

Organisations under pressure but powering on - the psychosocial approach within integrated management of threat

A model for human rights organisations and donor organisations



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Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
1.1	What are we talking about?.....	7
2	Recommendations for dealing with the psychosocial impacts of threat as part of integrated threat management.....	9
2.1	Sensitisation.....	11
2.2	Analysis and assessment.....	15
2.3	Measures.....	20
2.4	Mainstreaming in the organisation.....	28
2.5	Reflection and adjustment.....	32
3	And the process continues... ..	36
4	Further reading and references.....	37

1. Introduction

“We received a threat”, “They are criminalising our partner organisation”, “I feel exhausted sometimes” – human rights organisations (HROs) working in violent contexts have to deal with threats as part of their everyday routine. Donor organisations that support threatened HROs are also confronted with this situation.

This guide is the result of a collective process which we hope will help threatened HROs and their donor organisations to answer questions like these: How do threats affect us? How can we deal more effectively with their impacts? How can we help our partner organisations to manage these threats?

Threats have impacts on the personal as well as the work lives of human rights defenders, causing stress, physical and emotional exhaustion, fear, feelings of guilt towards their families or conflicts within the team. There are various measures to confront a situation of threat but it is essential to make a proper assessment of which measures may help.

For example, a padlock or a safe to protect sensitive information in the office is of little use if we are worried that our cell phone conversations are being intercepted. For some people, an incident protocol can minimise the feeling of impotence but for others, it is just a measure of physical security. A bodyguard may be a good option, but if he is present in all areas of a female human rights defender’s everyday life, behaving in a patriarchal way, what at first seemed like a good measure becomes a burden or an additional threat.

All dimensions of dealing with threat therefore have to be considered, including the interconnections between different areas and levels – in other words, the integrality of threat management. In this publication, the integrated management of threats refers to the physical, digital and psychosocial dimensions, always taking into account the particular needs of human rights defenders. We consider the psychosocial approach to be a lens or prism through which we can perceive reality and from which we can derive psychosocial measures.

Based on these considerations, the questions guiding this publication are: **How can we deal with the psychosocial impacts of threat in HROs in order to achieve integrated management of threat? Which options are there for donor organisations to support this process?**

This guide is intended to complement existing publications, some of which we mention throughout this document. Rather than repeating what has been said before, we provide links to further reading which may be helpful. The model that we have developed offers options for integrated management of threat for HROs and the organisations supporting and funding them and consists of recommendations for various moments and fields of action. These recommendations are not exhaustive; rather, they are suggestions of how it can be done. They are understood as contributions which elaborate or strengthen what organisations already do or have.

The recommendations reflect what has been learned through a collective process in 2016, which was conceived with the goal

of strengthening the resilience of HROs which are working in violent contexts and are threatened. The project *Dealing with threat and risk on a psychosocial level within human rights organisations* (Spanish abbreviation: MAPA) was initiated and coordinated by the Berghof Foundation with input and advice from ALUNA, a Mexican organisation specialising in psychosocial accompaniment. MAPA brought together participants from nine HROs in Mexico, Colombia and Honduras and from five German donor organisations. The recommendations were compiled by the authors.

Over a seven-month period, three workshops took place with HROs and one workshop was held with donor organisations. We explored the challenges of incorporating the management of the psychosocial impacts of threat into the organisations' thinking, attitudes, structures and work routines. In the process, we reflected on what helps and hinders its integration. Besides the obvious factor of not having enough time or resources, we discovered underlying factors and different ways to overcome this resistance.

After a collective analysis of the violence and threats that they are confronted with in their countries and an introduction to the psychosocial approach, each HRO designed an action plan. While the organisations were implementing and adapting their respective plans, we engaged in shared reflection on the achievements and challenges associated with this process.

As an organisation specialising in conflict transformation, the Berghof Foundation considers it essential to maintain the space for action by change agents such as HROs in contexts of high social and political violence. The learning process underlying this publication took place in contexts of high levels of armed social violence. The situations in which the HROs work show similar patterns of violence and human rights violations. Their scope for action is diminished – through threats, criminalisation and stigmatisation. Managing threat in an integrated manner within HROs means strengthening the organisation and expanding their space for action.

The HROs which were part of this process work on a variety of human rights issues: land rights/ resistance to land grabbing, support for victims of armed conflict, LGBTI, peacebuilding, and communication. They also show considerable diversity in terms of their time in existence and level of consolidation, types of leadership and management, political orientation and culture. They are characterised by generational and structural diversity and were balanced with regard to gender and age. The governmental and non-governmental donor organisations that participated maintain various types of relationships with the organisations they fund, ranging from short-term project funding to long-term support.

We hope this publication will serve as inspiration for HROs and donor organisations as they develop their own specific form of integrated threat management together with their partners.

1.1 What are we talking about?

What do we mean when we talk about managing the psychosocial impacts of threats as part of integrated threat management?

