Kenya’s Health NGOs Network (HENNET) is a network of over 100 civil society organizations (CSOs) working in health across all 47 counties in Kenya. HENNET coordinates and promotes the engagement of these CSOs to advocate for advancements in health policy. While PATH had been a member of HENNET since its inception, starting in 2019, PATH began providing consistent, strategic advocacy technical support to HENNET to increase its effectiveness by strengthening the network’s technical capacities, partnership management, operational functions, and financial management systems. Through PATH’s support, HENNET has increased its visibility and presence across critical health decision-making tables, contributed to and influenced key policy decisions, and strengthened its position as the national convenor of health CSOs in Kenya. Today, HENNET effectively coordinates CSOs to take collective action on national issues and is a go-to partner for all stakeholders working to strengthen Kenya’s health system.

The challenge and opportunity

HENNET has historically played a critical role as an umbrella organization for CSOs in Kenya since 2007 but lacked the necessary influence in the policy advocacy environment to contribute to transformative policy change. HENNET also needed stronger operational structures to coordinate CSOs toward effective health policy advocacy.

Beginning in 2019, PATH partnered with HENNET to grow its network, improve its operational systems, and build capacity and momentum among CSOs to conduct health policy advocacy more effectively. The partnership aligns with PATH’s approach to strengthening the capacity of locally led organizations in order to drive sustainable policy change. The process of building HENNET’s advocacy network and capacity was driven by a phased transition strategy, leveraging PATH’s strengths in advocacy and scientific and health expertise to empower HENNET to lead healthy policy advocacy at the national and subnational level.

“We believe that local organizations and communities are the experts. They understand what their needs are. They know the challenges. Our role as an organization is to provide the support—by delivering technical assistance, bridging capacity, and providing tools and templates—that they need to be able to find and implement the solutions they want.”

– Rosemarie Muganda-Onyando, Regional Advocacy Director, Africa, PATH
Implementing the strategy

PATH’s initial support to HENNET focused on building the network’s capabilities to advocate more effectively for their policy goals. We recognized that the organization’s leaders and members brought deep expertise in what needed to be done to best support the health and health equity of their communities; they just needed tools and approaches to help them come together, find consensus, and advance their goals through policy. To that end, PATH provided training and mentorship on advocacy and coalition management to bridge HENNET’s capacities and better position them to advocate on behalf of their communities and hold their government accountable to commitments.

A key tactic included raising HENNET’s profile by leveraging PATH’s decades of experience working closely with the government in Kenya to open doors to decision-making fora. PATH worked with HENNET to develop their advocacy strategy, including identifying priority policy questions grounded in evidence, and to connect HENNET leadership and members to opportunities to influence key policy discussions.

For example, PATH helped to ensure that HENNET was a key partner on the establishment of a multistakeholder platform for reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health and nutrition (RMNCAH+N) in Kenya, which was launched in 2021, providing a specific opportunity for HENNET to represent civil society in strengthening the RMNCAH Investment Framework.

At the same time, PATH recognized that strengthening HENNET’s operational capacity would also be necessary for it to sustainably manage resources and partnerships. An institutional assessment conducted in 2021 identified key weaknesses in institutional structures which were an impediment to organizational growth. PATH leveraged its experience in institutional capacity strengthening to work with HENNET to bolster its governance structures, leadership development, partner management, and donor relations. This included supporting HENNET to develop internal policies and strengthen management systems, including those for financial and human resources management. From providing training and mentorship to reviewing templates and forms, our support was deep, consistent, and multidisciplined. As a member of the HENNET board, PATH also oversaw the onboarding of new leadership and adoption of a new strategic plan incorporating lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Achieving the goal

PATH’s partnership with HENNET helped fill capacity gaps, supporting the network to build a more organized approach to advocacy among local organizations, bringing the CSOs’ collective and critical voice to the health policy table. Initially, PATH provided a significant level of technical assistance and thought leadership to bolster HENNET’s foundation; gradually that support became more limited as HENNET’s operational and advocacy capacities grew. Today HENNET is a stronger organization, demonstrating significant improvements in institutional capacity, accountability, resilience, and ability to influence policy.
In particular, thanks to improved coordination of its members, HENNET is better able to gain consensus and deliver valuable policy insights, which has earned the network government recognition as a vital convener and the voice of civil society in key health policy dialogues. For example, HENNET serves as one of the co-chairs of the Health Sector Partnership and Coordination Framework along with the Council of Governors, the private sector, and faith-based organizations, providing valuable guidance for coordination of health sector governance and partnerships. In addition, HENNET entrenched its role as a CSO representative at the RMNCAH+N multistakeholder Country Platform and took on a leadership role alongside the MOH.

HENNET has mobilized its members to influence major policy initiatives and hold government accountable to their policy commitments. For example, HENNET members influenced foundational primary health care policies passed in 2022 and coordinated, alongside PATH and other partners, a civil society effort to successfully advocate for inclusion of PHC in the political manifestos of all the major political parties in Kenya.

In late 2023, HENNET played a vital role in convening civil society and gathering inputs in response to a call for input by Parliament to inform several health laws which lay the foundation for a massive transformation of Kenya’s health system to better serve all Kenyans.

Most recently, in 2024, HENNET led and coordinated partners in an intensive campaign highlighting stockouts and shortages of supplies including vaccines to protect children against rotavirus, polio, tuberculosis, measles, and rubella. In addition to engaging with Ministry of Health officials, development partners, and the public through media, HENNET engaged with the parliamentary health committee, challenging cuts in immunization budgets. This prompted the government to respond, addressing vaccine delivery and distribution bottlenecks and mobilizing KSh 1.2 billion (~USD9.4 million) for urgent procurement and uninterrupted supply of vaccines.

Finally, building the organizational capacity of HENNET also increased its potential for partnership opportunities with influential organizations and funders. In 2023, HENNET received its first grant from a major international donor.

**Looking forward**

PATH will continue to engage with HENNET as a member and thought partner, sharing our technical expertise especially on primary health care. While no longer providing subgrant funds to HENNET, PATH will provide targeted capacity strengthening to address needs that may arise within HENNET’s operational structures and advocacy efforts. Given the rapidly shifting health policy context in Kenya, careful monitoring of the environment is critical to maintaining HENNET’s position as a key convener of CSOs in the health policy arena. Meanwhile, PATH will continue to document its processes and tools for capacity bridging to inform future efforts to strengthen the autonomy of local organizations to effectively advocate for their priority health policies.

“In Kenya, the right to a voice is enshrined in our constitution. So how do we operationalize that without strengthening capacities and providing a platform to elevate those collective voices to demand accountability? That is the mission of HENNET, and PATH has been instrumental in providing technical support to help us achieve our mission.”

– Margaret Lubale, Executive Director, HENNET