External Evaluation Consultancy

T E R M S   O F   R E F E R E N C E

Digital Defenders Partnership (DDP) is seeking external consultants to carry out an external evaluation of the project Local Safety, Global Learning Field Building 2023-2025, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Social Development Department (DSO).

- Location: Home-based.
- Type of contract: Self-employed consultancy contract.
- Deadline for statements of interest: August 1, 2025.
- Total budget: € 25,000.

About Digital Defenders Partnership

DDP (https://digitaldefenders.org) is an international programme that contributes to strengthening the resilience of human rights defenders (HRDs) by increasing their digital security through a holistic and sustainable approach.

DDP s committed to centring feminist and decolonial practices across all of its work through a holistic approach that goes beyond recognising and addressing surface-level issues to delve into the systemic injustices that threaten the digital security of HRDs.

DDP was founded in 2012 by the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), initially as an emergency grant mechanism in response to digital threats against HRDs. Our programme of activities has grown significantly in recent years to provide a more holistic response to digital

threats against HRDs. Hosted as a programme of Hivos, DDP is currently supported by seven governmental donors, all of whom are FOC members.

About the Project

The primary aim of the Local Safety, Global Learning - Field Building 2023-2025 (after this referred to as Field Building), was to sustain the work done in the Anglophone region while extend the field building work leaning on the expertise and experience of DDP to Francophone countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (please find a list of countries of implementation below in the scope of the evaluation section). This goal followed up on findings that the region fell short of significant practitioners and is often left out, mainly due to language limitations. DDP intended to contribute to filling the gap in terms of long-term accompaniment support, sustainable grants, and resilience building in the region, as well as providing a response to incidents.

The overall strategy of DDP consists of three areas of work:

- Incident Response, which aims to provide timely, flexible, and holistic emergency response resources that reduce the impact or risk of digital attacks against human rights defenders;

- Sustainable Protection Support, which aims to strengthen awareness and capacities necessary to build sustainable and effective responses to digital threats among human rights defenders at risk;

- Facilitation and Community Building, by which we aim to develop and maintain accessible, collaborative, resilient, and responsive networks of expertise and support to human rights defenders under digital threat.

Our priority groups for support under our current strategy are:

- Journalists and other actors who make data available to the public;

- Women's rights defenders;

- Environmental, land, and Indigenous peoples' rights defenders;

- LGBTQIA+ rights defenders.

Each area of work consists of several activities, including small grants, digital protection accompaniment, and support for organisations; strengthening the capacities of digital protection experts; development of learning materials and resources; and actively supporting collaboration in disciplinary fields including technology, digital security, HRD protection, and digital rights advocacy. To support this work, we have diversified our team to include regional teams in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Project Objectives and Activities

Within these three areas of work, the Field Building project has the following specific project objectives and activities to be evaluated:

Objective 1: Human rights organisations, collectives, and movements have increased security capacities to continue their work despite latent threats.

Activities:

- Accompaniment processes in digital protection from a holistic perspective to human rights organisations, collectives, and movements at risk in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa

- Incident Emergency Funding (IEF)

Objective 2: Improved skills and capacities of protection providers in digital and holistic security and protection.

Activities:

- Regional Field Building: capacity building in Sahel/Francophone Africa

- Skill-building meetups of Digital Protection Facilitators

- Regional and Global Strategy Workshop

- Resources for Learning and Best Practices.

- Sustainable Protection Funding and Regional Partnership grants

Objective 3: Strengthened networks of collaboration and support among protection providers, human rights organisations, collectives and movements, intermediaries, and the diplomatic community.

Activities:

- Regional Network Workshops

- Global Learning events to share feedback from stakeholders with a larger audience

Project Approach and Theory of Change

This project, worth 1,6 M€, is the 4th leg of the Field Building project, which started in 2019. It is built on the initial four years of DDP's Digital Integrity Fellowship (DIF) project, which offered capacity strengthening in digital protection, from a holistic perspective, to human rights organisations at risk through what we call accompaniment. Pitched in opposition to the "parachute"-style training workshops which were common at the time of its inception, DIF accompaniment aimed to engender sustainable change within human rights organisations, networks, and movements through between six and 12 months of engagement, based on a needs assessment, and carried out in a manner which recognised the interconnected and interdisciplinary nature of security capacity building.

