supporting the right to information movement from its early days. Today, transparency – and more specifically the right to information – has gained widespread recognition as a fundamental right at both the national and international levels. National right to information legislation, international standards, regional model laws, the first international treaty on the right to information in the [Council of Europe](http://www.right2info.org/resources/publications/instruments-and-standards/coe_conv-on-access-to-doc_eng), and international jurisprudence have been created. Many of these developments took place with support from the Open Society Foundations.

The excitement about the relatively rapid normative gains is in contrast with the questionable quality of several of the newly adopted laws and the challenges of implementing the right to information in practice. It became increasingly clear that laws, even good laws, were not sufficient to engineer a robust framework for producing and disclosing information critical to the exercise of other rights. Over the last decade, we have seen right to information activists increasingly turn their attention to the strength of implementing mechanisms. Perhaps more interestingly, starting in Latin America, but also in other parts of the developing world, we saw right to information groups turn to applying the right to information to new fields, including education, health, and the environment. A movement that had been predominantly concerned with the exceptions to disclosure, particularly around national security and privacy, has expanded to address the complex intersections of civil and socio-economic rights.

Many excellent civil society organizations around the world defend and advance the right to information. These organizations are primarily capital-based and run by well-educated, middle class activists. During the last couple of years, most of these groups came to realize that if they want to advance their goals they must build alliances at the national and international levels, and not only with similar organizations but also with other stakeholders, such as human rights groups, local communities, and movements. This is especially relevant in the current global context where even those countries that made progress on the right to information are now rolling back some of these gains.

The rapid expansion of the right to information movement and early successes in the adoption of dedicated laws helped to attract a range of new donors to the field, including the EU, UNESCO, the World Bank, DFID, USAID, HIVOS, AUSAID, the Asia Foundation, Civil Rights Defenders, Oxfam Novib and private funders such as the Hewlett, Omidyar, Gates and Ford Foundations, the National Endowment for Democracy, Fundacion Avina, MacArthur, the Sigrid Rausing Trust and, more recently, the Adessium Foundations and the World Wide Web Foundation.

**Our place**

The Open Society Foundations has played a central role in the spread and strengthening of the right to information movement. The Open Society Justice Initiative’s Freedom of Expression and Information Program seized upon the wave of new right to information laws being passed in the late 1990s and early 2000s to support local groups around the globe to test and litigate on the implementation of the new laws. Most of the geographic programs of the Open Society Foundations prioritized right to information to a greater or lesser extent in their strategies.

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| **Right to Information Grants** | | |
| **Human Rights Initiative** | | **OSF Co-funding** |
| 2009 - 2014 | | |
| **TOTAL** | **$12,088,731** | **$8,788,509** |
|  |  |  |
| 2009 | $1,262,860 | $166,675 |
| 2010 | $1,940,183 | $405,440 |
| 2011 | $2,139,681 | $802,143 |
| 2012 | $2,669,909 | $2,830,326 |
| 2013 | $2,205,004 | $1,491,130 |
| 2014 | $1,871,094 | $3,092,795 |

The Human Rights Initiative has developed its funding strategy based on what the other parts of the Open Society Foundations and other donors have already funded in the field. Our aim was to complement existing work and fill in gaps that we identified in advancing the right to information as an enabling right. As a consequence we have not focused our grant making on promoting case law. The Open Society Justice Initiative has been leading such efforts and we have been working very closely with our colleagues to coordinate activities. We have not directly engaged around issues of corruption, revenue transparency, national security, whistleblower protection, extractive industries, archives, and right to truth. We have not supported general awareness raising, trainings and general adoption campaigns, if they were not part of a comprehensive strategy on applying the right to information in practice.

Instead, we decided to focus our support to advance the right to information as an enabling right and in geographies where we saw an opportunity to match our work to existing efforts, with the aim of increasing the impact of our grants. We have also decided to fund in some countries where other donors were less active or not present at all, when we saw opportunities to build effective models and contribute to the global movement. We invested significant effort in building greater collaboration within the Open Society Foundations and increasing buy in for programs on the right to information as an enabling right. In the same spirit, the Human Rights Initiative has developed close relationships with some of the donors, such as the World Bank Institute, Hewlett, Ford, Omidyar, and HIVOS, including co-funding and coordinating efforts. Some new initiatives, such as the Transparency and Accountability Initiative, the Latin America transparency donor collaboration, the Open Government Partnership brought further opportunities for us to share our approaches and to deepen our learning and think together with other stakeholders in the field about strategies going forward.

