

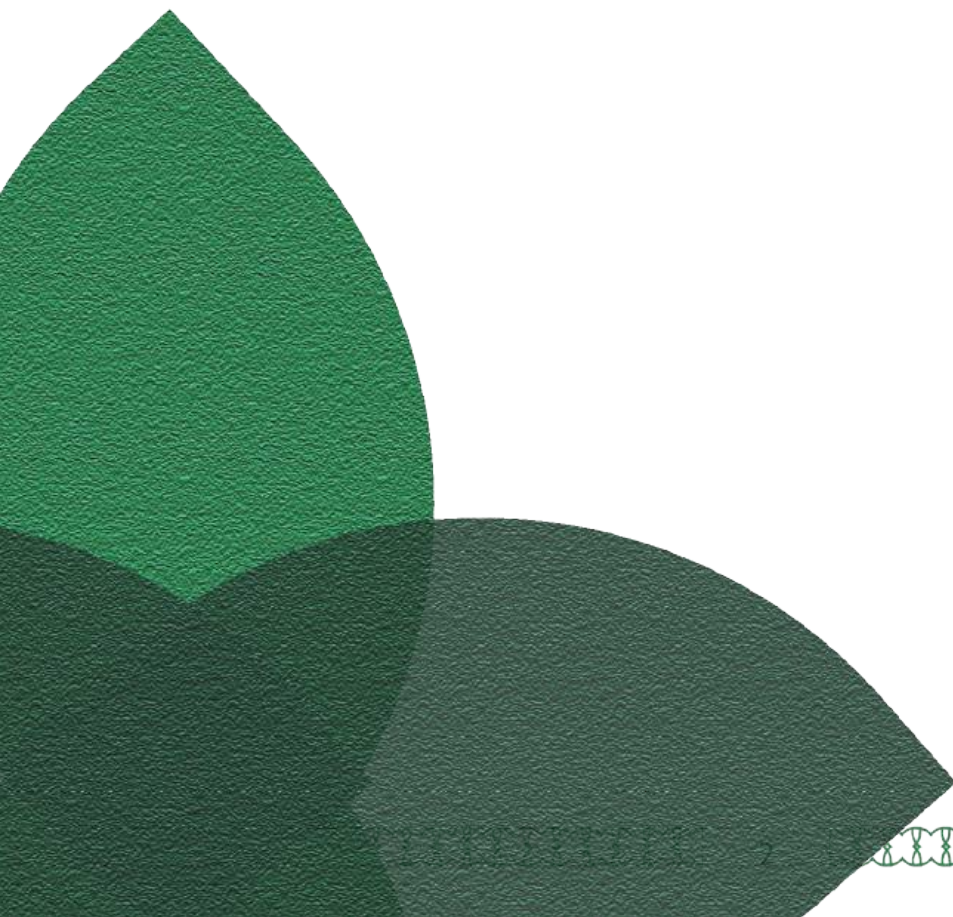
# SECURITY AND PROTECTION OF EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS

FACILITATION TOOLKIT



EARTHRIGHTS INTERNATIONAL







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## About the toolkit

### PURPOSE

The Facilitation Toolkit has been developed by EarthRights to increase the understanding, awareness and importance of security and protection amongst individuals, communities and organizations who work to defend the land and environment in the Greater Mekong Subregion. It is designed for those facilitating security and protection training to their local organizations and communities. It intends to equip them with the information and guidance necessary to provide training that is both relevant and specific to the region. The Facilitation Toolkit contains a practical, action-oriented set of tools, exercises and materials for facilitators to utilize when delivering training to those that they work with.

### THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION

The Greater Mekong Subregion includes the countries of Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and the southern provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi in China. It is a naturally resource rich and biodiverse geographic region in which large-scale development projects take place – often damaging the land and environment and adversely affecting the livelihoods of local communities.

Individuals, communities and organizations working to defend the land and environment in the Greater Mekong Subregion frequently find themselves targeted for their peaceful human rights work. The Facilitation Toolkit takes into consideration the regional context, concerns and challenges they experience and is informed by EarthRights' extensive work with local communities and grassroots activists in the region.









## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The Facilitation Toolkit is divided into six different sections focusing upon:



***EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS  
(ERD)***



***SECURITY STRATEGIES AND  
RISK ASSESSMENT***



***DIGITAL SECURITY***



***THE CRIMINALIZATION AND  
JUDICIAL HARASSMENT OF  
EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS***



***PHYSICAL SECURITY***



***WELLBEING AND SUSTAINABLE  
ACTIVISM***

## RECOMMENDED READING AND REFERENCES

The Facilitation Toolkit includes recommended reading and references a number of reports and publications from other organizations. These are included as they are considered to provide valuable additional guidance and information. Facilitators should refer to, and utilize, these additional resources alongside the information in this toolkit to further enhance their understanding and approaches to security and protection. All of the additional resources that are found in the Facilitation Toolkit have been extensively researched to give facilitators and those they are supporting as much guidance as possible.

Facilitators, and those receiving security and protection training, should also familiarize themselves with the different human rights organizations working within the Greater Mekong Subregion. These organizations document human rights violations and advocate for long-term substantive change to the laws and policies that enable violations. Their work can provide important insights about the situation facing those protecting the land and environment as well as information on any legal and political developments that may affect them.

## GENDER

Consideration is given to gender throughout the Facilitation Toolkit and facilitators must ensure that gender equality and inclusion are incorporated at all stages of training. This should include ensuring equal gender representation amongst learners and enabling all learners the opportunity to speak up and be involved in discussions and other activities.

The facilitator should also encourage gender to be mainstreamed throughout all areas of a community or organization – including in the different policies and practices they undertake.

It is important for facilitators to be aware that gender does not refer only to cis-men and cis-women (those whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth), but also to transgender and non-binary individuals. As a result of their gender, many of those defending the land and environment encounter discrimination and experience additional and unique threats when undertaking their work – making the consideration of gender an essential component of security management.









## ADAPTATION AND FACILITATION TIPS

Facilitators should carefully consider those they are delivering training to and adapt the content to the background, experience level, local context, and energy of the trainees. This may include: Adapting the objectives, being aware of the time provided for activities or ending the session early, changing the format of the activity or examples so it's more interactive/engaging (such as partner sharing, small group work), changing the location/space of the meeting, and checking-in often about the pacing, expectations, and content for the learners.

It is particularly important for facilitators to note that the Facilitation Toolkit refers to instances of those protecting the land and environment being targeted for their work. Facilitators should consider that learners may have previously been targeted themselves and that certain topics or examples may bring up difficult painful and traumatic experiences. Facilitators must ensure they approach the topics and case studies with awareness and sensitivity at all times and adapt their facilitation approach accordingly. Before beginning the training, emphasize that learners may share as much or as little as they feel comfortable. Participants should not feel compelled to divulge information that they feel uncomfortable sharing. ). It is recommended that before discussing a particularly sensitive topic, facilitators give a 'content warning' or 'trigger warning' to participants, so they are informed about what to expect and can be given an opportunity to take a break, if required.

The glossary is the list of key vocabulary words used in each module. We suggest you use this with the module's learning objectives to structure review activities and keep track of learners' comprehension.

## EARTHRIGHTS INTERNATIONAL

The Facilitation Toolkit has been designed and produced by EarthRights. We are a non-governmental, nonprofit organization that combines the power of law and the power of people in defense of human rights and the environment, which we define as "earth rights." We specialize in fact-finding, legal actions against perpetrators of earth rights abuses, training grassroots and community leaders, and advocacy campaigns. Through these strategies, EarthRights seeks to end earth rights abuses, to provide real solutions for real people, and to promote and protect human rights and the environment in the communities where we work.

## LEGAL DISCLAIMER

The information contained within the Facilitation Toolkit should not be considered as legally binding or as legal advice. While there are many things that those defending the land and environment can do to carry out their activism in a safer way, there are no guarantees against the threats and risks that may be encountered as a result of their work.

All situations and contexts are unique and change continuously. Information contained in the Facilitation Toolkit should be treated as guidance, advice and recommendations only.



1

***EARTH  
RIGHTS  
DEFENDERS***







**AN EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDER (ERD)** is someone who, individually or collectively, promotes land and environmental rights – or “Earth Rights.” ERDs expose violations and fight for justice for the victims. Unfortunately, governments and corporations don’t just sit back and watch. They often try to silence ERDs by targeting them in a number of different ways.

ERDs are often at risk of experiencing arbitrary arrest and detention, violence, intimidation, harassment and many other forms of harm for carrying out their peaceful and legitimate human rights work. It is essential, therefore, that ERDs have an understanding of security and protection and the threats that they may encounter when undertaking their work.

This section of the Facilitation Toolkit will explore the concept of Earth Rights Defenders in greater detail. It will enable facilitators to explain what is meant by the term, how ERDs fit within the international human rights framework, and how being aware of this can be useful in terms of their security and protection. It also examines the underlying reasons why ERDs are often targeted, the threats they face, and who the perpetrators often are.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Learners will:

- Understand who an ‘Earth Rights Defender’ is, what they do, and how they fit into the wider category of Human Rights Defenders (HRD);
- Discover why ERDs are targeted, the specific threats that they may encounter, and from whom;
- Analyze why women are disproportionately affected by harmful development projects and the additional challenges that women ERDs encounter.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- [Fighting Back: A Global Protection Strategy for Earth Rights Defenders](#) by EarthRights
- [Women Lead the Fight Blog](#) by EarthRights
- [Land and environmental defenders: annual report archive](#) by Global Witness
- [Front Line Defenders Global Analysis \(2019\)](#) by Front Line Defenders
- [The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders \(English\)](#) by UN General Assembly  
([Burmese](#)) ([Thai](#)) ([Karen](#)) ([Mon](#)) ([Lao](#)) ([Shan](#)) ([Vietnamese](#)) ([Chinese](#))
- [Human Rights Defenders: Protecting the Right to Defend Human Rights \(Fact Sheet No. 29\)](#) by Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- [Defenders at Risk](#) by Swedwatch
- [The Gender at Work Framework](#) by Gender at Work
- [Gender at Work Framework Webinar](#) by UN Women Training Centre

*A summary of recommended reading and additional information can be found in Annex 1.*



## 1.1 DEFINING EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS

### WHO IS AN EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDER?

The extraction and exploitation of natural resources can have a detrimental impact on land and environment, and subsequently, the livelihoods, culture and security of local communities. An Earth Rights Defender (ERD) is someone who, alone or with others, advocates for the promotion and protection of land and environmental rights, including the right to a healthy environment, and corresponding human rights necessary to defend threatened and sensitive ecosystems on which people and communities depend for survival. These corresponding rights include the right to speak out, assemble, and protest in defense of land and livelihoods, and the right to participate in development decisions.

ERDs may be individuals working alone, or members of local communities and organizations. They are instrumental in supporting communities to stand up for, and claim, their human rights: they expose injustice, demand accountability from their governments, and help change laws that undermine the realization of human rights.

#### Summary of Key Learning Points

- An ERD is someone who defends land and environmental rights;
- ERDs may be individuals working alone, or members of local communities and organizations;
- ERDs support communities to stand up for, and claim, their human rights.











## 1.1 WHO CAN BE AN EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDER?

Anyone can be an ERD. They may be farmers, students, lawyers, housewives or non-governmental organization (NGO) workers. It does not matter what gender a person is, women, as well as non-binary individuals and gender minorities, can be ERDs.

An ERD is any person who works to promote and protect land and environmental rights in a peaceful, non-violent manner and who accepts that all human rights are for all people irrespective of their age, nationality, gender, ethnic group or other characteristic.

The term ‘Human Rights Defender (HRD)’ is often used in the international human rights framework. An HRD is a person that promotes and protects internationally recognized standards of human rights. Put simply, an ERD is a HRD that focuses on land and environmental rights. In 1998, the United Nations (UN) adopted the *Declaration of Human Rights Defenders* or as it is officially called, the *Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of individual groups and organs of society to protect and promote internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms*.<sup>1</sup> The declaration spells out both the rights and responsibilities of HRDs, but also outlines the actions states should take to protect them.

Understanding that ERDs are HRDs is important because it means that those defending land and environmental rights are internationally recognized within the human rights system and are a part of a wider community of human rights advocates. It also means that human rights organizations that operate in a country, region or internationally may be able to provide various types of assistance to ERDs and support their work.

Research by human rights organizations has found that those working to protect land and environmental rights are one of the most targeted categories of HRDs. This is particularly true for the Greater Mekong Subregion.

### Summary of Key Learning Points

- Anyone can be an ERD – it doesn’t matter what they do for a living, where they come from or what their gender may be.
- ERDs must always conduct their work in a peaceful, non-violent manner and accept that all human rights are for all people.
- An ERD is a category of HRDs that focuses on land and environmental rights.
- Recognizing that ERDs are HRDs is important because it means that they are part of a wider community of human rights advocates, and human rights organizations can provide them support.



## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Discussion Questions

Consider using one or more of the following questions to begin a group discussion:

- Do you consider yourself an ERD? Why?
- Do you know anyone that you consider an ERD? What do they do as an ERD?
- Why is it useful to know that ERDs are recognized as Human Rights Defenders in the international human rights system and by human rights organizations?
- When you think of human rights organizations, which organizations come to mind? Do you know whether they support the work of ERDs and HRDs? How?

### Activities

#### Activity 1: Examples of ERDs

Instructions:

- Show images of well-known defenders from the region which can explain who defenders are and what work they do.
  - ◊ Alternative: Trainees put together a brief project with biographies of various defenders from the region.
  - ◊ Alternative: Trainees highlight an HRD or ERD in their community or someone they've met in their life, and present/reflect on what makes them an HRD/ERD.

Debrief/Questions:

1. What are some of the common qualities of HRDs and ERDs, according to the examples we discussed?
2. Do you think anyone can be an HRD/ERD? Why or why not?

#### Activity 2: Declaration on Human Rights Defenders

Instructions:

- The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders is available in different languages including those spoken throughout the Greater Mekong Subregion.
- Share the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders with trainees and provide an overview of Human Rights Defenders: Protecting the Right to Defend Human Rights (Fact Sheet No.29). Links to both documents can be found in the Recommended Reading section.

Debrief/Questions:

1. What are the rights of HRDs according to the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders?
2. Why is it important that HRDs know their rights at both a local and international level? How does it help them in their work?





## WHY ARE EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK?

The work of ERDs often involves standing up against powerful actors such as multinational corporations, big businesses, government agencies and security services. These actors seek to gain, financially or politically, from development projects impacting the land and environment, which the ERDs seek to protect. Viewing the work of ERDs as an obstacle to securing their own vested interests, these actors use multiple ways to silence and target ERDs, so harmful development projects can continue unchallenged.

While there is international recognition of the work of ERDs and some limited protection mechanisms are in place, in practice many ERDs find themselves unable to exercise their rights and are targeted and threatened for carrying out their legitimate human rights work. This is largely a result of the contexts in which ERDs operate.

In the Greater Mekong Subregion, there is often a lack of effective protection from the government or local law enforcement. Rather than protecting the rights of ERDs, these actors are often complicit or directly responsible for targeting ERDs. Many countries across the region lack independent judiciaries and effective and accountable legal systems. This has led to a culture of impunity, where those responsible for targeting ERDs are rarely held accountable for their actions.

The work of ERDs usually takes place in remote and isolated rural areas, where their activities are more visible than urban areas. There are also rarely any other organizations or support networks nearby, which can offer ERDs assistance or advice.

It is particularly important to note that women, non-binary individuals and gender minorities may encounter discrimination and additional unique threats because of their gender. The reasons for this are varied, but a major reason is the perception that their activism work challenges prevalent gender roles in society and traditional notions of family. Gender and the challenges faced by women ERDs is discussed in more detail in sections *1.4 WOMEN EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS* and *1.5 WORKING TOWARDS AN IMPROVED ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN ERDS*

### Summary of Key Learning Points

- ERDs are often at risk because there is no effective protection from the government or local law enforcement. Additionally, those responsible for targeting ERDs are rarely held accountable;
- ERDs often work in isolated and rural areas where they are more exposed and have limited access to support networks;
- Women, transgender and non-binary ERDs may encounter discrimination and additional, unique threats



## **PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR**

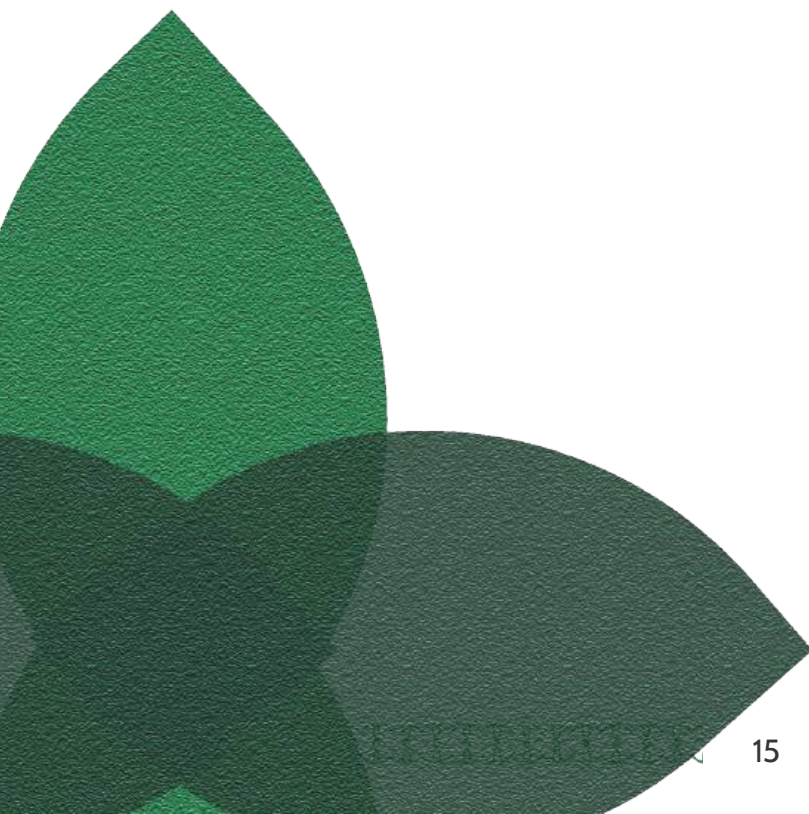
### **Discussion Questions**

Use one or more of the following questions to prompt a group discussion:

- Why do you think ERDs might be at risk?
- Do you think ERDs in your country are protected by law or the police? Why do you think this is?
- What additional threats might women, transgender or non-binary ERDs face? Why do you think this is the case?

### **Information for facilitator**

- Geographical location, available resources, and support from partner organizations are some factors that may impact the level of risk faced by an ERD and may be worth exploring further.
- This is also an opportunity to begin exploring the concepts of gender and social inclusion which will be discussed later in this section. For example, consider asking participants what aspects of their identity put them at greater risk and why?
- Consider developing a case study to explore the context in which ERDs experience risk because of their work. Ask participants to identify the factors within the case study that put ERDs at risk.





## 1.2 WHAT ARE EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK OF?

Across the Greater Mekong Subregion, human rights organizations have documented many instances of ERDs being targeted for their work. ERDs have often faced harassment, intimidation and violence. In some instances, ERDs working in the Greater Mekong Subregion have disappeared or been killed. ERDs have had their offices shut down, or searched and their equipment and documents have been stolen.

The activities of ERDs are often criminalized, which means that the law is changed to make legitimate activities illegal. ERDs also face judicial harassment, whereby the legal system is used to subject them to lengthy, expensive and stressful legal proceedings. Increasingly, ERDs are falsely accused of ‘incitement’, ‘public mischief’, ‘trespassing’, ‘public disturbance’ and ‘property damage’. A particularly common experience that ERDs in the region encounter is arrest and detention.

ERDs who face legal action also frequently see their cases circulating in the courts for months, or sometimes years, and they are often denied bail. Once they are released, they face potential re-arrest, under other laws applied arbitrarily.

ERDs are also targeted in digital spaces and face a variety of threats such as online harassment and trolling, data theft and digital surveillance. Today, the internet, and social media in particular, have become essential tools for ERDs to spread their message and mobilize people. However, the use of digital technologies also exposes ERDs to the risk of their data or information being stolen and used against them. Human rights organizations in the region have documented many instances of ERDs and other human rights defenders being arrested and charged for online activities, usually through the use of laws designed to restrict online freedoms.

ERDs also face gender-based threats. Women ERDs, in particular, encounter sexual harassment, gender-based violence and smear campaigns - an effort to damage their reputation. These occur in addition to the other threats ERDs encounter. In the next section, we discuss the threats faced by women ERDs in more

### THREATS AND ATTACKS ON EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS CAN TAKE MANY FORMS, INCLUDING:

Threats and attacks on earth rights defenders can take many forms, including:

- Killings and attempted killings
- Rape and other forms of sexual violence
- Torture
- Forced disappearances
- Physical violence (and threats of violence) and intimidation
- Illegal arrest, arbitrary detention, judicial harassment, and other forms of criminalization
- Stigmatization (such as accusing earth rights defenders of being ‘anti-development’, ‘anti-government’, ‘agents of the west’, or ‘environmental terrorists’)
- Digital surveillance, hacking and online harassment
- Financial threats (such as closing defenders bank accounts)
- Regulatory threats (such as taking away organizations’ non-profit or legal status)

detail.

It is also important to emphasize that the threats faced by ERDs are not just intended to stop their ongoing activities, but are also meant to intimidate them. These threats create an environment of fear so ERDs and other activists are prevented from carrying out their work. Threats and attacks, whether in physical or online spaces, have a negative impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of ERDs. They result in increased levels of stress and anxiety and can cause emotional and psychological harm.

The targeting of ERDs often begins with the monitoring of a defender’s activities. However, this can quickly escalate to more serious threats and attacks, which affect the physical and mental wellbeing of the ERD’s, those they work with and their families.



## CASE EXAMPLES

Below are some examples of well-known ERDs in Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam being targeted in the past.



### CAMBODIA:

A lake development project in Phnom Penh in Cambodia forcibly displaced around 4000 people who lived in the area. In 2011, *EarthRights Defender A* and three other ERDs, were arrested for participating in a protest demanding a genuine resettlement and compensation package for communities adversely affected by the project.

Following their arrest in 2011, *EarthRights Defender A* and other ERDs were arbitrarily charged with “obstruction of a public official with aggravating circumstances” and “insult” under Articles 502 and 504 of Cambodia’s Penal Code. Later, they were released on bail. However, in the years that followed, *EarthRights Defender A* was repeatedly arrested and charged for her activism. Despite a royal pardon, in 2016 charges were reactivated and in 2017, she was convicted.

