

Through the Lens of Brazil: The Changing Dynamics of Human Rights and Global Philanthropy in Emerging Powers

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Safety, Security, and Well-Being of Human Rights Defenders

An in focus discussion circle

Speakers: **Jelena Djordjevic**, Consultant, Integrated Security and Sustaining Activism of Human Rights Defenders

- It has taken time for the rights community to recognize that the safety and well-being of rights defenders are important aspects of activism.
 - Both activists and donors felt that the priority was fighting on the front lines, neglecting security in favor of action.
 - Others recognized that safety and well-being are important but struggled to find the funding.
 - Activists who lived through threats came to view safety and well-being as a priority.
- There must be safe environments for donors to sit with grantees and discuss their needs.
 - Donors can look beyond political issues and day-to-day work with a simple question: “How are you?”
 - These conversations can give donors a more holistic picture of the work of activists.
- There is a continuum of approaches to the security and well-being of rights activists:
 - Physical protection, ranging from bars on windows to digital security
 - It can be difficult to discuss digital security with grantees: the conversation is inherently technical, and the capabilities of government far outstrip our ability to protect ourselves
 - Holistic approaches that include spaces to build strategies collectively to sustain activism
 - Donors must understand that needs and responses differ in different contexts.
 - The needs of an urban activist working on reproductive rights are different from a woman living in a favela fighting racism.
 - Donors cannot expect the same conditions for or the same level of visibility for activists working in the same country, because that can place certain
- Donors must accept the activist as a whole, complex person, not expect them to put one part of their identity (sexual orientation, etc.) on hold to pursue a separate cause. Similarly, donors can share honestly their own limitations as foundations. Embracing complexities and connecting stories and experiences can spur a change in grantmaking.
 - Donors themselves are still activists: They are still passionate and fully immersed in the movement with close ties to the NGO community. Local funders are well-positioned to connect and share with activists, ensure that resources reach the grassroots groups.
- Safety and well-being apply to the full community, including donors.
 - Donors that work closely with the movement struggle not to be seen as technocrats by the activists and as just another NGO by the funding community.

- But they themselves are under threats of surveillance, violence, break-ins and other security breaches.
- It is a challenge to move past good laws and ensure implementation. Donors and the rights community can struggle to find the funds when a country is perceived to have achieved rights through passing a law.
- Community rights often supersede individual rights, and the state and other forces are unwilling to intervene on behalf of one person against the broader community. Donors and activists can work to ensure security, but they can still fall victim to community backlash.

Strategies for Grantmakers

- Rather than defining safety and security, support regional groups and allow them to define safety and security for themselves.
- Address the stigmatization of Human Rights Defenders through public education and outreach.
- Use flexible strategies to respond to the needs of grantees.
- Collaborate with other funders to connect activists: For example, connect women's human rights lawyers to survivors of violence.
- Create regional spaces both to allow conversations and to show who is working in which regions.
- Link grantees at risk to other organizations with higher visibility.
- Relocation as a strategy varies from one context to another.
 - Support safety and psychosocial well-being in a way that builds the movement rather than relocating or removing activists from the context
- Front Line Defenders has begun issuing identification cards to let HRDs show that they are not on their own but are supported by a community

Panelist Biography:



Jelena Djordjevic

Consultant, Integrated Security and Sustaining Activism of Rights Defenders

Jelena Djordjevic is a feminist activist and trainer who has been working for 12 years in the area of prevention of violence against women and trafficking.

Specialized in the Balkan region, Jelena is the co-founder of the Anti-Trafficking Center in Belgrade, Serbia, which she co-led for 8 years. She served on the Board of Directors of the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights and is on Advisory Board of the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice. Jelena is co-author of the book, *What's the Point of Revolution if We Can't Dance?*, a publication on sustaining activism of women human rights defenders, published by the Urgent Action Fund. In the last seven years, Jelena has been developing and leading integrated security trainings for activists globally; advocating for mobilization of resources for the safety and well-being of activists, and advising women's rights defenders globally in their responses to their safety and well-being needs. Currently, Jelena is based in Rio de Janeiro, where she is researching cases of violations against human rights defenders stemming from the preparations for the 2014 World Cup. Jelena is one of the founders and a member of the first Brazilian collective on the well-being and safety of women's rights activists. Jelena holds a Masters Degree in Migration Studies from Sussex University in the United Kingdom.