

POLICY AND PRACTICE NOTE

Networks for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: Notes from the Field

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS PROJECT*

Abstract

Founded in 2005, the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP) functions as the Secretariat to the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net). Its core mandate is to offer protection to and promoting the rights of human rights defenders (HRDs) throughout the East and Horn of Africa subregions. In this policy and practice note we reflect on strategies, tactics and results in four core areas of interrelated work: protection, security management, advocacy, and capacity and coalition building. We argue that a concerted, holistic approach to the protection of HRDs is necessary to mitigate the worst risks that HRDs face as well as to foster an enabling environment for the effective defence of human rights. This involves complementing urgent responses to HRDs at immediate risk with the provision of prevention-oriented security management training, as well as conducting sustained institutional and public advocacy. We also stress the importance of capacity building as well as coalition building and networking in this work. Supporting the growth of national HRD coalitions helps to bring protection expertise down to the national level, strengthening the regional network model. Finally, we put forward areas of work that need further development in the context of the East and Horn of Africa.

Keywords: human rights defenders; HRD protection; activism; East Africa; Horn of Africa; civil society

Introduction

On 4 November 2005, 43 activists from across the East Africa and the Horn of Africa subregion gathered at the Lake Victoria Hotel in Entebbe, Uganda, and signed the first Declaration of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net). The founding human rights defenders (HRDs) of EHAHRD-Net also developed a Plan of Action to complement the

* The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (<http://www.defenddefenders.org>) is a Uganda-based organization working to protect and promote the rights of human rights defenders in Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia (and Somaliland), South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The authors of this policy and practice note are Neil Blazevic, Rachel Nicholson, Tabitha Netuwa, Nora Rehmer, Joseph Bikanda, and Hassan Shire Sheikh (program@defenddefenders.org).

Declaration (Amnesty International and EHAHRDP, 2006), a wide-ranging blueprint for a holistic strategy of interventions that support HRDs on the ground.

The Plan summarized the threats faced by HRDs in the East and Horn of Africa subregion, including targeted physical attacks, legislative restrictions, and civil war. The Plan also recommended specific actions and strategies, such as building capacity, providing legal protection, enhancing the political environment for human rights work, and promoting psychosocial support for HRDs.

The Plan also provided strategic input to the Secretariat to the Network, the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), established earlier that year following research organized by the Centre for Refugee Studies (York University, Toronto, Canada) (Shire Sheikh, Torh and Penz, 2005). Since 2005, EHAHRDP has been supporting HRDs in Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia (and Somaliland), South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. Eight years later, the Plan is still relevant. Many of its recommendations have become fundamental daily activities of the Secretariat, while others are carried out in collaboration with a network of partner institutions. Still others remain as future priorities.

The objective of this policy and practice note is to examine the range of interventions utilized by EHAHRDP in its work since 2005, and to reflect on these practices in order to draw out key lessons for other regional or national networks and projects that intend to use similar interventions. We recognize that HRD protection is a relatively new and small field. We also recognize that HRDs around the world face diverse challenges—the risks they face are shaped by the political conditions of their work, their geographical location, and their sociocultural contexts. We argue that a concerted, holistic approach to the protection of HRDs is necessary to mitigate the worst risks that HRDs face as well as to foster an enabling environment for the effective defence of human rights. We also discuss the power of networks in strengthening the protection of HRDs and the importance of making those networks available at the local level. It is our hope that by reflecting on our actions in this subregion we will contribute to a global conversation on how protection interventions can support HRDs in carrying out their critical work.

Governance structure and context of EHAHRDP

EHAHRDP was assessed in an external evaluation report as a ‘strong secretariat’ with a ‘slimmed-down governance model’—qualities cited as key learning points from assessment of other subregional networks for HRD protection (Stalker and Smith 2011; 27, 5). The Secretariat operates under the leadership of the Executive Director, Hassan Shire Sheikh, who is also the Chairperson of EHAHRD-Net. The Secretariat is able to make fast responsive decisions based on the needs of the region. A Board of Directors, an Advisory Council, and the General Assembly of the Network provide oversight and set strategic priorities.¹

EHAHRD-Net's structure has evolved over time. It now integrates national coalitions of HRDs as they are founded in the subregion (further discussed below). National coalitions extend the availability and quality of protection within countries of the subregion. In 2009, EHAHRDP was given the mandate by the General Assembly of the Johannesburg + 10 All-African Human Rights Defenders Conference to host the Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network (PAHRD-Net), an initiative to link five subregional HRD networks across Africa (EHAHRDP 2009).

