



Program

Localization:

Ouagadougou

Partnership

Coordination Unit

(OPCU) Case Study

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INTERNATIONAL

Because Health Workers Save Lives.



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INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESOURCE

Global Health & Localization



Localization means increasing international investment in and respect for the role of local actors, with the **goal of increasing the reach, effectiveness, and accountability of development efforts.**

International development donors in all sectors are increasingly committed to localized programming—**placing decision-making and implementation in the hands of local people and institutions.**

In 2022, USAID announced that **25% of direct funding** in the next 4 years and **50% over the next decade** will go to local entities. USAID has developed a Local Capacity Strengthening Policy.

The Hewlett Foundation aims to better support **local ecosystems to drive long-term, sustainable progress** on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in East Africa and Francophone West Africa (FWA).



Localization at IntraHealth

Local capacity-strengthening is entrenched in IntraHealth's Strategic Plan because:

- Development is most effective when it is locally owned.
- Allying with local partners will deliver greater sustained long-term impacts on health outcomes and health systems.
- Minimizing power imbalances in global public health is the right thing to do and aligns with our values.
- There is tremendous existing, and rapidly growing, capacity in the countries where we work.

Using this Case Study

This case study of the transition of the Ouagadougou Partnership Coordination Unit (OPCU) to a local entity is meant to complement the existing resources for project localization by:

- Detailing the steps used to transition the project to the local partner
- Identifying the challenges encountered during the project localization process
- Describing lessons learned from the OPCU transition
- Providing recommendations for future efforts.



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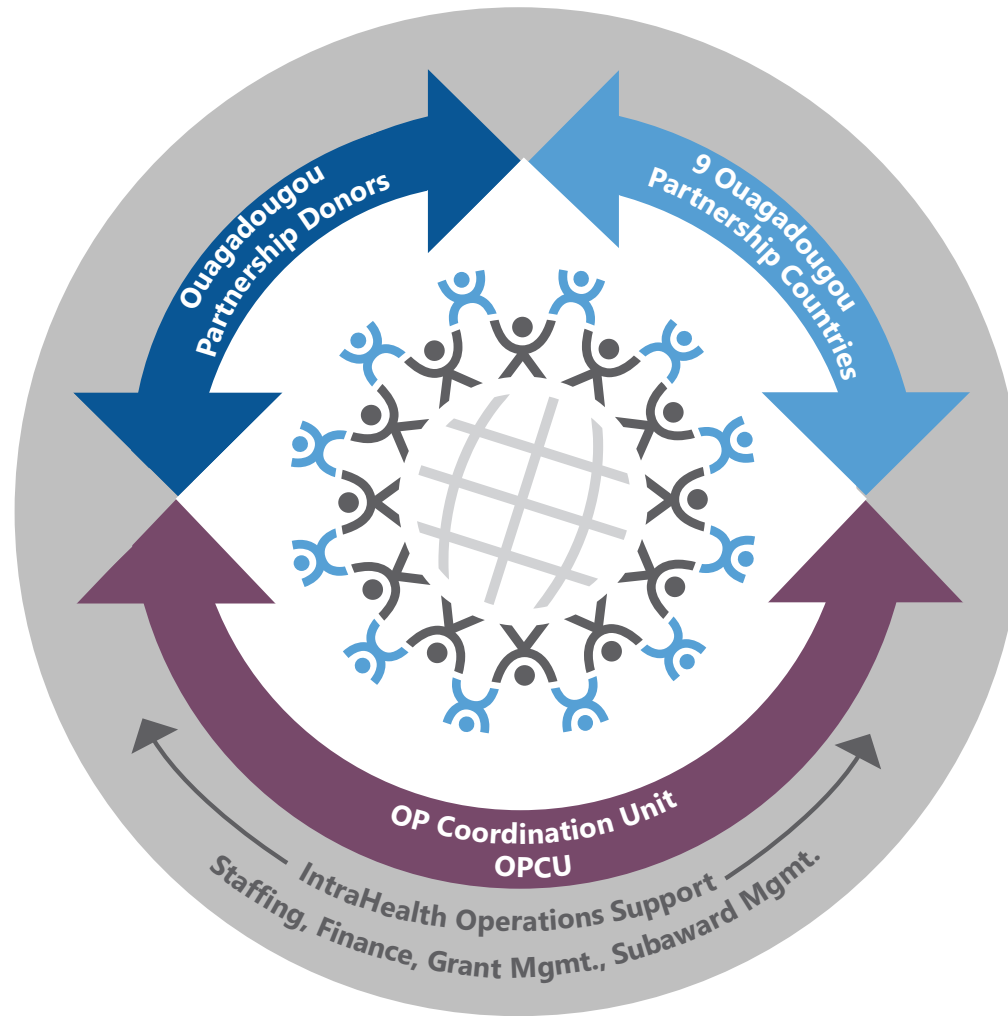
INTRODUCTION TO THE OPCU

