

# **Portfolio Review: Data for Advocacy**

Prepared by Elizabeth Eagen, Janet Haven, *January 2014*

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## Portfolio Review Document

Elizabeth Eagen, Program Manager, Information Program and Human Rights Initiative

### I. Definition of Portfolio

Information is the lifeblood of the human rights movement. New approaches to information handling in human rights practice have the potential not only to meet emerging challenges to human rights advocacy, but also to address established and persistent advocacy concerns. While badly collected information can threaten the field and hurt organizations' credibility, well-managed data is often an underused resource for advocacy. The **data for advocacy concept** is the Information Program's exploration of how to best maximize the value of data gathered, analyzed, presented and disseminated by civil society organizations advocating for rights and accountability goals.

In recent years, deep shifts in information technology, access to data, and the data demands of global institutions have taken place, which present new opportunities and challenges for civil society. In response, many funders in this space have concentrated on improving how civil society presents its information. While presentation is important, this concept looks to have a more extensive impact by extending the entire lifecycle of information, from generation to use to impact measurement, to shape the way civil society uses data to further its aims. Data can confer power, and technology can create unwarranted exuberance. Alone, data is necessary but not sufficient to support effective advocacy. This concept seeks to take the true measure of the contribution of data (and the technology that manages it) to achieving advocacy goals.<sup>1</sup>

This work is a **concept** of the Information Program, and is supported by the **field** *Skills and Capabilities in the Networked Public Sphere*. Its antecedents in the Information Program's history are grants made through the Civic Communications Program, and specifically the Human Rights Data Initiative (HRDI), a joint program of the Human Rights Initiatives and the Information Program. In the Human Rights Initiative, the work is supported by the **field** of *Participation: Political Participation of Citizens* and the **concept** *Building Broader Constituencies for Human Rights*.

### II. Original Ambition

The investigatory tradition of rights and accountability work follows a well-developed methodology, with data and information flowing into an organization through various channels in support of advocacy and legal work. Because many violations take place in chaotic or isolated locations, this information has always been fragile and often fragmentary. The changes to data use represented by advancing technology and the appetite for data in policymaking have created opportunity and demand by advocates to deploy data further and to make it do new things. However, civil society organizations rarely possess the in-house skills to use their digital resources to manage data securely and inventively, and technical groups that have both the skills and specialized knowledge to work with human rights organizations are few and far between.

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term "data" broadly throughout this document as this work is as much about the reliability and completeness of data sources as it is about analysis and outputs, and as much about the misuse and lack of numeracy as it is about the skilled use of information.

The Information Program and Human Rights Initiative came together in 2009 to address these gaps through the Human Rights Data Initiative.<sup>2</sup> The Initiative had organizational transformation at its heart: by examining information flow in organizations, we could see where competing data management strategies, information ownership, security holes and organizational inertia were holding back the modernization of many of the best rights-advocacy organizations. Though a number of human rights funders were exploring ways to connect their grantees to technology writ large, HRDI's groundbreaking insight was that strong data infrastructure would be needed to support the necessary culture shift to open up creative data and advocacy channels. We wanted to empower organizations to take control of their data's value. By supporting a critical mass of groups to use their data better, we hoped to give traditional human rights groups access to the visual and data-driven presence afforded to born-digital organizations.

HRDI developed two critical priorities: 1) supporting technical and information experts that serve the human rights community and 2) fostering relationships between the technology and human rights communities in support of the creative use of data for advocacy. The result is a field of skilled intermediary organizations, speaking the languages of both technology and advocacy. Instead of offering technology alone, HRDI focused on the structure and management of data both in fixed assets (such as computers and servers) and in organizational culture around information. HRDI grantmaking also addressed the growing need for serious examination of information flow, analysis, preservation, and data openness. Funds supported redesigning information infrastructure for core human rights and accountability actors, and sought to foster emerging data practices to enhance monitoring and advocacy work that extends the life cycle of human rights information. Our ambition was to spark a wave of *technology adoption with strategic intent* – understanding the barriers to advocacy organizations' use of technology, and solving that from the users' perspective, rather than supporting new technology in the hopes of attracting users.

Over the period 2010-2013, HRDI funded grants that explored the way advocacy organizations integrated data into their work. We made a series of grants where we sought to match advocacy grantees with technical intermediaries, and experimented with support for a variety of models of grantmaking, research and convening to engage organizations with data. This included a joint call for proposals with the Think Tank Fund on *New Uses of Data for Advocacy*, a project which grew to figure heavily in their 2014-2017 strategy;<sup>3</sup> work towards the development of multi-organization or multi-sourced pooled databases with data-heavy human rights organizations like the labor rights group Verité and the Afghanistan War Crimes Research Center at American University;<sup>4</sup> and funding small national-level tech-savvy accountability organizations working on innovative data projects like Jumpstart in Georgia and K-Monitor in Hungary.<sup>5</sup> Over time, HRDI developed and began to test its own set of hypotheses about data for advocacy work, which are included in Appendix A. In 2013 we began to ask our intermediaries to develop hypotheses of their own, to establish what they hoped their specific data intervention would achieve. A good example of success in this approach is the 2013-2014 core funding proposal from the New Media Advocacy Project.<sup>6</sup>

For the 2014-2017 strategy, we have split the *field* development of intermediaries from the *concept* work with advocacy organizations. To grow the field, we will support these intermediary organizations in a number of

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<sup>2</sup> This is a joint initiative started by the Information Program and the Human Rights and Governance Grants program and employs Elizabeth Eagen in the Program Manager position. HRGGP later merged with other rights departments to form the Human Rights Initiative, which we use throughout this document for simplicity and clarity.

<sup>3</sup> Appendix D, p. 6, 7, 9, 12-14.

<sup>4</sup> Appendix D, p. 20, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Appendix D, p. 19, 27.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix D, page 35, and Foundation Connect record OR2013-09011.

ways: to extend the emerging field of analytics for advocacy, to bolster international technology anchors bringing tools and guidance to rights organizations, and to feed the ecosystem of technology strategists, data scientists, security experts, designers and trainers. We have framed the Data for Advocacy concept (see below) as a related but separate effort, intended to draw conclusions about the ongoing shift towards handling and manipulating data to re-imagine advocacy and campaigning.

### **III. The Current Environment**

#### **A. Field Context**

The “technology for NGOs” field began to coalesce in the late 1990s, with an early focus on putting computers into NGO offices – sometimes without a great deal of forethought about the intended use. An associated cadre of consultants dedicated to serving non-profits (“e-riders”, punning off “circuit riders”) grew up in the late 90s and early 2000s, first in the United States and later around the world. At the same time, the nascent field of what has come to be known as “civic tech” – that is, software projects intended to advance civic, social justice, or rights goals – developed, often intertwined with the open source software movement. (In earlier days of the Information Program, our tactic upon arriving in a new country was to look up the local LUG – Linux User Group – which was usually also the home of local NGO/tech crowd).

From the earliest days, the gap between technically savvy, “born-digital” advocates and their non-technical counterparts was broad, and difficult to close without long-term, in-depth, strategy-level engagement. Many funders and organizations took a tools-led approach to trying to integrate technology meaningfully into advocacy work, latching onto the NGO tool of the moment and looking for ways to deploy it, rather than starting from strategic goals. The enduring gap in digital strategy skills and capabilities within the rights, accountability, and justice sectors continues to inform the Information Program’s field support to the present day.

