



For Immediate Release

Innovative Lab Launched to Strengthen Human Rights Work

Joint Initiative of Columbia and NYU Law Schools, Human Rights Watch

(New York, February 2, 2016) — A new joint effort will serve as an incubator for innovation in human rights research, the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at NYU School of Law (CHRGJ), Human Rights Watch, and the Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute (HRI) announced today. The [Human Rights Methodology Lab](#) will bring together leading human rights investigators, advocates, and scholars with experts across disciplines to develop new approaches to the investigation of human rights abuses and to propose concrete improvements in advocacy-oriented human rights research.

From the [use of architectural forensics](#) to research attacks in Syria, to [rights-based environmental studies](#) in Papua New Guinea, to a [mixed-methods investigation](#) of how access to water and sanitation effect sexual violence in Haiti, human rights investigations are becoming increasingly sophisticated and interdisciplinary, the groups said. The Methodology Lab will respond to growing demand from human rights advocates to share information about new and innovative techniques and investigation methods, and to collaborate with experts outside the human rights field.

“Rigorous, interdisciplinary methods are essential to making human rights advocacy more effective,” said Margaret Satterthwaite, co-chair and faculty director of the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at NYU School of Law. “Improving methods helps us solidify the evidence base for our advocacy, and gives us tools to help understand the dynamics behind violations, their scope and intensity, and ultimately, their causes.”

The Human Rights Methodology Lab will facilitate collaboration with experts in other disciplines, such as economics, statistics, health, environmental science, architecture, and anthropology.

“The lab will bring together small, carefully curated groups to develop methods for human rights projects during their early stages of development,” said Professor Sarah Knuckey, director of the Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic and co-director of the Human Rights Institute. “There are currently too few formal spaces for human rights advocates to critique and experiment, and the Lab responds to the needs of researchers to innovate, test and share new research tools and techniques.”

Through a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to human rights methods, the initiative aims to foster continuous learning within the human rights movement and to consolidate lessons for practice through scholarly reflection on this process.



In May 2015, the sponsors co-hosted a successful pilot workshop on a research project aimed at documenting the rights to water and sanitation in indigenous communities in Canada. The pilot brought together human rights advocates with experts from the natural sciences, sociology, anthropology, public health, and the law, to examine and advise on specific research methods best suited to developing the evidence needed to advance the rights to water and sanitation.

Building on this pilot workshop, the Methodology Lab has become a formal initiative supported by the Open Society Foundations' Information Program. The grant will enable the participation of a diverse set of experts, including human rights researchers from the global south.

Lab conveners include Satterthwaite of NYU, Knuckey of Columbia, [Brian Root](#), quantitative analyst at Human Rights Watch, and [Amanda Klasing](#), senior women's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. The Lab will also have the assistance of Holly Stubbs of the Center for Economic and Social Rights and Columbia Law.

The Methodology Lab creators are uniquely suited to build the methodologies needed to address complex human rights violations. The Center for Human Rights and Global Justice works on innovative and interdisciplinary projects in an array of human rights subjects, including counter-terrorism; economic, social, and cultural rights; and extreme poverty. Human Rights Watch conducts regular, systematic investigations of human rights abuses around the world and sets the standard for traditional human rights methodologies. The Human Rights Institute brings together education, research, and advocacy to advance social justice, and develops new human rights methodologies and scholarship in a variety of interdisciplinary projects.

"The chance to discuss methods with experts in other disciplines is an invaluable resource," Klasing said. "It allows researchers to develop innovative projects with data and approaches that can help us improve our advocacy for ending abuses."

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