

WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROGRAM 2016-2019 STRATEGY

I. Executive Summary

The newly-reconceived Women's Rights Program (WRP) strives to advance the **full and equal citizenship of women**: participation by them, accountability to them, autonomy and security for them. As used in this strategy, citizenship refers to the full inclusion of women in the collective life of a society. WRP will **advance sexual and reproductive rights, promote economic justice, and strengthen women's rights organizations and movements**. We see these goals as interconnected, because in order for women to take their full place as citizens, they must be able to control their bodies, have a level of economic security that enables public participation, and have the ability to advocate for themselves.

While leading donors in the field prioritize service-oriented, single-issue projects and as backlash against advances in achieving women's rights grows, WRP's work positions women as agents of change not beneficiaries of assistance, equipping them with tools and resources to demand accountability for their rights. Our distinctive role is to take on the controversial issues avoided by other larger donors, particularly on women's sexuality and reproduction. We can do so as a small program in a foundation that encourages risk taking and backing new issues, actors, and strategies. Unlike other donors, we can leverage a network of local foundations in over 40 countries to identify timely opportunities for action and the right frontline actors to back. Able to deploy a range of tools from grantmaking to litigation to direct advocacy, and membership in a network able to make connections between women's rights and other vibrant fields such as tax justice and social accountability, we will prioritize linking women's rights groups with other social change actors. We see WRP's role as catalytic, and will work in places with opportunities for impact, not restricting ourselves to specific regions at the outset.

Our 2016-2019 strategy includes work under three themes:

- 1) We will **advance sexual and reproductive rights (theme: health and rights)**, for women to have full control of their bodies. This includes *enabling access to safe and legal abortion, and rolling back efforts to constrain women's behavior through appeals to fetal protection*. Specifically, we will challenge the wave of legislation valuing a fetus "equally" or more highly than a pregnant woman, like in Ireland's constitutional amendment. In 2017, we will develop work to *challenge coercion and criminalization of women through control of their sexuality and reproduction*, including forced virginity testing; abuse of pregnant women during maternal care; and expulsion from school or work due to pregnancy. At the end of the strategy period, WRP expects to have helped establish a robust group of organizations committed to fighting these regressive trends, and piloted strategies to successfully stem, mitigate, or reverse harmful legislation and practices in at least three countries. We will commit 40-50% of the 2016 budget to this work.
- 2) We will **promote economic justice (theme: economic advancement and governance)** through *advocacy to reform structural determinants of women's autonomy and participation, such as*

reform of laws and policies that deprive women of the right to take tax deductions as heads of household or that permit women's disinheritance and deprivation of property. We will bring a *gender analysis to natural resource governance advocacy*, for example, examining the particular impact of mining industries on women in Southern Africa, and *strengthen the capacity of women's rights groups to more effectively engage in these and other relevant fields*. At the end of the strategy period, we will have identified clear opportunities to shape the portfolio; introduced the concept of "economic policy literacy" to women's rights organizations working nationally; increased participation by women's rights groups in advocacy on issues such as tax reform and natural resource governance; and injected gender analysis into social accountability and fiscal governance initiatives in select African countries. We will commit 10-20% of the 2016 budget to this work.

- 3) We will support work to **strengthen the field of women's rights (theme: human rights and democratic practice)**, through grants to *organizations undertaking strategies to push their governments to implement their commitments on women's rights, to link women's rights organizations to other social change actors, and to support development of intergenerational leadership or young leaders*. At the end of the strategy period, we will have identified a clear portfolio of women's rights organizations to support to develop or deepen national level accountability efforts; deepened the bench of women's rights organizations with ties to other vibrant social change movements; and outlined a strategy to develop and support young leadership in the women's rights movement. We will commit 30-40% of the 2016 budget to this work.

As the program is new, we will sequence our work to support known organizations, map new grantees, sound out interest of national/regional foundations, and make some seed grants in the first two years. We will develop specific initiatives in subsequent years and may also review our existing thematic areas.

II. Notable changes

N/A

III. Field analysis

The past 20 years saw an unprecedented commitment to women's rights laid out in global policy frameworks and national laws— from recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation, calls for gender parity in political representation, and affirmation of women's right to decide about childbearing. Implementation of these commitments has been mixed, with more progress in sectors seen as less controversial such as reducing maternal mortality or increasing the number of girls in school. At the same time, we see strong and effective pushback to advances made by women from conservative religious and political actors, including attacks on the word "gender" as undermining "family values," restrictions in abortion access even where legal, and increased policing of young women's dress and political participation in the Middle East and several African countries.