Many countries in the East and Horn of Africa have experienced massive human rights abuses, long-term and large-scale impunity, civil, social and political unrest, and autocratic leadership. Such situations and contexts both underline the need for the work of HRDs, and render their lives and work particularly challenging (Shire Sheikh, Torh and Penz, 2005; EHAHRDP, 2009).

The external events and conditions in the region have shaped the structure of EHAHRDP and informed its practices. Following the 2005 EHAHRD-Net inaugural conference, turbulent developments in the home country of several participants led them to claim asylum in Uganda. This placed immediate pressure on EHAHRDP to provide relief and support to these HRDs as well as others like them. The experience laid the framework for EHAHRDP's protection department in terms of engaging in direct welfare interactions with HRDs at risk, interactions with national immigration authorities and the international refugee regime, as well as the institutional and fundraising needs for an emergency grants programme.

In 2009, a vicious crackdown on civil society began in Sudan following the issuing of an International Criminal Court arrest warrant for President Omar al-Bashir. The crackdown initiated an outflow of HRDs from the country, which still continues. This national crisis (in addition to others such as that in Somalia) underlined the need for EHAHRDP's protection model; however, it also led to an acute recognition of the limitations and downfalls of exile for HRDs who as a result are separated from work, family, culture, and livelihood. In consequence efforts have intensified to utilize national coalitions, advocacy with in-country stakeholders, and security management training to improve the security of HRDs within their current location. The crackdown by the Sudanese regime also brought to the foreground the issue of reprisals against HRDs engaging with international human rights mechanisms, a threat

1 A six person Board of Directors (BOD)—composed of knowledgeable human rights activists from within and outside of the subregion—along with a Board Secretary and Treasurer provides governance oversight to the work of the Secretariat. The Chairperson of the Board is Mr Livingstone Sewanyana, a prominent Ugandan activist. An 18-member Advisory Council of the Network, comprising the Board and 12 elected country focal points, provides oversight and strategic guidance to the Secretariat. The BOD meets twice a year and the Advisory Council once every two years. The EHAHRD-Net General Assembly, comprising 74 subregional member organizations, meets on a five-yearly basis to draft, validate and produce a new five-year plan, elect a Chairperson, and approve applications for new members.

which has become a key thematic focus for advocacy (EHAHRDP, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2013).

The tragic 2011 killing of David Kato, an LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) community leader in Uganda, highlighted both the need to develop security management practices within organizations and activist communities, as well as to build links and goodwill between LGBTI activists and the mainstream human rights movements in the subregion, from which they are often alienated. EHAHRDP's coalition building, capacity building, and advocacy activities have continually sought to include LGBTI defenders within mainstream human rights movements, leading to positive opportunities for understanding through familiarity.

HRDs working in conflict zones face greater mortal danger than their colleagues elsewhere. Their protection needs may focus more on physical security, medical costs, and equipment needs. For example, 12 journalists were reported killed in Somalia in 2012 in direct relation to their work (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2013). As of 2012, EHAHRDP has commenced a special project to build security management expertise in Somalia.

The context on the ground led EHAHRDP to define categories of at-risk HRDs needing particular programmatic attention, which we have identified as women HRDs (WHRDs), defenders working on LGBTI rights, defenders working in zones of armed conflict and under repressive regimes, and journalists working to end impunity and corruption—though this list may be malleable as thematic needs emerge. Recently, for example, we have added HRDs working on issues related to the resource extraction industries as an at-risk category (EHAHRDP, 2012a).

Protection interventions

Protection is a core programme in EHAHRDP. The aim of this programme is to provide robust emergency support to HRDs at risk in the subregion. The protection department² at EHAHRDP responds to requests for assistance, made either by organizations on behalf of individual HRDs, or directly by HRDs themselves. The protection department assesses each application and decides if the person in question meets the criteria for support—namely, that he/she is a human rights defender and does not utilize violence; that the threat faced has arisen in relation to his/her human rights work; and that the situation they are in constitutes an emergency.

