CELEBRATING 24 YEARS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SUPPORT MECHANISM
Agenda: Celebrating 24 Years of the Human Rights Support Mechanism

December 11, 2023  1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. EST

- **Welcome**
  Nicole Bibbins Sedaca, Executive Vice President, Freedom House

- **Opening Remarks**
  Laura Pavlovic, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG), USAID

- **HRSM Overview**
  Lira Djumadylova, HRSM Technical Director, Freedom House
  Deanna Kolberg-Shah, Technical Team Lead, Freedom House

- **Panel: Reflections on the Rapid Response Portfolio**
  ABA ROLI and Search for Common Ground
  The Human Rights Support Mechanism supported 55 Rapid Response Grants (RRG). The panel will discuss how the RRG portfolio enabled partners to swiftly address urgent human rights crises, strengthen locally led approaches, and respond quickly in changing contexts.

- **Panel: Human Rights Work in Closing/Closed Environments**
  Freedom House, Internews, and PACT
  Panelists with firsthand experience in managing and implementing projects in closing and closed environments will discuss challenges associated with project implementation and shed light on their approaches and strategies to operating in those contexts.

- **Closing**
  Michael Abramowitz, President, Freedom House

- **Reception**

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**Cover Image:**
Protesters demonstrate in Lima, Peru, in the wake of President Pedro Castillo's removal from office in December 2022.
Photo: Mayimbu/WikiCommons
Celebrating 24 Years of the Human Rights Support Mechanism
What is the Human Rights Support Mechanism?

The Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSM) is a USAID-funded, seven-year Leader With Associates (LWA) cooperative agreement aimed at implementing USAID’s Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Strategy. It’s implemented by the PROGRESS Consortium, which provides technical assistance and support to partners and beneficiaries in developing countries around the world to achieve the following objectives:

- Promote and protect human rights
- Mitigate effects of human rights abuses
- Provide remedies to victims
- Identify approaches to protect human rights
- Respond rapidly to urgent and unforeseen crises

ENVIRONMENT BUILDING:
Strengthening normative frameworks (laws and policies), bolstering institutions that help safeguard against violations, and linking cultures of tolerance and respect for the rule of law with the prevention of abuses.

RESPONSE:
Actions to help mitigate the impact of abuses, regardless of our ability to end them or “set them right.”

REMEDY:
Judicial and non-judicial measures to provide redress to individual victims of human rights abuses, combat impunity, and seek accountability of perpetrators.

Note: All projects implemented under HRSM incorporate a technical and/or region-specific Applied Political Economy Analysis (APEA) conducted or directed by Pact. In addition, a Senior Gender and Inclusion Advisor is consulted throughout each project.
What is the PROGRESS Consortium?

The PROGRESS (Protecting Global Rights through Sustainable Solutions) Consortium is made up of five primary partners, which work collectively with USAID to identify and implement HRSM-wide strategic priorities, develop and implement Associate Awards (AAs) and Rapid Response Grants (RRGs), contribute evidence to the HRSM learning agenda, and develop and disseminate knowledge products that benefit the wider human rights community.

- **Freedom House** is the prime recipient of the LWA. It coordinates all PROGRESS Consortium efforts and manages the overall award implementation. Freedom House leads in civil society partnerships, fostering local and regional networks and coalitions that advocate for key human rights. Freedom House also provides expertise on documentation techniques, advocacy strategies, and holistic security for human rights defenders.

- **American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI)** provides technical legal assistance, training, research, and resources to strengthen formal justice sector institutions, so they can more effectively fulfill their critical roles in protecting human rights.

- **Internews** leads activities that strengthen media’s ability to protect human rights and provides expertise to strengthen media actors’ physical and digital safety and security.

- **Pact** provides expertise to build the organizational capacity of beneficiaries and to conduct applied political economy analysis. Pact also leads initiatives to integrate human rights activities into USAID programs in other sectors.

- **Search For Common Ground (SFCG)** provides expertise in various areas in the context of peace building, reconciliation, and atrocity prevention activities. SFCG also leads security sector reform, facilitates community-led conflict resolution services, and contributes to programming with youth.

There are seven associate partners and two resource partners, which contribute expertise in specific thematic or technical areas on an as-needed basis for AAs and RRGs.

- **The International Center for Not-For-Profit Law**
- **Mobility International**
- **Synergía - Initiatives for Human Rights**
- **The University of Minnesota’s OpenGlobalRights**
- **Videre**
- **World Organization Against Torture**
- **World Resources Institute**
- **RIWI**
- **Global law firm**

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<td>Total ceiling for Associate Awards</td>
<td>Ceiling for the Leader Award</td>
<td>Years of Performance (Oct. 2016 – Sept. 2023)</td>
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<td>Implementing Partners</td>
<td>Total implementations for RRGs under the Leader Award</td>
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Our Portfolio

**Associate Awards (AAs)** typically last 2–5 years and have ranged from $1M to $30M. Under HRSM, USAID Missions and Bureaus developed AAs to fund programs that fit within HRSM objectives and were tailored to a Mission or Bureau’s country strategy. The LWA mechanism enabled Missions to issue agreements quickly, avoiding the 2–6 months necessary to design and tender a solicitation. The HRSM LWA allowed for a flexible design process. Several awards were designed through co-creation, a process that encourages collaborative project design and incorporates implementor input in the program description and activity.

