

Request for Proposal

Consultant for a literature review of research on local and locally-driven human rights progress

Overview and Objective

Wellspring's human rights grant making is premised on several assumptions about how advancements in human rights happen. These include:

- A healthy eco-system of linked organizations operating at different levels, both community-based, national, regional, and global, generating pressure, documentation, and policy solutions
- Open civic space in which these organizations can safely and securely advance their work. Civicus, for example, defines civic space as “a set of universally-accepted rules, which allow people to organise, participate and communicate with each other freely and without hindrance, and in doing so, influence the political, economic and social structures around them”;
- Safety, security and resilience of advocates and their organizations to engage in a full range of tactics to advance rights;
- A range of tactics in combination [including mobilization of communities, documentation and media exposure of abuses, demonstration of alternative policies and practice, pursuit of accountability for harms, setting of norms to prevent abuses, and generation of pressure on powerful actors to implement policies, change practice to fulfil rights and secure justice]; and
- The ability of organizations to shift and pivot to respond to unanticipated situations to defend rights at risk or take advantage of unforeseen opportunities in fluid political contexts.

Regional and Country Programs (RCP) and International Human Rights (IHR), two programs at Wellspring, consider “human rights progress” across a broad spectrum. This ranges from citizens’ ability to enjoy civil liberties and freedoms, marked by indicators on how closed or open the political and civil spaces are as to allow expression of these rights; effectiveness of remedial and accountability mechanisms to redress rights abuses, material improvements in people’s lives, and changes in laws, policies and practices in ways that expand protection for civil liberties and economic and social rights. Often progress is simply about the ability or capacity of civil society actors to operate and put a spotlight on human rights violations in closed countries or repressive contexts.

A diverse array of social science research exists in the academic realm as well as in the grey literature about the role of local, national, and international human rights and civil society organizations in affecting social change and the effectiveness of their strategies and tactics, and yet this information has not been systematically reviewed for its relevance and concrete applications to RCP and IHR’s theory of change¹ and enabling conditions grantmaking strategies. This project seeks to review, analyze, and synthesize existing research.

Aggregating and synthesizing available research will provide a foundation for both programs to better understand how the available evidence relates to their current strategies, incorporate key findings into strategy and grant craft discussion with field partners, and consider future directions for more rigorous research and/or evaluation of these research questions.

¹ Overview of the programs annexed below, additional details about their theories of change to be shared at a later stage.

Research Questions

The literature review would review the available social science research and relevant grey literature to identify evidence to date for the following questions. These are draft questions and we would like to work with our consultant to refine these further to focus the literature review:

- How does human rights progress happen?
- What does a vibrant² local human rights and civil society ecosystem look like?
- What conditions allow or promote a vibrant local human rights and civil society ecosystem?
- Does the vibrant local ecosystem lead to tangible progress in protecting and fulfilling human rights?
- What are the respective roles/contributions of actors³ working at the global, regional, national, and grassroots levels? How do human rights actors at various levels operate in conjunction to advance human rights protection and fulfilment? What is the evidence that supports/rejects the idea that an interconnected network of organizations operating at different levels in the international system (local, national, regional and global) should be involved to advance broad human rights progress?
- How do international rights groups operating in a transnational context support, hamper, or even harm local progress or local organizations?
- How do geographically focused investments vs. general or issue-focused support differ in their efficacy to drive human rights progress?
- What is the range of research/evaluation methods used to address these research questions?

Deliverables:

- A concise synthesis of key findings from the literature review
- An annotated bibliography of the identified literature
- Recommendations for possible future research or evaluations based on an analysis for gaps in the evidence base

Next Steps

Interested consultants should submit a proposal to evaluation@wpfund.org with a subject line 'Human Rights Ecosystem Lit Review' by May 30th, 2023. Elements of the proposal should include:

- Understanding of work to be conducted and any questions that the consultants have about the scope;
- Proposed timeline & budget; and
- CV and bios of proposed consultant(s)

WELLSPRING'S INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE OF RESPECT, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING

Wellspring Philanthropic Fund believes we are strengthened by the diversity of consultants we work with. We welcome proposals from consultants of all cultures, backgrounds, and experience levels. In particular, we strongly encourage individuals or teams who are located in the Global South to apply.

² We currently conceptualize that a "vibrant" human rights and civil society ecosystem would be characterized by the existence of a diversity of promising actors at different levels, with a sustained agenda, coordination and collaboration. We would like to further refine this understanding with existing evidence and research.

³ By "actors", we mean civil society actors to make the literature review more manageable. However, if feasible, we would like to also learn about other types of actors such as funders and their roles and interactions.

Annex

Overview of Regional and Country Programs

Regional and Country Programs (RCP) supports a vibrant ecosystem of locally led, human rights and social justice actors and organizations aligned with Wellspring's mission, regional focus on Latin America and East Africa, and institutional commitment to advance gender, racial, and economic justice. RCP contributes local expertise, leadership, and resources while supporting local civil society organizations to defend and expand civic space and advance key, locally relevant human rights and social justice priorities.

Overview of the International Human Rights Program

The International Human Rights (IHR) program builds a global human rights field that advances the full range of human rights as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; deters abusers and holds individual, state, and non-state perpetrators accountable for rights violations; prioritizes marginalized people and their equality, autonomy, and access to power; and employs transformative approaches and strategies. IHR supports grantees to prevent human rights crimes; protect civilians in crises; ensure that human rights defenders can operate safely and legally; hold individual, state, and economic actors accountable for rights violations; and advance disability rights.

Additional details about the program's theory of change will be shared at a later stage with the consultants.