

RFSU'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Sextant (or Sextanten), which is the Strategic Framework of the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU) and adopted by RFSU's Congress in 2021, defines RFSU's Theory of Change (ToC). To complement the Sextant, this document, called RFSU's International Strategy (hereinafter referred to as the "International Strategy"), was elaborated and adopted by the RFSU Board on 18 February 2022. The International Strategy sets the direction for operationalising RFSU's ToC in its international work up until 2025.

The International Strategy will help RFSU navigate an ever-changing world and guide its decision-making as it continues to learn and progress. It also broadly sets how RFSU should work in diverse, rapidly changing, and complex contexts. RFSU is ever-evolving, developing, and growing and does not stick rigidly to a set approach to reach its objectives.

The International Strategy is organised as follows. Section 2 explains RFSU's ToC. Section 3 outlines RFSU's priority goals and how they will be employed in RFSU's international work. Section 4 presents RFSU's mission and strategies. Section 5 outlines RFSU's contribution to change. Section 6 provides guidance on RFSU's choice of geographic focus, while Section 7 provides guidance on selection of partners, collaborations, and ways of working. Section 8 describes the terms for use and revision of the International Strategy.

2. RFSU'S THEORY OF CHANGE: VISION, IMPACT GOALS AND HOW CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTES TO CHANGE

2.1. Vision

A world in which everyone is free to make decisions about their own bodies and sexuality

For everyone to be free, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) must be respected, protected, and fulfilled everywhere in the world. By using the word “everyone”, RFSU explicitly states that no one should be left behind and that the positions of individuals and groups that are most at risk of experiencing discrimination or have their rights violated need to be prioritised.

2.2. Impact goals

Political, legal, and financial policy decisions in Sweden and globally promote SRHR and sustainable development for all people notwithstanding their power and resources

Norms and attitudes in Sweden and globally afford people greater opportunities to enjoy and make decisions about their bodies and sexuality

People in Sweden and globally notwithstanding their power and resources have improved access to qualitative and equal sexual and reproductive care

People in Sweden and globally notwithstanding their power and resources have more opportunities to organise and influence sexual and reproductive health and rights

People in Sweden and globally notwithstanding their power and resources have increased knowledge about bodies and sexuality

RFSU believes that for individuals to experience the freedom to make decisions about their own bodies and sexuality, the conditions presented in RFSU's impact goals above need to be in place. Political, legal, and financial decisions aimed at protecting and ensuring access to SRHR for all must be supported by enabling societal norms that allow this freedom to be realised. All individuals also need to have knowledge about their own bodies and sexuality and SRHR in general. They should also have access to qualitative sexual and reproductive healthcare (including telemedicine) according to World Health Organisation (WHO) standards and have the possibility to organise to claim their rights. RFSU cannot achieve these impact goals alone, as the extent to which they can be realised is influenced by many different factors.

2.3 Civil Society's role in contributing to change

RFSU believes that civil society organisations (CSOs) are vehicles for citizens to come together, reflect, learn, and support each other, influence public opinion, make injustices visible, hold governments to account, and claim their rights and access to justice.

Civil society achieves change by empowering people whose SRHR are being violated. By empowerment, we refer to people coming together to develop critical consciousness about oppressive power structures that marginalise them and deny their rights. Civil society provides a platform for building, harvesting, and sharing knowledge, which is central to empowerment and the possibility to make informed choices.

Depending on the context, people may unite to demand access to rights, justice, and resources as a result of empowerment, thereby engaging in mobilisation in formal or informal civil society. Access to knowledge and some level of empowerment is a prerequisite for mobilisation to take place.

Building, harvesting and sharing evidence and knowledge on SRHR is also central for civil society to inform policy development, raise awareness, counteract misconceptions and prejudice and promote a positive view of SRHR. Harvesting and building knowledge involve drawing on people's lived experiences and experiences from programme and project implementation.

3. RFSU PRIORITY GOALS

The priority goals provide RFSU with a guide on how to prioritise its resources and operations, where to build knowledge and what to focus on in terms of communication.

Below is a description of how RFSU will operationalise these priority goals in its international work.

1. Agenda 2030 is implemented in its entirety with an SRHR perspective, in Sweden and globally

Increased collaboration between civil society actors locally, nationally, and globally promotes SRHR and an expanded civic space

RFSU's vision of "a world in which everyone is free to make decisions over their own bodies and sexuality" cannot be achieved solely through programmes with a narrow SRHR focus. Poverty, violent conflict, disasters caused by climate change and environmental degradation, shrinking democratic space and attacks by anti-rights movements all contribute to preventing women, sexual and gender minorities, youth, and other groups with limited access to power and resources from making free and informed decisions regarding their body and sexuality. The intersecting of these global challenges is addressed in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, where United Nations (UN) member states recognise that the three dimensions of sustainable development, economic, social and environmental sustainability, are interlinked and that the goals for achieving sustainable development are integrated and indivisible.