In 2020, *EarthRights Defender B* and *EarthRights Defender C*, along with four other members of their organization were arrested, for peacefully protesting for the release of their fellow ERD. Their fellow ERD had been arrested less than a month earlier because of his activism for land rights. During the arrest, *EarthRights Defender B* was assaulted, her personal property was confiscated, and a search warrant was issued for her home. The four other members of the organization were released shortly after the arrest, but *EarthRights Defender B* and *EarthRights Defender C* were charged under articles 494 and 495 of the Penal Code. The charges refer to “incitement to commit a felony”, a broadly worded law that does not clearly define incitement and so is often used to target ERDs. The four other members of the organization were also made to sign documents stating that they would not engage in such activities in the future. This is a common tactic used by authorities across the Greater Mekong Subregion.





## MYANMAR:

*EarthRights Defender D* is an environmental activist from Myanmar. He has a history of supporting communities protect their natural resources from coal powered plants in the area. In 2020, he was charged under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code, an article commonly levelled against ERDs in Myanmar. This relates to the “intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public or to any section of the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the State or against the public tranquility”. This old law is often applied arbitrarily to silence ERDs when they raise concerns about the adverse impacts of development projects.

*EarthRights Defender E* is a prominent woman ERD who has been repeatedly arrested and charged for her role in supporting communities resist the harmful impact of a mining project in Myanmar. In 2014, *EarthRights Defender E* and others were demonstrating against the mining project when police opened fire and killed a fellow woman ERD. A few days later, *EarthRights Defender E* and six other ERDs were arrested during a demonstration calling for an investigation into the killing of their fellow ERD. The six ERDs, including *EarthRights Defender E*, received sentences of over four years under Articles 147, 353 and 505(b) of the Penal Code as well as Article 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, which criminalizes peaceful assembly without prior permission.

In 2019, *EarthRights Defender E* was imprisoned for 15 days for the unauthorized use of the word “martyr” during a demonstration. In 2020, she was again charged under the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law.





## VIETNAM:

*EarthRights Defender F* is a woman ERD and a human rights blogger who was detained for her environmental rights activism in 2017. She had been arrested following her participation in peaceful demonstrations against a corporation responsible for an environmental disaster. Following a day-long trial hearing, she was sentenced to nine years in prison for ‘conducting propaganda against the state’ as well as an additional five years house arrest.

Prior to her arrest she had experienced physical attacks and death threats. On one occasion police officials surrounded her home and prevented her from leaving the premises. Throughout her detention she suffered severe physical and mental health issues and was repeatedly denied adequate medical treatment. She was also transferred to a prison 1,000km from home and refused visitors.

In 2020, she was released early on the condition that she go into exile and has not been able to return to Vietnam since.





## Summary of Key Learning Points

- ERDs face a range of physical threats such as harassment, intimidation and violence. There have been instances in which ERDs in the region have been killed or disappeared.
- A common threat that ERDs encounter is arbitrary arrest and detention.
- The activities of ERDs are often criminalized and many ERDs have encountered judicial harassment.
- ERDs also encounter digital threats, such as online harassment and trolling, theft of data, and digital surveillance.
- ERDs are also at risk of gender-based threats such as sexual harassment, gender-based violence and smear campaigns.
- Experiencing threats can have a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of ERDs and can result in increased levels of stress and anxiety.

## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Activities:

#### Activity 1: Case examples and discussion

##### Instructions:

- Discuss one or more of the case studies of ERDs being targeted, given in this section. Prompt discussion through guided questions to explore the case studies further, such as:
  - ◊ How was the ERD targeted for their work?
  - ◊ What are some similarities among the cases?
  - ◊ Why do governments and legal systems allow/facilitate human rights violations against ERDs?
  - ◊ Beyond targeting the individual ERD, what are the results and impact of these harmful actions on movements, communities, and other activists?

### Information for facilitator

- When describing instances of ERDs being targeted you must ensure that you are aware of the background of those receiving the training. If you suspect that participants have relationships with those described in the cases examples, or you think that certain accounts are going to be traumatic for ERDs, then you should find alternative case examples to discuss. It may be helpful to give a content warning before the lesson, and check-in with participants to make sure they are comfortable engaging with the case studies and content.



## 1.3 WHO ARE EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK FROM?

ERDs typically encounter threats as a result of intentional actions, by other persons or groups, aimed at causing them harm. Those that intend to cause harm to ERDs can be broadly categorized into 'state' and 'non-state' actors.

State actors include those in positions of authority, such as the police and members of other security forces, government officials and members of the judiciary. These actors are widely considered to be the main force behind attacks against those defending human rights. However, it is becoming increasingly common for non-state actors, i.e. those that are not government officials, to target ERDs. These actors are often security personnel and other employees of private businesses. In many instances, state and non-state actors work together to silence ERDs.

ERDs often expose human rights violations resulting from the construction of mega-infrastructure projects such as large dams, oil and gas pipelines, ports, highways, railways and the development of mines and agribusinesses. The stakeholders involved in these projects are non-state actors such as private businesses, but also state actors that seek to profit in one way or another. Non-state actors are, therefore, well-protected by government authorities and laws are often arbitrarily used to target ERDs and stop them from undertaking their work.

### Summary of Key Learning Points

- 'State' actors are individuals or groups in positions of authority such as police, security forces, government officials and the judiciary.
- 'Non-state' actors are individuals or groups that are not government officials and include private businesses and their employees, such as security personnel.
- Throughout the Greater Mekong Subregion, 'state and non-state actors often work together to silence ERDs.







## 1.4 WOMEN EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Women are particularly affected by the impacts of harmful development projects in their communities. This is because many household and family responsibilities that rely upon basic resources - such as food and water - fall upon women. Women ERDs often have to balance their activism with the gender roles expected of them in their families and communities. In conducting their work, women ERDs may find that they are denied support from within their communities, encounter stigmatization and face threats to their physical or mental wellbeing.

### THREATS TO WOMEN ERDS

Women ERDs navigate the intersection of environmental devastation, cultural dislocation, sexual violence and gender-based persecution. They face additional gender-specific threats, resulting from their status as both women and as ERDs. Threats that may be encountered by women ERDs include gendered verbal abuse, sexual harassment and sexual assault.



## INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is a framework that allows us to analyze, understand, and respond to the way each person's various identities connect and shape their unique experience with oppression and privilege. Many different identities come together to make up who a person is and what they experience. Examples of these identities include gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic class (dis)ability status, and age. Some of these identities are privileged, which means that they give a person more access to power, resources, and opportunities, while others are marginalized, which means that they may result in a person experiencing discrimination and exclusion.

Women ERDs often face additional and unique threats because of their gender. However, the risks they face may be worsened because of other identities such as sexual orientation or ethnicity. Recognizing how these identities come together/intersect, can help us understand the various types of threats and associated risks women ERDs encounter. For example, while they are both women and ERDs, an NGO worker who lives in the city and belongs to an ethnic majority group experiences power and risk in a different way, than an indigenous woman farmer.

Intersectionality is important because it helps us include the experiences of all women ERDs and particularly those most discriminated against: LGBTQ women, indigenous women, poor women, disabled women, ethnic minority women, etc.

## CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

In many cases, women bear the brunt of the negative impacts of investment projects that worsen their exposure to violence. Women ERDs more often work within patriarchal societies that still view the actions of male ERDs as more valuable. Male ERDs are often in leadership roles within organizations and are offered greater protection due to their status.

Globally, women ERDs face greater risks because in patriarchal societies women often do not have as much power as men. Many women ERDs report that they face intimidation, harassment and criticism from within their communities. This is often because their work as ERDs is seen as challenging a woman's traditional role within the household, and is one reason why women ERDs are not given as much respect and support within their communities as male ERDs.





## Summary of Key Learning Points

- Women are particularly affected by the impacts of harmful development projects in their communities.
- They face additional gender-specific threats, resulting from their status as both women and as ERDs. Threats that may be encountered by women ERDs include gendered verbal abuse, sexual harassment and sexual assault.
- Intersectionality is a framework that allows us to analyze, understand, and respond to the way in which each person's identities connect to shape their experience with oppression and privilege. Examples of various identities include gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic class, (dis)ability status, and age.
- Women's work as ERDs is often seen as a challenge to a woman's traditional role in a household and this has been reported as a direct reason for the additional intimidation, harassment and criticism women ERDs face within communities.



## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Discussion Questions

- What is an example of a gender-based threat?
  - ◊ Answers may include: verbal abuse, ridicule and hostility, threats that contain sexualized and gender specific messages, attacks on a woman's reputation, stigmatization; threats against a woman's children and family; sexual abuse and rape.
- What are some of the factors that worsen risks faced by women ERDs?
  - ◊ It may be helpful to discuss: land ownership that limits women's access to land titles; the distribution of care-giving work for family members whose health may suffer because of pollution from a project; women's ability to speak out publicly and gender norms about women's roles in decision making.
- Why are women more affected by environmental issues than others, in a community? How do sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic class, (dis)ability status, and age play into how a woman ERD might experience discrimination? Can you share examples from your own life?
- How can development projects increase the risk of gender-based violence? Can you think of an example?
- What gender norms in your community or country might impact a woman ERD's work?

## Activities

### Activity 1: Take a Stand

Instructions:

- Give participants 1-2 index cards each, and a pen or pencil. Ask them to sit in a circle. Label each of the four corners of the room with one of the following big signs: “Agree”, “Disagree”, “Strongly Agree”, and “Strongly Disagree”.
- On a PowerPoint slide or flipchart paper, show participants the list of numbered prompts (Before teaching this lesson, add more prompts according to the contexts the participants are coming from, to ensure that there are enough for your activity):
  - ◊ I feel safe walking home alone at night.
  - ◊ People talk to me differently because of my gender.
  - ◊ I have more opportunities than others in my community because of my gender.
  - ◊ Women ERDs encounter the same potential threats when undertaking their work as men ERDs.
  - ◊ I see many leaders in my community who look just like me.
  - ◊ I get more advantages at work because of my gender.
- Ask participants to write their responses to each statement next to the statement numbers on their index cards. Their responses should state whether the participants strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree to each statement.
- Once participants have written their responses to each statement, they can fold their index cards into paper airplanes, and launch them into the middle of the circle.
- Invite participants to pick up a paper airplane and read the first statement in silence.
- Ask participants to walk to the corner of the room that matches the statement on the airplane. Each corner group should discuss why someone might feel that way, or make that argument. Choose a speaker to share their group’s response with the larger group.
- OPTIONAL: After each corner has shared their responses, invite all participants to re-fold their airplanes and throw them around the room, and then pick up a different airplane and repeat the entire process for the second prompt (and then the third and fourth prompts and so on).

### Information for facilitator

- As gender discrimination is a personal and potentially sensitive topic, invite participants to share their personal experiences as much or as little as they feel comfortable. In order to create a comfortable space where participants feel safe to share these stories, encourage participants to practice deep listening skills. The facilitator may ask participants to define these skills first: How do you know if someone is listening to you deeply? What does it feel like when someone is listening to you with full attention? Why might it be important to listen deeply when someone is sharing an experience or story with you?





## 1.5 WORKING TOWARDS AN IMPROVED ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN ERDS

It is a reality that when carrying out their work, women ERDs face greater exposure to risk and encounter a wider range of threats than their male counterparts. As people who work for human rights organizations and communities, we have a responsibility to create a more inclusive and secure environment for women ERDs.

This will not get rid of the threats women ERDs face, but will allow them to face these threats together, with the support of organizations, colleagues, neighbors, friends, family and networks that work towards their protection.

The Gender at Work Framework is a way of understanding how change leads to gender equality. It allows us to look at the opportunities and challenges to gender equality in four categories (consciousness and capabilities; resources; formal rules and policies; and informal norms and exclusionary practices) and strategize for change at systemic and individual levels. This framework will be used to explore how we can better support women ERDs at the workplace and within communities. For more information about the Gender at Work framework, please see relevant links in the list of recommended reading.



## CONSCIOUSNESS AND CAPABILITIES

Change begins with us. This category of change in the Gender at Work Framework first happens at an individual or informal level. It means transforming our own knowledge, skills, political consciousness and commitment to support gender equality. This can take place through a variety of ways such as organizing training sessions on gender or listening to and responding appropriately to the needs and experiences of women ERDs, colleagues and community members.

## RESOURCES

An essential part of supporting and empowering women ERDs is ensuring their access to resources. Resources may refer to knowledge, health, education, food, land and money. Ensuring basic rights for women ERDs, better protects them and their families and improves their capacity to carry out human rights work. Many women ERDs are excluded from training opportunities that allow them to develop knowledge and skills useful for activism. Ensuring women ERDs' access to training opportunities helps amplify their voices within communities or organizations. Within organizations, women ERDs' access to these opportunities allows them to contribute to areas such as programming, strategy, staff recruitment, organizational policy and the approach to broader gender issues.

## FORMAL RULES AND POLICIES

On the formal side, change can take place through the transformation of harmful constitutions, laws, and policies and creating new ones that protect and empower women in the workplace, communities and the country.

### Creating an inclusive and safe workplace for women ERDs

Workplaces can often prove to be challenging or even oppressive environments for women ERDs. This is because women are unlikely to have the same degree of power, credibility or access to decision-making positions as their male colleagues. It is important to create a safe space for ERDs, especially women, within the workplace. A supportive workplace environment is one where women ERDs are comfortable speaking up and raising concerns.



## Organizational Policies and practices relating to gender

Each workplace should have an independent gender policy in place, which aims to promote and encourage gender diversity. It is necessary to ensure that an organization's gender policy has an equal and positive approach to recruitment, campaigning and career advancement opportunities.

The existence of sexual harassment, misogyny and gender-based abuses of power in any workplace or community, is extremely harmful to the wellbeing of its members. All workplaces must have sexual harassment policies in place, along with mechanisms which allow women to report issues confidentially, without the fear of being punished. The process in which a reporting mechanism is set up is very important to creating an inclusive policy, and the policy must ensure that all levels of the workplace are accountable under the mechanism.

Women must also play a major role in the development and review of workplace policies, particularly gender and sexual harassment policies. Workplaces must take steps to ensure women are at the forefront of change, supported by their male colleagues.

Efforts to address sexual harassment and gender inequality must not merely be limited to policy documents, but must be integrated into a workplace's culture and day to day operations.

Additionally, human rights organizations must play a key role in shaping national and regional policies which can support women ERDs in their work and protect them from threats. Organizations should participate in international, national and regional forums or workshops which focus on gender. This can help improve organizational knowledge and develop a greater understanding of the role women ERDs play in defending land and environment.

Currently, most organizations across the region have men in decision-making roles and positions of authority. Organizations must actively work towards improving women employees' access to professional opportunities. This can take several practical, actionable forms, such as:

- Inviting women ERDs to attend external workshops and represent the organization
- Reviewing the organization's structure to better understand whether there is gender balance in positions of decision-making and leadership
- Arranging for organizations with expertise on gender issues to hold trainings and workshops, all members of staff to encourage a better understanding of gender
- Provide women ERD staff with opportunities for capacity-building and skill-based learning that strengthens their ability to hold leadership positions in the future

## INFORMAL NORMS AND EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES

The last category of the *Gender at Work Framework* requires the transformation of everyday practices that maintain inequality within a culture. We must work towards ensuring work and community cultures are inclusive and supportive towards women ERDs. This can be done by working together to identify and eliminate discriminatory behaviors and practices, so women ERDs can speak up about their experiences and carry out their work safely.





## Supporting women ERDs within a community

Most recommendations or suggestions pertaining to gender in this section refer to the ways an organization can be more gender inclusive and support women ERDs. This means not only changing our own working practices and improving gender mainstreaming efforts, policies and attitudes, but also bringing about change in communities in which we, as organizations, work.

It is important to note that in most communities in the Greater Mekong Subregion, literacy rates among men are higher, as they often have greater access to education than women. As a result, men are more often actively meeting and collaborating with NGOs and external actors. Moreover, women and girls are burdened with a greater share of household responsibilities and are expected to give up plans for further education or training to focus on care work.

As some ERDs are not part of organizations, it is important to develop a more inclusive community culture to support women ERDs. Some actions which could help promote such a culture include the following:

- Supporting women with community responsibilities;
- Creating or strengthening measures to protect women against harassment and discrimination;
- Activities to improve gender awareness and sensitivity within a community;
- Creating opportunities for women to learn and participate in the community and engage in activism;
- Valuing the specific knowledge and skills that women in the community have
- Providing opportunities for them to access leadership roles.

If women ERDs have difficulty reading or writing, then facilitators should consider changing their method of engagement and their approach to training. Facilitators can use translators, incorporate oral and visual forms of communication and tailor the training curriculum and materials to ensure greater access.

## Representation of women ERDs within communities

Those engaging with communities must always ensure women ERDs actively participate in activities and contribute to discussions.

It is also worth noting that women ERDs' inclusion should not just be limited to issues that affect women, but their voices should be heard and amplified on all issues that affect their community. As women bear a greater burden of household and community responsibilities and are affected by the loss of livelihoods in a variety of ways, they often have a greater understanding of how a project may impact their community.



## Community-based research and gender

Conducting community-based assessments and capturing the experiences of the women within the community can be an important and sensitive area of research. However, in patriarchal cultures, women may not always feel comfortable giving full and honest accounts of their experiences. Certain measures can be taken to address this, such as creating safe spaces for women away from male community leaders, employing women data collectors and interviewers and training staff in gender-sensitive data collection. Similarly, men may also be more comfortable sharing their perspectives and experiences with male interviewers, and this should be kept in mind when planning data-collection activities.

It is important to be aware that women in affected communities may have encountered gender-based violence and domestic abuse. Those engaging with women in communities should be given extensive training on asking questions in a sensitive, trauma-informed manner and be able to recognize an interviewee's need for comfort and privacy.

Speaking to members of community-based organizations may be one of the few ways survivors of gender-based violence and abuse can seek support. However, not all organizations are trained to provide this support. This is why it is important to maintain a list of other organizations and individuals who can offer support to victims of violence and abuse.

### Summary of Key Learning Points

- The Gender at Work Framework helps explain how we can move towards gender equality, by bringing transformation in the following areas: consciousness and capabilities; resources; formal rules and policies; and individual norms and exclusionary practices.
- Women ERDs are often excluded from training opportunities that would allow them to develop their skills and knowledge. Organizations and communities must actively create and seek out such opportunities and encourage women ERDs to access them.
- Office and community cultures may prove to be challenging or even oppressive environments for women ERDs. Conscious efforts must be made to ensure women's equitable access to positions of power and decision-making.
- Gender and sexual harassment policies should be put in place in the organizations where ERDs work. Women ERDs must also have a role in shaping the policies.
- Organizations where ERDs work must have gender and sexual harassment policies in place. Women ERDs must play a role in shaping these policies.
- Beyond organizational practices, developing a more inclusive community culture is also important to supporting women ERDs. This may include supporting women with their responsibilities in the community, accountability measures protecting women against discrimination, valuing women's specific knowledge and skills within the community and creating opportunities for them to access leadership positions.
- Those engaging with communities must always ensure women actively participate in activities and contribute to discussions. Genuine safe spaces for women to give full and honest accounts of their experiences must also be created.



## **PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR**

### **Discussion Questions**

Consider using one or more of the following questions to begin a group discussion:

- Who has decision making power and authority at your workplace and in your community? How does their gender and other identities reinforce their position?
- How could your organization or community create a safe and inclusive space for women ERDs?
- Does your organization or community have any policies or practices that focus on gender and how effective do you think they are? Why do you think this is the case?
- What professional opportunities would women ERDs benefit from and why?
- How could you ensure the support, involvement and representation of women ERDs within a community setting?
- What is one example in which men and women in your community are expected to behave differently and how you would like to see this changed?

### **Information for facilitator**

- Analyze the context and sociocultural backgrounds of the individuals in the group you're working with. If the group is not experienced in discussing and analyzing gender, additional discussion may be required to ensure participants fully understand how gender and power operate at an individual, interpersonal, and systemic level.
- It is recommended to use a visual to explain the Gender at Work framework. Please refer to the example on page 27.





# 2

## ***SECURITY STRATEGIES AND RISK ASSESSMENT***



**ERDS WORKING WITHIN THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION** may encounter a number of threats when undertaking their work. It is therefore essential for them to be equipped with the knowledge and skills required to create and implement strategies to enhance their protection.

Risk management is about preparation and response. If ERDs can adequately prepare for the risk they may encounter, they may be able to reduce their exposure to threats and carry out their work more safely.

This section will explain the importance of a security strategy and provide guidance on how ERDs can analyze the context in which they operate. It will also explain terms such as ‘risk’, ‘threat’, ‘capacity’ and ‘vulnerability’ and show how they can be applied when conducting a risk assessment.

ERDs will also learn about the steps involved in conducting a risk assessment, what is meant by ‘security indicators’ and why it is important to take them into consideration.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Learn more about the importance of security strategies
- Analyze the context in which ERDs operate
- Define ‘risk’, ‘threat’, ‘capacity’ and ‘vulnerability’ and to use these terms to help ERDs conduct a risk assessment
- Learn about the steps involved in conducting a risk assessment
- Identify ‘security indicators’ and understand their importance

## RECOMMENDED READING

- [New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders](#) by Protection International
- [Holistic Security Training Manual](#) by Tactical Technology Collective
- [Integrated Security: The Manual](#) by The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

*A summary of recommended reading and additional information can be found in Annex 1.*



## 2.1 SECURITY STRATEGIES

A security strategy is a plan of action aimed at protecting an individual or group's physical, digital or psychosocial safety and wellbeing. The term 'holistic security' refers to security which covers these three areas.

### WHY DO YOU NEED A SECURITY STRATEGY?

Having a security strategy in place enables you to identify any potential threats - and associated risk - you may encounter when carrying out your work, and prepares you for a situation before it occurs. It can help in identifying the steps that can be taken to reduce risk, as well as the most appropriate and effective responses and actions.

## 2.2 ANALYZING THE CONTEXT

It is important to analyze the context in which you work and be aware of any developments that show that the situation may be changing or getting worse. It is recommended that you stay updated with news and political developments that may affect you, those you work with or the activities you plan to undertake. Understanding your environment will enable you to build a more detailed and relevant security strategy that is informed and tailored to your specific situation.

Part of analyzing the context is understanding the project that is impacting the community. It is important, as an individual, community or organization, to know the key stakeholders involved in a project and those you may encounter in your activities. Identifying the key actors involved in a project will help you understand the scale of the project, the level of investment, the investors, and public sector bodies are responsible for the project. This will not only help you with advocacy activities and stakeholder targeting, but also with identifying sources of threat and the level of associated risk.