In 2012, the World Bank launched the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, which supports collaborations between civil society and governments to solve critical governance challenges in developing countries, including around the application of the right to information. The Human Rights Initiative is the most active OSF partner in this new initiative, which also illustrates our central role within OSF in promoting right to information and public participation as tools to advance other rights. Beyond our grant-giving activities, we have also worked with OSF network colleagues to build a common understanding about the right to information as an enabling right and ensure their support for projects that use the right to information as a tool. For instance, we have co-facilitated spaces for dialogue and coordination, such as the right to information mapping workshop we hosted for African grantees and OSF partners in South Africa in 2010, something OSISA replicated earlier this month. We have worked in closer collaboration, providing technical support, with some of the regional and national foundations that expressed interest in developing more robust right to information work, such as with the TIFA Foundation in Indonesia and with country coordinators in Tanzania, Liberia, and DRC. We have worked very closely with LAP, OSISA, OSF-SA, OSIEA, OSIWA, ARO and more recently with OSIFE and the Asia Program. Our efforts at building collaboration within OSF network are reflected in the considerable amount of co-funding attracted to our portfolio.

**Our assumptions and ambitions**

In this context our ambition was to promote the exercise of the right to information by supporting civil society efforts that show how the right to information is fundamental to the realization of other rights. In collaboration with other Open Society Foundations programs and donor partners, we aimed to create strong models demonstrating the positive impact of effective implementation of national laws guaranteeing access to public information.

Our main assumptions were:

While provisions within existing laws and regulations may help to advance the right to information, a strong, free-standing access to information law and its implementation will most effectively ensure public access to information about public policy and expenditures.

In order to ensure that people could access necessary information about their rights in a timely, accurate, usable, and reliable manner, we needed to support campaigns for the adoption of national and state level access to information laws. We also assumed that to make these laws effective we had to support efforts to ensure their proper implementation, including supporting the adoption of good implementing regulations, establishing independent oversight mechanisms and appeal processes; addressing records management and archiving issues; and training the public and the media on the utility and use of access to information laws. Experience and studies, such as the 14 country comparative study “Transparency and Silence” published by the Open Society Justice Initiative in 2006, showed that in countries with dedicated access of information laws government entities responded to information requests at a much higher rate than in countries that did not have a law. Countries with relatively strong access to information legislation, such as Mexico, Slovenia and South Africa, provided inspiring examples of how this right can be applied and protected.

By supporting efforts focusing on the demand side of information, we would empower communities to request and obtain information that affects their lives. Using right to information provisions, human rights activists, community organizers, and policy advocates will be able to increase public participation in the development and implementation of policies and challenge government failures to protect and promote their rights.

Even in countries with right to information laws, few people use them or understand their potential benefits. Most of the public, including a majority of civil society groups working outside of the transparency field, do not understand how this right could be instrumental to securing other rights. Too often, the right to information remained inaccessible, particularly for those groups and communities that could benefit most from greater access to information. Right to information groups tend to work at the national level, distanced from community needs. We assumed that we could break this silo by supporting right to information organizations to collaborate with other groups and movements at the community, national, and international levels to learn from each-other’s experience, to document successes and failures, and ultimately to design more effective, innovative strategies – including the use of new technology -- to use the right to information as a tool to advance other rights. We believed that by showcasing how the right to information can lead to improvements in the delivery of government services, and in the protection of other rights, we would be able to build awareness, understanding, engagement, and enthusiasm for the right to information among civil society actors, the broader public, and state actors.

The public will be able to hold the government and public sector officials accountable more effectively when information of public interest is proactively disclosed in a timely manner and accessible format.

Recently-adopted right to information laws are not limited to the obligation of the state to provide information upon request. They also require the state to produce and disclose information in a proactive manner. Most of these provisions, however, are vague and governments fail to produce up-to-date, accurate, desegregated, plain-language, reusable information. The open data movement succeeded in compelling governments across the globe to publish large amounts of data, but in reality much of the data they publish is not what the public is interested in and often of questionable quality. We assumed that if we supported efforts to understand what information was needed for specific rights struggles, what related information governments have already made public, and what the obstacles are to producing and disclosing the information needed, we could create models of collaboration between civil society and government that foster the creation of clear transparency standards on proactive disclosure.

