External Mid-Term Evaluation
of
Digital Defenders Partnership

Final Report
(Short Version)

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April 2022

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Abbreviations

CiviCERT - Computer Incident Response Centre for Civil Society

CNF – Community and Networking Fund

DFAK – Digital First Aid Kit

DIF - Digital Integrity Fellowship

DMEAL - Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation for Accountability and Learning

DPC – Digital Protection Coordinators

DPF – Digital Protection Facilitators *(acronym not used by the evaluators, who chose to use ´facilitators´)*

DPL – Digital Protection Leads *(acronym not used by the evaluators, who chose to use ´leads´)*

GPF – Global Partnership Fund

ICT – Information and Communications Technology

IEF – Incident Emergency Fund

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

PO – Project Official

Rarenet – Rapid Response Network (global)

RPF – Regional Partnership Fund

RPM – Regional Project Manager

RRN - regional Rapid Response Networks *(acronym not used by the evaluators, who chose to use the complete name)*

SPF – Sustainable Protection Fund

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Digital Defenders Partnership (DDP) was founded in 2012 by the Freedom Online Coalition. It was initially an emergency grant mechanism in response to digital threats against human rights defenders, but its programme of activities has grown significantly in recent years, and it now intends to provide a more holistic response to digital threats against human rights defenders. Hosted as a programme of Hivos, DDP is currently supported by seven governmental donors, all of whom are Freedom Online Coalition members. It has an annual budget of approximately 3.5 million euros (2020–2022).

DDP Strategy 2020–2023

DDP Strategy 2020–2023 defines DDP's overall objective for the strategic period: to improve the access of human rights defenders in repressive and transitional environments to capacities and networks. DDP's desired ultimate outcome is that defenders remain resilient to closing civic space and continue using the internet and digital technologies to effectively defend human rights.

DDP provides support in three main work areas: Incident Emergency Response for providing flexible and holistic emergency support, Sustainable Protection Support for capacity building and increasing awareness and Facilitation and Community Building for developing networks to support defenders. Each work area consists of several activities, including 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 information and communications technology (ICT), digital security, human rights defenders' protection and digital rights advocacy.

To support its work during the strategic period, DDP has promoted the Field Building Project to diversify and increase the members of its team by including therein the regional teams in Southeast Asia (2019), Latin America (2020) and Sub-Saharan Africa (2021). Furthermore, DDP is active in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which have not undergone a field-building process.

Value and benefits of DDP for its stakeholders

Direct and indirect beneficiaries, donors, independent experts and network members (Rapid Response Network [Rarenet], Computer Incident Response Centre for Civil Society [CiviCERT] and regional rapid response networks) were asked about DDP's work and the general context of human rights defenders' work. As a result, it was found that the direct and indirect beneficiaries of DDP's support have clearly benefitted from it. DDP's strength lies in its holistic approach; its human-centred values; the fact that it has regional teams, allowing better context and cultural understanding and provision of customised support; its provision of medium- and long-term sustainable protection support and its network-building efforts. Especially in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, as part of the field-building process, defenders have benefitted from DDP's accompaniment processes and establishment of local networks. In addition, human rights defender beneficiaries reported that the support of local digital protection leads (hereafter, 'leads') and digital protection facilitators (hereafter, 'facilitators') is very valuable as it has provided their needs.[1]

However, balancing global, regional and local approaches remains a challenge as the beneficiaries requested that DDP embed itself more in the local communities, requesting more local support through the promotion of more local networks and the appointment of more leads and facilitators in their countries. However, despite the budget limitations, DDP's work and efforts to broaden the holistic digital protection ecosystem for rapid and sustainable responses were positively evaluated.

All the DDP grants were reported to have positive impacts on human rights defenders (individuals, organisations and networks), adequately responding to many of their needs. In addition, the grants were assessed as having contributed to the attainment of DDP's objectives, being consistent to the outcomes desired. Grantees also gave positive feedback regarding the application process and the support given to them by DDP. However, there is room for improvement, such as simplifying and improving the dissemination of information regarding the grants (e.g. overcoming the language barriers), the grant allocation and awarding processes and the reporting requirements and increasing the speed of the approval process and resource transfer. Many of these issues, however, lie outside DDP's sphere of influence and are affected by external factors, such as the donors' requirements.

Moreover, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic posed an additional challenge for human rights defenders and DDP's support of them because much of the work could be done only digitally. However, beneficiaries of DDP's support gave very positive feedback regarding working with DDP during the COVID-19 pandemic. Conscious about the pandemic and its effects, DDP

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[1] DDP uses the acronyms 'DPL' and 'DPF' for 'digital protection lead' and 'digital protection facilitator', respectively. However, to avoid the excessive use of acronyms, which may make it harder for the external stakeholders to understand the organisation and its operations, the evaluators opted to use 'leads' and 'facilitators' instead.

extended its deadlines and adapted its funding to the situation. Overall, DDP reprogrammed its resources and showed a high ability to adjust to the prevailing situation.

Donors and network members evaluated DDP's support positively and appreciate the organisation's networking efforts and gender equity and diversity inclusion strategy. Overall, all the stakeholders assessed DDP as having been effective. Donors feel that DDP's funding contributes to their attainment of their aims and that DDP spends its resources wisely. The data gathered for the mid-term evaluation also indicate that DDP's resources are effectively spent, producing valuable outcomes for their beneficiaries and thus perceived as positive by all the stakeholders. In conclusion, DDP's expenditures have led to valuable and positive outcomes and impacts on the support for human rights defenders (individuals, organisations and networks), which strongly indicates that the donors' funding of DDP's programme is worthwhile.

Conclusion

DDP's highest strength lies in its provision of long-term support for human rights defenders via sustainable funding and the accompaniment process, with a holistic approach to digital security and mindfulness regarding the context of human rights defenders. This makes the organisation suitable for providing support in different environments and enables it to understand the needs of human rights defenders. DDP's offers of grants, support and facilitator presence in local communities strengthen the organisation's portfolio. Furthermore, DDP's gender equity and diversity inclusion strategy and provision of flexible support make it attractive for funders and beneficiaries. The aims of DDP Strategy 2020–2023 seem to be well followed, and DDP has managed to adapt itself well, both internally and in its exchanges with its beneficiaries and external stakeholders, to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Introduction

1.1. The context of digital security and the work of human rights defenders

DDP is active in various countries and regions where human rights defenders face different threats depending on the context and circumstances. The digital realm especially brings about new and fortified forms of threats such as surveillance, mobbing, trolling, disinformation, hate speech and censorship. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, human rights defenders and their supporters could only work mainly online. The heavy use of online tools, social media, messengers and communication applications have increased digital security threats. Moreover, many governments used restrictions and lockdowns to decrease human rights defenders' possibilities and put those who support them under pressure. The use of social media, which is widespread worldwide, can bring opportunities to reach target groups and bring awareness about human rights and other issues. However, it exposes human rights defenders and makes them more vulnerable to threats.

Furthermore, the use of digital technology requires literacy and capacities that human rights defenders of a pre-digital generation often lack, and defenders often have low awareness of online security. Lack of access to sufficient infrastructure and hardware to use secure tools is another widespread issue and often makes activists' lives and work more difficult. Moreover, digital threats are not confined to the digital space but have consequences in real life, and these spill-over effects have been observed in many regions. Overall, governments and entities that want to limit human rights defenders' reach and decrease their influence have significantly more resources to use digital tools. Therefore, DDP tries to establish local networks of holistic support for human rights defenders, including digital, legal, physical and psychosocial aspects.

1.2. The context of the mid-term evaluation

DDP commissioned a mid-term evaluation of their **2020-2023 strategy** to assess their work in general and the ongoing strategic period in particular. Enabling Digital Rights and Governance aimed at conducting a transparent, professional and high-quality assessment that provided a valuable resource for DDP to strengthen promising areas, activities and approaches. Furthermore, that supported DDP in facing ongoing challenges effectively by identifying appropriate actions to address particular issues in the programme's design, implementation, and management.

