



Dealing with Threats, Risks & Safety: Introduction

Overview: Throughout the world, women activists are on the frontline of defending and advancing human rights and, as such, face the direct backlash and violence associated both with challenging misogyny and advancing struggles for social justice. Certain contexts and political moments are more dangerous than others. Being able to analyze these contexts and threats, assess risks and develop protection plans are important skills both for survival and empowerment. Women activists highlight a variety of tools and steps for dealing with danger and risk. These often include:

- Contextual analysis
- Identification of threatening incidents
- Threat analysis and risk assessment
- Development of a protection plan for personal, family and community security

Purpose: It is critical to note that dealing with risks and creating safety is not something that can be accomplished with a few tools or on one's own. It is a sustained process best done with a support team or in an organizational context. What we have compiled here is a basic collection of "tools" and methodologies developed by and for women activists to support that process. These are by no means comprehensive but a foundation on which to build. We recommend that you work with these tools as a whole as each adds a layer of analysis and planning. We also recommend you think about this as an on-going process with various steps, rather than something you will complete on one day.

This set of interrelated activities provide a detailed approach to assessing risks and threats and developing plans to ensure people's and organization's safety in the face of ever changing contexts. These activities are drawn and adapted from the experiences of groups around the world. We have streamlined some of the approaches to provide a set of fundamental tools and steps, starting with a contextual analysis that gives an overview of power dynamics. We provide an example that allows for an analysis of key contextual forces but is not as extensive as some forms. After completing this basic contextual overview, a series of other steps follow. We





highlight a process used by Mexican and Central American colleagues -- women human rights defenders and activists. Following a careful contextual analysis, they go on to identify and examine incidents where security has been threatened in order to get a sense of patterns and the likelihood of new threats emerging. From this review of previous security threats, they move on to examine current ones using a set of frameworks that provide a way to assess risk levels and develop a protection plan.

Because these processes reveal scenarios that are often unnerving and frightening, it is important to be aware of potential emotional reactions that such reflections may generate and to be prepared to provide psychological support. You will want to start each session with an activity that inspires and energizes, reminding people of their collective power and synergy. For example, it might be a lively dance that gets everyone moving while deepening their sense of creativity and solidarity, or a story of an inspirational figure, or a ritual that taps people's inner strength and spirit. We often include shared food, moments for laughter, song and self-care to support our collective and individual resilience. Always make sure you have created a safe space (See Creating Safe Space tool).

Activities Included:

- Opening: Sources of Strength (suggested)
- Session 1: Contextual Analysis
- Session 2: Identification and Analysis of Security Incidents
- Session 3: Threat Analysis and Risk Assessment
- Session 4: Developing a Protection and Security Plan
- There are a set of accompanying handouts and materials

Time: This will depend on how the group approaches this process. Again, we recommend a process over days or weeks, not a single session.

Materials and Space needed:

- Colored cards
- Markers
- Flip charts
- Newsprint
- Masking tape
- Space on wall for paper quilt
- Question and Discussion Guide: Contextual Analysis



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

Some other resources:

- [Paving the Road for Freedom and Equality](#), Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative (IMD)
- [Frontline Defenders Workbook](#)
- [Claiming Rights, Claiming Justice](#)
- [Materials and Resources for WHRD's](#)
- [Our Right to Safety](#)

Overall Process:

- As you embark on this process, make sure to create a safe space as this work requires trust and will bring up emotion. It is important to be aware of potential reactions that such reflections may generate and to be prepared to provide psychological support. You will want to start each session with an activity that inspires and energizes, reminding people of their collective power and synergy. Close in a way that offers the support and solidarity of community.
- Remember to introduce the purpose and describe the overall method and session by session approach that includes:
 - Sources of strength
 - Contextual analysis
 - Identification of security incidents
 - Threat analysis and risk assessment
 - Development of a protection plan



WE RISE