### Summary of Key Learning Points

- A security strategy is a plan of action designed to ensure your physical, digital or psychosocial safety and wellbeing.
- Having security strategies in place enables you to identify any potential threats and associated risks that you may encounter when undertaking your work. It will help you assess what you might be able to do to reduce risk and the most appropriate and effective responses or actions.
- It is important to analyze the context in which you work and be aware of any developments that indicate that the situation may be changing or getting worse.
- You should also know who the key stakeholders in the project are and who you may encounter during your activities







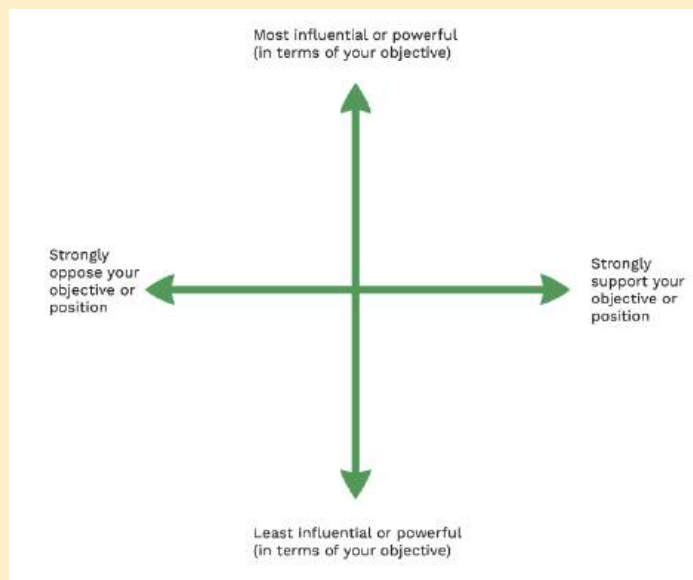
## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Activities

#### Activity 1: Stakeholder Mapping Exercise

##### Instructions:

- Use large flipchart paper or a wall to draw a graph that is split into four sections as shown in the image below.



- Then, participants write different actors on their sticky notes (one actor per note) and place them accordingly on the graph. They should identify the level of influence or power they believe the stakeholder has and how much they oppose or support their work (don't forget international actors, including UN agencies and embassies. Participants also often forget media).

##### Debrief:

- Once stakeholders have been mapped, ask participants:
- Why did they position the stakeholder where they have?
- How do they believe the different stakeholders they have identified might affect their safety and security?

### Information for facilitator

- There are many ways to analyze the context in which a community or organization works. In this exercise a stakeholder mapping exercise is used to look at how actors are positioned in respect to the community or organization and how that may affect their safety and security.
- You may also use a 'force field analysis' which can be found described in [Protection International's New Protection Manual for HRDs](#) on pages 19-24.

## 2.3 RISK ASSESSMENT

The development of an effective security strategy typically begins with a risk assessment. This is the process through which potential threats can be identified and measured against capacities (strengths) and vulnerabilities (weaknesses) to assess the level of risk for you and those you work with. It then helps you identify what steps could be taken to reduce the level of risk and respond should the threat occur.

As the threats and level of risk each individual faces is different, it is recommended to carry out a risk assessment with others in an organization or community so that everyone has an opportunity to contribute. This can help ensure that nothing important is overlooked and various levels and types of knowledge, skills and experience within an organization or community can be utilized.

### THREAT, RISK, CAPACITIES AND VULNERABILITIES

The terms ‘threat’ and ‘risk’ are often used interchangeably in different security resources – meaning that the terms are used in place of one-another. In this Toolkit we use the definitions outlined below to make a distinction between the two terms.

A **threat** is anything that may harm your physical, digital or psychosocial safety and wellbeing. It is typically the result of an intentional action by another person or group (a threat actor) and examples include the threat of physical attack, data theft, or harassment and intimidation.

A **risk**, simply put, is the potential harm that you will be exposed to – typically as a direct result of a threat. Examples of risks include the possibility of being injured or killed as a result of a physical attack, the potential of confidential data being exposed because it has been stolen, or experiencing stress or trauma as a result of being harassed or intimidated.

Threats may occur at the individual or organizational level and some individuals may face different threats - and therefore different risks - than others. People who undertake research and documentation of human rights violations in the field, for example, may encounter very different threats – and associated risks - than someone editing videos in an office.

In this Toolkit, it is important to recognize that while a threat is defined differently from a risk, the two are related. Identifying a potential threat enables you to think about what the associated risk may be and how serious it is.

The level of a risk may be thought of in levels such as high, medium, and low. However, it should be noted that the level of risk is dynamic and changes with time depending on the nature of the threat and as a result of capacities (strengths) and vulnerabilities (weaknesses).

**Capacities** are strengths, the factors that reduce the likelihood or impact of a threat. Examples of capacities may be a strong knowledge of the legal system, the use of secure communications, or the networks that are in place to support you.

**Vulnerabilities** can be understood as weaknesses, factors that increase the likelihood or impact of a threat. Examples of vulnerabilities may be a lack of knowledge of the legal system, the absence of secure communication devices, or working alone, without a network in place to support you.





## Summary of Key Learning Points

- Risk assessment is a process through which you and your colleagues can identify potential threats and consider your capacities and vulnerabilities, to assess the level of risk to you and those you work with.
- Because different people face different threats and levels of risk, you should always carry out a risk assessment with others.
- A threat is anything that may harm your physical, digital or psychosocial safety and wellbeing
- A risk, simply put, is the potential harm that you will be exposed to—typically as a direct result of a threat.
- Capacities are your strengths - factors that reduce the likelihood or impact of a threat.
- Vulnerabilities are your weaknesses – factors that increase the likelihood or impact of a threat.



## HOW TO CARRY OUT A RISK ASSESMENT

### 1. Identify all the potential threats you might face during your work.

Ask yourself: *“What am I afraid might happen when I am undertaking my work?”*  
List all the things that you think could potentially happen and cause you harm.

You should include things that can cause harm to you, your colleagues, family or members of your community. You should also identify potential threats to your data, your assets and your property.



### 2. Identify your strengths (capacities) and weaknesses (vulnerabilities)

Ask yourself: *“What are the things that protect me and those I work with from harm?”* (your capacities) and;

*“What are the things that make me and those I work with vulnerable to harm?”* (your vulnerabilities).

Write down all those things that you can think of in relation to the potential threat.





### 3. Assess the risk level

In order to assess the level of risk, you must measure a threat against your existing capacities and vulnerabilities.

It is also important to consider the likelihood of a threat occurring and its potential impact. This not only helps us in assessing the level of risk, but also helps us decide which potential threat to direct attention and resources towards.

**Likelihood** means how likely it is for a threat to occur. For example, the likelihood of being arrested and detained during a public protest might be higher than the likelihood of being arrested and detained when you are working on a report in the office.

**Impact** is about the level of harm there will be if a threat were to occur. The harm may be to you, your colleagues, community members or to your reputation (whether others see you in a good or bad light) or to your materials and information.

It is easiest to measure likelihood and impact using the classifiers Low, Medium and High.

Threats that are thought to have a higher impact will have more serious consequences and you will need a better level of planning, especially when their likelihood is medium or high.

If a threat has a high likelihood of occurring *and* high impact, then it is important that you prioritize your response to it. It is important to note that you should always think of ways to reduce risk and respond to any potential threat that is identified.

It is important to look at the security situation as it is **now**: both in terms of the political context and what you have in place to reduce risk and respond to threats.



### 4. Consider the impact of potential threats on others

When carrying out a risk assessment, it is important to be aware that threats you may encounter could also affect others. Due to the context that you work in, it is likely that the authorities, or other actors, will try to find out information about your work. They can do this in a variety of ways, including gaining access to your documents, phone or computer. This could also occur digitally with data theft and monitoring of your digital devices or online activities. Depending on the information they access, the impact on you and others could be high. This is because the information may expose details about colleagues and those you work with as well as your plans and strategies.





## 5. Identify risk mitigation actions to reduce your vulnerabilities



You often have some level of control over capacities and vulnerabilities and should always work towards *improving* your capacities and *reducing* your vulnerabilities. By doing so, you may reduce the likelihood of a threat occurring and its potential impact. *Risk mitigation actions are preventative measures that you can take to reduce the level of risk associated with a potential threat.*

There could be multiple risk mitigation actions you take in response to a potential threat. You should explore these with your colleagues and agree on the most appropriate, effective and practical risk mitigation actions to implement. It is important to prioritize implementing mitigation measures, particularly for threats that have a high likelihood of occurring and a high impact.

You may have already noticed that some of those risk mitigation actions can easily be turned into permanent measures that can help reduce the level of risk in the longer term. When you return to look at the strengths or capacities, you can see that these may once have been vulnerabilities before mitigation actions had been implemented. For example, if you had no secure place to keep sensitive documents it would be a vulnerability. Yet, if your mitigation action is to buy a safe to keep sensitive documents in then, when this is done, it then becomes a capacity.

Some examples of risk mitigation actions associated with attending a protest may include:

- Not carrying smartphones, tablets or laptops with confidential or sensitive data during protest;
- Identifying safe spaces and exit points along the protest route in case of trouble;
- Coordinating security and logistics arrangements with other organizations;
- Inviting trusted and independent media to attend the protest and document what happens





## 6. Identify ways to respond to potential threats by formulating contingency actions

Despite the best risk mitigation actions you should always be prepared to respond to a threat should it occur. By thinking about how to respond to a threat if it occurs, you will be able to identify potential contingency actions that could be implemented. Contingency actions are reactive measures that you take once an identified threat has occurred.

Contingency actions do not change the likelihood or impact of a threat occurring but are instead aimed at controlling the associated risk with appropriate, effective and realistic responses.

Some examples of contingency actions associated with attending a protest may include:

- Contacting a lawyer who is on stand-by and aware of the protest;
- Contacting your support network and family members of those who have been arrested and detained;
- Assessing what sensitive information the person detained was carrying and informing others that may be at risk because of it;
- Increasing security of the office and safeguarding sensitive information in case you are visited by the authorities.

## 7. Create an action plan for implementation



Implementing risk mitigation and contingency actions is often more difficult than identifying them. Therefore, it is essential to make a solid plan with responsibilities for risk mitigation and contingency actions assigned to individuals and groups, along with deadlines. This will ensure that things get done.

For example, you may realize that outsiders can access your office easily. In this case, you may decide to add lights, fix a lock on the gate, and keep the front door closed at all times. However, this does not clarify who will take these actions and by when.

When you want to implement risk mitigation or contingency actions it is important to carefully consider each step rather than trying to address all issues at once. This way you will make progress and achieve what you have set out to do. However, we must remember that ensuring security is a process and some measures will depend on others, their behavior and habits.

Many risk mitigation actions are simple, easy to implement, and don't require huge investment. They simply require us to be vigilant and apply a little more discipline in our daily routines.

It is important to be aware that your security strategy is only ever as strong as the weakest link. Meaning that if one person fails to follow the rules, then regardless of how strict others are, your security strategy plan may still fail.





## 2.4 THE LEVEL OF ACCEPTABLE RISK AND ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

When you have analyzed the current context and conducted a risk assessment, you should consider whether the level of risk is acceptable. No activity will ever be free from risk, but you may determine that the level of risk is low and that it does not prevent you from doing your work.

For example, an ERD plans to interview members of a community. In the past a colleague that interviewed the same community members experienced physical aggression, when conducting research. However, this was many years ago and there have since been multiple occasions in which colleagues and partners have interviewed the same community members without any incidents occurring. In this example, it may be decided that the planned interviews should be carried out.

It is very important, however, to consider that the level of acceptable risk is not the same for every person. It should never be assumed that the level of acceptable risk for you will be the same as someone else.

While it is understandable that you may want to continue your work regardless of the risks to you, you must also be strategic so you can continue the work you undertake on another day and ensure the safety and security of colleagues and those you work with. When you encounter harm, you will not be the only one impacted but also those you work with and those who care about you.

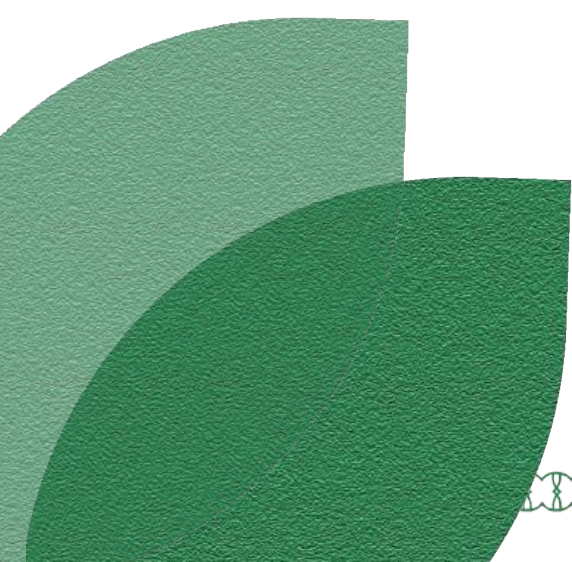




If you consider the level of risk of a particular activity to be too high, you can always consider alternative strategies that will still achieve your desired results but with lower levels of risk. For example, you could:

- Collaborate with actors that are less exposed to risk, such as international organizations, and provide them with information and cases to advocate on your behalf;
- Focus on raising awareness through community engagement initiatives rather than through public protests as they are less likely to draw the attention of the authorities;
- Advocate to influential individuals you know to be trusted and sympathetic to the work you undertake rather than those you don't;
- Consider prioritizing aspects of your work that carry lower levels of risk, while the security situation improves.

You succeed in assessing risk when you have not only thought about physical or digital threats, but also threats related to wellbeing. The way we react to threats and assess risk also depends on our state of wellbeing. For example, if you are suffering from severe stress or anxiety, something that may seem trivial to others could have a great impact on you and carry a higher level of risk. Your wellbeing is also tied to how you prevent and respond to risk and if you do not pay attention to your wellbeing, you may be less careful in following security practices. It is important to be aware when our wellbeing is affected, as we may not react to incidents as we normally would.



## 2.5 SECURITY INDICATORS

*Tactical Technology Collective* describes security indicators as anything out of the ordinary that we notice which may impact our security.<sup>2</sup>

Attacks on ERDs, their organizations, communities or families rarely happen randomly. They almost always follow a pattern where the opponent gathers information about an individual before threatening them. The process of gathering information can be done legally (governments want NGOs to report on their activities so that they can monitor them) or illegally (governments sometimes use surveillance to spy on activists).

Information can be gathered physically (someone watches your office to see who is going in or out), or digitally (someone is trying to hack your email address to read your emails). It is important to be aware of things that are out of the ordinary, as they may be signs of you being targeted.

If you experience something out of the ordinary, such as a person watching you when you leave your home, it may indeed mean that someone is monitoring you. However, it could also be a coincidence, they could simply be waiting for a taxi to arrive. We cannot always be sure, but it is important to analyze such an incident.

You should always:

- Analyze the situation (preferably together with others so that you can try to make objective and informed decision about the security indicator and your next steps). This should include analyzing *what* happened, *how* it happened, and *why* it happened.
- React to the security indicator (e.g., by changing your behavior or patterns).

It is important that you record security indicators when you encounter them and regularly analyze them to see if any trends or patterns emerge. If one incident happens in a year, then there may be little cause for concern – it may just be a coincidence. However, if several incidents have occurred in a certain period, it may require attention. Recognizing trends and patterns helps you to better understand what sort of indicators to look out for. A staff member should never be afraid or hesitant to share their observations or worries, even if they turn out to be nothing. Everyone should always be encouraged to share any security indicators they encounter.

<sup>2</sup> [https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/ckeditor\\_assets/attachments/60/holisticsecurity\\_trainersmanual.pdf](https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/ckeditor_assets/attachments/60/holisticsecurity_trainersmanual.pdf)



## Summary of Key Learning Points

- To undertake a risk assessment:
  - ◊ Identify all the potential threats you might face during your work.
  - ◊ Identify your strengths (capacities) and weaknesses (vulnerabilities)
  - ◊ Assess the risk level
  - ◊ Consider risks to others
  - ◊ Identify mitigation actions (preventative measures) to reduce your vulnerabilities
  - ◊ Identify ways to respond to potential threats by formulating contingency actions (reactive measures)
  - ◊ Create an action plan for implementation
- You should always determine what the acceptable level of risk is for you and those you work with. Do not assume the acceptable level of risk for another person.
- Security indicators are anything out of the ordinary that we notice which may have an effect on our security
- Attacks on ERDs, their organizations, communities or families rarely happen randomly. In almost all cases, they follow a pattern where the opponent gathers information before threatening them.
- It is important that you record security indicators when you encounter them and regularly analyze the security indicators to see if any trends or patterns emerge.

## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Activities:

#### Activity 1: Risk Assessment Exercise

##### Instructions:

- Below is a scenario that can be shared with participants. Hand out copies of the scenario and ask participants to split into groups of no more than six people to identify any threats – and associated risk - that have already been experienced by the organization and the community. Afterwards, have the groups report back their findings and explain why they identified them.
- Next, ask the groups to identify two potential threats that may be experienced with the planned march by the community and discuss any possible vulnerabilities (weaknesses) or capacities (strengths) related to the two potential threats and the reason for doing so. Have the groups report back their findings and explain why they identified them as vulnerabilities or capacities.
- Finally, ask the groups to identify potential risk mitigation actions and contingency measures that could be taken to reduce the vulnerabilities. Afterwards, have the groups report back what they discussed and what possible risk mitigation actions and contingency measures could be taken.





## SCENARIO:

The director of an environmental and land rights non-governmental organization (NGO) in your country is asking you for support. Land rights issues are highly contested in your country where most land is owned by the military and indigenous people often lack land titles and recognition of ancestral lands. However, momentum for change is increasing as there is a new government, mostly made up of non-military officials, and they are open to talks about land reform. The NGO, based in the capital, advocates for land rights and also works on some high-profile cases involving land disputes over land owned by some generals.

The NGO has worked hard on building support networks, including with INGOs, foreign embassies and donors, and also invested in some security measures, including CCTVs outside the office and satellite phones for staff that do field work.

However, opposition to the work of the NGO and to the communities they support remains fierce. Recently a particular case has received attention: the NGO documented the illegal eviction of a local community by a company that is affiliated with the military. The company wants to use the land to build a casino and other recreational facilities.

The community have been peacefully protesting the actions and been met with violence from the company's security personnel as a result. Furthermore, ten community members and two members of the organization were arrested by local police. The NGO workers were released later that day and transported to the capital by police. However, the community members remain in custody, charged with 'incitement' and 'trespassing'.

The community still want to continue demonstrating against the illegal eviction and have now planned a march to the provincial land administration office. They will then march to the police station where their friends are held. They have asked the NGO for support. Many of the community members have been told to stop their activism by unknown armed men approaching their temporary shelters - about 2 km from the land they were evicted from. Also, the NGO office has been visited by unknown people, asking them why they are always looking for trouble and telling them to mind their own business.

The NGO's Facebook page has also been receiving an increase in trolling attacks (negative comments mostly accusing them of being foreign agents and anti-development) and one staff member reported receiving what she thinks is a genuine Google prompt notice that someone has tried to access the organization's email account. The NGO's director also received a phone call late one evening from a high-level military official who warned him not to pursue work on the case.

The director is calling you for support. They are concerned about the security of their staff and the community they are supporting. They called a staff meeting to discuss the situation and at the staff meeting, they became aware of all the previous incidents and having discussed it, staff have become increasingly concerned. Unsure what to do, they decided to call you and ask for help to analyze the situation.

## Information for facilitator

- Ensure that groups are diverse in terms of gender and make sure plenty of time is given for participants to discuss.
- Participants can use the risk assessment template found in Annex 2.
- Encourage participants to think about the potential threats - and associated risks - in relation to physical security, digital security and wellbeing.
- If necessary, consider reviewing the new vocabulary to ensure that all participants understand the terms: threat, risk, likelihood, impact, security indicator, mitigation action, contingency measures, vulnerabilities, capacities.





# 3

## ***DIGITAL SECURITY***





**IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY COMMON FOR ERDS IN THE GREAT-ER MEKONG SUBREGION TO USE COMPUTERS, MOBILE PHONES AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES.**

These devices enable ERDs to store information, communicate, organize and raise-awareness about the injustices they seek to expose. While the use of electronic devices and the internet can help ERDs in their work, they may also expose them to a range of digital threats. Powerful actors who want ERDs to stop their activities often have extensive resources to organize digital attacks. They may seek to find out what ERDs are doing, who they are working with and attempt to steal their data.

There are many - often simple - steps that ERDs can take to improve their digital security. This section examines the various types of digital threats ERDs may encounter, and offers guidance on ways in which they can improve their security.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- Learn about various types of digital attacks that may be encountered and why they pose a threat
- Discuss hints, tips and guidance for ERDs to better protect their devices, accounts and data
- Explore how we can communicate safely over social media and use photographs, and multimedia
- Understand how we can protect the physical security of digital devices

**RECOMMENDED READING:**

- [Surveillance Self-Defense \(SSD\)](#) by Electronic Frontier Foundation
- [Security in a box](#) by Tactical Technology Collective and Front Line Defenders
- [Digital Security Helpline](#) by Access Now

*A summary of all recommended reading and additional information can be found in Annex 1.*



## 3.1 DIGITAL THREATS

ERDs encounter a number of digital threats that can take a variety of forms and impact them in various ways. ERDs should be aware of the different types of threats they may come across and how they work, so they can be vigilant against possible attacks.

**Software** refers to computer programs that enable users to perform specific tasks. It is found on desktop and laptop computers as well as on mobile phones. It includes specific applications (or apps) that someone can use to access the internet (e.g., Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer), play music or movies (e.g., Windows Media Player, iTunes), communicate digitally (e.g., Skype, WhatsApp, Signal), send emails (e.g., Microsoft Outlook) as well as commonly used applications like Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

**Malware** – or ‘malicious software’ is software that has been designed to harm, disable, or access a digital device and its content without the user’s permission. Various types of malware work in different ways. They can spread and reproduce themselves, disguise themselves as legitimate software or files, and change the operation of the device that is being used. Malware can scan the content of a device, steal passwords or make it impossible to use the device. It is important for ERDs to note that malware can be found not only on computers but also on mobile phones and even apps or documents that ERDs download on their mobile phones.



**Phishing** is a method in which digital attackers trick a person into sharing their account details, passwords or other sensitive information. It is usually done by sending a person an email or SMS message with a link to a false website that pretends to be real and asking the user to secure their account by entering their account details or passwords on the false websites. These details are then taken and changed by the attacker giving them access to the real account and stealing the user’s information. Across the world, those defending human rights are known to have been targeted in this way. In 2018, and again in 2019, Amnesty International documented alarmingly widespread and targeted phishing campaigns in the Middle East and North Africa against defenders.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that phishing attacks are increasingly more sophisticated and may falsely appear as emails from other non-governmental organizations, friends or online accounts like Google. Examples of phishing emails are found later in this section.



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2019/08/evolving-phishing-attacks-targeting-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders-from-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>





A **Trojan** attack delivers malicious software - often as a result of clicking on a link or downloading other software. Often through the method of phishing, an ERD may receive an email or SMS message and click on the link which then opens a webpage and unknowingly installs malicious software putting their device and data at risk. Trojans can also be found on software that users intentionally download which is why it's always important to trust what you are clicking on or downloading.