Following this objective, the leading question of this evaluation process, according to the Terms of References, is:

To what extent does the DDP programme of activities effectively support human rights defenders to continue their work in the face of socio-political violence and its digital aspects?

The evaluation will focus on the following specific topics:[2]

- Programmatic aspects
- Planning, monitoring and evaluating outcomes
- Processes and structure
- Costs/benefits
- Recommendations

1.3.   Brief description of the programme

DDP was founded in 2012 by the Freedom Online Coalition, initially as an emergency grant mechanism in response to digital threats against human rights defenders. However, DDP's programme of activities has grown significantly in recent years to provide a more holistic response to digital threats against human rights defenders. Hosted as a programme of Hivos, a non-profit organisation headquartered in the Netherlands, DDP is currently supported by seven governmental donors. They are Freedom Online Coalition members, providing an annual budget of approximately 3,5 million euros (from 2020 to 2022).[3]

DDP's strategy for 2020 to 2023 has its main presentation in the Strategy document. According to this document, the **overall objective or outcome** for the strategic period is for:

"Human rights defenders in repressive and transitional environments to access improved capacities and networks so that they can continue their work despite digital threats" (DDP Strategy 2020-2023).

Or, according to DDP Logic Model (2020), the **ultimate outcome** is:

"Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) remain resilient to closing civic space and continue to effectively use the Internet and Information and Communications Technology to promote and defend human rights."

The main **areas of work** and **strategic goals (outputs)** for the period are (DDP Strategy 2020-2023; DDP Logic Model 2021):

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[2] See Annexe 1 for an overview of all research questions.
[3] See Table 13 - Overview of DDP funding 2020-2022.

1. **Incident Emergency Response** aims to provide timely, flexible and holistic emergency response resources to reduce the impact or risk of digital attacks against human rights defenders. That includes digital, psychosocial, legal and physical support.

2. **Sustainable Protections Support** aims to strengthen awareness and capacities for building sustainable and effective responses to digital treats among human rights defenders at risk. That includes increasing capacities for holistic responders.

3. **Facilitation and Community Building**: aims to develop and maintain accessible, collaborative, resilient and responsive networks of expertise (among human rights defenders' organisations, Rarenet, regional rapid response networks, Digital Protection Leads and Facilitators, international organisations, and funders), and support for defenders under digital treat.

Each area of work consists of several **activities,** including: 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 information and communication technology, digital security, human rights defenders' protection and digital rights advocacy.

DDP believes that in performing these activities and achieving these goals (outputs), they will contribute to the following three **intermediate outcomes** (DMEAL Strategy 2021, 2020):

1. Human rights defenders (organisations, individuals or networks) can prevent or recover from digital threats (including threats to digital rights) in high-risk contexts

2. Defenders have access to strengthened global and regional organisations, networks and individuals providing digital security, protection and digital rights support to civil society.

3. Accessible, collaborative, resilient and responsive networks of expertise and support for HRD organisations, individuals or networks under digital threat are developed and strengthened.

DDP's **priority groups** for support under the current strategy are:

- Actors that collect, interpret, and make data available for the broader public (including artists, bloggers, journalists and their sources, election monitors, and those monitoring internet shutdowns);
- Environmental, indigenous, and land rights defenders;
- LGBTQI+ communities and those who promote and defend their rights
- Women and gender rights defenders and groups.

In order to support this work, during the strategic period, DDP has geographically diversified its team through the **Field Building project** to include regional teams in Southeast Asia (2019), Latin America (2020), and Sub-Saharan Africa (2021). Furthermore, DDP is active in the MENA region and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which have not undergone a field-building process.

1.4.   Methodology

The evaluation team used a mixed-method approach, using different and complementary methods as an evaluation methodology.[4] We divided the data collection phase into two: Inception and Impact Evaluation.

1.4.1.   <u>Inception phase</u>

The *Inception Phase* aimed at getting qualified information from DDP staff, the network of global partner organisations, and funders.

Kick-off and follow-up meetings

A kick-off meeting between the research team and members of the DDP coordination team (DMEAL officer, Regional Project Managers, Project Officer gender equity and diversity inclusion & Rarenet, among others) was held on 29 September 2021. Additionally, follow-up meetings were held with the DMEAL Officer on 26 October and 10 November. All sessions were held online. Finally, a secure channel in the Wire app was set up for communication between the DMEAL officer and the evaluation team. This channel and these meetings have been beneficial to discuss the evaluation methodology and the data collection process and fine-tune them collaboratively.

Risk Evaluation

The evaluation team subsequently drew up a risk evaluation to make the possible risks and limitations of the evaluation process clear. The main risks identified include organisational risks such as difficulties when coordinating different time zones and potential problems of lexicality during interviewing and translations. To mitigate these risks, the evaluation team developed multiple strategies. First, the team collaborates with interviewers in the global south to ensure the planned schedule can adhere to, and interviewees can join in their preferred language. Furthermore, all interviews and workshops were held online, decreasing the risk of COVID-19

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[4] Annexe 1 provides an overview of all the research questions and the proposed research methods. It also gives insight into which research question will be addressed by what method(s).

transmission and making participation more accessible. In addition, secure and end-to-end encrypted means of communication were used, primarily Signal and Wire and data is stored securely using Mac FileVault or Linux Systems. Finally, the Enabling Digital team provided training for collaborators in using secure means of communication and storage.

Desk research

As a starting point, the research team conducted desk research to get insight into the organisation, implementation of the programme's activities and regional offices. Therefore, available programme documentation, annual reports, previous evaluations, and programme plans were studied.[5]

Interviews with DDP, global network members and donors

During November 2021, fourteen (14) semi-structured interviews were held with DDP staff based in Europe, DDP regional teams, members of the Freedom Online Coalition – donors – and the global Rarenet. During the interviews, more information about the design of the programme, its implementation, costs and benefits, specific needs and contexts, as well as lessons learned were addressed. In addition, these interviews provide the possibility to gain insight into individual perspectives, strategies and needs to reflect the diverse environment of DDP more accurately.

The final list of potential interviewees was generated in consultation with DDP's DMEAL Officer, who provided an extensive list from which the evaluation team had the autonomy to select. The DMEAL Officer also introduced the research team to interviewees via email to facilitate the scheduling process. We evaluate this strategy as successful since all interviewees signed up for interviews quickly, and all interviews planned were conducted within a month.

Table 1 - Inception Phase: Overview of respondents of in-depth interviews

Types of stakeholders	In-depth interviews
DDP Coordination Team	6
DDP Project Officers & Admin	1
DDP Digital Protection Leads	3
Donors	2
Rarenet	2
Total interviews	**14**

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[5] The main documents analysed during the desk research period are listed in Annex 3.

The interviews were conducted online via Wire or Signal. They were recorded (when the interviewees gave their consent). All recordings were used only to improve the evaluation team's notes and will be deleted once the study is over. The interview questions were tailor-made for each stakeholder. The research team prepared a general subset of questions but added, removed or adapted different questions depending on the stakeholder group.

1.4.2.   Impact evaluation phase

The *Impact Evaluation Phase* aimed at getting qualitative fieldwork information from direct and indirect beneficiaries (individuals, organisations and networks), local external experts, and facilitators to evaluate the outcomes and impact of DDP's activities. The qualitative fieldwork will focus on the three regional programmes in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Country case studies and other interviews

Three case studies were selected based on DDP's DMEAL Officer inputs:

- The Philippines
- Brazil
- Zimbabwe

These cases follow some important selection criteria such as **geographical coverage** (one country in each region where DDP has a regional team: Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa) and having different **DDP programmatic activities** in place (e.g. Incident Emergency Response, Sustainable Protections Support, and Facilitation and Community Building).

However, to be able to assess DDP's work as a whole, other regions (especially MENA and Eastern Europe) were added. DDP's work has different characteristics in these regions due to the lack of a strong presence, focusing on Facilitation and Community Building.

In total, 28 interviews were held by four local researchers in different countries and regions. The interviews were held online from December 2021 to February 2022, mainly in the local language. The table below details the various stakeholders that were interviewed.

