

WORKBOOK ON SECURITY: PRACTICAL STEPS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK



CHAPTER 6: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONTEXT

In this Chapter, we will look at some reasons why a context analysis can be useful, with whom and when to do it. We introduce two tools for context analysis – Context Analysis Questions and an Analysis of Actors. There is also a simpler tool in Appendix 1 – SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis.



Participants at a security training work through an Analysis of Actors

Why is a context analysis useful?

“There are so many armed groups! A HRD working in this area must be able to identify each type of group – their location, appearance, their aims and methods. If you don’t and you see armed men, you don’t know what your best protection strategy is. If the armed men are robbers, I know they only want to steal the vehicle and they will let me go. If they are narco-traffickers, then they will try to kill me, so I need to accelerate out of there! We developed this knowledge of the aggressors in the area with the local communities – and we make sure all our workers know what to look out for and what is likely to be the best action to take in a dangerous situation”
HRD, Americas

“In our country, knowing influential people is the best protection mechanism. We had discussed in our organisation which high level contacts we had connections with. When our female colleague was detained, we knew that her grandfather was a friend of a senior government official, so he was asked to advocate for her release – this was a successful tactic.”
HRD, Middle East

“So we can be effective in human rights work, we have developed an in-depth knowledge of our context – our history, our political system and our culture. We know who our opponents and supporters are, how they work and what motivates them. And when we discussed these issues, we realised that we had not considered how to transfer this knowledge to the crucial context of our security! We then spent some time considering how these factors related to our security, and fed the results into our security plan.”
HRD, Europe

HRDs work in extremely complex environments with many actors and interests. HRDs working in the same area for a long time develop deep knowledge about the context of the work.

However, taking some time to re-conceptualise and re-analyse this knowledge in the context of security will benefit your organisation in many ways. You can share new information, such as access to or how to get in touch with influential contacts, and document the resources you have so that others can benefit from your expertise. You can draw new lessons from your environment in terms of security, raise awareness in your organisation about strategic actions and contacts, gain fresh insights and recognise new opportunities.

With whom and when to do a context analysis

The best context analysis is carried out with a group of trusted colleagues. This collaborative sharing and mapping draws out aspects of insecurity and enables less experienced colleagues to better understand and manage their security.

A good time to do this is during the development of your organisation’s plan for the next planning period (or when there is a clear change in the security environment in which you work). The process will clearly identify opportunities where you can weave security and protection strategies into your activities. Below we suggest two tools to use for this process, which are ideally used consecutively.

Depending on the size of the organisation, and the level of trust, not every person in the organisation might participate in this discussion, but it is essential to document the key points and clearly communicate to others in the organisation what they need to know.

However, if the paragraphs above don’t apply to your situation, perhaps you are a HRD working alone, we suggest that you (with others if at all possible) start with the simpler SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis on security in Appendix 1.

If you can take the time to put thought, research and analysis into considering your context, the clearer and more focused your protection strategy can be.

Tools for context analysis

1. Context Analysis Questions

Below are some useful questions to answer for a context analysis. (You can find an example of one organisation’s answers in Appendix 2: Context Analysis Questions.) The questions are only a guide and you may find that different questions would be more suitable for your unique situation.

Reminder: If you are part of an organisation, you can get the best results if you discuss the question as a group.

Fig. 6.1

<p>Context analysis questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the key issues which impact on 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 organisations, business 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)? (Eg prior to or during elections, after publishing reports or naming key figures publicly, demonstrations, anniversaries, high-level visits, events etc)
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"We were monitoring and documenting information on killings and other abuses by state forces controlling the diamond field. Our state began to negotiate re-entry to the Kimberly process (which aims to regulate the sale of diamonds so that they are not associated with human rights violations). Our NGO's Director was arrested and charged with 'communicating and publishing falsehoods about the state.'" HRD, Africa

(The charges were later dropped after months of sustained national and international pressure.)

Clearly the NGO's work deeply challenged key strategic issues of the Government and security forces by calling international attention to human rights violations and thereby threatening economic interests.

Your work may to a greater or lesser extent challenge the key strategic objectives of those in power. If it relates directly to a key strategic interest, you may risk severe repression when your work becomes increasingly likely to have an impact.

It is important, therefore, to have flexible security planning which includes consideration of the safest ways to carry out challenging actions, and leads you to adapt, increase or create new security measures at times when the risk increases.

Our next tool is used to look more specifically at actors, their relationship to your security – and to each other.

"Every week we discuss our forthcoming activities and their implications for our security"
HRD, Americas

2. Analysis of Actors

An Analysis of Actors can help you deepen your understanding of those who have a negative or positive interest in and impact on your security. It will help you to identify the interests and conflicts, and lead you to develop insights into potentially productive relationships. It should enhance and expand your knowledge base, and assist you in choosing the most effective actions in relation to your security.