Most applications to the protection programme come through referrals within our existing and known networks. This makes it easier to verify an application and assess the level of need for intervention. It is harder to verify applications when applicants cannot provide verifiable references and when

2 The work of the protection programme for years was conducted by a team of two, however this has recently grown to six, incorporating a French-speaking and an Arabic-speaking security management officer (see section on security management below).

the work of a particular HRD is relatively unknown. This may lead to troubling gaps in protection as outreach is difficult in repressive countries or inaccessible rural areas. Through all activities, including capacity building, partner meetings, and research missions, EHAHRDP promotes the existence of its protection programme. Promoting the establishment of national coalitions of HRDs is another way to promote protective mechanisms as well as a discourse recognizing the rights of HRDs at the national level.

The process for bringing a HRD into the protection programme involves the completion of a standardized form either directly by the HRD at risk or by an EHAHRDP staff member through an interview. Translation is made when necessary and possible. Intake questions cover basic biographical information, family information where applicable, background of human rights work, details of threats faced, and requested intervention. This data is entered into a database for future reference and case management. Efforts are being made to develop this database for the purpose of analysis to strengthen EHAHRDP's protective interventions as well as to provide hard data to feed into EHAHRDP's research, reporting, and the development of recommendations for advocacy and public engagement.

Following an assessment of each case, a management-level decision is taken to approve or deny the application. EHAHRDP operates on a 'no-harm' principle. That is, while we recognize that fallacious applications are sometimes made and that the protection programme may be abused, we consider it better, as far as resources allow, to extend support in a fast and effective manner despite the risk of such abuse than to allow a HRD to come to harm due to inaction.³

EHAHRDP provides different types of protective interventions, the choice of which depends on the particular needs of HRDs. Interventions might include: one-off or one-item costs such as medical charges, security systems for home or office, equipment replacement, educational grants, psychosocial counselling, or legal costs; financial support for set periods of time (generally three to six months) covering basic living costs, communication, transportation, and family support; technical assistance in immigration applications/refugee claims or interfacing with authorities; referrals to other organizations for support; security consultation and training, including digital security; and public and private advocacy (further elaborated below). As a last resort, and when all other interventions are inadequate for addressing the risks that a HRD faces, EHAHRDP supports temporary relocation and evacuation and resettlement to another country or location.

The situation of HRDs and the risks they face are complex. It is not always clear what the 'correct' intervention is for an individual at risk. As a general principle, EHAHRDP holds that the HRD him/herself has a better

3 The same principle operates inversely in the case of advocacy interventions, where increased attention to a case may bring further reprisals against a HRD.

understanding of the most urgent intervention needed, and our actions are led by their decisions. Beyond this principle, however, we have learned other lessons. HRDs rarely request psychosocial counselling, although this is often needed. HRDs are also often primary breadwinners for their families and the disruption to their work imperils their families as well. Thus it is important to provide family support, especially for displaced HRDs. We have come to see family support as a necessary, gender-sensitive intervention for women HRDs. Family support may greatly reduce psychosocial stress on the affected HRD, however it also places considerable strain on the financial resources of the grants programme and slows immigration proceedings, especially in the case of large families. Grant-making needs to balance holistic support considerations with budgetary constraints to ensure that individual cases do not disproportionately drain grant funds. Sometimes referrals to other organizations will be made to share the costs of family support.

In situations of crisis or acute risk, HRDs often seek to leave their countries. However, permanent relocation raises serious challenges. Displaced HRDs and their families often find it difficult to obtain employment in their host country. Language and cultural differences compound the sense of dislocation from family and colleagues. While in exile, HRDs may have more freedom to report openly on human rights violations from another country; however, they also become unable to continue the same monitoring and documentation function they fulfilled in their home country. As a result, the constituents they seek to protect are then left with fewer advocates for their rights. As such, EHAHRDP's position is that permanent exile should be avoided as much as possible. Instead, EHAHRDP explores possibilities within the context of their work in home communities for interventions and strategies that raise the political cost of attacking a HRD.

Working with other stakeholders in HRD protection is both crucial to improving service delivery to HRDs and to protecting the integrity of the work itself. Communication between protection stakeholders, promoted through formal and informal networks, often leads to the identification of previously unknown avenues of protection, whether logistical, financial, technical, or diplomatic.

Last but not least, we have found that project staff who work with HRDs—even at arm's length—sometimes suffer from vicarious trauma. Such trauma is often not addressed, recognized, or discussed explicitly, as their symptoms may appear trivial in comparison to the trauma that HRDs themselves experience. Yet it is important to recognize the reality of vicarious trauma, to seek avenues of understanding, dialogue, and treatment. In response, EHAHRDP budgets for and offers counselling services to staff and reminds them of the importance of recognizing, preventing and responding to vicarious trauma.

