



ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

Project: Defending Human Rights Through Network Strengthening (DHRTNS)
Project Reporting period: July 2024 to June 2025

Project Background: The Defending Human Rights through Network Strengthening Project was born out of the growing need to create a united, resilient, and coordinated front among human rights defenders in the face of increasing global challenges. Across the world, human rights defenders and activists face escalating threats, including violence, persecution, digital surveillance, and legal repression. In many cases, these defenders operate in isolation, lacking access to critical resources, knowledge, and support systems. This environment of vulnerability has highlighted the importance of building strong, interconnected networks that can effectively protect and promote human rights, share resources, and respond rapidly to emerging threats. To counter these issues, a concerted and coordinated effort among various stakeholders, including civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights defenders, and advocacy groups, is essential. The Defending Human Rights through Network Strengthening Project aims to address these challenges by fostering robust, interconnected networks that enhance the capacity and resilience of human rights defenders globally.



In summary, the Defending Human Rights through Network Strengthening Project is a comprehensive initiative that seeks to address the growing risks faced by human rights defenders by building a stronger, more interconnected network. Through capacity building, advocacy, and collaboration, the project aims to create a safer, more resilient environment for defenders and advance human rights protections globally.

Project Goal:

The goal of the Defending Human Rights through Network Strengthening Project is to create a resilient, interconnected network of human rights defenders that can effectively advocate for, protect, and promote human rights at local levels. This project aims to empower individuals and organizations working in human rights through capacity-building initiatives, resource sharing, and coordinated advocacy efforts. By building and strengthening these networks, the project seeks to amplify the voices of marginalized communities, address human rights violations more effectively, and foster collaboration across diverse sectors, including civil society, government, and the private sector.

Ultimately, the project aspires to build a more just, equitable, and rights-respecting society where human rights defenders can operate safely and effectively, free from threats or violence. Through sustained collaboration, shared resources, and strategic advocacy, the Defending Human Rights through Network Strengthening Project aims to drive long-term positive change in the global human rights landscape.

Project Objectives:

The Defending Human Rights through Network Strengthening Project has several key objectives that are designed to address the needs of human rights defenders and create a more coordinated and effective approach to human rights advocacy. These objectives focus on building the capacity, resilience, and influence of human rights defenders while fostering collaboration and ensuring the long-term sustainability of their efforts. The objectives are as follows:



Strengthen the Capacity of Human Rights Defenders: One of the primary objectives is to enhance the skills and knowledge of human rights defenders. This includes providing comprehensive training on advocacy strategies, legal frameworks, digital security, and leadership.

Build and Strengthen Collaborative Networks: The project aims to foster the creation and reinforcement of networks that connect human rights defenders locally, and nationally. These networks serve as platforms for resource sharing, peer support, and collective action.

These objectives guide the overall direction of the Defending Human Rights through the Network Strengthening Project, ensuring that it effectively addresses the challenges faced by human rights defenders while fostering a more resilient, coordinated, and impactful human rights movement.

Project Output:

The Defending Human Rights through Network Strengthening Project has produced several significant outputs that reflect its progress towards achieving its objectives. These outputs highlight the tangible benefits the project has brought to human rights defenders, their organizations, and the broader human rights community. Below are the key outputs of the project in greater detail:

Enhanced Capacity of Human Rights Defenders:

One of the project's most immediate outputs has been the increased knowledge and skills of human rights defenders. Through a series of capacity-building training sessions, defenders have gained expertise in areas such as legal advocacy and fact-finding skills.

Creation and Strengthening of Human Rights Networks:

The project has successfully facilitated the formation and strengthening of local and regional of human rights defenders. These networks foster collaboration and coordination, enabling defenders to share resources, exchange knowledge and support each other in times of crisis. These networks have also helped to bridge gaps between grassroots activists and larger human rights activists, creating a more cohesive advocacy movement.

Increased Public Awareness and Engagement:

Through media, public events, and social media outreach, the project has successfully raised public awareness about key human rights issues and the role of human rights defenders. Public engagement has increased, with more individuals joining advocacy efforts and supporting human rights meetings.