Among these challenges, the climate crisis and environmental degradation are already devastating in many countries, forcing millions of people to flee from their

homes and relocate to refugee camps or urban slums. These have a detrimental impact on efforts to reduce poverty and provide access to SRHR. It leads to increased risks of early and forced marriages, sexual- and gender-based violence and interrupted school attendance, impacting access to services and information on SRHR for young people.

Centring the notion of justice, not rights alone, is crucial in addressing SRHR. This approach to SRHR relates closely to the notion of reproductive justice, which Black feminist activists in the US coined during the 1980s. Reproductive justice bridges social justice issues with reproductive health and rights while recognising that people's experiences and needs in relation to SRHR differ starkly depending on how they are positioned within intersecting power hierarchies of class, race, gender, ability, nationality and so forth. For instance, as poor women belonging to racial and ethnic minorities struggle with their access to safe, legal, and affordable abortion, they may also struggle against being subjected to forced abortion, sterilisation, and contraception, which are forms of bodily control that more privileged upper- or middle-class women are less likely to be subjected to.

Access to SRHR for all is also threatened and undermined by the growing anti-rights movement, working systematically and with strong financial backing to oppose sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality. This threat is interlinked with the shrinking democratic space in many countries. The anti-rights movement may be mobilising as part of a broader agenda aimed at reducing access to information, freedom of expression and assembly and other fundamental freedoms that are prerequisites for the ability to make free choices about one's body and sexuality.

The challenges in implementing Agenda 2030 and countering the shrinking democratic space are enormous. RFSU is but one among numerous organisations that are engaged and working on these priority goals. To advance SRHR globally, RFSU needs to sustain its reach and engagement with its stakeholders while at the same time going beyond its traditional SRHR partners.

RFSU, together with others, will address the problems by:

- Engaging in solidarity initiatives with local and transnational SRHR, youth and/or feminist movements, as well as other actors who fight for social, economic, and environmental justice, including organisations working for climate justice, labour rights and against racism.
- Collaborating with organisations representing persons who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression, learning from their experience and activism. RFSU will aim to work with rather than for such groups, including by sharing spaces of solidarity and being part of other organisations' spaces, engaging in joint advocacy, direct action and sharing knowledge and expertise with each other.
- Playing an active role in broad civil society coalitions, aiming to uphold freedom of expression, the right to organise, freedom of assembly and an independent media, given the central role of civil society in promoting and upholding human rights, including SRHR, and the detrimental effects of shrinking civic space, with increased restrictions and attacks on civil society.

Finally, since these priority goals are prerequisites for understanding the place of SRHR in relation to sustainable development, social justice and democracy, rather than goals in themselves, they need to be mainstreamed into all the other goals in the International Strategy and the formulation of indicators and monitoring.

2. Norms about the body, sexuality and relationships create enhanced and equal conditions for desire, pleasure and reciprocity and are not characterised by racism or other power structures

Sexuality and the norms surrounding it influence and interrelate with most aspects of people's lives, including societal status and economic position, relationships and parenting, and one's sense of self and identity. Inequalities and injustices may be enshrined in legislation and policies, for example, in the laws criminalising same-sex relationships and family formation. They may further be expressed through harmful and limiting norms, through which privileged groups may strengthen their power, influence, and wealth at the expense of groups with less access to power and resources, including women; children; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people.

Such norms may be policed in subtle ways, where living one's life in ways that deviate from normative scripts may result in the loss of privileges or opportunities. They may be more harshly enforced through discriminatory laws or threats of direct violence, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) or honour-related violence and other harmful practices such as forced marriage.

RFSU, together with others, will address the problems by:

- Working to find new and creative ways of reframing discourse around gender and sexuality, with the aim of shifting attitudes and behaviours that contribute to upholding unequal power relations such as race, ethnicity, age, and the like.
- Collaborating with organisations representing persons who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression, like queer people of colour or urban poor women from an ethnic minority group, learning from their experience and activism. RFSU will aim to work with rather than for such groups, including sharing spaces of solidarity, being part of other organisations' spaces, engaging in joint advocacy and direct action, and sharing knowledge and expertise with each other. Particularly important is to support groups creating a safe space to reflect, empower and mobilise for sexual and reproductive rights.
- Advocating for improved laws and policies protecting sexual and reproductive rights that in turn may influence norms.
- Generating, sharing, and making use of evidence and learning together with civil society, academia, governments, UN institutions and other actors. Evidence and facts are powerful tools to challenge and change norms about the body, sexuality and relationships.

