Environmental Human Rights Defenders

EHRDs Toolkit

A toolkit developed by defenders for defenders to support their work in upholding environmental rights

APNED
Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders

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Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDts) Toolkit

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Acknowledgements

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Context

The triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss represents the single greatest human rights challenge of our era.

In July 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted a historic resolution on ‘The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment’ (A/Res./76/300). The resolution “recognises that sustainable development, in its three dimensions (social, economic and environmental), and the protection of the environment, including ecosystems, contribute to and promote human well-being and the full enjoyment of all human rights, for present and future generations.”

Land and Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) play a vital role as levers of change in protecting the environment and standing up for communities and individuals who are disproportionately impacted by environmental harm. For years, they have been at the front line as advocates for sustainable practices and rights-based development, and in holding duty bearers and businesses responsible for unsustainable practices and violations of all peoples’ right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

At the same time, EHRDs continue to be vulnerable to human rights violations as they face growing resistance to their vital work to support a just and sustainable future for people and the planet. Violations against EHRDs are observed in different forms including criminalisation, harassment, threats, and killings.

Analysis by Front Line Defenders found that in 2021, 358 human rights defenders were killed, more than half of which (59%) worked on land, environmental, and indigenous rights. By failing to provide adequate support and enabling frameworks to protect and bolster the work of EHRDs, there are many missed opportunities to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, advance environmental rule of law and increase compliance with international environmental commitments.

However, the challenges and obstacles faced by EHRDs, as well as their important contributions to the attainment of environmental goals including Agenda 2030, are increasingly being recognised across all regions. There are also strengthened efforts to continue to support their work and improve the conditions in which EHRDs work. This toolkit will provide a set of resources to enable EHRDs to protect, promote and realise the right to a healthy environment and support their important role to tackle the planetary crisis and reach Agenda 2030.
Objective

This knowledge toolkit aims to provide a practical reference for EHRDs to support their work in promoting environmental rights and to prevent and mitigate security issues.

In particular, it aims to increase knowledge on:

Launching Environmental Campaigns  
Module 1

Conducting Risk Assessments  
Module 2

Accessing International Human Rights Mechanisms  
Module 3

Accessing support for EHRDs  
Module 4

Ensuring Psychosocial Wellbeing  
Module 5
Guidance on how to use the toolkit

The EHRD Toolkit has five modules namely:

Module 1: Launching environmental campaigns

Module 2: Conducting risk assessments

Module 3: Accessing international human rights mechanisms

Module 4: Accessing support for EHRDs and

Module 5: Ensuring psychosocial wellbeing

Each module can be used independently of each other but can also be used in combination with others depending on the need. The modules make use of various materials which can also be read as complementary references.

The toolkit is envisioned to evolve over time, being improved and developed, based upon the application and relevance for EHRDs in different contexts and with different needs.
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Module 1

Launching Environmental Campaigns

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit

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Module 01

Launching Environmental Campaigns

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit

*A toolkit developed by defenders for defenders to support their work in upholding environmental rights*
Image credit: Generated on Midjourney by Deepesh Sangtani

Prompts: People campaigning for the environment, nature, defenders, conceptual, artwork
Mass campaigns can be described as planned, organized, and sustained mobilizations of people to achieve specific objectives either by:

1. encouraging targeted actors (decision-makers and other important actors) to take action or refrain from doing something, or
2. encouraging the public to do something or to refrain from doing something.

These two strategies can also be interlinked—for instance, a campaign might ask the masses to sign a petition to call on a corporation to end its resource extraction operations. Campaigns recognize the masses of people as an effective force for change. Among other things, they are launched to seek justice, support the advocacy and struggle of environmental defenders, and increase community security.

The execution of a campaign usually involves thorough planning, internal and external education, organization, mobilization, and post-assessment. First and foremost, concrete analysis is required to plan and eventually launch a campaign. Qualitative and quantitative data is gathered of the social conditions surrounding the campaign. The internal strengths and weaknesses of our machineries, as well as the external opportunities and threats present among the masses, allies, and opponents, as well as the overall social, economic and political situation, are addressed.

A carefully thought-out and executed campaign can help achieve concrete gains for communities. Of course, with any campaign there is no guarantee of a permanent resolution to the issues being tackled. However, by empowering the masses in the process, campaigns can help people realize their potential in achieving change through sustained collective action.

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### Steps in launching an environmental campaign

#### Overview of the Campaign Process

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There is no Planet B
Knowing the community and the issue at hand

In launching any campaign, there needs to be an initial understanding of the issue at hand. Concrete analysis is needed to formulate the campaign and identify the objectives and demands of the community. There should be a basis as to why a campaign needs to be launched in the first place, which is to answer the question: What is the root cause for the particular challenge faced by the community? In order to do this, one must closely know the community the campaign is serving.

It is necessary to conduct a social investigation of the community with the objective of discovering the whole picture of the situation. It is the campaigner's goal to understand the nature of the factors and the relationships of the stakeholders to the threats. Discovering the history and the current situation of the community, while simultaneously acquainting oneself with other specificities of the community, will reveal the best way to tackle environmental issues.

The investigation itself is not a one-day activity but a process that continues even after the campaign is launched. Data gathering can be done by utilizing social media, through interviews with community leaders, and through observation through engagement with the community. Data should be comprehensively analyzed from different angles to produce a conclusion that is in line with the community's specific needs. Additionally, community involvement and participation are crucial to ensuring that the campaign promotes sustainable solutions and empowers members to tackle the issues they confront through their own decisions and actions.

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Background

In a campaign launched by Kalikasan People’s Network in 2019, OceanaGold Out Now, the quantitative and qualitative data gathered and assessed revealed the overall social, economic and political situation relating to the challenge their community was facing.

OceanaGold, an Australian-Canadian gold and copper producer that has multi-million dollar mining stakes in Australia, El Salvador, New Zealand, the Philippines, and the United States, was identified as a threat actor.

The investigation conducted by Kalikasan People’s Network uncovered that OceanaGold had a long history of human rights violations in the area of Didipio, Nueva Vizcaya, where from 2007 to present, various violations were monitored such as lack of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), threats and harassments, red-tagging, demobilization and burning of homes, economic displacement, violent dispersals, arrests, extrajudicial killings, and militarization of the area.

The environmental analysis included data from several investigations between 2013 to 2021, which indicated that watershed villages had been rendered waterless, and water pollution had been recorded twice beyond safe levels for irrigation and eight times beyond safe levels for riverine organisms. It was found that 80% of villagers were experiencing problems accessing clean water.

In relation to the economy, the Nueva Vizcaya Didipio Mine is a prime example of the ‘resource curse.’ Only 5.4% of the value of the minerals plundered from 2013 to 2018 equals OceanaGold’s contributed wages, taxes and costs for development programs, while 23% is equivalent to the estimated environmental and agricultural costs which could have prevented the damage from the watershed villages.
Drawing the strategic framework for the problem

With the data gathered from and with the community, we must identify:

1. our main objectives and demands,
2. our strengths and weaknesses, and
3. our allies and opponents.

By doing this, we are able to identify and tackle the roots of the problem, then locate its broadest expression based on masses' level of awareness and most concrete, urgent needs.

Knowing objectives and demands

Depending on the issue at hand, the objectives and demands of the campaign can take on several different forms. Some common demands include demanding accountability and justice, protecting land and environmental human rights defenders, and stopping a specific project that is destroying the environment. It can also involve relatively simple objectives such as projecting community issues to a broader audience.

Knowing strengths and limitations

In any campaign, it is important to correctly identify the level and scope of your campaign and struggle. Related to this is being familiar with what resources (financial, material, human, or otherwise) are available for your campaign. Past campaigns of a similar or related nature can also provide insight into what can be achieved or what to expect. Insight into the general political situation, including, but not limited to, the workings of the legal system, as well as other characteristics of the government and other relevant institutions, can also be extremely valuable here.

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Knowing your targets: allies, opponents, and the undecided or uninformed

By correctly identifying the targets of your campaign — that is, the institutions you are demanding action from — the task of identifying possible courses of action will become much easier. These targets can range from the government or a specific government institution, a specific company, the military, or financiers of a specific project.

From here, allies and opponents can be identified. Allies are institutions, groups, or individuals who are sympathetic to your campaign and advocacy; this could include community members, religious groups, professionals, civil society organizations, and sympathetic government officials. Integral to the success of any campaign is popular support, so it is helpful to identify as many allies as possible.

Opponents, meanwhile, are those who set out to overturn the campaign. It is important to note that targets may not necessarily be opponents if they are willing to listen and respond positively to your campaign. However, in many cases they are opponents, and those who side with the interests of the target institutions can likewise be opponents in these situations.

Other important targets are the undecided and uninformed. Interaction with them is particularly important because they can be persuaded to become allies and accordingly provide advocacy support, whether it be directly (supplying resources, donating, joining lobbying efforts) or indirectly (creating awareness).

Knowing on what level to launch the campaign

To answer this, it is important to know the nature of the organizations taking the lead in the campaign. Community-level campaigns would involve the social sectors, Indigenous peoples, peasants, and/or workers at a grassroots or localized level. National-level campaigns would be led by national organizations or federations, though local organizations still play a vital role in these campaigns. International-level campaigns would involve national-level organizations across different countries, or at least involve allies from other countries who are supportive of a specific campaign in one country.
Phasing and pacing

Campaigns often start with awareness raising, but it can develop into tactical situations where concrete gains can be obtained. It is important for campaigners to select and time their actions appropriately. The different types of campaigns are connected to one another and go hand-in-hand for a successful, sustained campaign.

*Educational campaigns* often mark the first phase of campaigning. Of course, all campaigns benefit greatly from having a consistent educational component that continues to raise awareness and comprehension among those engaging in the campaign. For this particular type of campaign, however, awareness-raising is the primary task, while looking towards opportunities to develop into a tactical campaign with more concrete demands and action steps.

Characteristics of an educational campaign include a heavy focus on educational activities as well as a more long-term perspective on engagements. Proposed solutions to the problems at hand also typically take on a more general character.

*Tactical campaigns*, on the other hand, usually emerge in response to decisive situations in which there is a clear win-lose scenario that involves persuasion with the target institutions. Compared to the previous type of campaign, it is intended to be short-term with clear, achievable goals.

*Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit*
Different types of actions

Depending on the situation, campaigners can make use of a great variety of actions to amplify their calls and effect the changes they wish to see through their campaigns. It is important to note that all of these approaches are context-dependent, and campaigners should make sure to use what is appropriate and effective in their situation, especially during tactical campaigns. The list below is not exhaustive, and many more different actions can be pursued as relevant to the issue you are tackling.

- Formal petitions
- Street or physical protests, strike actions
- Media-based awareness-raising
- Artistic actions
- Boycotts or non-cooperation with official processes
- Boycotts of companies or products
- Lawsuits
- Blockades
- Occupation of public or private spaces
- Tax resistance
- Vigils
- Creation of community green areas or sanctuaries

As with anything, risks and benefits should be properly assessed before engaging in any action. It also helps to go back to the demands and objectives formulated with the community to ensure that the action steps you are taking are appropriate.

Widening the alliance

As mentioned previously, the more supporters your campaign has, the better. It is in the interest of campaigners to build the broadest support for their campaigns, which can be done by engaging with as many interest groups and individuals as possible. Through this, campaigners can mobilize larger and larger numbers of people, and pursue more and more kinds of action, all contributing to the achievement of the identified goals and demands. Having supporters of all stripes also allows campaigners to reach more people and provides an opportunity for the campaign to snowball into higher levels of public engagement.
Tactical Activities

The OceanaGold campaign in the Philippines was marked with different activities responding to tactical situations across the duration of the campaign. In 2018, Kalikasan PNE filed a submission-complaint to UN special rapporteurs against the Duterte government and the OceanaGold mine in Nueva Vizcaya. This submission compiled years of evidence against the company, with the intention of building public and international pressure on OceanaGold to cease its operations in the Philippines.

In June 2019, with the initial expiration of the mine’s Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement permit, community members organized a people’s barricade to prevent the continued operations of the company in the area. With their barricade, they were able to prevent fuel tankers and service vehicles from entering the site. This was followed closely by a global day of protest held in August, in solidarity with the people’s barricade that paralyzed OceanaGold’s operations.
Assessing the success of the campaign

It is critical that in the process of campaigning, especially after significant tactical victories (or defeats), assessments are conducted so that those engaging in the campaign can learn from mistakes as well as maintain or improve good practices. Assessments should be both quantitative and qualitative to ensure in-depth analysis.

One measure of success that is easily assessed quantitatively is the number of people and/or organizations reached and mobilized by the campaign. By simply keeping track of the individuals and institutions you are able to talk to as a campaigner, or by counting how many individuals are present in organized actions, it is possible to plot how your campaign has grown quantitatively over time. If an aspect of the campaign includes building a dedicated organization or alliance, an increase in membership can also reflect the growth of your campaign as a whole.

More qualitative aspects that can be assessed include increases or decreases in unity among the community and the campaigners, as well as the robustness of organizational structures before, during, and after significant time-points of the campaign. It is important to obtain qualitative feedback from the community or fellow campaigners as numbers may not necessarily capture the whole story behind the successes or failures of a campaign at a given point in time.

Of course, circling back to the core objectives and demands of the campaign is one sure way of assessing whether or not a campaign has been successful at a given point in time. By ensuring that the lessons learned from each assessment are compiled, the campaign will be able to learn from the past and continue to develop towards more victories in the future.

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References


Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit

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Module 01

Launching Environmental Campaigns

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Module 02
Conducting Risk Assessments

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Image credit: Generated on Midjourney by Deepesh Sangtani

Prompts: environment, defenders, women, climate safety, artistic, conceptual
It is an unfortunate reality that people in certain fields are experiencing more grave threats and greater risks due to the nature of what they do. This section will talk about the reason why people working on human rights issues encounter significantly more danger in their daily work. It will also be talking about ways to assess risks, and how to come up with plans to strengthen personal and organizational security.

Why do EHRDs face risks and threats?

