



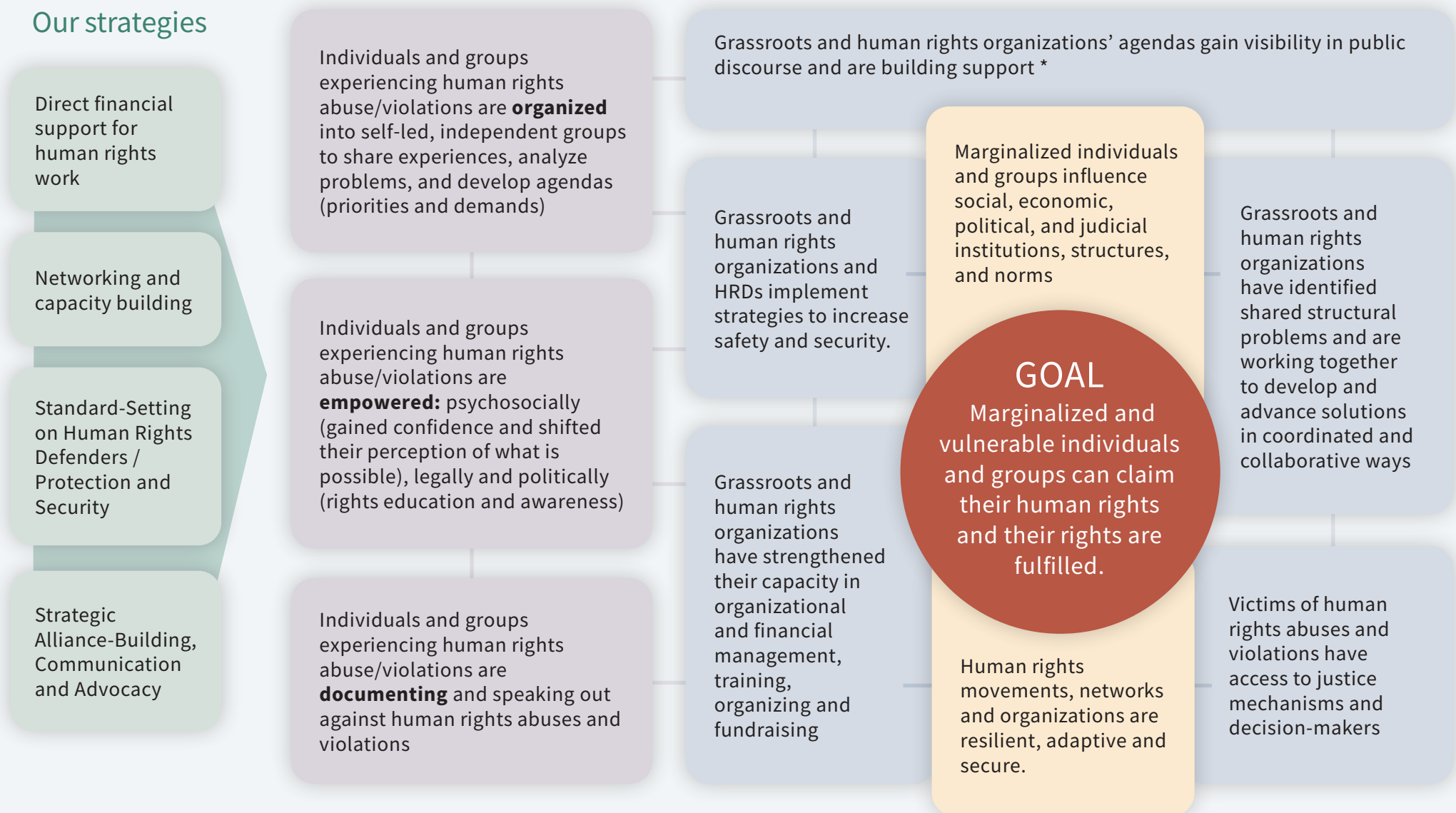
The Norwegian Human Rights Fund



Theory of Change

The change we are working for

Our strategies



Human rights organizations is an all-encompassing term that we're using generally to capture all varieties of formations for human rights work and people associated with the human rights work.