**Rapid Response Grants (RRGs)** typically last 6–9 months and average $150K to $200K per award. Rapid response interventions responded to “action-forcing events” with the goal of countering, preventing, or minimizing human rights abuses and restrictions on operating environments for human rights defenders. An “action-forcing event” is broadly defined as a development in country that is likely to trigger a human rights crisis in the absence of external intervention. Interventions can also respond to rapidly evolving political contexts where timely interventions could have a lasting impact on the enabling environment for human rights in the country. RRGs aimed to provide 50% of direct costs to the local partner in the affected country or region.

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<th><strong>32 Associate Awards</strong></th>
<th><strong>49 countries</strong> includes 7 regional awards</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>55 Rapid Response Grants</strong></td>
<td><strong>41 countries</strong> includes 3 regional awards</td>
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### Illustrative Interventions:

**Associate Awards**

**South America:** Over six years, Pact partnered with Indigenous Peoples Organizations in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname to increase their organizational and financial capacity through Strengthening the Capacity of Indigenous Organizations in the Amazon (SCIOA). As a result, the organizations were able to have greater control in development issues, organize their own communities more efficiently, and lead constructive advocacy efforts in the face of ongoing threats.

**The Balkans:** Through Balkan Media Assistance Program to Foster Organizational Readiness While Advancing Resilient Development (BMAP-Forward), Internews works with 15 independent key media outlets in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, to strengthen their competitiveness within local and regional markets, while enhancing the sustainability of the media sector across the region through creative partnerships and increased digital security of media partners.

**Burma:** Working with four PROGRESS partners, Freedom House provides timely, targeted, and strategic support to human rights defenders, pro-democracy activists, and community leaders in Burma, so they can effectively respond to human rights abuses and political repression perpetuated by the military regime and other actors. The program, Supporting Social Resilience Program (SSRP), is deploying over $2 million in emergency assistance to more than 4,000 victims of human rights abuses and at-risk individuals and groups.
Rapid Response Grants

**Armenia:** ABA ROLI supported the Human Rights House (HRH) Yerevan and its members, enabling HRH to provide more effective and targeted support to vulnerable women and LGBTI people during the COVID-19 crisis.

**South Sudan:** Search for Common Ground addressed the risk of ethnically driven violence and human rights abuses that stemmed from mounting community tensions, dividing the primarily Dinka cattle herders and the primarily Acholi and Madi farmers. SFCG facilitated collaborative inter-community actions and empowered community leaders to defuse rising tensions and violence.
Partner Expertise
Learning Agenda

To support the broader human rights community, the Leader Award funds learning initiatives that identify and disseminate effective approaches for protecting human rights, specifically in non-permissive and increasingly oppressive environments. HRSM’s learning agenda generates evidence on three themes: building dense and more diverse networks of human rights defenders as part of a systems-based approach, identifying effective practices for building partners’ trust, and mitigating the risks of intervening in closed and closing environments.

The learning agenda:

- Emphasizes comparative learning
- Enables learning across Associate Awards
- Builds evidence for human rights-related learning

Based on their scope of work and expertise, HRSM’s primary partners each adopted topical focus areas for their learning initiatives. PROGRESS has developed knowledge products and tools such as an Applied Political Economy Analysis, an Access to Justice Assessment, a Digital Security Framework, and more. These are among the 538 knowledge products and relevant resources available in the PROGRESS ConnexUs platform (formerly DME for Peace). More than 450,000 people have visited the platform since October 2016.
ABA ROLI:
Role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) Regarding Access to Justice & Their Interaction with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Addressing Justice Needs
ABA ROLI: Role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) Regarding Access to Justice & Their Interaction with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Addressing Justice Needs

“The [National Human Rights Commission] does not have any strategy in place that governs our relationship with CSOs except for the CSO platform and we have not been meeting that regularly, which I think we really need to look at.”

– The Gambia National Human Rights Commission Representative

Key Takeaways: Access to Justice

- A deep understanding of access to justice requires an increased focus on people-centered justice, which means a contextualized understanding of each community and consideration of individuals’ lived experiences with the justice system.

- Formal, informal, or customary justice systems all have a role in providing solutions to individuals seeking to resolve their legal issues. A comprehensive look at systems the individuals engage with is key to offering meaningful solutions.

- Thoughtfully exploring the intersectionality of different identities of individuals as they pursue justice provides an opportunity to tailor solutions to address their different needs. It also helps identify systemic issues that may create barriers for access to justice for vulnerable or marginalized individuals or groups.

Key Takeaways: Addressing Justice Needs

- Programmatic efforts that improve both public awareness of rights and the services available (should people experience violations) may address constraints to accessing human rights services.

- While NHRIs and CSOs are found to be trustworthy by most online survey respondents in all five countries, the abilities of individuals to seek help from these institutions is affected by their accessibility, awareness levels of their roles and mandate, the powers that they are granted, and individual trust levels.

- Individuals who received support from NHRIs indicate that their trust for the NHRI increased because of the support provided and the way their case was handled.

- NHRIs and CSO systems that seek to deal with victims’ grievances must be designed with victims in mind and routinely monitored to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of clients.