It can take some time to develop (and it will need to be updated either annually or in times of change) but it will be an invaluable resource.

Reminder: There is a simpler tool (a SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats - analysis in Appendix 1.)

Reminder: it is best to do this in a group, to share knowledge and experience.

You will need some paper and marker pens. The best way to do this is to cover a large section of your office wall with flip chart paper so you have lots of space.

Step 1) Make a list on flip chart paper of the different stakeholders or actors (state and non-state) with an interest - positive or negative - in the security of you as a HRD or your organisation. (You may have already done this by answering the discussion questions in Fig 6.1 above.) Examples could be: Office of the President; Ministry of the Interior; army; police; armed opposition groups; political parties; religious groups; media; commercial enterprises; international NGOs; national NGOs; foreign embassies; community leaders/elders, relevant communities.

If you are in a rural area, you might decide to concentrate on the area or region, rather than the national level. Ideally you would do both.

Fig. 6.2 Example: Analysis of Actors

	Government	Police	Religious Institutions	Media	International NGOs	Armed Opposition Groups	Army	UN Agencies	National HR NGOs	Other States
Government	X		SAMPLE 1							
Police		X								
Religious Institutions	SAMPLE 2		X							
Media				SAMPLE 3						
International NGOs					X					
Armed Opposition Groups						X				
Army							X			
UN Agencies								X		
National HR NGOs									X	
Other										X

SAMPLE 1: How do religious institutions influence Govt?

SAMPLE 2: How does Govt influence religious institutions?

SAMPLE 3: Interest in good topical stories. fear that govt could close them down. b) Coverage of events; printing articles from HRDs; c) Power to protect – high; d) Readiness to protect – medium

Step 2) When you have your overall list, consider which of these should be split down into sub-categories to best reflect the differences within entities or groups. For example, the Ministry of the Interior may be responsible for the police (who are opposed to your work and will not automatically protect you) and also a unit charged with the protection of HRDs (which may be trying to develop a good reputation for protecting HRDs). There are also likely to be differences in the relationships HRDs have with state-owned and private media, with different religious groups, different embassies, diverse communities etc.

Step 3) Next count the number of actors you have identified and draw a grid with that number + 1 of (vertical) columns and the same number of (horizontal) rows as columns.

Leaving the top left-corner box blank, list the actors in the same order both across and down the page.

Step 4) For each box where the actor name is the same vertically and horizontally (see the boxes marked X), fill in:

- a) their aims and interests in relation to protection (or attack) of HRDs
- b) their strategies for attacking or protecting HRDs
- c) the power they have to attack or protect HRDs (you could use: power (protect or attack) - low / medium / high)
- d) their readiness to attack or protect HRDs (low / medium / high)

The 'Media' box is shown as an example (see fig. 6.2)

For the other boxes, you will consider the relationships between the stakeholders in terms of protection of HRDs. So starting from the top row, consider the relationships and influences between the top row actor and the other actor intersecting that box.

For example, in the (vertical) column headed Religious Institutions which intersects with the horizontal row entitled Government, consider the way the religious institutions influence the Government. And in the column headed Government which intersects with Religious Institutions, you will consider how the Government influences the religious institutions.

When you have finished the analysis, make a note of implications that have struck you.

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Examples of insights that an Analysis of Actors provokes are:

- we are not yet in contact with some of the actors with power to protect HRDs
- there are some actors who attack HRDs who may be susceptible to influences from actors who have power to protect us (eg the President may be very sensitive to the media)
- some powerful actors who attack us may also have some elements of readiness to engage with us – are we taking opportunities to do so?

“My neighbours denounced me to the authorities as a ‘state enemy’. When I helped the community gain more equitable access to electricity, my neighbours started appreciating what human rights really meant, and began to support me.”
 HRD, Eastern Europe

“We assumed the Editor of a conservative newspaper would not be sympathetic to our work. When we had a meeting with him on concrete proposals to assist indigenous people, he agreed to all our proposals! This encounter developed our relationship with him and his newspaper started covering our events more frequently.”
 HRD, Africa

Final comments:

Security plans are essential building blocks in considering your security situation. One of the greatest learning associated with them is the time spent in considering ‘what if...?’ which develops your reactions to both the anticipated, but also the unexpected.

Security plans and procedures are valuable tools, but they also have to be balanced by situational awareness, common sense and good judgement.

Front Line warmly welcomes any comments on this Workbook. Please send them to: workbook@frontlinedefenders.org



Dr Mudawi, Sudan, Inaugural winner of the Front Line Award 2005 with President of Ireland, Mary McAleese