History shows that the greatest predictor of progress in women’s rights is the presence of strong, autonomous women’s rights movements.¹ Yet, at the very moment when they are most needed to respond to this growing pushback, the women’s rights organizations and movements that have been at the forefront of advancing women’s rights are weakened by leadership fatigue and decreased funding. There is new energy and activism among younger feminists who may not see a way into established organizations. There are also exciting new opportunities to protect and advance women’s rights through collaborations with other vibrant social change movements, such as transparency and accountability, access to justice and good governance. And there is still progress to be made through stronger efforts to push for implementation of existing commitments to advance women’s rights.

The largest donors in the field of “women’s rights,” including the Gates Foundation, the US government, and an increasing number of corporations, are focused on individual empowerment and the instrumental contribution of empowerment to development goals. The handful of donors that do support structural transformation of political and economic systems have comparatively fewer resources.

IV. Program positioning

In a field where the leading donors often prioritize single-issue, service oriented projects, and where political caution prevents the addressing of more sensitive issues of power, sexual and reproductive autonomy, and economic security, WRP can play a distinctive role in helping women engage as full citizens. Unlike most donors in the field, WRP can work with a network of locally-staffed foundations in over 40 countries and seven regions. This network offers a deep knowledge of local context, opportunities, and frontline actors—enabling work, for example, to strengthen the capacity of rural women in Senegal to insist their government respect their rights to own the land they work on, or the funding of a women’s rights organization in the Middle East collaborating with Muslim scholars to reinterpret religious teachings supporting women’s equality. The OSF network also allows us to make cross-country/regional connections, such as support for a nascent regional intergenerational feminist movement with the Eurasia Program. Working with women as active agents for change able to hold governments to account, rather than as victims in need of protection, we can use a diverse and adaptable set of tools— flexible general support for established, effective organizations; seed and capacity building grants to newer groups testing out innovative strategies; individual grants through fellowships and scholarships to explore fresh ideas; and direct advocacy or litigation when it is safer or more effective for us to challenge governments than for the organizations we support.

V. Categories of Work

1) ADVANCE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

A woman’s ability to have full control of her body, particularly with respect to her sexuality and reproduction, is essential to realizing her rights as an autonomous citizen. Yet gains in women’s sexual

¹ Htun, Mala and S. Laurel Weldon. The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005. *American Political Science Review*. Vol. 106 (3), August 2012.

and reproductive rights are under serious attack, with new strategies to criminalize those who seek abortion or are deemed to have endangered their fetuses. Forthrightly addressing these issues is often considered too controversial by leading donors, but is core for WRP. Work in this portfolio will help *enable access to safe and legal abortion, and roll back efforts to constrain women's behavior through appeals to fetal protection*. The work to increase autonomy of pregnant women's decision-making will include opposition to the wave of legislation which values a fetus "equally" or more highly than a pregnant woman, and to constitutional attempts to enshrine life from conception in a number of countries. In the second phase of our strategy (2017-2019), we will develop a portfolio to *challenge coercion and criminalization of women through control of their sexuality and reproduction*.

Protect and promote women's sexual and reproductive autonomy and right to self-determination in the context of pregnancy and abortion

- We will fund the Abortion Rights Campaign, Amnesty International Ireland, and the Irish Family Planning Association to work collectively on a campaign to repeal Ireland's constitutional amendment granting equal rights to an implanted embryo as the pregnant woman (referred to as "fetal personhood"). With one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world, a win there could impact other strongly Catholic countries in Europe, such as Poland, and provide much needed proof that change is possible, even in highly conservative places. The recent legalization of same-sex marriage offers valuable and timely opportunities to advance the campaign.
- We will support GIRE, a Mexican organization that works with state-level groups, to counter restrictive abortion laws through legal assistance to women facing criminal charges under fetal personhood provisions, challenging existing provisions and monitoring and preventing the passage of new ones.
- In 2016, we will also explore opportunities to test out additional strategies to stem the rise of fetal personhood laws in Zambia, Nigeria, and Tanzania, and other parts of Latin America and Europe where there are attempts to introduce right to life from conception language through constitutional reform processes.

Challenge coercion and criminalization of women through control of their sexuality and reproduction

In the second phase of our strategy, WRP will explore work to challenge coercive practices and criminalization of women's sexuality and reproduction. This is achieved through a variety of abuses, including: forced virginity testing; mistreatment and abuse of pregnant women during maternal care; detention or coerced caesarean section; and expulsion from school or work due to pregnancy.