- People have a limited understanding of NHRIs’ mandate and the scope of their functions and powers, which can hamper access to their services and affect the extent of NHRI interactions with other institutions, especially CSOs.

- Functions such as legal assistance, court intervention, and investigation are unclear in formal documents, which may limit understanding of the important role NHRIs have in protecting human rights.

- The use of formal mechanisms such as working groups, councils, and committees have built trust between NHRIs and CSOs. As a result, they can establish networks that expand the reach and types of services that may be provided for victims of human rights abuse.

- There is no evidence of high levels of interaction between NHRIs and CSOs in the five countries, although key informants identified several opportunities. NHRI and CSO interactions were found to be strongest when formal collaborative mechanisms are established.

- Both NHRIs and CSOs need support to build effective collaboration mechanisms, as well as to map out areas where each could fill in gaps in service provision for victims and witnesses of human rights violations.

- Further studies are needed to: 1) elucidate the interactions between NHRIs and other key players and 2) strengthen systems for protecting human rights violation victims and provide witness services, including interactions with courts, police, and other judicial and quasi-judicial bodies.
Why was this area of learning important? Why was a particular learning product needed?

Access to Justice

The Access to Justice Assessment Tool (AJAT) established a thorough understanding of how community members experience the justice journey as they try to resolve their legal needs. The Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) Integration toolkit helps organizations explore ways to create inclusive, people-centered justice programming. It is important to conduct research and analysis during the inception phase and understand the access to justice needs and gaps, as well as the GESI context.

Addressing Justice Needs

Surveying five countries, this study assessed the roles, processes, and interactions of NHRIs and CSOs in human rights violation claims and complaints, described the relationship between trust in the NHRIs and state legitimacy, and facilitated discussions among CSOs and NHRIs about actionable strategies in addressing possible hindrances to pursuing justice for rights violations. It identified promising practices for supporting NHRIs and filling evidence gaps in the growing academic literature on the role of NHRIs in individual pursuit of justice. The study explored concepts of public trust and state legitimacy in relation to the NHRIs role in justice journeys. It sought to review factors affecting an individual's ability to seek support from the NHRIs and CSOs, as well as the outcome of NHRI services.

Access to Justice

ABA ROLI worked with an international specialist to train OHRD staff in specific techniques to interview people with disabilities, elderly people, and survivors of gender-based violence. They collaboratively developed monitoring guidelines for tracking domestic violence cases. After CSOs highlighted large gaps in accessibility to medical care, the OHRD applied to the Ministry of Health with proposed changes to expand access. In less than a year, the Ministry of Health decided to broaden the list of persons who are eligible for free medical services and expand medical treatments covered based on OHRD’s recommendations.

Following the joint implementation of the AJAT and APEA integrated tool in Armenia, they were implemented together in Somalia. The Somalia AJAT research has shown the ways in which the AJAT index can be flexibly applied to diverse contexts, including legal-pluralist systems and systems where the state justice sector plays a limited role.

Addressing Justice Needs

Workshops in each of the five countries were facilitated by locally based researchers and HRSM program staff members after initial drafts of the analytical summaries were drawn. During the workshop, the researchers and HRSM program directors validated the findings of the study and facilitated discussions around strategies to strengthen the ability of NHRIs to seek justice for individuals who experience rights violations with key stakeholders from NHRIs, CSOs, and implementing partners.

What next steps will facilitate greater learning on your learning theme? What are the knowledge gaps or important questions that still need to be addressed?

Access to Justice

ABA ROLI and partners will continue to use the new materials and templates created through the HRSM Leader Award. The application of AJAT and people-centered justice methodologies can inform program design and implementation. Future programs will need to explore the extent to which all groups of society are able to access justice services and pursue solutions that resolve their legal needs in their specific context.
Addressing Justice Needs

Further studies are needed to: 1) understand the interactions between NHRIs and other key players and 2) strengthen systems for protecting human rights violation victims and provide witness services. These include interactions with courts, police, and other judicial and quasi-judicial bodies. Exploring the gender dimensions of data, especially as it relates to trust and behavior in human rights violations, may help strengthen strategies and approaches that impact each gender differently.

Products

- **AJAT Assessment Methodology**: ABA ROLI’s Access to Justice Assessment tool was adapted for use in countries within HRSM’s portfolio, including targeted adaptation to match the context needs in Armenia and Somalia. In West Africa country portfolios, sections of the assessment methodology were applied to explore specific aspects of the justice system targeted by those projects.

- **Gender & Inclusion Integration Toolkit**: A guide that helps organizations explore ways to create inclusive, people-centered justice programming. Global application for all HRSM programs.

- **National Human Rights Institutions and their Interaction with Civil Society Organizations in Addressing Justice Needs**: The study examines how NHRIs and CSOs interact with each other and with individuals who experience human rights violations. Focusing on five countries (Armenia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, and the Gambia), the study explores how interactions with an NHRI or CSO change the way individuals move through their justice pathways and whether individual trust affects justice journeys. It includes stakeholder views on actionable strategies that NHRIs and CSOs could take to strengthen the ability of the NHRI to pursue justice in the face of human rights violations.
Freedom House: Working in Closing/Closed Environments, Networking, and Award Management
Freedom House: Working in Closing/Closed Environments, Networking, and Award Management

“The national advocacy that we do generates from a grassroots level. It’s important that you have evidence, and our coalition team will provide us with that evidence ... What we see getting through in media and reporting, our role is facilitating that information. When we get support from Freedom House, we can do the [grassroots] empowerment and awareness raising.”