Security management

EHAHRDP differentiates between ‘protection’ and ‘security management’, a distinction that often confuses observers and partners. Protection work is generally defined as reactive—that is, responding to cases of threats and attacks against HRDs as they arise and making interventions accordingly. Security management, on the other hand, is preventive—that is, working with HRDs to manage their own security proactively, both before, during, and after the incident of an attack.

In this area of work, we help HRDs apply a framework for assessing risks, threats, and vulnerabilities based on the work of Protection International.⁴ This work is contextual, based on the understanding that protection needs and solutions are shaped by the particularities of a HRD’s working environment. We help HRDs to identify resources, allies and foes, and assist them in security planning in order to minimize risks and mitigate/prevent the negative impact of an attack.

The capacity building process usually starts with a training session, which contextualizes the security management tools described in the ‘New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders’ (Eguren and Caraj, 2009). Participants are trained on how to undertake a risk assessment based on their environment, develop a security plan in collaboration with their organization or colleagues, and apply individual security protocols. We conduct this training in two ways—as part of our annual plan of work, in which we target strategic at-risk groups of HRDs or organizations, as well as HRDs outside of country capitals. We also provide training at the request of individual HRDs and organizations who provide their own budget to facilitate the training of their staff.

Over the years, we have observed that support by management and decision makers within organizations is key to behavioural change in relation to security management. It is important for organizations to assign responsibility for overseeing the security management process to one or more staff members. Within EHAHRD-Net, these individuals or groups become focal points between EHAHRDP’s security management officers and their own organizations. EHAHRDP’s security management officers provide technical support and conduct follow-up field visits over an extended period of time. They also help HRDs in emergency situations to conduct a situational analysis. These sessions are oriented towards identifying vectors of threats and potential protective resources, and developing individualized security strategies with HRDs. We also encourage organizations to develop security plans in consultation with all

4 Until 2012, EHAHRDP and Protection International jointly operated two projects—Protection Desk Uganda and Protection Desk Kenya. This work is now integrated within EHAHRDP’s protection department. For more information on Protection Desk Uganda, see ‘Protection Desk Uganda—a portrait’ by Protection International, <http://vimeo.com/15389634> (referenced 11 October 2013).

staff members. Although this process can be resource intensive, in the long run it creates a sense of ownership towards security management.⁵

Advocacy

Advocacy activities at EHAHRDP are a multipronged effort to improve respect for the rights of HRDs, promote an enabling environment, improve the protective framework for HRDs, and promote public knowledge about the work and situation of HRDs. Advocacy efforts are conducted in response to violations of the right to defend human rights within the subregion and following analysis of whether EHAHRDP's intervention would be likely to have an impact. These efforts are done in relation to specific cases of individuals at risk, as well as to challenge more general, often legislative, restrictions on HRDs. Such efforts may be undertaken publicly or privately as appropriate to the specific case or situation—in some cases added publicity can have protective value for HRDs, 'raising the political cost' of attacking them, whereas in other cases a defender may need assistance from embassies to leave the country in complete secrecy. The decision is taken based on past experience in that country, specific circumstances of the case, and the wishes of the individual. Often advocacy activities are carried out in partnership with the organization or individual at risk, or as a joint effort with other human rights organizations and national coalitions. This can also have the effect of reducing the risks of engaging in advocacy for EHAHRDP or other individual organizations.

EHAHRDP regularly engages with international human rights mechanisms, in particular the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism at the Human Rights Council has been an important forum to raise the situation of HRDs in a given country within the context of more general human rights reporting and to encourage member states to accept specific recommendations and increase their formal commitment towards better protection of HRDs. As the UPR is a universal mechanism, states may feel less targeted by it and more willing to engage in incremental improvements. On the other hand, we have witnessed reprisals against HRDs for their engagement with this mechanism.