The NHRF's theory of change illustrates the dynamic and collaborative relationship between our role as a grantmaker and the human rights organizations and defenders we support. It outlines the changes we are striving to achieve together by charting pathways that lead from short-term to intermediate to long-term outcomes and arrive at the ultimate goal. While each level is generally seen as the preconditions to reach the next level of outcomes, we understand that change is not a linear process and some changes are happening simultaneously and/or reinforcing one another. For more information about our theory of change please refer to the accompanying narrative.



Who we are

Vision: The Norwegian Human Rights Fund's mandate is to protect and promote human rights internationally by being a flexible and courageous actor that provides direct financial support to local organizations working in the front lines for the rights of marginalized individuals and groups. The NHRF envisions that such support will lead to the creation of robust and resilient human rights movements and organizations that have the resources needed to carry out their critically important human rights work. Understanding the complexities and dimensions of local and national human rights work, we understand that the processes we support take time and that progress can be vulnerable. Therefore, our vision is placed within this reality while we work towards the long-term goal that marginalized and vulnerable individuals and groups experiencing human rights injustices will be able to claim their rights and have them fulfilled.

Shared responsibility for human rights: The NHRF understands that the social, economic, cultural, and political inequalities, that exist and persist in the world, are not isolated issues that are unique to any one country or context. It is understood that they persist in an interconnected world, which has an inextricable shared global history and present, that links responsibility to all of us. Therefore, the response and support to these inequalities must be shared and not the sole responsibility of those experiencing the extreme manifestations of historical inequalities. Responsibility must be shared by civil society organizations on the ground, international actors and organizations, and actors on all levels.

Norway and the global human rights community: From the beginning, Norwegian institutions, civil society, academia, and the labor rights movement have helped steer the NHRF's human rights work based on a firm belief in the equality of all. The work has had a deeply rooted connection to the advent and continued development of the modern-day human rights architecture, within which Norway has positioned itself as a prominent global actor in the human rights spheres for its work to protect human rights defenders and support civil society.

In addition, the NHRF works collaboratively and seeks guidance from peer actors in the broader, global human rights field. We understand that shared experiences, knowledge, and solidarity strengthen and collectivize our efforts.

What we do

Direct financial support for human rights work enables the NHRF to prioritize front line human rights initiatives and grassroots organizations and movements. It is flexible, takes measured risks, and integrates protection and security. Catalyzing and sustaining change is a complex and long-term process that works on many different levels. It requires strategy, innovation, determination, and a commitment to the cause among many other elements. It also requires the application of diverse strategies. The NHRF does not limit our support to certain methods, as this would counter our commitment to the agency and expertise of those experiencing human rights injustices. However, we do support the following methods: community empowerment and awareness, networking, participation and mobilization of victims and survivors of human rights violations, capacity building and training, legal aid and support, advocacy, and strategic litigation.



Networking and capacity building includes support for grantees and grassroots activists to connect and engage with decision-makers — including Embassy staff and UN Special Rapporteurs — and enabling them to connect with other civil society organizations and movements to share strategies and perspectives to use in their work. Support to organizational capacity, such as financial, administrative, and fundraising management and training is an investment in the sustainability of the organization and progress.

Standard-setting on protection and security for human rights defenders continues to increase in importance and urgency. Human rights defenders and organizations must have the skills and knowledge needed to adequately protect themselves so they can carry out their important work and reduce and mitigate risks to their lives and the lives of those connected to them. This includes supporting organizations to build their capacity and develop new tools to strengthen security for the continuation of human rights work in challenging contexts.

Strategic alliance-building, communication and advocacy builds solidarity and support for the NHRF's and NHRF grantee partners' human rights agendas. Alliance-building and advocacy is carried out with various strategic actors, organizations and institutions, including those in Norway, regionally in Europe and in the international human rights spheres.