As mentioned in the introduction of this module, some people are more exposed to risks and threats. In the context of this manual, the focus is placed on the risks and threats faced by Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs).

EHRDs are "individuals and groups who, in their personal or professional capacity and in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights relating to the environment, including water, air, land, flora and fauna." Those characterized as EHRDs also include people who are not in the field of environmental protection by profession, such as journalists and lawyers.

Due to the ever-increasing demand for natural resources globally, the environment is put to a strain like never before and thus is becoming the new frontline for what is essentially our human rights and our future. Extraction, exploitation, and devastation of the environment have increased at a staggering rate. This is brought by both state actors such as government agencies, as well as non-state actors such as multinational corporations (MNCs), transnational corporations (TNCs), national and local big businesses, and armed groups.

EHRDs protect the environment from exploitation and promote and protect the right to a healthy environment. EHRDs generally support sustainable development that is just and is in compliance with environmental laws.

EHRDs are often branded as “anti-development” or “unpatriotic” for speaking against extractive, illegal and exploitative projects which result in environmental harm, proposed by the government and their partner corporations. In some cases, EHRDs may be targeted as “enemies of the state” and may even be at risk of assassination or forced exile.

EHRDs of marginalized identities (Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, women, people with disabilities, children and youth, etc.) are systematically excluded from the decision making and planning of development or extractive projects even though they, more often than not, reside in affected areas. Intersecting forms of discrimination — against women in Indigenous communities, for instance — put them at heightened risk of exclusion and attacks. Aside from this, many EHRDs have access to fewer resources compared to State and non-state actors — this comparative lack of resources makes it more difficult for them to fight back against exploitative projects.
Why is security important to EHRDs?

EHRDs are at the forefront of the collective defense and promotion of our land, environmental, and fundamental human rights. EHRDs expose violations of environmental rights by State and non-state actors and oppose such violations by, for example, launching campaigns.

EHRDs seeking to protect the environment, as previously mentioned, are often silenced by the government and by corporations, as State and non-state actors may seek financial and/or political gain from the exploitative development projects that they are launching.

While EHRDs are afforded some protection under international law, they nevertheless remain vulnerable to extra-judicial harassment, threats and violence. It is not uncommon, therefore, for state forces to target defenders, in protection of exploitative projects (and their profit). The security of EHRDs working in remote areas is especially precarious because they are harder to reach for support in the event that something does happen.
Context and current conditions

Global Witness reported that over 200 land and environmental defenders were killed in 2020 and 2019, averaging over four people per week — its highest numbers on record thus far. Other lethal attacks on EHRDs, like arrests and smear campaigns, have been on the rise as well. Documentation from Mexico, Colombia, India and the Philippines showed increasingly concerning threats to the safety of defenders in these areas. Industries often linked to such threats are logging, agribusiness, hydropower and mining. Furthermore, since numerous land conflicts and resource extraction activities involve areas where indigenous communities live, these groups are disproportionately vulnerable to attacks.²

Due to the security of EHRDs often being under threat, plans must be in place to mitigate risks and threats. These plans are dependent on what the situation in the local area is; there is no be-all, end-all, security plan as we all have different needs depending on our current situation.

Risks

Definitions

What EHRDs do, as peaceful advocates of the environment and the rights of communities to a healthy environment, inevitably challenges the interests of influential actors, and that can expose them to risks and threats. Risks are, quite simply, any potential harm that a person is exposed to. Risks can be a direct result of a threat. They are also heavily dependent on the political context and landscape at the time.

Having established how dynamic risks can be, it is no surprise that they occur in many possible ways. Risks could range from personal stress and trauma from harassment, data breaches of important information, to even injury and loss of life.

Possible sources of risk

Potential sources of risk can come from different factors, such as the lack of legal protection, lack of law enforcement, impunity, work being undertaken in rural areas without access to proper healthcare or different threat actors.

Threat actors

Threat actors are powerful actors, such as government agencies, MNCs, big businesses, and security services.
Importance of risk management

Risk assessment and management should not be seen as selfish acts, but rather as tools that allow EHRDs to continue their work in defending environmental and human rights.

Effectively assessing and managing risks requires a clear perception of the potential threats in a given situation. Different or distorted perceptions can hinder EHRDs from managing risks, and likewise, from doing their work effectively. There may be threats that are apparent to some but are unrecognized by others. There is also a need to distinguish genuine, recognized threats from unfounded fears.

If EHRDs more accurately perceive threats and more effectively manage risks, then they will not only be able to ensure security for themselves and their organizations, but they will also be able to sustain the work they do in upholding and defending environmental and human rights. The following sections will discuss how to quantify and assess risks.

The Risk Formula

\[
Risk = \frac{(Threats \times Vulnerabilities)}{Capacities}
\]

Image 2.1: Risk Formula equation

There are many ways to assess and quantify risk, and one such method is through the use of the risk formula. A few terms must first be defined to better understand the given formula. Definitions given by EarthRights International’s facilitation toolkit\(^3\) will be used to define the following terms.

Threats are things that may cause harm in multiple ways, be it physical, digital, psychosocial, or financial. A more in-depth look at threats will be done in a later section.

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Vulnerabilities can be likened to the weaknesses of a particular EHRD, based on personal factors, circumstances, and identities. Vulnerabilities can also be found in multiple aspects of a defender’s environment. Vulnerabilities may increase the likelihood of a particular EHRD being targeted by a specific threat, or worsen the impact such a threat may have. Not knowing the legal system of the area where work is carried out is an example of a vulnerability. Working without a proper support group could also be considered a vulnerability, as proper support could lead to better work practices. Long-held beliefs surrounding particular matters can also prove to be a vulnerability, such as a community’s beliefs surrounding LGBT rights, reproductive health issues, or the separation of organized religion and state. The beliefs held by the community could be a vulnerability if the majority do not agree or support the defenders’ beliefs.

Lastly, capacities are the strengths that defenders have. Capacities can mitigate the risk posed by threats and amplified by vulnerabilities. Examples of capacities include having a solid grasp of the legal system of one’s area, having access to safe and accessible communication and/or transportation, and having strategies for taking care of one’s physical and mental health, to deal with any stress associated with being an EHRD.

An important matter to consider, though, is that risk is dynamic because of the fickle changes with the degree of threats and types of vulnerabilities. Sometimes, it may not be enough to adjust and grow capacities because of the amount of time and resources that it takes to do so.

Reducing threats and vulnerabilities as well as enhancing capacities, is the general idea for better handling risks. Threats, meanwhile, are harder to reduce as there are cases wherein the sources of threat are likely to go unscathed. The next focus should then be identifying risks and through various risk assessment methods/tools.
We can summarize the Risk Formula with the following:

There is a greater risk when the threats and vulnerabilities outweigh the capacities of the defender. To put it another way, risk can be reduced by having more and better capacities to sufficiently handle and get through situations.
Risk Assessment Tools

1. Identifying all potential threats during work

This point deals with what you are afraid to happen to you as a defender when you are doing your work. Make a list of things that could pose threats and bring you harm. Consider colleagues, family, and community, as groups that are potentially affected by threats posed to you.

2. Identifying strengths (capacities) and weaknesses (vulnerabilities)

This is all about asking what assets you have or are available to you, that protect you from harm and from other factors that make you more prone to danger. List down everything in relation to potential threats and group them suitably.

3. Assessing the risk level

As stated by the Risk Formula, the amount of risk is dependent on threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities surrounding a human rights defender. Alongside these, a threat’s likelihood and impact should be taken into consideration, so that proper attention and resources can be directed towards it.

Likelihood refers to how possible it is for a threat to take place. Likelihood depends on the context of the situation and is different for every threat. The possibility of getting arrested is higher during a protest as compared to working in an office. Another example could be the likelihood of two different threats varying, such as the likelihood of being arrested and the likelihood of having data stolen.

Impact, meanwhile, is about the level of harm present if the threat were to actually occur. The harm may be directed towards you or the people around you, and could even be directed to information and assets that you have.

Since risks and threats are not always exact, it could help to use categories like Low, Medium, or High, to assess the severity of the threat. Threats with high likelihood and high impact should be prioritized first. There is also the concept of acceptable risk which will be discussed in a later section.

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4 Considering the impact of threats on others

As EHRDs, you are not alone in carrying your tasks and responsibilities. EHRDs always work with their colleagues and they are surrounded by friends and family that may or may not be in the same line of work. However, due to the nature of the work, potential threat actors may find information about you and your work through the people around you.

It is important to construct security plans and measures that make sure people in your immediate circle are not exposed and vulnerable to threat actors.

5 Identifying risk mitigation actions to reduce vulnerabilities

As mentioned earlier, threats are not under an EHRD’s control. However, capacities and vulnerabilities are areas that EHRDs have an extent of control over.

The overall goal is to increase capacities and reduce vulnerabilities. Risk mitigation is about actively constructing preventative measures to reduce the level of risk at a particular threat. Multiple actions may be considered, but make sure to discuss them with your colleagues to make sure they are the most appropriate and effective measures for the threats at hand. Some mitigation measures could become permanent and then turn into capacities. As an example, having a way to pass information safely is a risk mitigation action that could become a capacity, as long as the system is maintained and updated.

6 Identifying responses to threats by making contingency actions

Regardless of how well-planned risk mitigation actions are, the situation on the field will not always be smooth. Contingency actions should be prepared as well, so EHRDs have an appropriate response to the situation should a threat actually occur.

In contrast to risk mitigation actions that are prepared prior to a threat occurring, contingency measures are for when the threat has occurred. These are not for changing the likelihood and impact of a threat, but rather for controlling the risk posed by the threat.

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7 Creating an action plan for implementation

The challenge that comes after identifying risks and coming up with the appropriate mitigation and contingency plans, is their execution. An action plan for implementation with specific assignments to people, groups, and schedules, will ensure that a proper and smooth implementation will be carried out. Ensuring security and carrying out action plans are a process and it is inevitable for some steps in the plan to depend on the previous steps, as well as the behavior of the people carrying out the plans. It must be stated that a security plan is only as strong as the weakest link in it. Make sure to instruct every member in your organization to diligently follow security protocols. Monitoring of threats and changing circumstances is essential. Monitoring could be done through various ways, such as access to physical documents, as well as information stored digitally.
Acceptable Risk and Alternatives

As mentioned earlier, the combination of a threat’s likelihood and impact should be considered before taking action. In line with this, a level of acceptable risk should be set so that EHRDs can decide whether or not to proceed with plans surrounding a particular situation. It should be noted, though, that the level of acceptable risk varies from person to person and from organization to organization. Never assume that the risk one person is willing to take is the same as for another person.

It is immensely important to have a set level of acceptable risk. It is fully understandable that you would want to carry out your work regardless of the present risks, but it has to be noted that continuing the work safely at another time would be more beneficial in the long term for you, your organization, and the people you are working with. Encountering and suffering harm from recklessly pushing through despite the given risks, impact not just you, but everyone around you.

Assessment of risks, vulnerabilities, and capacities

Now that the intricacies of risk have been discussed, we will take a look at how the concepts mentioned relate to the various risk assessment tools to be discussed.

Start with the assessment of risks, vulnerabilities, and capacities. This can be looked at as a tabular form of the Risk Formula.

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<th>Vulnerabilities</th>
<th>Capacities Existing</th>
<th>Capacities Required</th>
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<td>Abduction</td>
<td>Living alone</td>
<td>Good security at home, fence, alarm, camera</td>
<td>Guard dog</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trusted neighbors to keep a lookout</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other places for shelter in times of danger</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 2.1: Risks, Vulnerabilities, and Capacities

In making this table, it is crucial to consider vulnerabilities and capacities that are related to a particular risk. An example would be one’s knowledge of the law being useless in the case of an abduction, as an abduction is outside the law to begin with. Therefore, make sure to take the time to thoroughly align risks, vulnerabilities, and capacities. Vulnerabilities are a lack of capacities, which in turn makes it so that an increase in capacity is a decrease in vulnerability.

It should also be noted that the table should be updated should there be changes in any of the categories listed. There may be an increase in either vulnerabilities or capacities, and it is important to take note of those to make sure that risks are properly mitigated.
The following is a general checklist of different categories of capacities which could be helpful when filling out the assessment table above:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Capacities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>• On risks and threats you face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• On your legal rights and of local laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• On your community, culture, and political system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• On how to deal with stress and health issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contacts</strong></td>
<td>• Supportive local community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Large group of people to quickly mobilize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Human rights organizations, media, influential/public figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contacts in the government, police, health, and other key sectors*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contacts in Embassies which have specific guidelines for protection of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EHRDs (European Union and Norwegian Embassies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Regional and international human rights organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
<td>• Security plans for everyday risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contingency plans for ‘worst case situations’ and various threats and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clear roles and responsibilities for security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mainstreaming security in work plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Regular review and revision of security plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Organization /</td>
<td>• Good public reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office**</td>
<td>• Substantial physical security (gates, locks, secure doors and windows,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>good lighting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clear organizational mandate (for easy explanation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• IT security (firewall, antivirus and malware protection, password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>management systems, encrypted files both offline and online)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Visitor policy for preventing unauthorized access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>• Personal behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supportive family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Access to a safe house if required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Safe transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Financial resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Health insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ability to manage stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note that this is an example, and that this might actually be a liability or not apply in all contexts.
Assessing the risk levels in a situation becomes more challenging when EHRDs have been living in risky conditions for an extended period of time. Additionally, when the situation worsens, it may not be evident at which stage action should be taken to avoid harm.

For this, the Risk Matrix can be used. It makes planning easier so time is not wasted on risks that are unlikely to happen or risks with little harm. To use this, we will revisit the concepts of likelihood/probability and impact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>1 Very Low</th>
<th>2 Low</th>
<th>3 Medium</th>
<th>4 High</th>
<th>5 Very High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Very High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Very Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Image 2.2: Risk Matrix**

We will use the colors red, yellow, and green in understanding the Risk Matrix. In general, green cells have the lowest impact and the lowest probability. Conversely, the red cells have the highest impact and highest probability, which means they are the most dangerous/harmful and they are also the most likely to occur at a given time.

