

**The Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Empowerment Project**

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The “Human Rights Defenders (HRD) Empowerment Project” is a five (5) months project aimed at enhancing the capacity of grassroots HRDs in Hoima and Buliisa districts in Uganda to advance the rights of women and marginalized groups. The project will target HRDs, with a bias on women HRDs, working on land and other natural resource-related rights.

The primary issue that this project seeks to address is the empowerment of grassroots HRDs through trainings, documentation of rights violations to support strategic advocacy and strengthening HRD voices by increasing awareness and stakeholder engagement to advance these rights.

The project will cost USD 15,680 to its completion.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Response International was established as a loose coalition in 2015 and formally incorporated in January 2018 as a network of pro-democracy, human rights and social justice oriented human rights defenders, mostly composed of lawyers. The organization is a non-partisan, not-for-profit civil society organization with a mission to strengthen the foundations of democracy by nurturing a new generation of pro-democracy and social justice oriented young human rights defenders to spur the change.

It is set up with objectives of;

* 1. To **inspire** a new generation of pro-democracy and human rights lawyers
  2. To **promote** public interest lawyering and litigation of pro-democracy lawyers.
  3. To **offer** pro-bono and advisory legal services to deserving individuals and community groups,
  4. To **become** a forum for sharing good practices in pro-democracy and human rights advocacy

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The intended region for the project will be the oil rich Albertine region that is situated in Bunyoro sub-region, in the Western region of Uganda. This is the region where oil exploration is taking place in Uganda. The region is located approximately 200 kilometers northwest of Kampala. All the roads from Kampala to the two districts of operation are all-weather tarmac roads but since the project is to be conducted at the grassroots levels, most travels within the project areas will involve traveling to far and hard-to-reach areas in the districts.

Around 2009, an estimated 2.5 billion to 3.5 billion barrels of oil deposits were discovered in Lake Albert stretching to the shores of the lake in Hoima and Buliisa districts. This has since attracted a lot of economic activities to the area resulting in pressure on land and other natural resources in the districts and the surrounding areas. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), the estimated population of the most populated district in the project area, Hoima, was at 100,099 in 2014. This means the average population in the two districts is currently estimated at over 200,000 people. The region embraces a multiplicity of local government authorities, traditional institutions and people of various ethnic groups.

The project will target the grassroots HRDs who operate in the area to defend natural resource-related rights. Women HRDs will receive special attention to ensure that they form at least half of the target beneficiaries. The Human Rights Defenders Empowerment project is yet another program by Strategic Response International (SRI) going to be carried out for five months from the time of getting the necessary support in the Western region of Uganda.

Hoima and Buliisa districts are rural towns without any pressures on natural resources and property rights. This changed when commercially viable oil and gas deposits were discovered. Oil exploration have triggered land conflicts threatening the existence and the rights of the indigenous people which has significantly impacted on rural livelihoods derived from natural resources. The exploration activities require access to land on which the resources are located. This has led forced evictions, land grabbing, and displacements of households in violation of basic human rights and turned into a source of conflict in the region. Despite of government’s efforts to resolve the injustices, land conflicts have persisted. This struggle to end abuses have naturally triggered the increase of grassroots HRDs who fight to defend rights of women and vulnerable groups.

Most of these human rights defenders are neither lawyers nor do they have basic legal training. They basically pursue cases as individuals, largely based on their passion for justice. This fact inevitably limits their effectiveness in their tireless efforts to defend rights in their communities. For many HRDs who carry out their services under civil society Organisations, it is common to find that they operate without incorporation or permits. These circumstances expose the individual HRDs to arrests, brutality and violation of their rights and being in a rural setting, there are few civil rights bodies that robustly respond to their call. The unlawful arrests/detentions like in many rural areas go undocumented and unaccounted for since most HRDs are thrown in to detention and due process is not observed. This has left the urgent need to build the capacity, track HRDs to enable quick legal response to them when their rights are abused.

**4.** **PROJECT CONTEXT**

This project will seek to address these challenges by convening strategic training workshops for grassroots HRDs working in natural resource-related rights to empower them deliver their services more effectively. The trainings will include paralegal trainings, advocacy, documenting violations and use of databases, personal security, digital security, and other appropriate areas as needs assessments may require.

To address these concerns, this project will train the leaders of these institutions about the key issues in Uganda’s rapidly changing legal regime to promote legal compliance. Individual organisations will also be supported in follow-up to comply with legal compliance requests.