Through the mid-2000s, the field’s focus was on the development and (sometimes) deployment of new tools. In step with the commercial sector, the second half of the 2000s saw a growing interest in the advocacy sector in data as an outgrowth of increasingly ubiquitous technology, and a new opportunity for advancing advocacy interests – although where relevant data would come from, and how it would be used has been the source of much excitement and experimentation. Three notable strands in the “*from where*” discussion have revolved around crowdsourced data, (newly) open government data, and data collected by NGOs previously unavailable publicly; on the “*how*” side, new uses of data have raised hope of greater citizen engagement with governments, more effective public accountability mechanisms, strengthened evidence of rights violations in international justice venues, and smarter resource allocation in development aid, to name only a few. But few organizations possess the technical and design skills, the data, or the resources to experiment meaningfully towards these ends.

Now, at the beginning of 2014, expectations are high – both of the data and its impacts, and of advocacy organizations which may reframe their work through a data-driven strategy. At the same time, questions are emerging on data quality, comprehensiveness, and relevance in advocacy relative to costs. The most forward-thinking organizations are developing research to understand better the real impact of their data-heavy projects, and the organizational costs and benefits of managing an in-house data and technology program. Other organizations are exploring new models of data-sharing, while still others are beginning to develop protocols and approaches around “responsible” data use by the NGO sector. The field is pulling in two directions – one that is pursuing more and improved data and technology to manage it, and one that is focused on understanding the best use of the data, and the skills and capabilities needed to advance the rights and accountability sectors accordingly.

## B. The Funding Environment

OSF's Information Program was an early funder to the field described above. The "ICT for Civil Society" and "ICT Toolsets" initiatives launched in 2001 were later to be consolidated into the Civic Communications Initiative. In 2005, HIVOS approached us with the idea of developing a program similar to Civic Communications under which we would co-fund projects with them; that funding partnership has endured, and HIVOS' contribution to the field has increased over the past nine years. Other funders to this space have included private foundations (MacArthur, Ford, Knight's News Challenge, Hewlett, and more recently the Omidyar Network) and government entities – USAID and DRL within the State Department have both funded extensively within the larger field, as have European governments, such as SIDA and, relatively recently, DFID. IDRC, the Canadian agency, has focused on research. This list covers a very broad spectrum of activity, including support to "internet freedom" projects, human rights, government transparency and accountability. Although we don't have hard data on this, our sense is that a great deal of the funding has gone towards the development of technology and data tools, and less towards the development of skills and strategies to use these new tools well. A forthcoming report (Q1 2014) on human rights and technology funders, commissioned by the Ford Foundation and developed together with the OSF, MacArthur, and Radio Free Asia, will shed more light on these questions.

A number of funding trends have driven the field over the past decade, particularly in recent years as more funders have become interested in technology and data as an avenue to achieving goals. Below are several key trends that the Information Program and HRDI have, on the whole, avoided:

- *Processes for driving innovation, particularly around tool development:* In general, our focus both within this concept and in the associated field of "Skills and Capabilities" has not been on developing new tools, or demonstrating, through rapid prototyping, the value of bringing together technologists and advocates for short-term events. Thus, we have stayed away from supporting or joining the wave of bar camps, contests (from Knight's News Challenge to Humanity United's Tech Challenge for Atrocity Prevention), and hackathons that have produced much of the buzz that has defined the field in recent years. This is because our own approach favors long-term intervention, cultural and behavior change, and a focus on strategy over quick wins with tools.
- *"Internet freedom":* In the early years of the Information Program, we were deeply engaged in the NGO digital security field, both from the aspect of tools and capacity. After 2008, we stepped back from funding in that space because of the large amount of money coming in from mostly government sources: DRL at the US State Department, SIDA, and the Dutch government along with others were all active in supporting various tool and training programs via large regranters like Internews under the banner of "internet freedom." In the past year, we have re-engaged with this field again, both because of the urgent need for digital security information within the network of OSF's grantees, and because of new opportunities, to some extent following on from the Snowden revelations, to rethink approaches. This work is generally funded through the Skills and Capabilities field portfolio, but what we learn there deeply informs ways in which the Data and Advocacy work goes forward. This is also an important field for us to stay engaged with because it is a rare area where funders in this space – Ford, MacArthur, Wellspring, Hivos, Radio Free Asia and OSF – are actively collaborating, undertaking shared research, and trying to build mechanisms to keep one another informed of new projects.
- *Indices:* The availability of data has driven increasing interest in creating indices, indicators, and human rights equations. We are skeptical of the value of these types of tools, and have resisted supporting them in favor of more direct uses of data for advocacy.
- *Crisis-mapping:* An early confluence took place between humanitarian aid/crisis service delivery and technology. This coalesced particularly around "crisis mapping," that is, using new crowdsourcing

approaches and tools to report and manage unfolding disasters in real time. Ushahidi launched as the first home-grown platform to capture texted information about violence in the 2007 Kenyan elections; the first large-scale example of crisis-mapping was in the context of the Haiti earthquake in 2010. Though real-time collection of data is desirable, what we saw emerging over time was confusion between humanitarian aid information collected via crowdsourcing, and defensible human rights data. Although this line can easily blur, our focus has remained on the human rights side. We stay in touch with and track the crisis-mapping field closely, occasionally supporting events or exchanges where they touch directly on human rights issues.

Other funders are also trying to learn what works best in the data and advocacy field, although this initiative is the most focused attempt we know of. We hope that recent efforts to build closer ties among human rights and technology funders will continue to strengthen in 2014 and give us further opportunity to collaborate. In particular, we are interested in projects such as the MacArthur Foundation's grant to Carnegie Mellon University in support of research and analysis to advance the use of new data analytics for human rights research and advocacy. Another major project we are tracking (and that OSF is contributing to, giving us a closer view) is [Making All Voices Count](#), a USAID and DFID-funded global initiative that "supports innovation, scaling, and research to deepen existing innovations and help harness new technologies to enable citizen engagement and government responsiveness." MAVC includes a significant amount of funding dedicated to research and impact studies; how that will be used across what promises to be a highly diverse range of projects in many different locations remains to be seen.

### C. Lessons and conclusions

The grants in Appendix B from HRDI are precursors to the Data for Advocacy concept.<sup>7</sup> From them, we have drawn a number of conclusions that we apply to our grantmaking under the Data and Advocacy concept.

1. *Ecosystem approach*: Data and technology projects can fail to have impact if not part of an ecosystem of advocacy goals and advocacy groups. We saw this clearly in some of the orphaned Think Tank Fund projects, and in efforts outside the foundation to conduct electronic or crowdsourced election monitoring.
2. *Audience definition*: User-centric design is a key but often overlooked element of project planning, particularly when developing public-facing data projects.
3. *Peer influence*: Peer influence can play a strong role in adoption of data-centered advocacy. Through a number of coordinated HRDI grants made to organizations in Armenia and Georgia to develop advocacy projects with significant data components, we have been able to see this in action. The focused funding and support to intermediary organizations to work with local groups has led to a small-scale advocacy/technology incubator; data-driven advocacy seems to be catching on. We are currently doing research on peer influence and critical mass in Georgia and Armenia and expect broader publication of results in Q1 2014.
4. *Bridging cultures*: Advocates and technologists need to learn enough about each other's motivations and context to make collaboration fruitful. We have seen this with the grant to the labor rights organization Verité, which struggled to understand how it could share information with outside researchers without violating confidentiality agreements it had made with companies. Only after a technologist took a working vacation inside Verité did they finally feel they could do this. The technologist had to understand the social value of sharing and to discuss exactly what should be shared, and Verité had to adjust its expectations around what the technology could realistically do.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For docket write-ups of these grants, see Appendix D, p. 2-41.