Table 2 - Impact Evaluation Phase: Overview of respondents for in-depth interviews

Types of stakeholders	In-depth interviews* Countries (Brazil, Zimbabwe, Philippines)	In-depth interviews* Regions (MENA & Eastern Europe)
Direct beneficiaries: human rights defenders (individuals, organisations and networks) supported by DDP	11 (04 per country)[6]	4
Indirect beneficiaries: human rights defenders (individuals, organisations and networks) supported by DDPs partners or by organisations DDP supported	3 (01 per country)	2
Experts on the local digital safety context and not connected to the programme	3 (01 per country)	2
Digital Protection Facilitators	3 (01 per country)	0
Total interviews	**20**	**08**

*Interviews conducted by local researchers

Workshop with beneficiaries and local stakeholders (local workshop)

Brazil was selected as a country case to get more in-depth information about human rights defenders' context/threats, needs, existent local support, and support needed. This information was further contrasted with DDP's interventions and approach to better assess DDP's programmatic offers compared to the needs of human rights defenders. An online workshop was held in mid-February 2022 with 12 participants consisting of direct and indirect DDP beneficiaries, DDP's local facilitators, and other local stakeholders, focusing on the inclusion of DDP's priority groups.

Workshop with the DDP team (global workshop)

An online workshop was held in mid-March 2022, inviting all DDP team members: coordination team, Project Officers & Admin, Regional Project Managers, Digital Protection Facilitators and Leads, among other positions. The workshop was organised in a staggered manner, where topics were discussed in two steps over two days in different time zones to make the participation of DDP staff, based on different continents, possible. It was a hands-on workshop where preliminary results

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[6] Due to scheduling issues, one interview could not be led.

gathered in the other stages of the evaluation process were presented to DDP staff. They were asked to develop the recommendations further to address the challenging points.

Anonymisation and codifying stakeholders' interviews

The interviewees and their organisations were anonymised by omitting or modifying any personal and identifying information provided by the interviewees from the data. Confidentiality and anonymity are ethical practices designed to protect the privacy and safety of human subjects. Table 3 summarises the codes used for the participants interviewed during this evaluation. The codes are used to preserve interviewees' identities and allow them to speak freely about their experiences.

Table 3 - Codification of stakeholders for citation purposes

Type of Stakeholder	Code used for citations
DDP team members (coordination team, Project Officers & Admin, Regional Project Managers, Digital Protection Facilitators and Leads) during the interview process	DDP team
DDP team members during the global workshop	DDP GW
Donors	Donor
CiviCERT, Rarenet and regional rapid response network members	Network member
Direct beneficiaries (grantees, accompanied organisations or networks)	Direct beneficiary
Indirect beneficiaries (individuals or organisations supported by DDP's regional or global partners)	Indirect beneficiary
Independent experts in the different regions	Expert
Participants of the local workshop (Brazil)	LW

2. Results

This chapter assesses DDP from the perspectives of all its stakeholders, according to specific criteria followed throughout the evaluation process. First, the programmatic aspects focus on evaluating the programme design's quality. Second, the impact of DDP's outcomes or results. Third, DDP's processes and structure. Lastly, the benefits of the outcomes relating to the programme's costs are also reflected on.

Programmatic aspects and impact	Key conclusions
Context, vulnerable groups and needs of human rights defenders	• DDP accurately analyses the threats and context human rights defenders face. In addition, DDP's geographic expansion to Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa with regional teams played a crucial role in adequately understanding regional and local contexts. • The priority groups identified by DDP's 2020-2023 Strategy were reflected by interviewees and generally supported. In addition, DDP demonstrated flexibility and sensibility to adapt to regional and local differences. • DDP is well aware of and understands the needs of human rights defenders in different regions and countries.
Work areas, activities and outputs	• DDP's programme of activities responds well to the needs of human rights defenders under digital threat and generates valuable and positive impacts. However, some issues could be reinforced, such as advocacy efforts, promoting networks at the country and community levels and investment in hardware and infrastructure. • All the stakeholders evaluated DDP's work positively. However, improvement is needed in communicating DDP's work externally. • DDP's general purpose and vision of providing emergency and sustainable holistic protection support to human rights defenders under threat were clear to and supported by all the interviewees. In addition, holistic response was highlighted by the interviewees as one of DDP's most vital approaches that set them apart from other organisations. • The accompaniment process was described as a transformative and fantastic support modality for organisations. Therefore, combining emergency and sustainable support seems to be the right strategy to use.
Communication and outreach	• All the stakeholders gave very positive feedback about their collaboration with DDP and described the organisation as humane, sensible and

	flexible. They highlighted DDP's rights-based and human-centred approach and reported that the organisation is true to its stated values.
	• DDP's beneficiaries gave very positive feedback regarding working with DDP during the COVID-19 pandemic. They said that DDP was conscious about the pandemic and thus extended the deadlines and adapted its funding to the prevailing situation.
	• DDP's outreach is a vulnerable point as it is mainly based on DDP's network and strategic partners. This might indicate that human rights defenders (individuals or organisations) that are not connected to the digital safety net or ecosystem might not be reached by DDP.
	• It seems that DDP is not very good at explaining to its stakeholders what its programme does, how it is structured, the names of its activities (too many acronyms) and its available services, tools and grants. It seems that translating and making the relevant information accessible and easier to understand is a fundamental matter of inclusion for the most vulnerable human rights defenders.
Grants	• All DDP grants were reported to have positive impacts on human rights defenders (individuals, organisations and networks), adequately responding to many of their needs. In addition, the grants were assessed as contributing to the attainment of DDP's objectives, being consistent to the outcomes desired. The interviewed grantees gave positive feedback regarding DDP's application process and the support that DDP gives. However, there is room for improvement in the speed of the approval process and resource transfer and in the grant allocation and awarding processes. The reporting requirements also need to be simplified, and the language barriers need to be removed.
	• Simplifying and improving the outreach and communication regarding grants was identified as still being a challenge for DDP. There is still room for improvement in the outreach and communication regarding DDP's grants so that the information regarding such grants would reach the human rights defenders who need them the most.
	• The Incident Emergency Fund was reported to be a successful funding tool of DDP, addressing the most pressing needs of human rights defenders and enabling real change for the recipients.
	• The Sustainable Protection Support was highlighted by the interviewees as one of the biggest strengths of DDP as it can change the trajectory of human rights organisations or networks and can create a real impact.
	• For the Global Partnership Fund the assessment was that the selected global partners have a good reputation, and each of them responds to a unique need, enabling and strengthening DDP's holistic approach.
	• The Regional Partnership Fund started in 2020, and the overall feedback of the interviewed experts, donors and grant beneficiaries was that DDP's

	strategy to support more regional partners instead of broadening its roster of global partners is the right strategy. They argued that regional partners are more embedded in the local communities and better understand the local context and culture, thus being able to support human rights defenders in a much more customised way and more promptly. • The Community and Network Fund, which also started in 2020, was cited as having helped strengthen collaboration, trust and capacity building among digital rights organisations in different regions, such as MENA and the former Soviet Union.
Accompaniment process	• The interviewees assessed the medium- or long-term accompaniment model that DDP developed as very successful because it is prepared to 'walk the walk with an organisation' for as long as this is needed. • Human rights defender organisations or networks have reportedly increased their holistic capacities and resilience with regard to digital threats, reducing their medium- or long-term vulnerabilities through the accompaniment services offered by DDP's leads and facilitators. However, there is still room for improvement in this regard. • According to the beneficiaries, the positive aspects of the accompaniment programme are that it is collaborative and practical, there is groundwork with the organisations and it is jointly planned, executed and evaluated. • The facilitators' guidance is considered sustainable because it has become a culture inside many accompanied organisations, allowing people to create new habits around holistic security and helping them become empowered. However, the sustainability of the accompaniment process in the long term can be compromised by the fact that in many cases, the available resources are not enough to continue the work started during the accompaniment.
Collaboration and network building	• DDP's collaboration and network-building efforts involve collaborating with other organisations within the CiviCERT, Rarenet and the regional rapid response networks to refer rejected grant applications and to create a close-knit network. Moreover, DDP funds network efforts, meetings and events with the Community and Network Funding. • Donors, DDP team members, network members and beneficiaries generally applauded DDP's networking efforts. DDP was described as open, helpful and diplomatic. However, referrals of rejected grant applications and knowledge sharing could be made more efficient and structurally better. • The interviewees in the regions generally viewed DDP's networking support and collaboration positively. However, some regions require

	further support to build networks and become sustainable. In particular, their rapid responses could be increased and made more efficient.
Gender equity and diversity inclusion	• The gender equity and diversity inclusion strategy and how DDP internally and externally handles issues concerning gender and diversity were highlighted by the DDP staff, donors, network members and beneficiaries as definite strengths of DDP. DDP upheld its aim highlighted in its DDP Strategy 2020–2023. However, some room for improvement remains, such as including more transgender and neurodiverse individuals in the team. • The implementation of the gender equity and diversity inclusion strategy was reported to be unclear in some occasions. For instance, the influence of the gender equity and diversity inclusion aspects on the grant allocation process and hiring practices is not clear. Some interviewees asked if such aspects should play a role, and others reported that they were educating local organisations about gender equity and diversity inclusion. • DDP faces some challenges with its gender equity and diversity inclusion strategy, particularly with having female-identifying persons in charge, which some organisations or collaborators do not receive well.