3. People, notwithstanding their power and resources, have access to legal and safe abortion, and abortion stigma has decreased

This work shall be permeated by an intersectional feminist analysis of power, where restrictive norms related to gender and sexuality are understood as expressed through and mutually enhanced by other systems of oppression, including racism.

Millions of women, girls and other people suffer serious injuries or even death as a result of unsafe abortion. Even when abortions are available in theory, they are not always accessible or provided timely at acceptable quality standards. Abortion-related stigma continues to be a strong barrier, preventing pregnant people from seeking access to abortion and health care systems from providing care, even when it is legally available. The right to legal and safe abortion is denied by conservative groups, organisations and governments, and the processes for decriminalising and legalising abortion are often long and uncertain.

RFSU works for the right to comprehensive abortion care in a supportive environment, free from stigma and discrimination. Abortion should not be

restricted, prohibited, or criminalised, and it should be recognised as a healthcare issue and a human right. The right to abortion depends upon people also having other human rights, such as the right to health, equality, privacy and living free from violence and discrimination.

The more marginalised a person is, the greater the risk of being denied the right to abortion. Thus, abortion rights need to be integrated into the broader movements for healthcare access, gender and racial equity, and social justice.

RFSU, together with others, will address the problems by:

- Supporting and working jointly with CSOs and movements to normalise abortion and ensure that women and non-binary groups can access and champion abortion in a supportive environment, free from stigma and discrimination. RFSU undertakes this by acknowledging the importance of lived experiences for women and non-binary groups, especially when facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression.
- Supporting other CSOs advocating for legal and policy reform at all levels and working to ensure that states deliver comprehensive abortion care that is non-discriminatory, available, accessible, acceptable, and of appropriate and good quality. RFSU will also support CSOs to advocate for clear accountability mechanisms.
- Supporting civil society partners that work to ensure access to the full spectrum of quality, person-centred abortion care, including self-care and telemedicine.
- Systematically using evidence and learning to improve abortion access and care and contribute to innovation and research on abortion.

4. People, notwithstanding their age and resources, have access to and knowledge of contraception according to their needs

There is an enormous unmet need for modern contraception that is disproportionately high among adolescents who want to avoid pregnancy. The barriers include inadequate service provision, high costs, misconceptions, and discriminatory social and gender norms.

RFSU, together with others, will address the problems by:

- Working with and highlighting the importance of sexuality education in increasing levels of knowledge and awareness, especially focusing on adolescents and the youth.
- Exploring the potential for partnerships related to stigma and social norms, integrated SRHR services, and expansion of the range of contraceptive methods offered, ensuring that available contraception methods are tailored to adolescents and youth needs.

5. Improved access to qualitative and equal sexual and reproductive health care for all people, notwithstanding their power and resources, with particular focus on people subjected to racism

The obstacles between individuals and their enjoyment of sexual health and reproductive rights are interrelated and operate at different levels. These are in clinical care, at the level of health systems, and in the underlying determinants of health and discriminatory social norms and values. Groups with the least access to sexual and reproductive health services include poor women and girls, adolescents, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons, indigenous groups, and ethnic/racial minorities, reflecting social inequalities and unequal power distributions.

In advancing sexual health and reproductive rights, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) has come to play a key role. UHC means that *all individuals without discrimination receive quality health services without suffering financial hardship*. Key steps for countries to deliver UHC include the development of an Essential Package of Health Services, which describes a list of clinical and public health services that a government aspires to provide for their population.

RFSU, together with others, will address the problems by:

- Using UHC as a strategic entry point to increase access to and quality of sexual and reproductive health services. RFSU will support civil society and related movements in influencing the development, implementation, and monitoring of SRH in UHC related policies and plans and holding governments to account by tracking government performance on the quality of sexual and reproductive health services and equity in access to sexual and reproductive health services.

6. People have more opportunities to live, form relationships and start a family in the manner they wish, without being hindered by discriminatory legislation on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and other power structures

Unequal access to power and distribution resources leads to unequal conditions for desire, pleasure, bodily autonomy, the possibility of expressing one's sexuality and living and forming a family in the way one desires, without facing violence and discrimination. Today many people, especially women, children and LGBTQI+ persons, are prevented from deciding if, when and how to be sexually active, form sexual relationships, get married and have children. LGBTQI+ persons are also prevented from independently defining their sexual orientation and gender identity in many parts of the world. Such inequalities and injustices may be enshrined in legislation and policies, such as laws that criminalise same-sex relationships by consenting adults and same-sex family formation.