<sup>8</sup> Appendix D, p. 21; reported in interim report discussion.

5. *Total cost of ownership*: Organizations need to understand the real costs of undertaking a data and tech project, from acquiring the data to bringing on skilled staff or contractors to implement it, to technical project management, to ongoing maintenance and data support. This means the organizations need to be trained to manage a technology plan, and that viable local partners in technology for civil society need to be nurtured.
6. *Define a hypothesis*: Projects should be able to test a hypothesis, or a theory of change, through work with technology and data. We must make sure that organizations can define the measure of success in a data for advocacy project at the outset, particularly by defining what advantages they believe the data will bring to their outreach and advocacy strategies. This has been critical for N-MAP, helping them to articulate the place for legal advocacy and video in disability rights work.<sup>9</sup>
7. *Upgrade organizational culture, not just organizational tools*. Ultimately what these projects are trying to achieve is a cultural shift within the organization, one that moves the organization away from the question “how can we use this new tool?” to “how can data that we have or might acquire improve and extend our advocacy work, and that of our larger network?”
8. *Funders are a key element*: As technology becomes more prominent across the NGO sector, funders also need to build their own capacity to make better judgments about technology and data use by their grantees. Every department needs a firm grasp on the criteria for use, security, and funding of technology-oriented projects and to know where to turn for advice before funding technology.

#### IV. OSF’s Contribution

##### A. HRDI’s work through 2013

We recognize that not all human rights advocacy messages are enhanced by data sets. What we have looked for are projects where data would make a difference. We saw this in projects where the goals included:

- Challenging misleading but widely accepted public narratives with evidence (e.g. JumpStart)<sup>10</sup>
- Broadening participation in and support for human rights defense (e.g. Citizen media at the ICC)<sup>11</sup>
- Linking human rights and development more explicitly and concretely (e.g. Skopje project)<sup>12</sup>
- Analyzing human rights research against a geospatial frame (e.g. Property rights)<sup>13</sup>

Under HRDI’s banner, we see three major contributions that OSF has made in both defining and extending the concept of “Data and Advocacy.”

First has been the development of a strategy of **Rebuild, Reuse, and Refine**: rebuild the missing technology infrastructure and patch data management holes in key partners and institutions, including fixed assets, software, and out-of-date databases; help organizations reuse organized data creatively to extend its impact, and bring in new technologies to achieve advocacy goals based on the data they had collected in the course of their work; and refine their strategies once they have experimented with

***Rebuild, reuse, refine: an example***

*A Lawyers’ Association collects intake data on walk-in legal aid clients. The group claims that the free legal aid provided by the state does not address the majority of human rights violations occurring in administrative law. Rebuilding the group’s infrastructure would digitize the intake information and examine underlying barriers to collection and storage. Reuse would assist the group to use convenience data it already produces in creative ways to illustrate the issue for different audiences. Refining might mean that the group decides to target local officials in the most corrupt districts, and therefore begins to collect location and demographic data, using that to advocate for accountability on interventions made by IFI funding for local governance.*

<sup>9</sup> Appendix D, p. 35, and ongoing discussions with the Human Rights Initiative’s Equality fund.

<sup>10</sup> Appendix D, p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Appendix D, p. 38 (Witness, Inc. grant).

<sup>12</sup> Appendix D, p. 49 (Reactor grant).

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix C, Snapshot for sub-portfolio on Expropriations and Evictions, and Appendix D, p. 42-51.



new technologies for outreach and research, to open new channels for advocacy, new targets, and to enter new policy spaces.

Second, we have socialized the idea of “rebuild” with other rights-focused funders, both within OSF and externally. Given HRDI’s relatively small budget, we have been pleased to see both demand – requests from rights organizations for support for their technology infrastructure – and supply increase. Most notably, the Oak Foundation supported HURIDOCS to continue working with key grantees in Russia, an early HRDI priority. Others, such as the MacArthur Foundation, developed similar approaches to upgrading their own grantees. Local OSF foundations (Armenia and Georgia), and both thematic and regional programs (HRI, Afghanistan/Pakistan, and the Arab Regional Office), have co-funded with us, and then taken forward their own versions of this work. At this point, the very small number of intermediary organizations specialized in doing this kind of work is preventing larger-scale projects. A key success, we feel, is the shift in discourse with other funders about the reason behind this kind of project funding; where in 2009 the rationale for funding a “rebuild” project tended to focus on administrative tidiness, it is now much more likely to be discussed in terms of future advocacy potential, or shared data projects (for instance, [www.data.ge](http://www.data.ge), a multi-organizational FOI portal in Georgia).<sup>14</sup>

Our third major contribution is the way which we work with technical intermediaries, which we believe will help to shape this field going forward. HRDI’s cadre of intermediaries focus on different areas of data use. These groups assist advocacy organizations with interventions along the pipeline of data from collection to communication, providing technical assistance, advocacy development, or message amplification. Though diverse, these organizations and projects must share the following two underlying goals: first, advocacy groups’ collaboration with an intermediary should bring rapid results demonstrating the value of the new approach. At the same time, we ask these projects to concentrate on creating “affordances” – the learning and development that empower beneficiary organizations to develop their own technology strategy, manage their own security, and establish the organizational behavior change to modernize in a way that is appropriate to their organizational profile and desires.

We ask intermediaries to concentrate on building the local capacity in advocacy organizations – not to begin creating their own technology, but to know how to manage their own technology plan in the future in the service of data collection. We see this in juxtaposition to other efforts that drop in technologists for one-off advocacy efforts, or that focus on tools to the exclusion of strategy. Ours is a slow-burning approach that meshes the goals of sustained movement building with technology adoption, making it accessible for non-technical but strong advocacy groups.

## **B. Our plan going forward: the Data for Advocacy Concept**

Just as accessible technology designed with the non-profit sector in mind does not necessarily translate into better advocacy outcomes, neither does the presence of data, either gathered by organizations or other sources, necessarily strengthen advocacy. The mere presence of data masks deeper questions about the quality and relevance of data collected and its strategic and responsible use by advocates involved.<sup>15</sup> Civil society organizations need to develop the relevant data analysis and aggregation skills so that they can enter into these debates from a position of confidence, developing arguments based on credible data from multiple fields. Our objective is to understand when it is most useful for an organization to take on a data for advocacy project.

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<sup>14</sup> Appendix D, p. 10 (allotted under HURIDOCS grant Armenia 2; supplemented by OSGF allocation).

<sup>15</sup> For further exploration of this idea, see Jonathan Gray, “What Data Can and Cannot Do,” *The Guardian*, May 31, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/may/31/data-journalism-focused-critical>. Also included in Appendix E.

Because data projects come with their own hazards – they are expensive and time-consuming and they put the organization’s credibility on the line– we need to be able to articulate the pros and cons of working with data in various environments, with illustrative case studies, in order to make recommendations to other organizations and to other parts of the Open Society Foundations. Our work over the coming year will seek to understand the following: what is the context that encourages us to recommend a data-focused approach for an advocacy project? What fields and conditions make data use and collaboration among advocacy organizations a good choice and a good investment?

Our work in **data-rich approaches to advocacy** starts with two areas where sophisticated use of data can be a game changer: property rights in state abuse of expropriation, and private financial influence in the public sphere. We have chosen these because in both instances, a mixture of innovative domestic projects and international work as well as a startling amount of visual and analytical data is available and underutilized. Additionally, the issues appeal to broad constituencies disassociated from the transparency and human rights sectors that can be brought together via data sharing to look at public policy from multiple angles.