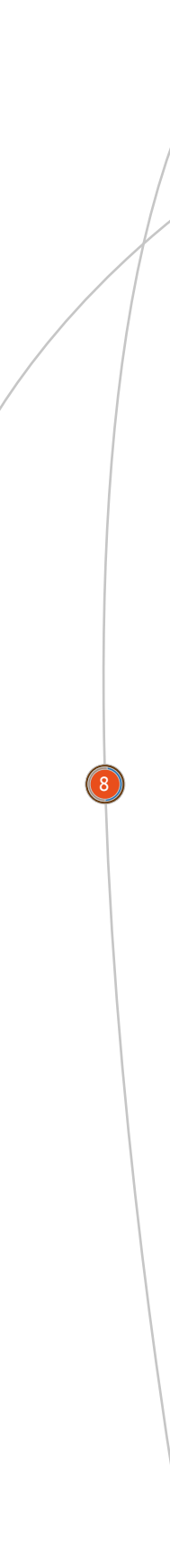
The departure point is that many HROs work in difficult situations: they are threatened and their members are and feel at risk. Working under constant threat changes the behaviour of the individual and the dynamics of the organisation. Although it is not always possible to confront the threat directly, what we can do is manage its psychosocial impacts.

Psychosocial impacts of threats are, for example, when people are afraid or feel impotent or guilty because their families are worried about them. These impacts can be conscious or not. **Coping with impacts** in a conscious manner helps people to feel better and able to continue to do good work although the threat persists. Moreover, given that the vision of many organisations is to change the difficult situation in which they work, it is very important to be able to *act* on the impacts of the threats in these contexts instead of *reacting* without reflection.

Many times when we take decisions regarding security, we focus at first on the technical aspect of security and leave the emotional part for later. Through the lens of the psychosocial approach, we can make visible and consciously deal with the impacts of threats on emotional wellbeing, as much at the individual as at the organisational level.

What is the **psychosocial approach**? The psychosocial approach, as defined by ALUNA, is a lens that allows us to see and understand the impacts of violence against human rights defenders at a personal, organisational and social level. Through the psychosocial approach, these impacts are perceived and understood within the socio-political context. The approach seeks to strengthen the coping mechanisms that individuals have in order to be able to continue with their life projects. Based on this approach, we identified options for consciously and collectively dealing with the psychosocial impacts of threats.

What does **psychosocial** mean? The term psychosocial in this context refers to the psyche of the individual (psycho) in relation to its



surroundings (social) and makes visible their interconnections. If, for example, members of the team feel frustrated due to threats they receive, at an organisational level this can cause destructive dynamics within the team. If we manage this frustration together within the team, we can change the dynamics.

In order to **manage threats in an integrated manner**, we can draw on various dimensions, such as the physical, the digital and the psychosocial dimension. Although we take the physical and digital dimensions into account, this publication focuses on the psychosocial. Threat management can occur at various levels which influence each other: at the individual level, the family level, in the organisation as a whole, at the community level, in networks of organisations, and at the societal level. This publication focuses on the organisational level of HROs and donor organisations.

The search for integrated management of threat, and hence the integration of a psychosocial approach into it, is never a linear process. It is, rather, a circular and collective process that depends on the context in which the HRO operates and on its members' individual perceptions.

2. Recommendations for dealing with the psychosocial impacts of threat as part of integrated threat management

How does an organisation begin to deal with threat in an integrated manner, and how can donor organisations support this process? We offer a model, based on experience with the MAPA process, that contemplates different fields of action and the interconnections between HROs and donor organisations.

The recommendations made in this publication on integrated management of threat are mainly focused on dealing with its psychosocial impacts, while aspects of physical and digital security are briefly mentioned, with links to publications which explain them thoroughly. We would recommend always keeping in mind all the various aspects of an integrated management because they are closely interrelated.