Planning, monitoring and evaluating outcomes	Key conclusions
Theory of Change and Logic Model	• It seems that DDP's Theory of Change is not yet clearly defined, especially the assumptions, and the latest actively used visual representation stems from the mid-term evaluation in 2017. • The DDP staff reported that the Theory of Change was unclear to them, and they had challenges understanding how it translates into and/or dialogues with specific activities. • DDP would benefit from internally discussing the need, usefulness and appropriateness of the Theory of Change as a planning framework. If decided as necessary and useful, DDP's Theory of Change framework should be deepened and updated (clarifying its assumptions, steps, impacts and pathway of change) so it would become a valuable tool supporting the strategic planning process. • DDP developed a Logic Model as a planning framework. A Logic Model that is a summary of the underlying Theory of Change is a much more powerful tool. Thus, it would be beneficial to 'blend' these two instruments, using them simultaneously and in a complementary way.
Consistency of strategy, outputs and outcomes	• The work areas and their respective activities and outputs set up in DDP Strategy 2020–2023 were assessed as valuable by all the stakeholders, having positive impacts on human rights defenders (individuals, organisations and networks) and proving to be consistent and to be helping the organisation realise its intended immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcomes.
Measurement and monitoring of outcomes and impact	• DDP's measurement, monitoring and evaluation process has evolved in recent years and includes different methods of data collection and a framework with different instruments (Logic Model, Performance Measurement Framework, DMEAL and participatory annual planning), which was assessed as generally positive by different stakeholders. However, using the Logic Model and making performance measurements were reported by the DDP team as feeling like ticking boxes for donors and a heavy load for the grantees and accompanied organisations.

Internal processes and structure	Key conclusions
Expansion and geographical diversification	• DDP conducted a Field Building Project in Southeast Asia in 2019, in Latin America in 2020 and in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2021. These projects enabled the training of local facilitators and enabled local network building to provide locally rooted support for human rights defenders. • DDP's aim of strengthening local and regional capacities was furthered by restructuring the organisation towards the global south. The interviewees generally welcomed such process and praised DDP for living its values and creating a local impact. However, several internal challenges were highlighted, especially for local teams. These include the changes or differences regarding salaries, deficient communication about the details of the structural change and fears of contract discontinuity. • The interviewees generally welcomed the expansion of DDP to support its values and support DDP's goals of decolonisation and shifting power to regional and local communities. Therefore, DMEAL and grants are discussed and implemented transnationally, and fundamental power, such as resources and capacities, is expected from regional groups.
Governance and decision-making structure	• DDP's decision making is done collaboratively in the coordination team, and due to regionalisation, also in the regional teams, where regional managers make decisions with their teams about their regions. Regular meetings are held in the regional and coordination teams, which, according to the interviewees, has made decision making more effective and has increased coordination. However, the diversification of the coordination team might be beneficial. • Gender equity, diversity and inclusion plays a crucial role in DDP's decision making and governance, and guides the allocation of grants and DDP's work. • The DDP staff generally reported feeling that their voices were heard in the decision-making process. Regional team members felt empowered to make decisions about their regions and the allocated grants and accompaniments. DDP's decision-making structure was perceived as flexible. However, the communication could be improved, and sometimes there is no person in charge of a process.
Work culture	• DDP's Code of Conduct codifies DDP's work culture, and a complaint mechanism for reporting harassment and unwanted behaviour is in place. The work culture is centred around a do-no-harm approach, protecting human rights, equity, diversity, collaboration, integrity, confidentiality, transparency and openness.

- The interviewees reported that DDP's work culture is compassionate with regard to health concerns and is centred around care, feminist values and listening to team members' concerns.
- The internal communication and knowledge management need improvement, and more resources must be allocated to these.
- The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges for the DDP team as transitioning to online work was not easy and involved more security risks. In addition, working online during the current pandemic has been psychologically burdensome and organisationally challenging. However, DDP has been providing its team members with psychological support, deadline flexibility and a supportive atmosphere, which received positive feedback.

Funding, costs and benefits	Key conclusions
Donors, Hivos and funding	- Donors reported having a good and trusted relationship with DDP and valued the organisation's work very highly. - DDP's communication with donors also received positive feedback, as well as DDP's Donor Committee annual meeting. - The budget is a limiting factor to DDP's potential and the needs of the human rights defenders (individuals, organisations, and networks) under digital threats. For instance, DDP receives much more grant requests than its budget allows it to reply to. As a result, DDP's potential and ambitions seem much bigger than its budget, which is one of the main barriers to achieving greater impact. - From donors' perspective, DDP's basket fund model is perceived positively and should continue. However, from DDP's perspective, it would be beneficial to have more secure yearly core funding. Therefore, more donor coordination and longer-term donor commitments (e.g. creating some joint responsibility for the annual budget) would generate more efficiency and sustainability, with less time spent on proposals and reports writing and fewer insecurities. - Overall, donors feel that the DDP fulfils the reporting requirements and assessed DDP's reporting as being very good. However, donors generally desire more quantitate data than DDP wished for. In addition, donors have different reporting requirements and periodicity. Therefore, as far as possible, it would be beneficial for DDP to create some kind of agreement on reporting requirements, making it as simple as possible. It's crucial that

	donors understand that some reporting requirements can be an overload for staff and beneficiaries, decreasing programme efficiency and quality, and harming the beneficiaries. • With DDP´s movement for decentralisation and geographical diversification, one of the pressing questions that emerged is: Will DDP deepen its decentralisation and move its management towards the regions, towards a more global south management? Will DDP be a programme hosted by one of the Hivos' regional hubs, or will it be a spin-off independent of Hivos? In any scenario, a different governance model will be needed.
Value of outcomes versus costs	• All stakeholders linked to the programme assess DDP's outcomes as valuable. • All direct and indirect beneficiaries of DDP's support feel that they have benefitted from the support and listed several positive impacts. • Five main aspects of DDP's approach were highlighted as an added value of the organisation within the broader networks of support to human rights defenders at risk and Internet freedom: DDP's holistic approach, including gender equity and diversity inclusion; DDP's human-centred values and the consistency of the organisation's interventions and its values; the fact that DDP's team is based in the regions providing customised support; the medium- and long-term Sustainable Protection Support, via SPF or the accompaniment model by facilitators; and networking building. • Overall, all stakeholders assess DDP as effective. In addition, the collected data for the mid-term evaluation indicates that DDP's resources are effectively spent, producing valuable outcomes for beneficiaries and being perceived as positive by all stakeholders. • DDP's expenditures led to valuable and positive outcomes and impacts to supported human rights defenders (individuals, organisations, and networks), indicating that donors' funding of DDP's programme is worthwhile.

3. Recommendations

The recommendations below try to support in identifying promising areas, activities and approaches to be strengthen, as well as support in facing ongoing challenges effectively by identifying appropriate actions to address particular issues in the design, implementation and management of the programme.