Further developing these experiences, the FBP aimed to decentralise and broaden DDP's accompaniment work, allowing it to be offered to more grassroots organisations while also developing the capacities and networks of digital protection experts in three regions: Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Having successfully established these regional teams from 2019 to 2021, enriched our approach to supporting civil society organisations with the insights of a new generation of dedicated activists and experts, and radically altered our

structure, DDP is seeking to fortify this new structure and expand capacity for holistic-trained experts in Africa.

To monitor this project, DDP updated the MEL framework from quantitative output indicators (such as the number of grants provided, the number of focal points accompanied, etc.) and self-assessments by beneficiaries towards more objective assessment methods which resulted in the development of additional qualitative indicators that focus on the outcomes of the project. DDP also seeks to explore how external factors such as military coup in Niger in July 2023, internet shutdowns and insecurity in Chad, the war with M23 rebels in DRC, and how the suspension of multiparty-ism and civil society activities by the junta in Mali since April 2024 have affected the project. Below are some of the baseline figures of the quantitative indicators monitored for this project:

- In 2022, in Sub-Saharan Africa, DDP has mentored five focal points within accompanied organisations.

- In 2021, in Sub-Saharan Africa, DDP selected 10 trainees, and five have been selected within the cohort to become DPFs.

- In 2022, 1 annual regional strategy session (for five days) was organised to feed into the DDP annual strategy.

- In 2022, DDP has supported HRDs and HRDOs through the provision of nine SPF grants and three RPF grants in Africa.

- In 2022, DDP attended one networking event (FIF Afrique).

What We Are Looking For - Objective of the Evaluation

To reflect critically on our work and respond creatively to the needs of human rights defenders including activists, journalists, and movements, we are looking for (a team of) consultants to evaluate how the Field Building project performed against the OECD-DAC criteria in order to realign implementation if needed.

The aim of this evaluation is to assess the success of the Field Building project in achieving its objectives of supporting and building the digital security capacity of local Human Rights defenders while strengthening the regional support networks in Africa. After two and a half years of implementation, we are looking to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the project's effectiveness. The overarching question we seek to answer is: "To what extend does the project support HRDs to continue their work, taking into account the digital aspects in their work, in a context of socio-political violence and shrinking civic space?".

DDP would like the winning bid to follow the OECD-DAC Evaluation criteria:

- Relevance & Coherence – Are the activities and interventions DDP offers under the program relevant for the target audience, and do DDP activities fit in with the existing interventions conducted in the region?

- Effectiveness – To what extent did the activities conducted by DDP achieve the set project objectives and goals? And how did activities contribute to the outputs and outcomes of the project?

- Impact – To what extend have DDP activities made a difference to the beneficiaries and resilience against digital attacks? To what extent are beneficiaries better equipped to continue their HR work? What could have been done differently to have a positive change?

- Efficiency – To what extent has the program utilised resources appropriately to yield the best results? How has the internal functioning of DDP supported the needs of HRDs?

- Sustainability – To what extent is it likely that the obtained capacity support (financial, training etc.) has led to sustainable outputs? And to what extent did the capacity strengthening of the organisations, make them sustainable to continue after support ends?

To this end, questions that the evaluation may address include:

Relevance & Coherence

• How accurate and adequate is DDP's analysis of context and needs, and to what extent do the Field Building activities respond to them?

• What is the added value of DDP within Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Benin Republic, Ghana, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, in addition to the broader networks of support to HRDs at risk?

• To what extent do the Incident Emergency Funding (IEF) and Sustainable Protection Funding (SPF) adequately address the short and long-term needs of human rights defenders under threat in the current global context?

• To what extent does our support adequately address the needs of human rights defenders under threat in a holistic manner? What is the impact of this activity on the partner organisations and broader networks?

• To what extend have there been changes in the contexts of the countries, and how did this affect the TOC and its implementation?

Effectiveness

• How and to what extent did the designed activities contribute to the stated results and objectives of the project?

• To what extent is DDP's collaboration with allies in the fields of diplomacy, technology, digital security, and HRD protection (such as through the Rapid Response Network, CiviCERT, and our own Field Building networks) supporting our objectives and those of the broader field?

• To what extend did the implementation of activities led to unintended/unexpected outputs and effects?

- To what extend has learning taken place?

Efficiency

- To what extent does the balance (frequency, time-investment of implementation of certain activities compared to the entire project capacity) of activities suit the contextual needs of HRDs?

- To what extent does the value of DDP's outcomes and outputs outweigh the costs of its implementation?

