



KIOS
Foundation

Strategic Plan of Action (2021-2024)



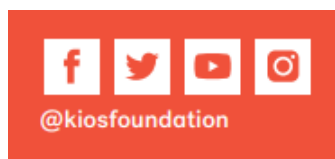
KIOS Foundation

The KIOS Foundation strengthens the realization of human rights by supporting the human rights work of civil society in developing countries. Support is mainly channeled to program countries and regions in East Africa and South Asia.

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Cover: Human Rights Defenders from Kamukunji Paralegal Trust (KAPLET) in Kenya. Photo: Holger Priedemuth

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Megatrends and the KIOS Foundation

Democracy is in turmoil and human rights work is more challenging. Climate change is a big threat to the realization of human rights. Growing inequality affects human rights and lessens the capability of marginalized groups and persons in vulnerable positions to defend their rights. The COVID-19 pandemic affects the human rights situation in many ways. There is an even clearer need for human rights work.

KIOS seeks to promote especially the rights of marginalized groups, women and girls, and those in vulnerable positions, in accordance with the Human Rights Based Approach. Supporting the work of Human Rights Defenders and their safety is still essential in KIOS' work. The local work supported by KIOS aims to bring together Human Rights Defenders to improve networking. As the civic space for human rights organizations shrinks, we will further develop our ability to adapt to and support local civil society initiatives.

The effects of climate change and biodiversity loss on human rights are increasingly in the center of global debate. KIOS follows the global debate and related human rights viewpoints are integrated in the work of the organization. Besides the government, other actors such as corporations must carry their responsibility for human rights. Therefore, KIOS has also started to develop business cooperation to promote human rights.

Our Purpose

KIOS is a partner to Human Rights Defenders in developing countries. KIOS supports and promotes the work of civil society organizations and groups based on local initiatives. KIOS also engages in human rights advocacy work and communications.

KIOS advances the realization of human rights as defined in the human rights treaties and instruments of the United Nations, as well as in regional human rights instruments. Human rights are universal inalienable rights that belong to everyone equally. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also at the core of the work.

Our Principles

Equality

- KIOS' core principle is that everyone has equal worth and rights.
- The starting point for our work is equal agency and partnership. Equality and non-discrimination must be realized also within the partner organizations and in their work.
- Our support strives for equality in the societies where our partners work.

Civil society ownership

- A central feature of KIOS' model is our partners' ownership of their projects or programmes. KIOS functions above all to enable the human rights work done by organizations and communities, as well as to empower our grantees. Local ownership is necessary for the relevance of our grantees' work.

Transformative human rights

- The initiatives we fund aim to change local practices to match international human rights conventions. This also means challenging practices and structures in order to support the rights of those that are discriminated against.
- Important principles for KIOS are: participation and partnership, accountability, defending human rights for everyone, consistency, integrity, truthfulness and commitment to action.
- Perseverance: Cultural change is slow, often happening in pulses when people are ready or when legislation or its interpretation changes through democratic decision-making or court cases. The transformative nature of human rights work is based on the ability of local organizations to carry out human rights-based advocacy work and to initiate processes that bring about change.

Sustainable development

- Our activities and the human rights work we support consider environmental issues and climate change.
- Human rights are essential for the realization of sustainable development. Activities supported by KIOS contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Some of KIOS staff with Kenyan human rights activist Njeri Gateru at the Helsinki Pride Festival in 2019.

Our direction

The work of KIOS aims to ensure that human rights for all people are realized and that states are committed to human rights in their legislation and implementation. At the heart of our work is realizing the rights of the marginalized and excluded groups and persons in vulnerable positions.

KIOS will work to strengthen the human rights movements in the countries and regions we work in, bringing about change in accordance with their own goals. KIOS will develop monitoring and evaluation to differentiate and strengthen good operational models. KIOS will strengthen its international networking, and develop funding and support processes. We will actively highlight the importance of human rights work for sustainable development and for building and maintaining peace. In addition, KIOS will offer human rights expertise for various target groups in Finland.

How we work

Funding and ethical selection process of grantees

Objective: We fund the activities of human rights organizations and movements in accordance with the Foundation's regulations and guidelines, strengthening regional and thematic priorities.

We give direct funding to the human rights work of civil society organizations and movements in developing countries. The starting point is our grantees' ownership of their work.

We identify and select reliable and relevant human rights organizations and movements in developing countries. The funded initiatives and grantees are chosen based on an open call for proposals or by requesting proposals from previously identified human rights actors. All proposals are reviewed based on the same criteria.