*Expropriation of property and evictions of people from their homes and land* is a byproduct of development from which the human rights argument is often sidelined or disregarded. Actions taken by the state when deploying this power reveal the depth of a state’s commitment to human rights, and human rights organizations have seized on the issue of expropriation as one which crystalizes their message for a large constituency. It is easily grasped in a global rights framework as well as on an individual level, and disproportionately impacts the politically powerless. Organizations working on the issue are driven to expand both their capacity to deal with new forms of data (mapping, architectural, and financial) and their partnerships. Dynamic expropriation campaigns bring together transparency advocates, urban planners interested in participatory processes, human rights advocates who witness rights abuse, and historical preservation and community groups. These groups access different levers of power, but are often not in tandem with each other. Legal and advocacy challenges to illegal evictions and expropriations are fragmented, and often rest on a group’s ability to handle large amounts of complicated information. Investments in groups that want to use data analysis may provide greater insight into the root of this state infringement of citizens’ rights.

This set of projects will take forward the small investments made in 2012-2013 and seek to build campaign efforts in support of a primary unifying message: **free, prior and informed consent** to the expropriation and development plans. An internal goal of the work is to inform our understanding of how different actors can be supported to leverage reform with international financial institutions, multi-national corporations, and other players in the development sector that are difficult to penetrate via rights arguments. Appendix C contains a snapshot of grants in this sub-portfolio.

By researching and supporting data-rich projects that tackle *private financial influence in the public sphere*, this concept will examine the underlying questions about the utility of data streams and tools in tracking the flow of money as it shapes political space. Beginning with a critical look at the concept and ecosystem surrounding three national-level online anti-corruption projects (ahalo.net in Hungary; Poderopedia in Chile; DataNest in Slovakia) that bring together multiple data streams to expose personal influence in public affairs, we hope to be able to better understand how data enhances (or undermines) accountability advocacy.

This set of projects is not as far along as the expropriations work. 2014 will begin with coordination among foundation partners, particularly with the Fiscal Governance Program at OSF and the Follow the Money Project at Omidyar, discussions with key grantees Sunlight Foundation and Global Integrity, and definition of research questions.

As both these lines of work unfold, we expect to draw some lessons to evaluate what kind of data it can take to reach a new audience with human rights advocacy; what data can create new momentum in an existing field; and to understand when data design for advocacy has an impact, and when it is merely cosmetic. We expect to make grants under this concept targeting those organizations that are ready to push their work with data forward.

To ensure a diverse set of outcomes, we will look for a balance among four categories:

- *Demonstration grants* show the value of evidence and data rich approach
- *Participation grants* show how policy work does not need to be restricted to elites
- *Transformation grants* let key existing partners change behavior via work with data
- *Evaluation grants* create research or other actions to test the impact of data contribution to social change outcomes.

We will conduct this work via collaboration with core partners in OSF, including the Human Rights Initiative and the Fiscal Governance Program.

### **Questions and issues related to this portfolio:**

1. How can we create better research and learning structures for this initiative? Is there a role for more formal experiments? What constitutes meaningful evidence in the data for advocacy context?
2. When OSF is supporting a project that relies, in some way, on data sources, what is the protocol for bringing in (potentially expensive) expertise, including database designers, data modelers, and data scientists?
3. When does it make sense to encourage a group of organizations to invest jointly in data repositories toward a shared goal? What are the best practices for doing this?
4. What are the privacy and ethical frameworks that data advocacy projects should follow?
5. How should the work on expropriation fit in with the shared framework on food security in Africa?
6. How do we help organizations make better use of data to target new audiences?
7. How do we choose projects that strike at the heart of “free and informed consent,” and do we believe that “informed consent” should include an understanding of the ramifications of expropriation?
8. Under HRDI we have supported an “incubator” environment in the Caucasus. However, our concept is organized around thematic work. One way we might organize an expansion of this work in the future is to focus on geographies rather than themes. What are the advantages and disadvantages of either approach?

## Appendix A: Hypotheses and Key Assumptions of the Human Rights Data Initiative, November 2012

The purpose of this memo is to put forward key questions on the goals and purpose of the Initiative as well as the assumptions and ideas the funding seeks to explore.

### **Key assumptions tested**

In a field that is changing as quickly as technology for human rights, funders can easily fall into a pattern of funding broad upgrades of equipment or materials, or the development of a better-looking website, without defining a greater goal for the transformative potential of technology. In the mix of a large core funding proposal, technology can become transactional<sup>16</sup> unless it can be understood in terms of some of the following ideas.

### ***Data Use by Existing Human Rights and Transparency Groups***

**The long-established cycle of advocacy traditionally followed by NGOs may need help: event, press release, advocacy and report can be amplified by sustained data work.** Human rights NGOs can greatly increase the effectiveness of their monitoring and advocacy by becoming more sophisticated in the way they work with data: specifically, how they collect data, work with it (collating, aggregating, analyzing, mashing up, and above all, re-using and re-purposing older data) and communicate it (using narrative reports, storytelling, data visualization, and data in combination with photographs and video).

- **N-MAP** works with existing organizations' clients and lawyers to match litigation work with a visual advocacy medium, breathing new life into hard-to-understand litigation campaigns by working with NGOs to create video, animation, and targeted advocacy so people can feel the impact in their own lives.

**Use of new technologies by established human rights organizations heightens the possibility that a campaign will have impact – but you have to solve their problems first.** Though technology organizations often prefer those activists who pro-actively adopt new technologies and data-informed advocacy approaches, focusing on the barriers to technology adoption within key human rights institutions is an underexplored avenue. Organizations with high-level access and a national megaphone are slow to choose and use technology, and need more concentrated assistance to pick it up. Additionally, creating a critical mass of implemented projects in a country may make a difference in the overall networked public sphere.

- **HURIDOCs** works with partners of the Law Programs and HRGGP in Armenia, Georgia, Russia, and the MENA region, to identify bottlenecks in data management that prevent them from adopting new technology.

### ***Data as an advocacy tool: driving collaboration and strengthening impact***

**Opening up silos between members of the human rights community through sharing of open, reusable and actionable data can make the whole greater than the sum of its individual parts.** Organizations are focused on their issues, and when they come together in coalitions, tend to share conclusions and positions, rather than raw data for reuse. New practices and baseline assumptions in data-sharing between organizations could help to open up these silos and build collaborations that would increase the collective impact of networked advocacy coalitions. Better tools and tactics for data sharing can be a powerful way to begin addressing this problem.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, equipment purchase is generally categorized as an admin expense in a budget, rather than an element in an information project.

- The **Opendata.ge** initiative seeks to centralize FOI-requested data among NGOs in Georgia. As groups share information, they find that different groups get different responses, and can research their own issues while establishing data campaigns.
- **Verité** and the **Afghanistan Documentation Project** seek to re-organize internal data, while also opening some data to the world for re-use. With these two projects, IP hopes to enrich its understanding of what data sharing and re-use is possible in the human rights field, which then can feed back into tools development if needed.

**Sometimes a new advocacy vector or law can be implemented by transforming collection of data, and supporting efforts to make that happen can be decisive.** As transparency organizations know well, financial institutions need hard data. The same is true for many human rights organizations' targets. As new human rights mechanisms arise, how can technology support human rights organizations to add incrementally to their research and ability to respond?