Our core values

PUTTING HUMANS FIRST IN HUMAN RIGHTS WORK — Those experiencing human rights injustices are always at the center of our work, and we support their leadership in the struggle and when claiming their rights. The NHRF is uncompromising in practicing this principle, which in its application, has proven to have a multidimensional meaning — putting resources into enhancing grantees' security, connecting grantees with relevant and strategic actors or organizations, building relationships to deepen our understanding of grantees' work and its importance are some examples.

MUTUAL TRUST & ACCOUNTABILITY — Respect, transparency and a sense of mutual accountability between the NHRF and grantee partners helps build trust in our partnerships. It lessens power imbalances, reduces barriers to communication, and enables the NHRF to provide more meaningful support to partners.

SOLIDARITY & CONNECTION — Solidarity is an essential component to influencing change at all levels as we believe that change is not as simple as a top-down or bottom-up process. It is a long-term process involving historical and cultural roots, multiple actors from across the spectrum of sectors, opportunities, and (un)predictable fluctuations. Consistency in solidarity by placing the power and belief in the people claiming their rights and supporting their human rights agendas is essential. Connection through strong partnerships enhances our ability to respond to the needs of grantees as they adapt to ever-fluctuating environments.

EMPATHY & COMPASSION — Solidarity cannot be genuine without empathy. Empathy drives solidarity and action. Our belief in equality and that human rights must be realized for all drives our empathy to act and support those experiencing human rights injustices.

COURAGEOUS SUPPORT — The NHRF was mandated to be a courageous global actor that is willing to take measured risks with its funding so that we can reach innovative, remote, nascent, and/or other types of projects, movements, and organizations operating in challenging and complex contexts that typically find it difficult to secure funding. We invest in the resources needed to be able to continue to support courageous human rights work courageously.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION — We understand that diversity and inclusion, to the fullest extent of their meaning, are essential to creating transformative and sustainable change. The NHRF therefore strives to support not only a diversity of human rights work and organizations but also organizations that are diverse in the composition of their personnel and target groups.

FLEXIBILITY — Flexibility allows us to provide direct support to organizations with varying capacities that might otherwise be missed by other donors. Practicing this principle helps us meet the needs and capacities of grantees by being a dynamic and adaptable partner.





Our theory of change

INTRODUCTION

The development of the theory of change was a participatory process involving the NHRF Secretariat, its Board, NHRF local consultants, and a selection of grantee partners. It is a living document that represents our theory of how change is created and driven forward. It articulates expected outcomes and their preconditions that, together, form pathways of change that lead to the overall goal. We understand these processes to be non-linear, interconnected, interdependent, mutually reinforcing, and occurring simultaneously or separately.

The theory of change will guide our work as a partner and grantmaker by informing the support we provide to human rights work to achieve the defined outcomes and overall goal. It is one of the key elements used in our monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes. We will regularly review and refine the theory of change as we assess if our interventions are bringing about change and if the pathways of change are accurate and realistic.

Resource the source of change: leadership at the grassroots level: NHRF primarily supports small- to medium-sized organizations and movements that represent and work with marginalized and vulnerable individuals and groups experiencing human rights injustices. Some initiatives are nascent, and others are more experienced and professional. Our goal is to directly reach communities and people experiencing injustice, so we prioritize support for initiatives that are led by the communities or people themselves or to those who are working in direct connection with and for them. The NHRF operates from the belief expressed by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, “There is no strict definition of human rights defenders because they can be anyone who acts at any moment for any human rights. ... A human rights defender can be a man, woman, lawyer, student, an NGO’s employee, a doctor or any person from any profession, of all ages, nationalities, religions, etc.” Therefore, the NHRF often refers to supporting human rights defenders (HRDs) in our work as we view all grantee partners working in the front lines for human rights as HRDs.