For the green cells (low impact, low probability), normal security measures can be used as these could be considered acceptable risks.

Action plans should be produced for risks that are in the middle of the matrix (yellow cells: medium to high impact, medium to high probability). These action plans should aim to reduce the probability, or the impact of risks, or both. Medium-level risks typically require both a plan for mitigation measures, and a plan for contingency measures (that are reactive). The same goes for extreme risks (red-coloured).

Lastly, for the red cells (risks with highest impact and highest probability), an action plan and a contingency plan should be made. Recalling from the previous sections, contingency plans are made for handling threats/risks that have already happened, and are used to reduce the impact to the individual and/or the organization.
Force Field Analysis

Force Field Analysis is a visual tool used for the identification of forces that could be helping or hindering the completion of target objectives. It uses the concepts of supporting and resisting forces, where risks could be represented by resisting forces and capacities could be represented by supporting forces.⁶

Image 2.3: Force Field Analysis for assessment of working environments⁶

To start, draw a horizontal arrow pointing to a box. This represents you working toward a target or a work objective. Write a brief summary of the objective in the box, and use it as a way to identify supporting and resisting forces that surround you on your way to completing your objective.

Supporting forces have arrows facing the same direction as you, while resisting forces have arrows facing the opposite. There is also a box for forces with unknown directions.

These forces could be supporting or resisting, but that will depend on what happens after continuous monitoring.

For a more concrete example, we will use Protection International’s example from their Protection Manual.

Imagine that you belong to an organization dealing with indigenous people’s rights to natural resources on their own land. There are ongoing conflicts between a number of stakeholders about the exploitation of those resources. You now want to extend your work to a neighbouring area with similar problems.

Image 2.34: Stakeholder Analysis⁶

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit

Also known as Actor/Stakeholder Analysis, this tool is an important way of increasing available information in decision-making concerning protection. It concerns itself with the identification and description of different actors/stakeholders that are involved in a situation, and assesses them based on their known characteristics and interests. A stakeholder is any person, group, or organization that has a stake or interest in the situation or issue.

There are different types of stakeholders in a stakeholder analysis:

**Primary stakeholders** are the defenders themselves, as well as their colleagues and the associated sector that they work for. They have a primary stake in matters of their own protection.

**Duty-bearer stakeholders**, meanwhile, are the ones responsible for the protection of primary stakeholders. Some examples could be government and state institutions, international bodies with mandates for protection, and to some extent opposition armed actors as they must refrain from attacking the defenders.

**Key stakeholders** are actors who can significantly influence the protection of defenders. These actors may be influential by having political clout that could put pressure on duty-bearing stakeholders that are not doing their jobs. Examples of these could be United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Conversely, other key stakeholders may also be involved in pressuring and attacking the defenders. These could be in the form of mass media, private corporations, private militaries, and other NGOs.

---

The Four Steps of a Stakeholder Analysis

1. Identifying the wider protection issue (i.e., the security situation of defenders in a particular region in a country).

2. Identifying who the stakeholders (institutions, groups, individuals) are that are relevant to the protection issue via brainstorming and discussion with your colleagues.

3. Analyzing the stakeholders' characteristics and particular attributes, such as responsibilities in protection, the power to influence the protection situation, aims, strategies, legitimacy and interests.

4. Investigating and analyzing relationships between stakeholders.

After conducting these four steps, place the relevant stakeholders in a matrix similar to what's shown below. Analyze the attributes of each stakeholder (aims, interests, etc.). Fill in the boxes in the diagonal line where each stakeholder intersects with itself.
## A Matrix System for Stakeholder Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Police</th>
<th>Armed Opposition Group</th>
<th>National Human Rights NGOs</th>
<th>Churches</th>
<th>Other governments</th>
<th>UN Agencies</th>
<th>International NGOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>(stakeholder)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>(stakeholder)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(stakeholder)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Opposition Group</td>
<td></td>
<td>National Human Rights NGOs</td>
<td>(stakeholder)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other governments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(stakeholder)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International NGOs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(stakeholder)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### BOX A

For each stakeholder:
- aims and interests
- strategies
- legitimacy
- power

### BOX B

Interrelationship between stakeholders:
- interrelationship in relation to the protection issue and in relation to strategic issues for both stakeholders.

---

Place the aims, interests, and strategies of armed opposition groups in the box “A.” Analyze the relationships between stakeholders, fill in the boxes that define the most important relationships in relation to the protection issue, for example, the one which intersects between the army and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in box “B,” and so on.

---

Threats

Definitions

Threats refer to the possibility of causing harm to a defender. More specifically, threats can be damaging to an EHRD’s work and their security, whether it be digital, economic, physical, psychosocial, or another type. An example of a threat is strict censorship laws because they can put EHRDs at risk of criminalization when, for instance, defenders expose unsustainable business practices on social media.

Threat responses vary from person to person and from organization to organization. Before proceeding to the security response to threats, we should remember that being targeted by a threat is a shocking experience that may cause trauma. Analyzing a threat properly ensures that the response is appropriate and would not cause any more harm to the one being targeted.

Threat analysis

A tool that may help us identify threats is a situational analysis through the PESTLE framework. Being aware of key developments in our political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental conditions (the acronym comes from the initial letters) can give us a clearer picture of how changes to our external surroundings can impose threats to our work and security. It is also important to note our sources of information in a PESTLE analysis to create a more accurate perception of the threats we face. Below are examples of questions that may be helpful to ask while using this framework.

Political factors

- What is the type of government in the countries we work in?
- Are there any rising figures in politics that have a history of being opposed to the work of activists, or more specifically, EHRDs?
- How active are NHRIs in collaborating with and protecting EHRDs in the countries we work in? Can they provide us support in the event that we are attacked?

Economic factors

- How might a possible economic downturn affect the wellbeing of the people in our organization and its partner community?
- Do we have the resources to provide support to EHRDs in the event that threats materialize? (E.g. if they are displaced by a typhoon while on the field.)

Social factors

- Are we part of any groups (e.g. women, ethnic minorities) that are especially vulnerable or disproportionately targeted by the government, business sector, etc.?
- What are the cultural norms (e.g. patriarchal society) of the places we work and how might these affect our work?
Technological factors

- Are there new forms of government surveillance that might threaten our digital privacy?
- Is hacking of digital devices of EHRD organizations or other advocacy groups common in the area?

Legal factors

- What are the implications of censorship laws on our security as defenders?
- On what charges are EHRDs in the area usually arrested? What are the patterns of trial outcomes involving detained EHRDs? Can these patterns make us more vulnerable to criminalization considering our field of work?

Environmental factors

- How would natural disasters affect our access to the internet and electricity?
- Are the roads and infrastructure in the areas we work stable enough for us to efficiently do our job?

Tactical Technology Collective’s Strategy Manual for Human Rights Defenders provides a comprehensive guide to preparing for threats, exploring them and their potential impacts, strategizing our responses to them, and acting on these security tactics to overcome them.

This manual is recommended for further reading on effective security practices for EHRDs, including how to efficiently do a PESTLE analysis, amidst a wide array of threats.

Analyzing a threat properly ensures that the response is appropriate and would not cause any more harm to the one being targeted.

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
Monitoring threats

Threats are alarming, but to maintain a level of alert for an extended amount of time can pose problems like disinterest or losing focus in maintaining security protocols. Raising alarm for the whole organization should only follow the confirmation of reliable evidence of an emerging threat.

Threats that do not materialize should be taken note of. Explanations as to why it did not materialize must be made and depending on the conditions surrounding it, the threat value may be brought down to a lower priority or it could even be closed altogether. At the same time, it should also be considered what may cause the threat to rise again in the future.

Perception and response to threats

As mentioned earlier, threats are shocking experiences that could lead to trauma. The trauma developed could potentially warp threat perception, and in turn warp the responses done to address threats.

Unfounded fears arise from sensitivity to things that remind a person of their past traumatic experiences. Harmless situations seem more daunting than they really are, and danger is perceived even though there is objectively nothing to fear for. This then brings out reactions that are unsuitable for the situation at hand, and it can lead to a negative impact for the person, the people around them, and the organization they are in.

Unrecognized threats could also be exacerbated by previous traumatic experiences. After a prolonged exposure to risks and threats, a person’s internal alarm systems may be thrown off, which could lead to an overall lack of awareness surrounding potential threats.

As mentioned earlier, threats are shocking experiences that could lead to trauma. The trauma developed could potentially warp threat perception, and in turn warp the responses done to address threats.
Security

Introduction

Generally speaking, security could be defined as freedom from the real or potential harm of threats. All the tools and methods so far are part of protection: the plans and prevention schemes to enhance security.

This section will be primarily divided into two categories: physical and digital. Physical security will focus more on how to secure yourself, your home, your office, and the people around you. Digital security will focus more on what you can do to secure information stored digitally and online, especially now that we are at a time where everyone and everything could be digitally connected. The topic of psychosocial security and wellbeing is tackled in Module 2.5.

Physical security

Physical security is concerned with finding vulnerabilities concerning the spaces you occupy and taking appropriate measures to address the issues and threats of damage, unauthorized access, physical harm to occupants, etc. in such spaces.

Physical security can be looked at in multiple categories: personal, home, and office. The goal here is to prevent unauthorized access. Personal health and safety greatly impacts security through things like awareness of surroundings, decision making, and burnout.

The following are recommendations from the Workbook on Security:*

*This checklist is not intended to be a blueprint for security. Your own context is the key determining factor. Consider the risks and threats you face, and any vulnerabilities you have in order to supplement and personalize this list.**

Environmental Human Rights Defenders

[EHRDs] Toolkit
# Recommendations Checklist for Home Security

## General
- Using best protection measures available and common in the community you belong in (security cameras, locks, gates, sufficient lighting)
- Have an easy-to-access list of emergency numbers for quick contacting, including international networks and organizations that can provide support

## Health and Safety
- Fire alarms, fire extinguishers, first aid kits
- Having separate entrance and emergency exits
- Safety of parking areas

## People and Reception
- Inform family to not accept unexpected packages
- Get to know your neighbors so they can then alert you of any suspicious activity in the area

## Communication
- Have a discussion with your family regarding the risks surrounding you and have plans ready for certain cases
  - **Partner** – It is up to you the extent of how much you will tell your partner. Consider what is best for your situation and how to navigate threats so that your partner remains safe
- **Children** – Consider what you can tell and how you will explain the risks surrounding you. Instruct them to not talk to strangers and not give away personal information
- **Teachers** – Have a good relationship with the school faculty and staff. Notify them that only authorized people can fetch your children from school.
- Consider having code phrases

## Data and Documents
- Avoid leaving sensitive documentation at home
- Avoid taking home work with sensitive content
## Recommendations Checklist for Office Security

### Emergency Contacts
- Have an easy-to-access and updated list of contacts for local NGOs, hospitals, lawyers, and other sources of emergency assistance

### Technical and Physical Boundaries
- Maintain the condition of external gates/fences, doors and windows, as well as the walls and roofs
- Maintain the condition of lighting, alarms, and cameras
- Review key procedures and storage areas

### Office Personnel
- Ensure that only trustworthy people are hired
- Train all personnel on relevant security plans
- Have a plan in case of a raid
- Consider operating on a ‘need-to-know’ basis regarding sensitive work
- Get to know if the staff have problems (financially or other pressures), as disgruntled staff can be more vulnerable to external pressure
- Change protocols whenever a position is vacated

### Visitor Admission Procedures
- Are admission procedures in operation for all types of visitors? Make sure all the staff are familiar with these procedures
- Consult with the staff members executing admission procedures if the set protocols are efficient
- Make plans for handling unexpected parcel arrivals
- Note down the names of visitors that arrive in the office

### Information Security
- Carry out proper backup procedures for data storage
- Make sure to not leave any sensitive information lying around on easily visible places
- Have a system for recording and filing confidential information

### Security in Case of Accidents
- Check the conditions of fire extinguishers, gas pipes, water taps, electricity lines and fuse boxes, etc.

### Responsibility and Training
- Have assignments for various aspects of office security
- Conduct a security training program and review it often
Digital Security

In this information age, data is the most valuable asset. Unfortunately, gaps exist in access and capacities surrounding information technology; and these affect the work of EHRDs too.

Since these threats are not tangible, unlike those in physical security, they can sometimes be more difficult to notice, track, and solve. It is thus important to develop and maintain your digital literacy. EarthRights International has identified six forms of digital threats, namely:

**Malware** — software that intends to infringe on, steal and/or destroy content stored in a device or online account without the owner’s authorization.

**Phishing** — employing deception to retrieve personal information and is often sent to one’s email or phone.

**Trojan attack** — clickable links that download or install malware into one’s device.

**Spyware** — software that allows the attacker to keep the device or account owner under surveillance without their knowledge.

**Monitoring of social media profiles** — close observation of social media profiles to obtain information (e.g. location, contact details).

**Online harassment and smear campaigns** — badgering from anonymous individuals online to intimidate defenders and, sometimes, spread false information about them.