**Our work**

We promoted strong, free-standing access to information laws and their implementation

To achieve our ambitions we have supported a number of regional level efforts that advance the right to information from multiple approaches, such as innovative campaigns for the adoption of access to information laws based on broad coalitions, including the media, academia, civil society organizations, grass-root groups, churches, and youth. The Human Rights Initiative supported regional and global right to information efforts and networks, including the Regional Alliance for Freedom of Expression and Information (Alianza) in Latin America, the African Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) in Africa, the South Asia Right to Information Advocates Network (SARTIAN) in Asia and the Freedom of Information Advocates Network (FOIAnet) at the global level. Our grantee Alianza provided technical assistance and developed strong policy arguments for a broad coalition of civil society actors in Paraguay to advocate successfully for the adoption of their right to information law.

As the number of right to information laws increased, we also provided support for the replication of strong models in countries where the right to information movement was still at a more incipient stage. We supported leading right to information groups to provide technical assistance to groups in their regions on how to advocate for right to information laws and their implementation. With our support, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in India has offered technical assistance to groups in South Asian countries and also to build the capacity of their Ghana office. The Open Democracy Advice Center in South Africa helped groups and coalitions in the Southern Africa region to advance the right to information. We supported Access Info Europe, based in Spain, to advance right to information within the European Union to implement the right to information.

We promoted the demand side of information

The Human Rights Initiative has supported a variety of projects that aim to use right to information as an instrument to advance other rights. We have supported this work in countries with dedicated right to information laws, but also in places where we could see some government readiness, existing right to information provisions and a civil society willing to advance the right to information. These projects included a combination of strategies to obtain, analyze and use information to achieve specific goals. The strategies included applied research, monitoring, capacity building, requesting information, using the appeals system, litigation, analyzing the information obtained, advocacy, engaging with governments. Some of our grantees have been sectorial organizations working on education, health, or community development. More typically, however, we have supported organizations working on the right to information or transparency to train and assist sectorial and grassroots organizations and work in cooperation with them to address specific social, economic, or human rights problems. As efforts to use the right to information as an instrumental right were relatively new, and as we worked in very different contexts, we have not limited our support to a specific sector. Our grantee, Sonora Ciudadana has built a strong working relationship with local communities, media, and national level groups to advance equal access to social security services. The coalition led by Sonora obtained data on budgets, proved mismanagement of funds and discrimination, and successfully pressured authorities to take practical steps to increase access to services in the state of Sonora, in Mexico.

With our support, some of our grantees analyzed the extent to which existing right to information legislation allows access to specific types of information and prepared guides for vulnerable communities on how to exercise their right to access this information. An excellent example is the guide - produced by our grantee the South African History Archives – on how to use the Promotion of Access to Information Act to advance the position of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons in South Africa.

To ensure that our efforts do not take place in isolation, and that we develop deeper thinking around some of the most challenging topics, the Human Rights Initiative facilitated exchanges among right to information groups, academia and experts. An example was our support for the former director of the Kenyan organization Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI), to travel to Pakistan and train and support local organizations on how to implement effective social audit projects that use the right to information.

We supported groups to use new technologies to promote proactive disclosure of information

The Human Rights Initiative has supported projects involving the use of new technologies in order to strengthen the work of our grantees advocating for governments to disclose specific types of information in useful and verifiable formats and to increase public participation. New technologies provide significant opportunities to advance understanding and advocacy in support of access to information, but utilizing these can also be challenging and until recently open data and right to information movements had little chance to interact. We have been working closely with the Open Society Foundations Information Program to help our grantees make better use of technological tools. We have supported the participation of our grantees in events organized by MySociety, where right to information groups learn how to use open source software tools to build sites that allow people to submit and track right to information requests. We enabled grantees to build such sites, in South Africa where environmental organizations are the top users of the tool ([PAIAtracker](http://foip.saha.org.za/request_tracker/search)) that allows them to file, track and analyze information through a single site. In Europe, our grantee Access Info Europe built asktheeu.org. The site is used to promote specific campaigns on access to clean air and finding out related information from EU member states.