The NHRF has always instilled the essentiality of human rights initiatives and efforts being led by those experiencing human rights injustices, who are empowered with the expertise, agency, and knowledge of the most effective methods for not only defending rights but also uprooting systemic oppression. Human rights work transforms power relationships and dynamics and it is inherently political. Its focus on systemic change requires a long-term commitment and an understanding that holding one's ground and preventing changes that erode human rights will be necessary in some contexts.

Flexible funding is a critical resource to drive social change. This should be bolstered by solidarity from international organizations. Taken together, these two elements have been key in the NHRF's support to grassroots organizations and movements for the past three decades. This understanding has led to the establishment of close relationships based on respect, trust, and accountability towards one another. Other components, such as capacity building/training and protection and support for W/HRDs are also recognized as critical to building resilience, which reinforces sustainability of progress.

The NHRF approach to gender: The NHRF understands that there are extreme variations between the experiences of human rights violations between women, men, and LGBTQ+ persons and therefore the approach to human rights work must be one in which the consideration of and action on gendered differences are central. We understand the importance of investing in women's organizations and women's leadership roles and therefore will prioritize funding for feminist or women-led organizations. We assess whether supported initiatives are lifting women's role in society and in the movement and empowering them through activities such as capacity building, leadership opportunities, rights education, and others. We assess the gender balance in organizations and whether a gender perspective is present in the workplace.

The NHRF approach to the intersections of diverse identities: The NHRF understands that there are many diverse identities within our target groups that are marginalized and discriminated against. We understand that these identities are intersecting and lead to compounding forms of discrimination and oppression. We prioritize funding to projects and organizations led by marginalized and vulnerable individuals, groups, and communities. We assess the connection to and representation of the target community/ies in an organizational structure. We have also increased our attention to projects with an intergenerational approach as an additional lens to our assessment, i.e. if youth are leading and/or being engaged, educated, trained, and/or are generations working together for change.



Contextualizing what is possible: The NHRF supports projects across all our priority countries, with the addition of thematic support for the ‘HRDs at Risk’ program, which is not geographically limited. Our grantee partners’ work may focus on different pathways or levels of outcomes depending on the context in which they work. The NHRF understands that external and unpredictable factors influence the progress of grantee partners’ work and can facilitate progress or have negative impacts that backslide progress in the ever-fluctuating environment for human rights. A range of actors, from non-State, State, businesses and others can also influence the change processes. Thus, the starting point for human rights work is different as it is contextually-based, i.e. some organizations may be starting in a context with space for claiming rights, while others may be starting in a context that is hostile and closed for human rights work. These contextual considerations are detailed in our individual country strategies.

THE THEORY OF CHANGE EXPLAINED

Our theory of change is rooted in the value of the abilities, skills, knowledge, and agency of all human rights defenders. Change starts from there and is further enabled by 1) resources (financial and non-financial); 2) security and protection (for human rights organizations, groups, individuals, etc. and human rights work); 3) action-oriented solidarity; and 4) networking. The NHRF has an integral understanding of the risks associated with the human rights work grantee partners are undertaking. Individual, organizational and occupational risks are unfortunately prevalent in nearly all contexts of human rights work and substantially influence change.

Who we support: The NHRF supports marginalized and vulnerable individuals and groups experiencing human rights injustices and those who help mobilize these communities to claim their rights. This includes women, indigenous communities, LGBTQ+ persons, migrants, persons with disabilities and other groups who are among the most marginalized across the world and those who are most marginalized and made to be vulnerable within a country or regional context based on identities such as caste; class; ethnic and religious minorities; people experiencing conflict; and workers in the informal and unprotected labor sectors. NHRF support goes beyond capital cities to organizations in rural and remote areas to ensure vital human rights work is supported. (See the section above on *Resourcing the source of change* and subsequent sections for more detailed information about who we support.)