**Spyware** is a type of malware that is exactly as it sounds – it is software that enables attackers to spy on a person when unknowingly installed. It usually works in the background to gather information about the user and their data. If there is spyware installed then it may mean that emails, contacts and personal information are all vulnerable and accessible by the digital attacker. For those defending human rights this can be particularly concerning as it may mean that everything they are doing is being observed.



**Monitoring of social media profiles** is a particularly important thing for ERDs to be aware of. The information found on social media accounts can provide a wealth of information about an ERD – from their location, contact details, to who they work with and their planned activities. Those defending human rights in the Greater Mekong Subregion have had their social media account monitored with some facing arrest and legal action for what they post. In Thailand, for example, a company filed a legal criminal defamation case against three women human rights defenders after they posted, or re-posted, content about human rights violations.



**Online harassment and smear campaigns** are increasingly being used to target those defending human rights. Across Asia there have been numerous instances of defenders, particularly women defenders, receiving abusive messages and photos intended to insult and offend them. This not only creates distress and fear but can also lead to defenders holding back on what they say online in what is called self-censorship.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2020/03/FoE-Under-Threat\\_Chapter-on-Women-in-the-Digital-Age.pdf](https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2020/03/FoE-Under-Threat_Chapter-on-Women-in-the-Digital-Age.pdf)

## Summary of Key Learning Points

- ERDs encounter various forms of digital threats, which can impact them in a variety of ways;
- Malicious software – or ‘malware’ - is software designed to harm, disable, or use a digital device and its content without the user’s permission. It can be found not only on computers, but also on mobile phones;
- Phishing is a method in which digital attackers trick a person into sharing their account details, passwords and other sensitive information to gain access to their accounts;
- A Trojan delivers malicious software - it often occurs as a result of clicking on a link or downloading other software;
- Spyware is a type of malicious software that enables attackers to spy on a person’s activities when unknowingly installed.
- The monitoring of social media profiles can provide a wealth of information about an ERD – from their location, contact details, to who they work with and their planned activities.
- Online harassment and smear campaigns are increasingly experienced by those defending human rights - particularly women defenders- and may include abusive messages and manipulating photos to intentionally insult and offend

## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Discussion Questions

- What digital threats can you think of? What are the associated risks?
- Do you take any measures to secure your device or online accounts? What are they and what do you think they will protect you from?
- How much digital information do you think exists about you? If someone wanted to find out about you, what could they learn from the online information that exists about you?



## 3.2 DIGITAL SECURITY HINTS, TIPS AND PRACTICAL MEASURES

There are many steps ERDs can take to secure their digital security. Changing certain habits and embracing regular computer hygiene and safety practices can go a long way in securing devices and data. However, it is important to remember that a device and its data is only as safe we make it.

This section outlines several steps that ERDs can take to ensure their digital security. Facilitators are expected to not only explain the suggestions in this section, but also provide examples and guide participants in implementing the measures outlined.

The hints, tips and practical steps outlined below provide a general overview of digital security best practices. However, facilitators should try to continue to enhance their understanding of digital security and encourage ERDs to do the same. The recommended reading section at the beginning of this chapter offers a wealth of information that facilitators can refer to and integrate into any session on digital security offered to ERDs.

### DEVICE HYGIENE

We are all in the habit of brushing our teeth and keeping our bodies clean; it should be the same for maintaining our electronic devices. This means using anti-virus software to regularly scan our devices for threats, regularly updating the system and software and ensuring that we know the software and documents on our devices.

It is also important to use legitimate software and licenses on our devices and not pirated or unlicensed copies of software. This is because non-legitimate software can disable or change security settings, prevent important security updates from being installed, and can deliver malicious software to a device.

It is also important to review installed software and applications on computers and mobile phones and what 'permissions' they have been granted. 'Permissions' determine what information an app or software can access on a device and the actions it can take on its own. For example, computer software or mobile phone apps may have the ability to access the location of a device, its microphone, camera, documents and messages. We must always be able to trust the software and apps on our devices. Whenever we install new software or an app, we must ensure we know its functions and carefully review the permissions we are granting. If you do not have confidence in the legitimacy of software or an app, do not install it.



## ANTI-MALWARE AND ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE

'Anti-virus' and 'anti-malware' are types of software that provide security and protection from digital attacks. This kind of software is essential for every computer and mobile phone and prevents and responds to the various digital threats we may encounter. If anti-virus or anti-malware is not installed on a device, we risk losing personal information, documents and even the money in our bank accounts. If you do not already have anti-virus or anti-malware installed, then you must download and install it and scan your device. Upon scanning, the software will alert you of any threats to your device. Additionally, most anti-malware and anti-virus software also come with a firewall that blocks malicious attacks from the internet.

*[Malwarebytes is free software that can be downloaded and installed here.](#)*

*[Avira is a free security suite that can be downloaded and installed here.](#)*

## PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM PHISHING AND TROJAN ATTACKS

When it comes to protecting your device, it is particularly important to pay attention to the websites you are visiting and the files and software you are downloading. There are three basic rules that relate to this:

1. If you didn't look for it, don't click on it or download it.
2. If you installed it, update it.
3. If you don't need or use it, remove it.

To avoid email phishing and Trojan attacks, always double-check who has sent an email before opening attachments or links to ensure they're safe and genuine. We can check if a sender is genuine by looking at the email address. If the address contains a lot of random numbers or letters or uses different spelling, then it is likely that it is not genuine.

If you do receive a potentially harmful email, ensure that you alert others you work with so they are not exposed to the same threat. Below are a few examples of phishing emails in which the email addresses of the senders are false.





**From:** Microsoft office365 Team [<mailto:cyh11241@lausd.net>]

**Sent:** Monday, September 25, 2017 1:39 PM

**To:**

**Subject:** Your Mailbox Will Shutdown Verify Your Account



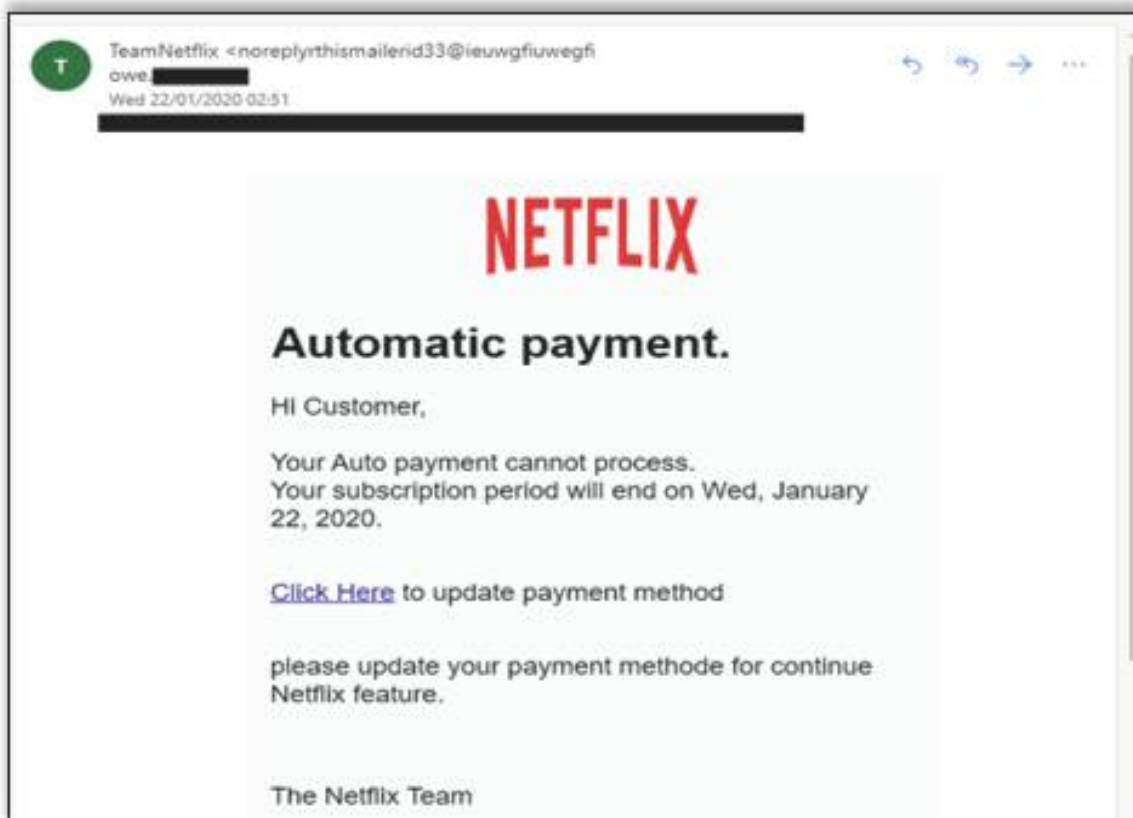
Detected spam messages from your <EMAIL APPEARED HERE> account will be blocked.

If you do not verify your mailbox, we will be force to block your account. If you want to continue using your email account please verify.

[Verify Now](#)

Microsoft Security Assistant

Microsoft office365 Team! ©2017 All Rights Reserved



From: "MS-Support Centre" <outlook\_2C5A4DD15A5A1106@outlook.com>

Sent: Tuesday, June 2, 2020 11:30:27 AM

Subject: Account unusual sign-in activity

Microsoft account

## Suspicious Account Activity

Hello

This is to inform you that we have found suspicious activities with your account. Due to that, we have terminated your windows account.

### Please find suspicious incident details:

Recent Incident Details: Eastern Belarus (IP Address : 10.97.87.25 )

MAC Address 01:AD:99:00 & IP: 10.97.87.25

If you think this was a mistake and you wish to continue using this windows license key, Please contact consumer technical support at 1-800-341-8835.

PS NOTE: Please be at your computer while you call consumer technical support.

**Windows Help**

**1-800-341-8835.**

Re: Automatic reply to PayPal email SAXX (KML521L52112KM) :ppNA



PayPal Service <id-noticed.csaccount348194@ethernet-axanahotels.com>

Mon 24/09/2018, 17:21

noreply@cs.paypal.com



Dear Sir/Madam,

On Monday, September 24, 2018, We noticed a successful sign in to your account from an unrecognized device in Shanghai, China.

#### What to do next?

Please [Log in to your account](#) and complete the steps to confirm your identity and recent account activity.

You must notify us to help ensure that your account is not accessible to anyone without your knowledge.

Thank you for being a Customer.

Yours Sincerely,  
PayPal

## Summary of Key Learning Points

- Anti-virus software should be installed and regularly used to scan for threats.
- Only legitimate software should be used - not 'copies' or 'pirated' software. All software should be regularly updated.
- It is important to review which software or apps are installed on a device and what 'permissions' they have been granted.
- Always know exactly what is being installed and the permissions it requires. If the legitimacy of software and apps cannot be confirmed, then it should not be installed.
- To protect against phishing and Trojan attacks it is particularly important to pay attention to the websites you visit and the files and software you download. Always double-check if the email address is real, before opening attachments or links to websites to ensure they are safe and genuine. Three basic rules that relate to this are:
  1. *If you didn't look for it, don't click on it or download it.*
  2. *If you installed it, update it.*
  3. *If you don't need or use it, remove it.*

## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Activities

#### Activity 1: Indicators of Phishing

Instructions:

1. Show participants examples of phishing emails given in this section and discuss the following:
  - a. Who does this email look like it's from?
  - b. What are the signs that make this email suspicious?  
 Some signs may be: the email address that is provided does not look genuine (it has a strange email address); the person may be receiving an email about an account they do not have; the email is poorly written with spelling mistakes; the email asks for immediate action and creates a sense of urgency; it may have gone into the 'spam' folder; it includes suspicious links or attachments
  - c. What might happen if you provide the details it asks for?
  - d. How can you prevent this from happening?



## PASSWORDS

Passwords should always be difficult for others to break and you should aim to use complex and unique passwords for your email and online accounts. You should ensure your mobile phone, laptop, hard drives and any USB sticks you use are all password protected.

Seven rules for creating strong passwords:

1. Make it long: *All passwords should be ten or more characters.*
2. Make it complex: *Always include upper case letters, lower case letters, numbers and symbols.*
3. Make it practical: *Choose something that you will be able to remember but...*
4. Don't make it personal: *Avoid words or phrases that are easily linked to you such as your name, date of birth, phone number, favorite football team, or the name of your partner, child or pet.*
5. Keep it secret: *Do not share your password with anyone.*
6. Make it unique: *Never use the same password (or a similar word) for more than one account. If you do, anyone who learns that password will quickly be able to guess the passwords to your other accounts.*
7. Keep it fresh: *Change your password regularly, preferably at least once every three months.*

It is also important that you ensure that your passwords are not saved. If they are, anyone that accesses your device will then be able to log-in to your accounts. To ensure passwords are not saved follow the following steps:

- In Google Chrome go to **Menu > Settings > Auto-fill** and turn off the option to remember **Passwords, Payment methods and Addresses and more**. It is also recommended to go to **Privacy and Security** on the same page and click **Clear Browsing Data**.
- In Mozilla Firefox go to **Menu > Options > Privacy & Security > Logins and Passwords** and turn off options to save logins and passwords. It is also recommended that you go to **Cookies and Site Data** on the same page and **Clear Data**.

[Further guidance from Security in a Box on how to create and maintain strong passwords can be found by clicking here.](#)





## PASSWORD MANAGERS

A password manager can be used to make it easier for you to manage all your different passwords and is generally considered to be a more secure way of managing your online accounts. It works by storing all your passwords in a secure and encrypted online vault that only one master password can open and access. A password manager typically comes with the function to randomly generate long, complex and difficult passwords that you can use for your different accounts.

Some people worry that password managers may put them at risk if their master password is stolen as it will mean an attacker has access to all their other passwords. This is a legitimate concern, however, if you have a strong, long, unique master password that follows the seven rules outlined above and is not used more than once then a password manager can be safe and useful.

If you do choose to use a password manager, then make sure that you remember your master password and keep it somewhere safe.

You can watch [this animated film](#) from [Surveillance Self-Defense](#) to learn about the usefulness of a password manager.

A recommended password manager is [KeepassXC](#) and details about how to install and set-up KeepassXC can be found at [this page](#) from [Security in a Box](#).

## LOCK-SCREENS

It is also important to consider using complex and unique passwords for logging into devices and unlocking screens. Using face recognition or fingerprint technology to unlock devices can make it easier for others to unlock your device if you are arrested or detained. Other people near us can also easily observe and learn simple patterns or pin codes we may be using to unlock our devices.

## APP-LOCKS

An 'app-lock' is an additional feature offered by many mobile phone apps, which means that even if the screen lock has been disabled, a password or pin is required to access the app. It is recommended that you use an app lock for any app that comes with this feature. Alternatively, app-locks can be downloaded and installed separately for extra protection. However, these app-locks must only be downloaded from trusted sources such as well-known providers of digital security applications and antivirus.



## TWO-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION (2FA)

Two-factor authentication is an easy and simple way to improve the security of online accounts including email and social media accounts. This adds an extra layer of security in the sign-in process by requiring a user to input another code, after they have entered their password. Setting up two-factor authentication is simple and straightforward and can be done by simply changing the security and sign-in settings of an account.

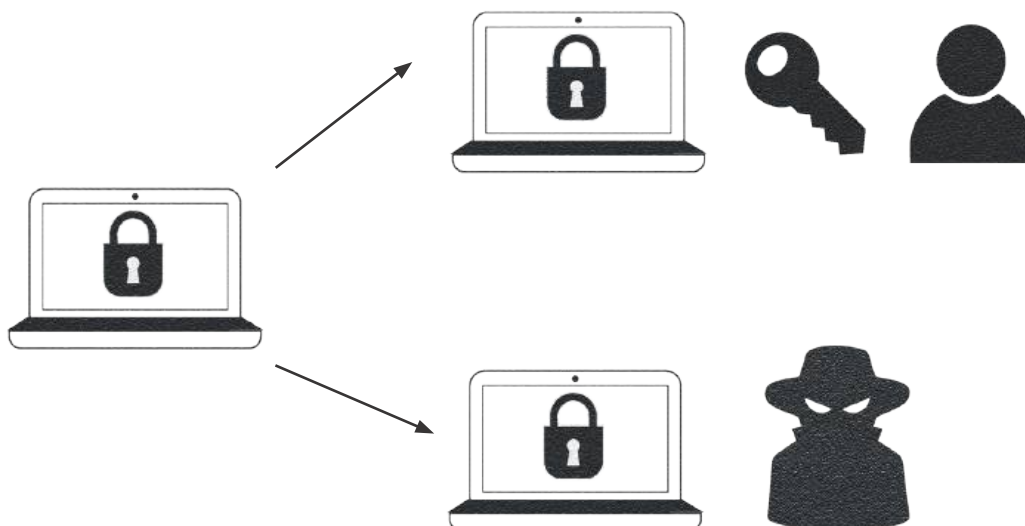
Two-factor authentication can be used in a number of different ways. A user can choose to have the code sent to them via text message or phone call or use an 'authenticator' app to generate the code. Having the code sent via text message or phone call may create a challenge for those who frequently change their sim card. Therefore, it is recommended to use an 'authenticator' app which can generate codes in a secure manner. There are a number of different 'authenticator' apps that can be used and some of the most widely used and recommended are Google Authenticator ([Android](#)) ([iPhone](#)), Microsoft Authenticator ([Android](#)) ([iPhone](#)), LastPass Authenticator ([Android](#)) ([iPhone](#)), and Authy Authenticator ([Android](#)) ([iPhone](#)). It is important to note, that if you choose to use an 'authenticator' app with an online account, you should always have a backup option, in case you are no longer able to access the 'authenticator' app. This can be done by setting up backup codes or including a backup email and telephone number, when two-factor authentication is initially set up.

[Here](#) is a YouTube tutorial that provides easy guidance on how to set up two-factor authentication on a Google account using Google Authenticator.

## FILE AND DEVICE ENCRYPTION

Encryption is the process of converting information into a secret code, so only people who have permission are able to access it.<sup>5</sup> Encryption is important because it prevents people who do not have permission from accessing certain information.

5 <https://media.kaspersky.com/en/business-security/Kaspersky-File-Level-Encryption-Technology.pdf>



## SIMPLE FILE AND FOLDER ENCRYPTION

A simple way to encrypt files and folders on a Windows 10 computer is to simply go to a file or folder and right click on it. You should then select **Properties** and under the **General** tab click on **Advanced**. Once you have done this, you will have the option to **Encrypt Contents to Secure Data**.

In Microsoft office, you are also able to encrypt documents with a password. To do this, select **File** and then click on **Info**. You will then be given the option to **Protect Document** followed by **Encrypt with a Password**.

## Device encryption

Devices can be encrypted in different ways. However, it is very important to use a password or pin number you are not likely to forget. Otherwise, one can potentially lose access to a device and its contents. It is often possible to save a **recovery key** in case you forget a password or pin number to access a device. A recovery key can be used to unlock/decrypt an encrypted device, and should be stored securely on not only the encrypted device but on another device as well.

Encrypting a device can be a time-consuming process. Depending on the speed and type of device you are encrypting, it can take anywhere between 15 minutes to 10 hours. Therefore, if you are planning to encrypt a device, it is important to ensure that it is plugged into a charging cable and that you chose a time when you will not need to use your device. If you lose power or attempt to stop the encryption process, you can lose all the data on the device.

### Computers

- **Bitlocker:** Windows computers with Windows 10 Pro come with Bitlocker – a built in way to encrypt your device. [To enable device encryption and use Bitlocker you can follow the steps provided by Microsoft here.](#)
- **Filevault:** If you use an **Apple** computer you can use Filevault to encrypt your device. [To enable device encryption and use Filevault you can follow the steps provided by Apple here.](#)
- **Veracrypt:** An alternative to Microsoft's Bitlocker and Apple's Filevault is Veracrypt. It is free open-source disk encryption software and can be useful because not all Windows systems come with Bitlocker. [To enable device encryption and use Veracrypt you can follow the steps provided by IDRIX here.](#)

### Mobile Phones

A mobile phone can also be encrypted like a computer. You can use the following links to find out more about how you can encrypt your mobile phone:

- [How to encrypt on iPhone](#)
- [How to encrypt on Android](#)



## LOCATION SETTINGS

It is particularly important to pay attention to location settings on a device, which can identify your location. You should always check the location settings on both your computer and mobile phone to ensure that your location is not being tracked.

On a computer, this can be done by typing **Location Privacy Settings** into the search bar and the turning off external access to the location of the device. It is also important to not allow apps to access your location.

On a mobile phone you can go to the **Security and Privacy** settings and click on **Location** to disable location access. Please note that different types of mobile phones may have different names for location settings.

## VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORK (VPN)

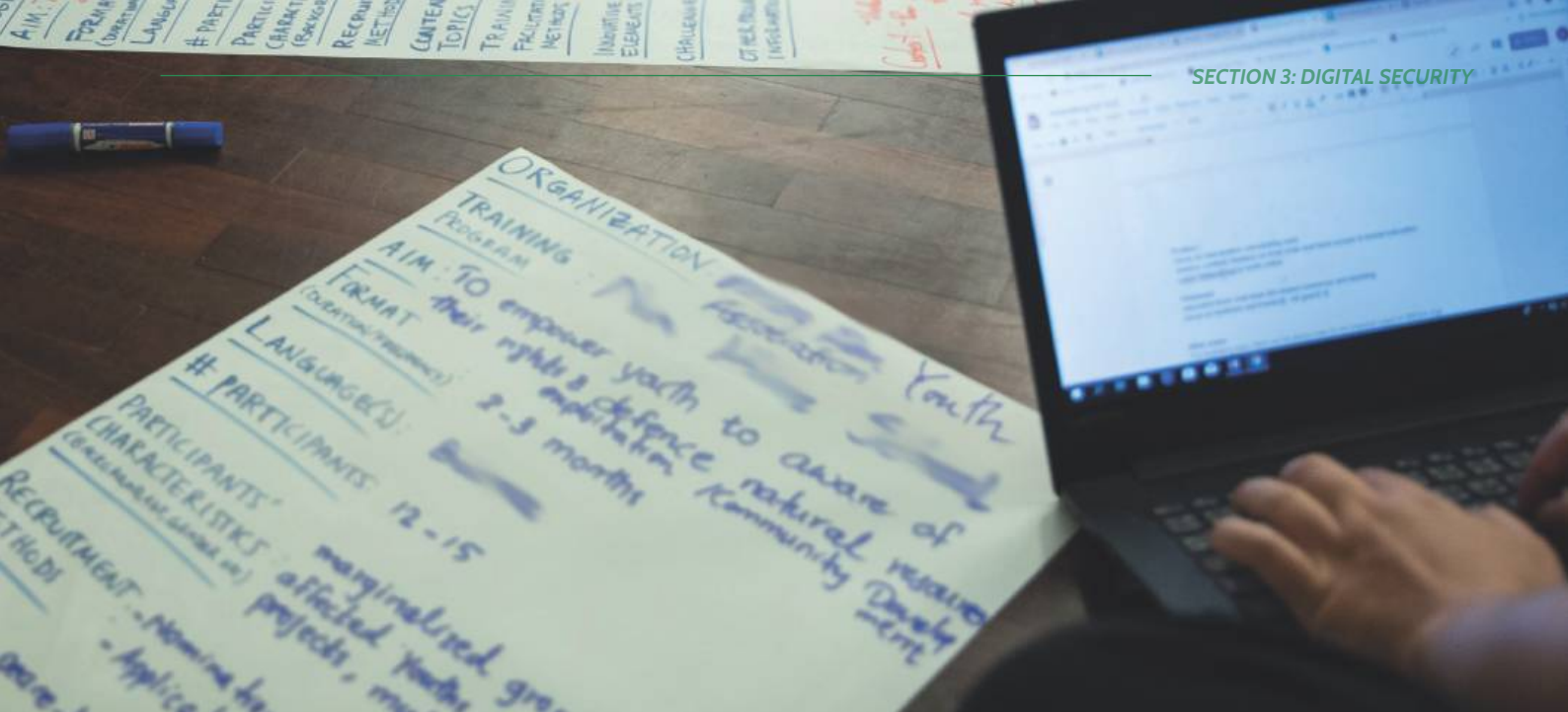
A virtual private network - or VPN - encrypts internet activity and hides the geographical location from where you are connecting to the internet (your IP address). VPNs prevent an internet service provider or anyone else from tracking your online activity and are useful for ensuring privacy and security. A VPN makes it seem like you are in a different geographical location and helps protect your identity from websites, apps and services. It is especially important to use a VPN to protect your device, when it is connected to public Wi-Fi.