3.1.   Communicating DDP externally

This part will try to shed light on how to externally communicate DDP's structure, goals, and offers more efficiently (on the website, for potential grantees and donors, etc.). The difficulties in externally communicating DDP's work have already been highlighted during the previous mid-term evaluation by Kaleidos in 2017 (van Gent et al. 2017, p. 43f). Considering budget constraints, it seems crucial to invest energy and resources in this topic.

Visualise DDP and make it easier to understand

- **Improve DDP's public information**. That includes improving the website by having more information available but, mostly, by presenting information more efficiently. For example, the website only states what DDP's grant support but not which types of support are excluded, which might be worth mentioning (DDP GW). Also, making DDP's areas of work and scope easier to understand for external stakeholders is an urgent task. Furthermore, referrals and support mechanisms for human rights defenders under attack could be made more visible for partners on the website (DDP GW).

- **Fewer acronyms** should be used when communicating DDP externally to beneficiaries and other stakeholders. The extensive use of abbreviations (e.g. GEDI, IEF, SPF, CNF, GPF, RPF, RRN, DIF, DFAK, DPF, DPF, PO, RPM) makes the organisation very hard to grasp from the outside. For instance, DPF and DPL are understood mainly by organisational's stakeholders. They could be simplified, for example, as the evaluators did for the current mid-term evaluation report by calling them 'facilitators' and 'leads'. In addition, the grants' names are long and could be simplified (e.g. Emergency Fund, Sustainable Fund, and Network Fund).

- **Improve the grant's communication and outreach**. It's recommended to make it simpler to understand the types of grants and clarify what each of them are and are not for. In addition, professionalise and be more transparent on the criteria for approval or rejection of grants. These improvements would potentially reduce the number of

submissions that are not applicable because they do not fall in DDP's mandate or the mandate of their network (e.g. request for funding for a school), which would consequently reduce the workload for DDP team (DDP GW). In other words, the grant outreach needs to be clearer and precise to filter the applicants from the start point. Furthermore, the types of grants should be communicated, as far as possible, in the local languages since many defenders do not speak English well. Finally, many grantees and beneficiaries would appreciate more feedback, for instance, about the application process (Indirect beneficiary) and about the reasons for the rejection of grants to help shape future proposals (Indirect beneficiary).

- Better define DDP's **scope and working areas** and make them visual (figures, diagrams, charts, etc.) to increase understanding regarding the organisation's work. That includes designing a diagram with all DDP's activities connected to the area of work they belong to, a description, and a definition of its aims. Making this visual representation of DDP's work accessible to all stakeholders is strongly recommended. For instance, the evaluators elaborated a rough sketch of DDP´s areas of work, activities and outputs desired.

- The **name DDP** was repeatedly questioned as not coherent with the scope of the organisation's work (Donor) or as not understandable (LW), especially to non-English speakers. Changing the name might be worth a discussion (DDP GW). Changing the name could enable DDP more visibility, as its work is reportedly often downplayed, and the organisation is reduced to a "digital security trainer".

Translate DDP and make it more accessible

- DDP's documents are primarily in English, decreasing accessibility for human rights defenders and beneficiaries. Therefore, **translating documents** into as many languages as possible or adding an Annex with translations (DDP GW) is recommended, maybe according to strategic areas and countries (DDP GW). Regional interviewees stated, for instance, that the Arabic language should be considered crucial for DDP's communication to reach its target group (Indirect beneficiary). Some recommend updating (design, editing) and more translations of the Digital First Aid Kit and the Digital Integrity Fellowship manual. Overall, that includes adding staff that speaks those languages (DDP GW) and adopting the culturally aware intersectional language, which is challenging, especially considering DDP's budget limitations.

- Making the **website available in as many languages as possible** is recommended. Especially because most of the grants' information is provided on the website, having it in different languages improves its accessibility.

- The use of language was frequently discussed when debating grants and grant information access. In that regard, it is recommended to develop more accessible mechanisms for releasing grant resources by using **local languages** (for instance, Portuguese in Brazil) for the outreach, submission process, monitoring, reporting, and communication with grantees (DDP team).
- The organisation's **communication and accessibility** to beneficiaries and other stakeholders can be improved, especially in situations of staff changes. For instance, during the handover of the grant process to the new DDP staff, one organisation reported that the new staff member was not appropriately informed, and there seemed to be no proper oversight (Direct beneficiary). That might be improved by making email addresses for "roles" rather than individual people (DDP GW) and by reducing staff turnover to make internal points of reference as reachable as possible (DDP GW).

Publicise DDP's work

- Better **outreach and marketing** were frequent topics among various stakeholders, reporting that DDP is not communicating itself well. That includes visibility and sharing more about DDP's work, including how resources can be accessed, for instance, on the website. DDP operates in a niche and should be more mainstream and easier to grasp. It is recommended improving the outreach and advertising of DDP's services that have often remained unnoticed by donors, such as its efforts to build a better community and groundwork. Furthermore, increasing outreach in remote and rural areas where (potential) beneficiaries do not know much about DDP's offers or if and how they can be supported in case of attacks (Expert). That would include rethinking the marketing strategy and providing more personnel and resources for external communication.
- Sharing best practices across regions and documenting engagements to replicate best practices can be a valuable tool to better publicise DDP's work (Direct beneficiary). In addition, storytelling with **stories of change** would be beneficial to strengthen the field in which human rights defenders work, as DDP is still little known, and if more organisations knew about it, many more could ask for support (DDP team).
- DDP should emphasise its work on **gender equity and diversity inclusion** in public documents.
- Publicisation of the outputs of DDP's work is strongly encouraged.

3.2. Balancing the local, regional and global approach

This part will elaborate some suggestions on balancing and consolidating local, regional and global needs and approaches.

Go down to local, regional is not enough

- Clearly **define what local, regional and global interventions are**. For instance, for the evaluators, local was considered as country or community-wise, regional as continent or sub-continent (e.g. Latin America, Southeast Asia, etc.) and global as across continents.

- Moreover, **increase the focus on local areas,** as regional is not enough in many aspects and the physical location matters. For instance, one human rights defender said not being able to access regional networks due to language barriers (LW). Many requested more local support by promoting local networks and having more facilitators in their countries. DDP has invested over the years great effort in being global, but our recommendation would be to get more and more embedded in local communities and needs, increasing local networks and support. Therefore, as a general strategy, we advise DDP to go deeper into the localities the organisation is already working in before expanding to new countries and regions.

- DDP needs to get **more embedded in local communities**, for instance, by increasing the number of facilitators in the countries (DDP team), including specific target groups (e.g. younger or older people, rural area workers, etc.), and giving more autonomy and a planning role to the regional project managers.

- **More local strategies** need to be developed, including awareness and capacity building, local networks, infrastructure, training defenders for advocacy, and the update of accompaniment training.

- The focus on **raising awareness and capacity training** in the medium- and long-term is recommended to continue, even as there is a lot of resistance from defenders regarding digital issues, making it more challenging to raise awareness. There is little knowledge about digital threats, security protocols, and how to use tools safely on a local level. Defenders are highly exposed to the online world and are often unaware of the dangers (LW). The digital security debate needs to be integrated into the political struggle, and DDP's effort in doing so was recognised.

- It is necessary to work more with **community groups**. For instance, to work in the rural areas of Brazil with the MST [Landless Workers' Movement, a significant social

movement at the national level]. Many direct beneficiaries mentioned to suffer when they fight against the State and its repressive mechanisms.