History of OPCU and IntraHealth



- The Ouagadougou Partnership (OP) was established in 2011 to support collaboration among nine countries in West Africa to address high levels of unmet need for family planning (FP).
- The OPCU supports the nine OP countries to achieve their FP commitments through advocacy and coordination while coordinating the efforts of the OP donors.
- As a family planning thought leader in West Africa, IntraHealth was selected by the OP donors to administratively host and support the functioning of the OPCU.
- The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and Hewlett Foundation funded IntraHealth to transition all operational support for the OPCU to Speak Up Africa in 2021.

OP Relationship Matrix



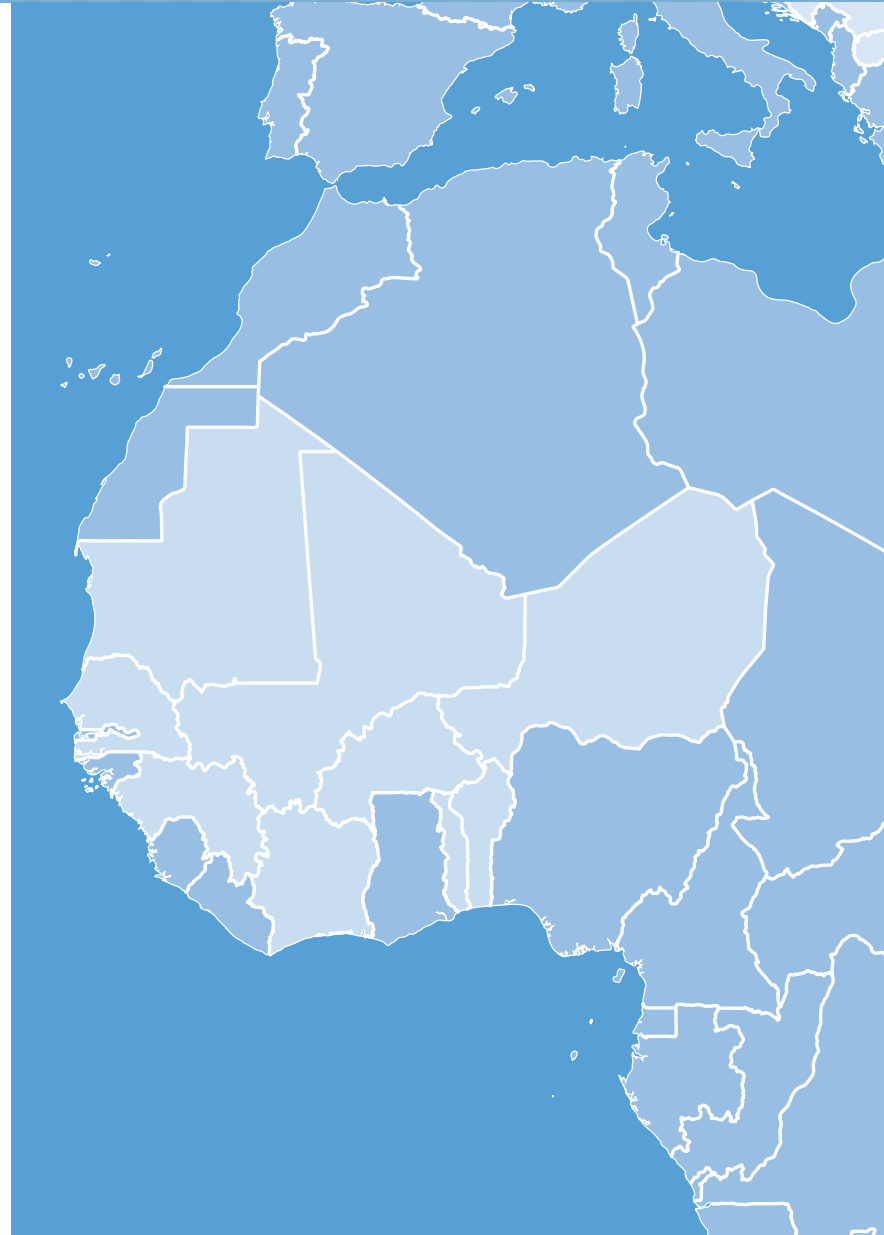
The design of the OPCU was a positive facilitator of the transition; as was the shared responsibility for the success of the OPCU.