– Rights and Justice Activity Partner (Uganda), Subgrantee Focus Group

Key Takeaways: Donor Community

Restricted Context Programming

- Program descriptions can include a pool of emergency assistance funds with a simplified approval process from USAID that establishes a monetary threshold for emergency assistance cases that do not need AO or AOR approval.
- USAID should co-design specific communication protocols with the implementing partner (IP) and be prepared to follow established communication safety protocols requested by the IP, including the use of encrypted email, two-factor authentication, encrypted video calling applications, or password-protected data sharing.
- Solicitations should require a security plan, a digital security plan, and a well-being protocol with explicit efforts for how both USAID and the IP will reduce paperwork to protect security. Security protocols must be continually updated.

Co-Creation

- Pre-announcement co-creation can be demanding of a partner's time and resources without the guarantee that a) USAID will issue a solicitation, b) USAID will opt to use a pre-competited mechanism, or c) the partnering coalition will be the mechanism selected. If USAID opts for co-creation before a funding announcement, HRSM encourages USAID to name a preferred IP in the solicitation.

- Local partners often do not have the resources to support the time of their staff on unfunded lines of effort, and making such a request has practical and ethical limitations. If local partner input is highly valued by USAID, it may make more sense to include an inception period for adaptive management post-award.
- HRSM recommends USAID approve the use of award funds for IPs and local partners during co-creation of a cost extension.

Rapid Response Grants (RRG)

- Since RRG projects have short timelines, it's advantageous to work with local partners that are known to have the capacity to implement subawards to avoid any delays.
- Action-forcing events that cause violence and insecurity might not be appropriate for an RRG. Addressing violent conflict often requires long-term support.
- It would be helpful to emphasize objectives, instead of activity issue areas (e.g., women’s issues, youth engagement, support of legislation capacity), when deciding which IP will be most effective in carrying out the project.

Key Takeaways: Implementing Partners

Reaching Audiences in Closed Spaces

- IPs should help communicators prepare for worsening conditions in the country by establishing multiple access channels, creating organizational management structures that are resilient to security risks, and building audience trust.
- International implementers should build in psychosocial support into programming while also recognizing that support cannot heal trauma until individuals are taken out of traumatizing situations.
**Why was this area of learning important? Why was a particular learning product needed?**

**Working in Closing/Closed Spaces**

As democracy erodes globally, human rights defenders and organizations are increasingly under attack. HRSM programs operate in some of the most restrictive and sensitive environments around the world, and it is essential for donors and IPs to understand how to: 1) support local partners who face significant risk in the form of state-backed repression, harassment, and surveillance, and 2) design and implement programs with local partners that mitigate associated risks.

**Networking**

As attacks on human rights organizations (HROs) increase, it is imperative for them to establish and nurture local support networks to sustain their vital work and continue advancing global rights. Much of the knowledge about networking between HROs and the broader community of stakeholders surrounding human rights work lies in unwritten institutional memory and lacks an evidence base that can be referenced by human rights practitioners. Under HRSM, Freedom House sought to fill this gap by outlining a framework for how HRDs engage with stakeholders, documenting tactics on how to forge connections with key audiences, and gathering evidence on the credibility of HROs.

**Award Management**

As the main recipient of the Leader Award, Freedom House prioritized learning to reflect on the efficacy of the mechanism itself and improve collaboration between USAID, the PROGRESS Consortium, and local partners.

**What next steps will facilitate greater learning on your learning theme? What are the knowledge gaps or important questions that still need to be addressed?**

**Working in Closing/Closed Environments & Networking**

With support from PROGRESS partners, Freedom House's efforts have focused on generating evidence on these key themes from HRSM's learning agenda. Drawing on this new evidence base, Freedom House will look to its active AA portfolio to test these tools, particularly with local partners in repressive contexts. Freedom House seeks to better understand the dynamics of closing/closed environments across different regions and will continue to share learning products with USAID and other IPs based on its expertise.
Award Management

Freedom House will continue to explore how pre-competed mechanisms can better support localization, which continues to be a priority for USAID and IPs like Freedom House. RRGs under the Leader Award provided a speedy mechanism to deliver aid and funds directly to local partners, with the target of partners receiving 50% of activity funds; however, future RRG mechanisms should incorporate clear and robust guidance on localization. Drawing on lessons learned from HRSM and institutional expertise in emergency assistance, Freedom House aims to hone support for localized, rapid interventions.

Products

- Restricted Context Programming Best Practices: Recommendations on writing solicitations and programming implementation for programs in closed environments, based on consultations with local partners and country staff in HRSM's programs working in restricted contexts.

- Project Risk Planning—A Workshop Facilitation Guide: A guide offering human rights IPs a practical toolkit, including a theoretical overview of the risk management process, budgetary and logistical considerations, and three workshops to use with teams.

- Digital Security Framework: Freedom House's particular expertise in working in closed environments—and the associated digital risk in such spaces—spurred collaboration to co-author this reference with Internews.