- To **foster and strengthen local networks**, various specific measures are recommended:
  - DDP is encouraged to **promote local spaces (networks).** Networking after the accompaniment process was recommended to create more options for exchange and care among former accompanied organisations and DDP grantees (DDP GW). In addition, these spaces would enable frequently updating the knowledge on digital security given during the accompaniment process. Furthermore, DDP could cross-host organisational activity driven by facilitators (Global WS).
  - Having a **country level DDP seminar** regarding digital security was suggested for Brazil, for instance. This strategy would help outreaching DDP's work locally and promote the local network (DDP team).
  - A more substantial networking effort was, for instance, recommended for Georgia. In addition, especially **offline events** and psychotherapy sessions would be beneficial, as they provide participants more security. However, that might require travel grants, as travel restrictions sometimes make work difficult (Direct beneficiary).
- More collaboration at the local level with **complementing support providers** (psychosocial, legal etc.) through the grants schemes or network building activities (DDP GW) is recommended to ensure a holistic approach.
- DDP should increase its advocacy efforts not by advocating directly but by **supporting advocacy efforts of local organisations** for digital protection at country and international levels and by encouraging and training human rights defenders in Internet freedom policy (Indirect beneficiary). The approach should be around developing responses to the red-tagging and trolling of activists online in a multi-pronged way, not just in building the capacity to ensure that communications are secure (Expert).
- In addition, DDP needs to continue being considerate of **decolonisation** and go deeper. It is essential to be careful not to impose a colonialist vision of offering security (Direct beneficiary), to identify the specific needs of different organisations and provide customised support to address the needs (Indirect beneficiary), and to focus on regions with fewer media representation who have fewer funds and donors. From a decolonisation perspective, the local and regional teams should have more and more autonomy regarding priority groups, grants, and other topics. They are in closer contact with local realities and understand them better. Power needs to be shifted from historically more robust global northern spaces to southern spaces to make decisions for the countries with complete knowledge and autonomy.

- DDP should be even more considerate of the **local context** and its differences. For instance, if awareness building in Southeast Asia includes the recommendation to encrypt phones or use secure messengers like Signal or Wire, that is often not possible because people's phones cannot handle these applications or cannot be encrypted. Therefore, it is recommended that DDP looks even deeper at how digital security and protection is possible for different regions, countries and communities, and find a consensus within the team to adapt their recommendations more and more to the local needs (Direct beneficiary). This is already in place with facilitators and leads interventions and should continue and go deeper. Moreover, it is recommended to tailor the support considering contextuality and cultural differences, for instance, increasing the sustainability of DDP's work by thinking about using commercial tools (WhatsApp, Google, Facebook, etc.) with more significant security, which is often unavoidable in the local context (Expert).
- The **accompaniment model** is good to stay. Trained focal points in the organisations that can provide protection support for safety and security measures should continue to be funded. However, the focus should be shifted to more engaged organisations at the grassroots level (DDP GW). Moreover, interviewees mentioned that experimenting with methods and improving the work model, such as training and accompaniments, might be beneficial (DDP GW). That might include making team staff more visible during accompaniments for monitoring or evaluation because sometimes just the facilitators have contact with host organisations (DDP GW).
- An overall **structure revision of grants** was recommended, for instance, by regionalisation of grants distribution, where regions would get autonomy on how they would like to divide a certain amount between Emergency Funding, Regional Funding and Sustainable Funding (Planning 2022). That would allow DDP to cater to the context more than coordinate the grants globally (DDP GW).

Support regional networking and knowledge exchange

- It would help if the **local digital security situation were more articulated with the regional situation**, and the local and regional networks were more extensive (Direct beneficiary).
- **More investment in regional networks** was recommended by supporting the grants assessment process, complementing the holistic security approach of DDP, and seizing the opportunity to link all the partners of the different grants (Planning 2022). Overall, networks need to be encouraged to enable holistic security as single organisations have capacity limitations (Direct beneficiary).

- Improving network efforts should include verifying and **checking references** from other rapid responders quickly. That would enable, for instance, sharing the names of rejected requests with the network so they can be referred more easily. Furthermore, that could avoid duplications, and a close-knit system could be established.

- Provide more **venues for sharing regional experiences.** For instance, sharing among the DDP Asian team and defenders' organisations in the region is considered helpful because there are similar strategies among Southeast Asian governments when working against human rights defenders. More exchange across countries would be beneficial. For example, when COVID-19 is gone, a face-to-face conference could be organised for 2-3 days of learning and sharing (Direct beneficiary).

- The **network efforts in regions where DDP does not have regional teams**, such as MENA and the Former Soviet Union and the promotion of regional rapid response networks, are a fundamental strategy to share knowledge and support defenders in these regions with little support. Therefore, this kind of support should be increased.

- It would be beneficial to promote a **pool of experts**, including digital, legal, psychosocial, and gender and diversity experts. Then, partners could benefit from all the expertise (Direct beneficiary).

- One participant said it would be good if Asian partners and DDP's work in Southeast Asia could be more **centralised**, i.e., have one central point. That would be one track for DDP to consolidate the partners from particular areas and share experiences (Direct beneficiary).

Increase global networks

- Better **collaboration with global partners** and the media defence team was recommended (DDP GW), and impacts could be improved. DDP now supports organisations, provides grants and aims to promote networks. However, more network incentives could be created, for instance, regarding better developed digital infrastructure services. In addition, a synergy between projects could benefit human rights defenders, including enhanced communication among the Rarenet and the regional rapid response networks.

- Expanding the **CiviCERT community** and finding additional platforms for communication beyond just an encrypted email list is recommended to increase activity in the global network, especially during the pandemic.

- Increase access to regional and global networks for beneficiaries and decrease the language barrier to make that possible (Indirect beneficiary).

3.3. Planning, monitoring and evaluating

This part explores DDP's planning, monitoring and evaluation structure and makes recommendations based on DDP staff, beneficiaries and donors' perceptions.

Better define the planning framework

- Clarify the usefulness and appropriateness of the **Theory of Change** as a planning framework. Make the assumptions, steps and impact desired by each intervention explicit, elucidating the pathway of change.
- Use the **Theory of Change and the Logic Model** simultaneously and in a complementary way. A Logic Model that is a summary of an underlying Theory of Change is a much more powerful tool.
- Update the current **Strategy Document** to reflect the changes in names and the strategy itself. The document should be comprehensive, as now the information is spread in different documents, and it is hard to understand the complete picture. Furthermore, the document should include how the impact is measured.
- Finding a clear agreement on the **scope** of DDP's work and its planning framework is recommended.

Simplifying the monitoring process

- Generally, monitoring should focus more on **impact, change and effects** and less on activities and numbers. For instance, it's unclear if the SPF and the direct funding of organisations generated more impact than the accompaniment process by facilitators. Overall, the cost of a Sustainable Protection Fund is, on average, €30,000–40,000, which is a similar cost to a Digital Protection Facilitator. The two provide very different forms of assistance, but it is hard to determine which between them would have a greater impact. Focusing the monitoring on impacts would help decision-making.
- More **support for the DMEAL officer** is recommended (DDP GW).
- More **documentation on the best practices** is necessary regarding the **accompaniment process**. That would include an agreement of the requirements for a successful accompaniment, mainstreaming co-accompaniment, providing for post-accompaniment support, and changing the accompaniment model's reliance on focal points. Sometimes, it is more effective to engage the entire organisation directly rather than expect focal points to become proficient at tasks such as training (Planning 2022). In addition, accompaniment goals should be defined more precisely as

facilitators sometimes feel that they are left to work too autonomously with organisations. That gives them more freedom, but organisations cannot provide feedback to DDP during the accompaniment process. Only after the accompaniment is over does DDP ask for feedback. Moreover, it is recommended to have a follow-up conversation with beneficiaries after a finished project to provide information on how other projects do, provide networking, and share some practices (Indirect beneficiary). Finally, asking for feedback longer after the end of the accompaniment would be helpful to estimate the long-term impact of DDP's work.

- **Reducing bureaucracy** and **making monitoring smarter** is needed for beneficiaries (Direct beneficiary) as it is extra paperwork in an already busy working agenda and distracts from the core work. For instance, beneficiaries reported that four reports for a one-year project were very demanding. Therefore, fewer reports and a monitoring format focused on interviews are recommended (DDP GW). That could include transforming intermediary reports into feedback and monitoring meetings (Direct beneficiary) or creating a working group to co-create the best monitoring format (DDP team). Moreover, interviewing facilitators and defenders could provide insights into best practices and lessons learned. The insights, then, should be synthesised in one document or another form of output (Planning 2022). Furthermore, reports, report formats and tracking sheets could be simplified and translated. Facilitators could co-own that process.
- For DDP staff, a **reduction of paperwork** is recommended for the monitoring process. Using the logic frame, logic model, and performance measurements were assessed positively by DDP staff but sometimes felt like ticking boxes for donors as they require that process. Furthermore, fewer surveys inside DDP were recommended (DDP GW).
- The **grants team** needs to document some topics such as technical knowledge on digital security, like, for instance, secure tools processes that are going on to help the team to do an assessment. It can be done through discourse threads (Planning 2022). Furthermore, grantees' responsibility should be visible on reports (DDP GW).