EHAHRDP facilitates the engagement of HRDs with these regional and international human rights mechanisms through regular training on how to develop advocacy strategies and use existing mechanisms, and by supporting delegations of HRDs to directly interact with these institutions. This includes engagement with the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council and the special mechanisms of the ACHPR, in particular both the Special Rapporteurs on HRDs. Increased visibility and national/international

5 For a more thorough overview of practices, challenges, and future directions for protection and security management, including the work of national coalitions within EHAHRD-Net and the East and Horn of Africa, see the Report of the June 2013 Protection Stakeholders Meeting, available upon request.

recognition of the work of an individual HRD or organization has been seen to contribute to a stronger profile reducing the risk of intimidation and attack for fear of a strong response by various stakeholders nationally and internationally. Linked to this, sustained engagement can also evoke a more rapid response from international stakeholders when HRDs are in need of assistance, as they and the credibility of their work are already known. At times, attending international forums, outside of their usual place of work, can offer a level of respite to HRDs, while still continuing their work.

On the other hand, engagement in advocacy activities at the UN or ACHPR level can sometimes result in acts of reprisal or intimidation. Human rights defenders who coordinated the civil society input for the UPR of Rwanda, for example, were forced into exile following a smear campaign; two Kenyan human rights defenders were assassinated after they met with the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. EHAHRDP encourages HRDs to analyse the potential risks incurred from the heightened exposure in international or regional advocacy and to make an informed choice of whether or not to engage. EHAHRDP therefore also advocates for a more robust response by both the UN human rights system and the ACHPR to reported cases of reprisals, in recognition of these mechanisms' dependence on the input of HRDs to enable them to function effectively (EHAHRDP, 2012b).

EHAHRDP has focused much of its advocacy efforts around the European Union (EU) Guidelines on HRDs (European Union, 2008). This policy document commits the EU and its organs to make efforts in support of HRDs' protection in third countries where they are represented, and therefore offers concrete possibilities for leverage in favour of HRDs. Constructive engagement with EU delegations and member states' embassies has led to the development of local implementation strategies (LIS) of the Guidelines in many countries. While the existence of a LIS does facilitate greater engagement between HRDs and the EU mission, it is also possible to work effectively with the EU missions without a formal strategy in place, or indeed to seek actions on their part which may not be formally identified in the LIS. On the other hand, the existence of a LIS does not guarantee a response on the part of EU missions when needed, even if it does make it more likely. EHAHRDP engages bilaterally with the embassies of EU member states to seek protection measures in individual cases of HRDs at risk, and to share experiences of good practices between countries in the region.

The situation of most-at-risk HRDs is often highlighted in advocacy engagements. For example, EHAHRDP supports the effective engagement of HRDs working on issues to do with sexual orientation and gender identity at the UN Human Rights Council and the ACHPR. EHAHRDP has also provided input to a forthcoming ACHPR study on the situation of WHRDs, including in presenting concrete follow-up recommendations.

A research programme is maintained in order to produce timely information on the situation of HRDs in the subregion, including on the specific thematic areas mentioned above, to inform intervention by EHAHRDP and other stakeholders towards better protection and recognition of HRD rights. Most recently, EHAHRDP has produced a report on HRDs engaging on the natural resource extraction sector in Uganda and Tanzania (EHAHRDP, 2012a). Research questions arise from trends observed in the course of EHAHRDP's engagement with HRDs in advocacy, protection and capacity building. Having recognized the wealth of information at our disposal and the importance of well-grounded policy recommendations, EHAHRDP is currently in a process of strengthening and expanding our research programme, including through the development of an in-house database.⁶

Building capacity and national coalitions

EHAHRDP offers training to HRDs on a variety of topics, such as strategic advocacy; monitoring, documenting and reporting human rights violations; security management; digital security; financial management; how to use social media; and stress reduction and coping with trauma.

Capacity building activities offer benefits both to HRDs and to EHAHRDP. These activities are a form of outreach—they are, simultaneously, a way of imparting skills as well as a way of building trust and establishing face-to-face connection with HRDs in the field. They reinforce knowledge amongst HRDs about the identity of EHAHRDP and the protective services offered; HRDs are then more confident about turning to EHAHRDP in times of vulnerability and need. These events also help to create greater solidarity between civil society actors at the regional level. Through these events, civil society actors in the East and Horn of Africa get to know each other, relate to each other, learn of each other's struggles, and begin to perceive regional level developments.