RFSU, together with others, will address the problems by:

- Working with and supporting movements made up of people facing multiple and intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination, who mobilise to claim their sexual and reproductive rights.
- Working to abolish discriminatory laws and ensure legal protection from discrimination, hate, and violence hinders the fulfilment of sexual and reproductive rights. RFSU prioritises working for the legal protection of groups most at risk of discrimination and violation of sexual and reproductive rights. When laws and policies supporting the realisation of sexual and reproductive rights are in place, civil society should be vocal when the legal, health and education systems fail to implement laws and policies.
- Harvesting and making use of experiences from other movements and legal processes across countries and regions.

7. The sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, children and LGBTQI+ people are not limited by gender-based violence, such as harmful practices, including honour-related violence and oppression

Hate, threats of violence and acts of violence like SGBV and early and forced marriages are systematically used to uphold norms around sexuality and specifically control women, LGBTQI+ people and youth. Sometimes these discriminatory and harmful norms are also supported by the legal system. Discrimination and violence linked to gender, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression also articulate with and enhance other forms of discrimination linked to race, class, (dis)ability and the like.

RFSU, together with others, will address the problems by:

- Supporting youth, women and LGBTQI+ movements who work for empowerment and mobilisation to claim their sexual and reproductive rights.
- Advocating for legal protection from discrimination, hate and violence, as well as the abolishment of laws allowing sexual violence, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices.
- Harvesting and making use of experiences from other movements across countries and regions.

8. All children and young people, regardless of life situation, have equal access to sexual education and knowledge about sexuality, bodies and relationships

Knowledge is the key to empowerment, attaining SRHR and the possibility to make informed choices. However, the provision of sexuality education in schools remains both limited and incoherent in most countries. Access to knowledge is the most limited for those facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Even in countries where governments have committed to ensuring that young people and adolescents have access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), sexuality education curricula are not comprehensive and/or are closely regulated by governments. There is pressure to ensure that content adheres to mainstream or conservative socio-cultural, religious and gender norms, which are often influenced by conservative, religious and far-right groups.

Digital sexuality education (DSE) offers an opportunity to have a positive impact on SRHR knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of young people. However, it is an emerging field without a quality assurance mechanism, and evidence is lacking on its effectiveness in shifting young people's behaviour. Moreover, access to the internet, especially in a private setting, is still not a reality for all young people worldwide.

RFSU, together with others, will address the problems by:

- Exploring possibilities to support mobilisation and open non-judge-mental discussions and dialogue through safe online spaces that enable young people to co-create knowledge and provide spaces for sex-positive activism.
- Supporting youth organisations and movements mobilising for access to knowledge about their sexuality, bodies, and relationships

- Supporting advocacy for the development and implementation of high-quality CSE curricula in school settings.
- Exploring possibilities to improve access to sexuality education through online spaces.
- Contributing to pleasure-based, sex-positive, norm-conscious content production focusing on health and well-being, with non-judgemental and realistic advice providing young people with the possibility to make informed decisions. This content is done through collaborations with other actors and the development of own material.

4. RFSU'S MISSION AND STRATEGIES

RFSU's mission summarises how RFSU contributes to the ToC and the priority goals described above, as follows:

Through knowledge, mobilisation, and policy advocacy, RFSU contributes to a world in which everyone is free to enjoy, and make decisions about their own bodies and sexuality

RFSU has identified three key strategies to achieve change, as follows:

Knowledge: Build knowledge and empower people to know their body, sexuality, and relationships.

Mobilisation: Build public opinion and mobilise people as well as civil society.

Policy Advocacy: Contribute to and advocate for laws, frameworks and systems and hold duty-bearers to account.

5. RFSU'S CONTRIBUTION TO CHANGES

Below is a description of how RFSU's mission and strategies are operationalised in its international work and how RFSU thereby contributes to change globally.

Strengthening intersectional feminist perspectives: Implicit in RFSU's vision is a commitment to address the unequal distribution of power and resources that delimits access to SRHR for certain categories of people more than others. Such inequalities are expressed through intersecting power hierarchies of race, gender, class or social origin, nationality, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, migration status and other markers of difference. RFSU has therefore decided to mainstream *intersectional feminist perspectives* throughout all its work. When planning for a new intervention or partnership, this entails analysing whose needs and priorities are de facto addressed, particularly when single-axis categories of people, such as 'women' or 'youth', are identified as target groups. It also entails addressing harmful, unequal, and limiting gender norms and stereotypes in programming. RFSU will collaborate and partner with organisations representing persons who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression, learning from their experiences and activism and sharing spaces of solidarity.

Ensuring a human-rights based approach: RFSU's work is based, on the fact, that human rights are universal and indivisible. Duty-bearers have the responsibility to respect, promote and fulfil the rights of rights-holders, without any exceptions. Adopting a *human rights-based approach* to development, RFSU understands that the role of CSOs is to support popular movements and empower groups and individuals claiming their rights and holding duty-bearers to account. Actions and programmes should be justified and underpinned through linkages to human rights instruments and commitments. Adopting a human rights-based approach also entails adhering to the principles of active and meaningful *participation* and *empowerment* of people affected by a decision and a commitment to *non-discrimination, transparency, and accountability*.

