On-call Scientists: Pro Bono Scientific and Technical Support for Human Rights

*Example: Partnership with HelpAge*

Theresa Harris
Scientific Responsibility, Human Rights and Law Program
Overview

- What is the AAAS On-call Scientists initiative?
- What types of projects can On-call Scientists volunteers take on?
- How can human rights organizations request assistance?
- Project example: HelpAge report on sexual and gender based violence against older people in situations of prolonged displacement
AAAS is the world’s largest multidisciplinary scientific membership organization

NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC since 1974

Publisher of the *Science* family of journals

AAAS Headquarters, Washington, DC
The SRHRL Program is committed to...

- promoting high standards for the practice of science
- advancing the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress
- engaging scientists in human rights
- enhancing assessment of ethical, legal, and human rights issues related to science and technology
- furthering the use of science and technology in support of human rights
AAAS On-call Scientists

- Answer scientific questions about evidence or methodology
- Provide specialized expertise in investigations
- Design a survey or help with sampling
- Review documents for scientific accuracy
- Provide training for human rights organization staff

... support almost any human rights-related project that requires specialized, technical expertise from a scientist, engineer, or health professional.
AAAS On-call Scientists

- **Volunteers**: Scientists, engineers, and health professionals (M.S. + 2 years experience minimum)
- **Hosts**: Human rights organizations in need of pro bono scientific and technical expertise

![Types of assistance provided: 197 projects](chart)

- In life, physical, social and behavioral sciences:
  - 345 biologists
  - 270 health scientists
  - 240 chemists
  - 239 psychologists
  - 187 engineers
  - 136 forensic scientists
  - 116 environmental scientists
  - 105 social scientists
  - 100 statisticians
  - 81 physicists
  - 38 geologists

- **23**: Other environmental research and analysis
- **24**: Social science research
- **29**: Support for scientists’ human rights
- **34**: Review and analyze environmental impact assessments
- **10**: Other
- **10**: Data management
- **7**: Economic analysis
- **5**: Training for staff
- **23**: Survey methods, design, analysis
- **7**: Health impacts
- **25**: Forensic analysis
Matching Process

- AAAS staff discuss project needs with the requesting human rights organizations.
- AAAS staff assess eligibility of organization.
- Where a match from the roster looks possible, AAAS staff review the volunteer’s CV and interview the prospective volunteer.
- In addition to qualifications, we look for:
  - Science communication skills;
  - Strong endorsement from three references regarding qualifications, experience, integrity, and judgment.
Matching Process

- AAAS shares the volunteer’s contact information, CV, and other relevant information with the human rights organization.
- The final decision regarding a placement rests with the human rights organization.
- We provide project leaders and volunteers with guidelines to support the initial stages of building their partnership.

Project example: HelpAge

Inclusion agenda

Older people

Gender-based violence among older people living in protracted displacement
Project example: HelpAge

Problem

- 65.3 million people displaced worldwide.
- Global data sets do not include older people.
- Gender-based violence surveys are among those that limit data collection to those younger than 50.
- Older people often excluded from humanitarian and development services.
- What is their experience with GBV?
Project example: HelpAge

- Research funded by U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
- HelpAge USA served as project lead
- AAAS coordinated pro bono assistance from team of 18 statisticians, social scientists, psychologists, medical professionals, and computer scientists
- Research carried out in four different countries with local volunteers in each location to train and supervise
Findings

- **Older people experience violence, including GBV, before and during displacement**
  - 2 of 3 experienced violence either before or after displacement
  - 1 of 3 reported violence during displacement
  - 1 of 10 have experienced some type of GBV in their lifetimes
- **Older people experience domestic abuse, including IPV**
  - 35% report DV, abuse, or neglect in their lifetimes
  - 25% respondents reported IPV in their lifetimes
- **Older women experience certain types of GBV at higher rates than men, while older men reported higher rates of conflict-related violence**
  - Women were 2.5 x more likely to experience IPV than men
  - Men reported higher rates of violence typically related to conflicts and displacement
Evidence-based policy advocacy by HelpAge

- Remove age caps on data collection
- Expand existing services to include older people
- Involve older people in design and delivery of services
- Training for service providers to increase awareness
Thank you!

Theresa Harris
Project Director
Scientific Responsibility, Human Rights and Law Program
E. tharris@aaas.org
P. +1 202.326.6796