The following is a checklist of digital security checkpoints provided by Security in a Box to get you started with proper digital security: 8
Digital Security Pointers

- **Create and maintain strong passwords**
  - Avoid using personal information
  - Avoid reusing passwords
  - Use longer passwords with a varying mix of symbols, numbers, and capitalized and non-capitalized letters
  - Regularly change passwords
  - Do not share passwords to others
  - Be careful when typing your password in public
  - Use Two Factor Authentication when logging in, which ensures that only you have access to your account; this can be in the form of a verification code sent to your mobile number, face or fingerprint ID, security question, etc., after you input your username and password

- **Protect the privacy of your online communication**
  - Create multiple disposable accounts
  - Encrypt messages and delete message history whenever possible
  - Ensure mic/camera are off by default on video calls
  - Remove identifying information from files

- **Protect yourself and your data when using social media**
  - Avoid linking multiple addresses and numbers to the same account
  - Avoid sharing personal information on social media
  - Limit the people who can view and have access to your social media accounts and activity

- **Protect against physical threats**
  - Make an inventory of your devices
  - Create office access policies and arrange rooms for increased privacy and security
  - Keep your devices close to you at all times
  - Avoid unnecessary connections to your network
  - Secure your wifi network by changing its name, creating a guest wifi account, and storing network equipment in secure rooms
- Dispose of sensitive information properly
- Consider getting Uninterruptible Power Supplies to prevent accidents and power outages

**Protect against malware**
- Beware of suspicious links
- Install a reliable anti-malware software
- Encrypt sensitive information and backup files

**Protecting mobile devices**
- Update to the latest Operating System available
- Download apps only from reliable sources
- Review app permissions and privacy settings
- Separate and secure user accounts
- Set your screen to sleep and lock, and control visible notifications when device is locked
- Turn off WiFi, Bluetooth, etc. when not in use
- Use a physical privacy filter to prevent others from seeing your screen or camera

**Internet Connection**
- **Visiting blocked sites**
  - Use a VPN to spoof access location (ensure that VPNs are legal in your area beforehand)
  - Use Tor Browser and DuckDuckGo to browse safely on the Internet

**Files**
- **Protect your sensitive information**
  - Delete old data instead of storing it
  - Encrypt your files and devices
  - Use a system of code words
  - Backup your files

- **Back up and recover from information loss**
  - Identify and organize your information to be backed up
  - Have multiple copies of your information stored in different places

- **Destroy sensitive information**
  - Regularly erase sensitive information from your device
  - Encrypt sensitive information before erasing them
Way Forward

Formulating a security plan

To synthesize all the risk assessment tools, threat monitoring tools, and security checklists, we will now discuss how to come up with a security plan. Security is dynamic and complex; it changes quickly and it is a result of many interacting variables. Security plans must also be implemented in many levels: personal/individual, and organizational.

The goal of a security plan is to reduce risk. To do this, it must attempt to reduce both threat levels and vulnerabilities, as well as have a way to add and improve to your capabilities. Security plans should consider day-to-day policies, and protocols for handling specific scenarios.

A security plan should have the following:  

- Context analysis
- Threat analysis
- Risk assessment
- Security protocols and planning
- Mitigation and contingency measures
- Implementation and review

Security plans should consider **day-to-day policies, and protocols** for handling specific scenarios.

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
Most of these have been discussed in the earlier sections of this module so the focus now would be on conducting a context analysis. Context analyses aim to highlight different aspects of insecurity present and help your understanding of your own and your organization’s current capacity in relation to security. It is recommended to do this during your organization’s planning period, or when security factors are about to change. Conducting a context analysis can be done using a variety of guiding questions, or through a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis.

The following questions are from the Workbook on Security:  

1. What are the key issues which impact human rights in the country? (Consider political, economic, and social issues)

2. Who are the main actors on these key issues? (Consider powerful individuals, institutions, local, national, regional, and international organizations, businesses, and other states)

3. How might our human rights work negatively or positively affect the interests of these key actors — how have they responded already?

4. When are HRDs most likely to be attacked (verbally or physically)? (E.g., prior to or during elections, after publishing reports or naming key figures publicly, at demonstrations, anniversaries, high-level visits, events, etc.)

A SWOT analysis involves analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (the acronym comes from the initial letters). The strengths and weaknesses are ‘internal’ (within your organization) and the opportunities and threats are from the external environment in your region, country or community.

A SWOT analysis can be carried out in relation to any situation, but here is an example in relation to security.

To do a SWOT analysis:

1. In a group of colleagues, use a sheet of flipchart paper divided into four (as below) and brainstorm the items to be included. Write up the contributions of everyone.

2. Consider which are the items to be prioritized (between three and five) and develop concrete action plans relating to these priorities.

Context analyses aims to highlight different aspects of insecurity present and help your understanding of your own and your organization’s current capacity in relation to security.
### Sample SWOT Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths (in relation to security)</th>
<th>Weaknesses (in relation to security)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Committed staff</td>
<td>• Knowledge about how to deal with threats is not shared in a uniform way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Senior staff are experienced in dealing with threats</td>
<td>• No security plan for office and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some influential contacts in government</td>
<td>• Poor relationship with Ministry of Defence (which is responsible for the army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Independent media supports our work</td>
<td>• Government-controlled media does not cover our activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Good contacts with regional and international human rights organizations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities (in relation to security)</th>
<th>Threats (to security)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Other local NGOs working on human rights; advocacy; legal issues; and psychological support</td>
<td>• Army and armed opposition group both issue threats to NGOs working on human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• European Union Guidelines on HRDs – we can approach Embassies to assist us</td>
<td>• Potential legislation to control activities and funding of human rights NGOs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit

A toolkit developed by defenders for defenders to support their work in upholding environmental rights

Module

02

Conducting Risk Assessments
Module 3

Accessing International Human Rights Mechanisms

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit

APNED
Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders
Module 03

Accessing International Human Rights Mechanisms

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
A toolkit developed by defenders for defenders to support their work in upholding environmental rights
Image credit: Generated on MidJourney by Deepesh Sangtani

Prompts: risk assessment, people, human rights, conceptual, artwork
EHRDs in various parts of the world continue to be vulnerable to human rights violations as they face growing resistance to environmental activism.

These violations are observed in different forms including harassment, threats, and killings. The First Global Report on Environmental Rule of Law published by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2019 found that at least 908 EHRDs across 35 countries were killed between 2002 and 2013. In 2021, 358 human rights defenders were killed, of which 59% worked on land, environmental, and Indigenous rights.

While there continues to be a lack of effective measures for local and global protection of EHRDs, defenders may consider submitting information to the human rights mechanisms listed below to call for local, regional, and international attention to ongoing human rights violations.

UN Human Rights Mechanisms

UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies

Major international human rights treaties have been in force for several years, covering a broad range of concerns. If a State is a party to a treaty, it has an obligation to take measures to ensure everyone in the State can enjoy the rights being forwarded in the treaty.

The UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies are committees composed of independent experts tasked to monitor compliance and implementation of these treaties.

The independent human rights experts of the treaty bodies are nominated and elected for fixed, renewable terms of four years by State parties.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treaty body</th>
<th>Corresponding treaty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)</td>
<td>International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)</td>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Committee (CCPR)</td>
<td>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and optional protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and optional protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee against Torture (CAT)</td>
<td>Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (CAT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT)</td>
<td>Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (OPCAT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and optional protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW)</td>
<td>International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CRMW)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)</td>
<td>International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED)</td>
<td>International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Treaty bodies consider regular and comprehensive reports from State parties outlining their progress in implementing the treaty provisions in their country. They also publish report drafting guidelines for State parties, elaborate on treaty provisions, and organize discussions on themes related to the treaty.

Some treaty bodies consider complaints filed by individuals regarding alleged violation of rights by a State party, and some treaty bodies also conduct inquiries.

Monitoring reporting obligations of State parties

States are obligated to submit regular reports to the treaty bodies of the treaties to which they are a party. Upon ratification or accession, the State must submit an initial report within a year of the treaty entering into force for that State (or two years for the CESCR and the CRC). Afterward, the State is also obliged to submit periodic reports generally every four or five years, though this may differ for some treaty bodies.
In these reports, the State must detail the legal, administrative, and judicial measures taken to enforce the treaty in its country, and it should also mention any challenges encountered in the process of realizing the treaty provisions. Guidelines are provided by the treaty bodies to ensure that adequate information is included in these reports. In drafting these reports, States are encouraged to engage with civil society, and in the process, incorporate criticism and constructive feedback from the public.

The UN recognizes that submitting reports on time may be a challenge for some countries, particularly if the State is party to several or all of the core treaties. If a State party fails to report over a long period of time, the treaty bodies undergo a “review procedure” to consider the situation of the country in question in the absence of a report.

Activists and campaigners can monitor the State’s progress (or lack thereof) in drafting these reports to gain information about the State’s approach to human rights relevant to the treaty in question and to fight for the consideration of their concerns in these documents and elsewhere.

Attending and contributing to treaty body sessions

Treaty bodies meet regularly to discuss developments in the human rights situations of States parties. Civil society participation in treaty body sessions is indispensable, as NGOs and local campaigners provide valuable information across all parts of the process leading up to and during these sessions.

All of the treaty bodies provide general guidelines and information on how civil society can participate in their work. They also provide specific information on upcoming treaty body sessions. All of this can be accessed online on their respective websites.

All observers who wish to attend and participate in treaty body sessions physically need to be duly registered. The registration portal can be accessed on the specific webpage of the session you wish to attend. Note that physical attendance to the sessions, which are held in Switzerland, means that participants are responsible for their own travel and accommodation arrangements, as well as any matters related to visa procurement.

Global Witness reported that over 200 land and environmental defenders were killed in 2020 and 2019, averaging over four people per week.
Following up on treaty bodies’ concluding observations

Concluding observations refer to a public and official document wherein UN Committees evaluate and make recommendations on the situation of human rights in a particular country. Campaigners can make use of the concluding observations on the State in question to amplify their calls and demands. One tactic would be through media outreach and dissemination — by getting media coverage and increasing public awareness of the issue, this can place additional pressure on the State to respond. Among other things, press conferences, news articles, and audience-friendly social media content are all avenues that can be explored.

Civil society actors can also help in monitoring the implementation of the concluding observations by the State party. This information can then be communicated back to the relevant treaty body either formally or informally. Producing a follow-up review for the periodic review process can be helpful for assessing the implementation of the concluding observations.

Meetings with governments can also be explored, where the concluding observations can be brought up with State delegates. This can involve promoting relevant legislative or policy reforms, using the concluding observations as a guide. This approach is of course dependent on the situation of your country, and whether or not government officials will be open to such meetings with civil society. Adoption of national implementation plans, based on the treaty body recommendations, can also be sought out. Having such plans can assist in the implementation of the recommendations, particularly at the national level. UN agencies such as the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), alongside international NGOs and the diplomatic community, can aid in the development and execution of such plans.

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), in countries where the NHRI is an independent body, can also be engaged regarding tactics related to following up on the recommendations.

National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow up (NRMFs) can also be approached by NGOs. If there is no NRMF in your country, or the NRMF does not adequately cooperate with civil society, campaigners can lobby for the creation of an NRMF or the improved cooperation of the NRMF and civil society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treaty body</th>
<th>Complaint</th>
<th>Inquiry</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CERD</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CESC</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCPR</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
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<td>CAT</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPT</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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Environmental Human Rights Defenders
(EHRDs) Toolkit
Submitting complaints to a treaty body

Eight treaty bodies are mandated to consider individual communications, also known as complaints: CERD, CCPR, CESCRR, CEDAW, CAT, CRC, CRPD, and CED.

Individual communications are helpful as they are another mechanism of seeking accountability from the State for human rights violations. These may be submitted by or on behalf of the individual. For some treaty bodies (CESCR, CERD, CEDAW, CRPD, or CRC), you may also submit on behalf of groups.

However, there are some limitations to this approach. Should the relevant treaty body recognize the human rights violation, it can only recommend action to the State party, while it has no way of enforcing its decision. It may also take several years for an individual communication to be processed by a treaty body.

In addition, complaints are typically not anonymous, which can have repercussions for those who submit them. However, some protective measures can be requested from the treaty body to address any security concerns.

Individual communications are helpful as they are another mechanism of seeking accountability from the State for human rights violations.

How to submit a complaint to a treaty body

Who can submit a complaint?

The victim, their representative, or an NGO/legal representative on behalf of the victim. Organizations do not require UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) status or registration with the UN to submit.

Other requirements

Representatives must have authorization or consent of the victim to submit on their behalf. However, this requirement may be waived if a convincing argument is provided as to why obtaining said authorization is not possible. Communications cannot be anonymous, though it can be requested that personal information is kept confidential.
General criteria for admissibility

- The State must have either ratified or acceded to the treaty in question
- The State must have recognized the competence of the treaty body to consider individual communications, either by ratifying the relevant optional protocol to the treaty (for submission to CESCR, CCPR, CEDAW, CRC, CRPD) or by making a declaration (for submission to CERD, CAT, CED)
- You must have exhausted all possible domestic remedies, though exceptions can be made if such remedies are proven ineffective for your specific complaint
- The complaint cannot be a pending consideration by any other international or regional mechanism
- If the State party has declared a reservation to an article of the relevant treaty applicable to the case, then a complaint alleging a violation of that specific article is not admissible
- The incident that is the subject of the complaint must have occurred after the relevant treaty entered into force for the concerned State party. However, if effects of a prior incident continue to be felt after the treaty entered into force, a complaint may still be submitted.

What information should be included?

Several treaty bodies have provided a ‘model complaint questionnaire’ that can be used as a template for complaint submissions. Generally the complaint should contain the following information:

- Facts of the case detailing the basis of the complaint
- Basic personal information of the victim
- Proof of consent of the victim (if applicable)
- Steps taken to exhaust domestic remedies
- Steps taken to submit the complaint to any other international body
- Reasons why the victim considers their rights violated, citing specific articles of the relevant treaty which have allegedly been violated
- Relevant documents (with translations if in non-UN language)
After an individual communication is submitted, it will go through a process of screening and deliberation by the treaty body. The process is outlined in the figure below.

**Screening and Deliberation Process**

**START**
Screen against admissibility criteria

**Inadmissible**
Communicated to the complaint, no appeals possible

**Admissible**

**Submit complaint to State party for a response, and request additional information from both State party and complainant**

**Resolved**
Complaint can be resolved at this stage without the treaty body making a decision

**END**

**Unresolved**

**Deliberate case in a closed session**
Treaty body does not recognize a violation

**Communicate to both State and complainant**

Release a decision to the State party, and call on the implementation of recommendations within 3-6 months

*Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit*
Engaging in the inquiry process

Six treaty bodies — CESC, CEDAW, CAT, CRPD, CRC, and CED — can initiate an inquiry into well-grounded allegations of ‘serious, grave or systematic’ human rights violations by a State party. Treaty bodies can only initiate an inquiry if the State party has agreed to be bound by the inquiry procedure.