**What we have achieved**

Progress in international legal norms setting and a growing number of national laws and implementation frameworks

By supporting projects involving a circle of activists beyond media professionals and demonstrating the use of right to information in practice to advance rights, we were able to strengthen campaigns for the adoption of right to information laws. Our support of the Right to Know Initiative (R2K) in Nigeria, along with the work of the Open Society Justice Initiative, contributed to the adoption of a strong right to information law in 2011, after more than ten years of struggle. The Human Rights Initiative’s support contributed to the creation of the Model Law on Access to Information for Africa, launched in 2013 by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights. This process entailed a broad, multi-stakeholder, two years long consultation process that put the right to information on the agenda of both governments and civil society in Africa and helped draft new laws on the continent.

The Human Rights Initiative has contributed to the consolidation of the global right to information movement by helping our partners to establish themselves as leaders in their countries and regions. For example, Access Info Europe has become the lead organization on the right to information in Europe and globally. It is instrumental both in advancing the normative framework and empowering civil society at both national and international level to exercise their right to information. The group has inspired and supported right to information projects in all continents and has published research and analysis that is used by right to information advocates globally, such as the [right to information law rating](http://www.rti-rating.org/)and a World Bank Institute supported publication on [proactive transparency](http://wbi.worldbank.org/wbi/Data/wbi/wbicms/files/drupal-acquia/wbi/Darbishire%20-%20Proactive%20Transparency.pdf).

We invested in the national, regional and global right to information infrastructure of sustainable networks and organizations that exercise influence beyond their home country. For example, the Freedom of Information Advocates Network (FOIANET) unites more than 200 organizations and over 700 individuals working to promote the right of access to information all around the word. FOIANET has been successful in multiple occasions mobilizing its members against threats to the right to information, and in standard-setting efforts.

Groups have effectively used the right to information to defend other rights and compelled governments to disclose public interest information

The Human Rights Initiative has supported a large number of projects that connect themes, groups, sectors, countries and regions to broaden the understanding of how the right to information can be effectively advanced and used to defend other rights. We have been successful in increasing the enthusiasm of right to information groups to apply the right to information in practice. Most of these projects have also offered a sharp learning curve both for us and for our grantees. Admittedly most of what we have supported is still a work in progress, though some of our grants have already provided successful examples of how a coordinated effort can deliver at multiple levels.

Our grantees in Argentina Asociacion por los Derechos Civiles (ADC) and Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia (ACIJ), members of the Article 24 Coalition, a collaboration of more than 100 civil society and professional organizations throughout the country used the right to information to advocate for the inclusion of children with disabilities into the education system. They have collaborated with organizations dealing with disability rights and with affected communities. The groups revealed that the government of Argentina was not producing and disclosing basic information needed to advocate for the implementation of disability rights related policies. They produced a report that exposed the fact that children with intellectual disabilities were completely excluded from public secondary education. Based on the results of this study, the groups have developed more sophisticated advocacy tools, including litigation and budget analysis, to support the case for inclusion. An organization in Uruguay, Centro de Archivo y Acceso a la Information Publica (CAinfo), has started to replicate this model of work in Uruguay and has achieved measurable progress in compelling the government to produce information on children with disabilities attending primary schools.

Another successful collaborative effort is led by the World Resources Institute, involving local partners in Indonesia and Mongolia, with the aim of supporting vulnerable communities least able to access remedies or gain political support. Project partners in Indonesia and Mongolia focused on promoting the proactive release of information related to companies’ reports and government’s data regarding water and air pollution related to big development projects. The project also builds the capacity of communities to interact with government, monitor and influence its policies. One of the tangible results of the effort to date is that the Ministry of Environment in Indonesia released a List of Public Information, which will require over 110 documents be proactively and periodically disclosed.

We have stimulated the use of new technologies to promote pro-active disclosure of information

Only a few years ago the gaps between open data, technological, and right to information communities were wide. Thanks to the efforts of the Open Society Foundations, including those of the Human Rights Initiative, these groups started to talk to each other and discover common agendas and ways to learn from each other. Today many understand that technology is critical, but only if applied in context and complemented by other approaches. With our support, organizations were able to collect, analyze, visualize and therefore align supporters to act upon information governments had made public. Two examples include a Mexican website to promote transparency in migration policies created by Fundar and partners and a Uruguayan website on domestic violence created by CAInfo and partner organizations. With the help of these tools, partners succeeded in advocating for policy improvements and pushing state institutions to collect and publish higher quality data. Other partners used technology in a creative way to collect information from and by citizens and to contrast that information with what they received from their governments. In Indonesia our grantee, Media Link, used mobile messages to get local communities to report on their challenges accessing health services, while the government reported on full health coverage. Through this method, Media Link documented gaps in the service-provision system and advocated for improvements. With our support several countries have now implemented “alaveteli,” an open source web tool that allows people to submit and track right to information requests in a single portal. We funded grantees to participate in related trainings and directly funded some of these websites, for instance in Hungary ([KiMitTud](http://atlatszo.hu/)), or in South Africa ([PAIAtracker](http://foip.saha.org.za/request_tracker/search)).