IntraHealth's Support to the OPCU

As the host, IntraHealth's support to the OPCU included:

- **Grant management:** As the award recipient, IntraHealth wrote and submitted proposals and all progress reports.
- **Financial management:** IntraHealth managed award budgets, funded OPCU costs and activities, monitored spending, and did all financial reporting.
- **Staffing:** The OPCU team members were IntraHealth staff and received salaries and benefits in line with internal policies.
- **Partner management:** IntraHealth engaged all OPCU subpartners, monitored their progress, and arranged payments.

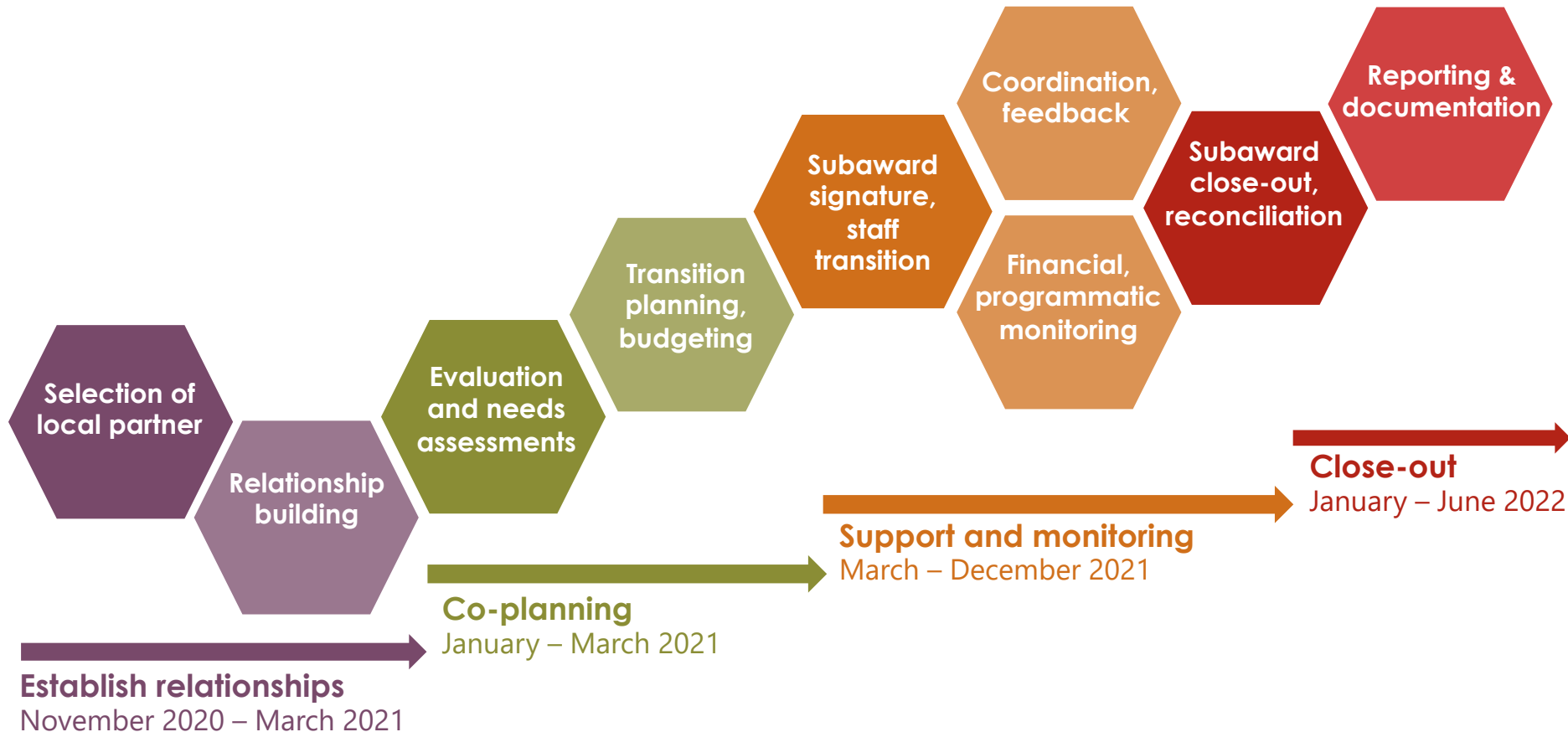
The OPCU is strategically driven by the priorities of OP country leadership and OP donors.