Another key area of work is the development of national coalitions of HRDs that specifically address the protection needs of HRDs. These differ from national NGO networks and human rights forums that focuses on human rights

6 These various advocacy and research activities often combine in a holistic fashion and complementary to the work of other EHAHRDP programmes. In Burundi, for example, EHAHRDP along with a number of international NGOs has provided support to the nationally-led Campaign for Justice for Ernest Manirumva, on behalf of the anti-corruption campaigner who was murdered in April 2009. EHAHRDP has provided support and capacity building to a national coalition of HRDs, including through joining advocacy activities at the national, regional and international level, and has engaged regularly with national authorities and embassies in the country to push for the implementation of national protection mechanisms for HRDs. A trial observation report (EHAHRDP, 2011) produced by EHAHRDP's protection and research teams was launched at the ACHPR with the participation of network members from Burundi. EHAHRDP has also supported Burundian HRDs to engage at the UN level with the Independent Expert on Burundi and the UPR of Burundi, as well as coordinating a joint report on the situation of HRDs in Burundi with Front Line Defenders and Protection International for Burundi's UPR in 2013.

issues rather than the security of defenders. National coalitions have been founded in Burundi, Kenya (NCHRD – K),⁷ Tanzania (TNHRDC),⁸ Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda. Each coalition maintains a different structure and level of activity. Some are nascent, while others have a stronger focus on protection or advocacy.

The national coalitions enable the extension of protection activities to HRDs outside of capital cities. They are able to provide a more immediate and timely response, offer a more nuanced understanding and analysis of the national context for HRDs, and provide more consistent follow-up of individual HRDs. The relationship between national coalitions and EHAHRDP at the regional level has been mutually beneficial. For example, EHAHRDP benefits from their insights and their geographical reach when assessing cases or providing trainings. The national coalitions in turn benefit from EHAHRDP's established expertise, resources and connections at the international and regional levels.

Ways forward and debate

In the above sections we have discussed the specific mix of interventions utilized by EHAHRDP in responding to the needs of HRDs in the East and Horn of Africa. These interventions interlock with each other: in isolation their impact is limited, but in harmony and in cooperation with many actors we have begun to see the emergence of a more robust protection environment. Many HRDs in the region now have strong technical skills, greater visibility, cognizance of a security framework for their work, and are better networked, with access to emergency 'safety nets' at national and subregional levels.

Nevertheless, many areas of our work require continual development, thought, and debate.

The reactive protection model utilized by EHAHRDP was for several years administered separately from the preventive security management model as practised in the training curriculums of actors such as Protection International and Front Line Defenders. Yet security and protection are deeply interconnected, and by promoting the former, we reduce the need for the latter. Both programmes have recently become housed in the same department at EHAHRDP. Finding additional complementarities and integrating and comparing principles of the two approaches may form an avenue for future work and research.

Within the framework of security management and protection, work needs to be done to reduce the instances of forcible displacement due to human rights work. Stronger engagement with national duty bearers, robust security

7 National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Kenya, <http://www.hrdcoalition.org> (referenced 1 May 2013).

8 Tanzania Human Rights Defenders National Coalition, <http://tanzaniahumanrightsdefenderscoalition.blogspot.com/?view=classic> (referenced 1 May 2013).

management, and national-level advocacy and monitoring can help to keep HRDs secure in their own communities.

When HRDs have no other choice but to be relocated, it is better that relocation is short in duration and productive. Trainings, internships, and access to resources for continuation of their work would ideally be available. It is important to ensure that a relationship of dependency on the protective grant-making programme or on host organizations does not develop.

While the HRD discourse developed largely at the international level with advocacy focused at international human rights forums, work is needed now to make this discourse more meaningful at national and local levels. Most African nations have notions of ‘patriotism’ and ‘heroism’, ‘eminent persons’, ‘celebrated critics’, and ‘respected dissidents’. These precedents should be built upon to build engagement from friendly African governments, African diplomatic missions, political, religious and community leaders, media and society.

Technological risks and opportunities should not be ignored or bypassed in Africa. The rapidly growing capacity of state surveillance to monitor digital communications, which has far outpaced legislating for privacy guarantees, poses an acute risk to legitimate human rights work.

While we outline these areas of work for future development, we admit that there can be no perfect system for HRD protection. Risks are inherent to human rights work, which is fundamentally about challenging abuses in unequal and unjust power structures. Yet by undertaking a programme of HRD protection as a network at subregional and national levels, as EHAHRDP has done, the worst risks can be mitigated; capacities and structures of support can be augmented; and a better environment and framework for the defence of human rights can emerge.

Conflict of interest statement

All authors are directly involved in the projects discussed.

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