Field building: shore up the existence of a robust group of organizations and actors able to protect sexual and reproductive rights

- For 30 years, the International Women's Health Coalition has been instrumental in advocating for comprehensive sexual and reproductive rights in international fora, lobbying for removal of funding restrictions for sexuality education and abortion, and developing the advocacy and organizational capacity of national organizations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, with an emphasis on young women. The Center for Reproductive Rights, a leading legal advocacy organization, has successfully

defended reproductive rights in the US and around the world and incubated a new generation of legal advocates in the field. Both organizations are backbones of the reproductive rights movements and longstanding grantees of OSF that WRP will continue to support.

- National Advocates for Pregnant Women (NAPW) has been a lone defender of the most marginalized and vulnerable pregnant women, including prisoners and women who use drugs, and forecast the threats of fetal personhood initiatives. Similarly, Women on Web (WoW) has forged new directions in access to reproductive services, using the internet to make abortion information and medication available online. NAPW and WoW's work, occasionally controversial, is introducing new ideas for advancing women's reproductive rights and autonomy. Organizations such as these, which are adept at identifying innovative approaches to advance rights and foreseeing future threats, are critical to keeping the field relevant and proactive.
- Recognizing that strong national advocates and lawyers are essential to identifying and responding to threats and opportunities, we will support their development through training and fellowship or internship programs. Given the shortage of these programs in Africa, we plan to fund the Center for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria where Charles Ngwena, a renowned academic who pioneered the first graduate law program on reproductive rights in Africa, directs a Master's program for lawyers and advocates. We will encourage the Center to partner with the Southern Africa Litigation Center, an OSISA spin-off successfully litigating on sexual and reproductive rights, to provide internship or fellowship placements for the students to gain practical experience

Drug Policy shared frameworks: New era in drug policy reform

With the Global Drug Policy and Public Health Programs, WRP is co-funding NAPW to develop a declaration to the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session on the "World Drug Problem," calling for an end to the drug war given its dangers to women, children, and families. NAPW will do this in collaboration with women's rights and reproductive rights organizations. This effort addresses dominant narratives of the "bad" or "dangerous" pregnant woman or mothers, which results in pregnant women who use drugs being the frequent target of coercive and abusive treatment.

At the conclusion of the strategy period, we expect that these activities will have led to the piloting of strategies to stem, mitigate, and reverse the tide of fetal personhood laws and constitutional amendments; increased awareness of, commitment to opposing, and strategies to resist challenges to sexual autonomy through criminalization and control; and a robust set of organizations advancing and defending sexual and reproductive rights and injecting new thinking/strategy into the field.

2) PROMOTE ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Significant funding goes to initiatives to help women access economic resources (e.g., through micro financing to set up small businesses) but considerably less goes to making economic policies and structures responsive to women's needs. The little work that has been done to analyze the gender dimensions of fiscal policy, for example, has revealed different biases against women, such as countries with tax policies that fail to recognize women as heads of households, making them ineligible to deduct dependents (this is the case in Morocco and was also in Senegal until 2013 when the first female prime minister created fiscal parity). Our initial field mapping has made it clear that very few women's rights

organizations are actively advocating in national economic policy arena where decisions affecting their economic lives are made. Our strategy seeks to promote a fair playing field for women and equal access to economic resources and opportunities. This access would enable women to have better economic security and improve their ability to engage fully as citizens in their communities.

Our goals for this work are to **reduce barriers in specific sectors that inhibit women's economic access and security** and to **strengthen the capacity of women's rights advocates to promote gender-responsive economic policies and programs**.

Reduce barriers in specific sectors that inhibit women's economic access and security

- As OSISA's economic justice program builds up its work on natural resource governance, we will collaborate with them and the foundation's women's rights program to build the capacity of women's organizations in Lesotho, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to identify and address the effects on women of extractive industries, such as deprivation of land access and detrimental environmental impacts. We will be visiting OSISA in the latter part of 2015 to further elaborate the strategy.
- In follow up to a visit to OSIWA in April 2015, we will explore collaboration relating to land reform in Senegal to promote equitable access for women, a goal OSIWA has been supporting rural women's organizations to advance. WRP will explore opportunities to support women to monitor the implementation of the reform and provide legal support by the Association des Juristes Sénégalaises, the leading women's rights legal and advocacy organization in Senegal and longstanding grantee of OSIWA.
- The dearth of gendered analysis and advocacy in the fiscal policy field presents an opportunity that we will further explore with the Fiscal Governance Program as it builds up its tax justice work.

Strengthen the capacity of women's rights advocates to promote gender-responsive economic policies and programs

- Through 2015 and 2016, we will explore support for feminist economic scholarship to influence economic policy. This will include mapping of the field at the conference of the International Association for Feminist Economists in July 2015 and elsewhere, and exploration of the gender working group newly created by the young scholars of the Institute for New Economic Thinking (INET). We met Yuan Yang, one of its founders at the INET conference in April 2015 but she has now moved to The Economist, so we will need to reengage with INET to assess potential partners.
- Starting in 2016, we will explore creating a fellowship initiative, potentially in collaboration with the Fellowships Program, to support innovative thinkers on women's economic justice and identify ideas from which to develop future initiatives.