- Reaching Audiences in Closed Spaces: A report that captures strategies for media organizations and communicators to connect with their target audiences.

- Advocacy and Communications in Closed Spaces: A framework for how human rights defenders engage with stakeholders, including documented tactics on how to forge greater connections with key audiences.

- The Credibility of Human Rights Organizations (Country Memos): Lacking a nuanced understanding of constituents’ perspectives on HROs, Freedom House launched a survey in several countries (e.g., Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Philippines, Poland, South Africa, and Turkey) and compiled country reports based on the findings.

- HRSM Recommendations on Co-Creation with USAID: Outlines considerations for the co-creation of activities, based on the PROGRESS Consortium’s experiences with USAID, and applicable for USAID’s co-creation with any coalition of international and/or local IPs.

- HRSM Rapid Response Mechanism Evaluation: This qualitative evaluation identifies achieved outcomes and the factors that helped or hindered the success of HRSM’s rapid response activities.

- HRSM Reflection Session Summary: Lessons learned and ways to address challenges encountered throughout HRSM, which can support ongoing partner collaborations or future USAID pre-competed mechanisms.

- Human Rights Assessment Methodology: This assessment illuminates the human rights context by identifying the core problem(s) and associated risks to address during implementation, as well as providing guidance on scenario planning and stakeholder mapping.

- Securing the Past, Acknowledging the Present: A Guide to Broadening the Utility of Human Rights Documentation: The product of a Videre-Freedom House collaboration, this guide provides an overview of documentation efforts, how they can be conducted, and how documentation should be used. Understanding the range of documentation strategies is critical to document immediate conflict and its aftermath, and it can be used for a host of justice and accountability initiatives.
Internews: Information and Digital Safety
Internews: Information and Digital Safety

“Before attending the BMAP Forward learning event, the planning team asked participants to indicate their goals for the event. Over 50% of respondents said they need to increase organizational awareness/staff education about digital security; 40% of respondents said their personal goal was to improve their overall understanding of digital security.”

– BMAP Forward Learning Event Final Report

Key Takeaways: Donor Community and Implementing Partners

- The long-run outcome of digital security programming is digital security resilience, which refers to changes in organizational systems and culture that are contextually specific, adaptive, holistic, and sustainable. Digital security awareness, knowledge, and adoption effectively create a feedback loop, and when measured and assessed consistently over time, that data can promote learning and digital resiliency within an organization.

- Digital threats or attacks are constantly evolving, so digital security cannot be pinned on a specific technology or tool. The response must always match the digital threat environment, as well as the broader operating environment, which can change suddenly or over time.

- Addressing digital security inherently requires human rights organizations (HROs) to expose their organizational vulnerabilities, which is difficult. Many HROs work in digitally and physically insecure environments and may be less trusting of implementing partners or outside experts.

- HROs focus on delivering social change in alignment with their missions, sometimes at the expense of operational digital security. Personnel may view digital security training or practices as a mystery and a chore that interferes with completing their work.

- Uneven understanding and appreciation for the importance of digital safety across an organization is typical. Unmotivated and untrained staff is one of the greatest sources of risk that organizations face because they are only as safe as their weakest adherent to digital security protocols.

- Buy-in at every level of an HRO is crucial; management also needs to demonstrate commitment, leading by example and dedicating organizational resources to invest in digital security.

- Emergency interventions are difficult to plan for not only because they usually occur unexpectedly, but also because they require immediate attention and financial resources for hardware, software, or third-party services. Addressing a specific incident requires time to consult with digital safety experts, as well as a commitment to adopt new digital security measures.

- Short-term interventions can provide training that focuses on helping partners understand the appropriate mitigation and/or prevention tactics for their situation and plan for future scenarios that could unfold given their operating environment.

- Long-term interventions offer a greater opportunity for HROs to deepen their understanding of risk and increase their capacity for both preventative and responsive digital security approaches. They also allow implementing partners/digital security experts the chance to work with HROs over time as threats evolve.

Why was this area of learning important? Why was a particular learning product needed?

Digital security is crucial for HROs because they manage sensitive information and are often at risk of surveillance, cyberattacks, and censorship by governments and other malicious actors. HROs also face escalating harassment, intimidation, and repression because of this digital monitoring and interference. By prioritizing digital security, HROs can protect their data and communications, safeguard the privacy and safety of their staff and partners, and ensure the continued effectiveness of their work. Strong digital security practices can also demonstrate a commitment to transparency and accountability, building trust with the communities they serve.

Under increasing attack, HROs need the support of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and
donors to make the improvements necessary to increase their digital resiliency; however, INGOs and donors lack strong evidence or frameworks for providing this support. Internews and Freedom House created the **Digital Security Framework** to offer preliminary guidance intended for INGOs and other implementers who aid in HRO capacity building. Using this framework, democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) stakeholders can better plan for, evaluate, and improve digital security support in programs, given the time and resources available.

**SaferJourno** was launched with the aim of bolstering the digital security capacity of trainers working with journalists around the world. Journalists face a complex array of digital threats, which includes the increasing use of sophisticated spyware, as well as state-sponsored online smear campaigns designed to undermine journalists and their reporting. The guide provides trainers with best practices on how to mitigate these risks in a way that is both practical and accessible for journalists.

