

International Planned Parenthood Federation – The Need for Change

By Steven Sinding (Commission Chair) and Lynette Lowndes (Commissioner), the Independent Governance Reform Commission

Introduction

IPPF is a global service provider and a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). IPPF is locally owned and globally connected Federation of 134 national Member Associations which has over 29,000 staff and hundreds of thousands of volunteers working with and for communities and individuals across the globe.

The Independent Governance Reform Commission has been tasked with undertaking a review of the organisation's governance structure, and to provide a proposal for radical and urgent reform on the basis of evidence and input sourced through a series of federation-wide consultations. The Commission works in parallel with the Independent Resource Allocation Commission.

The below paper, outlines the background of IPPF's governance structure and the drivers for the change, as they are seen by the Commission.

The paper forms part of a larger effort to share thinking and evidence as it emerges. The Commission hopes that the paper will inspire discussion and input for its ongoing work.

Governance history

Created in 1952 to promote and advance women's rights and access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, IPPF grew from a small number of affiliated national organisations with a minor secretariat in London. It was funded by dues paid by the member affiliates. The early pioneers decided on a governing body comprised entirely of volunteers from the membership. As the membership expanded, the governing body grew in complexity from a single annual members assembly, to a central council. Later, a central executive committee was added, and later still regional governing structures. Today, the Federation is governed by a Governing Council (GC) composed of 18 voting members with 6 non-voting members. The current composition of the board was developed in 2016 and has not changed markedly since.

Resource allocation history

In the 1960s and 70s, as population issues became increasingly important on the global agenda, donors offered IPPF foreign aid in order to expand the organisation's membership and programming. This was a pivotal moment for IPPF. Many were sceptical about accepting funds, because, in their view, it might transform IPPF from an egalitarian Federation of like-minded autonomous associations into a grant-receiving and grant-making instrument of donors.

The new resources enabled IPPF to become a global leader in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). But it also posed a new set of challenges. Specifically, the growth required the organisation to develop more sophisticated systems for management, reporting and accountability. This resulted in the Secretariat effectively having two 'masters': 1. an affinity group of MAs that wanted the Secretariat to be responsive to their needs, and 2. the donors who expected the Secretariat to open new programmes and to expand its services while complying with increasingly demanding grant conditions.

Financial formulas were developed during the late 1960s about how the increasing financial resources would be allocated to members. The most recent financial resource allocation model was devised in 1997 and has remained largely unchanged ever since. In applying this model, IPPF Regional Offices devised their own mechanisms for how to share funds to national members, including performance-based ones. The economic dynamics of countries, e.g., 'graduating' to lower middle and middle income status, was never factored into the resource allocation models.

The need for change

The Governing Council agreed in May 2019 that a more accountable, agile and modernized Federation is critical to its survival. The governing structure that had served the needs of an affinity organisation was coming under increasing stress as fraud and safeguarding cases revealed a lack of clarity between governance and management and an inability to respond quickly and effectively in accordance with requirements of IPPF's donors and the UK Charity Commission. These issues, having received wide press in the UK, where IPPF is registered, resulted in an existential crisis in 2019 with loss of donor confidence and the potential of IPPF being split, as one region moved to protect itself from the reputational and resource impact.

Many now see this crisis as an opportunity to transform IPPF into a more modern, agile and accountable Federation that is better able to respond to the current challenges in today's world. These include:

- An emboldened opposition that is better organized and funded than ever and beginning to reverse the hard-fought gains of the last two decades.
- Trust in institutions is in decline. Recent crises in the sector, including on safeguarding, as highlighted by the #MeToo and #AidToo movements, have eroded public support.

- WISH, a £130 million three-year contract, will pay in arrears for third-party verified performance. Only a more business-like IPPF, with tight management and streamlined systems, will be able to deliver on such a demanding and time bound programme.

Why such a short timetable for change?

Donors have given IPPF six months to complete its reform. Moreover, they have also provided resources for IPPF to facilitate the reform process within this timeframe. This is why the GC requested that the Director General set up an independent review of governance and the process through which IPPF allocates core (unrestricted) resources across regions and countries. It was agreed that its proposals be shared with the Governing Council for approval and at an extraordinary General Assembly of all IPPF Member Associations, alongside partners, and donors, to be convened in November 2019.

So the time is very short. However, the Commission is confident we will deliver a proposal on which the membership can vote in November. We are fully aware of the stakes involved if we do not.

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