**Where we have fallen short**

Organizations that successfully advocate for the adoption of legal frameworks are not necessarily the ones who will be able to advance implementation of the right to information

We were impressed by the professionalism, enthusiasm, and commitment of several of our grantees in advocating for the adoption of right to information laws. It was not a question for us to support the same groups when it came to the implementation of these laws. We came to realize, however, that these groups do not necessarily have the capacity or networks to test right to information laws in practice and effectively link right to information to other rights. Our grantee Right to Know Nigeria was at the forefront of the adoption campaign, but when it came to implementation, they lacked experience working with other rights groups, and ended up doing general awareness raising campaigns instead of a more meaningful testing of the new Nigerian law.

Replication efforts do not necessarily work

We failed in some cases to assess the local context correctly, including the capacity of our partners. We were very excited with the successes obtained in the different areas of our work and were enthusiastic about replicating them. Although we were aware of the fact that we could not simply copy and paste the same approaches, in some cases we did not apply sufficient scrutiny and were unwilling to take unpleasant decisions or use a more cautious approach. In Tanzania we supported the Media Institute of Southern Africa, Tanzania Chapter to broaden the right to information adoption campaign, along the lines of the successful Nigerian adoption campaign. The Tanzanian group, however, was too vested in media work and was not able to reach out to groups in other sectors. Although the group was successful in broadening the coalition, its right to information advocacy efforts remained media-focused and did not produce a meaningful shift in understanding how right to information is more than just a tool by which the media tracks corruption.

India is probably the most inspiring example of how vulnerable communities can benefit from the right to information. Civil society organizations were able to use the right to information to support some of the most vulnerable communities engage directly with government on a range of socio-economic issues. Drawing on its experience supporting activists from local communities, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, decided to replicate its internship model in its Ghana chapter, in order to increase the capacity of local organizations to use the right to information to advance their goals. Ghana not only does not have a dedicated law (India has one), but the dynamics of interaction between people and the government is different. India has a long history of strong community activism, and this history is difficult to replicate. The internship program in Ghana, as a result, did not have the same impressive effect as it did in India.

Right to Information groups still struggle to break the silo in which they have been working and are still learning how their assumptions translate into practice

Despite of our efforts, many right to information groups continue working in isolation, engaging primarily in elite advocacy, distanced from grass-root struggles. Promoting legal frameworks is very different work from using them in practice to address communities’ specific problems. We assumed, together with our grantees, that if people are able to access information they need they will use this information to fight for their rights. We have learned, however, that information provided by governments is often too technical, complex, and of questionable quality. It has to be analyzed and interpreted before it can be used. But even then, people need avenues through which they can engage with their governments. Just because we speak about vulnerable communities, it does not mean those communities are homogeneous or well organized. People are busy, skeptical, and in many contexts afraid of power. The situation can get more complicated if the information needed is in the hands of private entities.

An example that illustrates this weakness is our co-funding for the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union to build and assist local Roma communities in Hungary to monitor how government funds dedicated to the improvement of infrastructure in Roma settlements were spent. The Budapest-based group soon learned how fragmented Roma communities in Hungary were; the very different priorities they identified; the many threats, including physical security, they faced when standing up for their rights; the challenges to building trusted relationships; and the limited human capacity of our grantee to provide the intense assistance that this sort of support work requires. We were more successful in cases where more preparatory work was done to build relationships of trust among organizations working on legal and thematic issues at the grass-root and national levels.

**What we have learned**

Support to new groups

One challenge has been to ensure that we find the specific sectorial expertise within or outside OSF to assist us and our grantees in assessing how to craft interventions in particular fields. This work requires right to information advocates working with sectorial partners – or the other way around -- to develop a clearer understanding of how access to government-held information can support their advocacy goals. This can be very challenging and demands human resources, a commitment to learning, and flexibility in approach. Developing partnerships across movements has not always been straightforward and we appreciate this approach will take time and resources. We need to invest in exploring and building relationships, and support collaborative efforts where mutual commitment and interest exists.