**How did you successfully apply a learning product during an HRSM program? How did you gather input from local partners to inform the learning product? What effect did it have on local partners/the program?**

The **Digital Security Framework** was jointly developed by Internews and Freedom House to document the types of digital security training implemented under Associate Awards and Rapid Response Grants. The aim was to track the corresponding monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches to identify similarities, differences, and gaps. The first step was to administer a short survey to identify the various forms of digital security support and corresponding M&E methods deployed with different types of recipients by HRSM. The survey was followed by a two-day digital security learning event organized by Internews and Freedom House with the BMAP Forward project team and key partners. The input provided at this event became the basis of the Digital Security Framework, which sets out three main types of digital security interventions and theory of change commonly used in HRSM programs: incident response or emergency intervention, short-term, and long-term programming, as well as a typical pathway of change through awareness, knowledge, and adoption. The aim of the Framework is to support improved design, implementation, and measurement of effective digital security activities for human rights programming.

Internews’ updated **SaferJourno** resource is an interactive web interface developed by Ura Design and is designed to allow trainers of all skill levels to mix and match content. It includes guidance for both media development trainers (who may be new to digital security) and digital security trainers (who may be new to training journalists). Finally, the topics covered, and recommendations made throughout the updated SaferJourno resource, were selected based on evidence and the analysis of targeted attacks against journalists and other civil society groups that Internews gathered through programming.

**What next steps will facilitate greater learning on your learning theme? What are the knowledge gaps or important questions that still need to be addressed?**

Internews’ intention is to undertake further dissemination so that both products become embedded within Internews’ and partners’ practice and to encourage adoption across the wider field. This work is intended to ensure that the practices promoted by these products become widespread and sustained—and provide opportunities for further learning. Notably, the **Digital Security Framework** should be subject to ongoing testing and refinement in different contexts since the report proposes a theoretical and programmatic approach, based on a limited evidence base. Implementing partners can work closely with HROs to tailor the framework based on an organization’s specific needs, operating context, and available resources.

**Products**

- **Digital Security Framework**: This reference assists in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of digital security activities with HROs, including civil society organizations or media outlets that focus on human rights issues.
- **SaferJourno**: A training curriculum that provides trainers with best practices on how to mitigate digital risks in a way that is both practical and accessible for the journalist.
PACT:
Thinking and Working Politically (TWP) and Applied Political Economy Analysis (APEA)
PACT: Thinking and Working Politically (TWP) and Applied Political Economy Analysis (APEA)

“In the era of the ‘iron hand’ regime, our advocacy efforts often involved concealing our true intentions, with our primary focus being on raising awareness within communities. However, achieving our intended results was an arduous task.

“Rather than resorting to camouflage or confrontations, we now prioritize engagement with the government … Our experience has shown that by aligning our approach with the changing political environment, we can achieve more positive outcomes in our advocacy efforts.”

– Abdalla Abeid, Executive Director for Zanzibar Fighting Against Youth Challenges Organization

Key Takeaways: Donor Community

- USAID and other donors can limit or extend the impact of APEA activities based on how open they are to adjusting approaches.
- Built-in mechanisms for enabling flexibility (i.e., rapid response funds, flexible capacity development/technical assistance pools, streamlined processes for adjusting work plans, etc.) can facilitate APEAs and related activities contributing to decision-making by project teams.
- USAID or other donor buy-in and involvement in the APEA process is an important success factor contributing to uptake of APEA findings.

Key Takeaways: Implementing Partners

- Embedding APEA in project cycle management systems on an ongoing basis can inform project decisions and contribute to project achievements. However, projects must be flexible about how they best integrate APEA into their systems (i.e., there is no single recipe for doing this).
- Staff mindsets and soft skills matter. APEAs cannot influence decision-making if projects are not open to rethinking assumptions and approaches.
- Effective APEA requires dedicated time from staff and project leaders.
- Focused and problem-driven APEA analyses are more likely to be seen as useful. By contrast, more general activities may provide contextual information, but may not be as “applied.”
- APEA learning is more likely to positively impact programming if results are shared and discussed with the expanded team, up to and including partners. If results are held within a smaller circle of staff, then they are less likely to guide the thinking and actions of the larger team.

Why was this area of learning important? Why was a particular learning product needed?

Thinking and Working Politically (TWP)-aligned approaches, including APEA, have been a significant focus of programming within the democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) sector over the last decade. While APEA has become a standard element of DRG programming, at the time HRSM began, there had been limited efforts to systematically and critically learn from efforts to use the approach. Additionally, there was also an opportunity to provide more practical and accessible guidance around the use of APEA to USAID implementers and local partners. HRSM was unique because it offered the opportunity to apply APEA across a broad but coherent body of human rights programs. HRSM was positioned to consider practical operational questions about how best to integrate APEA into human rights program, while also considering deeper questions related to the “so what” of APEA.
How did you successfully apply a learning product during an HRSM program? How did you gather input from local partners to inform the learning product? What effect did it have on local partners/the program?