After the inquiry is initiated by the treaty body, the State in question is invited to respond. The inquiry process may involve a country visit. The result of the inquiry procedure is a set of actionable recommendations to the State party, which must respond.

Activists and campaigners can kickstart the inquiry process by submitting reliable information on human rights violations to the relevant treaty body. During the inquiry, NGOs can continue submitting reports to the treaty body, and assist the treaty body should a country visit be conducted. Once the results of the inquiry have been published, these can be disseminated publicly to further campaigns and increase pressure on the government involved.

As with individual communications, there are limitations to the inquiry process. For one, the process can easily take years; on average, it takes two to four years from the start of the inquiry process. The process is also confidential, with treaty bodies disclosing little to no information to the public; at times, even the outcome may be withheld from public dissemination. Lastly, a treaty body can only undertake one inquiry process at a time.

How to request a treaty body to initiate an inquiry

Who can initiate an inquiry?

Any individual or organization can submit information for consideration to initiate an inquiry. Organizations do not require UN ECOSOC status or registration with the UN to submit.

Criteria for admissibility

The State must have either ratified or acceded to the treaty in question, which would typically also bind it to the inquiry procedure, so long as the State:

- Does not opt out of the inquiry procedure at the time of signature, ratification, or accession (for CAT, CEDAW, CRPD, and CRC), or anytime (for CESC), or
- Does not make a declaration that they do not recognize the competence of the Treaty Body initiating the inquiry.

Note: For the CED, the competence to conduct inquiries is not subject to the acceptance of State parties.

What information should be included?

Limited guidance is available as to the format of the submission. However, each treaty body has its own particular working method, so it is helpful to consult the website of the relevant treaty body for information. Make sure to include reliable, evidence-based information of serious, grave, or systematic human rights violations, including information that demonstrates that such abuses are widespread, “throughout the territory of the State.”

Complaints must be submitted in either Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian or Spanish, with a summary in English if possible.

Where do I send it?

To CESC: CESC@ohchr.org
To CEDAW: CEDAW@ohchr.org
To CAT: CAT@ohchr.org
To CRC: CRC@ohchr.org
To CRPD: CRPD@ohchr.org
To CED: CED@ohchr.org
From the submission of information to initiate an inquiry, the following process ensues as outlined in the figure below:

**Inquiry process**

A Treaty Body receives information regarding the ‘serious, grave, or systemic’ violations of rights by a State party.

If the Treaty Body considers that the information is reliable, they may first invite the concerned State to cooperate by submitting observations regarding the information the Treaty Body has received.

On the basis of this information, the Treaty Body may decide to deploy one or more of its members to conduct a confidential inquiry and submit an urgent report.

Treaty Body members may also conduct a country visit as part of the inquiry, with the consent of the concerned State.

The findings and recommendations of the Treaty Body are submitted to the concerned State.

A six-month deadline is set for the State to respond and inform the Treaty Body of measures taken in line with the findings of the inquiry report.

The final comprehensive report of an inquiry cannot be made public if the State does not agree. In a case where a State does not consent, the Treaty Body may in any event publicize a lengthy summary of its support.

**UN Human Rights Council**

The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) is an international body composed of 47 UN Member States elected by the UN General Assembly (UNGA). It is responsible for promoting and safeguarding human rights around the world, as well as addressing instances of human rights violations by proposing recommendations for these. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the secretariat for the Human Rights Council.

**Working with the Human Rights Council**

One of the main ways of working with the Council is through attendance in the Council sessions. NGOs must have consultative status with the UN ECOSOC to participate in Council sessions as Observers. Those with such status can send a letter of request for accreditation to the OHCHR. As Observers, NGO representatives can attend all proceedings of the Council (aside from deliberations under the Complaints procedure, to be elaborated later), submit written statements to the Council, make oral interventions to the Council, participate in various meetings and activities, and organize parallel events relevant to the Council’s work.

**NGOs must have consultative status with the UN ECOSOC to participate in Council sessions as Observers.**

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
Complaint Procedure of the Human Rights Council

The complaint procedure of the Human Rights Council aims to address "consistent patterns of gross and reliably attested violations of all human rights and fundamental freedoms occurring in any part of the world and under any circumstances." It is the only universal complaint procedure that covers all human rights and all fundamental freedoms in all Member States of the UN.

The complaint procedure closely resembles the former 1503 procedure of the Council, which allows the complaints to remain confidential, unless the national government indicates that they should be made public, but features modifications that aim to make the process more impartial, efficient, and victims-oriented.

What is the advantage of submitting a complaint through the complaint procedure of the HRC?

A complaint may be submitted against any Member State, regardless of whether the country has ratified or acceded to a treaty or made reservations under a particular instrument.

Who can submit a complaint?

Any individual, group of individuals or NGO that claim to be victims of, or have knowledge of, human rights violations can submit a complaint.

Admissibility criteria for initial screening of complaints

1. Submitted in writing without abusive or insulting language
2. Submitted in one of the six UN official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish)
3. Submitted with factual description of rights violations, with as much detail as possible, without exceeding 15 pages
4. Not manifestly politically motivated
5. Not exclusively based on reports by mass media
6. Not already being addressed by a special procedure, another treaty body, other UN or another complaints procedure in the field of human rights
7. Domestic remedies must have been exhausted, unless ineffective or unreasonably prolonged
Four stages of the complaint procedure

First stage:
Initial Screening of Complaints

The Chairperson of the Working Group on Communication, together with the Secretariat, conducts the initial screening of all written communications. Complaints that are declared admissible according to the criteria are transmitted to the States concerned to obtain their views on the allegations of violations.

Second stage:
Working Group on Communications

The Working Group on Communications assesses the merits of the allegations. The group may decide to dismiss a complaint, keep a complaint under review to request further information from the concerned State, or transmit the complaint to the Working Group on Situations for the next stage. The group may also decide on whether a complaint is transmitted alone or in combination with other complaints to reveal a consistent pattern of gross and reliably attested violations. The Working Group on Communications meets twice a year.

Third stage:
Working Group on Situations

Similar to the previous stage, the Working Group on Situations may decide to dismiss or keep a situation under review. It may also present the situation to the HRC, if a consistent pattern of gross and reliably attested violations is revealed, along with its recommendations. The Working Group on Situations meets twice a year.

Fourth stage:
Human Rights Council

The HRC examines the report presented by the Working Group on Situations and may dismiss or keep a situation under review with the appointment of a highly qualified, independent expert on the situation (i.e., a Special Rapporteur). It may also decide to discontinue consideration of a situation under a confidential procedure to take up public consideration of the matter. It may also recommend action to the OHCHR to provide technical cooperation, capacity-building assistance, or advisory services to the State concerned.

Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council

Special procedures are non-paid independent human rights experts with country-specific or thematic mandates to report on human rights situations in various parts of the world. Submitting information to the special procedures may be a more accessible UN human rights mechanism because the special procedures receive information on a daily basis with at least one less admissibility requirement compared to the Complaint Procedure of the HRC.

The scope of work of the special procedures includes undertaking country visits, sending communications to concerned States regarding reported violations and other concerns, and contributing to the development of international human rights standards. In addition, as the issue of human rights intersects many contemporary issues, several mandate-holders hold expertise on specific topics or engage in cross-cutting issues like climate action, marine conservation, and biological diversity.

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
How can individuals or groups submit a complaint?

Communications intended for the HRC complaint procedure may be addressed to the information provided below, as listed on the OHCHR website, to any country or regional office of the OHCHR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complaint Procedure Unit</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Council Branch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Nations Office at Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax: (41 22) 917 90 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:CP@ohchr.org">CP@ohchr.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communications are submitted in the form of a complaint procedure form which can be accessed through the OHCHR website.

Country visits by Special Procedures

Mandate-holders carry out country visits upon invitation from the government to conduct a fact-finding mission. During the visit, a mandate-holder assesses the human rights situation at the national level. The mandate-holder meets with various stakeholders including national and local authorities, NHRI members, NGOs where applicable, and victims of human rights violations.

Findings and conclusions gathered from country visits, along with recommendations, are published through mission reports to the HRC.

Several countries have extended a standing invitation to thematic special procedures, which signifies that they are always open to receiving a visit from special procedures. There are 128 Member States who have extended a standing invitation as of May 02, 2022. A list of countries is posted on the Standing Invitations page of the OHCHR.\[^{10}\]

Communications process of the Special Procedures

Communications allow the special procedures to send letters to governments and other stakeholders including the military, intergovernmental organizations, and businesses. These letters may contain concerns relating to legislation or practices that do not adhere to international human rights standards. The communications may also be of the following form:

- A letter of allegation for past human rights violations
- An urgent appeal about ongoing or potential human rights violations

The letter may include requests for clarifications on the allegations and requests for concerned authorities to take action. However, the mechanism in which the special procedures work is not a quasi-judicial procedure. The experts do not have the authority to enforce their views or recommendations.

Who can submit information to the Special Procedures?

Individuals, groups, civil society organizations, intergovernmental entities, and national human rights institutions (NHRIs) can submit information to the Special Procedures. Information may be submitted regardless of whether or not the concerned State is a State party to a regional or international human rights treaty.

Unlike the criteria required by the Complaints Procedure of the HRC, the Special Procedures criteria do not require the alleged victims to have exhausted all domestic remedies before sending communications.
How can individuals and groups submit their information to Special Procedures?

Communications intended for the Special Procedures are sent through the Special Procedures online submission form which can be accessed through its dedicated page on the OHCHR website. Post submissions are sent to:

**OHCHR-UNOG, 8-14 Avenue de la Paix, 1211 Geneve 10, Switzerland**

Universal Periodic Review

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a peer-review mechanism established by the HRC to assess each Member State’s fulfillment of its human rights obligations and commitments. Each review cycle is conducted in a four-year period with about 14 States subject to review per session.

The UPR addresses State obligations based on:
1. The UN Charter
2. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
3. Human rights instruments or any human rights treaties to which the State is a party
4. Voluntary pledges and commitments declared by the State through its national policies and programs
5. Applicable international humanitarian law

The Universal Periodic Review Process

The UPR Working Group conducts its reviews based on the following documents:

1. a national report containing information provided by the State under review
2. a compilation by the OHCHR containing information provided by human rights treaty bodies, the Special Procedures, and other UN bodies
3. a compilation by the OHCHR containing information from stakeholders including NHRIs and NGOs

How can NGOs participate in the UPR process?

There are at least three ways in which NGOs can participate in the process, depending on levels of accreditation: as a contributor of written information, as an observer in a Working Group session, or as a participant in a Council session.

All NGOs can submit a written report that can be considered by the OHCHR in making its compilation of relevant stakeholder information. The submission must adhere to the technical guidelines and be submitted within the tentative deadline.

Accredited NGOs, or those in a consultative relationship with ECOSOC, may attend the sessions of the UPR Working Group as observers. In these sessions, there are no provisions allowing them to comment or submit information.

Said NGOs can also participate in a regular HRC session where the UPR outcomes are considered and adopted. In these sessions, they can make brief comments or statements before the adoption of the outcomes.
How can stakeholders send written submissions?

The OHCHR has issued technical guidelines for stakeholder submissions for the UPR’s 4th cycle through its website. Submissions are accepted through the OHCHR on-line UPR submissions registration system, a dedicated UPR documentation page that can be accessed through upr-doc.ohchr.org.

Stakeholders must consider the tentative deadlines provided for the 4th cycle which is usually set about six months before the relevant UPR Working Group session for the State concerned. For instance, the deadline for the 41st UPR Working Group session (October to November 2022) where the Philippines is recommended for review is March 31, 2022.

Technical problems in using the online system may be addressed through: ohchr-uprsubmissions@un.org

UNEP Rapid Response Mechanism

The rapid response mechanism allows EHRDs to directly communicate individual cases of threats and attacks to UNEP. The mechanism, wherein regional offices play a central role, aims to speak out on individual cases and assist stakeholders (including civil societies and governments) in strengthening the environmental rule of law and governance by providing technical and legal support. The UNEP also features a gender-sensitive approach to its internal mechanism and aims to make it accessible to vulnerable and marginalized groups such as defender groups in remote areas.

The following process describes the internal accountability mechanism outlined by UNEP:

1. Communities and individuals report cases of environmental rights violations or threats, in confidence, through the email account: unenvironment-defenders@un.org

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRD) Toolkit
References


Module 04

Accessing Support for Human Rights Defenders

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
A toolkit developed by defenders for defenders to support their work in upholding environmental rights
Image credit: Generated on Midjourney by Deepesh Sanghani

Prompts: united nations, support, environmental activists, funding and advocacy, conceptual, artwork
Environmental campaigns require financial, legal, and technical support in order to be effective. Effective funding for mass campaigns ensures that campaigners have access to adequate resources to carry out seminars, area research, mobilizations, and other activities. Legal support provides protection and security for EHRDs and their organizations. Technical support ensures that the organizations have the necessary knowledge, skills, and capacities to carry out their mass campaigns effectively.

This section discusses how financial, technical, and legal support can be utilized in the form of emergency support, legal assistance, digital security, and capacity building.

# Reporting human rights violations involving EHRDs

## United Nations Special Procedures

The Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council are independent human rights experts who monitor the situation in countries through visits, act on complaints of alleged human rights violations by sending communications, conduct thematic studies and organize expert consultations, contribute to the development of international human rights standards, engage in advocacy and raise public awareness and provide advice for technical cooperation to governments.

There are Special Rapporteurs on human rights defenders, human rights and the environment, and on the rights of Indigenous peoples that can be contacted directly.

You may find more information and make your submissions on this website or send your submission via email:

urgent-action@ohchr.org

You may contact the following Special Rapporteurs directly via their email addresses:

1. **Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders:**
   - defenders@ohchr.org

2. **Special Rapporteur human rights and the environment:**
   - srenvironment@ohchr.org

3. **Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples:**
   - indigenous@ohchr.org
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Rapid Response Mechanism

The email account unenvironment-defenders@un.org has been set up to enable communities and individuals whose environmental rights have been violated - or are in danger of being violated - to contact UNEP directly and in confidence. These emails will be responded to in a timely fashion and will assist UNEP, including its Executive Director and leadership, to take appropriate action.²

You may find more information here and send your reports to this email address:

unenvironment-defenders@un.org

UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies

The human rights treaty bodies³ are committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of the core international human rights treaties. Each State party to a treaty has an obligation to take steps to ensure that everyone in the State can enjoy the rights set out in the treaty. Find out which treaties your country is a signatory of in this link.