Human rights organizations and movements supported by KIOS must respect the principle of the indivisibility of human rights and act within the framework of international and regional human rights treaties. The funded work must aim to promote structural change that strengthens the implementation of this framework.

KIOS takes into account the key guidelines of Finnish and international development policy and the terms of its own funding when selecting partners and supporting their work.

Actively supporting our grantees' work

Objective: Our grantees strengthen their skills and capacity and are better equipped at promoting and defending human rights also in challenging situations.

We will strengthen the capacity of our grantees to make their human rights work more effective and efficient. If necessary, we guide and advise our grantees on e.g. human rights issues and the application of the Human Rights-Based Approach and other guidelines. Special attention will be paid to gender equality and non-discrimination, rights of persons with disabilities and to work against multiple discrimination. In addition, we provide support in project planning, financial and project management, and reporting.

We will keep developing our results-based monitoring, measuring how our program has worked in a human rights-and results-based management model. Result categories include the strengthening of grantees and their networks, increased awareness and capacity of the rights-holders and human rights defenders to assert their rights, more equal functioning of legal mechanisms and increased access to justice, and increased accountability and awareness of those responsible.

We strengthen Human Rights Defenders and their safety by funding safety trainings and other security measures, by developing networking and by advocacy work and communications.

We also support our grantees' networking on national, local and international levels. KIOS aims to organize trainings and seminars together with our grantees in the countries we work in. Local and international networking and peer learning done by our grantees is supported and encouraged.

Promoting the work of human rights defenders in developing countries

Objective: The work of Human Rights Defenders and human rights movements is visible in Finland.

In Finland, we communicate about the work and the results of our grantees. We share information on the human rights situation in the countries we work in, and on the status of Human Rights Defenders and civil society. We bring up the importance of human rights work to sustainable development and peace.

KIOS' thematic and geographical priorities as well as areas for development steer the content and target groups of our communications. Communications will have a separate annual action plan, which will define the messages and target groups in detail.

We aim to raise journalists' awareness of the work done by Human Rights Defenders in developing countries and make it more visible in the Finnish media.

Human rights expertise and advocacy

Objective: We build networks internationally and we are human rights experts for target groups. In 2024, KIOS is the organization in Finland people turn to for information on human rights on a country-level.

We offer our expertise for raising human rights awareness. We make initiatives to decision-makers.

We have discussions with decision-makers and officials about the human rights and civic space issues of the countries and regions we work in, as well as recent human rights issues our grantees have raised.

In addition, we advocate for individual Human Rights Defenders whose situation KIOS has first-hand knowledge on.

We do long-term advocacy work to develop modes of action that support the work of Human Rights Defenders and strengthens civil society, as a part of Finland's and the European Union's foreign and development policy.

KIOS's thematic and geographical priorities as well as development areas guide the content and target groups of our advocacy work. Each year, the office lists current issues and draws up an action plan for our advocacy work. Other important human rights issues that arise during the year will be addressed at the earliest possible stage.



Women Human Rights Defenders in Nepal. Photo: WOREC

What will take us forward

Skills and involvement of staff, board and founding organizations

- A separate development plan is created and implemented for each staff member. The communication skills of the staff are supported by training.
- The way the KIOS Board works is developed so that the expertise of the Board members can be utilized to increase the effectiveness of KIOS. Work methods are developed and the possibilities brought by digitalization to smooth the work flow are mapped out.
- During the strategic period, the participation of the founding organizations will be increased. The founding organizations come together once or twice a year to discuss topical human rights issues.

Developing administration, visible results and broadening the scope of funding sources

- Administrative processes in project application, monitoring and reporting will be made as practical and clear as possible.
- The Foundation's internal structure, division of labor and communication will be developed in line with the changing operating environment, digitalization and other emerging needs. The daily

and long-term well-being of the personnel and the meaningfulness of their work are developed in co-operation and by staff participation.

- Results-based reporting is a key tool for gathering evidence and transparency. Results-based reporting will be developed to cover the criteria for results- and human rights-based work. With the help of reporting, funders, KIOS and grantees get a meaningful monitoring tool for their work.
- KIOS will expand its funding base primarily by looking for institutional funders, such as national development coordination organizations in Europe, the EU and human rights foundations.

Partnerships and cooperation

- KIOS co-operates with other foundations, NGOs, human rights actors and Human Rights Defenders, and seeks synergies in Finland, in the countries and regions we work in and internationally.
- KIOS maintains and strengthens contacts with officials, decision-makers and other target groups identified in the advocacy strategy.