Pact’s core task was to support the integration of APEA across HRSM Associate Awards. We did this by working closely with project teams to make sure that they understood the methodology and thought carefully about how it could support their own decision-making and programming. Early on, Pact developed the overall APEA guidance document to support project teams and partners in understanding the methodology. Pact then prioritized learning and engagement with HRSM consortium members around the APEA process, most notably by conducting a mid-term APEA learning review in Year 3. Based on the lessons from that mid-term learning review, Pact adjusted our approach to mainstreaming APEA. For example, the learning review highlighted the importance of project team ownership over the APEA process. Thus, Pact moved away from leading APEAs for Associate Awards it otherwise wasn’t involved in and instead focused on supporting project teams to lead their own processes. Pact continued to focus on learning and engagement, most notably with the end-line learning review.

What next steps will facilitate greater learning on your learning theme? What are the knowledge gaps or important questions that still need to be addressed?

Pact and the HRSM consortium’s learning has yielded significant operational lessons regarding what contributes to useful/less APEA processes. Through HRSM, we have also begun to generate examples and evidence of how APEA can contribute to project decision-making and even programmatic results, as well as the success factors that contribute to those outcomes. However, there is a need to seek and test evidence regarding how TWP-aligned approaches like APEA contribute to higher-level programmatic results. Additionally, most of the learning from HRSM focuses on how project teams (i.e., primarily project staff) use or don’t use APEA. Building on experience from HRSM-funded Associate Awards, such as in Tanzania, there is a need for deeper learning around how projects can foster local partners’ participation in (and leadership of) APEA processes.

Products

- **Applied Political Economy Analysis for Human Rights Programs and Campaigns**: A handbook with detailed and practical guidance for human rights programs and campaigners to integrate APEA into their activities.

- **Applied Political Economy Analysis Toolkit**: A set of practical tools that accompanies the Pact/HRSM-developed APEA guidance. Includes “ready to adapt” tools for APEA-related activities over the course of a project.

- **Applied Political Economy Analysis Guidance Videos**: Pact developed two videos that (1) provide an overview of APEA and (2) provide guidance on “how to get started” with an APEA activity.

- **Applied Political Economy Analysis Learning Review**: Pact funded mid-term and endline externally led learning reviews of APEA activities under HRSM. The mid-term learning review looked at factors that facilitated utilization of APEA. The endline learning review probed more deeply into the contributions of APEA on three projects that were high-users of the methodology (i.e., Colombia, Tanzania, and Somalia).

- **Citizen Security Index Technical Report**: The Citizen Security Index was designed for an Associate Award in Colombia to measure levels of human-rights-oriented citizen security at the municipal level. It describes the purpose, the need, the methodology, provides a summary of results, and ends with lessons for those wanting to undertake an index to measure a complex outcome, or to measure citizen security more specifically.

- **Civic Network Analysis (CNA)**: A guide for strategy and action in restrictive contexts: Helps international partners working with human rights activists, marginalized groups and other grassroots organizations understand whether, why and how to conduct a network analysis.

- **Applying Rights-Based Approaches**: Provides practical guidance on how designers and implementers of development projects can integrate rights-based approaches into activities, across sectors.
Search For Common Ground: Atrocity Prevention and Trauma-Informed Research

“The conflict cases have reduced because the community members now know where to report the issues to, compared to some months back before this intervention ... I now see the youth from the Acholi community going to buy some milk from the camp communities and this has indeed indicated an increase in the level of trust and the confidence among the two communities compared to two years back.”

– Community Mobilizer in Magwi, South Sudan

Key Takeaways: Atrocity Prevention

• Prioritize improving social cohesion and reducing polarization as national security priorities in diplomacy, development, and defense.

• Invest in inclusive structures to identify, analyze, and respond to conflicts during moments of stability.

• Ensure the size and duration of early action programming is fit for purpose. Returns on investment in social cohesion take time to realize. Establishing peace committees, shifting narratives, and building trust require long-term investment and programming cycles beyond an 18-24-month cycle. Rapid response programs to respond to emerging opportunities or crises require a different disbursement method to quickly channel resources.

• Review how diplomacy, development, and defense agencies are contributing to improving social cohesion and reducing polarization throughout their portfolios in priority atrocity risk countries.

• Prioritize atrocities prevention in funding allocations and increase investments in peacebuilding and programs that reduce vulnerabilities.

• NOTE: The above steps should be taken during times of relative stability.

Engage more, not less, in moments of crisis:

• Ensure that humanitarian and non-humanitarian support continues to support the people at risk of violence. Sanctions and other response mechanisms should not preclude the ability of local organizations to access resources and support.

• Build an inclusive, diverse peace architecture over time to reduce risk factors for atrocities and provide quick response mechanisms to de-escalate conflicts.

• Amplify and support the work of communities doing de-escalatory work when possible.

• Identify a focal point in embassies and missions whose job includes understanding where local capacities for atrocity prevention exist and establish secure communications.

Share lessons learned on atrocity prevention and apply to programming:

• Share generalized or redacted findings on what has worked, or not worked through donor/policymaker/practitioner communities of practice (such as the ConnexUs platform).

• Ensure that continual context updates and practitioner experience inform programming decisions. Build flexibility into programs and mandate moments of meaningful reflection, creating incentives and safety for implementers to share in a transparent manner lessons learned and best practices.

