



Contextual Analysis

(Also used as **SESSION 1 FOR DEALING WITH THREATS, RISKS AND SAFETY**)

Overview: This activity can be used for many purposes: informing strategy, mapping power dynamics in our social and political landscape, and laying groundwork for risk assessment and planning.

Purpose: Understanding the context in which we are located and its power dynamics provides is vital for us as activists. The following activity leads participants through a process called contextual analysis that creates an overview of power dynamics in a specific time and place. It will yield important insights for any process.

Because certain contexts and political moments are more dangerous than others we also begin our work on **Dealing with Threats, Risks and Safety** with this activity as well. Being able to analyze these contexts and threats, assess risks and develop protection plans are important skills both for survival and empowerment (*if you are using it as part of your own risk and security process, please see our Integral Protection/HMB pack*).

Time:

3 – 4 hours

Credit: Adapted from multiple JASS experiences around world

Materials and Space needed

- Markers
- Flip charts
- Masking tape
- Question and Discussion Guide: Contextual Analysis attached



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Facilitation Note: There are many ways to do a contextual analysis. For purposes of this process, we will be focusing on analyzing the forces and dynamics present in the current political moment, a time period that reflects the situation today through the upcoming 6 – 12 months. Depending on your focus, this kind of analysis can be done at a national or local level and can be adapted for an international context as well.

This exercise involves small group work on two sets of fairly complex questions. Depending on your goals and time available, you will probably want to assign one or two questions per group from the first set in order to streamline the process since the analysis, when done well, can be quite involved and time-consuming. All the groups should reflect on the second set of three overall analysis questions.

While this particular version of a Contextual Analysis is focused on women's lives and activism, you can modify the activity to include or focus on the lives and activism of other marginalized groups (e.g. indigenous communities, low wage workers).

Conceptual Note: In this exercise, we look at two interacting forms of power -- oppressive and transformative – and how they impact women's well-being and activism, or that of other groups, in the different realms of their lives. The questions basically ask: 1) What forces and dynamics of power are operating in your context to keep women and/or other groups oppressed and marginalized and 2) which ones can transform those dynamics and build more equal and just relationships and societies? These questions allow us to look at how some forms of power silence and subjugate while other forms can work to transform oppressive systems and create equality and justice. This information and analysis makes it possible to study the challenges and opportunities that a specific context offers.

(For more on power, See the Power and Transforming Power pack.)



Process:

- Introduce session and the activity, explaining the notions of power over and transformative power and the realms in which they operate both positively and negatively -- the personal realm of the individual and family as well as those within the wider public realm of the community, the organization, the government, and the business sector.
- Review the following question guide, provide a copy to everyone and divide into groups of 4 – 5 people. Explain that while the forces and dynamics we are going to analyze are presented under separate realms for clarity, they obviously overlap and interact with one another across people's lives. Although, of course, power dynamics are constantly shifting and changing, it is important for our own clarity to take a snapshot of the moment and understand the dynamics.

In small groups:

- Each group will use the question and discussion guide and capture their key points on flip chart paper

Question and Discussion Guide

For purposes of analysis:

1. You will be looking first at dynamics and forces operating in different sectors of society and how they are affecting women's lives and activism, either positively or negatively. These realms include:
 - Political/ governmental
 - Economic
 - Belief systems/social norms
 - Civil society/organized groups
 - Family
2. Second, you will examine how these different forces and power dynamics are oppressive or supportive of our lives and what this means in terms of challenges and opportunities in the current context.