We use the term, *marginalized and vulnerable individuals and groups experiencing human rights injustices*, for our target group to account for the variations in the organization or formation of those carrying out human rights work. For example, some organize or form as groups of individuals, a collective, a community, families, an organization, a movement, et al. In the theory of change, we refer to the full target group term in the goal only and use variations of it in the outcome levels (see below for more on the outcome levels).



Our theory of change is based upon a few core assumptions:

- When people collectively organize into human rights organizations, campaigns, movements, and other forms of organized human rights work identify shared structural barriers and solutions, they are more effective and protected
- Organizations, collectives, campaigns, movements and other forms of organized human rights work are strengthened by the inclusion of diverse voices, experiences, and ideas.
- Safe and enabling spaces for civil society and human rights work are a prerequisite for positive, long-term change.
- Strategic partnerships and solidarity with diverse stakeholders and human rights actors strengthens human rights work and is a source of security.
- Change does not follow a simple top-down or bottom-up model. It is a non-linear process that requires the engagement of a multitude of stakeholders at all levels and the sharing of knowledge, experience, practice, and expertise between all stakeholders involved.

Stakeholders

As there are many actors involved in and engaged with in change processes, we devised our theory of change to be open and not to specify actors. For example, it accounts for actors like politicians, judiciaries, government officials, businesses/corporations (national or international) environmental/conservation organizations and groups, non-State actors, international organizations, regional actors, and other actors that are relevant to the thematic area within which our grantee partners are working.

Short-term outcomes

This level is focused on the foundational shifts in individuals and groups that are needed to bring about social change. We have identified that awareness and education of rights, psychosocial empowerment, mobilizing and acting collectively, and collectively identifying strategies and solutions are actions of agency that catalyze human rights change. Psychosocial empowerment refers to the shift and recognition in attitudes and beliefs by individuals and groups in their ability to effect change as individuals and in their communities. We are cognizant of the profound impact caused by trauma due to human rights violations and how this can affect attitudes and motivations to participate in change processes; this is included in our consideration of psychosocial empowerment.

Intermediate outcomes

At this level, we are witnessing the results of community-led empowerment, organizing and agenda-setting that has taken place in the short-term. Campaigns and agendas have been informed and shaped by the concerns of marginalized individuals and groups. Human rights organizations are building a wider base of support and using accessible platforms for advocacy, awareness-raising, visibility, to access and influence justice mechanisms, and decision-makers at all levels. Security and protection for HRDs and human rights organizations is also identified as a key outcome/precondition. As organizations are gaining momentum and visibility, they can become less secure and need to reinforce their work and its potential for sustainability through active implementation of risk mitigation and security practices.

Long-term outcomes

At this level, human rights organizations, movements and organizations will be able to gain power and influence over key institutions and norms as a result of the collaborative and coordinated work carried out in the other levels. The institutions span all power-holding institutions, from judicial, political, businesses/corporations, international organizations, local governments. Movements have also become more resilient and adaptable so that they can sustain their work and influence in the long-term. These two outcomes are reinforcing.

Indicators include but are not limited to, legal reforms, the adoption of positive law, social norm change, accountability (a decrease in impunity), persisting change in practice by companies, and other systemic and structural changes that reduce power imbalances. Social norm change is defined as a transformational change that occurs at the root causes embedded in the social structures like inequality, poverty, violence, and other societal issues. The change shifts societal views towards equality, accountability, and promotion of human rights.

Ultimate goal

Our ultimate goal envisions marginalized individuals and groups, human rights defenders and representative civil society organizations claiming their human rights without negative consequences and with an ultimate recognition or fulfillment of their human rights. The fulfillment of human rights means that positive, non-discriminatory laws are effectively implemented, that people are able to exercise their rights, that rights are respected and protected, and that States are meeting their international human rights obligations.



The Norwegian Human Rights Fund (NHRF)

works to protect and promote human rights internationally through direct support to organizations working in the first line of defense for human rights. For more information about our work and who we support, please visit our website.

www.nhrf.no

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