Strengthening civil society voices and agency: By channelling funds and partnering with progressive civil society voices and actors, RFSU aims to strengthen the influence of civil society globally. Thereby, RFSU wants to contribute to the empowerment and mobilisation of communities to influence public opinion and make demands on governments and hold them to account.

RFSU is guided by the Istanbul CSO Development Effectiveness Principles in its role as a donor and partner and has defined the ways of working as central to the partnerships it engages in. They are as follows:

- *Independence:* A good partnership relies on recognising and respecting each organisation's independence, integrity, and dissimilarities. RFSU acknowledges that power imbalance between a donor and a recipient limits independence and autonomy. RFSU aims to address the multi-levels of power imbalances that exist through long-term commitments, predictability, flexible funding, and core support to the priorities of the partner. RFSU will also invest time in understanding partners' contexts through engaging in dialogue.
- *Mutual accountability:* Accountability rests on transparency in terms of the vision, values and procedures of the organisations and clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities. RFSU aims to have open and honest communication and a willingness to engage in dialogue in case of disagreement.
- *Equitable partnerships and solidarity:* RFSU aims to work in solidarity with partners, sharing resources, spaces, skills and knowledge. The partnership is based on shared development goals and values, mutual respect, trust, organisational autonomy, long-term accompaniment, and global citizenship.
- *Mutual learning:* RFSU makes space and encourages mutual reflections and learning in all relevant processes. RFSU encourages self-reflection, creativity and the sharing of ideas by enabling an environment that cultivates trust and values the outputs of learning processes.

Monitoring RFSU's compliance with these principles will be done through regular anonymous surveys of partners and allies. The results will be shared with the respondents.

Harvesting, generating and sharing knowledge: RFSU, on its own and jointly with other CSOs, co-creates knowledge and expertise, which in turn informs empowerment, mobilisation and policy advocacy – and contributes to shaping public opinion.

As evidence, RFSU values lived experiences, taking cognisance of that people's experiences and needs related to SRHR differ starkly depending on how they are positioned within intersecting power hierarchies of class, race, gender, ability, nationality and so forth.

Priorities include:

- *Harvesting and generating knowledge and expertise:* RFSU facilitates and participates in joint learning platforms where RFSU, together with other CSOs and academia, may draw on each other's knowledge and experience from local, national, regional, and global work. RFSU also collaborates with other CSOs and academia in data collection and assessment of intervention models, strategies, and approaches.
- *Sharing knowledge and expertise:* RFSU contributes to thought leadership, curates knowledge, relates it to practical work, and makes research and studies available to other CSOs. These include training and workshops to promote a better understanding of SRHR and intersectional feminist perspectives and the management of learning platforms around themes based on RFSU priority goals to advance learning among communities of practice.

Influencing and holding governments to account: RFSU engages in policy advocacy to achieve legal, political, and financial commitments to SRHR at the global level, regional level/European Union (EU) and national level/Sweden. This work is often conducted in close collaboration with members of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), where RFSU is a member; with CSOs who work in partnership with RFSU; and with like-minded Swedish and international organisations and networks.

Priorities include:

- *Influencing and advising the Swedish government* on its foreign policies and financial priorities, including Swedish EU parliamentarians, in order to contribute to a strong SRHR focus in Swedish foreign policy dialogue and overseas development aid budgets. Closely linked to this is *monitoring and holding the Swedish government to account* for its policy and financial commitments, including tracking spending on SRHR and monitoring the government's adherence to human rights obligations.
- Working, in close collaboration with IPPF and other networks, towards *the recognition of SRHR within international commitments* and following up on the implementation of key commitments such as the Commission on Population and Development (CPD), the Beijing Platform of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Following up and providing input to *multilateral institutions' policies and their implementation*, as well as the monitoring processes at the Human Rights Council (HRC) and other Human Rights Organs, as relevant (e.g., the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Rapporteurs (OHCHR), inter alia).
- Providing *technical expertise and financial support to partner organisations* to hold national governments to account through engagement in international political negotiations and human rights mechanisms. The main instruments used are the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, international and regional human rights mechanisms, the sustainable development goals and, where applicable, regional International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) review outcome documents and their follow-up.

6. GUIDING RFSU'S CHOICE OF GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

RFSU supports partners working at the global, regional and country levels in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The countries and regions that RFSU engages with are assessed regularly. RFSU may decide to withdraw from partnerships in a country or region and identify new partnerships in other Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) list of official development assistance recipients. The choices of country and region are guided by a number of contextual factors, including (not in order of priority):

- That SRHR needs, as per the RFSU priority goals, are to a large degree unmet.
- That opportunities for achieving change have been identified within the priority goals.
- That there is an active civil society able to contribute to societal change by implementing programmes within the priority goals, taking into consideration the context and conflict sensitivity of the area.
- That there is an unmet need for donor funding within one or several priority goals.
- That there are possible synergies with the ongoing work of other CSOs in the country or region.
- That RFSU has connections and networks with relevant international and national actors in the country or region.
- That the country has a specific role to play in Swedish foreign and development policy and global SRHR policy processes, with RFSU and CSOs able to contribute in a meaningful way.
- That RFSU will be able to work in the country with an acceptable level of cost-effectiveness and security for staff, considering that RFSU does not have an in-country presence.

RFSU aims to have partners across various geographical regions in order to inform global policy work, be part of the global SRHR-community and thereby be a more relevant partner and actor and enable access to diverse funding streams for RFSU and partners.

7. GUIDING SELECTION OF PARTNERS, COLLABORATIONS AND WAYS OF WORKING

Context, conflict sensitivity and intersectional analyses will guide RFSU's selection of partners, collaborations, and ways of working. RFSU assumes that by supporting a variety of organisations and actors, which have different roles in society, RFSU will contribute to a multitude of strategies and methodologies to address SRHR concerns. This broad coverage will, in turn, enable synergies to be made between organisations, facilitate enhanced learning on different perspectives and magnify the joint efforts towards long-term SRHR changes. It is also a way to mitigate risks in changing political contexts, increased resistance to SRHR and the shrinking democratic space.

Below is a number of guiding principles that will be used:

Priority goals

- RFSU will work with partners that address one or several RFSU priority goals.
- RFSU will contribute to SRHR concerns that are underfunded or unfunded, and where RFSU can play a catalytic role.

Conflict sensitivity

- Given the shrinking democratic space in combination with the organised resistance toward SRHR, there is a continuous security risk for activists. RFSU recognises that the choice of partners and collaborations can have an impact on the conflict dynamics in any context. RFSU's ways of working and actions may also have an impact on the security situation of partners and activists. Therefore, RFSU will conduct a conflict sensitivity analysis when identifying actors to collaborate with, both in relation to the potential impact on the SRHR landscape, as well as in relation to how the funding may have an impact on the intended partner, its employees and the community it serves/represents. RFSU acknowledges the importance of digital security in terms of the platforms, devices and the like, and data collection security and confidentiality.
- Working through a human rights-based approach throughout the dialogue and programme cycle provides important information. Participation, transparency, and accountability help identify and mitigate possible or existing sources of tension and/or conflict.

Types of organisations

- RFSU will strive towards supporting a mix of more established CSOs and self-organised feminist, youth and/or sexual rights movements, as well as non-registered smaller organisations. RFSU will also engage with other actors who fight for social, economic, and environmental justice, such as organisations working for climate justice and labour rights and against racism.
- RFSU sees potential in supporting organisations that sub-grant to other groups in civil society.
- RFSU will explore opportunities to support academia and think tanks in order to contribute to thought leadership.
- RFSU sees potential in cooperating with other entities such as social entrepreneurs who contribute to the RFSU priority areas. Examples include social enterprises providing contraceptives to underserved populations/areas; entrepreneurs working within femtech; consultancies on social media that enhance knowledge sharing, sexuality education and movement building; and actors that provide digital solutions to access SRHR services and information.

- RFSU will consider making impact investments. By doing so, RFSU makes a financial investment in for-profit businesses with the intention to generate positive, measurable social and environmental impact alongside a financial return.
- In order to increase the potential for achieving change for SRHR, RFSU will try to cooperate with a critical mass of partners in every given country. RFSU believes that a substantial number of partners is important to create momentum for change.

Multi-country initiatives with a regional/global reach

- RFSU will complement the work on a country level with support to organisations that have a regional and global reach. Multi-country projects/regional programmes are especially relevant when there is a problem and context that is similar in several countries. It can also be of relevance when there is an oppressive environment at the national level, making allies in other countries or regional bodies of key importance. A regional programme can facilitate joint learning and contribute to leveraging policy advocacy work. Where relevant, RFSU can make use of regional/global mechanisms in order to contribute to normative regional and global frameworks.
- RFSU will aim to support one regional partner in each geographic region where it is supporting partners at the country level. RFSU will primarily support already existing regional partners and/or multi-country initiatives.
- In order to link RFSU's global policy advocacy work to the country level, RFSU will work with at least one partner organisation per regional portfolio that will be able to collaborate around global policy work.

Three types of collaborations

RFSU will collaborate with partners in three ways. A partner can be in all categories and move across the different categories.

1. *Partners receiving funding from RFSU and with limited engagement with RFSU and other partners:* Here, RFSU's value-added is to provide funding primarily. Partners in this category could include grantmakers, which are sub-granting to other organisations.
2. *Partners receiving funding from RFSU and engaging with RFSU and other partners:* In this category, RFSU will work with partners to implement joint projects focused on joint learning, joint policy advocacy or other explorative collaborations. These projects can be undertaken at the country, regional, cross-regional and/or global level. RFSU priority goals will guide the thematic focus for these projects and collaboration initiatives.
3. *RFSU cooperating with other CSOs, in networks and solidarity initiatives:* The collaborations in this category are ad-hoc and based on taking part in solidarity initiatives, networks for action, mobilisation and advocacy initiatives. For RFSU, this could take the form of sharing spaces of solidarity, being part of other organisations' spaces, and engaging in joint advocacy or direct action.

RFSU will work in an exploratory and gradual way, open to new forms of partnerships and actors and within priority goals where RFSU has limited previous experience. RFSU will explore new programmatic approaches and innovations to address SRHR concerns. RFSU, together with partners and relevant key stakeholders, including rights-holders, will work in collaboration to design, implement and evaluate new initiatives.

Moreover, as RFSU grows its impact investments, it will ensure coordination between these investments and international partnerships to help accelerate positive, measurable social and environmental impact in the regions and countries where RFSU operates.

Criteria for partners receiving funding from RFSU

When identifying new collaborations with partners that will receive funding from RFSU, the most important criterion is the potential partner's ability to contribute to improving access to SRHR for all. In practice, RFSU supports partners where there is:

- Capacity to implement programmes and contribute to change for improving access to SRHR for all.
- Shared core values and a sufficiently shared vision between RFSU and the partner, as well as a sufficiently shared understanding of how to achieve the vision.
- A commitment to democratic governance, transparency, mutual accountability, and participation of rights-holders

Based on an analysis of risks and benefits, RFSU can deviate from the criteria above, provided that adequate risk mitigation measures are put in place.

8. USE AND REVISION OF THE INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

This International Strategy provides guidance to decision-making on RFSU's international commitments. It sets the direction for RFSU's international programming in low- and middle-income countries, its global policy advocacy; its knowledge and learning; and its initiatives to enhance Swedish public support for SRHR for all. It also gives direction for resource mobilisation, including individual fundraising, institutional funding, and other funding sources. RFSU's membership in IPPF, together with other partners, will be a key asset in implementing the International Strategy.

The International Strategy covers the period 2023-2025 since the RFSU Congress will make a new decision about the priority goals for 2026-2029. However, the overall strategic direction in this International Strategy will remain the same throughout 2023-2029. The International Strategy will regularly be revisited and assessed to reflect internal and/or external changes. Possible reasons for changes could be a major shift in the donor or policy landscape or decisions made by the RFSU Congress, the RFSU Board or RFSU senior management.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abortion-related stigma: According to the International Network for the Reduction of Abortion Discrimination and Stigma, abortion-related stigma is a social process of devaluing those who have had abortions or those associated with abortion. It leads to the social, medical and legal marginalization of abortion worldwide.

Anti-rights movements: According to the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, anti-rights movements are highly organised, well-funded, transnational movements working to undermine women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and civil society.

Bodily autonomy: According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), bodily autonomy means people have the power and agency to make choices over their bodies and futures, without violence or coercion.

Climate justice: According to the Mary Robinson Foundation, climate justice links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts equitably and fairly. The UN defines climate change as long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural, such as through variations in the solar cycle. But since the 1800s, activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.

Essential Package of Health Services: A list of clinical and public health services that a government aspires to provide for their population.

Economic justice: According to the Centre for Economic and Social Justice, economic justice encompasses the moral principles which guide us in designing our economic institutions. These institutions determine how each person earns a living, enters into contracts, exchanges goods and services with others and otherwise produces an independent material foundation for a person's economic sustenance.

Feminist movements: A series of collective efforts that demand gender equality and social justice at local, national, and international levels.

Femtech (female technology): According to PC Magazine, femtech is an umbrella term for hardware, software and scientific procedures geared to female health and pregnancy. For example, femtech applications track menstrual cycles and fetal health.

Forced marriage: According to the OHCHR, it is a marriage in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union.

Duty-bearers: According to the UN International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), duty-bearers are actors who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realise human rights and to abstain from human rights violations. The term is most commonly used to refer to State actors, but non-State actors can also be considered duty-bearers.

Grantmakers: Organisations that make and allocate grants, including foundations, corporate giving programs, non-governmental organisations and government agencies.

Honour-related violence: According to Kvinnofridslinjen, honour-related violence is a form of violence and oppression against women and girls often carried out by several people together, for example parents, siblings, relatives, a current or previous partner, or other members of the family's community. The main purpose of it is to control the sexuality of women.

Intersectional feminist perspectives: An analytical framework which seeks to make visible the complex ways in which power is organized and operates within a given society. It is aimed at bringing multiply marginalised groups, whose experiences are often rendered invisible, into the centre.

Labour rights: Human rights in regards to matters such as employment, remuneration, conditions of work, trade unions, and industrial relations.

Non-binary groups: According to the LGBT Foundation, non-binary groups are people who feel their gender cannot be defined within the margins of the gender binary.

Oppressive power structures: structures within society that allow inequities to exist and continue.

Racism: systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another.

Reproductive justice: According to SisterSong, reproductive justice is the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. It is rooted in the internationally-accepted human rights framework created by the United Nations, and it combines reproductive rights and social justice.

Rights-holders: According to UNICEF, they are individuals or social groups that have particular entitlements in relation to specific duty-bearers. In general terms, all human beings are rights-holders under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In particular contexts, there are often specific social groups whose human rights are not fully realised, respected or protected.

Same-sex family formation: a family that consists of a same-sex couple, or same-sex parents and their child or children.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV): According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), SGBV is any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It includes physical, emotional or psychological and sexual violence, and denial of resources or access to services. Violence includes threats of violence and coercion.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR): RFSU subscribes to the integrated definition of SRHR by the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission, as follows. Sexual and reproductive health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Therefore, a positive approach to sexuality and reproduction should recognise the part played by pleasurable sexual relationships, trust, and communication in the promotion of self-esteem and overall wellbeing. All individuals have a right to make decisions governing their bodies and to access services that support that right. Achievement of sexual and reproductive health relies on the realisation of sexual and reproductive rights.

Sexuality: According to the WHO, sexual health cannot be defined, understood or made operational without a broad consideration of sexuality, which underlies important behaviours and outcomes related to sexual health. The working definition of sexuality is: "...a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles

and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.”

Sex positive activism: initiatives that promote and embrace open sexuality.

Shrinking civic space: According to European Alternatives and CIVICUS, the civic space is the set of conditions that allow civil society and individuals to organise, participate and communicate freely and without discrimination, and in doing so, influence the political and social structures around them. Shrinking civic space occurs when government and other actors close down spaces for civic engagement.

Social justice: justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.

Spaces of solidarity: Spaces held online or in-person that embrace allyship and intersectionality, and enable opportunities for learning and/or unlearning.

Solidarity initiatives: Joint activities, projects or programmes in collaboration with other groups and organisations, with the aim to support our movements and strengthen our impact.

Sustainable development: According to the Brundtland Commission Report, sustainable development means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Theory of Change: A methodology and framework developed and used for planning and evaluation. It describes the change that a particular organisation wants to see, and how it plans to achieve such change.

Telemedicine: A term coined in the 1970s which literally means *healing at a distance*, the WHO defines it as the use of Information and Communications Technology to improve patient outcomes by increasing access to care and medical information. The delivery of health care services, where distance is a critical factor, by all health care professionals using information and communication technologies for the exchange of valid information for diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease and injuries, research and evaluation, and for the continuing education of health care providers, all in the interests of advancing the health of individuals and their communities.

Universal healthcare: All individuals without discrimination receive quality health services without suffering financial hardship.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEDAW – Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

CPD – Commission on Population and Development

CSE – comprehensive sexuality education

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

DSE – digital sexuality education

EU – European Union

HRC – Human Rights Council

ICPD – International Conference on Population and Development

IPPF – International Planned Parenthood Foundation

LGBTIQI+ – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex

OECD-DAC – Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee

OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

RFSU – Swedish Association for Sexuality Education

SGBV – sexual and gender-based violence

SRHR – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

ToC – Theory of Change

UHC – Universal Health Coverage

UN – United Nations

UNFPA – **UN** Population Fund

UNHCR – **UN** High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF – **UN** International Children Emergency Fund

WHO – World Health Organisation

RFSU's aim, since it was founded in 1933, has been to give people the means to change their lives for the better.

RFSU is a nonprofit organisation independent of any political party or religion. We are dedicated to promoting a well-informed, open-minded attitude about sexuality and relationship issues. RFSU is founded on a firm belief that sexuality and relationships are central to the individual and to society. By informing and educating people and shaping opinion, RFSU aims to break down prejudices, overcome ignorance and improve sexual health in Sweden and abroad. RFSU views sexuality as a matter of individual liberty and human rights, in which all of us have the freedom to be ourselves, the freedom to choose and the freedom to enjoy.

When you purchase a product, become a member, collaborate or support RFSU's work, you are contributing to our constant efforts to change people's lives.

**RFSU is a member organisation.
Do you want to become a member? Register at
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