Free VPNs are generally considered less reliable and secure than paid VPNs. However, [Psiphon is a reliable free VPN that can be used](#). A version without advertisements can be downloaded directly from the Psiphon website (rather than using the Play Store). A free version of [ProtonVPN](#), a VPN from the creators of Protonmail, is also available. However, the paid version is loaded with more features and offers increased protection. Some widely recommended paid VPNs are [NordVPN](#) and [ExpressVPN](#). Both offer fast browsing speeds and a range of security options.

For more information about VPNs, and how to choose the right one, please [look at this guidance information from Surveillance Self-Defense \(SSD\)](#).







### 3.3 SAFE INTERNET BROWSING

To ensure safety when browsing the internet, it is important to be able to trust the websites we are visiting and pay attention to what we are clicking or downloading. This can help us avoid webpages or downloads containing malicious software or content. Again, if you did not look for it, do not click or download it. You should also try to use web addresses that begin with <https://> rather than <http://>. The additional s stands for 'secure' and means that the data sent and received by the website has a level of encryption.

### 3.4 THE PHYSICAL SECURITY OF YOUR DIGITAL ITEMS

However, all digital security best practices can be ineffective if we lose or misplace the physical devices containing sensitive information. It is therefore important to make sure devices are not left unlocked or unattended. You should always be aware of the location of your devices – particularly smaller devices such as phones and external hard drives. In public spaces, you should be aware of who is around, and whether they are able to see the content on your device. If you feel that others can see the information on your device, then do not use it. It is also important to always turn off your computer when you are not using it, rather than leaving it in 'standby' mode.





### 3.5 USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND VIDEOS

It is essential to respect the privacy of others when engaging in any project activity. When documenting an activity, it is important for participants being photographed or filmed to provide explicit consent in advance, ideally in writing. This typically refers to photographs or videos where people can be identified. However, when someone is participating in a public activity, such as a demonstration, then consent is often assumed, as the activity is taking place in a public space. However, if you plan to take photographs or shoot videos as part of your work, you should familiarize yourself with local laws.

It is also important to recognize the potential risk of being photographed or filmed by those that wish to prevent you from engaging in your human rights work. If you are photographed or filmed, you can be identified and the footage may be used as evidence to arbitrarily file criminal charges against you. Therefore, it is important to always be aware of your surroundings and whether someone you don't know is photographing or filming you.

You should also never carry sensitive photographs of your activities or those you work with on your devices. If you are detained and your devices are taken from you, those detaining you could access information about your activities and those you work with.



## Summary of Key Learning Points

- Passwords should be long (ten or more characters), complex (including upper case letters, lower case letters, numbers and symbols), practical (something that you will be able to remember) but, not personal (words or phrases that are not linked to you), secret (not shared with anyone), unique (never use the same password for more than one account) and fresh (changed regularly).
- Password managers can be used to manage passwords for different accounts and are generally considered to be a more secure way of managing online accounts.
- Complex and unique passwords should be used for a device when logging-in or unlocking the screen – using face recognition or fingerprint technology to unlock devices can make it easier for others to unlock your device, if you are arrested or detained.
- Some mobile phone apps come with ‘app-locks’ – which means you have to enter a password or pin to access the app. There are also some app-locks that can be downloaded separately and installed to give extra protection.
- Two-factor authentication adds an important extra layer of security to the sign in process by requiring an additional code after you have completed the first normal stage of sign-in.
- Encryption is the process of converting information into a secret code which makes the information unreadable to those you don’t want accessing it.
- Individual files and folders can be encrypted but also entire devices. However, it is very important to use a password or pin number that is not easy to forget – otherwise you can lose access to a device and its contents.
- The location settings of a device identify where you and your device are. It is important to regularly check the location settings and access on your computer and mobile phone.
- A virtual private network – or VPN – encrypts your internet activity and hides the physical location of where you are connecting to the internet from (your IP address).
- It is important that you always trust the websites you visit and know exactly what you are clicking on or downloading. Web addresses that begin with <https://> rather than <http://> should always be used – this means the web address is more secure.
- It is important to never leave your devices unlocked or unattended. You should always know where your devices are– particularly smaller devices such as phones and external hard drives.
- It is important to respect the privacy of others when photographing or filming. You should seek explicit consent in advance, ideally in writing. You should always be aware of your surroundings and whether someone you don’t know is filming or photographing you. You should also never carry sensitive photographs of your activities or those you work with on your devices.







## 3.6 COMMUNICATIONS

### STANDARD PHONE COMMUNICATIONS

It is important to note that standard phone communication methods are not as secure as you may think. Both landline and mobile phones can be easily monitored and call histories, messages, and locations can be stored by the phone company.<sup>6</sup> In many countries, authorities can use communication laws they have created to force phone companies to share this data.

### ONLINE MESSAGING

Many community groups and activists in the Greater Mekong Subregion use Facebook to send messages, share information and post updates. It should be recognized that, while Facebook is a good way to reach a large number of people, it is not a secure way to communicate. It is important you use messaging apps that offer end-to-end-encryption. This means the messages can only be read by the person who sends the message and the intended recipient. This prevents the monitoring or surveillance of messages.

[Signal](#) is a messaging app, widely recommended for its enhanced security and encryption features. It collects less data than other popular apps, is privacy-focused and does not analyze, share or profit from users' private information.<sup>7</sup> It also offers the option of **Disappearing Messages** so anything shared or communicated over the app is permanently deleted from the devices of both the sender and the receiver.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

For ERDs, social media is a powerful tool that can be used to raise awareness, campaign and stay in touch with the latest developments related to work. It is therefore, particularly important for us to consider how we can use social media safely.

If you haven't already reviewed the privacy settings on your social media accounts then you should immediately do so. This is where you can decide who can see your personal details, what you post and who you are friends with. [Surveillance Self-Defense \(SSD\)](#) provides an overview of how to protect yourself on social networks that you can [view here](#). This [article](#) from Defending Digital also provides a number of useful social media safety, security, and privacy tips.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.apc.org/es/irhr/digital-security-first-aid-kit-5>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/jan/24/is-it-time-to-leave-whatsapp-and-is-signal-the-answer>



## EMAIL

Many ERDs use basic email service providers such as Gmail or Yahoo! Mail. These are often free and easy to use. However, if you plan on sharing particularly sensitive content over email, it is important to use a service that offers end-to-end encryption.

One way of doing this is using Pretty Good Privacy, commonly referred to as PGP. This is an end-to-end encryption method, which means that only the person sending the email and the one receiving it will be able to open and read the message. Some people may find PGP to be a bit too technical, however, it is a trusted and proven tool for encrypting emails. [You can find out how to set up and use PGP here.](#)

Another option is to use an email provider such as Protonmail, which offers integrated end-to-end-encryption of emails. Protonmail uses an integrated version of PGP, which means that emails are automatically encrypted to other Protonmail accounts. There is also an option to encrypt when sending to other email accounts. This makes it more user-friendly. It is as easy to set-up and use as other email clients and [you can sign up for a free account by clicking here.](#)

## VIDEO CONFERENCING

It is becoming increasingly common for individuals and organizations to use video conferencing, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is essential for ERDs to use secure and safe channels for video conferencing to prevent others from listening in.

Zoom is among the most popular video conferencing services used today. Millions of individuals, businesses and non-governmental organizations regularly host online meetings and conferences on Zoom. However, over the last year, users experienced a number of security breaches, which raised concerns regarding the platform's safety. These have largely been addressed by the company. However, it is essential to regularly install Zoom updates, as these include security improvements.

It is equally important to enable and use the security features in Zoom such end-to-end encryption, passwords to enter video conferences and the waiting room function to allow or refuse admission into a call. You should always pay attention to who is joining a Zoom meeting, and if you are unsure of a person's identity, do not allow them to join a call. Guidance on setting up security settings in Zoom can be found by visiting [this link](#). A useful video guide on how to use the 'waiting room' function can also be found [here](#). An alternative to Zoom, often recommended by digital security experts, is [Jitsi](#). Jitsi is a free service that does not require users to create an account. It allows users to enable end-to-end encryption, password protect meetings and comes with a 'waiting room' function. You can find out more about Jitsi and how to use it safely by visiting the [guide by Front Line Defenders here](#).



## Summary of Key Learning Points

- Standard phone communication methods are not as secure as you may think. Both landlines and mobile phones can be easily monitored. Call histories, messages, and locations can be stored by a phone company and passed to the authorities in the country they operate.
- It is important to use messaging apps with end-to-end-encryption. This means the messages can only be read by the person who sends the message and the person who is the intended recipient. This means that anyone attempting to monitor the message will not be able to read it.
- It is important to regularly review the settings on your social media accounts and choose who can see your personal details, what you post and who you are friends with.
- Sensitive content should only be sent over email with end-to-end encryption.
- When using video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom, it is important to regularly update the software and use the security options to add passwords, use end-to-end-encryption, and the 'waiting room' function to allow or refuse people admission into the call.



## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Activities

#### Activity 1: Try out tools and tips

- Facilitators should not only explain the hints, tips and practical measures that ERDs can take to improve their digital security, but should actively help ERDs to implement them with clear instructions.
- If there are only one or two facilitators, it may be helpful to immediately guide participants to implement the security activities and tools after each sub-section rather than teaching all of the content first and waiting till the end to implement it.
- Alternatively, if there are multiple facilitators, it may be helpful to break out into small groups and set up “stations” according to the different subsections. This ensures that participants have more personalized guidance and help in setting up their devices.

#### Instructions:

- Assign one or two facilitators to each station, and one group of participants to one station.
- Assign a set amount of time to each group to finish implementing the security activities and tools for a specific station.
- Once time is up or all participants have completed the activity at their station, they can rotate stations and move to the next one to implement the next set of security activities and tools.
- 

### Information for facilitator

- Before beginning a training session, it is important for facilitators to measure the participants' level of IT literacy. The 'Growth Mountain' activity outlined below is one helpful way of measuring an individual's familiarity with IT terminology and concepts. Depending on the results of this activity, the facilitator can decide which hints, tips and practical measures will be most useful for the participants and if descriptions and instructions need to be further simplified.
  - ◊ If the group has mixed skills and experiences with IT, encourage those with more IT experience and literacy to support and help others who are not as experienced. It may be helpful to identify these participants from the beginning of this module, so they can be “support people” for those participants who need more help. Similarly, encourage those with less IT experience to ask for support.
- When instructing the participants, facilitators should share their computer or mobile phone screens to demonstrate how the advice given in the module can be implemented.
- It is important to remember that participants are likely to need direct, hands-on support during the sessions on digital security. Facilitators should therefore plan accordingly and give adequate time to provide support during these sessions. Consider dividing the above information and activities into separate sessions, and remember to take plenty of breaks so participants do not feel overwhelmed by new information.



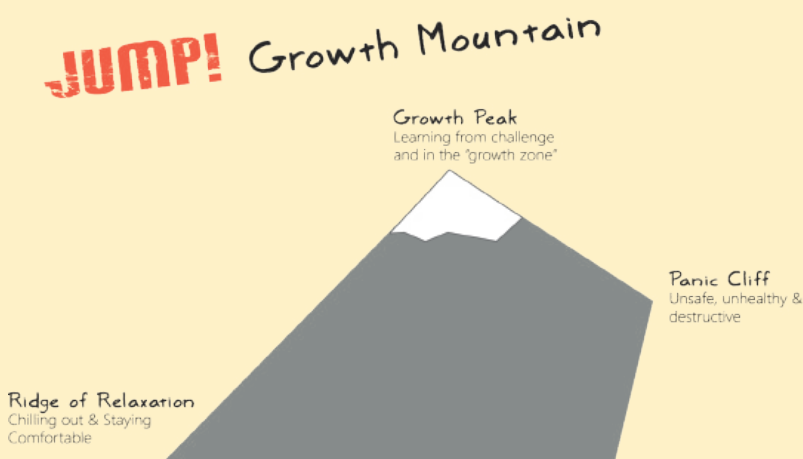


## Activity 2: Growth Mountain

Adapted from JUMP! Foundation, Growth Mountain is a model that helps you measure growth during an experience. In this context, it can be used to measure the training participants' experience and comfort with digital tools and concepts. [Click here](#) to see the original activity.

Instructions:

1. Use tape or rope to create the shape of a wide mountain with a peak on the ground with enough space for all participants to stand along the line. Label the left end of the line "Very comfortable", the peak, "Growth peak", and the right end of the line, "Very uncomfortable" (see diagram by JUMP! Foundation below).
  - a. Explain to participants that "growth peak" is the area of growth that is challenging and uncomfortable, but they are still motivated to learn from the challenge.



2. Explain to the participants that this activity is best carried out in silence, which is a good way to show respect.
3. The facilitator reads out the prompts and the participants place themselves at the point on the mountain, which best explains how they feel. Facilitators should encourage the participants to be as honest as possible. If they are unsure, they can sit at the right side of the line. As a facilitator, you should make note of which participants appear to be uncomfortable with the training content and ensure that you offer them adequate support.
4. Suggested Prompts (Consider adding more or changing these to suit the language or IT literacy level of the training participants). You may also want to consider adding more prompts that are activism related but not security related in order to value everyone's experiences and strengths. For example: planning an event, organizing a training, facilitating a meeting, public speaking, etc.):
  - a. Creating a strong password for your devices and apps
  - b. Setting-up and using two-factor authorization;
  - c. Installing and using 'anti-virus' and 'anti-malware' software;
  - d. Changing privacy settings on social media;





# 4

## ***THE CRIMINALIZATION & JUDICIAL HARASSMENT OF EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS***





**LAWS ARE OFTEN USED OR MISUSED** to charge and arrest Earth Rights Defenders (ERDs) and limit the space for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) to operate.

In the past, ERDs have been unfairly accused of encouraging others to commit a crime (incitement) and causing public disturbance. At times, even traffic offences have been used to arrest and imprison ERDs. ERDs are involved in court cases which last for years and can be very expensive to deal with.

Criminalization and judicial harassment are two of the most common ways in which Earth Rights Defenders in the Greater Mekong Subregion are targeted. This section of the *Facilitation Toolkit* discusses criminalization and judicial harassment and laws commonly used to target ERDs. It also examines what arrest and detention can mean for ERDs and offers guidance to ERDs on protecting themselves against judicial harassment and criminalization.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Understand how criminalization and judicial harassment are used against ERDs
- Explore how ERDs may be able to protect themselves against it
- Identify practical preventative and reactive measures ERDs can take when faced with criminalization and judicial harassment

### RECOMMENDED READING

- [Instruments of Repression](#) by FORUM-ASIA
- [Fighting to Exist: Legislative Protection For Human Rights Defenders In Asia](#) by The International Service for Human Rights
- [Criminalization of Human Rights Defenders](#) by Protection International
- [The chilling effect of threats, violence and criminalization](#) by Forest Peoples Programme
- [Attacks and criminalization of indigenous human rights defenders: report](#) by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples
- [Coping-with-Prison](#)

A summary of all recommended reading and additional information can be found in Annex 1.







## 4.1 WHAT IS CRIMINALIZATION AND JUDICIAL HARASSMENT?

Criminalization is the changing or manipulation of laws by a government to make certain activities illegal, so those they wish to target can be treated as criminals under the law. An example of criminalization is police arresting a defender for criticizing a development project or participating in a peaceful protest.

Judicial harassment is the use of the legal system by a powerful state or non-state actor, to intimidate or silence a person by subjecting them to long, expensive and stressful legal proceedings. An example of judicial harassment is a company filing a civil lawsuit or criminal or administrative legal charges against a defender to silence them. Across the region, ERDs have been targeted and charged with various offenses such as trespassing, traffic violations, crimes against the states and holding public gatherings.

These tactics can have serious consequences for ERDs, such as:

- ERDs are presented as criminals who are anti-development and anti-government, rather than citizens with legitimate concerns about the land and the environment. This makes it harder for ERDs to get the support they need from communities, NGOs, and other actors.
- It costs them time, money and other resources, and denies them their freedom. Rather than spending their time and energy on campaigns, they are forced to defend themselves in complicated legal proceedings. This is precious time lost, that could have otherwise been spent on activism.

Criminalization and judicial harassment occur when the legal system is vulnerable to influence by powerful actors and corruption. ERDs often find themselves at risk from laws claiming to be supportive of peaceful demonstration and activism, but are in reality used to prevent them from engaging in activism.

The criminalization of human rights activities is common. ERDs are often arrested when carrying out their work, and detained for the maximum period allowed, before their cases are heard at trial. ERDs also often face multiple charges, which makes it more difficult for them to get bail and extends their pretrial detention.







## SOME EXAMPLES OF THE MOST COMMON LAWS USED TO DETAIN ERDS

In Cambodia and Vietnam, the constitution protects the right to peaceful demonstration. Countries that are signatories to international human rights declarations also have a duty to protect their citizens' right to peaceful assembly, demonstration and protest. However, despite these rights being guaranteed in national and international law, in the Greater Mekong Subregion, these laws are more often used to detain and punish ERDs.

Cambodia's Peaceful Assembly law<sup>8</sup> allows citizens to exercise freedom of expression through peaceful public assembly. Article 2 specifies that the right shall not be used to "affect the rights, freedoms and honor of others, good customs of the national society, public order and national security". This means that the right can be restricted. The law uses unclear language which allows for broad interpretation and understanding of its meaning and application. This is why it has often been used to prevent marches and detain individuals.

Similarly, Myanmar's Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law is often used to detain peaceful human rights activists and has often been criticized for being unclear, restrictive and inconsistently applied.<sup>9</sup>

Defamation accusations, whereby a person is accused of ruining or destroying the reputation of an individual or company, are also common in the region. When activists try to hold companies and authorities accountable for abuses, they push back with defamation charges, claiming that the ERD is unfairly attacking the company's reputation. An example of this is Myanmar's 2013 Telecommunication Law, which has been repeatedly used to restrict free speech and criticism of authorities.<sup>10</sup>

For ERDs, the threat of arrest is high, with many ERDs having been detained and imprisoned for their activities in the past. Arrest itself can be stressful and traumatic, as many ERDs report experiencing physical abuse during arrest and detention.

## ACCESS TO BAIL

ERDs who have been arrested in the past report that their rights in detention are often violated, particularly with regards to bail, access to legal aid and the legal duration of detention. For instance, in Myanmar Section 505 of the Penal Code is used to detain activists without bail. This law uses unclear language, which allows authorities flexibility in applying charges and denying bail. The offences under 505 (a) and (b) do not allow bail, and these laws are commonly used to detain peaceful political activists.

8 [https://cambodia.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Law\\_on\\_peaceful\\_demonstration-promulgated\\_Eng.pdf](https://cambodia.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Law_on_peaceful_demonstration-promulgated_Eng.pdf)

9 <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/01/31/dashed-hopes/criminalization-peaceful-expression-myanmar#7023>

10 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/29/burma-repeal-section-66d-2013-telecommunications-law>

## COERCION IN DETENTION

Many ERDs report that while in detention, they are pressured into signing statements declaring that they will not engage in similar activities in the future. ERDs report that these statements are written in a way that tricks them into agreeing that they had violated the law, when carrying out human rights activities. If ERDs sign such statements, police are known to use them at a later date as evidence that the ERD had been breaking the law and re-arrest them. ERDs often sign these statements under the assumption that doing so will allow them to be released and not charged with a criminal offense.



## Summary of Key Learning Points

- Criminalization is the manipulation or changing of laws by the government to make certain activities illegal, so a defender can be treated like a criminal under the law.
- Judicial harassment is the use of the legal system by a powerful state or non-state actor to intimidate or silence an ERD by engaging them in long, expensive and stressful legal proceedings.
- ERDs are often detained for the maximum period allowed, before their cases are heard at trial. They also typically face multiple charges which makes it more difficult for them to get bail and extends their pre-trial detention.
- Arrest and detention can be stressful and traumatic, with many ERDs reporting physical harm during both arrest and detention.
- ERDs often share accounts of their rights in detention being violated, particularly with regards to bail, access to legal aid and the duration of detention.
- While in detention, ERDs report being pressured into signing statements declaring that they will not be undertaking further activities. These are often used against ERDs at a later date, especially when they are rearrested.

## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Activities

#### Activity 1: Case Study Research

##### Instructions:

- If participants have access to the internet, ask them to conduct quick, individual research to identify (a) which laws ERDs in their country have been accused of breaking and (b) which of their activities were criminalized.
  - ◊ If activists from across the region are participating in the training, it may be helpful to group them according to their countries.
  - ◊ If the participants are unsure about where they may find such information, refer them to the websites below which document cases of ERDs being targeted.
  - ◊ [https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/?&content\\_types=attacks](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/?&content_types=attacks)
  - ◊ <https://asianhrds.forum-asia.org/>
  - ◊ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/search>
  - ◊ Note that the websites listed above are in English so may not be accessible for all participants. If this is the case, or they do not have internet access, consider selecting a few case studies to share with the participants in advance and asking them to reflect on these case studies and share their own experiences with criminalization.
- Once the participants have completed their research and discussion, ask one representative from each group to share what they discussed.

##### Debrief:

- What similarities and differences did we find between how ERDs have been legally targeted in different countries?
- What impact do you think this had on the ERD?
- What impact do you think this had on the ERD's community and movement/campaign?
- What are some of the ways in which we may be able to prevent criminalization of ERDs?