• Increase coordination and knowledge sharing between experts in conflict prevention and human rights and democracy, to enhance cross-fertilization and alignment of goals.
Key Takeaways: Trauma-Informed Research

- When conducting research into atrocities, researchers should be sensitive to gender, trauma, and politics, including: Developing strategies to ensure access to female respondents (considering cultural norms); hiring female enumerators/moderators to enhance women’s comfort in sharing sensitive information; adjusting sampling to maintain gender balance during data collection.

- On the topic of trauma sensitivity: Involve enumerators and moderators who share the same ethnicity, religion, or age group as respondents to build trust; recruit respondents through local networks (such as civil society organizations) to offer support if needed; provide psychological resources and support to respondents and researchers; train enumerators to identify signs of trauma and handle sensitive questions with care; consider the potential negative impact of research and limit the sample size when dealing with traumatic topics.

- On the topic of political sensitivity: Ensure the integrity of respondent selection, avoiding bias introduced by local authorities or CSOs; maintain the independence of enumerator and moderator selection; avoid conducting interviews with members of rival groups in the same location; use phone or online interviews when research presence may elicit mistrust, ensuring secure communication methods; be aware of potential biases in respondent categories and ensure data analysis is balanced; avoid collecting GPS coordinates in sensitive contexts; carefully word questions about trust in authorities to avoid issues with local officials.

Why was this area of learning important? Why was a particular learning product needed?

There are barriers to effective learning in atrocity prevention. Donors and practitioners often struggle with how to communicate what is being done and what works with the sensitive nature of the intel, the parameters of “prevention” work are not clearly defined, and conversations are siloed between different sectors (e.g., conflict prevention and democracy and human rights focused institutions). Looking specifically at programs in countries at high-risk of atrocities showed how programs that reduce the risk factors for atrocities contribute to atrocity prevention as a policy goal.

As it relates to atrocity prevention, we found that local individuals, groups, and structures that were trained and resourced to manage conflicts led to reductions in violence, improved stability and increased the number of conflicts managed non-violently. We saw this from Insider Mediators in Yemen and Peace Ambassadors in South Sudan and ‘truth tellers’ in Mali to Early Warning Early Response groups in Northeast Nigeria to community information committees in Burma. What all these entities had in common was that they were tapped into the community dynamics, held trust with the targeted community, provided structures to resolve conflicts, and had consistent support and resources over time. We saw continuous reports that these entities reduced violence and improved accountability, even in places with active conflict.

In South Sudan, this looked like training community members from Magwi and Nimule to monitor conflict data and trends for early warning in real time and share with local peace committees to provide early responses to conflicts in their communities. These mechanisms to anticipate and respond to conflict issues “drastically reduced” the road attacks on the Juba-Nimule highway, reduced cases of domestic violence and rape, and reduced violence surrounding land issues, as people return from internally displaced persons and refugee camps. All of these were major triggers for conflicts to escalate into widespread violence.

How did you successfully apply a learning product during an HRSM program? How did you gather input from local partners to inform the learning product? What effect did it have on local partners/the program?

The research team conducted thorough reviews of project report documents, baseline and endline evaluations, and conflict snapshots/analyses that were conducted via local project implementation teams. The team conducted key informant interviews with project stakeholders during the research/analysis stage and throughout the writing review. Finally, during dissemination the team conducted joint briefings with country team members to ground the report’s findings with up-to-the-minute analysis of the atrocity risks in specific countries, like Yemen and Burma. This joint briefing style helped connect donors and policy makers with tools that can be deployed to improve the risk factors for atrocities.
What next steps will facilitate greater learning on your learning theme? What are the knowledge gaps or important questions that still need to be addressed?

Enhancing the learning process in atrocity prevention requires greater collaboration among donors, practitioners, and policymakers to exchange and apply lessons learned in the field. The inherent sensitivity of atrocity prevention poses a considerable hurdle to knowledge-sharing across various stakeholders, including countries, donors, practitioners, and policymakers. To build a robust evidence base for the development of effective strategies and programs aimed at preventing atrocities, it is crucial to promote the sharing of valuable insights and identify opportunities for collective action whenever feasible.

This should include:

- Atrocity prevention specialists should include a separate section in public country/region context reports and executive summary/recommendations strategies that specifically addresses “early action” programming. Government bodies tasked with atrocity prevention duties should hold at least one meeting per year with civil society about how they have worked toward prevention in each of its regional contexts and lessons learned.

- Share generalized or redacted findings on what has worked and what has not through donor/policymaker/practitioner communities of practice, such as the ConnexUs platform. Share general specifics of the conflict factors and what approaches have yielded results.

- Ensure that continual context updates and practitioner experience inform programming decisions. Build flexibility into programs and mandate moments of meaningful reflection, creating incentives and safety for implementers to share in a transparent manner lessons learned and best practices.

- Increase coordination and knowledge sharing between experts in conflict prevention and human rights and democracy, to enhance cross-fertilization and alignment of goals.

Products

- **Atrocity Prevention Guide**: A guide for how to improve early action to prevent atrocities through a review of its programs, including HRSM projects, implemented in ten countries at high-risk of atrocities over the past decade.

- **Trauma-Informed Research Guide**: Capturing lessons learned from research and other best practices and learnings, this document compiles “Do No Harm” best practices and lessons learned that may prove useful to other HRSM member organizations.
Freedom House is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works to create a world where all are free. We inform the world about threats to freedom, mobilize global action, and support democracy’s defenders.

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