More participation in the planning

- Increase **decision-making and participation** of leads and facilitators.
- The local and regional teams should have **more autonomy** regarding priority groups, grants, and other topics, as they are closer to local realities and understand them better.
- It should be co-decided what should be included when planning and how to **translate from global into regional and localise** into the realities of the audience in question.

3.4. Funding limitations

This part brings recommendations trying to contribute to leveraging the impacts with the available programme funding, as well as highlighting some needs of human rights defenders that lack funding.

Funding limitations, fundraising and sustainability of funds

- DDP's **basket fund model** is perceived positively and should continue from the donors' perspective. However, from DDP's perspective, it would be beneficial to have more secure yearly core funding. Therefore, **more donor coordination** and longer-term donor commitments (e.g. creating some joint responsibility for the annual budget) would generate more efficiency and sustainability, with less time being spent on proposals and reports writing and fewer insecurities.
- The budget is a limiting factor to DDP's potential and the needs of the human rights defenders (individuals, organisations, and networks) under digital threats. For instance, DDP receives much more grant requests than its budget allows it to reply to. Therefore, one strategy to expand DDP's budget would be **fundraising beyond the Freedom of Online Coalition**, focusing on attracting new donors. Moreover, it seems beneficial to diversify the types of donors (e.g. foundations and non-governmental organisations) and have more options. Therefore, rethinking the communication strategy and re-positioning DDP's work to potential donors seems urgent.
- With DDP´s movement for decentralisation and geographical diversification, one of the pressing questions that emerged is: Will DDP deepen its decentralisation and move its management towards the regions, towards **a more global south management**? Will DDP be a programme hosted by one of Hivos' regional offices, or will it be a spin-off independent of Hivos? Frank conversations should be held with donors regarding this topic.

Human rights defenders' needs Vs. Grants and resources

- Generally, stakeholders recommended improving defenders' access to alternative and accessible **hardware, tools and infrastructure** (DDP GW), focusing on solutions from the global south instead of big tech companies (LW). Furthermore, the focus on "retro-tech" was recommended as many people are unfamiliar with platforms like Wire and do not have access to it (Expert). This is related to the fight against structural inequality, as most human rights defenders are low-income and socially vulnerable. As far as possible,

DDP and its partner organisations should, for example, provide resources for accessing information and communications technology (for organisations and activists), offer community spaces with internet access, purchase cell phones and laptops for activists, and improve internet access (LW). In addition, invest more in (regional) infrastructure and donations for open-source tools (DDP GW).

- o Especially, consider **financing more access to hardware and device**. Unfortunately, human rights defenders lack the resources to access the necessary equipment and devices (computers, laptops, smartphones, etc.). In some cases, defenders don't have any or have very old smartphones, which will prevent them from having secure applications for chats and securing their data. (Expert). In many cases, the mobile phone is shared with the household members, having one device for many people, making it very challenging to follow security procedures. Therefore, increasing hardware and device grants would be helpful.

- Resources should focus on **prevention** (LW) **and continuous training**. Therefore, strengthening the **accompaniment process** was considered the right way (Indirect beneficiary). Furthermore, investing in capacities was also recommended to prevent emergencies and prepare concerned organisations and individuals, for instance, in the Former Soviet Union region, as the situation in the region will likely become more severe (Expert).

- Funding for the **accompaniment model** should be continued after the process is concluded, including a rapid response component, promoting network among accompaniment organisations, general improvements, and technical support (DDP team).

- Develop more accessible mechanisms for **releasing grant resources**. In addition, the process could be faster, especially for those in emergencies (Expert).

- Beneficiaries recommended more **capacity building for digital literacy**. For instance, by developing a tool for people with little or no understanding of digital literacy increases training opportunities (Direct beneficiary). The lack of digital literacy requires a lot of resources from organisations, as many questions surrounding digital security and creating an infrastructure reflecting the organisations' values need to be answered beforehand (Direct beneficiary). Furthermore, continuous training should be ensured as information and communications technology changes fast (LW).

- Furthermore, it was recommended to take the risk to work with **young people** and invest more in youth organisations (Direct beneficiary).

- In the MENA region, access to training about **content production** and raising awareness about content specific to the region is recommended (Direct beneficiary).

- In Brazil, it was a demand to guarantee **legal support** for human rights defenders to defend themselves against threats (LW). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, legal issues need to be addressed. For example, the Data Protection Act was enacted to guide organisations on compliance (Direct beneficiary).

- Pursuing **gender equality** in this field of digital protection through increasing constant training opportunities for women who want to work with digital technology is recommended (LW). Furthermore, there is a need for constant review of gender structures. For example, consider new conversations around the marginalisation of men and male children in Zimbabwe (Direct beneficiary).

- Promoting the diversification of the **trainer's community** was a frequent recommendation. Increasingly, women and members of the LGBTQI+ community work in that sector but, generally, much more men than women or LGBTQI+ members are involved in training activities or an online engagement (Direct beneficiary).

- Ensure **psychosocial support** to face the traumas of living under threat and encourage potential Emergency Fund applicants to have psychosocial support.

- Investing in **digital forensic investigation** was recommended for Brazil (LW) and the region of the former Soviet Union (Indirect beneficiary).

- Increasing the **emergency infrastructure** was recommended, for instance, having channels like helpdesk or call centres for defenders to contact when under attack. Furthermore, other support such as displacement and transport, including emergency exits, should be provided for defenders (LW). Therefore, prevention mechanisms and partner or supported organisations working on emergencies should be increased. For more effective emergency response, DDP should commit to set-up a robust infrastructure to be able to do this with agility and the necessary speed. That includes a diagram from the time of receiving the request, the time duration of request processing, how to vet the information, who are the advisors to contact, how to negotiate the contract, what are the templates for the contract, how to transfer the money, how to follow-up on the grantees' safety and the usage of funds. People who are on-call 24/7 should be available to respond to these requests. DDP should set aside money for a quick reaction. If the amount is measly and not serious about creating infrastructure, DDP will create expectations, and its reputation will be affected (Expert).

- Financial and technological support for **direct digital actions** was recommended for Brazil. For example, preparing an intervention to take down an attacker's website. Also, rethinking struggle strategies, for example, seeking to destabilise the established order (LW).

Make the granting process smarter

- Manage expectations and make the **grants' scope, requirements and purposes clear** to DDP staff, donors, and applicants (potential beneficiaries). DDP staff and defenders often do not understand the grants' scope. Furthermore, DDP's expectation does not always match the local reality regarding the administrative capacities of organisations.

- Increasing the **scope of the emergency fund** to include emergencies that are not direct short-term but have a different pace, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is recommended. Furthermore, various beneficiaries recommended increasing the scope to include relocalisation and size of grants, such as in the MENA region (Direct beneficiary).

- Find a better way to **balance open and closed calls** for grants not to overburden the grants team and have a strategic focus. That includes external input, accountability, risk mitigation, managing the entry ceiling to DDP support and applying lessons learned from DDP's work and partners (Planning 2022).

- Form a robust **grant team** (with at least one from each region) with staff allocated to it, in order to not overload team members and do a financial workshop with the grants team and the Financial Officer to help with developing the budget, handling applications and best practices (DDP GW).

- Increase the **accompaniment funds** so facilitators can have more areas of focus (equipment, service subscription etc.) (DDP GW).

- Improve the process of **grant allocation**, which is not efficient sometimes due to lacking deadlines, leading to lag and nobody having the final responsibility. Furthermore, explore different options for the grant allocation process because often the grant goes to people who are skilled proposal writers but maybe are not the ones that need it most.