## 4.2 PRACTICAL PREVENTATIVE MEASURES TO TAKE WHEN THERE IS THE POTENTIAL FOR ARREST

### IMPROVING LEGAL AWARENESS

Improving your knowledge of the law is the first step in protecting yourself against authorities.

Understanding all the laws in a country would probably require years of study, however knowing some key laws and basics of legal proceedings is an important part of a protection strategy. One way of doing this, is learning about how ERDs in your country have been targeted in the past and draw out lessons from these experiences into your own security plan.

There are also a number of organizations and lawyers who can help ERDs improve their legal knowledge. It is recommended that you seek out such organizations and individuals and participate in relevant legal trainings and seminars. You may also consider collaborating and engaging with other regional advocacy and civil society networks that support HRDs and organizations.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS

Knowing your rights in detention is also important to ensuring your safety and reducing the duration of detention. Communicating confidently, but respectfully, that you are aware of your right to bail, legal representation, contact with your family and time-limited detention, may allow you to access support and avoid prolonged detention. These rights are guaranteed under most legal systems, including those in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Many countries are party to international conventions that guarantee basic human rights. However, this varies from country to country, so it is important to familiarize yourself with the international conventions that your own country is signatory to. However, these international standards often do not guarantee rights within a country and cannot be enforced locally. It is therefore important to consider what type legal representation is available and what kind of advocacy efforts may be effective and safe for others to undertake on your behalf.

An ERD's behavior during arrest or in detention can have an impact on how they are treated later and the outcome of their case. If you are aware of your rights and are able to articulate them, you may be able to change the circumstances of your arrest and detention.

### PROTECT YOUR PERSONAL PROPERTY

When there is risk of arrest or detention, it is advisable to not carry confidential information or valuable items. If it necessary for you to carry something, then in case of arrest, mention your right to defend your property.





## **4.3 PRACTICAL REACTIVE MEASURES TO TAKE**

### **FIND OUT WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN CHARGED WITH**

It is important to know the charges being brought against you as soon as possible. You have a right to this information. Communicating this information to your support network is also important as it can help them secure your release. If you are able to speak to lawyers or family members, make sure to tell them what you have been charged with.

### **GAIN ACCESS TO A LAWYER**

It is essential to build relationships with lawyers or organizations who have access to lawyers and ensure that they are aware of your activities. This is an important part of planning. In case of arrest, it is important for these lawyers to be informed, so share their contact details with a member of your organization, family or community and ensure that they are contacted.

### **AVOID BEING COERCED INTO SIGNING OR THUMB PRINTING A DOCUMENT**

As highlighted earlier, ERDs are often coerced into signing documents that restrict their rights and freedoms. It is your right to refuse to sign documents or statements you don't agree with, do not understand, or without the presence of legal counsel. If you encounter a situation where you are being forced to sign a document, politely and confidently communicate your knowledge of your legal rights, as this can improve the likelihood of your rights being respected.

If you cannot resist the pressure to sign a document, keep track of the process, what you have been forced to sign, and make this a key issue in court proceedings. It is important to make your lawyer, human rights organizations, and supporters aware of the coercion. Any advocacy for your release should highlight that this is a clear violation of your rights in detention.



## ENSURE YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

Your physical and mental wellbeing comes first: if you feel threatened or experience physical violence, avoid escalating the situation and making the individuals questioning or detaining you angry. While in detention, as much possible, try to keep your body healthy by doing some low key exercise. You can also practice deep breathing, which can help ease your anxiety. The [Coping-with-Prison](#) project is a helpful tool designed by human rights activists, journalists and other professionals, who have suffered state repression in the past. It provides guidance to those who are detained, their families, lawyers and supporters. Additional information and resources on psychosocial wellbeing can be found in Section 6: Psychosocial Wellbeing and Sustainable Activism.

## KNOW HOW TO BEHAVE DURING DETENTION

Preparing for the possibility of detention and understanding the laws being used will give you more confidence and control over the situation. While this knowledge may not prevent you from being detained, your behavior during the arrest, and in custody, may influence how you are treated and the outcome of your situation.

When dealing with authorities, it is always advisable to stay as calm as possible. Remember that those in positions of authority often operate with impunity. If you express anger or make those detaining you angry, they may charge you with additional offences such as ‘insulting an official’ or ‘obstructing an official from carrying out their duties’. This does not mean that you must do everything they say, you can resist calmly, confidently and respectfully. Doing so does not mean that you are giving up but that you are accepting the situation at that particular moment and taking steps to ensure it does not worsen.

Women ERDs often face additional challenges in detention. They may be subjected to sexual assault, harassment, and intimidation by officers and may have specific health concerns (e.g. if they are pregnant).

## HOW TO HELP AN ERD YOU KNOW HAS BEEN DETAINED

An ERD may feel very lonely in detention, so it is important for them to know that community members, colleagues, friends and family are working towards their release. It is recommended that ERDs include others such as community members, colleagues, friends and family in security planning, so everyone is aware of their responsibilities in case of detention or arrest. This also means that the detained ERD will be assured that others are doing everything they can to ensure their release. Now let’s look at some ways in which you can help others in detention.

Ideally, organizations and communities should plan for emergency situations such as arrest and detention, so everyone knows what to expect, including those who have been arrested and those trying to help.



## VISIT THE PLACE OF DETENTION

If you know where an ERD is being detained, try to visit the police station but only if it is safe to do so. When visiting a police station, it can be helpful to bring a lawyer or a person in a position of power or authority. In other words, this means bringing along someone the police may feel intimidated by.

It can also help to go to the police station in large numbers to show the authorities that many people care for and support the detained person. If you choose to gather outside a police station in large numbers, try to do so peacefully and not escalate the situation, as doing so may result in further arrests.

## INFORM FAMILY AND NETWORKS

Follow the plan you have made with the detainee. Inform their family, but do so with care without causing them to become overly worried. If a detainee is likely to be released within 48 hours, or depending on their personal situation, it may not be necessary to inform family members.

Building a network you can mobilize in such a scenario, is an important part of planning. Such a network may include lawyers, human rights organizations, international NGOs, United Nations (UN), people in the media and staff at foreign embassies.

Informing those in your network can serve various objectives. Civil society actors such as human rights organizations, or even friendly, independent media channels can engage in public advocacy in support of the detained ERD. It can also be helpful to inform others such as contacts at embassies or UN office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights so they can carry out 'behind the scenes' advocacy. Preparing accurate and up to date case files with timelines (discussed in more detail below) will help you in providing useful information to these stakeholders. It is also a good idea to think about what actions you would like these actors to take.

Many women ERDs play key roles within their families and may have caregiving responsibilities towards children or elderly parents. It is important to be aware of this and offer to provide support with these responsibilities, inside and outside detention. You could consider requesting others (including men) in an organization or community, to temporarily take up some of these responsibilities.

## DOCUMENT THE ABUSES AND DETAILS OF THE ARREST

Maintain accurate and up-to-date case files with timelines. Land and environmental rights cases are often long and complex, so you should maintain an accurate record with dates and case developments.

Understand the importance of any evidence you can include in case files. This includes any letters sent to local authorities requesting permission for an event, information that has been made public about the event, profiles of the individuals detained, and other documents that prove unlawful detention.

Do not hesitate to ask trusted partners, such as human rights organizations, for help in documenting cases as they may have relevant training and experience.





## Summary of Key Learning Points

- Preparing for the possibility of detention and understanding the laws being used can give you more confidence and control over the situation.
- When there is risk of arrest or detention, it is advisable to not carry valuable items or confidential information.
- Ensure that you maintain a relationship with lawyers and/or organizations who have access to lawyers and are aware of your activities.
- It is important to know the charges being brought against you as soon as possible and inform those in your network.
- Confidently, but respectfully, communicating that you are aware of your right to bail, legal representation, contact with your family, and a time-limited detention may help you access support from outside and avoid prolonged detention.
- Your physical and mental wellbeing comes first: if you feel threatened or experience physical violence, avoid escalating the situation and making those questioning/detaining you angry. This could potentially make the situation worse.
- Women ERDs often face additional challenges in detention. They may be subject to sexual assault, harassment, and intimidation by officers and may have specific health concerns
- If you know where a detained ERD is being held, consider visiting the police station if it is safe to do so. It can be helpful to bring a lawyer or another person regarded as authoritative and respectable.
- In line with what you have previously agreed with a detained ERD, inform their family member(s). Do this with care, so as not to make them overly worried.
- Many women ERDs also play a key role in their families and have caregiving responsibilities towards children or elderly parents. It is important to be aware of this and support them both inside and outside detention.
- Maintain accurate and up-to-date case files with timelines. Land and environmental rights cases are often long and complex so you should maintain an accurate record of dates and case developments.



## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Activities

#### Activity 1: What to do if you are detained

Instructions:

- Divide participants into groups
- Ask each group to develop a checklist for an ERD at risk of detention outlining key steps and considerations in case they are detained in their country. You may prompt them with the following categories:
  - Before detention....
    - ◊ Access to a lawyer
  - In detention...
    - ◊ Physical safety
    - ◊ Coercion
    - ◊ Behavior
- Once the group is ready, discuss key points to come up with more ideas, add to the list, or debate what is included.

### Information for facilitator

- Suggestions for steps to include in the What to Do in Detention Checklist:
  - Before detention...
    - ◊ Engage with ERD networks
    - ◊ Ask human rights organizations to help identify lawyers who can support you in case of detention
    - ◊ Ensure that lawyers are aware of your activities and you have built relationships with organizations which can help find you representation
  - In detention...
    - ◊ Physical safety - while asserting your rights you should be aware of the potential threat of physical abuse and torture. Assess your situation and respond to it in a way that protects your physical safety.
    - ◊ Coercion-activists are often coerced into signing documents that are detrimental to their rights and freedoms. You have a right to refuse to sign something. If you are confident and secure in your knowledge, this is the time to assert your rights. Resist and refuse to sign documents you don't agree with, do not understand or you are asked to sign without the advice of legal counsel. Keep track of the process and what you are forced to sign, and make this a key issue of the court and proceedings. Inform human rights organizations and supporters of the coercion you face. Any subsequent advocacy for your release should highlight this violation of your rights in detention
    - ◊ Behavior - stay as calm as possible
    - ◊ Do not resist those detaining you - even if you know you have not committed an offence, the risk of you being subjected to physical harm is higher if you resist arrest. Know that if you are arrested, your colleagues, family and friends are working towards your release and you are not alone







# 5

## *PHYSICAL SECURITY*





**EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS (ERDS) MUST CAREFULLY CONSIDER THEIR PHYSICAL SECURITY AT ALL TIMES.** ERDs operate in a number of different settings and it is important that they consider their physical security in the various settings they find themselves in.

This section explains the importance of situational awareness, and outlines physical security best practices in the workplace, while travelling and when conducting community-based field work. It also highlights factors which should be taken into account, when operating in different settings and offers tips and suggestions to safeguard physical security.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Strengthen the practice of exercising situational awareness
- Explore tips and practical steps that can be taken to ensure physical security, in relation to:
  - ◊ The workplace – including security equipment, relationships, visitors, documents and equipment, raids by authorities, entry and exit routes, location, and the workspace as a safe space
  - ◊ Travel - including vehicles, travel routes, checkpoints, communications, hotels and guesthouses
  - ◊ Community-based field work – including development of trust and data collection
- Identify various factors to consider when developing a security plan for field work.

### TRAINING MATERIALS

#### Recommended reading:

[New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders](#) by Protection International

[Holistic Security Trainers' Manual](#) by Tactical Technology Collective

[Security Guidelines for field research in complex, remote and hazardous places](#) by International Institute of Social Studies

[Security Risk Management: A basic guide for smaller NGOs](#) by European Interagency Security Forum

A summary of all recommended reading and additional information can be found in Annex 1.



## 5.1 SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

ERDs should pay attention to their surroundings and take an interest in them. Situational awareness is about knowing your environment and being aware of *where* we are and *what* is going on around us. It is also about knowing *who* is around, *why* they are there and *what* they are doing. It is important for ERDs to consider whether something or someone in the environment poses a threat to their safety and security and to what extent. This will allow ERDs to make clear and informed decision, which can help them respond appropriately and effectively, should they encounter a threat.

## 5.2 PHYSICAL SECURITY HINTS, TIPS AND PRACTICAL MEASURES

This section offers several tips and suggestions for practical steps that ERDs can take to ensure their physical security in various settings. Facilitators should explain the advice given below.

### SECURITY WHEN IN THE WORKSPACE

The security of an ERD's workplace is very important. This is where ERDs spend most of their time and carry out important tasks. Some ERDs work in communities, others work from home. Similarly, organizations may operate out of a traditional office space or an open community area. Regardless of the type of workplace, it is essential to ensure that strong and tested security measures are in place.

### SECURITY EQUIPMENT FOR THE WORKSPACE

If an ERD operates in an office building or residence with doors and windows, solid locks *should be* installed. An office should also have a good quality safe to store any sensitive documents or equipment.

If an organization has the required funding available, installing additional security equipment can also be considered. This can include CCTV cameras, alarms, intercoms, door and window grilles, and key card access systems. It is particularly important to regularly check equipment and immediately communicate any issues to the person responsible for maintenance.

While the security equipment mentioned above can prove useful for an office, it will not be possible for all ERDs to purchase it. For those working at the local level in community-based organizations, security equipment is likely to be too expensive or they may operate in open areas where installing security equipment may not be an option. In such instances, it is important for ERDs to consider other ways to improve security.





## RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE THAT LIVE OR WORK NEARBY

For those that do not have access to advanced security equipment, and even for those that do, it is useful to maintain good relations with those who live or work nearby. They can alert ERDs to any suspicious activity and help avoid threats. However, it is important to consider whether ERDs can tell others about their work, and this depends on the level of support and trust between an ERD and their neighbors. If an ERD does not feel confident that they can trust those who live or work near them, they should refrain from talking about their work.

## VISITORS

If there are visitors to the workplace then it is important to know exactly who they are and why they are there, especially if they are unexpected or the ERD has not met them before. If an ERD works in an office with CCTV cameras installed this can help ERDs screen visitors and also observe any potential threats that may come from outside. If CCTV cameras have been installed at a workplace, this can help screen visitors and allow ERDs to notice any potential threats coming from outside. However, in most instances, CCTV camera will not be available and it is recommended to keep doors locked, ask visitors for ID and not allow a person inside, until their identity has been verified. It is also particularly important when there are unexpected or unknown visitors to consider *what* is in the workspace (are there any sensitive documents or equipment in view?) as well as *who* is there (are there any at risk ERDs in the workspace?). If there is an unexpected or unknown visitor, pay attention to *what* is at the workplace (check if there are there any sensitive documents or equipment in view), as well as *who* is there (see if there are any at-risk ERDs at the workplace).

There should be clear communication regarding visitors, between everyone at a workplace. If there are any official visits expected, such as from immigration officials, it is important to alert others beforehand to prevent anxiety and alarm.

Visitors must always be supervised when in the workspace and not left alone—especially if they are not well known to the ERDs.



## SENSITIVE DOCUMENTS OR EQUIPMENT

ERDs must always ensure that any sensitive equipment or documents are stored safely when not in use—whether at an office, open community area or at home. If someone gains access to the workspace, loss and exposure of sensitive equipment or documents may not only put the ERD and those they work with at risk, but could mean losing all the work an ERD has done.

Ideally, an office should have a strong safe to store important equipment and sensitive documents. If a safe is not available then a secret place could be used to hide important equipment and sensitive documents. ERDs may prefer to keep sensitive equipment or documents on their person or at home. If they do so, they must be aware of the potential risk of losing their equipment or documents in case they are arrested or detained or if they simply misplace their belongings.

ERDs should also keep a list of all their documents and equipment. In the event of a break-in, such a list will allow ERDs to check which items have been taken and analyze its potential consequences. This will give them an idea of whether any sensitive information has been obtained by those who wish to target them.

## RAIDS BY AUTHORITIES

Many ERDs in the Greater Mekong Subregion have had their offices or homes raided by the authorities. It is important to consider this possibility, if there is any sign of an individual ERD or an organization is being targeted. To prepare for a possible raid it is important to ensure everything is organized. This will help keep sensitive documents and equipment secure or out of sight, and anything that is confiscated can be quickly identified. It is also important to know exactly where an organization's registration documents are kept. Authorities raiding an office may demand to see these documents and struggling to locate them under pressure is likely to cause stress and panic, and aggravate those carrying out the raid.

Another important point is to be aware of is the motivation of the authorities conducting a raid. Typically, the purpose of a raid is to find something that can be used to arrest an ERD or to incite fear. This makes it even more important to ensure that there is nothing at a workplace that can be used as evidence against an ERD or others. It is also important for ERDs to mentally and emotionally prepare for the possibility of a raid, should there be any signs it may be happen.

## ENTRY AND EXIT ROUTES

When thinking about the safety of a workplace, entry and exit routes are often not considered. If there is an attack, a raid or a fire, ERDs should know how to safely exit a place. It is therefore important to identify all possible exit routes, ensure that these are not dangerous and are accessible to everyone.

In an office building or residence, the entry route may be the only means to exit the workspace. This can make it difficult to avoid a potential risk and exit safely. In this case, it is important to identify contingency options such as moving to a safe room that can be locked from the inside, shutting down a phone or laptop in case of a raid or ensuring fire extinguishers are available to put out a fire. It is also important to prevent unauthorized persons from entering an office or residence—this means shutting outer doors when entering or leaving the workspace and telling others of any attempts to gain unauthorized entry.





## LOCATION

It is important to pay attention to the location of a workplace. If an ERD is working from home or in a community, they may not have many options for choosing where they work. However, if an ERD is part of an organization and has the authority to decide where an office is located, a few factors need to be considered. These include distance from medical services and how busy, isolated, or safe a neighborhood is.

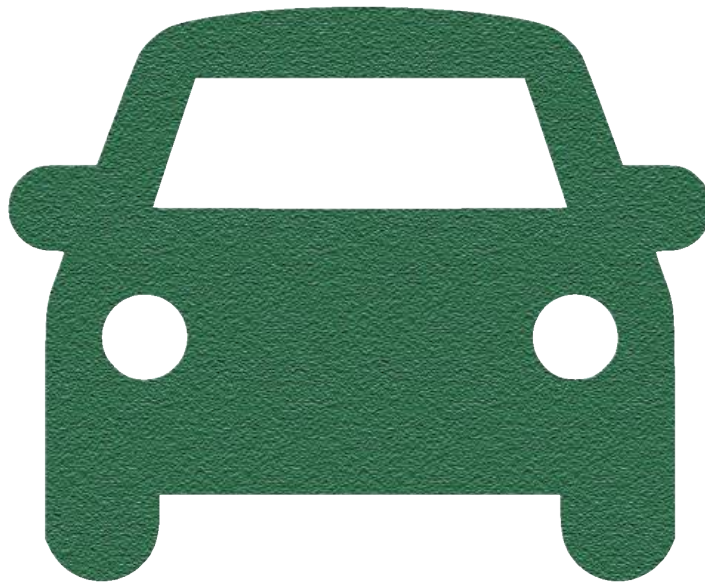
## SAFE SPACES

It is important to have a workplace that is a safe space to those that work there. Creating a safe space also means ensuring that it is an environment that is free from bullying, abuse and sexual harassment and measures are in place for everyone to feel safe and respected. When discussing security, these aspects are often overlooked. However, an office is a place where ERDs spend most of their time and it is essential to ensure that it is safe not just from outside threats but also safe for those who work there. Creating a safe space also means ensuring that no one is left alone at the workplace, especially late at night and when ERDs or their organization is being targeted.

### Summary of Key Learning Points

- ERDs should always practice situational awareness. They should consider their surroundings and take an interest in them – it is important to not just look, but to see, and to always be alert to what is going on.
- Security at the workplace:
  - ◊ Security equipment should be considered for the workspace if it is an office or a residence – this should consist of basic locks and a quality safe at minimum. Additional security equipment would provide further layers of protection if there is available funding.
  - ◊ It is important to have good relations with those that live or work in the vicinity of an ERD's workspace. They could potentially alert an ERD of any suspicious activity they notice, and help avert threats.
  - ◊ If people visit a workplace, it is important to know exactly who they are and why they are visiting, especially if they are unexpected or the ERDs have not met them before.
  - ◊ ERDs must always ensure sensitive equipment and documents are stored safely, whether they work at an office, in a community space or at home.
  - ◊ To prepare for a possible raid, it is important to ensure that everything is well organized and that sensitive documents and equipment are securely stored out of sight.
  - ◊ It is important to identify any possible exit routes and ensure that those routes are accessible and not hazardous.
  - ◊ When deciding where to set-up an office it is important to think about how far it will be from the nearest medical center, how isolated the neighborhood is, and how safe the local area is for those working at the office.
  - ◊ It is important that the office is not just safe from those outside, but also safe for those that work there. It should be an environment free from bullying, abuse and sexual harassment and that has concrete measures in place for all staff to feel safe and respected.





## SECURITY WHEN TRAVELLING

It is important that ERDs take their safety and security into consideration when travelling for work or any other purpose. This means carefully choosing their means of transport, travel route, accommodation and the equipment they plan to carry.

### VEHICLES

It is important to consider the various means of transportation that might be available, and to choose the safest option. For ERDs working at the local community level, this is likely to be a private car or motorbike. They may also use public transport or taxis.

When using a private vehicle, ERDs must ensure that it is in good condition and ready for the journey. This means checking the engine and ensuring there is enough fuel to reach the destination. This also applies to rented vehicles and even public transport. If an ERD is using a taxi or public transportation, it is essential to ensure that the driver is in a suitable condition for driving (i.e. not under the influence of drugs or alcohol). Furthermore, if a taxi is not from a well-known and trusted company then it should not be used.

When using a taxi or public transport, it is essential for ERDs to be careful about what they talk about. This not only includes what they say to the driver or their fellow passengers, but also what they say over the phone. ERDs should avoid talking about their work or any other issues that are considered problematic or likely to cause offense. They should not assume that those listening in will be supportive of them and their work.

If at any point in the journey an ERD becomes suspicious about a taxi driver, they should choose a safe location to end the journey and not continue to their planned destination.

### TRAVEL ROUTES

ERDs undertaking travel should always consider their travel routes carefully and identify any possible issues. This includes ensuring they familiarize themselves with the route before they set off on the journey, identifying possible places to stop and rest. This is especially important for long journeys. In case a certain route presents challenges such as poor road conditions, an alternative route should be identified.



## CHECKPOINTS

If you expect to encounter a checkpoint, it is useful to carry any documents you may be asked to present. This includes IDs and entry permits. It is important to keep them at a location you can easily access. It is also important to know what you will say to the authorities at the checkpoint. In some cases, it may be useful for ERDs to have a cover story, in case they are interrogated or questioned. A cover story is a false, but believable, story ERDs may tell to hide their identity or motivation for travel. However, if a false story is difficult to believe or unverifiable then it could potentially put ERDs at greater risk.