The treaty bodies perform a number of functions in accordance with the provisions of the treaties that established them. Their thematic focus and working methods all differ slightly, but in general, they consider States parties' reports, consider individual complaints, conduct country inquiries, adopt general comments and organize thematic discussions to interpret the provisions of their treaty or treaties, attend the annual meeting of Chairpersons, and contribute to the treaty body strengthening process.

Learn more about the UN Human Rights Treaty System in this link. Submit requests or individual claims to a specific treaty body by sending an email to petitions@ohchr.org

Front Line Defenders

Front Line Defenders⁴ provides 24-hour support to human rights defenders at immediate risk. If in crisis, you can contact Front Line Defenders at any hour on the emergency hotline. Urgent actions can include faxed or phoned appeals to the relevant authorities, raising the case through the EU or individual government representatives, practical help with temporary relocation, assistance with medical or legal expenses.

Their emergency hotline number is +353-1-210-0489. You may find more information here.

Environmental Justice Atlas

The Environmental Justice (EJ) Atlas⁵ collects stories of communities struggling for environmental justice from around the world. It aims to make these mobilizations more visible, highlight claims and testimonies, and to make the case for true corporate and state accountability for the injustices inflicted through their activities. It also attempts to serve as a virtual space for those working on EJ issues to get information, find other groups working on related issues, and increase the visibility of environmental conflicts. You may find more information about EJ Atlas here and make a report here.

Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNED) Support Services

To talk to members of the APNED Secretariat for more information on reporting human rights violations, you may send an email to info@apned.net⁶
Organizations that provide emergency support

In the process of carrying out mass campaigns and other activities, there may be instances where EHRDs encounter threats. These can come in the form of harassment, death threats, and illegal arrests, for example. Sometimes, these instances are urgent, requiring immediate support.

![Emergency Contact](image)

**Emergency Contact**

**EMERGENCY CONTACT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS:**

The emergency call number gives human rights defenders an option to be forwarded to someone speaking Arabic, English, French, Russian or Spanish and who will help determine how to best support in the urgent situation. Due to time differences, poor connectivity, and the significant amount of detail in the urgent case, it is good, if possible, to send us a message via secure and encrypted channel using the contact form below.

![Front Line Defenders](image)

Fig. 2.4.1. The emergency contact section of the Front Line Defenders website.

There are organizations that can provide support in case of emergent threats to security to the EHRD. An example of one of these organizations is Front Line Defenders’, shown in Figure 2.4.1. Their website contains an **emergency contact form** in which an EHRD can avail of emergency support. Front Line Defenders is also available for emergency calls in which an EHRD can talk to someone who will determine the best ways they can support in a situation. The call can be conducted in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, or Russian.

ProtectDefenders.eu is an organization that provides support in the form of financial grants which can be used for travel, medical costs, and security measures. ProtectDefenders.eu has two programs for financial grants.

The first is the emergency support program which is a rapid response mechanism for protection measures. An EHRD can avail of grants for safe transportation, alarm systems, legal aid, medical costs, family support, etc. An EHRD can apply for the emergency support program and their situation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and thus a budget breakdown for the costs must be provided.

The other program is the temporary relocation program for defenders at risk, in which defenders at risk, with their families if needed, can apply for a grant that would cover the costs of relocating to a location of their choice. Note that relocation in this program is temporary and the goal of ProtectDefenders.eu is for the EHRD to be able to continue their human rights work once conditions allow their safe return.
Any EHRD, as defined by the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, is eligible for a grant if (a) the applicant is facing risks to their well-being due to their work, and (b) the applicant needs support, wherein applicants that lack other forms of support will be prioritized. The process of applying for a grant is as follows:

- Download the application form for the respective grant (Emergency Support or Temporary Relocation). Alternatively, the secure online form can also be used.
- Answer the pertinent questions in the application form, including the budget breakdown in which the costs that need to be covered are indicated. The maximum grant that can be given for the emergency support program is 10,000 EUR, and the maximum grant that can be given for the temporary relocation program is 60,000 EUR.
- Submit the form to the organization where the case will be processed and evaluated.

These steps are demonstrated in Figures 2.4.2(a)–2.4.2(b).

An EHRD can apply for the emergency support program and their situation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and thus a budget breakdown for the costs must be provided.
Please answer the following questions

1a) Contact details of the applicant:
   - Full name:
   - Gender:
   - Name of the organisation, if any:
   - Country of origin:
   - Country of residence:
   - Please indicate your preferred contact method. All communication will be kept confidential:
   - Phone number:
   - E-mail address:

Fig. 2.4.2(b) Fill out the pertinent questions in the form which will be downloaded

Fig. 2.4.2(c) Send the form via the indicated email (eg@protectdefenders.eu). One may also use the
Secured Contact Form which can immediately be found on their site.

Other organizations that provide support for
EHRDs at risk are Lifeline⁹ and Urgent Action for
Women’s Rights - Asia Pacific (UAF-AP)¹⁰ The
latter specifically provides emergency support
funds for women human rights defenders. All
follow similar procedures in applying for a grant.
Organizations that provide legal assistance

One example of an organization that provides legal assistance is the Accountability Counsel. Specializing in human rights and environmental issues, they assist people impacted by internationally-funded projects. The organization’s lawyers guide communities through the process of engaging with accountability offices, which are mechanisms set in place by some institutions in which affected individuals can raise concerns. They also have a policy advocacy and research arm in addition to their legal assistance work. A guide is also accessible on their website for a more detailed run-down on the process of seeking accountability, among other things.

Another example is the Environmental Defender Law Center (EDLC), an organization that assists environmental defenders in finding free-of-charge lawyers and procuring resources and grants necessary for their work. With a focus on protecting human rights of environmental defenders in the Global South, the EDLC has worked in over 60 countries around the world.

Likewise, the American Bar Association - Center for Human Rights coordinates pro bono legal support and engages in advocacy on behalf of human rights defenders around the world. Its staff attorneys have regional portfolios and extensive regional and legal expertise.

EarthRights International files groundbreaking accountability cases against corporations and governments globally and defends earth rights activists against civil and criminal liability. It also develops specialized legal tools and pioneers innovative legal strategies.

With its Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide (ELAW) global alliance of attorneys, scientists, and other advocates collaborating across borders, the ELAW Secretariat is able to intervene when its lawyer partners are threatened or attacked.

Lastly, the website Environmental Legal Protection - Legal Assistance and Resources for Environmental Defenders contains a database that links environmental defenders from around the world, as well as the general public, to organizations that can provide them with legal support as part of the UNEP's work on environmental rights.

With a focus on protecting human rights of environmental defenders in the Global South, the EDLC has worked in over 60 countries around the world.
Digital Security

Digital security is crucial especially when it comes to communicating with fellow EHRDs about the mass campaign and organizational activities.

Digital security includes proper protocols that must be followed in communicating online, such as having encrypted files and folders and an end-to-end encrypted messaging medium.

Digital Security Helpline

Digital Security Helpline is an organization that provides EHRDs and their organizations technical assistance and advice for digital security. This assistance and advice come in the form of digital security risk assessment, instruction, digital security strategizing, guidance on security practices, support for technical infrastructure such as digital security training, etc.

WHAT IS THE DIGITAL SECURITY HELPLINE?

Access Now's Digital Security Helpline works with individuals and organizations around the world to keep them safe online. If you’re at risk, we can help you improve your digital security practices to keep out of harm’s way. If you’re already under attack, we provide rapid response emergency assistance.

CONTACT US

Our 24/7 services are available with support in nine languages: English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog, Arabic, and Italian. We respond to all requests within two hours.

Fig. 2.4.3. An EHRD can contact the Digital Security Helpline by going to the help section and clicking 'Contact Us.'

Digital Security Helpline can be contacted through either email (help@accessnow.org) or via a public key in the help section of their website. Figure 2.4.3. shows how to access this Digital Security Helpline. Within two hours of request, they will secure a communications channel and then confirm the EHRD’s identity with their partners (this is in case of impersonation). After the EHRD’s needs are communicated, they will provide the necessary technical support.

Other organizations

Other organizations, such as the ones included previously, provide technical assistance and financial assistance. Front Line Defenders has programs on digital security training. Protect Defenders.eu also provides grants in order to cover the costs of digital security.

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
Organizations that provide grants for Environmental Defenders

For activists in the frontlines focusing on environmental issues, here are some of the organizations that can be approached for financial support specifically for environmental justice initiatives.

**CHEJ Small Grants Program** / Link
Capacity building grants for grassroots groups working with rural or urban communities of color, and those of low wealth in the USA.

**Environmental Defender Law Center** / Link
Support for environmental defenders in the Global South.

**Accountability Counsel** / Link
Support for communities impacted by internationally-funded projects.

Organizations that provide grants for Human Rights Defenders (HRD)

Environmental issues often intersect with human rights issues. A HRD may tackle a particular issue surrounding human rights, whether it be gender, freedom of the press, or artistic freedoms. The following is a list of some examples of organizations that provide grants for EHRDs working on particular human rights issues.

**FORUM-ASIA** / Link
Support for temporary relocation, trial observation, and other urgent matters for Asian human rights defenders within the FORUM-Asia network.

**Civil Rights Defenders** / Link
Support for security trainings, as well as an emergency fund for relocation, legal aid, other costs.

**Amnesty International** / Link
Small grants for victims of human rights violations, towards temporary relocation or medical treatment.

**Freedom House** / Link
Emergency funding for at-risk EHRDs, grants for civil society organizations facing restrictions, and grants for building resiliency of civil society organizations.
**Freedom House LGBTI Assistance Program** / Link
Emergency support for EHRDs fighting for LGBTQ rights.

**Urgent Action Fund** / Link
Rapid response grants to women and trans human rights defenders facing immediate threats.

**Mama Cash** / Link
Support for women, girls, trans, and intersex human rights activists.

**UN Trust Fund for Gender Equality** / Link
Support for initiatives of national, women-led civil society organizations that aim to empower women economically and politically.

**Global Fund for Women** / Link
Support for gender justice movements, including gender-sensitive crisis response grants.

**UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women** / Link
Support for initiatives towards addressing, reducing, and eliminating violence against women.

**Arcus** / Link
Support for LGBTQ communities in focus countries, including support for increased safety of LGBTQ people.

**Reporters Without Borders Assistance for Journalists** / Link
Support for professional and citizen journalists (and their families) who have experienced violence, legal reprisal, and other threats.

**International Federation of Journalists Safety Fund** / Link
Fund for journalists facing violence, persecution, threats, or illness.

**International Media Support** / Link
Support for journalists (and their families) in case of killings, injury, and threats, including response to urgent situations.
Institute of International Education
Through the Artist Protection Fund, support for threatened artists of any field to bring them to institutions in safe countries.  

Artists at Risk
Support for persecuted art practitioners at serious risk, including provision of long-term (though temporary) shelter for artists.

Artists at Risk Connection
Platform compiling initiatives of different institutions which can provide assistance to persecuted artists.

Culture Resource
Support for artists in the Arab region, whether they are persecuted for their creative work or they are affected by socio-political violence and instability in their area.

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Contemporary Forms of Slavery
Support for civil society organizations combating modern-day slavery through humanitarian, psychological, social, legal, medical, and/or financial assistance.

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture
Support for civil society organizations providing medical, psychological, legal, social, and other forms of assistance to victims of torture.

Do note that because the movement for environmental justice is intersectional, EHRDs may be able to avail of these depending on the nature of their work. For example, a journalist at risk covering ecocide can avail of the grants for journalists at risk.
Organizations that provide capacity building programs

While emergency support helps EHRDs respond to urgent threats which they currently cannot address independently or with their organization, capacity building ensures that these organizations are able to withstand said threats and risks. Capacity building would entail having the EHRDs be able to support themselves in times of risk and threat in order for them to independently sustain their human rights work.

Protection International

Protection International is one example of an organization that carries out capacity building programs. A screenshot of their site’s section on these programs is shown in Figure 2.4.4.

Their capacity building program focuses on teaching communities, organizations, activists, and EHRDs ways to devise their risk management strategies, build networks of support, and carry out campaign work to resist criminalization. Protection International may also connect EHRDs with government and state apparatuses (when they are not themselves threatening the EHRDs) for support. Protection International’s end goal is to have EHRDs be able to independently protect themselves from risks and threats.

Fig. 2.4.4. One can view the types of capacity training on Protection International’s website.
EarthRights International

EarthRights International provides community-level training and seminars, focusing on environment-related issues. Figure 2.4.5. shows their section on capacity training. EarthRights International has experience in conducting community training with Indigenous peoples in the Mekong region and in the Amazon region, with sessions touching on issues surrounding development aggression. EarthRights International brings in experts from environmental and human rights fields with the goal of teaching local activists ways to sustain their campaigns and lead their communities amidst threats and risks.

Fig. 2.4.4. One can view the types of capacity training on Protection International’s website.

Diplomacy Training Program

The Diplomacy Training Program (DTP) is an independent non-governmental organization based in Australia that works with civil society across the Asia-Pacific in advancing human rights through capacity building. Following a participatory methodology in its training programs, the DTP uses role-playing scenarios, practical exercises and case studies, among other approaches, to improve the negotiation and lobbying techniques of participants. Other sessions cover using social media and the internet effectively for campaigns. Various themes are covered in the training program, such as migrant workers’ rights, human rights and business, child rights, rights of persons with disabilities, among others.

Global Network for Human Rights and the Environment

The Global Network for Human Rights and the Environment (GNHRE), in partnership with the UNEP, hosts an annual summer/winter School for Human Rights and the Environment. Sessions, which last a few days, tackle specific environmental and human rights issues which campaigners can participate in. These sessions are open and free for anyone who wishes to attend.