At the end of the strategy period, we expect to have better clarity about strategic opportunities for removing barriers to advancing economic justice for women; introduced the concept of "economic policy literacy" to a range of national and local women's rights organizations; built capacity to bring a gender analysis to the fields of fiscal governance and social accountability and transparency in select

African countries; and strengthened engagement by women's rights groups in economic justice advocacy including tax reform and natural resource governance.

3) STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

Demanding accountability from one's governments is an essential exercise of citizenship. Supporting and strengthening the capacity of women to do so for themselves is therefore critical to achieving our strategic goal. With the decrease in funding to organizations seeking to increase their power and exercise of their rights -- in favor of programs seeking to protect women and girls, including from maternal mortality, violence, and child marriage -- coupled with the pushback on women's rights, the organizations needed for this work are largely in a fragile and isolated state. Additionally, too few women's rights organizations have been engaging with different national level mechanisms for this; the majority have been seeking such accountability in international arenas such as the United Nations meetings. As more organizations recognize the limitations of such outward facing efforts, we see an opportunity to strengthen capacity in national level accountability work and linkages with other social change movements from fields such as access to justice that are important to advancing women's rights.

Our goals for this work are to **harness the power of women's rights groups to push for government accountability to uphold women's rights and to strengthen links with other social movements** and **catalyze new energy in the field by fostering inter- and next generation leadership**

Harness the power of women's rights groups to push for government and other actors' accountability to uphold women's rights and to strengthen links with other social movements

- The rallying cry "women's rights are human rights" in the 1990s successfully called on governments and mainstream human rights and associated movements to acknowledge and pay greater attention to women's rights. Implementation of these commitments remains shaky, and today's highly globalized world calls for women's rights organizations to join forces with other movements if they are to succeed in their efforts. JASS, a multigenerational, multidisciplinary, feminist movement-building organization prioritizes building alliances across movements as a strategy for advancing women's rights. It has successfully built women's abilities to demand accountability and create alliances -- from improving access to HIV treatment in Malawi to collaborating with indigenous, environmental, and labor movements for economic justice in the Mesoamerican region. Indeed, JASS' work has, with too little acknowledgement, directly influenced much of the social accountability field's power analysis. WRP will support women's rights organizations, such as JASS, that are able to demand accountability from their governments and other actors with influence over women's ability to exercise their full citizenship. Recognizing that few organizations have JASS' capacity, we will identify those with potential to develop, particularly in national contexts, to undertake such work. We will do this through collaborations with geographic programs that are keen to collaborate with us, and have begun discussions with the Latin America Program, OSIWA, OSISA, MENA/SWA, the Afghanistan and Pakistan foundations, and the Asia Pacific Regional Program. In 2016, we expect to have a clearer idea of opportunities for meaningful engagement and impact in these regions, and determine where to focus our limited resources.

Catalyze new energy in the field by fostering inter- and next generation leadership

- The FRIDA fund, established in 2012 to seed nascent young feminist-led organizations, is seeing an ever growing demand, with over 500 applications in its last call. Well-placed to identify new leaders and new ideas that we could support in the future, FRIDA's rapid growth highlights their acute need for institutional support to sustain that growth and meet increasing demand. In Mexico, El Closet de Sor Juana is a young lesbian feminist-led organization that conducts research and advocacy to promote the sexual and reproductive rights of lesbians and transwomen, creating alliances with patients' rights organizations and others. In Zimbabwe, ROOTS is a newly created organization by a graduate of OSISA's young feminist leadership training program which mobilizes girls and young women on issues such as child marriage and economic empowerment, and develops their capacity to advocate with members of Parliament. These three examples demonstrate the potential for young leaders to breathe new energy into the women's rights movement and the types of organizations and leaders we would support.
- We plan to fund FRIDA in 2015 and have nominated them for the cohort of youth organizations to be supported by the Youth Exchange. We also plan to collaborate with the Eurasia Program to strengthen a nascent, intergenerational feminist movement building effort in the region.
- In 2016, we will formulate a strategy for supporting young feminist leaders whose new energy and excitement can be harnessed to rejuvenate and strengthen the broader movement.

At the end of the strategy period, WRP will have identified a portfolio of organizations that we'll fund to develop or deepen national level strategies pushing for accountability in commitments to women's rights; developed a deeper bench of women's rights organizations with capacity to undertake national level accountability efforts; and identified a new generation of leaders to infuse energy into the field while building on the success of the past.