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TRANSITION OVERVIEW

OPCU Transition in Nine Steps



Transition of Support Functions



SpeakUpAfrica.

IntraHealth worked with Speak Up Africa to transition all support functions for the OPCU.

- **Financial management:** IntraHealth signed a subagreement with Speak Up and provided advance funding for all OPCU activities starting on April 30, 2021.
- **Staffing:** OPCU staff signed employment contracts with Speak Up beginning on May 1, 2021.
- **Partner management:** Subpartner contracts were transitioned in August 2021 in order to stagger transition activities and allow time for course corrections, if needed.
- **Grant management:** Speak Up submitted the 2022 OPCU proposal for ongoing, independent funding to the donors, which was awarded before the end of the transition year.

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TRANSITION PROCESS AND LESSONS LEARNED

STEP 1

Partner selection



- In November 2020, BMGF and Hewlett established a selection committee of priority stakeholders including RedStone Strategy, OP donors, OP country leadership, and IntraHealth.
- The committee decided on selection criteria, requirements, and priorities for the local partner.
- A detailed RFP was produced and published with clear, explicit instructions for local partner applicants.
- The committee unanimously selected Speak Up Africa in Dakar, Senegal as the future host of the OPCU.

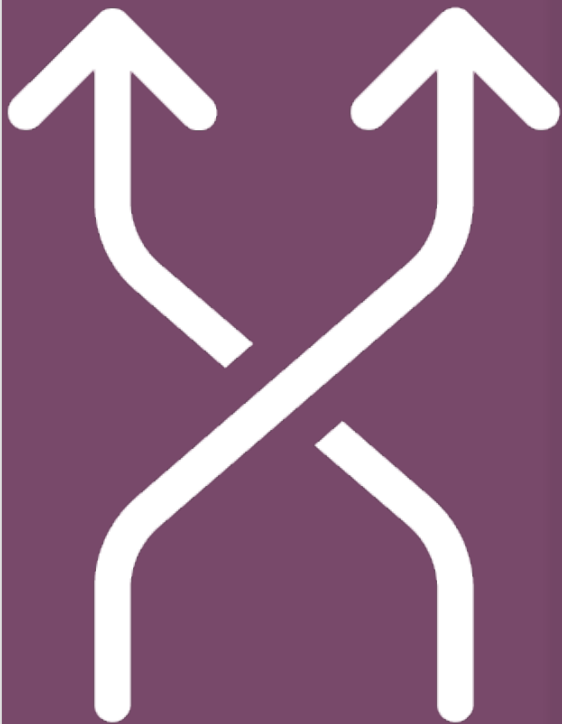
STEP 2

Relationship building



- IntraHealth hosted an official launch to achieve the following:
 - Introduce each of the key team members
 - Discuss expectations from all parties
 - Talk through the OPCU and transition project goals
 - Review key deliverables and timeline
 - Identify cadence and timing of coordination calls
- During this phase, we used regular calls between the partners to:
 - Jointly develop the transition plan and timeline
 - Review expectations of all parties
 - Develop the transition RACI matrix and define roles
 - Review IntraHealth subagreement terms and conditions