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
Support for campaigns and advocacy

Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders (APNEUD)

APNED is a solidarity campaign network of individuals, civil society groups, and peoples' organizations in the Asia-Pacific region that aims to facilitate support to EHRDs, conduct campaigns at the national and international levels, raise awareness on the situation of defenders, seek justice for human rights violations, advocate for the recognition of the vital role of defenders in environmental protection, monitor and document human rights violations, and campaign for policies and other protection mechanisms for defenders.

Cultural Survival

Cultural Survival's Advocacy Program supports indigenous peoples around the globe by amplifying grassroots movements to bring awareness and international pressure to their struggles while enhancing indigenous communities' capacity, always at the invitation of community leaders, to demand and assert their rights outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net)

The System of Solidarity (SOS) is a vehicle to harness the collective voice of ESCR-Net through online petitions, collective letters, outreach via social and mainstream media, and sharing resources and tools — to increase protection for EHRDs under threat and prevent imminent human rights violations from taking place.

FIDH — International Federation for Human Rights

The Observatory has developed several ways to take action in response to the demands and specific nature of each situation: issuing and distributing urgent alerts in six languages, provision of emergency grants (medical, psychological and legal support; help with relocation) and capacity grants, prison visits, judicial observation and defense, national and international advocacy, investigative missions, public campaigns on social media and the internet, urgent advocacy directed at actors of social change, initiating legal and paralegal recourse, analyzing repressive trends (through their Annual Report), consolidating the intergovernmental system for protecting defenders ('inter-mechanism' process and advocacy), etc. For more information, you may visit their website.

Global Witness

Global Witness campaigns for governments and international organizations to adopt regulations that respect and protect EHRDs, and to bring perpetrators to justice. It also pressures businesses and financiers to look at their supply chains and operations.

International Indigenous Peoples Movement for Self Determination and Liberation (IPMSDL)

IPMSDL is a global network of indigenous peoples' rights activists, advocates, and organizations committed to advancing the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination, land and life.

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
MiningWatch Canada

MiningWatch Canada works in solidarity with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities who are dealing with potential or actual industrial mining operations (involving Canadian mining companies) that affect their lives and territories, or with the legacy of closed mines, as well as with miners workers and former workers seeking safe working conditions and fair treatment. 40

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

FORUM-ASIA provides urgent financial assistance including for temporary relocation for their members/partner organizations or human rights defenders working together with their members/partners in Asia. They also offer costs for trial observer teams to be present during the trial of human rights defenders. 20

Civil Rights Defenders

The organization provides emergency funds which can be used for relocation efforts, legal aid, or other costs necessary for the security of human rights defenders. 21

Civicus

Civicus’ Donor Finder includes a list of progressive donors offering funding and non-financial resources to civil society, including small and even informal groups and individual activists. It contains simple but complete profiles, organized by geographic region, that will help you identify donors who align with your work and needs. 51

Coalition for Human Rights in Development

The Community Resource Exchange (CRE) is a system to facilitate collaborations and co-develop strategies with and among communities defending their rights in the context of international investments and development projects. It works at the direction of communities and their partners, to coordinate linkages with potential allies and collaborators, exchange of information and resources, sustained collaborations, cross-learning among communities leading similar struggles, and access to small financial assistance (under US$ 5,000) through regular calls for applications. 52

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
Digital Defenders Partnership

The Incident Emergency Fund is a rapid response mechanism for human rights defenders, journalists, activists, or organizations facing digital threats and attacks. It covers costs of activities that directly reduce the impact of a digital attack. 53

The Sustainable Protection Fund aims to help human rights organizations or collectives build their long-term digital security capacities. These can include new computers, servers, or hosting for data or websites, technical support in implementing new systems, training or accompaniment processes on digital security or other aspects of security and protection, measures to improve physical security, which support information management and digital security and measures to address the psychological and psychosocial impacts of digital threats. 54

The Regional Partnership Fund supports initiatives promoting online freedom and digital or holistic protection for human rights defenders. These can include the provision of internet access in cases of shutdowns, slowdowns, censorship, or infrastructural damage, the provision of training or accompaniment on digital security or other aspects of security to human rights defenders at risk, the provision of expert advice, digital forensic analysis, hosting, or other technical services to civil society and lobbying and advocacy work for digital rights and internet freedom. 55

FIDH — International Federation for Human Rights

FIDH, under the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, provides emergency material support to at-risk human rights defenders working in the most difficult circumstances. Costs eligible for financial support or direct material support include the following: physical security, digital security, communications, capacity building in security, secure transportation, legal support, medical support (including psychosocial support and rehabilitation), humanitarian assistance (including family support), urgent relocation, urgent monitoring, reporting or advocacy). 56

Front Line Defenders

Protection Grants can pay for provisions to improve the security and protection of human rights defenders and their organizations, including, but not limited to, improving physical security of an organization or individual, digital security and communications security, supporting legal fees for EHRDs who are being judicially harassed, paying for medical fees for EHRDs who have been attacked or who have suffered a medical condition as a result of their peaceful human rights activities, and providing family assistance for imprisoned EHRDs or family members who are at risk because of an EHRD’s activities. 58

Global Greengrants Fund

Global Greengrants works to protect the rights of individuals and communities to defend the environment. The ability for EHRDs to organize, voice their opinions, access environmental and social information, protest, and meaningfully participate in decisions about their environment and livelihoods are fundamental to a healthy civil society. It provides funding to EHRDs at risk identified through a global network of advisors. 58

Indigenous People Rights International

The Global Initiative to address criminalization of and impunity against Indigenous peoples is a global effort led by Indigenous peoples’ leaders and organizations to strengthen coordination, solidarity and actions on this critical issue at all levels to improve the situation of indigenous

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit
peoples. It raises and allocates funds to provide emergency support for Indigenous leaders, and EHRDs needing protection or security measures; and for victims and or their families seeking justice through legal and other forms of remedies or support.  

**International Human Rights Funders Group (IHRFG)**

The [Directory of Emergency/Rapid Response Grants](#) was compiled by the Human Rights Defenders Working Group. It contains information on the type of support, description of the grants and contact information of the organization providing these.  

**Lifeline for Embattled Civil Society Organizations**

Lifeline rapid response **advocacy grants** give local CSOs the resources to push back against closures of civic space as they arise. Lifeline advocacy grants are highly flexible, and can support a wide variety of activities, such as community mobilization, policy and legal analysis, civil society coalition building, strategic litigation, awareness raising campaigns, and advocacy capacity building.  

Lifeline rapid response **resiliency grants** provide support to at-risk CSOs to proactively mitigate the threats they face and help them continue to work in high-risk environments. These grants are highly flexible and support a range of activities including digital or physical security training; technical training on how to respond to restrictive CSO legislation; building peer-to-peer support networks, or establishing temporary collaborative space to help CSOs return to work.  

For more information, you may visit their website or send an email to **info@csolifeline.org**.

**The Fund for Global Human Rights**

The [Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF)](#) offers long-term core funding to grassroots activists and organizations who are supporting their communities to tackle systemic injustices and advocate for expanded protections under the law.

**Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights**

Urgent **Action Fund’s Rapid Response Grants** support the resilience of women’s and trans movements by providing flexible and responsive support to women defenders who face immediate threats and by supporting advocacy when unanticipated opportunities emerge to set new legal or policy precedents.
Websites with information and resources

This section has given a brief overview on the ways an EHRD can avail of support in times of risk and threats. Front Line Defenders provides a further discussion on assessing threats and risks for EHRDs as well as managing well-being and security in several workbooks. 67 (See Figure 2.4.6.)

Fig. 2.4.6. Front Line Defenders also provides workbooks on security.

In times of risk and threats, EHRDs will also face challenges to their mental health. Indeed, these can stem from a wide range of causes, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), trauma due to threats and harassment. Resources can be accessed online about this topic. The next module also discusses this in a more in-depth manner.
References


6. Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders. (2020). Homepage. [https://apned.net/about/](https://apned.net/about/)


Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit


33. IIE. (n.d.). Artist Protection Fund. https://www.iie.org/Programs/Artist-Protection-Fund


Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit

A toolkit developed by defenders for defenders to support their work in upholding environmental rights

Module 04

Accessing Support For Human Rights Defenders
Module 05

Ensuring Psychosocial Wellbeing

Disclaimer: This module serves as an introductory guide to mental health and wellbeing. It does not serve to diagnose or treat mental illnesses or disorders. If you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health, or finding it difficult to cope, it may be time to consider reaching out to mental health professionals in your area for advice.

Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit

A toolkit developed by defenders for defenders to support their work in upholding environmental rights
Image credit: Generated on MidJourney by Deepesh Sangtani

Prompts: mental health, well being, human rights, nature, heal, conceptual, artwork
Taking care of ourselves is a crucial part of better serving our communities and protecting the environment. To do this, we must pay important attention to our overall mental health and wellbeing so that we can continue our work as defenders in the long run. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a person has good mental health and wellbeing when they can cope with the normal stresses of life on top of being productive and making positive contributions to their community. ¹

In our activism/work, we are exposed to experiences and conditions that negatively affect us whether immediately or gradually over time. This includes witnessing injustice and violence and their effects, being exposed to threats, intimidation, physical or verbal abuse, discrimination, and even internal conflict within our organizations. In addition, there can be a tendency in activist circles to prioritize our causes and the wellbeing of others over caring for ourselves. These stressors can lead to detrimental effects on activists over time. Movements need healthy activists to help lead, contribute to and participate in movements, and who can stay active in their movements as long as possible. Ensuring our own mental health and wellbeing means that we can continue to positively contribute to our movement.

Unhealthy or unsustainable activism can lead to physical and emotional trauma, burnout, and other negative experiences. These deprive activists of living a healthy and happy life, and may lead them to leave the movement, which would in turn deprive the movement of their knowledge, contributions, and skills. To promote a healthy viewpoint towards our activism, we should always keep in mind the following: ²

1. The weight of the world does not and should not rest on our shoulders as individuals. Remember to reach out for help when needed, and to build support networks that allow you to seek help.

2. You cannot take care of others if you do not first take care of yourself. Your wellbeing is also important, and you deserve to take time for yourself.

3. You can take time away from activism. You are allowed to have other things in your life outside of the movement. Taking breaks will allow you to maintain energy and enthusiasm in the long run.

4. It is not your responsibility to fix everything wrong in the world. It is okay to focus on a few issues so that you don't spread yourself too thin.

5. You don't need to be an expert in anything to be a good activist. Learn what you can, but knowing less than others about certain issues does not make you a worse activist.

6. We are making a difference. Activism is always an ongoing process, and everything we do makes it easier for the activists who come after us.

It is important to not only know what to remember as we do our daily work, but also how to manage our mental health when critical situations arise. We discuss three of the most common issues that face our mental health and wellbeing: stress, burnout, and depression.

Ensuring our own mental health and wellbeing means that we can continue to positively contribute to our movement.
Stress

What is stress?

Stress is our body’s response to pressure. It is often triggered by new experiences, experiences that threaten our safety or sense of self, or when we experience situations where we feel out of control. Stress can occur on a scale from mild to severe. Mild stress allows us to focus and get tasks done, but extreme or prolonged stress can make it impossible to function. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the human body produces the chemical cortisol in response to stress, and prolonged exposure to cortisol can lead to negative physical and mental effects. It can weaken your immune system, leaving you more susceptible to illness, and even exacerbate pre-existing mental conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

People are most susceptible to stress when they

1. are not getting enough sleep,
2. lack a support network,
3. experience a major life change,
4. experience poor physical health, or
5. are not eating well.

Common signs of stress include: headaches, trouble sleeping, jaw pain, changes in appetite, mood swings, difficulty concentrating, and feeling overwhelmed. When stress is long-term, it can also affect memory and sleep. Long-term stress has also been linked to gastrointestinal and cardiovascular health issues.

How to manage stress

If you are experiencing more stress than normal, or experiencing stress over a prolonged period of time, there are some things you can do as an individual to help yourself cope (adapted from the Mental Health Foundation):

1. Recognize when stress is a problem. Are you experiencing muscle tension, tiredness, headaches, or migraines more than usual? Are you feeling more overwhelmed, having difficulty concentrating, or experiencing mood swings? Are these feelings getting to the point where they are impacting your quality of life?

2. Determine where you can make changes to reduce stress. Make sure you are setting realistic goals and expectations of yourself. If there is too much on your plate, practice saying ‘no’ to more work, and learn to delegate tasks to others.

3. Reach out to your support systems. Friends, family, and other social circles can provide support or advice when you are stressed.

4. Try to live a healthy lifestyle. This includes eating well-balanced meals, taking the time to exercise regularly, and minimizing smoking and drinking. Try to get enough sleep, and try to ensure that sleep is restful. Consider reducing your caffeine intake and/or your screen time.

5. Take time for yourself. Take breaks, schedule in time for relaxation or recreational activities.
Coping with stress should not be an individual endeavor alone. Studies have found that collective problem-solving and coping are more effective in reducing stress than individual actions. Organizations can help their members cope with stress on an organizational level through two ways:  

1. Problem-focused coping
   
   These coping mechanisms aim to solve problems related to the stressor. If the stressor is a lack of cohesion or unity among members of the organization, try to do team-building or bonding activities to create better cohesion in the organization. If the stressor is fluctuating workloads, try to be more flexible in assignments and delegation of tasks. Provide members the opportunity to air their problems or issues with tasking, workload, or other work-related matters, and work collectively to address these problems and issues.

2. Emotion-focused and appraisal-focused coping
   
   These coping mechanisms aim to produce a good working climate. Allow time for joking, chatting, and positive reinforcement. Try to foster a culture that prioritizes the health and well-being of members, rather than encouraging overwork.

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**Burnout**

**What is burnout?**

Burnout is the result of prolonged stress from work, leading to emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion. It generally manifests as loss of interest and passion for things that one previously cared a lot about, feelings of cynicism, hopelessness, and resentment, and a general lack of energy. Burnout differs from simply having a ‘bad day’ in that the feelings persist over time, and are experienced in multiple different situations. In addition, one may experience changes in how one feels in similar situations.

