

Summary of independent project evaluation report ¹

June 2019

This external independent evaluation was commissioned by ISHR to review the project Increasing Legal Protections at the International, Regional and National Levels for Human Rights Defenders Working in Africa and Asia (E-WEL-2016-5378, September 2016–August 2019). The project was co-funded by Bread for the World (which grant funded the evaluation) and Irish Aid among others, and implemented by the International Service for Human Rights. The evaluation was carried out a little more than two years into the lifespan of the project.

The three-person team of evaluators comprising Sheila B. Keetharuth, Angela Naggaga-Forbes and William Paul Simmons conducted a total of 40 interviews with key stakeholders between October 2018 and February 2019.

➤ **Main findings**

The evaluation finds that the project achieve the following results.

1. Increased capacity for individual human rights defenders and networks of HRDs to gain better understanding of policies and legislations to protect HRDs.
2. HRDs feel more empowered to participate in political processes to get HRD protection laws to be enacted.
3. Better protection of HRDs through the effective enforcement of existing laws and policies on HRDs while advocating for specific HRD laws.
4. Greater understanding and awareness of HRDs about their rights and assertion of their rights and how to access support when engaged in their human rights work.

➤ **Model law on the protection of human rights defenders**

The evaluation reports finds that the model law has become a reference tool which most actors who want to improve conditions of HRDs in their countries are using which has helped reverse the trend of legislative restriction and political stigmatisation of human rights defenders. The Model Law has become a benchmark for evaluating legislative proposals and the protection of HRDs in various countries. It has also contributed to peer influence between countries at the regional level, notably in West Africa. Pushing for a law of common interest has broken down barriers between HRDs and led to increased collaboration among HRDs, and between CSOs, NHRIs, and governmental officials.

➤ **Côte d'Ivoire**

Côte d'Ivoire was the first African country to adopt a national law on the protection of HRDs in 2014, and the evaluation report includes a dedicated section on the impact of that law domestically².

The evaluation finds that:

¹ This summary was prepared by ISHR on the basis of the full report submitted by the project evaluators to ISHR on March 26, 2019.

² P.21

- The HRD law is helping to change perceptions of HRDs in Côte d'Ivoire and raising the profile of HRD's work.
- The HRD law is already having an impact in protecting HRDs from persecution.

The evaluation also underlines that “having laws is not enough; we need laws that are respected, applied and implemented.” The implementation phase of the HRD law can be more challenging than the passage of the law and requires further support, training and civil society engagement and investment in order to make it work. In the implementation phase, ISHR is credited for facilitating constant dialogue and information sharing between stakeholders, providing links to international and regional mechanisms and processes, helping with strategy development, addressing emerging issues, and encouraging stakeholders.

➤ ISHR's role

Many of the respondents explicitly stated that they found the ISHR to be an invaluable resource, especially on technical issues related to the Model Law as well as when HRDs have general questions or needed advice on dealing with political issues. ISHR's expertise includes the ability to organize successful national and regional consultations, secure financial resources for such events and bring key stakeholders and experts from other regions. ISHR's reputation also helps a great deal in encouraging participation by special rapporteurs and high-level government officials. ISHR's presence often gives opportunities for groups of HRDs to meet them privately and discuss the implementation of the law as well as the challenges faced in their work. ISHR does not oversell the potential impact of the laws or the ease in passing a HRD law. In fact, ISHR seemed to present their case in a matter of fact way, not trying to convince HRDs of something they did not really believe.

➤ Recommendations and learning

The evaluation report contains a series of recommendations, which informed the following phase of the project. Those include inter alia

- Best practice documents: consolidate best practices in a document or series of documents showing how national laws have been developed in different country contexts.
- Provide examples of impact stories
- E-Networking: increase use of videoconferencing and e-networking, including the use of webinars.
- Consider additional trainings or focused workshops on issues such as best practices for dealing with threats to HRDs by non-state actors.
- More cross-national learning, including learning across continents.
- Focus on specific groups of HRDs, inc journalists, LGBTI, disability and children HRDs
- Strengthen cooperation with NANHRI and GANHRI

At the national level

- Consider expanding the scope of ISHR NGO partners
- Reach out to rural areas and HRDs based outside capitals, and aim for decentralization.

Gender and WHRDs

- Maintain focus on WHRDs and develop a feminist guide to the model law

New narratives on HRDs

- Advance positive narratives on the importance of human rights in every aspect of our societies