If an ERD encounters a checkpoint, either guarded by state authorities or by non-state actors, it is important to remain calm. If those at the checkpoint are armed, then ERDs should not make any sudden movements that suggest they pose a threat. It is also important to obey instructions and try to not make those manning the checkpoint annoyed or angry.

## COMMUNICATIONS

ERDs should inform their colleagues and families about their travel plans—including information about the route they are taking, the mode of transport, and their destination. ERDs should inform others of their expected time of arrival. They should also keep others informed about safety and in case they encounter any issues.

ERDs should also remember that rural areas may have weak phone or internet signals. They should identify such locations beforehand and inform others. Breaks in communication can affect their ability to keep others informed and cause stress and anxiety to the traveler and their colleagues or family.

## HOTELS AND GUESTHOUSES

If an ERD needs to stay at a hotel or guesthouse, they should choose a place in advance – ideally one that has previously been used and is considered safe. It is important to choose a place which is located in a safe area and is equipped with locks and a good quality safe, where sensitive documents and equipment can be stored. If a room does not have a safe, care should be taken to keep sensitive documents and equipment out of sight.

If there is a bolt lock installed on a door, it should be used. If there is an unexpected knock on the door, ERDs should verify the identity of the caller from the hotel reception, before opening the door.

When travelling, ERDs sometimes host meetings at the hotels or guesthouse where they are staying. This should be avoided, as it can endanger the safety of the place where an ERD is staying. If a person they are meeting is being monitored, an ERD can unknowingly put themselves at risk. If possible, ERDs should consider meeting people at a different hotel or guesthouse. Again, it is important that ERDs do not talk about their work or any sensitive or problematic issues in the presence of unknown people.

When staying in a hotel or guesthouse, it is useful for ERDs to familiarize themselves with the layout of the building and identify escape routes. This can help them avoid arrest and other potential threats.



## Summary of Key Learning Points

- Security when travelling:
  - ◇ Try to choose the safest mode of transport and always check the condition of the vehicle.
  - ◇ When using a taxi or public transport, it is essential to ensure the driver is fit to drive and the vehicle is operated by a trusted and well-known company.
  - ◇ When using public transport, ERDs should be careful about what they say. This includes what say to the driver and their fellow passengers, as well as what they say over the phone.
  - ◇ It is important to familiarize yourself with a route before setting off on a journey, and identify locations where it may be possible to stop and rest.
  - ◇ If you know that you will be encountering checkpoints, ensure that you have your documents ready and accessible. If you need to have a cover story, ensure that is believable and verifiable.
  - ◇ At checkpoints, be careful to not make any sudden movements, obey instructions and do not make those guarding the checkpoint angry or annoyed.
  - ◇ Share your travel plans with colleagues and family members, including the route you plan to take, the mode of transport and the destination.
  - ◇ Remember that in rural areas phone or internet signals may be lost.
  - ◇ Choose the hotel or guesthouse you will be staying at in advance. Ideally, you should choose places where you or your colleagues have previously stayed at and are generally considered safe. Ensure that rooms are equipped with decent locks and a safe where you can store sensitive documents and equipment.
  - ◇ Knowing the layout of a building and any escape routes may help evade arrest and other potential threats.





## COMMUNITY-BASED FIELD WORK

When undertaking community-based field work, ERDs are likely to be out in the open. In these situations, ERDs are likely to encounter a wide range of people. Usually, these are people who are supportive of their work, such as partners or community members they are interviewing. However, they may also encounter those who do not approve of their activities and want to stop their work. ERDs should therefore pay attention to their environment and those present there.

## DEVELOPING TRUST

When undertaking community-based field work, it is essential that ERDs build trust and develop good relations with individuals and communities they are trying to support. Doing so will not only enable ERDs to support them more effectively, but will also ensure their security.

If an ERD has a good relationship with a community they are working to support, the community is more likely to alert the ERD of any security incidents or potential threats. They may also provide assistance and practical support, in case of an incident.

## DATA COLLECTION

When doing community-based field work, it is important for ERDs to pay attention to what they are documenting. Writing down or storing sensitive information on an electronic device is likely to not only put the ERD at risk, but also those they are trying to support.

It is therefore advisable to not include names or addresses, when gathering data. To document their work safely, ERDs may consider using codes such as the first letter of a person's name.

### Summary of Key Learning Points

- Community-based field work
  - ◊ Building trust and developing good relations with individuals and communities is essential. This makes it more likely for them to alert ERDs of any security issues or potential threats.
  - ◊ When doing research, it is important that the data gathered does not include names and addresses as this may put an ERD or those they are supporting at risk.



## DEVELOPING A SECURITY PLAN FOR FIELD WORK

To develop a security plan for field work, it is important to first conduct a risk assessment as this will enable ERDs to identify potential threats as well as possible risk mitigation and contingency actions. A security plan should be a realistic document that is updated regularly, as situations often change. It should include the following elements:

- Context;
- Clear risk mitigation actions that can be taken to reduce the level of risk associated with any potential threats;
- Clear contingency actions that can be taken once a potential threat occurs;
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- Names and contact details of any actors that may be able to provide assistance should it be required;
- Resources and equipment required to prevent and respond to potential threats; and
- Clear timelines and communications procedures.

A security plan for field work does not need to be a long, detailed document but should be actionable so those involved can respond to threats effectively. A security plan for field work should guide you, your colleagues and your organization to reduce the level of risk when undertaking field work.

### Summary of Key Learning Points

- A security plan for field work should be a realistic document, which is updated regularly as situations often change
- A security plan for field work does not need to be a long and detailed document, but should be actionable and enable those involved to respond to threats effectively

## PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR

### Activities:

#### Activity 1: Identify measures to improve physical security in different settings

##### Instructions:

- Working in groups, participants should think about the ways in which they may be able to strengthen their physical safety and security in various settings. For example, at:
  - ◊ The office
  - ◊ At a hotel or guesthouse
  - ◊ While travelling
  - ◊ In the community
- Each group should focus on one setting and use flip-charts to list security measures they can take.
- Once they are finished, groups can share the security measures they listed and why they think those measures would help their physical security.



## Activity 2: Assessing the current setting

Instructions:

- Ask the participants to walk around the building in pairs and note down:
  - (a) any security measures that are in place
  - (b) what these measures might provide protection from
  - (c) additional measures that could be taken to strengthen security.
- Afterwards, the pairs should change and they should share their findings with their new partner.

## Activity 3: Planning a public protest

Instructions:

- Share the following scenario with participants on a hand-out:

SCENARIO:

You are a member of an NGO and are planning to organize a public event, in the downtown area of the capital city, to highlight your concerns over increasing investment in coal plants in your country. As a senior organizer for the event, you are expected to look into all aspects of planning, including logistics and security. You are aware that in the past, people from other organizations have faced challenges when holding such events and have even been detained and charged.

- Split the participants into groups of no more than six, and ask them to respond to the following questions:
  - ◊ What information should you have before the event?
  - ◊ What tools can you use to assess risk?
  - ◊ Where might you find information on the challenges and threats you may encounter?
  - ◊ At what point would you consider the risk to be too high to continue the protest?
  - ◊ What equipment should you be carrying?
  - ◊ Who should you contact prior to the event?
  - ◊ What factors make you and your colleagues vulnerable to being targeted by authorities?
    - ◊ Possible response may include: gender, previous detention, being known to local authorities.
- Once they have had time to discuss-ask them to share their answers with the rest of the group in plenary.





# 6

## ***WELLBEING AND SUSTAINABLE ACTIVISM***



**THE WELLBEING OF THOSE DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED.** It is essential for ERDs to be aware of how their work – and the threats they encounter – may impact their mental and physical health so that they can care for their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. Doing so they can help sustain activism over time.

ERDs often put the wellbeing of others ahead of themselves. They may think they need to sacrifice themselves for the good of the community and others whose fight they support. However, if ERDs do not take good care of themselves they will be more vulnerable to threats and intimidation. This may, in turn, further affect their wellbeing, potentially risking the health of their movement and community. ERDs who take care of their own mental and physical health, and the wellbeing of others, such as colleagues and allies, are better equipped to lead communities.

This section discusses why it is important for ERDs to care for their own wellbeing and how doing so, helps them sustain movements, build healthier communities and strengthen their holistic security.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

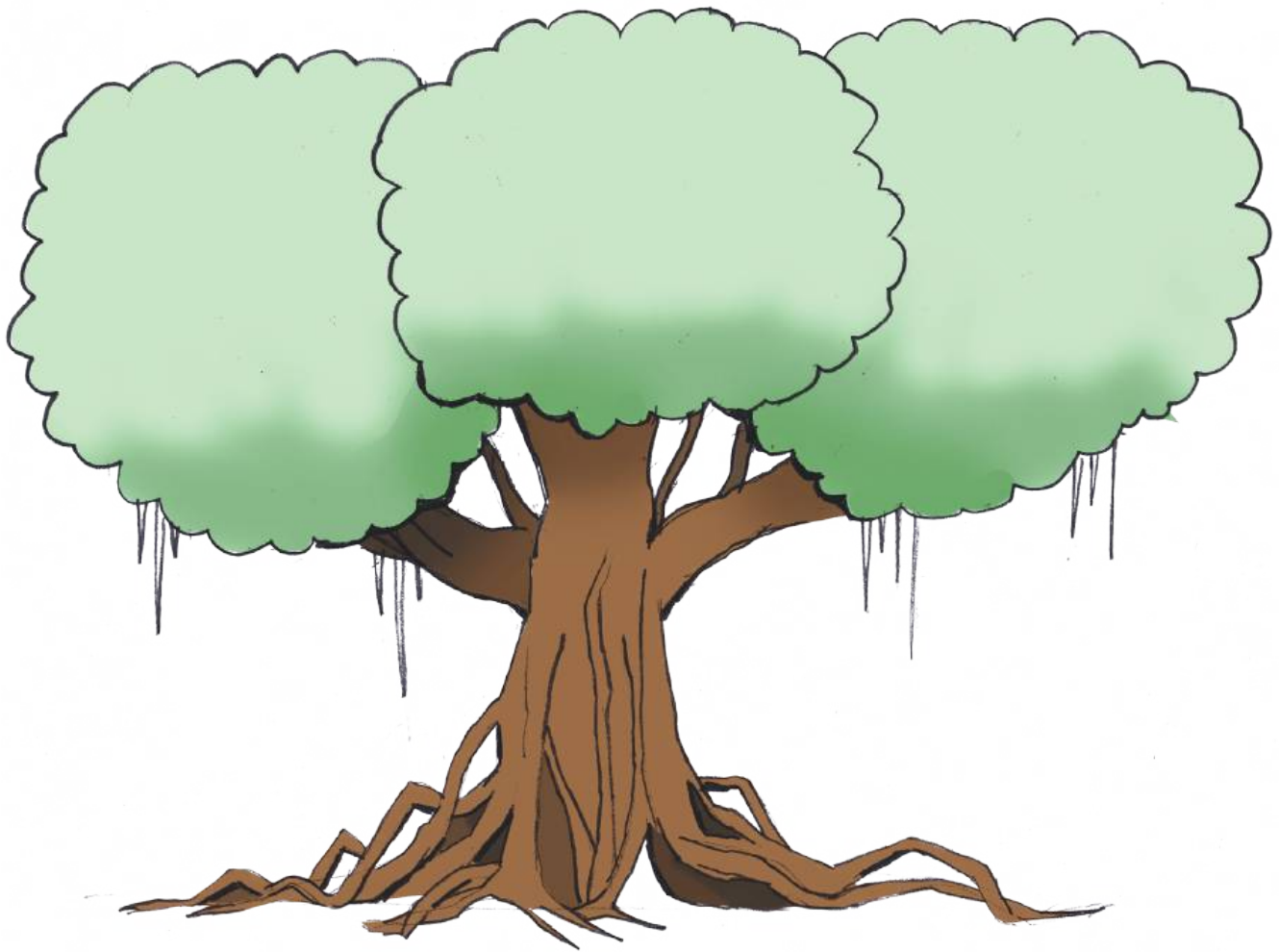
- Define wellbeing and discuss its relationship with sustainable activism
- Understand the importance of wellbeing for yourself, your community, and your movement
- Identify how stress and trauma affects ERDs and those around them, and explore and practice various methods of managing it
- Explore the impact of vicarious trauma and burnout

## RECOMMENDED READING

- [Human Rights Resilience Project](#)
- [Caring for yourself so you can keep defending human rights](#) by Amnesty International
- [Self-Care for People Experiencing Harassment](#) by Hollaback!
- [The Young Feminist Foundation self-care resources](#) by FRIDA
- [Strategies for building an organization with a soul](#) by Hope Chigudu and Rudo Chigudu
- [What's the point of revolution if we can't dance](#) by Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
- [Coping-with-Prison](#)
- [New Tactics in Human Rights: Self-Care for Activists: Sustaining Your Most Valuable Resource](#) by Center for Victims of Torture
- [Manual on Human Rights Monitoring: Trauma and Self-care](#) by UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
- [Activist self care and wellbeing](#) by Amnesty International Australia
- [Capacitar Emergency Kits of Best Practices](#) by Capacitar International
- [Sustainable Activism and Avoiding Burnout](#) by Activist Trauma Support
- [Staying Resilient while trying to Save the World](#) by Amnesty International
- [Psychosocial Well-being for Human Rights Defenders in the Philippines](#) by FORUM-ASIA

A summary of all recommended reading and additional information can be found in Annex 1.





## 6.1 WHAT IS WELLBEING AND SUSTAINABLE ACTIVISM?

For most ERDs, activism is not a choice, but a necessity. This is because the survival of the land and environment, and the communities that depend on them, are under threat. The wellbeing of ERDs can suffer as a result of the pressure that comes with the activism they undertake and the challenges they face. It may lead to illness, weaken their ability to carry out their activism, and affect their families and relationships.

**Wellbeing** can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

**Sustainable activism** can be understood to refer to the ability to continue and maintain undertaking activism over longer periods of time.

ERDs should aim to build strong and resilient movements to support one another. When ERDs have strong, resilient movements and feel they are supported it will help them continue to face the variety of challenges they encounter.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/measuring-wellbeing.pdf>

## 6.2 ASPECTS OF WELLBEING

This section aims to help us understand some of the different aspects of wellbeing and how they connect with each other. It also provides some general recommendations that may help improve our overall wellbeing which has been informed by working with ERDs, partners and the resources found in the recommended reading at the beginning of this section.

**It is important to note that the information found in this section should not be considered as professional healthcare advice. If there is concern about the wellbeing of yourself or another person then it is important to seek help from a trained healthcare professional.**

Our habits, cultural norms, or lack of time and resources may make it difficult for us to access professional help. However, whenever we do not seek help, we may negatively impact ourselves, our families, our communities, and the causes we stand for. Seeking help from healthcare professionals and receiving treatment when it is needed should be recognized as an act of courage and strength.

### PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Physical wellbeing is the ability to improve the functioning of our body through healthy living and good exercise habits.<sup>12</sup> Some things that might help our physical wellbeing include:

- Eating a healthy, balanced diet.
- Undertaking regular physical exercise.
- Getting adequate and restful sleep.
- Listening to your body to know when you need rest.

### MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Mental and emotional wellbeing refers to our thoughts and feelings and how we cope with life.<sup>13</sup> It helps us to be happy, at ease, and generally hopeful about our lives. Some things that might help our mental and emotional wellbeing include:

- Practicing mindfulness (meaning we maintain awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and surrounding environment).<sup>14</sup>
- Exploring new ways of thinking that promotes hope, positive thinking, confidence and trust.
- Reflecting on the positive things in our lives.
- Anticipating sources of stress and planning accordingly.
- Allowing ourselves to process any negative emotions we experience - such as anger, fear, frustration, sadness and disappointment.
- Undertaking healthy activities and practices that we enjoy and that support our mental and emotional wellbeing.
- Recognizing our accomplishments and when to 'switch-off' and take a break from our work.
- Having realistic expectations of ourselves, others and our work.
- Reminding ourselves of our purpose and motivation for the work we do and our purpose in life.
- Communicating how we feel and letting others know when we need support.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-happiness/201901/what-is-well-being-definition-types-and-well-being-skills>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.caba.org.uk/help-and-guides/information/what-mental-wellbeing#:~:text=Share,two%20can%20influence%20each%20other.>

<sup>14</sup> <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness/definition>



## SOCIAL WELLBEING

Social wellbeing refers to our ability to make and maintain meaningful positive relationships and regular contact with other people in our world – family, friends, neighbors and co-workers.<sup>15</sup>

Our relationships and social interactions contribute a great deal to our wellbeing. Healthy relationships enable us to feel appreciated and supported when we face challenges. When we have strong and positive relationships, we feel safe being who we are and expressing what we think and feel.

Healthy relationships are based upon a mutual respect for one another in which no one is being taken advantage of, manipulated, and/or abused. Healthy relationships provide us with a safe space in which to grow, develop confidence, and feel comfortable about ourselves. Some things that might help our social wellbeing include:

- Practicing empathy (our ability to understand another person's feelings and experiences) by listening fully and engaging with others with an open mind.
- Spending time with those that make us feel good about ourselves – such as our friends or family.
- Limiting our use of social media to acceptable levels that avoids work-related content and instead focuses on any positive personal relationships we have.
- Practicing cultural traditions and rituals that connect us to our communities and culture.
- Expressing ourselves and communicating honestly and respectfully about how we are feeling and our different needs.
- Expressing kindness, respect and gratitude in our relationships and with those we interact with.

The term **psychosocial wellbeing** is often used when referring to wellbeing. This refers to the close connection between psychological aspects of our experience (e.g., our thoughts, emotions, and behavior) and our wider social experience (e.g., our relationships, traditions and culture).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.wellbeingtherapyspace.com.au/social-wellbeing/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://inee.org/system/files/resources/INEE\\_Thematic\\_Issue\\_Brief\\_Psychosocial\\_2010\\_ENG\\_o.pdf](https://inee.org/system/files/resources/INEE_Thematic_Issue_Brief_Psychosocial_2010_ENG_o.pdf)



## 6.3 UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND TRAUMA

Understanding a little bit about the psychology behind stress and trauma can help us recognize when we or others may be experiencing it and may help us respond appropriately.

### STRESS

**Stress** is our body's response to pressures from a situation or life event.<sup>17</sup>

Despite popular belief, stress is not always bad. In fact, stress can be a motivational force. It encourages us to act, or react, in extreme situations and is therefore, key to our survival. However, stress, especially long-term stress, can also be harmful to our mental and physical wellbeing. It can make us feel overwhelmed or unable to cope with the pressures we are experiencing. Stress can lead to anxiety and physical illnesses which can negatively affect our body, mind, behavior, and relationships.

Everyone has a different physical, emotional, and behavioral reaction to stress. Taking care of our wellbeing is a self-reflective practice and it is important for us to identify how we are feeling and reflect on what in our environment, relationships, or behavior may be connected to it. Some symptoms of stress that are important to be aware of and to reflect on are outlined below:<sup>18</sup>

#### Physical symptoms

- Headaches or dizziness;
- Muscle tension;
- Stomach problems;
- Chest pain or a faster heartbeat;

#### Mental symptoms

- Difficulty concentrating;
- Struggling to make decisions;
- Feeling overwhelmed;
- Constantly worrying;
- Being forgetful.

#### Behavioral symptoms

- Feeling irritable and snappy;
- Sleeping too much or too little;
- Eating too much or too little;
- Avoiding certain places or people;
- Drinking or smoking more.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/understanding-stress/>



## TRAUMA

Trauma refers to the emotional and physical response during and after very stressful, frightening or upsetting events.<sup>19</sup> A person who has experienced trauma may feel:<sup>20</sup>

### Emotional and psychological responses

- Denial
- Anger
- Fear
- Sadness
- Shame
- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Numbness
- Guilt
- Hopelessness
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating

### Physical responses

- Headaches
- Digestive problems
- Fatigue
- Racing heart
- Sweating
- Feeling nervous

The mental health charity Mind provides useful guidance for those who have experienced trauma. [This link](#) will take you to relevant information about treatment and support for those experiencing trauma. It outlines various short-term and long-term strategies to help to respond to trauma. Often people cannot heal from trauma on their own and need support from trained healthcare professionals. This is normal and accessing professional support and treatment is important to a person's wellbeing.

A particularly important type of trauma that often affects those who work with people who have experienced human rights abuses and violations, is *vicarious trauma*. This refers to trauma resulting from hearing about someone else's traumatic experiences.<sup>21</sup> Despite not having experienced the trauma directly, vicarious trauma can have a very serious impact on the listener's wellbeing. Listeners may demonstrate the same physical and mental symptoms as someone experiencing trauma.

When trauma continues and/or has long-term effects on a person it is likely the trauma has become a mental health disorder called **post-traumatic stress disorder**—often referred to as PTSD.<sup>22</sup> This is a serious condition that requires support and treatment. Another issue that affects those working to defend human rights is **burnout**. This is when a person becomes emotionally, physically and mentally exhausted as a result of stress. Burnout typically makes a person feel overwhelmed and unable to cope with, or meet, responsibilities and demands.

When we undertake human rights work, we may experience stress or trauma and, if unmanaged, it can have a serious impact on our family and those around us.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/trauma/about-trauma/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/trauma#symptoms>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Chapter12-MHRM.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/trauma#definition>

## STIGMATIZATION

Stigmatization is when you are regarded with great disapproval and is a tactic that is increasingly being utilized across the world, by those who oppose the work of those defending human rights. As the law is typically perceived as offering protection to law-abiding members of society, criminalization and judicial harassment subsequently leads to stigmatization. This means that the peaceful work of ERDs is portrayed as wrong, unlawful and immoral. This results in negative attitudes and behaviors towards ERDs, potentially causing social isolation and harm. Stigmatization campaigns have been used to discredit the reputation of defenders, in order to legitimize criminalization charges they later face.

Stigmatization can affect both us and our family's wellbeing. To protect ourselves from the negative effects of stigmatization, we should always ensure our work is undertaken peacefully and respectably and that we make clear, evidenced and articulated arguments that justify our work. Acting alone may make us more vulnerable to stigmatization. It can instead help to work with mutual understanding and consent from our partners, community members, and family.

Stigmatization can be particularly harmful for women ERDs. In communities across the Greater Mekong Subregion, women typically have an important role in the household and often when they engage in activism, it is assumed that they are ignoring their domestic responsibilities. This may result in a lack of support and solidarity from friends, family and community, which can further affect their wellbeing. Preventing stigmatization of women ERDs requires a change in community attitudes. It is important to support women ERDs with their responsibilities and acknowledge their experiences.

## STRESS AND TRAUMA RESULTING FROM DETENTION

Imprisonment can have a devastating impact on the wellbeing of detained ERDs. The excessive stress experienced in detention can result in trauma. If there is a high risk of being arrested and detained it is recommended that you discuss the possibility of being detained with your colleagues and family and plan for maintaining your wellbeing in detention. Some people in your organization or community may have past experiences of being detained or arrested and it is useful to talk to them about their experiences to better prepare yourself for such a situation.