- To what degree are the grant types the most strategic and effective use of our financial resources?

- How has the internal functioning of DDP supported the needs of HRDs?

Sustainability

- If the program stops, what benefits acquired from DDP activities would beneficiaries carry with them in terms of digital security?

- To what extend do HRDs feel strengthened, through the support, to be able to continue their work without DDP?

Impact

- What changes in digital security behaviours and incident response have been reported by HRDs in Sub-Saharan Africa and Digital Protection Facilitators following holistic accompaniment from DDP?

Scope, Methodology, and Profiles

The evaluation should focus on our project activities that were implemented from 2023 to 2025 in a variety of countries in Africa, both anglophone and francophone speaking countries. The regional focus of the project is as follows:

- Horn of Africa; this includes our current DDP team trained through the MFA-funded Field Building project in 2021, including team members in Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Kenya, and Zimbabwe.

- West Africa and Congo; Chad, Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso and Benin Republic.

An exhaustive list will be provided to the evaluation team during the inception phase but countries where DDP implemented projects (grants, accompaniments etc.) include: Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Rwanda, Ghana, Tanzania, Niger Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc. As we do no request a trip to the regions for this evaluation, there will be no issues of physical access to consider, however, the contexts in the different countries are difficult when it comes to the economic, social and political situations which will require the evaluators to show caution and sensitivity when reaching out to local partners. The regions are characterised by non-existent rule of law, human rights abuse, criminalisation of homosexuality, ethnic tensions, political instability, shrinking civil society operating space, lack of economic opportunities, environmental effects of climate change and refugee movements, which highlight economic and social issues in both the host and the departing countries. A detailed context assessment is conducted yearly and updated regularly by the teams and will be available to the evaluators at the inception phase.

We plan for this evaluation to be conducted within 3 months at most (please see proposed timeline below. There is naturally some flexibility concerning the precise methodologies that can be employed in the evaluation, and we expect applicants to detail both (see below) and be ready to discuss and adapt the said methodology during the inception phase with the DDP team. In general terms, we will tend to prioritise methodological proposals which:

- Adopt a critical, intersectional feminist approach to socio-political violence against HRDs, its digital facets, its root causes, and the potential responses to these.

- Will be framed, designed, and implemented by a diverse team located in the Global South - with proven experience evaluating projects (online or offline) in Africa.

- Creates a safe space for participatory input from DDP's (potential) beneficiaries, donors, team members, partners and other actors not directly involved in the project.

- Plans to include at least one in-depth case study per activity (accompaniment, grants and training) type in the methodology and final report).

- Are familiar with alternative models of evaluation online.

- Seek alignment with the [IOB quality criteria](.).

- Shows triangulation of data collected during the evaluation.

  In this connection, successful candidates will be able to demonstrate:

- Strong knowledge of the field of human rights defender protection and its key issues.

- Strong knowledge of digital rights and the role of technology in human rights violations.

- Knowledge of key issues and tools about digital security, especially in the context of human rights work.

- Proven communication and research skills in a variety of socio-cultural contexts;.

- How to apply an intersectional, decolonial and gender-focused lens to the topics of human rights, technology and security.

- Past experience of evaluating donor-funded projects, especially from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would be an added asset.

- No involvement in DDP project's activities.

- Knowledge of French and English or any local language would be an asset.

Deliverables, Milestones, and Timeline

Subject to negotiation in light of the proposals made and their particularities, we suggest the following set of deliverables and timeline for the same:

1. Statements of Interest concerning this ToR by August 1, 2025 (see the next section for details).

2. Following acceptance, an initial discussion to finalise the scope and methodology by August 15, 2025.

3. An updated, detailed work plan/Inception report by September 1, 2025.

4. Research and data collection to be carried out between September 8, and October 10 2025.

5. Initial results to be shared with DDP by October 31, 2025.

6. Final reports:

    i.   One internal to be shared with donors by November 15, 2025.

    ii.   One shorter report to be shared with participants, partners working in the field and posted on the DDP website) by December 15, 2025.

The total budget available for this evaluation is € 25,000.

How to Apply

Statements of Interest should be send to leila@digitaldefenders.org and xeenarh@digitaldefenders.org and include:

• A project proposal including scope, methodology, tentative research questions and timeline (1,000 - 2,000 words).

• An itemised budget.

• Curricula Vitae of the Consultants.

- If available, at least one example of a previous research-based publication or other relevant project.