In conclusion, the Defending Human Rights through Network Strengthening Project has delivered a wide range of outputs that significantly strengthen the capacity, coordination, and effectiveness of human rights defenders. These outputs have laid the foundation for a more resilient and impactful human rights movement, equipped to face current and future challenges.

Project Progress Overview

The Defending Human Rights Through Network Strengthening Project has remained largely on track during the reporting period. Most planned activities, including training sessions, legal aid support, and advocacy meetings, have been implemented as scheduled. Continuous monitoring shows positive progress in strengthening human rights defenders' capacity and network coordination, although some operational and contextual challenges require ongoing attention.

Summary of Numerical Progress

S L	Activities	Target (Events)	Achieved (Events)	Participants (Without Disability)			Participants (With Disability - PWD)			Total Participants	% Achievement
				Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total		
1	Monthly Meetings	14	14	280	300	580	0	0	0	580	100%
2	Bi-Monthly Meetings	6	6	120	135	255	0	0	0	255	100%
3	Quarterly Meetings	4	4	80	100	180	0	0	0	180	100%
4	HRD Skill Training Sessions	9	9	2	7	9	0	0	0	9	100%
5	Fact Findings of Violent Incidents	38	36	0	54	54	0	0	0	54	95%
6	Litigation Support	12	11	0	11	11	0	0	0	11	92%
7	Legal Aid Support	25	23	0	20	20	0	0	0	20	92%
8	Day Observation	2	2	14	81	95	0	2	2	95	100%
9	Organize Protest (Human Chain, Rally, Press Release)	20	20	200	300	500	0	0	0	500	100%

The project demonstrates strong overall implementation performance, with most core activities fully achieved and high levels of community participation. Key activities such as monthly, bi-monthly, and quarterly meetings, day observations, and protest actions were completed at 100%, reflecting effective coordination, strong community engagement, and active network mobilization. While some components were partially achieved HRD skill training (100%), fact-finding (95%), and legal aid support (92%) these gaps were mainly due to scheduling constraints, security challenges, and the complexity of legal processes. Litigation support (92%) remains ongoing, as cases require longer timeframes within the judicial system. Overall, out of 130 planned events, 125 were successfully completed, engaging a total of 1,704 participants (696 men, 1008 women, and 3 persons with disabilities). Notably, higher female participation indicates strong inclusion of women in human rights initiatives; however, the very low participation of persons with disabilities highlights a need for more inclusive strategies. While advocacy and community mobilization activities performed exceptionally well, technical and legal interventions require additional time and resources to achieve full targets.



Successful Practices and Progress

The Defending Human Rights through Network Strengthening Project is progressing effectively with several key strengths. Strong community engagement has ensured active participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, making the interventions more inclusive and relevant. The project has successfully empowered Community Young Women Leaders and Feminist Human Rights Defenders, enhancing their confidence and capacity to advocate against gender-based violence and promote human rights. Additionally, advocacy dialogues and day observations have significantly increased public awareness on GBV and gender justice.

Overall, these achievements demonstrate that the project is effectively strengthening networks, building local leadership, and promoting community-driven human rights advocacy.

Areas for Strengthening and Future Improvement

While the project has made strong progress in strengthening coordination among human rights defenders, improving advocacy actions, and supporting victims of human rights violations, several key areas require further enhancement to increase effectiveness, inclusion, and long-term sustainability.

1. Strengthening Coordination and Communication

There is a need to further improve coordination between district-level and community-level human rights networks. Strengthening communication mechanisms will ensure faster sharing of information on human rights violations, improved case tracking, and more timely collective responses. A more structured referral and reporting system will also help enhance efficiency and accountability.

2. Deepening Community and Grassroots Engagement

Although community participation has been strong in organized activities, deeper engagement at the grassroots level is still required. Expanding outreach to more remote and marginalized communities will ensure that interventions better reflect local realities and increase community ownership of human rights initiatives. This will also strengthen the sustainability of local advocacy actions.