1. *First Set of Questions:*

- **In the formal political sphere:**
Name 2- 3 major government policies, laws, institutions or decision makers that are currently affecting women in your context, pro or con.
- **In the economic sector:**
Name 2 -3 major powerful economic dynamics and actors (behavior and agendas of corporations and businesses, banks, investors, treatment of labor, types of work and wages, etc), that are currently affecting women's well-being and activism, pro and con.
- **In terms of belief systems and social norms about women:**
Name 2 – 3 major ideological and cultural forces and beliefs that are currently affecting women and women activists, pro or con.
- **In civil society:**
 - Describe the state of women's organizations, their allies and feminism as they affect women's well-being and activism, pro or con, name 2 -3 aspects.
 - Name any other organized forces (some may be shadow players, others may be known) that are impacting women's lives and activism – name 2 or 3 aspects.
- **In the home and family:**
Name 2 – 3 major aspects of family life and expectations that are currently affecting women's well-being and activism, pro or con.

If possible, while still seated in small groups, invite each group to share 1 of their responses per sector with the plenary group. Write this up on flip charts at the front of the room. A sheet for each sector. This will serve to amplify and affirm the groups understanding of the dynamics at play. Then rather than discussing them, go into the second round of analysis.

2. *Second Set of Questions:*

Remind the group that they will be presenting their analysis to the plenary so they should capture key points on paper for presentation.

- **Based on your earlier responses:**
What does this analysis of the current moment tell you about what's happening in your own life and the lives of women in your country?



- **Specifically:**
 1. How are these forces and dynamics operating to oppress women's lives, activism and security (e.g. their emotional and physical health, their economic autonomy and survival, their political participation and leadership, their personal sense of self-worth and security, etc.)?
 2. How are these forces and dynamics working to support their well-being, activism, and security and helping transform oppression?
 3. What is the role of belief systems in either challenging or supporting women's lives and activism? Is there any change happening in this realm?
- In this context, who are the principal allies and forces supportive of women, gender equality and different women's rights struggles? Which groups are actively opposed? And are there any who could be allies even if not at the moment?
- Based on your overall analysis, what are the principal challenges and opportunities that this context offers you in your efforts to build more equal and just societies and relationships?

In plenary:

- Groups report back on overall analysis questions. After each presentation ask for comments from other groups regarding points of clarification, questions, doubts, additions etc.
- Ask full group -- What insights or questions does this overall analysis raise for you about the current challenges and opportunities you face in your work over the next 6 to 12 months?

Wrap up: Synthesize the group reflections, clarifying any misunderstandings or doubts, and summarizing the points you feel are relevant and important.



HANDOUT

SESSION ON CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Question and Discussion Guide

In this analysis you will:

- Look at dynamics and forces operating in different sectors of society and how they are affecting women's lives and activism, (or that of other marginalized groups) – either positively or negatively. These realms include:
 - Political/ governmental
 - Economic
 - Belief systems/social norms
 - Civil society/organized groups
 - Family
- Second, you will examine the impact of these different forces and power dynamics - oppressive or supportive of our lives and activism- and what this means in terms of challenges and opportunities in the current context.

1. First Set of Questions:

- **In the formal political sphere:**
Name 2- 3 major government policies, laws, institutions or decision makers that are currently affecting women in your context, pro or con.
- **In the economic sector:**
Name 2 -3 major powerful economic dynamics and actors (behavior and agendas of corporations and businesses, banks, investors, treatment of labor, types of work and wages, etc), that are currently affecting women's well-being and activism, pro and con.
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2. Second Set of Questions:

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Based on your earlier responses:

What does this analysis of the current moment tell you about what's happening in your own life and the lives of women in your country?

Specifically:

1. How are these forces and dynamics operating to oppress women's lives, activism and security (e.g. their emotional and physical health, their economic autonomy and survival, their political participation and leadership, their personal sense of self-worth and security, etc.)?
2. How are these forces and dynamics working to support their well-being, activism, and security and helping transform oppression?
3. What is the role of belief systems in either challenging or supporting women's lives and activism? Is there any change happening in this realm?
4. In this context, who are the principal allies and forces supportive of women, gender equality and different women's rights struggles? Which groups are actively opposed? And are there any who could be allies even if not at the moment?

Based on your overall analysis, what are the principal challenges and opportunities that this context offers you in your efforts to build more equal and just societies and relationships?