- The **Leahy Law** can take US funding away from training foreign military accused of rights violations, but only if the DRL has specific information that is not normally collected by organizations. Efforts to convince human rights NGOs to collect those granular pieces of data should be accompanied by a technology plan to ease its use from the start – especially where the competitor for information is a five-minute Google search.

**Issues that cross-cut transparency and human rights are generally high in data needs, and many are important to the public. Technology can help these groups to share goals.** Multiple programs within OSF often come to work on the same issue without alignment. Issues emerge naturally from accountability, human rights, and technology partners, and one issue can have multiple angles.

- The **HRDI Evictions Research** shows that campaigns on human rights, transparency, historical preservation, and public access to decision-making lack coordination. In networking these efforts, technology can be a game-changer. As this project unfolds, we expect not only to learn more about the abuse of eminent domain and urban planning, but also draw some lessons for broader evaluation of what kind of data it can take to reach a new audience with human rights advocacy; what data can create new momentum in an existing field; and to understand when data design for advocacy has an impact, and when it is really only cosmetic.

**The project also seeks to address the following questions:**

1. When high-value data sets are available, what are the most effective ways of using them? What are the best case scenarios?
2. How do we measure the impact of exposure to tech intermediaries in transforming human rights movement? How can we verify our belief that long-term work with technology intermediaries is more impactful than short term drop-in trainings?
3. How do we create opportunities for individuals who, given the chance, would transform an established organization
4. Under what conditions does a new technology or tool change organizational culture?

## Appendix B: Snapshot of sample of grants in this portfolio

Data for Advocacy Grants: Current and Past Relevant Grants						
	Group Name	Project Title	Country	Amount	Start Date	End Date
<b>Past Grants</b>	Mother's Right Foundation	Modernization Project	Russia	53,365	3/1/2010	5/31/2010
	Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center	Monitoring of Urban Development in Yerevan City	Armenia	50,000	3/1/2010	9/30/2011
	Southeast Asia Centre for E-media (SEACem) – Regional	Asian Human Rights Monitoring	Asia regional	150,000	6/1/2010	5/31/2011
	Analitika - Center for Social Research (Bosnia and Herzegovina)	My Place (Moje Mjesto): Local Governance Data Reform Project	BiH	24,955	9/1/2010	8/30/2011
	JumpStart Georgia	Open Taps/Georgia	Georgia	25,000	10/11/2010	11/30/2011
	Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems	Information Systems Interventions: Armenia 1	Armenia	99,840	10/15/2010	3/15/2011
	Network for Human Rights Documentation Burma (ND-Burma)	Human Rights Database of Burma/Phase II	Burma	73,000	1/1/2011	12/31/2011
	Center for Security Studies (CSS) - Bosnia and Herzegovina	Armed Violence and Injury Monitoring System/Crime Observatories	BiH	24,940	11/1/2011	4/30/2013
	Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems	Information Systems Interventions: Armenia 2	Armenia	98,946	11/1/2011	8/11/2012
	Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems	A Yerevan Story: Digitizing and Archiving Photos of Yerevan	Armenia	40,760	11/1/2011	5/31/2012
	Center for Economic Analyses	Enhancing Evidence Based Advocacy for the Budget of Macedonia	Macedonia	22,800	12/15/2011	12/15/2012
	Institute Alternative	Municipal Budget Monitoring/Montenegro	Montenegro	19,050	12/15/2011	7/31/2013
	Think Tank Populari	The Parliament Searchlight	BiH	23,920	12/15/2011	12/15/2012
	Reactor - Research in Action	Public Spaces in Skopje/Transformation, Urbanization and Misuse in Macedonia	Macedonia	25,000	12/20/2011	12/20/2012
<b>Present Grants</b>	Open Knowledge Foundation	CSOs and Spending Data	Global	48,050	12/31/2011	4/30/2013
	New Media Advocacy Project Inc.	New Media Strategies for Human Rights	Caucasus	100,000	1/1/2012	1/1/2013

		Advocacy in Armenia and Georgia	regional			
	JumpStart Georgia	Visualizing the News in Georgia	Georgia	65,544	7/15/2012	11/15/2013
	American University	Afghanistan Documentation Project	Afghanistan	90,000	12/15/2012	12/14/2013
	Verité, Inc.	Creation of Verité's Knowledge Management Database	Global	75,000	12/15/2012	12/15/2013
	New Media Advocacy Project Inc.	New Media Strategies for Human Rights Advocacy Georgia and Armenia	Caucasus regional	115,000	1/1/2013	12/31/2013
	Vjetrenjaca, udruga za promicanje prava na pristup informacijama	Creating open data, open governance, data transparency blog/Croatia	Croatia	40,000	3/1/2013	9/30/2013
	Fair Play Alliance	Capacity Building and Strategic Planning of Technology Driven Projects	Slovakia	29,898	1/1/2014	2/28/2015

Data for Advocacy Grants: Transitional grants representing a mixture of field and concept					
Group Name	Project Title	Country	Amount	Start Date	End Date
JumpStart Georgia	Visualizing for Data-Driven Advocacy	Georgia	65,000	11/1/2013	10/31/2014
The Engine Room Foundation	Responsible Data Forum/2014	Global	48,830	12/31/2013	5/1/2013
Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems	Core Support and Russia and Ukraine Regional Support	Global	190,000	10/1/2011	10/31/2013
New Media Advocacy Project Inc.	New Media Advocacy Project Core Grant 2014	Global	250,000	1/1/2014	12/31/2014
Witness Inc.	Enhancing Citizen Media as Evidence	Global	100,000	7/1/2013	6/30/2014

## Appendix C: Snapshot for sub-portfolio on Expropriations and Evictions

Expropriations and Evictions					
	Group name	Project title	Location	URL	Summary
Present Grants	Open Society Georgia Foundation	Property Rights Coalition	Georgia	<a href="http://www.osgf.ge">www.osgf.ge</a>	Unite the work of the coalition (Green Alternative, Transparency International Georgia, GYLA, Georgian Regional Media Association) in this field to advocate and track violations
	Public Association for Assistance to Free Economy	Property Rights are Inviolable!	Azerbaijan	<a href="http://freeeconomy.az">freeeconomy.az</a>	Promote reform of government policies to protect property rights in Azerbaijan, advocacy with parliament, litigation at ECHR
	New Media Advocacy Project	New Media Strategies for Human Rights Advocacy in Georgia and Armenia	Georgia, Armenia	<a href="http://newmediaadvocacy.org">newmediaadvocacy.org</a>	Provide advocacy intermediary services for a range of issues, including to Property Rights Coalition
	Reactor	Public Spaces in Skopje	Macedonia	<a href="http://reactor.org.mk">reactor.org.mk</a>	Support access to info and citizen involvement in the urban planning process in Skopje.
Past Grants	Green Alternative	Advocacy for Social and Environmental Justice During the State Property Privatization	Georgia	<a href="http://greenalt.org">greenalt.org</a>	Monitor privatization process, promote public access to information
	HURIDOCS	Information Systems Interventions – Armenia 2	Armenia	<a href="http://huridocs.org">huridocs.org</a>	Assist photographer in preserving documentary archive of destroyed buildings in Yerevan
Possible Future Grants	WITNESS	(property rights advocacy)	Brazil or Southeast Asia	<a href="http://witness.org">witness.org</a>	Support WITNESS' ongoing campaign work with local advocacy groups
	(TBD)	Beyond Stop Evictions partnerships	Global	n/a	Open call for proposals in this space
	Sahmakum Teang Tnaut	(combating government corruption)	Cambodia	<a href="http://teangtnaut.org">teangtnaut.org</a>	Partnership with Southeast Asia Initiative
	Open Development Network	(Mekong Delta work)	Vietnam		Partnership with Southeast Asia Initiative
	Free Economy	Property Right is Inviolable! (continuation)	Azerbaijan	<a href="http://freeeconomy.az">freeeconomy.az</a>	Continuation grant (see above)
	International Accountability Project	Global Policy Advocacy	Global	<a href="http://accountabilityproject.org">accountabilityproject.org</a>	Support coalition of domestic advocates on property rights to form global movement reforming World Bank policies



**Appendix D: Dockets for Portfolio Review of Data for Advocacy [included separately]**

## Appendix E: Supplementary Reading

Below are three articles presented to the portfolio review Data for Advocacy as supplementary reading.

### 1. What Data Can and Cannot Do

Jonathan Gray, Open Knowledge Foundation

<http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/may/31/data-journalism-focused-critical>

May 31, 2012

**Jonathan Gray** from the [Open Knowledge Foundation](#) argues that aspiring data journalists and civic data hackers should strive to cut back on data-driven hype and to cultivate a more critical literacy towards their subject matter

In the early days of photography there was a great deal of optimism around its potential to present the public with an accurate, objective picture of the world. In the 19th century pioneering photographers (later to be called photojournalists) were heralded for their unprecedented documentary depictions of war scenes in Mexico, Crimea and across the US. Over a century and a half later – after decades of advertising, propaganda, and PR, compositing, enhancement and outright manipulation – we are more cautious about seeing photographs as impartial representations of reality. Photography has lost its privileged position in relation to truth. Photographs are just a part of the universe of evidence that must be weighed up, analysed, and critically evaluated by the journalist, the analyst, the scholar, the critic, and the reader.

The current wave of excitement about data, data technologies and all things data-driven might lead one to suspect that this machine-readable, structured stuff is a special case. The zeitgeist at times bears an uncannily resemblance to the optimism of a loose-knit group of scientists, social scientists, and philosophers at the start of the 20th century, who thought they could eschew value-laden narratives for an objective, fact-driven model of the world. "Facts are sacred" says the Guardian Datablog and "for a fact-based worldview" says Gapminder. The thought of tethering our reportage, analyses and reflection to chunks of data-given truth is certainly consoling. But the notion that data gives us special direct access to the way things are is – for the most part – a chimera.

Data can be an immensely powerful asset, if used in the right way. But as users and advocates of this potent and intoxicating stuff we should strive to keep our expectations of it proportional to the opportunity it represents. We should strive to cultivate a critical literacy with respect to our subject matter. While we can't expect to acquire the acumen or fluency of an experienced statistician or veteran investigative reporter overnight, we can at least try to keep various data-driven myths from the door. To that end, here are a few reminders for lovers of data:

- **Data is not a force unto itself.** Data clearly does not literally create value or change in the world by itself. We talk of data changing the world metonymically – in more or less the same way that we talk of the print press changing the world. Databases do not knock on doors, make phonecalls, push for institutional reform, create new services for citizens, or educate the masses about the inner workings of the labyrinthine bureaucracies that surround us. The value that data can potentially deliver to society is to be realised by human beings who use data to do useful things. The value of these things is the result of the ingenuity, competence and (perhaps above all) hard work of human beings, not something that follows automatically from the mere presence and availability of datasets over the web in a form which permits their reuse.
- **Data is not a perfect reflection of the world.** Public datasets (unsurprisingly) do not give us perfect information about the world. They are representations of the world gathered, generated, selected, arranged, filtered, collated, analysed and corrected for particular purposes – purposes as diverse as public sector accounting, traffic control, weather prediction, urban planning, and policy evaluation. Data is often incomplete, imperfect, inaccurate or outdated. It is more like a shadow cast on the wall, generated by fallible human beings, refracted through layers of bureaucracy and official process. Despite this partiality and imperfection, data generated by public bodies can be the best source of information we have on a given topic and can be augmented with other data sources, documents and external expertise. Rather than taking them at face value or as gospel, datasets

may often serve as an indicative springboard, a starting point or a supplementary source for understanding a topic.

- **Data does not speak for itself.** Sometimes items in a database will stand by themselves, and do not require additional context or documentation to help us interpret them – for example, when we consult transport timetables to find out when the next train leaves. But often data will require further research and analysis in order to make sense of it. In many ways official datasets resemble official texts: we need to learn how to read and interpret them critically, to read between the lines, to notice what is absent or omitted, to understand the gravity and implications of different figures, and so on. We should not imagine that anyone can easily understand any dataset, any more than we would think that anyone can easily read any policy document or academic article.
- **Data is not power.** Data may enable more people to scrutinise official activities and transactions through more detailed, data-driven reportage. In principle it might help more people participate in the formulation of more evidence based policy proposals. But the democratisation of information is different from the democratisation of power. Knowing that something is wrong or that there is a better way of doing things is not the same thing as being in a position to fix things or to affect change. For better or for worse flawless arguments and impeccable evidence are usually not sufficient in themselves to affect reform. If you want to change laws, policies or practices it usually helps to have things like implacable advocacy, influential or high profile supporters, positive press attention, hours of hard graft, bucketloads of cash and so on. Being able to see what happens in the corridors of power through public datasets does not mean you can waltz down them and move the furniture around. Open information about government is not the same as open government, participatory government or good government.
- **Interpreting data is not easy.** Furthermore there is a tendency to think that the widespread availability of data and data tools represent a democratisation of the analysis and interpretation of data. With the right tools and techniques, anyone can understand the contents of a dataset, right? Here it is important to distinguish between different orders of activity: while it is easier than ever before to do things with data on computers and on the web (scrape it, visualise it, publish it), this does not necessarily entail that it is easier to know what a given dataset means. Revolutionary content management systems that enable us to search and browse legal documents don't mean that it is easier for us to interpret the law. In this sense it isn't any easier to be a good data journalist than it is to be a good journalist, a good analyst, a good interpreter. Creating a good piece of [data journalism](#) or a good data-driven app is often more like an art than a science. Like photography, it involves selection, filtering, framing, composition and emphasis. It involves making sources sing and pursuing truth – and truth often doesn't come easily. Amid all of the services and widgets, libraries and plugins, talks and tutorials, there is no sure-fire technique to doing it well.

I'm sure as time goes by we'll have a more balanced, critical appreciation of the value of data, and its role within our information environment. As former BBC journalist Michael Blastland [writes](#) in the recently published [Data Journalism Handbook](#), "we need to be neither cynical nor naive, but alert".

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## 2. Forget Big Data, Small Data is the Real Revolution

Rufus Pollock

<http://blog.okfn.org/2013/04/22/forget-big-data-small-data-is-the-real-revolution/>

April 22, 2013

There is a lot of talk about “big data” at the moment. For example, this is Big Data Week, which will see events about big data in dozens of cities around the world. But the discussions around big data miss a much bigger and more important picture: the *real* opportunity is not big data, but small data. Not centralized “big iron”, but decentralized data wrangling. Not “one ring to rule them all” but “small pieces loosely joined”.

Big data smacks of the centralization fads we've seen in each computing era. The thought that ‘hey there's more data than we can process!’ (something which is no doubt always true year-on-year since computing began) is dressed up as the latest trend with associated technology must-haves.

Meanwhile we risk overlooking the much more important story here, the *real revolution*, which is the **mass democratisation** of the means of access, storage and processing of data. This story isn't about large organisations running parallel software on tens of thousand of servers, but about more people than ever being able to collaborate effectively around a **distributed** ecosystem of information, an ecosystem of **small data**.

Just as we now find it ludicrous to talk of “big software” – as if size in itself were a measure of value – we should, and will one day, find it equally odd to talk of “big data”. **Size in itself doesn't matter** – what matters is having the data, of whatever size, that helps us solve a problem or address the question we have.

For many problems and questions, small data in itself is enough. The data on my household energy use, the times of local buses, government spending – these are all small data. Everything processed in Excel is small data. When [Hans Rosling shows us how to understand our world through population change or literacy](#) he's doing it with small data.

And when we want to **scale up** the way to do that is through **componentized small data**: by creating and integrating **small data “packages”** not building **big data monoliths**, by **partitioning problems in a way that works across people and organizations**, **not** through creating **massive centralized silos**.

This next decade belongs to **distributed models not centralized ones**, to **collaboration not control**, and to **small data not big data**.

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*The following article is included as an illustration of the complexity of the data and data analysis a human rights organization might need to undertake to make an advocacy case. Our grantee, Verité (see Appendix D, p.21), has been involved in this work:*

Like most retail brands, American agencies typically do not order clothes directly from factories. They rely on contractors. This makes it challenging for agencies to track their global supply chain, with layers of middlemen, lax oversight by other governments, few of their own inspectors overseas and little means of policing factories that farm out work to other plants without the clients' knowledge. When retailers, labor groups or others inspect these factories, the audits often understate problems because managers regularly coach workers and doctor records.

### **3. U.S. Flouts Its Own Advice in Procuring Overseas Clothing**

Ian Urbina

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/23/world/americas/buying-overseas-clothing-us-flouts-its-own-advice.html>

December 22, 2013

WASHINGTON — One of the world's biggest clothing buyers, the United States government spends more than \$1.5 billion a year at factories overseas, acquiring everything from the royal blue shirts worn by airport security workers to the olive button-downs required for forest rangers and the camouflage pants sold to troops on military bases.

But even though the Obama administration has called on Western buyers to use their purchasing power to push for improved industry working conditions after several workplace disasters over the last 14 months, the American government has done little to adjust its own shopping habits.

Labor Department officials say that federal agencies have “zero tolerance” for using overseas plants that break local laws, but American government suppliers in countries including Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, Pakistan and Vietnam show a pattern of legal violations and harsh working conditions, according to audits and interviews at factories. Among them: padlocked fire exits, buildings at risk of collapse, falsified wage records and repeated hand punctures from sewing needles when workers were pushed to hurry up.

In Bangladesh, shirts with Marine Corps logos sold in military stores were made at DK Knitwear, where child laborers made up a third of the work force, according to a 2010 audit that led some vendors to cut ties with the plant. Managers punched workers for missed production quotas, and the plant had no functioning alarm system despite previous fires, auditors said. Many of the problems remain, according to another audit this year and recent interviews with workers.

In Chiang Mai, Thailand, employees at the Georgie & Lou factory, which makes clothing sold by the Smithsonian Institution, said they were illegally docked over 5 percent of their roughly \$10-per-day wage for any clothing item with a mistake. They also described physical harassment by factory managers and cameras monitoring workers even in bathrooms.

At Zongtex Garment Manufacturing in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, which makes clothes sold by the Army and Air Force, an audit conducted this year found nearly two dozen under-age workers, some as young as 15. Several of them described in interviews with The New York Times how they were instructed to hide from inspectors.

“Sometimes people soil themselves at their sewing machines,” one worker said, because of restrictions on bathroom breaks.

Federal agencies rarely know what factories make their clothes, much less require audits of them, according to interviews with procurement officials and industry experts. The agencies, they added, exert less oversight of foreign suppliers than many retailers do. And there is no law prohibiting the federal government from buying clothes produced overseas under unsafe or abusive conditions.

“It doesn’t exist for the exact same reason that American consumers still buy from sweatshops,” said Daniel Gordon, a former top federal procurement official who now works at George Washington University Law School. “The government cares most about getting the best price.”

Frank Benenati, a spokesman for the Office of Management and Budget, which oversees much of federal procurement policy, said the administration has made progress in improving oversight, including an executive order last year tightening rules against federal suppliers using factories that rely on debt bondage or other forms of forced labor.

“The administration is committed to ensuring that our government is doing business only with contractors who place a premium on integrity and good business ethics,” he said.

Labor and State Department officials have encouraged retailers to participate in strengthening rules on factory conditions in Bangladesh — home to one of the largest and most dangerous garment industries. But defense officials this month helped kill a legislative measure that would have required military stores, which last year made more than \$485 million in profit, to comply with such rules because they said the \$500,000 annual cost was too expensive.

Federal spending on garments overseas does not reach that of Walmart, the world’s biggest merchandiser, which spends more than \$1 billion a year just in Bangladesh, or Zara, the Spanish apparel seller, but it still is in a top tier that includes H & M, the trendy fashion business based in Sweden, Eddie Bauer and Lands’ End, sellers of outerwear and other clothing.

Like most retail brands, American agencies typically do not order clothes directly from factories. They rely on contractors. This makes it challenging for agencies to track their global supply chain, with layers of middlemen, lax oversight by other governments, few of their own inspectors overseas and little means of policing factories that farm out work to other plants without the clients’ knowledge. When retailers, labor groups or others inspect these factories, the audits often understate problems because managers regularly coach workers and doctor records.

The United States government, though, faces special pressures. Its record on garment contracting demonstrates the tensions between its low-bid procurement practices and high-road policy objectives on labor and human rights issues.

The Obama administration, for example, has favored free-trade agreements to spur development in poor countries by cultivating low-skill, low-overhead jobs like those in the cut-and-sew industry. The removal of trade barriers has also driven prices down by making it easier for retailers to decamp from one country to the next in the hunt for cheap labor. Most economists say that these savings have directly benefited consumers, including institutional buyers like the American government. But free-trade zones often lack effective methods for ensuring compliance with local labor laws, and sometimes accelerate a race to the bottom in terms of wages.

### **Unsafe and Repressive**

Along a dirt road in Gazipur, about 25 miles north of the Bangladeshi capital, riot police fired tear gas shells, rubber bullets and sound grenades in a fierce clash with garment workers last month, sending scores to the hospital. The protesters demanding better conditions included some from a factory called V & R Fashions. In July, auditors rated that factory as “needs improvement” because workers’ pay was illegally docked for minor infractions and the building was unsafe, illegally constructed and not intended for industrial use.

Like dozens of other factories in the area, V & R makes clothes for the American government, which is constantly prowling for the best deals. In interviews, workers at a half-dozen of these suppliers described the effect of such cost pressures.

At Manta Apparels, for example, which makes uniforms for the General Services Administration, employees said beatings are common and fire exits are kept chained except when auditors visit. The local press has described Manta as one of the most repressive factories in the country. A top labor advocate, Aminul Islam, was organizing there in 2010 when he was first arrested by the police and tortured. In April 2012, [he was found dead](#), a hole drilled below his right knee and his ankles crushed.

Several miles from Manta, 40 women from another supplier, Coast to Coast, gathered late one night to avoid being seen publicly talking to a reporter. Dressed in burqas, the women said that prices of the clothing they make for sale on American military bases are now so cheap that managers try to save money by pushing them to speed up production. In the rush, workers routinely burn themselves with irons, they said, often requiring hospitalizations.

Work does not stop, they said, when rain pours through a six-foot crack in the ceiling of the top floor of the factory — a repurposed apartment building with two extra floors added illegally to increase capacity. Even after the manager swipes their timecards, they say, he orders them to keep sewing.

While giving a tour of the plant, the manager described the building crack as inconsequential and too expensive to repair. He denied the workers’ other allegations. The owner of Manta declined to comment.

Conditions like those are possible partly because American government agencies usually do not know which factories supply their goods or are reluctant to reveal them. Soon after [a fire killed at least 112 people](#) at the Tazreen Fashions factory in Bangladesh in November 2012, several members of Congress asked various agencies for factory addresses. Of the seven agencies her office contacted, Representative Carolyn Maloney, Democrat of New York, said only the Department of the Interior turned over its list.

Over the summer, military officials told Representative George Miller, Democrat of California, that order forms for apparel with Marine Corps logos had been discovered in Tazreen’s charred remains but that the corps had ties to no other Bangladeshi factories. Several weeks later, the officials said they were mistaken and had discovered a half-dozen or so other factories producing unauthorized Marine Corps apparel. On Sunday, the owners of Tazreen and 11 employees [were charged with culpable homicide](#).

President Obama has long pushed for more transparency in procurement. As a senator, he sponsored legislation in 2006 creating the website USASpending.gov, which open-government advocates say has made it far easier to track federal

contracting. However, procurement experts fault the website for requiring agencies to name their contractors, but not identifying the specific factories doing the work. Some states and cities already require companies to disclose that information before awarding them public contracts, said Bjorn Skorpen Claeson, senior policy analyst at the [International Labor Rights Forum](#).

Federal officials still have to navigate a tangle of rules. Defense officials, for instance, who spend roughly \$2 billion annually on military uniforms, are required by a World War II-era rule called the [Berry Amendment](#) to have most of them made in the United States. In recent years, Congress has pressured defense officials to cut costs on uniforms. Increasingly, the department has turned to federal prisons, where wages are under \$2 per hour. Federal inmates this year stitched more than \$100 million worth of military uniforms.

No sooner had the Transportation Security Administration, or T.S.A., signed [a \\$50 million contract](#) in February for new uniforms for its 50,000 airport security agents and other workers, than the agency was attacked from all sides.

Union officials, opposed to outsourcing work overseas, objected because the Mexican plant making the clothing, VF Imagewear Matamoros, was the same one that had treated uniforms with chemicals that caused rashes in hundreds of T.S.A. agents. Congress called an oversight hearing, where some lawmakers questioned why two-thirds of the uniforms would be made in foreign factories, saying the deal was a missed chance to stimulate domestic job growth. Other lawmakers faulted the agency for spending too much money on clothing, especially on the cusp of a federal budget crisis, no matter where the merchandise was made.

“Bottom line,” John W. Halinski, T.S.A. deputy administrator, told Congress, “we go for the lowest-cost uniform, sir.”

The hunt for lower costs and the expansion of free-trade pacts have meant that more of this work is being done abroad, often in poor countries where the Obama administration is trying to spur competition and development.

In Haiti, for instance, trucks loaded with camouflage pants, shirts and jackets, some of them destined for American military bases, idle in front of a factory called BKI. While the Dominican manager of a garment factory in Codevi says the industry is helping improve lives, a worker says conditions are bad for people like him.

Next year, BKI managers hope to double the amount of camouflage clothing made for the American government, part of a contract worth more than \$30 million between a division of Propper International, a Missouri-based uniform company, and the General Services Administration, which outfits workers for more than a dozen federal agencies.

Three years ago, much of this camouflage clothing was made in Puerto Rico, where workers earned the minimum wage of about \$7.25 an hour. By 2011, many of these jobs moved to a factory in the Dominican Republic called Suprema. Wages there were about 80 cents per hour and unpaid overtime was routine, according to workers in recent interviews and a 2010 audit. Since then, most of these jobs have migrated again, this time to BKI in a Haitian free-trade zone called Codevi. Average hourly wages at BKI are about 8 cents less per hour than those at Suprema, according to workers.

Standing near the factory entrance, several BKI workers said they were proud of the clothes they made for the American government. “We push hard because we know they expect better,” said Rodley Charles, 29, a quality inspector at the factory.

But there is basic math: the average pay of 72 cents per hour (which is illegal and below Haiti’s minimum wage) barely covers food and rent, said Mr. Charles, who has since quit, and two other BKI workers.

These wage pressures may soon intensify. Codevi will soon face new competition from another industrial park called Caracol, which is being built partly with money from the United States Agency for International Development as part of reconstruction efforts after the earthquake of 2010.

American officials predict that Caracol will eventually create 60,000 new jobs. Current wages there? About 57 cents per hour, or roughly 15 cents less than typical wages at Codevi.

## **Big Business**

At a military store in Bethesda, Md., Tori Novo smiled as she looked over a pair of \$19.99 children's cargo pants made in Bangladesh that sell for \$39 in most department stores. The best part of living on base, said Ms. Novo, a 31-year-old Navy recruiter, was "savings like these."

Known as exchanges, these big-box stores on military bases around the world offer a guarantee: to beat or match any price from rivals. That promise puts the exchanges in direct competition with the deep discounts offered by stores like Gap and Target. It also adds to already intense pressure to lower costs by using the cheapest factories, industry analysts say.

These stores, run by the Defense Department, do big business, selling more than \$1 billion a year in apparel alone. Exempt from the Berry Amendment, the exchanges get more than 90 percent of their clothes from factories outside the United States, according to industry estimates. The profits from these tax-free stores mostly go toward entertainment services like golf courses, gyms and bowling alleys on bases.

Though the Government Accountability Office criticized the exchanges over a decade ago for exerting less oversight than private retailers and for failing to independently monitor their overseas suppliers, little has improved.

The Marine Corps and Navy still do not require audits of these factories. The Air Force and Army exchanges do, but the audits can come from retailers, and defense officials fail to do routine spot checks to confirm their accuracy.

For example, Citadel Apparels, a factory in a seven-story building in Gazipur, has cut, stitched and shipped more than 11 metric tons of cotton boys' T-shirts and other clothes for sale at exchanges on Army and Air Force bases in recent months. This summer, lawmakers in Congress asked the Defense Department for proof that Citadel was safe. Defense officials produced an audit conducted for Walmart, another client of the factory, showing that it had an "orange" risk ranking in July 2012, the same high level of alarm that Walmart had given the Tazreen factory before the fatal fire there last year.

While allowing the factory to stay open, the audit offered an alarming statistical snapshot.

Sixty-five percent: number of workers barefoot, some on the building's roof. Fifty percent: workers without legally required masks to protect against cotton dust. Sixteen percent: workers missing time-sheets, a common sign of forced overtime. Most serious infractions: cracks in the walls that could compromise the building, and partly blocked exit routes and stairwells.

By January, Citadel's auditors concluded that most of these dangers had been fixed. However, a half-dozen Citadel workers offered a starkly different picture. Virtually none of the original problems had ever been corrected, they said in interviews last month with The Times.

"We aren't sewing machines," one worker said. "Our lives are worth more."

For now, Bangladesh's garment sector continues to grow, as do purchases from one of its bulk buyers. In the year since Tazreen burned down, American military stores have shipped even more clothes from Bangladesh.

Ian Urbina reported from Bangladesh and Washington. Research was contributed by Susan Beachy in New York, Poypiti Amatatham in Bangkok, Karla Zabludovsky in Mexico City, Malavika Vyawahare in New Delhi and Meridith Kohut in Ouanaminthe, Haiti.