Our strategic choices

Geographical regions

During the strategic period 2021-2024, KIOS will direct its funding mainly to East Africa and South Asia. These regions will be predominant in the communications and advocacy work as well. KIOS has strong expertise in human rights issues and the civil society in these regions. We have three categories for program countries.

A. The bulk of the funding will be allocated to category A countries, which include Kenya and Uganda in East Africa and Nepal and Sri Lanka in South Asia. It also includes work promoting regional cooperation, which can make a significant contribution to the networking, security and expertise of human rights organizations, movements and defenders.

B. In the B category, which receive a smaller amount of funding, are civil society in Rwanda and Burundi in East Africa and Tibetan refugee organizations in South Asia.

C. Countries or actors in category C include those where new areas of activity will be identified 1) if the operating environment for categories A and B becomes so challenging that KIOS support cannot be used meaningfully or adequately, or 2) if there is funding available that is closely related to KIOS' work but is partially or completely outside our program regions.

If necessary, KIOS may consider extending its support to refugee and human rights organizations in Europe if an appropriate funding mechanism is identified.

When choosing a new program country, we will assess the potential influence of KIOS funding. We will look at whether there are suitable organizations and funding needs in the country and see if we can create synergies with other actors. We also take into account the Least Developed Countries (LDC) emphasis and Finland's main bilateral partner countries for development cooperation. The aim is to concentrate grants in a program region so that they form a critical mass, in order to make monitoring and support measures possible. There is a need for human rights funding in countries with various situations, and KIOS also seeks to support organizations in the most challenging countries if the safety of everyone involved can be organized satisfactorily.

Themes

In the strategic period 2021-2024, funding will be allocated specifically to three main themes, which will also be the focus of communications and advocacy work. These themes have emerged based

Democracy and Rule of Law

Rule of law and democratic rights have deteriorated sharply in recent years. Globally and in the countries KIOS works in, the fundamental civil and political rights of people are becoming less and less actual, especially for marginalized groups and persons in vulnerable positions.

In this strategic period, grants are given especially to work that strengthens rule of law and democratic rights, and which follow the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality.

Non-Discrimination and Gender Equality

Projects that promote non-discrimination and gender equality have played a key role in KIOS' program, and both themes have seen a backward development in recent years, especially during the corona pandemic.

During the strategic period 2021-2024, KIOS funds work against discrimination and for equality in the fields of economic, social and cultural as well as civil and political rights. Funding is also given to protect and promote the rights of sexual and gender minorities and persons facing multiple discrimination.

Business and Human Rights

The harmful effects of business, especially on the human rights of groups in vulnerable positions, have become very visible in recent years.

In the strategic period 2021-2024, support will be directed to work dealing with business and human rights, focusing on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons in vulnerable positions.

Cross-cutting themes

Cross-cutting themes which are dominant in the field of sustainable development and human rights are taken into account in all of KIOS' work and the work we fund.

Non-discrimination and gender equality

KIOS will develop its own protocols to take into account the rights of persons with disabilities and discriminated groups in all grants and programs.

The safety of Human Rights Defenders

The security of Human Rights Defenders has suffered in recent years and digitalization is creating additional threats but also opportunities. These must be investigated, and the safety of Human Rights Defenders is a cross-cutting theme in all grants. Digital and security training must be developed and updated.

Environmental and climate issues

Environmental and climate issues are related to corporate responsibility, among other things, and many KIOS grantees are interested in and report on the impact of climate change on human rights. On the other hand, for many grantees the topic is still relatively new. It is important that KIOS strengthens its own expertise in this area, guides, and encourages grantees to consider climate issues in all project and program work.

The criteria for themes that arise locally

Human rights situations are always changing and themes outside KIOS' strategy may become important. KIOS can support such local themes according to the following criteria:

- There is a need and it is recognized by our grantees as a rising human rights issue.
- Effectiveness and human rights relevance are strong.
- Those in vulnerable positions, the marginalized, silenced and excluded groups are important. KIOS follows the 2030 SDG main principle of "Leave no one behind". Situations change depending on the country and region and funding is not restricted to some groups.
- We aim to offer thematic expertise to many grantees in the same region, which is why a local theme should cover multiple grants. This way KIOS can offer better local networking, synergy and trainings.
- In a certain country or region, KIOS can include both difficult themes that are critically looked at by the administration and easier, less sensitive themes. This makes work possible in challenging environments.