A valuable resource for human rights defenders that are detained (but also their families, lawyers and supporters) is [Coping-with-Prison.org](http://Coping-with-Prison.org) which offers guidance and inspiration. It is written and updated by defenders that have been detained in the past and those that care for, and work with, them.

If you are arrested or detained it will affect your family and those around you. As you have a role in your family, community or organization, your absence could mean that others may need to take over your responsibilities. It is also likely that there will be expenses associated with arrest and detention in the form of legal and medical fees and possibly, a reduction in household income. This can be a major source of stress for you and your family.

ERDs have reported that a common tactic used against them is to imprison them far away from home. This creates an extremely challenging situation for both the ERD and their family. The ERD's family members typically need and want to support the ERD while they are imprisoned but long, extensive travel to visit an ERD can be physically, emotionally and mentally draining and can also have financial implications for the family. It is therefore important to think about how an imprisoned ERD's family can be supported financially and emotionally.

This is another reason why it is so important for human rights defenders to have strong network of support. Having a good support network means you can provide emotional and financial support to each other and your families in times of difficulty, but also allows you to share experiences. Additionally, many support networks have linkages with international organizations that can provide emergency assistance to human rights defenders that are detained in the form of financial, legal, medical or other types of aid.



## ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

The resources within the *recommended reading* part of this section are useful for organizations to better understand wellbeing and can guide organizations to better support the wellbeing of their staff.

It is very important to note that while organizations may be able to provide support, ERDs whose wellbeing is suffering should seek advice from healthcare professionals. Organizations who wish to support their staff should help them to do so and make resources available to them which can be accessed confidentially.





## 6.4 SUGGESTED EXERCISES FOR IMPROVING YOUR WELLBEING

Below are descriptions of some suggested exercises for improving your wellbeing that expand on a few points identified earlier in this section. The content comes from *Capacitar International* – an organization that has been sharing trauma recovery and wellness practices for more than 30 years<sup>23</sup>:

### BREATHING

Breath is the source of life, bringing fresh energy into the tissues and cells to nourish the body, mind and the whole person. When we breathe out, accumulated stress and toxins are released. Breathing through a stressful time is an effective way to let go of the tension that accumulates in the body. A few long deep breaths at a difficult moment can completely change the way we handle a situation. Breathwork combined with images of light or nature can promote feelings of peace, calm and focus.

**Abdominal breathing exercise:** Sit comfortably supported and close your eyes. Breathe deeply and center yourself, letting go of all worries and thoughts. Place your hands on your abdomen, breathe in deeply through your nose and imagine the air moving down through the body into your center within your abdomen. Imagine that your abdomen fills with air as if it were a balloon. Hold your breath for a few moments and then exhale slowly through your mouth, contracting the muscles of your abdomen, letting go of all the tension in your body. Continue abdominal breathing for several minutes. If thoughts come into your mind, gently release them, returning to the image of the air moving in and out of your body.

**Breathing in nature exercise:** Nature is a great resource for healing and grounding. With feet on the ground, breathe in deeply imagining that your feet are long roots running into the earth. Breathe in earth energy, breathe out stress, tension and pain.

### FINGERHOLDS TO MANAGE EMOTIONS

The following practice is a simple way to work with emotions by holding each finger. Emotions and feelings are like waves of energy moving through the body and mind. Each finger is connected with an organ system and related emotions. With strong or overwhelming feelings, energy can become blocked or repressed, resulting in pain or congestion in the body. Holding each finger while breathing deeply can bring emotional and physical release and healing.

The fingerholds are a very helpful tool to use in daily life. In difficult or challenging situations when tears, anger or anxiety arise, the fingers may be held to bring peace, focus and calm so that the appropriate response or action may be taken. The practice may also be done for relaxation with music, or used before going to sleep to release the problems of the day and to bring deep peace to body and mind. The practice may be done on oneself or on another person.

**Fingerhold practice exercise:** Hold each finger with the opposite hand 2-5 minutes. You can work with either hand. Breathe in deeply; recognize and acknowledge the strong or disturbing feelings or emotions you hold inside yourself. Breathe out slowly and let go. Imagine the feelings draining out your finger into the earth. Breathe in a sense of harmony, strength and healing. And breathe out slowly, releasing past feelings and problems. Often as you hold each finger, you can feel a pulsing sensation as the energy and feelings move and become balanced. You can hold the fingers of someone else who is angry or upset.



## A CULTURE OF 'COLLECTIVE' CARE

While you can do things to help your own individual wellbeing - typically referred to as 'self-care' - it is especially important to recognize the need to have a culture of 'collective' care.

The popular understanding of 'self-care' focuses on an individual's responsibility and behavior to improve their wellbeing. Wellbeing is connected to cultures and systems that may prevent people with marginalized identities from accessing and performing the care that they need. For example, an indigenous land rights activist might find challenges to 'self-care' because a company has taken away their ability to grow food on their land - negatively impacting their access to food and their financial security. The activist might also live far away from a hospital or health-care center where they might be able to access advice and treatment. Therefore, the activist will not be able to practice 'self-care' in the same way as someone with more privileges can.

In referring to a culture of 'collective' care, a 'collective' may refer to an organizing, activism, or community group. This may be a formalized group in the form of an organization, or it might be informal in the case of a loosely structured working group. Multiple 'collectives' may exist and we can be a part of many at the same time. No matter what the 'collective' looks like, the reason it is emphasized is to encourage ERDs to think and approach problems that affect not just themselves, but others that are part of a 'collective'.

In a culture of 'collective' care, the wellbeing of ERDs should be the responsibility of multiple actors and systems and not only individuals. It should take into account an analysis of the country's systems and policies that impact upon the wellbeing and access to healthcare of communities and individuals.

Caring for wellbeing should not be an individual and isolated approach – but rather one in which the responsibility is shared. Different actors that could support a culture of 'collective' care may include:

- Employers and their organizational policies (ensuring fair wages, fair working hours, and access to healthcare benefits, respecting work boundaries);
- Family members (supporting with domestic work, family care);
- Other activists and friends (creating safe sharing/listening spaces, building support systems);
- Funders (acknowledging the self-care needs of activists and its place in financial agreements, e.g., costs associated with psychosocial needs).

It is often the case that ERDs do not take sufficient time to address their wellbeing and they may feel guilty about taking time to look after themselves. It is important for a culture of 'collective' care to be developed because it creates a sense of responsibility for each other's wellbeing. We should take care of our own and others' wellbeing because every human being has the right to enjoy the highest standard of health that enables them to live a life in dignity.<sup>24</sup> In addition, ERDs that look after their wellbeing and the wellbeing of others are more resilient, efficient and

effective in their work.

24 <https://undocs.org/E/C.12/2000/4>







## 6.5 SUGGESTED APPROACHES TO SUPPORT THE WELLBEING OF ERDS

Below you'll find a number of suggested approaches that could be undertaken to support the wellbeing of ERDs and their families, and to build a stronger culture of collective care in a community. This is not an exhaustive list but should give you ideas on how to better understand and support the wellbeing of others:

- Consider holding trainings, or connecting with those that provide trainings, for ERDs, communities and organizational staff to better understand issues related to wellbeing - including those related to gender;
- Promote access to professional medical, psychological, and other support service providers that may help promote wellbeing;
- Identify and engage counsellors so they are able to provide support to those that require it;
- Consult with family members of detained people and provide them with emotional and/or financial support, information and involvement with any efforts to get their relatives released;
- Support family members, and other relevant persons, to visit people in detention - especially where long distance travel is involved;
- Engage with the community to ensure they understand the importance, value and work that ERDs undertake;
- Consider raising, or dedicating, funds to support ERDs that find themselves detained;
- Create, or join, support networks in order to offer solidarity among ERDs and share experiences, learning and best practices;
- Identify providers of emergency assistance to human rights defenders.

When you and fellow Earth Rights Defenders feel well and are united you will stand stronger together in the face of challenges and threats. Looking after your wellbeing and the wellbeing of others is very important - it will help you sustain your efforts to defend the land and environment and do so more effectively.





## Summary of Key Learning Points

- Wellbeing can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole.
- Sustainable activism can be understood to refer to the ability to continue and maintain undertaking activism over longer periods of time.
- Physical wellbeing is the ability to improve the functioning of our body through healthy living and good exercise habits.
- Mental and emotional wellbeing refers to our thoughts and feelings and how we cope with life.
- Social wellbeing refers to our ability to make and maintain meaningful positive relationships and regular contact with other people in our world – family, friends, neighbors and co-workers.
- The term psychosocial wellbeing is used to refer to the close connection between psychological aspects of our experience (e.g., our thoughts, emotions, and behavior) and our wider social experience (e.g., our relationships, traditions and culture).
- Stress is our body's response to pressures from a situation or life event. Trauma refers to the emotional and physical response during and after very stressful, frightening or upsetting events.
- A particularly important type of trauma that often affects those working with people that have experienced human rights abuses and violations is vicarious trauma. This refers to trauma resulting from hearing about someone else's traumatic experiences.
- When trauma continues and/or has long-term effects on a person it is likely the trauma has become a mental health disorder called post-traumatic stress disorder – often referred to as PTSD.
- Burnout is when a person becomes emotionally, physically and mentally exhausted as a result of stress.
- Stigmatization is when you are regarded with great disapproval and is increasingly a tactic utilized by those who oppose the work of HRDs across the world.
- ERDs should not just place the responsibility of care on themselves but should instead develop a culture of 'collective' care.
- When Earth Rights Defenders feel well and are united, they can stand stronger together in the face of challenges and threats.



## **PROPOSED GUIDANCE FOR FACILITATOR**

### **Activities**

#### **Activity 1: Breathing Exercise and Wellbeing Ritual**

- Wellbeing rituals are the actions that we do for grounding. They can be very simple things, like combing one's hair while breathing or stretching before bed. The key is the repetition so that the body and mind associate the actions with peace. Rituals will help maintain our mental health during difficult times. In this workshop, simple gestures and breathing are introduced. It is to be repeated often throughout the training.

##### Instructions:

- The facilitator will explain what wellbeing rituals are.
- Facilitator asks participants to check in with their body and become aware of how they are sitting.
- Ask participants to sit in an "open posture": shoulders rolled back, back straight, and neck in a position that enables breathing (Chin pointed gently downward).
- Participants raise their arms and breathe in. Lowering their arms, they breathe out. Repeat a few times, slowly.
- End by rubbing their palms together so that their hands are warm. Choose a part of their body to place the warm palms on (Face, arms, legs, neck, etc.).
- Ask participants to stay in touch with themselves and observe any shifts in their body.

##### Debrief/Questions

- How do you feel after this exercise?



## Activity 2: How does wellbeing matter to ERDs?

### Instructions:

Participants stand in a circle. One by one, ask participants to describe something they do to take care of their wellbeing and relax.

### Debrief/Questions

- In partners, participants should discuss:
  - ◊ How does wellbeing matter to you as an activist? (5 min)
  - ◊ What were some situations in which you wanted care and support from other activist friends? Were they able to provide that support? (5 min)
- In the large group debrief: (15-20 min)
  - ◊ What came up as a common theme between you and your partner?
  - ◊ What did you learn about the relationship between wellbeing and activism? Why is this important for your work?
    - ◊ Possible Answers may include -- When our wellbeing suffers, it may affect our activism by causing irritation & anger. Projecting our irritation and anger onto others can affect our relationships and how we work with our community.
    - ◊ We may be less creative and more fatigued, leading to feelings of hopelessness which will also impact our colleague's morale and the morale of the overall movement.
    - ◊ It may lead to insecurity. When we are very tired, we may be more prone to being insecure in our work and who we are, which may leave us feeling unfulfilled. This may lead us to make decisions out of insecurity that are not for the community's benefit, but to fulfil our own insecurity. For example, this may lead us to want to exclude people who make us feel insecure from important conversations, even though it is in the movement's best interest.
  - ◊ What can make us emotionally/physically unhealthy in our work as earth rights defenders? What are the personal challenges to wellbeing that earth rights defenders face?
    - ◊ Possible Answers--feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, depression, isolation, anger, frustration; fear (of security risks, threats, intimidation, harassment, violence); stress, anxiety, low confidence; exhaustion, burnout; health problems; absorbing the suffering and pain of the people we are helping; bearing witness to violations that are close to us (inflicted on people we know, or people like us); no time for family or friends; live or work far away from loved ones; unsupportive family or friends; financial difficulties; no money to support family; being stigmatized as a way to delegitimize and discredit the work of earth rights defenders

### Discussion Questions

- Have you heard of the term "self-care"? What do you think it is? What things come to mind when you hear the term?
- What might make self-care difficult to access or do, especially for activists?
- Who do you think is responsible for self-care and our wellbeing?



## Information for facilitator

- It is important not only to teach the content about wellbeing, but to integrate wellbeing practices into this module while facilitating so participants are exposed to and can practice the skills and self-reflection that is required for taking care of their wellbeing.
- Wellbeing may be a sensitive topic for participants, particularly if they have experienced trauma in their lives or are uncomfortable sharing with others. It is very important that participants feel comfortable with any activity before undertaking it. Ensure that enough breaks are taken, and that a safe space is created so that all voices and experiences can be listened to and valued. One way to make a safe space is to introduce the concept of deep listening and listening with one's heart. In order to do this, the facilitator should ask participants what makes them feel good when they talk about important things to their friends. List the answers on the board.
- It is essential to emphasize the importance of confidentiality, listening with a non-judgmental attitude, and not interrupting or rushing to give advice.
- It is worth noting that some participants may be more receptive to the proposed activities outlined above while others may not. If possible, try to determine the most appropriate activity for participants and adapt it to the participants that are receiving the training.





## ANNEX 1: RECOMMENDED READING

- [Fighting Back: A Global Protection Strategy for Earth Rights Defenders](#) by EarthRights
- [Women Lead the Fight Blog](#) by EarthRights
- [Land and environmental defenders: annual report archive](#) by Global Witness
- [Front Line Defenders Global Analysis \(2019\)](#) by Front Line Defenders
- [The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders \(English\)](#) by UN General Assembly
- [\(Burmese\) \(Thai\) \(Karen\) \(Mon\) \(Lao\) \(Shan\) \(Vietnamese\) \(Chinese\)](#)
- [Human Rights Defenders: Protecting the Right to Defend Human Rights \(Fact Sheet No. 29\)](#) by Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- [Defenders at Risk](#) by Swedwatch
- [The Gender at Work Framework](#) by Gender at Work
- [Gender at Work Framework Webinar](#) by UN Women Training Centre
- [New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders](#) by Protection International
- [Holistic Security Training Manual](#) by Tactical Technology Collective
- [Integrated Security: The Manual](#) by The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
- [Surveillance Self-Defense \(SSD\)](#) by Electronic Frontier Foundation
- [Security in a box](#) by Tactical Technology Collective and Front Line Defenders
- [Digital Security Helpline](#) by Access Now
- [Instruments of Repression](#) by FORUM-ASIA
- [Fighting To Exist: Legislative Protection For Human Rights Defenders In Asia](#) by The International Service for Human Rights
- [Criminalization of Human Rights Defenders](#) by Protection International
- [The chilling effect of threats, violence and criminalization](#) by Forest Peoples Programme
- [Attacks and criminalization of indigenous human rights defenders: report](#) by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples
- [Security Guidelines for field research in complex, remote and hazardous places](#) by International Institute of Social Studies
- [Security Risk Management: A basic guide for smaller NGOs](#) by European Interagency Security Forum
- [Human Rights Resilience Project](#)
- [Caring for yourself so you can keep defending human rights](#) by Amnesty International
- [Self-Care for People Experiencing Harassment](#) by Hollaback!
- [The Young Feminist Foundation self-care resources](#) by FRIDA
- [Strategies for building an organization with a soul](#) by Hope Chigudu and Rudo Chigudu
- [What's the point of revolution if we can't dance](#) by Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights
- [Coping-with-Prison](#)
- [New Tactics in Human Rights: Self-Care for Activists: Sustaining Your Most Valuable Resource](#) by Center for Victims of Torture
- [Manual on Human Rights Monitoring: Trauma and Self-care](#) by UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
- [Activist self care and wellbeing](#) by Amnesty International Australia
- [Capacitar Emergency Kits of Best Practices](#) by Capacitar International
- [Sustainable Activism and Avoiding Burnout](#) by Activist Trauma Support
- [Staying Resilient while trying to Save the World](#) by Amnesty International
- [Psychosocial Well-being for Human Rights Defenders in the Philippines](#) by FORUM-ASIA



## ANNEX 2: RISK ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE

RISK ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE								
POTENTIAL THREATS AND ASSOCIATED RISKS	VULNERABILITIES	CAPACITIES	LIKELIHOOD (Low/Medium/High)	IMPACT (Low/Medium/High)	RISK LEVEL	RISK MITIGATION ACTION	CONTINGENCY ACTION	
Authorities conduct an office raid and seize sensitive documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Your office has no locks on the doors.</li> <li>- Sensitive documents are not usually stored away securely.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You have partners that can help install security equipment for the office.</li> <li>- You have an unused safe.</li> </ul>	Low	Medium	Low/Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with partners to install locks for the office doors</li> <li>- Store documents considered sensitive in the unused safe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify any confiscated equipment or documentation</li> <li>- Inform colleagues and partners of any sensitive information that has been seized</li> </ul>	

## ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

### SECTION 1: EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS

**Arbitrary:** An action or a decision that is not based on reason or judgment but on personal choice, without regard to evidence, rules or standards.

**Intersectionality:** A framework that allows us to analyze, understand, and respond to the way each person's various identities connect and shape their unique experience with oppression and privilege. Examples of various identities include gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic class, (dis)ability status, and age.

**Earth Rights Defender (ERD):** An ERD is someone who defends land and environmental rights.

**Human Rights Defender (HRD):** An HRD is a person who promotes and protects internationally recognized standards of human rights.

**Non-state Actors:** Individuals or groups who are not government officials and may include private businesses and their employees, such as security personnel.

**Patriarchal:** Relating to patriarchy, a social system in which men control most power and resources and hold most roles of political leadership, moral authority and social privilege.

**State Actors:** Individuals or groups employed by the government, such as police and members of other security forces, government officials and judges.

**Stigmatization:** Being regarded with great disapproval and is a tactic that is increasingly being utilized across the world, by those who oppose the work of HRDs.

### SECTION 2 SECURITY STRATEGIES & RISK ASSESSMENT

**Capacities:** Strengths or factors that reduce the likelihood of a threat occurring or its impact. Examples of capacities may be strong knowledge of the legal system, the use of secure communications, or support networks.

**Contingency actions:** Reactive measures that you take once a threat has occurred.

**Impact:** The level of harm there will be if a threat were to occur..

**Holistic security:** An integrated approach to security involving physical security, digital security and psychosocial wellbeing.

**Likelihood:** The probability of a threat materializing. For example, the likelihood of being detained during a public protest might be higher than the likelihood of being detained when you are working on a report in the office.

**Mitigation actions:** Preventative measures that can be taken to reduce the likelihood of a threat occurring or the level of risk.

**Raid:** An unexpected entry of police or security forces at a place to search for something or someone.

**Risk:** The potential harm faced by an individual or group - typically as a direct result of a threat. Examples of risks include the possibility of being injured or killed as a result of a physical attack, the potential of confidential data being exposed because it has been stolen, or experiencing stress or 'burnout' as a result of being harassed or intimidated.

**Risk assessment:** A process through which potential threats can be identified and measured against capacities and vulnerabilities, to assess the level of risk faced by an individual or group.



**Security strategy:** A plan of action aimed at protecting an individual or group's physical, digital or psychosocial integrity.

**Threat:** Anything that may harm an individual or group's physical, digital or psychosocial safety and wellbeing, examples include the threat of physical attack, data theft, or harassment and intimidation.

**Vulnerabilities:** Weaknesses or factors that increase the likelihood of a threat occurring or its impact. Examples of vulnerabilities may include a lack of knowledge of the legal system, the absence of secure communication devices, or working alone, without a support network.

## SECTION 3: DIGITAL SECURITY

**Anti-virus or anti-malware:** Software that provides security and protection from malicious software.

**App-lock:** A feature in some mobile phone apps, requiring an additional password or pin to access the app.

**Encryption:** The process of hiding data by changing it to an unrecognizable form such as a code. Encryption is commonly used to protect sensitive information, so only those with permission can access it. It is used to secure data over wireless networks and the internet.

**Malware:** Malicious software that has been designed to harm, disable, or use a digital device and its content without the user's permission.

**Security indicators:** Anything out of the ordinary that may impact our security.

**Software:** Computer programs that enable users to perform specific tasks.

**Spyware:** A type of malware or malicious software that enables attackers to spy on the user of a device.

**Trojan:** An attack on a system which delivers malicious software - often as a result of clicking on a link or downloading other software.

**Two-factor authentication:** A method for improving the security of online accounts including email and social media accounts, by adding an extra layer of security in the sign-in process and requiring a user to input another code, after they have entered their password.

**Phishing:** A method used by digital attackers to trick a person into sharing their account details, passwords or other sensitive information.

**Virtual private network (VPN):** A means to encrypt internet activity and hide the geographical location from where a device connecting to the internet (its IP address).

## SECTION 4: THE CRIMINALIZATION & JUDICIAL HARASSMENT OF EARTH RIGHTS DEFENDERS

**Arbitrary:** An action or a decision that is not based on reason or judgment but on personal choice, without regard to evidence, rules or standards.

**Coerce:** To convince an unwilling person to do something by using force or threats.

**Criminalization:** The manipulation or changing of laws to make legitimate activities illegal.

**Defamation:** The action of damaging someone's reputation.

**Incitement:** In criminal law, incitement is encouraging another person to commit a crime.





**Judicial harassment:** The use of the legal system by a powerful state or non-state actor, to intimidate or silence a person by involving them in long, expensive and stressful legal proceedings.

**Manipulation:** To skillfully manage or change something, usually with intent to deceive someone

## SECTION 5: PHYSICAL SECURITY

**Situational awareness:** Refers to the practice of knowing our environment, being aware of where we are and what is going on around. It also means knowing who is around, why they are there and what they are doing.

## SECTION 6: WELLBEING AND SUSTAINABLE ACTIVISM

**Collective-care:** A culture where multiple actors come together to care for the wellbeing of an individual and a community. These actors may include employers, family members, other activists, funders etc.

**Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** A mental health disorder resulting from trauma that continues over time and/or has long-term effects on a person.

**Psychosocial wellbeing:** Psychological and emotional wellbeing and how it connects to social factors.

**Self-care:** The practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, especially during times of stress

**Stress:** The human body's response to pressures from a situation or life event.

**Sustainable activism:** Activism that can be carried out over time.

**Trauma:** The emotional and physical response during and after very stressful, frightening or distressing events. Vicarious trauma: A type of trauma resulting from hearing about someone else's traumatic experiences.