According to the WHO, burnout has three dimensions: (1) feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, (2) increased mental distance from and/or feelings of negativity and cynicism towards one’s job, and (3) reduced professional efficacy. Symptoms of burnout include: anxiety, guilt, isolation, irritability, anger, sadness, pessimism, disappointment, numbness, fatigue, insomnia, lack of motivation, and even physical pain and sickness.

Burnout is caused not just by working long hours or taking on too many tasks. More important factors are a person feeling that they are not in control of how a task is carried out, or feeling that a task conflicts with their sense of self, according to Psychology Today. In activism spaces particularly, Gorski (2019) identified these four as the primary causes of burnout:
1. Emotional-dispositional causes - causes that are related to a defender’s sense of commitment and sense of personal responsibility.

2. Backlash causes - causes related to experiencing negative repercussions for activism, as well as the cumulative stress of these repercussions.

3. Structural causes - causes related to having to contend with structures of power.

4. In-movement causes - causes related to infighting and oppression among activists.

---

**BURNOUT TEST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling fatigued in a way that rest or sleep does not feel restive</th>
<th>0 - never</th>
<th>1 - very rarely</th>
<th>2 - rarely</th>
<th>3 - sometimes</th>
<th>4 - often</th>
<th>5 - very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling more cynical or pessimistic about things that you used to feel positive about</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of sadness or emptiness</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Experience physical symptoms of stress such as insomnia, stomach pains, headaches, migraines, etc</td>
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<td>Unreliable memory</td>
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<td>Irritability or feeling like you have a ‘short fuse’</td>
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<td>More susceptible to illness such as colds, flu, allergies, etc</td>
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<td>Feeling like isolating yourself from friends, family and/or colleagues</td>
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<td>Difficulty relaxing, having fun, or enjoying yourself</td>
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<td>Feeling that you are accomplishing less</td>
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0-15 | doing well  
16-25 | some attention needed, candidate for burnout  
26-35 | on the road to burnout, need to make changes now  
36-50 | experiencing burnout, need to take action  

Environmental Human Rights Defenders  
(EHRDs) Toolkit
How to manage burnout

On an individual level, some lifestyle changes can help reduce the likelihood or impacts of burnout:

1. Draw better boundaries at work. Avoid taking on too much work and practice saying ‘no’ to additional tasks when you don’t have the time or space for them. Try to delegate or otherwise reduce your workload. Schedule time in the day for breaks, and set regular times to start and stop working. It is also important to minimize multitasking and try to focus on one task at a time.

2. Try to improve your work-life balance. In line with drawing better boundaries at work, it is important to set boundaries and know when ‘work’ ends. Try not to answer work-related emails or messages after hours. Allow for adequate downtime in the day, and try to delegate extra work tasks if needed. Take some time every day to do a recreational activity.

3. Take time off. It may simply be necessary to take a break from work to rest and recover. Note that this is only a temporary solution at best, and changes need to be made in your routine when you get back to work.

It is important to recognize that better self-care is not enough to address burnout. Rather, it may even worsen the effects as it makes one feel like they are not doing enough to address their burnout. It must be recognized that social and environmental factors need to be addressed to help with burnout.

1. Increase social support. Take the time to meet with friends and loved ones, even virtually. This could be for emotional support, or simply to relax and bond. If it’s within your capacity (financial or otherwise), consider seeking out a therapist or counselor.

2. Organize better working conditions. Talk with your co-workers and team leaders on how to structure your working conditions to be more holistic. This could include scheduling days where there are no meetings, or being more strict about contacting co-workers on their days off. Make sure that expectations and output goals are clear and reasonable. If tasks are too numerous, consider adding more people to the team.

Schedule time in the day for breaks, and set regular times to start and stop working. It is also important to minimize multitasking and try to focus on one task at a time.
Depression

What is depression?

According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, depression can refer to a wide range of mental health problems that are characterized by (1) a loss of interest and enjoyment in everyday things and experiences, and (2) low mood. It also comes with a range of associated emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms. Depression can refer to a continuum of severity, ranging from a clinically significant degree of this experience (known as major depressive disorder) all the way to a normally occurring feeling. Depressive episodes can last up to 4-6 months or even longer, and may be recurring or chronic.

Common symptoms include tearfulness, irritability, feeling socially withdrawn, increased muscle tension that may lead to pain, feelings of fatigue and accompanying low activity, or reversely feelings of agitation and anxiety, significant changes in one’s sleeping and eating patterns, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and helplessness, loss of self-esteem and confidence, poor concentration, reduced attention, and persistent thoughts of death or suicide.

If you have been experiencing a combination of these symptoms for two or more weeks, especially to the point that you feel your functioning is impaired, you may have depression. If you suspect that you or someone you know is suffering from depression, the best course of action is to go to a health expert.

There are several risk factors for developing depression, including genetics, biochemistry, personality, and environmental factors. In terms of environmental factors, these may be physical or social:

- Some physical factors include:
  - Sleep deprivation
  - Hazardous or stressful working conditions
  - Extreme weather conditions

- Some social factors include:
  - Experiencing stigma or prejudice
  - Experiencing strife or violence in the home or in the community
  - Experiencing poverty
  - Lack of social support
  - Dangerous or toxic relationships
  - Lack of safety

How to manage depression

For less severe cases of depression, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America recommends some strategies to cope. It is important to note that depression comes with the feeling that nothing will help, or that any relief will only be temporary. Coping with depression includes fighting such feelings as well.

1. Take care of your physical health. This includes physical exercise, eating healthy, and getting adequate sleep.

2. Challenge your own thinking. Depression can come with negative thoughts about
yourself, your future, or the world, but often these thoughts are distortions that are per-
petuating unhelpful behaviors. Are these thoughts real or do they just feel real? What
evidence do you have for thinking in such a way?

3. Identify unhelpful or unhealthy behaviors and work to change them. Set realistic
goals, and limit avoidance or procrastina-
tion. Try to engage with your community and support systems, even when you feel
like isolating or withdrawing. Extend grace and compassion towards yourself instead
of being overly critical.

Often, people experiencing depression find it difficult to reach out for help. If you suspect
someone you know is suffering, it is also impor-
tant to reach out to them. Here is a first aid plan
to help someone who is suffering from depres-
sion (adapted from Mental Health First Aid from
the National Council for Mental Wellbeing):

Assess for risk of suicide or harm. Has the per-
son expressed feelings of wanting to die? Are
they engaging in riskier behaviors? Have they
harmed themselves in non-lethal ways? Are they
likely to do any of these things? This may indicate
that the person’s life is in immediate danger. At
this stage, contacting a medical professional
to discuss observations and to receive advice
for intervention is the best answer.

1. Listen non-judgmentally. It is important
that you don’t minimize, belittle, or dis-
miss someone’s experiences, especially
if they have come to you for help. Lan-
guage like “lighten up,” “get over it,” or “it
doesn’t seem that bad to me” is unhelpful.
Instead, ask them how they are feeling,
how long they have been feeling this way,
why they might be feeling this way, and
listen attentively to them.

2. Give reassurance and information. Some
one who reaches out to you may only be
looking for support and reassurance, or
may also be looking for more help. Don’t

blame the person for their symptoms or
experiences. Approach the conversation
with respect for them. If you are being
reached out to, try to be prepared with
information so that you are more ready
to cope with their condition.

3. Encourage appropriate professional help.
The person experiencing depression may
benefit from counseling, talk therapy, or
other professional support. If it is in their
means to seek out this help, encourage
them to do so. You can also assist in look-
ing for resources.

4. Encourage self-help and support strate-
gies. Reaching out to support networks like
family, friends, faith groups, etc., can help
in coping with depression. Taking care of
one’s physical health (eating well, sleeping
well, keeping one’s surroundings clean)
can also help in coping with depression.
Often, depressed people find it difficult
to do these things. You may be able to
provide help, support, or encouragement
in these areas.

There may come a time when depressive
feelings become so severe that professional
help is needed. Reach out to professionals if
you or someone you know is experiencing the
following:

1. Symptoms that are intense and paralyzing,
and/or last for months

2. Inability to take care of oneself and one’s
own basic needs, or to attend to daily re-

3. Symptoms are accompanied by sub-
stance abuse, self-harm and/or thoughts
of suicide

Environmental Human Rights Defenders
(EHRDs) Toolkit
General care practices

What we can do for ourselves

There are things we can do for ourselves as individuals that can help improve our mental health and wellbeing. These are habits and patterns of thinking that we can develop. Here are some (adapted from Amnesty International Australia):¹

1. Build resilience.

Resilience refers to how well we can handle and adapt to problems in our lives, and how we can bounce back from stress and trauma. Building resilience improves our ability to handle negative experiences. Here are some ways to build resilience.

- Treat problems as learning opportunities. When faced with a problem, analyze where things went wrong, what could be done differently, what worked well and what did not.
- Have a realistic workload. Make sure you have the capacity for the tasks you’ve taken on. Practice saying ‘no’ to additional tasks if you’re not sure you have the time or space to do them. Learn to delegate extra work if your load is currently too heavy.
- Build a strong support network. This includes friends, family, and co-workers you can talk to about your problems. A support network can help you find solutions, or simply provide emotional support.

2. Practice positive self-talk.

Positive self-talk is not so much about acting like there is nothing negative, but rather re-framing a situation so that we can learn from a negative experience. Being hypercritical of ourselves or our situation when setbacks occur can make us feel worse about ourselves rather than helping us overcome what we are facing. In practicing positive self-talk, we are able to build a more positive self-image.

3. Practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness allows us to clear our minds and focus on the present when we are presented with a problem, rather than becoming overwhelmed.

What we can do within our organizations

An organization that will likely expose members and workers to difficult or even traumatic situations has the responsibility to care for the psychosocial wellbeing of its members and workers. Here are some things that we can do at the organizational level to help care for psychosocial wellbeing (adapted from FORUM-ASIA): ¹⁵

- Develop an environment that prioritizes well-being. Encourage informal discussions about how members are feeling. Make sure members know that they can and are encouraged to take time off for themselves to rest. If possible, try to schedule activities only within certain hours, and try not to contact members for work during their downtime or when they are taking time off.

   1. Encourage team bonding and social activities. These kinds of activities allow organization members to decompress and bond with each other.
   2. Conduct mandatory debriefings after conducting activities. These debriefings
allow participants to discuss what happened during an activity, its strengths and weaknesses, as well as their personal feelings on what happened. Debriefings may also allow participants to process their own feelings about the events.

3. Provide training for wellbeing practices. Find space and time to train organization members on basic coping mechanisms, what kind of warning signs to look out for, and what resources are available to them should they need help.

4. Create a list of mental health professionals that members can be referred to. Some members may need more assistance than the organization can provide. It is important to recognize when members may need the assistance of a health professional and to have resources ready and available for them.

Collective Care

EarthRights International suggests recognizing the need for collective care on top of self-care. Our communities, cultures, and overall external environments affect our wellbeing just as much as our individual actions and behaviors. We should thus share the responsibility of caring for the wellbeing of others, in the same sense that they will care for ours. After all, defenders that engage in collective care “are more resilient, efficient and effective in their work.”

Taking shared responsibility for one another’s wellbeing can manifest in multiple ways. Here are some examples shared by EarthRights International:

1. In the workplace- ensuring fair wages, fair working hours, and access to healthcare benefits, respecting work boundaries.

2. In the family- supporting domestic work, family care.

3. With other activists and friends- creating safe sharing/listening spaces, building support systems.

4. In funding- acknowledging the self-care needs of activists and its place in financial agreements, e.g., costs associated with psychosocial needs.

Our communities, cultures, and overall external environments affect our wellbeing just as much as our individual actions and behaviors.
Psychological first aid (PFA)

What is PFA?

One way of facilitating resilience within individuals — especially among defenders — is psychological support. These interventions allow us to bounce back from the impact of crises that are too complex and overwhelming to confront on our own. At the same time, they can empower us with coping strategies and resources that we can employ in the event that we experience shocks again in the future.

PFA is a psychological support intervention that focuses on assisting distressed individuals following a crisis, whether it be an accident, incident, calamity, or other events. It is ideal that PFA is provided within the first two weeks after the event.

The good thing about PFA is that it is highly accessible. You do not need to go to a psychological professional to receive it; anyone can provide PFA so long as they are adequately trained on it. This means that you can ask trained members of your community for PFA, in the same way that you can give it to your fellow defenders after being taught. PFA can also be conducted wherever one feels safe.

There are four key principles to providing PFA. The following are from FORUM-ASIA’s booklet on psychosocial support for human rights defenders:

1. Prepare. The PFA provider should have background information on who they will be assisting, as well as on the crisis they recently faced. It is also ideal for them to make note of references for further support before providing PFA.

2. Look. The provider should be attentive of their surroundings and what the person receiving PFA is saying so that they can respond accordingly.

3. Listen. This entails actively practicing empathy. It is important to not only listen intently, but to also demonstrate that they are being heard with no judgment. This can be done by repeating or rephrasing what is being shared, for example.

4. Connect. Link the receiver to resources that can provide them with what they need like food, shelter, further psychological support, and even other people who went through similar situations. At the very least, basic suggestions on how to take care of their wellbeing (such as the ones previously mentioned) should be discussed.

What does PFA do?

The goal of PFA is to reinforce a sense of security within the receiver in a compassionate and non-intrusive manner. It also aims to connect with, ground, and orient the individual to ultimately reduce distress after the crisis. Finally, it establishes preparations for moving forward and links the receiver to accessible forms of emotional, physical, and social support that may be of further assistance.

It is important to note that PFA is not a substitute for crisis counseling or other professional psychological services. If you feel that you need specialized or subsequent support on top of PFA, do not be afraid to reach out to a professional. There is no shame in asking for help.
References


Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) Toolkit

A toolkit developed by defenders for defenders to support their work in upholding environmental rights

Module 05

Ensuring Psychosocial Wellbeing

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Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders