Dealing with Threats, Risks & Safety

SESSION THREE:
THREAT ANALYSIS AND RISK ASSESSMENT

Overview: This session is designed to help activists and organizations identify and analyze the nature of threats in order to assess risk and inform protection plans.

Purpose: This session involves two moments of reflection and analysis. Identifying and examining the nature of threats provides important information for assessing risk and danger, especially those considered the most serious and imminent. Analyzing a person's abilities and vulnerabilities to respond to such threats provides a way to estimate the relative risk involved and, with that input, develop protection plans and strategies.

Facilitation Note: In a workshop setting, depending on your goals and time available, you may want to limit the analysis to one or two threats so that people can understand the tool content and how to apply it. When working with individual women activists and defenders in dangerous contexts, you will need to explore in depth the range of serious threats they feel they are facing. In an organizational setting, you will also need to do the same.

Time:
- Step 1: 2+ hours
- Step 2: This activity needs to be tailored to a specific context. Review the process and accompanying checklist of questions to determine your time needs.

Materials and space needed:
- Markers
- Masking tape
- Flip chart
- For Step 1:

  o Threat Chart: Either create a handout or create a flip chart version of the Chart (below).
- For Step 2:
  o Create a flip chart version of the example in the text below on Threats, Strengths and Vulnerabilities to walk through with the group.

      o   Copies of Assessment of Risks, Strengths and Vulnerability checklist and questions.

Credit: Adapted by Marusia López Cruz and Valerie Miller, drawing on the Protection International manual "New Manual for Defenders of Human Rights" and our work with women activists in JASS Mesoamerica (including with IM-defenders) and JASS Southern Africa

Process:
- Explain overall purpose of this two-step session.
- Introduce idea of threat analysis and risk assessment, explaining the two-step process for doing both the analysis and assessment and the methodological mix from working in pairs, to small groups to plenary.

Step One: THREAT ANALYSIS
Identifying and examining the nature of the threat

In pairs: Diving deeper
Reviewing the situations with high and medium threat potential from the prior session
(**Session Two: Identification And Analysis Of Security Incidents):**
- Of these, which do you see as current or imminent threats directed at you and your work?
- What other high to medium threats have emerged from the contextual analysis that might be directed specifically at you and your work?
- Based on these two sources, identify and discuss two threats using the framework below and record the information in categories provided.

THREAT: What is it?	WHO and/or WHAT institutions are threatening you?	WHY: causes of the aggression	HOW: means to carry out threat and their capacity to do so	WHEN: immediacy of threat	Weaknesses of the perpetrator/ strategy

In plenary:
Ask for volunteers to share ONE high level threat and their analysis of it based on the chart.

Have the group reflect: What overall insights and questions do you draw from the analysis and the experience of others in the group? What information may be missing that you need to get about the threat?

Make transition to risk assessment.

Step Two: RISK ASSESSMENT

Identifying and evaluating personal and organizational strengths and vulnerabilities in the face of threats to assess levels of risk. Prior to the session, review and tailor the attached checklist and questions created by Consortio Oaxaca (Assessment of Risks, Strengths and Vulnerabilities). This is a comprehensive set of questions to guide protection planning.

Facilitator Note: As not all questions are appropriate to every context and can be overwhelming, we recommend focusing on a selected set of questions or approaching the planning in stages over different sessions.

Conceptual Note: Translated and adapted from Consorcio Oaxaca. Risk for our purposes is defined as the possibility that a threat will produce some harm to an activist, her work or organization, preventing them from carrying out their mission. The level of risk is measured in terms of the relative strengths and vulnerabilities of a human rights defender and her organization to confront a given threat. Risks are never static, always changing with the shifts of strengths, vulnerabilities and contexts. Given their constantly changing nature, they need to be evaluated periodically to accurately track their potential escalation and danger.

In assessing risk, a person's or organization's vulnerabilities (limitations and weaknesses) increase the risk they face, while their strengths (abilities, individual and collective power) reduce it. Women experience these vulnerabilities and strengths in both their personal life and in their organizational life.

By evaluating the relative weight of these elements in relation to one another, a rough assessment of risk can be made. These measures are always imperfect but provide a general idea of what the level of risk may be in different contexts and at different

moments. The image to illustrate this type of assessment is a familiar one. Think of a with limitations and vulnerabilities on one side and strengths and abilities on the other. When the scales are unbalanced and tilted toward vulnerabilities, the risk can be said to be high; when they

are in balance, medium risk; when tilted toward strengths and abilities, lower risk. Obviously, sudden unforeseen changes in the context can quickly shift the balance.

*To further examine the dynamic of vulnerabilities and strengths, a set of factors affecting the threat have been developed and used in Mesoamerica by **Consorcio Oaxaca** and women human rights defenders (see attached **Assessment of Risks, Strengths and Vulnerabilities for questions and checklist**). These factors and accompanying questions help deepen the assessment, making it more systematic and comprehensive. Often in dangerous settings people are making quick day to day judgements almost intuitively about the likelihood of threats being carried out without doing this kind of extensive analysis. Yet when they are familiar with the framework and have internalized some of its major elements, they can apply them almost unconsciously to their immediate analysis and decisions about what to do.*

When you carry out a collective risk analysis, there will inevitably be differences in opinion as to the gravity and seriousness of threats and levels of risk. These often reflect subjective judgements – from individual views regarding the legitimacy and sources of violence (whether family, government, economic or other) to the information available on a specific threat. They also reflect an individual's personal experience and intuition which also need to be considered.

Process:
Introduce the framework and concepts of vulnerabilities and strengths as well as some of the key factors that affect the threat.

Use a specific threat as an illustration to explain how the Threats, Strengths and Vulnerabilities framework operates (example provided below), pointing out how it is applied to assess the level of risk. Then ask for any questions, clarifications or comments and respond as needed. (The example relates to domestic violence. You could substitute an example from another type of threat or attack.)

Threats, Strengths and Vulnerabilities		
Threat: Repeated beatings by spouse		

Factors affecting threat	Strengths (capacities, skills, personal and collective power, knowledge etc.)	Vulnerabilities (limitations, weaknesses)
Having hiding places, escape routes, access to transportation, lodging, communication etc.	I have identified escape routes and temporary lodging, have cell phone	I live in a dangerous place where neighbors support my husband and tolerate domestic violence; cell phone needs to be charged
Access to judicial system and authorities	In my organization we have contacts with authorities sensitive to gender and supportive of women in these situations	Many authorities justify family violence and support husbands; I am in danger of losing my children in court if I make any accusation
Having a protection plan		I have no plan if this happens again
Personal empowerment	I am aware of my rights as a woman	I am fearful and lack confidence in the face of this problem

Individually:
Ask everyone to choose a threat from step one and do the following. (If it feels difficult or overwhelming to someone to begin this on their own, you may want to work in pairs or with a support team from the beginning.)

- Considering the nature of that threat, review the list of factors affecting threats and the related questions (*using the Assessment of Vulnerabilities and Strengths checklist*); select 5 or 6 relevant factors to use in evaluating your strengths and vulnerabilities accordingly, and assess the potential risk. The chart above can serve as a template for the analysis, adapting it to the threat and factors you want to pursue.

- After everyone finishes the above task, ask the following:

o With that information and anything else you feel might be affecting the threat, estimate what you think the actual risk might be by using the imagery of a

simple scale. Remind everyone that when the scales are unbalanced and tilted toward vulnerabilities, the risk can be said to be high; when they are in balance, medium risk; when tilted toward strengths and abilities, lower risk. With that in mind, what does the scale show? Which side seems to weigh more? Which weighs less? Are they in balance? What does that tell you about the level of risk you may be facing?