3. Strengthening Coordination with Government and Legal Support Systems

Improved and more systematic engagement with government institutions, legal aid providers, and law enforcement agencies is needed. Stronger collaboration with these actors will enhance access to justice, improve case follow-up, and ensure better protection for victims of human rights violations. Regular coordination meetings with relevant authorities should be institutionalized.

4. Expanding Advocacy and Policy Influence

While local-level advocacy has been effective, there is a need to strengthen higher-level policy engagement. Future interventions should focus more on sustained advocacy campaigns addressing structural human rights issues, influencing policy reform, and improving institutional accountability. Strategic use of evidence from fact-finding reports should be expanded for policy dialogue.

5. Strengthening Media and Public Engagement

Greater use of media platforms, storytelling, and strategic communication is required to increase visibility of human rights issues. Documenting success stories, survivor voices, and advocacy outcomes will help build broader public support and strengthen feminist and human rights narratives at both local and national levels.

Adaptation to Address Improvement Areas

The Defending Human Rights Through Network Strengthening Project has identified key areas for improvement and is continuously adapting its approaches to strengthen effectiveness and sustainability.

- **Increasing Local Engagement:**



Local human rights defenders and community-based organizations are now more actively involved in decision-making, planning, and implementation processes to ensure stronger ownership and relevance at the grassroots level.

Training and Capacity Building:

The project is promoting continuous learning through refresher trainings, international-level capacity-building opportunities for HRD members, and skills development initiatives to strengthen the knowledge and effectiveness of human rights defenders over time.

These adaptations are helping to improve participation, responsiveness, and the overall impact of the project.

Key Learning Insights

Several important lessons have emerged during implementation. Continuous capacity building is essential, as one-off training is not sufficient for long-term impact. Strong and well-coordinated networks significantly improve advocacy outcomes and peer support. Inclusive participation—especially of women, youth, and marginalized groups—enhances the relevance and effectiveness of advocacy actions. In addition, public awareness and media engagement have proven critical in strengthening accountability and driving social change.

Implementation, Monitoring, and Reporting Constraints

The project faced several challenges during delivery and monitoring. Resource constraints and political instability in some areas affected smooth implementation. Data collection was sometimes difficult due to logistical and safety concerns, while limited M&E capacity at local level affected reporting quality and consistency. Reporting delays and the sensitive nature of human rights information also created additional challenges. Despite this, the project maintained strong engagement with communities and continued core activities.

Protection, Safeguarding, and Inclusion Issues

Key protection issues included GBV risks, limited accessibility for persons with disabilities, and youth exclusion in decision-making. Actions taken included GBV awareness sessions, improved accessibility measures in selected venues, inclusive training approaches, and youth-led advocacy initiatives. Intergenerational dialogue sessions have also helped strengthen inclusion and participation across age groups.

Risk and Safeguarding (Red Flag Issues)

Some safeguarding and financial risks were identified, including isolated cases of fraudulent reimbursement claims and safeguarding concerns related to harassment risks. The project strengthened financial oversight, conducted compliance training, and introduced reporting mechanisms for fraud and misconduct. Safeguarding policies, training sessions, and confidential reporting channels were also reinforced to ensure a safe and accountable project environment.

Conclusion

Overall, the *Defending Human Rights Through Network Strengthening Project* has made steady and meaningful progress toward its intended outcomes during the reporting period. Most planned activities were successfully implemented, contributing to stronger coordination among human rights defenders, improved advocacy capacity, and enhanced community engagement on human rights issues.

Despite operational, contextual, and safeguarding challenges, the project has demonstrated resilience and adaptability through continuous learning, improved monitoring systems, and stronger safeguarding and accountability measures.

Moving forward, continued investment in capacity building, inclusive participation, and strengthened protection mechanisms will be essential to sustain and scale the project's impact. The project remains well-positioned to contribute to a safer, more accountable, and rights-based environment for marginalized and vulnerable communities.