Terms of Reference (TOR) for Research Consultancy

Project Title: Examining Post-Pandemic Civic Space and Analysing Civil Society Networks

Background: The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action. Drawing on continuing spiritual insights and working with people of many backgrounds, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life that transform social relations and systems. AFSC is building a global program focusing on civic space and intends to undertake research to inform the development of this initiative.

The purpose of this research falls into two parts:

1. The transformation of civic space in the aftermath of the Covid-19: 2022 onwards

This research seeks to analyze the transformation of civic space in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. It aims to measure global civic freedoms before and after the pandemic, assessing how civil society engagement and civic freedoms have been impacted. The research aims to uncover lessons from the pandemic experience and provide recommendations for bolstering civil society's preparedness for future crises. Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, from grassroots groups to global institutions like the UN, the research aims to create a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape of civic space.

2. Analysis of Active Civil Networks and Network Building

Alongside the analysis of civic space, this research examines active civil networks. It evaluates the effectiveness of existing networks, understanding their successes and challenges, and assessing the potential for new network creation. The research aims to support effective network building by providing insights into strategies for sustainability and growth. By offering guidance on resources, funding models, and organizational structures, the research seeks to contribute to the development of resilient and impactful civil networks at various levels – local, regional, and global.

Objectives of the research: The researcher will;

1. Investigate how civil society organizations have been affected by the pandemic, including challenges faced, adaptations made, and opportunities utilized.
2. Examine the recovery process after the pandemic and the lasting effects on civic engagement, activism, and freedoms, considering both positive and negative outcomes.
3. Extract lessons from the pandemic experience to provide recommendations on how civil society can better prepare for future crises, suggesting strategies to maintain and enhance civic freedoms during emergencies.
4. Identify and assess active civil networks globally, evaluating their structures, objectives, successes, and challenges, to understand their contribution to maintaining civic space.
5. Analyze successful approaches to sustaining active civil networks, highlighting strategies, best practices, and lessons learned that can inform the development of new networks or the enhancement of existing ones.
6. Identify common challenges faced by civil networks in maintaining their momentum and relevance, considering factors such as resource limitations, communication barriers, and changing social dynamics.
7. Determine the need for creating new civil networks at various scales (local, regional, global), based on gaps identified in existing networks' coverage and effectiveness.
8. Investigate the potential for sustainable existence of new or enhanced networks, exploring the necessary resources, funding models, organizational structures, and ongoing support mechanisms.
9. Provide actionable recommendations for supporting existing networks and establishing new ones, including guidance on network design, engagement strategies, funding sources, and methods for measuring impact.

**Methodology:** Given the complexity of the research objectives and the need to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, a mixed-methods approach would be expected for this research consultancy, such as a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues presented.

**Scope:** The scope of work for this research consultancy encompasses a comprehensive range of activities and deliverables to fulfill the objectives.

**Deliverables:**

A 25-page maximum report, excluding appendices, with 1.5-page executive summary. The report should include:

1. Literature review highlighting key concepts, gaps in knowledge, and relevant studies
2. Data analysis presenting the analysis of civic freedoms and civil society engagement indicators before and after the pandemic, including tables, charts, and statistical findings;
3. Analysis of civil society networks presenting active networks, their structures, challenges, and recommendations for network building
4. Case studies of 1-2 countries detailing the context, impact of the pandemic on civic freedoms and civil society, and the role of civil networks
5. Integrated findings and recommendations

Please note: We propose integrating these points into the report and extend an invitation to the appointed researcher for a collaborative effort in co-creating the content.

**Timeline:** The report is expected to be submitted by 30 September 2023. There may be some back and forth with comments or questions, and a final report will be submitted by 15th October 2023.

**Reporting and Communication:** The consultant will maintain regular communication with the focal contact person from AFSC throughout the research process. Progress updates and draft reports will be submitted for review and feedback as required.

**Consultant profile:**

1. **Research expertise**
   1.1. Advanced degree in a relevant field such as Political Science, International Relations, Social Science, or a related discipline
   1.2. Proven track record in conducting rigorous research, including experience with mixed methods approaches, data collection, analysis, and interpretation
2. **Subject matter knowledge**
   2.1. In-depth understanding of civil society, civic freedoms, and the dynamics of social and political engagement.
3. **Methodological proficiency**
   3.1. Strong skills in both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.
4. **Analytical skills**
   4.1. Ability to critically analyze complex data, identify trends, draw meaningful conclusions, and derive actionable recommendations.
5. **Communication skills**
5.1. Excellent written communication skills to present findings, insights, and recommendations effectively
5.2. Experience in creating clear and concise reports

6. Ethical awareness
   6.1. Strong understanding of ethical considerations in research, particularly when dealing with sensitive data and engaging with diverse stakeholder groups.

7. Cultural sensitivity
   7.1. Cultural awareness and sensitivity, especially when working with stakeholders from different regions and backgrounds.

8. Project and time management skills

**Budget:** 4,500 USD total for the consultancy, with the expectation that the time committed will be at least ten days.

**Confidentiality:** All information and data gathered during the research consultancy will be treated with utmost confidentiality and used solely for the intended purposes.

**Rights and Ownership:** Upon completion, all research findings and materials will be the property of American Friends Service Committee and the consultant shall not use or disclose the findings without prior written consent.

**Submission of Proposals:** Interested consultants should submit their research project proposals, including a cover letter, CV, sample of previous work to TOR@afsc.org by Monday 21st August 2023 at 9am BST. Interviews are planned to be held on 23rd and 25th August. For any questions or clarifications please contact the email provided.