In pairs:
Since such assessments can be highly subjective, it helps to get feedback from a colleague in order to have a better read on reality. Invite everyone to share their analysis and solicit feedback from their partner. For example, does this analysis seem to make sense? What are some of the implications? Are there things that might be missing that should be taken into consideration? Etc.

In plenary:
Ask for volunteers to share their analysis – what is their threat, what does the scale indicate about its risk. Does that assessment agree with your own judgement?

- Optional: Ask group to reflect on -- how useful was the tool, could it be adapted? What was it like to solicit feedback from a colleague?

Wrap up:
Ask for any final reflections. Summarize the key points you feel are relevant, clear up any misunderstandings and emphasize the following -- obviously this tool can only give you a general idea of what the actual risk might be but it is not fool proof. A neat equation or linear process, it is not. For example, sometimes even though you identify more vulnerabilities and limitations than strengths, the quality of your strengths may be sufficient to overcome the threat. So you need to use both common sense and the knowledge you have about the threat when applying the tool. Similarly, the fact that a risk is assessed as low or medium doesn't mean you can ignore it since it may be an early warning of things to come. If addressed in its initial stages, you may be able to mitigate or prevent its worst case consequences.

As always with this work on risks and threats, it is good to close the session with something affirming, calming and supportive – breath work, song, movement to release tension, a communal meal, solidarity offering, etc.

Assessment of Risks, Strengths and Vulnerabilities

(Adapted from Consortio Oaxaca)

Vulnerability and Ability Components
GEOGRAPHIC, PHYSICAL, AND TECHNICAL COMPONENTS
EXPOSURE: Do we need to go through dangerous areas [1] to carry out our daily or occasional activities? Do we often pass through places where we are harassed? Do our daughters/sons or persons under our care need to go through dangerous areas to conduct their daily or occasional activities? Are there threatening actors in the area? Have we established personal/family/organizational protection measures to pass through dangerous areas?
PHYSICAL STRUCTURE (house, office, surroundings): Are we the owners of the house in which we live? If not, is there a possibility that we could be forced to leave the house in a conflict situation? Does the organization have its own facilities? If not, is there a possibility that the owners could evict us from our office in a conflict situation? Does the organization have minimal protection measures in keeping with the level of insecurity of the surroundings and the need for protection (locks, security bars, night lights, escape routes, cameras, intercom, etc.)? Do we have accessible public places such as markets, schools, health centers?
HIDING PLACES, ESCAPE ROUTES: Have we identified escape routes (at home, in our communities, at work)? Do we have places to hide (at home, at work)? Are they easily accessible (how far away are they?), and who can use them (for specific persons or for the entire group)? If necessary, could we leave the area for some time?
ACCESS TO THE AREA: Is it difficult for us and/or for allied persons and organizations to get to our homes and workplaces? Is it easy for those who pose a threat to access our organization, workplaces, and/or homes?
NEIGHBORHOOD Are we on good terms with the neighbors (both where we live and work)? Do the neighbors see us as a threat or as friends? Have we noticed acts of defamation or attacks against us by the neighbors because we are women?

TRANSPORTATION AND LODGING:

Do our daughters and sons and persons under our care have access to safe transportation in order to conduct their work or commute to/from home? Is harassment against women common on public transportation?

Do we have access to safe lodging when we travel?

In case of an emergency, do we have quick access to transportation and lodging?

COMMUNICATION (both at home and at work):

Are there telecommunication systems (radio, telephone)? Can we access/control them and resources to obtain or change them when they cease to function? Do men have more access and control of these systems? Can they be used easily or can we quickly learn to use them? Do they always work? Could they be cut before an attack by those who threaten us?

COMPONENTS RELATED TO CONFLICT

ACTIVITIES THAT PUT US IN CONFLICT WITH SPECIFIC INTERESTS OR ACTORS:

Does our work directly affect the interests/power of an actor involved (in the private or public sphere)? By being women defenders (i.e., by not assuming roles traditionally assigned to women), do we affect or aggravate some person/community (either in the personal or public sphere)? Do we deal with a subject that is especially sensitive to the powers that be? Are we defending rights that have yet to be recognized and/or groups that are stigmatized (for example, sexual and reproductive rights or the LGBTQI community)?