Influence over Peer Donors

We have learned that the focus on compelling states to produce data on rights obligations and the use of new technology and data visualization to support the demand for information on community level has not been systematically explored by other donors in the field. The staff time invested in tailored assistance to grantees, combined with our knowledge and reputation, provides the Human Rights Initiative with powerful leverage to continue supporting the field by influencing other donors. While this kind of engagement does not require funding, it demands significant additional staff time, effort, and coordination.

We have worked with the World Bank and we were the first to support a grant under the agreement between OSF and the World Bank under the Global Partnership for Social Accountability. We will continue to build on this opportunity and to better understand the dynamics of public participation with state and private entities. We will also continue to be active members of the Transparency and Accountability Initiative that offers space for open data and right to information communities to align approaches. These fora also give us a chance to put our approaches and assumptions up for discussion with the broader donor communities.

Advocacy and Impact

Policy advocacy and the creation of sustainable mechanisms for public participation remained a challenge for many projects. In some cases, our grantees got “carried away” with the use of technology and collection of data, and they lost sight of their original advocacy goals. In others, the organizations either did not have a specific advocacy agenda or claimed their product targeted everyone. In addition, in many cases the assessment of users’ abilities to digest information appears to have been overly optimistic. HRI and its grantees have recognized that the approach to advocacy needs to be more intentional and critical from the beginning. Groups need to identify clear targets, specify their advocacy goals, develop more precise benchmarks for understanding their impact, and assess more robustly how information is changing debates. Identifying, understanding, and working with the right audiences and the right knowledge products tailored for these audiences is tremendously important. To reinforce this point, we will have to strengthen this requirement in our support to the field.

Focus on narrower set of issues

As groups move from adoption to implementation, there is necessarily a need to focus their attention to specific rights obligations and associated data. We have realized that where we understand those intersections better, we are better able to engage with partners around their projects and to assess the chances for impact. For example, our partner in Argentina successfully compelled the Argentinian state to produce specific data on children with disabilities, and we have been able to link that work to other work we are supporting in Argentina on the rights of people with disabilities as well as to efforts on inclusive education we are supporting elsewhere.

Regional networks require significant investment in sustainability

We have invested considerable amount of time and resources to build effective regional and global networks and effective organizations that do regional level work. While some of these networks and organizations have grown to be real game changers in their regions – such as Alianza in Latin America or Access Info Europe in the European Union – they all face or have faced serious challenges. One of the big challenges for networks is to clearly define how they bring in added value to national level efforts. As HRI and other OSF programs have been the main supporters of these networks they did not have to cope with the internal tension in most alliances produced by the perception among some members that they are competing for funding with their own alliance.

The Africa Freedom of Information Center (AFIC) has been established by OSF and OSF had an observatory status in the board of the organization until recently. This dependence created challenging dynamics. To overcome these structural challenges, HRI provided an outside evaluator, Holly Cartner, and following her recommendation we provided expert support to AFIC to strengthen its leadership structure and strategic focus. However despite these efforts we have not seen a significant improvement. We have also supported the establishment of the International Information Commissioners Network based at the University Dundee. The University contributed with in kind support, including providing offices and admin support, which due to current restructuring was withdrawn and therefore the network remained without a secretariat and bank account.

The above structural weaknesses represent an important learning curve for HRI and despite the cut in our support to some of these networks we will closely follow their development in the future. AFIC just recently informed us that the network was shortlisted for EU funding. The International Information Commissioners Network is exploring ways to continue their work and establish new coordination structures. A lesson to be learned is that we should not be afraid to stop holding the hands of some of the organization that are overly dependent on OSF.

**Questions for consideration:**

Given the difficulties we encountered moving from adoption to implementation, what have we learned about how we might focus our work more squarely on accessing information on specific human rights obligations?

Participation is a term we have used fairly loosely, neither requiring our grantees to clarify what kind of participation they envision nor specifying ourselves what outcomes we would like to see. With the increasingly closing space for civic activism and engagement, can we become more precise in our use of the term and in our expectations for our support?

Why have right to information groups struggled to engage with other rights groups to support their needs? Have we contributed to this disconnect, and what will successful scenarios for collaborative efforts look like?