- Consider **reducing the number of grant types/categories** and having only one grant per work area (total of three grants only). For instance, consider integrating the Global and Regional Partnership Funding into the other grants.

3.5.   Consolidating a global team

This part tries to reflect on and make suggestions for improvement of DDP's internal processes such as communication, working conditions, cultural differences, governance, and decision-making and its effects on the DDP team and external stakeholders.

Improve internal communication

- More clarity about the **impact of outcomes** and their measurement would be helpful for staff.
- Include **storytelling sessions** during all monthly DDP team meetings with Regional Project Managers to map out potential topics, including lessons learned, best practices, challenges, etc., that can be useful for members from other regions. These stories can come from the regional team, sourced from reports or weekly update meetings (Planning 2022).
- Regular facilitators and defenders' meetings (bimonthly or quarterly) to exchange accompaniment experiences. The session can be documented through notes and recordings (Planning 2022).
- Provide more personnel and resources for **internal knowledge sharing**. Currently, just one team member is assigned for the role and shares it with other tasks, making it hard to develop continuous and solid strategies.
- Proper **handover** and takeover during grant processes and ensuring oversight of the grant processes to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication (Direct beneficiary). For instance, developing a protocol for situations when the DDP's team member changes is recommended. In addition, the organisation receiving the funds must be informed shortly (Direct beneficiary).
- **Communicate the budget** for accompanied organisations clearly to facilitators and systematically share the Accompaniment and Grantee Survey results.
- Improve communication to DDP staff regarding the specific **outcomes of the gender, equality, diversity, and inclusion strategy**. Moreover, improve internal clarity on how much it should influence grant allocation and decision-making, not to impose outside ideas on local contexts but also consider gender and diversity in their work. Furthermore, build on DDP's experience in how to practice a feminist approach in grant-making (Planning 2022).
- **Field Building Project communication** to the DDP team needs to improve. Expanding to a new region was clear for team members, but not how it would be implemented and the implications of a new structure (new positions and roles, group meetings, study

groups, etc.). The communication during field building was not ideal, according to some team members, as they felt the expansion structure was not explained clearly. Involved staff experienced the process as stressful in Latin America and Southeast Asia. However, other team members mentioned that information was provided, but some changes generated resistance.

Recognising cultural differences

- Continue the **caring and flexible** work culture. The local staff reported the work culture enables geographical flexibility. Staff could live in any country in the region and keep and use their networks in other areas. Furthermore, the work culture is very centred on care. Listening is highly valued, respect and feminist values are essential, and consideration to individuals' situations was highlighted (DDP team).
- Although the work culture is well assessed, further discussing some aspects of DDP's **work culture** is recommended. DDP aims to decolonise, but for now, European work culture and mindset reportedly dominate, and multiple interviewees pointed out the differences in work culture, especially in Southeast Asia. That includes the notion of well-being among activists, which has cultural differences. Discuss the idea of wellness and well-being among team members is recommended. According to one participant, self-exploitation is quite common among activists to show their dedication. Therefore, self-care and well-being are sometimes frowned upon and thought of as laziness. Some participants located tensions in DDP about that topic (Expert).

Improving working conditions

- Digital Protection Facilitators are employed mainly **part-time**, making their engagement with DDP weaker (DDP team).
- Managing different **time zones** decreases the well-being of some staff members, and remoting working hours policy for different time zones should be improved.
- Capacity building or **learning sessions** on technical topics (Gitlab, installing Jitsi Meet, sysadmin, etc.) for facilitators are recommended (Planning 2022).
- Most training and interventions during the pandemic occur online, posing infrastructural and pedagogical challenges. More support from DDP is required to respond to these issues. In addition, an **in-person meeting** once a year is recommended (Planning 2022).
- Enable more **diversity in teams**, especially more inclusion of transgender, indigenous and neurodiverse communities. Furthermore, more multilingual people are recommended (DDP team).

- **Reduce workload** for staff who need to do educational work regarding gender, equity, diversity and inclusion with a partner organisation, for example, by hiring an outside organisation (DDP team).

- Rediscuss and make the **Financial Fair Model** more transparent to DDP staff members. This model was reported to work generally. However, some improvements could be made (DDP team). The perception of some DDP staff in regions is that, due to regionalisation, some people are now getting paid less. In addition, some facilitators have difficulties covering their costs due to the use of American Dollars in Bolivia or the significantly higher cost of living in Singapore than in the region of Southeast Asia (DDP team).

- Continue **psychosocial support** to DDP staff members as they work in a stressful environment, and the pandemic increases pressure. For instance, Southeast Asia is reportedly very cost-effective. It can support many organisations with one lead and few facilitators, but staff needs to be careful with burnout and overworking (DDP team).

Structure, governance and decision-making

- Continue improving the **regionalisation of the coordination team** by giving regional project managers more planning roles and autonomy. In the regions, they have weekly meetings and work collaboratively. In addition, improve the participation of leads and facilitators in planning and decision-making.

- A strong **coordination team** is essential and considered a great way of decision-making. If there is a need for regional input, the regional project managers go back to their units first, discuss them, and come up with the information from their teams. However, in terms of really diversifying the team and management and governance of the programme, conversations about who should be part of the coordination team should be held (DDP team).

- Define a clear and transparent **decision-making model**. One regional project manager gave the feedback that they feel very much part of the decision-making processes inside DDP due to coordination meetings that enable giving and receiving feedback. One lead said not to be an active part of the decision-making process, but they feel like their voice is heard and they can influence decisions, especially at the regional level. Another participant perceived a big part of decision-making power to be in the hands of the Europeans in the coordination team (DDP team). Therefore, developing a transparent decision-making model is recommended.
  - It is crucial to create a **collaborative environment** where everybody has an equal say and to be oversensitive in listening to the voices further out. Transparency about

who is making the decisions – one team or everybody – would be beneficial to prevent people from thinking that a cabal is making decisions behind the scenes. Flexibility is essential, but it would be beneficial to have clear leadership in every process (DDP team).

- The **mandate** needs to be updated and be more focused as there is confusion around the support of legal, physical, and psychosocial needs. The clarity that those are only complementary to digital security incidents and the starting point is always a digital emergency is missing (Planning 2022).
- Starting with a more extensive regional team and **reducing the group** (such as in Latin America) should be avoided.

4. Final Considerations

The overarching question that this mid-term evaluation process seeks to answer is:

To what extent does the DDP programme of activities effectively support human rights defenders to continue their work in the face of socio-political violence and its digital aspects?

DDP was generally evaluated as successfully supporting human rights defenders in their work by offering them different grant types, such as emergency response, sustainable funding and network building. DDP also employed different and adequate tools for defenders' contexts. Furthermore, DDP's provision of holistic support for digital protection has successfully met defenders' various needs, including psychosocial and legal support. Due to the field building and extension of local networks in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, DDP's work was significantly improved. DDP's context-sensitive approach and focus on gender equity, diversity and inclusion make it unique and attractive to donors. Some specific recommendations to strengthen the tools used and the organisational structure and communication can be found in section 3.

To improve its work and outreach, DDP could mainly improve its external communication regarding its support mechanisms, grants and general offer by making them more known and accessible. This could be especially beneficial in areas where DDP already has an established network and wants to strengthen its presence.

Furthermore, DDP should make its structure easier to understand and should reflect about its name, grant types and accessibility. This might help it reach new target groups and expand its operations so it could reach the most vulnerable communities. Mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting increased use of digital tools, new challenges should be considered in DDP's work. Providing infrastructure and capacity building should remain an essential part of the programme as it is a prerequisite for defenders' and their supporters' work. The digital landscape is changing rapidly, and new ways to monitor and control defenders, such as on social media, are a challenge that should not be overlooked and should be included in DDP's capacity-building efforts.

Overall, DDP provides valuable and helpful support for human rights defenders in preventing and protecting themselves against digital threats. As the threats change rapidly with the advances in ICT and with the rise of increasingly repressive governments in many parts of the world, DDP needs to stay flexible to be able to provide adequate support for human rights defenders. Overall, though, DDP has established itself as an essential local, regional and global resource and programme for many defenders.

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