TIES TO PARTIES IN CONFLICT

Do we have some connection to parties involved in a conflict (relatives, people from our own background, with our same interests) that could be used against us?

TRANSPORTATION OF OBJECTS, MERCHANDISE, AND WRITTEN INFORMATION:

Do defenders carry/transport goods or things that could be of interest to power groups (victims' testimonies, reports of human rights violations, money)?

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CONFLICT ZONES:

Do we have specific knowledge about places characterized by conflicts (narcotics trafficking, organized crime, checkpoints, company "thugs"/armed security, places of people trafficking or forced prostitution) that put us at risk?

DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES BY THE PARTIES IN CONFLICT

Do the parties to a conflict that can affect us explicitly act in a violent or discriminatory manner against women? What support do they have in carrying out these acts?

COMPONENTS RELATED TO THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS

ACCESS TO AUTHORITIES AND LEGAL SYSTEM TO UPHOLD OUR RIGHTS:
Can we easily begin legal procedures to defend our rights (access to the justice system, access to legal aid, legal services with a gender perspective)? Are there discriminatory practices and violence against women in the justice system?

ABILITY TO OBTAIN RESULTS FROM THE LEGAL SYSTEM AND AUTHORITIES:
Do the authorities respond favorably to our requests? Have we built alliances with justice practitioners who are gender sensitive? Are there laws that criminalize defenders or that can be used to repress us? Are there laws and legal measure to guarantee women's rights? Are there laws that discriminate against women? Can we develop sufficient political weight such that the authorities cannot ignore our requests? Does being a woman limit our ability to influence the legal system and authorities?

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

SOURCES AND ACCURACY OF INFORMATION:
Do we have reliable sources of information (regarding matters related to our activism and our personal situation, especially about situations that imply risk, such as domestic violence)? Is the information published by our organization backed up by internal systematization and fact checking? Does the information we access and generate from our organization have a gender perspective (breakdown of information by gender, analysis of power relationships and inequality among men and women, does it recognize women's specific circumstances, etc.)?
Do women participate in generating information within the group?

STORING, SENDING, AND RECEIVING INFORMATION:
Is information kept in a safe place? Can it be robbed? Can information be received and sent safely? How do women feel about the use of digital safety measures? Is there specific training for women? Do we take away information from our workplaces?

BEING A WITNESS OR HAVING KEY INFORMATION
Are women defenders key witnesses against powerful actors? Do defenders have relevant and unique information for legal cases and processes?

ORGANIZATIONAL COMPONENTS

STRUCTURE AND MISSION OF THE GROUP:
Is the group clearly structured and organized? Does the structure encourage an acceptable degree of internal cohesion and avoid unequal relations among members and among men and women? Are the domestic and maintenance duties shared equally among men and women? Are there specific areas to address women's rights or are these rights clearly specified within each area of the organization?
Does the organization's mission prioritize equality among men and women as an aspiration to achieve full enjoyment of human rights? Are there sufficient resources

(financial, political, communication, social support) to carry out the mission?

ABILITY TO MAKE JOINT DECISIONS:
Are women's needs and contributions explicitly taken into account in group decisions? Are decisions made and responsibilities assigned by a single group of persons or by all? Do women participate in decision-making and hold management positions or representational roles in the organization? Are steps taken to avoid decision-making when or where women cannot be present (night shifts, bars)? Are stereotypes avoided that reflect negatively on women's ability to make decisions or assume leadership roles?

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION MEASURES:
Are there internal procedures to address conflict in a proactive manner? Are there specific spaces in the organization where women can address their personal or organizational concerns in an atmosphere of trust?
Have discriminatory and sexist practices been identified within our organization or in organizations with which we work? Have ways to address them been defined?