In addition, to support documentation of nature of human rights abuses the HRDs are battling with, the project will track, analyze and publish a report of violations. The contents of the report will largely be informed by interviews of the beneficiary HRDs. This will present a unique voice of HRDs operating in the region to identify patterns for action. During dissemination of the report, efforts will be made to utilize the opportunity to promote awareness and strategic engagements with stakeholders to ensure that the voice of grassroots HRDs is heard and listened to.

The project is also meant to embrace the use of technology through the use of a mobile application installed in the mobile devices of all the trained HRDs to track, document and share gross human rights violations to our team of lawyers. This will enable our team to adequately/ robustly respond to all violations.

**5. PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The goal of the project is to empower grassroots HRDs to effectively deliver their services through capacity building, strategic advocacy, and awareness rising.

The project has three main objectives namely: -

1. To enhance the capacity of HRDs by empowering 60 defenders to boldly and effectively defend rights in their communities.
2. To track, analyze, and document cases of human rights violations through the use of technology to advocate for justice and an end to patterns of abuses.
3. To increase awareness and government engagement on the rights of the HRDs and the communities residing in the project area.

**6. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND METHOD**

The proposed activities will train HRDs on Uganda’s rapidly changing legal regime to promote legal compliance. For documentation of human rights abuses that the HRDs are battling with, the project will track, analyze and publish a report of violations. The report will largely be informed by interviews of the beneficiary HRDs. A unique voice of HRDs operating in the region to identify patterns for action will be presented. Efforts to utilize the opportunity to promote awareness and strategic engagements with stakeholders to ensure that the voice of grassroots HRDs is heard.

The organization has developed an android application called RABURA that is to be installed in the phones of the HRDs. This application is GPS enabled and shall be used in the documentation of rights violations in form video, audio, photographic or any form to our server. This technological innovation shall keep HRDs connected to our lawyers and will have an Alert button in cases of arrests and abuses.

These shall be mainly through;

**Capacity building**

* Identifying participants.
* Identifying the venue for the training activity.
* Conducting needs assessment ahead of the training.
* Identifying facilitators for the training sessions.
* Sending out invitations and receiving participants.
* Conducting the paralegal trainings.
* Conducting post-training interviews.
* Follow up meetings with individual participants on any support needs.

**Research and documentation of human rights abuses in the region.**

* Interviewing all individual HRDs beneficiaries.
* Reviewing media reports and other desk research to identify cases of violations.
* Collection of police or court documents in relation to cases that are in the criminal justice system.
* Obtaining trial observation status in the courts of any on-going cases.
* Analysis of conduct of police, judicial officers, and other criminal justice institutions of interest.
* Publication of a report of findings from the investigations.

**Rabura Android Application for HRDs**

* Using the Android Application, HRDs will be tracked and monitored via GPS so as to keep them in touch with lawyers within the network for robust legal responses where need be. The Application shall be used to document Human rights abuses as they happen in terms of photography, Videography.
* The Application shall have an Alert/ Danger button that can be used in case of danger or threat by the HRDs. This shall be directly via GPS and our lawyers respond to secure the situation.

**Advocacy**

* Dissemination of the report of findings and engaging in strategic discussions with stakeholders.
* Strategic media engagements to share project findings and promoting awareness.
* Follow up on the ongoing human rights abuse cases in court in the area and legal representation for the victims.

1. EVALUATION

To determine and ensure that the project objectives are being met efficiently, the committed SRI management has proposed the following strategies for assessing the program.

7.1. Process Evaluation

It’s necessary to determine the extent at which the project is effective to the target group, this will be done through questioners on assessing the effectiveness of the project use of independent evaluators will also be used.

7.2.Outcome Evaluation

The primary interest is whether the project achieves the set objectives and effectiveness in empowering Human Rights Defenders. Strategic Response International will submit reports with evidence of success to the partners and entities that support the program which will portray the expected results such as 60 grassroots HRDs (half will be women HRDs) empowered to deliver their services to advance rights and access to justice for all more effectively, over 25 leaders of HRD civil society Organisations trained on legal compliance for Organisations, Publication of a detailed, accurate and verifiable report on cases that participant HRDs often have to deal with to identify patterns for response, a better understanding of human rights that is capable of influencing policy and practices among others.