KEY LESSONS LEARNED



1. Using a RACI matrix is a great way to learn the roles of each team member, and to ensure effective communication throughout the transition.
2. At the outset, it is critical to identify the priorities and expectations of each partner and the donors. In this case, that included:
 - IntraHealth (including the OPCU team)
 - Speak Up Africa
 - The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
 - The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

STEP 3

Evaluation & assessments



- Prior to signing a subagreement with IntraHealth, Speak Up Africa completed a pre-award assessment of their operations and shared policy documents. This helped identify some organizational capacity needs.
- Speak Up Africa organized discussions with the OPCU team to gauge their preferences for organizational support. These discussions resulted in a list of upgrades for Speak Up operations (e.g., digital receipt software).
- IntraHealth hosted a call to talk through priorities for Speak Up Africa (e.g., HR policy development) and to incorporate those into support activities.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED



1. Pre-award assessments should be collaborative and involve contracts and finance staff from both organizations.
2. In addition, IntraHealth arranged site visits to Speak Up Africa offices as in-person opportunities for collaboration and capacity-building.
3. Areas for capacity-building should be driven by the needs of the project and the local organization. Efforts should build on long-term capacity goals or strategic plans.

STEP 4

Planning and budgeting



- The transition plan was jointly developed and discussed with all parties—the OPCU team, both organizations, and donors. The timing of the transition shifted several times to accommodate the preferences of all stakeholders.
- The transition plan with Gantt chart was used as a roadmap to set expectations and identify clear deliverables.
- Speak Up Africa developed and shared a budget, in adherence with the transition plan and OPCU annual plan as well as IntraHealth agreement terms.
- IntraHealth used the budget and the transition plan to draft the subagreement for Speak Up Africa.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED



1. The planning process is a **time of potential tension** between international and local partners. This tension is a result of **differing expectations** in terms of timing for each step of the transition. Local partners may want to speed up the process while international partners are hesitant to do so.
2. The reporting and deliverables outlined in the subagreement should be integrated into the transition plan to **align expectations and facilitate compliance**.
3. Review of the agreement terms and conditions is an **opportunity** to establish very clear expectations and procedures, particularly in terms of financial management, reporting, approvals, and deliverables.
4. Consider working through a **mock financial report** to discuss required supporting documentation and to identify potential barriers in financial reporting.

STEP 5

Subagreement and staff transition



- IntraHealth drafted a subagreement and reviewed the terms with Speak Up Africa. After several rounds of revision and discussion, the \$2.2M USD subaward was signed and effective on April 30, 2021.
- Upon signature, IntraHealth provided a 2-month project advance to ensure that Speak Up did not need to pre-finance activities.
- OPCU IntraHealth employee contracts were terminated on April 30. Team members signed new employment contracts with Speak Up effective May 1, 2021.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED



1. Transitioning of employees requires careful review of remuneration and benefit packages. Speak Up Africa undertook a review of its organizational HR policies to accommodate the OPCU team.
2. Flexibility is paramount in the transition planning. IntraHealth planned a phased approach in which operational functions were gradually transitioned to Speak Up. But ultimately, the plan changed to accommodate the OPCU and Speak Up preferences.

STEP 6

Coordination



Coordination during the transition included:

- Internal IntraHealth team meetings to discuss progress and challenges
- Biweekly meetings between primary contacts for Speak Up Africa and IntraHealth, with occasional participation from other RACI team members, as needed
- OPCU team and Speak Up Africa check-ins (both in-person and virtually)
- New contracts for all OPCU project subpartners (11 in total) were signed with Speak Up in May and August 2021. This was coordinated with all organizations to avoid gaps in funding.

STEP 6 CONTINUED

Feedback



IntraHealth solicited feedback from all project partners to evaluate the transition and identify challenges prior to the end of the award. This included :

- Survey of key Speak Up Africa staff (4 staff)
- Conversation with OPCU leadership (2 staff)
- Discussion with OPCU donors: Gates and Hewlett foundations
- Call with OPCU strategic partner, RedStone Consulting.

All respondents characterized the transition as successful.

Financial management and oversight were identified as challenges, particularly because of the resulting long payment delays (June 2022).

STEP 6 CONTINUED

Feedback



What did IntraHealth do well?