PROTECTION PLANS AND PROCEDURES:
Are there individual and organizational protection plans? Does everyone generally obey the protection measures agreed to? Have protection plans been made from a gender perspective that includes private and public spheres? Is there access to emergency funds and consideration of self-help needs?

WORKING CONDITIONS AND WELL-BEING:
Do all women defenders have appropriate labor contracts (is there equal pay for men and women, are there adequate salaries for the work being done and minimal social benefits)? If we are in a collective or assembly without a labor relationship, have the means of participating and support been defined so that women members can play a part in favorable conditions and without discrimination?
Are there policies in the organization that support people who have domestic and care duties (daycare centers, special schedules, recreations centers for relatives at the office, etc.)?
Have self-care actions been established (healing spaces and psychosocial impact care, recreational spaces, health care)?
Are there reasonable duty schedules so that group members can develop other aspects of their lives and tend to other responsibilities (particularly care or family duties)?

ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND AND VISUALIZE A COMMITMENT TO THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS:
Are defenders able to understand the context and influence their social surroundings and are there spaces for analyzing the context?
Is there explicit recognition of women defenders' work, both within the organization and in the larger context? Are specific actions taken to generate greater recognition of

women's participation?

Are we able to involve key people and/or actors in public activities?

RECORD KEEPING AND ABILITY TO FOLLOW ACCOUNTING PROCEDURES AND LEGAL CRITERIA:

Are our organizations legally registered? Is legal standing for the group denied or held up?

Is our bookkeeping up to date and are we fulfilling all of the country's legal requirements?

Are we using pirated software? Are we using open-source software?

FAMILY AND CLOSE RELATION COMPONENTS

DOMESTIC AND CARE DUTIES

Are domestic and care duties evenly divided within the family?

Is there support from public or other sources for childcare or to care for the elderly or the ill, etc.?

Is there awareness within the family that everyone is responsible for domestic and care chores? Do the women in the family feel subordination due to domestic and care tasks?

EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Has discrimination or sexist violence appeared in the emotional relationship?

Has the sexual/affective orientation or preference been a motive of discrimination?

Do the defender's family and close relationships approve and support her work?

In case of domestic violence, can the defender count on support from her family, close relationships and/or organization?

PSYCHOLOGICAL COMPONENTS (GROUP/INDIVIDUALS)

ABILITY TO HANDLE STRESS AND FEAR:

Do we, as key persons in our group, or as a group, trust what we are doing? Do we as persons in our group/community express unambiguous feelings of mutual support (with words and deeds) and about our common purpose? Are the levels of stress affecting good communication and interpersonal relations? Are we open to receiving outside psychological support and/or have we developed our own psychosocial resources? Are sexist and discriminatory practices affecting the organizational dynamic and fulfillment of our group objectives?

Are differences between men and women defenders addressed in dealing with fear and stress?

FEELINGS OF DISCOURAGEMENT OR PERSECUTION:

Are we able to clearly express feelings of depression or hopelessness when they appear?

PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

Are we aware of the rights we have as women? Do we have minimal conditions of

financial independence? Do we feel able to handle situations of violence? Do we feel that our self-perception and self-esteem is strong? Do we feel weak or exploited because we are women?

ACCESS TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS AND TO THE MEDIA

ACCESS TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS:
Do we have access to contacts within national and international networks?
Can we take charge of urgent actions?
Do we have relations with the feminist movement and/or women-focused human rights organizations?

ACCESS TO THE MEDIA AND ABILITY TO GENERATE NEWS:
Do we have access to the national and international media, as well as to alternative media?
Do defenders know how to handle themselves with the media?
Do the media disseminate discriminatory and sexist messages that reproduce traditional gender roles?

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[1] We understand dangerous areas to be those that are unsafe for the entire population and also those in which there are patterns of violence against women, from intimidation and verbal harassment to physical and sexual attacks. Dangerous areas also include those where there are people or groups who are being confronted by our actions, for example, our relatives or other men denounced by our organization or group for domestic violence.