"...the preparation of the RACI matrix and adequate follow-up"

"...monitoring visits, which are control procedures that Speak Up Africa could use with partners"

"There has been no interruption of OPCU activities. This is a tribute to the fluidity of the process."

How could IntraHealth improve?

"The process of verifying financial reports with all supporting documents is very slow."

"Less micromanaging and more sharing of lessons learned from old host to new host."

KEY LESSONS LEARNED



1. Maintaining effective communication **across all partners** is crucial. In this transition, bilateral IntraHealth and Speak Up Africa meetings were useful but insufficient. We should have organized broader check-ins with the OPCU project team and donors.
2. Use the RACI matrix to make meetings more effective by making sure the right people are participating.
3. Don't skimp on **external communications**. It is useful for others in the sector and OPCU project collaborators to be regularly updated.

STEP 7

Financial & programmatic monitoring



- Speak Up was required to submit monthly financial reports and reconciliations for payments.
- IntraHealth conducted an external financial audit of Speak Up in the last quarter of the project.
- IntraHealth conducted two site visits to Speak Up offices for monitoring, collaboration, and capacity-building activities.
- As noted previously, biweekly calls helped ensure that implementation was on track.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED



1. Audits should be both **programmatic and financial** as one way of monitoring project implementation and financial management. IntraHealth did not sufficiently monitor project implementation, leading to some missing deliverables.
2. A **post-audit meeting** is useful to discuss key points and develop action plans to addressing any findings.
3. Use of an **external auditing firm** served to avoid a perceived conflict of interest for IntraHealth, in case of major findings, and maintain a collaborative relationship with Speak Up Africa throughout the transition.

STEP 8

Subaward close-out



- The transition of the OPCU support functions was completed December 31, 2021, after which Speak Up Africa received direct funding from the donors.
- IntraHealth shared a project close-out checklist with Speak Up Africa as a tool to successfully manage a project close-out. The responsibilities included termination of subgrants, final payments to all vendors, reconciliation of bank accounts, and submission of final financial report.
- IntraHealth submitted final award deliverables to the donors (final project narrative and financial reports) in June 2022.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED



1. Review of a **mock financial report is recommended** prior to signing a subagreement. Reconciliation of financials was a big challenge for Speak Up due to lack of supporting documentation for expenses and program advances. This led to long delays in payments and reimbursements.
2. Allow **six months** for award close-out. IntraHealth originally requested three months for final reporting to the donors, but due to delays in monthly financial reconciliations, an additional 3-month extension was required.

STEP 9

Documentation, reporting



- The OPCU team reported on their project activities for the final narrative report. This was challenging for the OPCU team as they relied heavily on IntraHealth for these tasks previously.
- IntraHealth documented the transition process including challenges and recommendations as part of the final narrative report to donors.
- Speak Up Africa was not involved in final narrative or financial reporting to the donor.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED



1. Speak Up Africa should have contributed to the final narrative donor report as a **capacity-building activity** and to offer their **perspective on the transition process**.
2. **Reporting and knowledge management** are critical competencies that are required for good project management. These competencies should be included in capacity assessments and strengthening activities.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for IntraHealth

- Prior to signing the agreement, work with the local partner to set clear expectations on the process for reconciliation of financial reports including the supporting documentation that is needed.
- When establishing the transition plan and timeline, remain flexible in your expectations and take extra time to communicate with the local partner.
- In addition to monitoring the transition, find ways to monitor progress in the OPCU workplan implementation, and offer guidance when needed, to ensure the project meets donor expectations.
- Clearly define the resources available (training, policies, tools) and time needed from staff for capacity-building. Put those activities in the work plan.



Recommendations for Donors

- Donors should consider providing more funding for transition awards/grants to provide time for both organizations to work together. This mechanism provided continuity to OPCU efforts and opportunity for capacity-strengthening.
- Conduct thorough pre-award assessments as part of partner selection. The assessment should include an understanding of the requirements of the “prime” organization and a measurement of the risks from their perspective.
- Establish quarterly check-ins with the local partner and the prime to monitor progress and ensure alignment with donor expectations.
- If capacity gaps continue after the local transition, initiate conversations with both organizations to evaluate the risks to future projects and identify ways to make improvements, if needed.