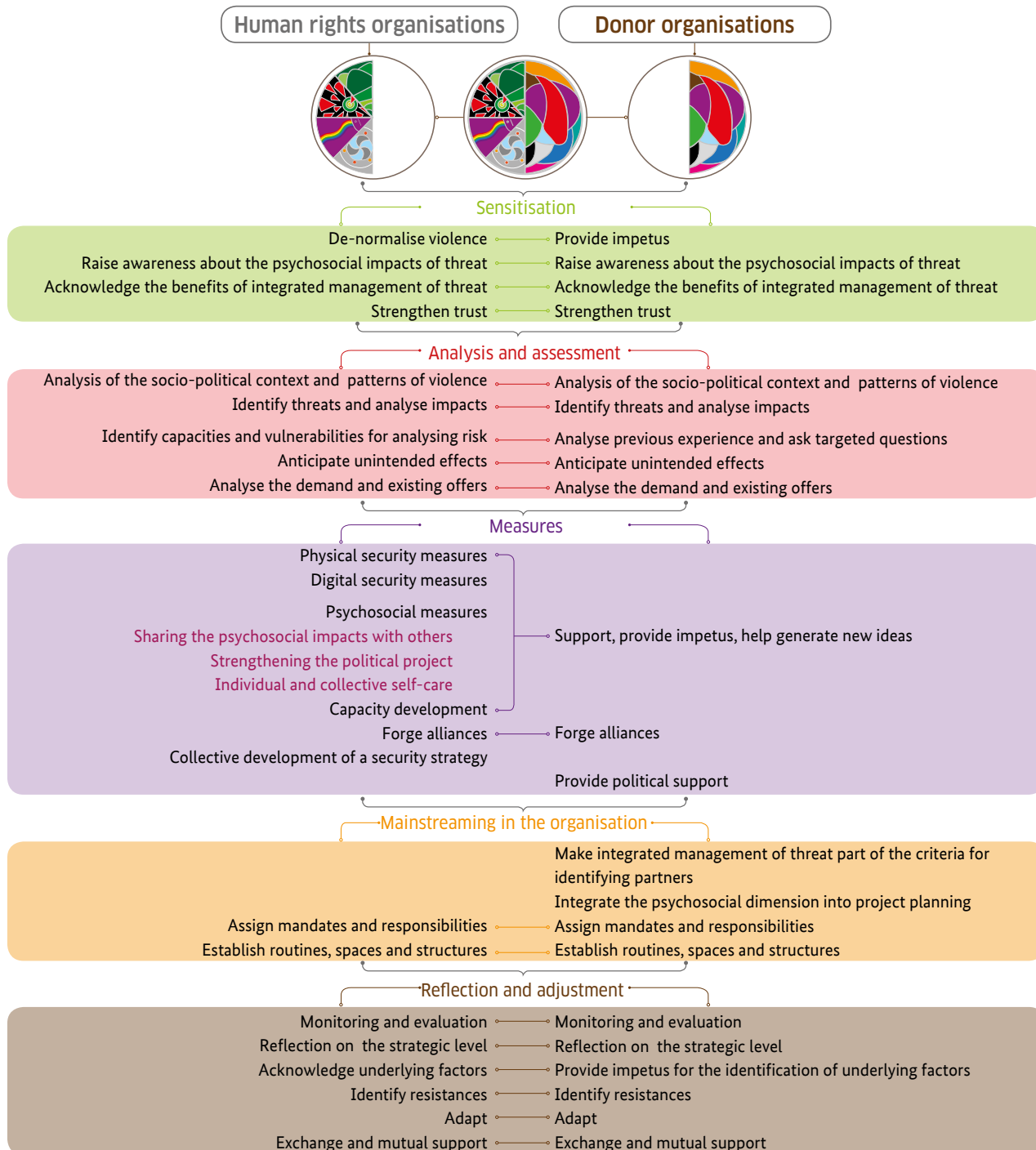
Principles of integrated management of threat

Before exploring the fields of action, there are some key principles to bear in mind. The principles

were identified during the MAPA process, and we consider them paramount in moving towards integrated management of threat.

The process of dealing with threats should be dynamic, flexible, differentiated and people-centred, given that it addresses individual perceptions in the changing context of HROs. It is a process at the personal and collective level, so creating and maintaining an atmosphere of trust and aiming for horizontal and consensus-based processes is key. The cooperation within and between organisations must take place on equal terms, be based on shared responsibility and on mutual respect for the autonomy of each organisation. Taking into account that the cooperation between a HRO and a donor organisation is more often than not time-limited, sustainability is essential. The development of a shared vision within and between organisations is the foundation for identifying a more appropriate way to manage threat.

The psychosocial approach within integrated management of threat – a model for human rights and donor organisations



2.1 Sensitisation

How does threat affect us? Do we want to make changes?

The first step towards change, such as a move towards integrated management of threat in an organisation, is that we notice that something needs to change and identify the reasons why.


Sensitisation starts a process which involves changing perceptions, ways of acting and finally attitudes. Once we are aware that the situation of violence and threat in which we live is not normal, we open a path towards transformation in our organisation. If we want to raise awareness of how threat affects us, it is important to ask questions and challenge our own perceptions.

Often, it is a specific security incident that motivates us to start to talk about how we deal with the impact of threats, although it would be better to do so without pressure and in a preventive way. Both for the HRO and the donor organisation, an emergency can highlight the importance of dealing with impacts, and is the opportunity to discuss in the team what happened and explore different perspectives. It

is essential to take into account that one incident can stimulate quite diverse reactions because the perception of risk, how threats affect us, and coping mechanisms are subjective and individual. Sensitisation should be conceived as a collective process involving the whole team, and also as a continuous one, so that new members can understand how certain measures, structures and mandates have come about.




De-normalise violence. Many human rights defenders no longer question the situation of violence in which they work and live. Often, the threats are perceived as an inevitable part of defending human rights. Many people therefore do not allow themselves to observe and reflect in more depth on what is happening to them and to their organisation. By examining the circumstances of work and life more closely, they come to realise that it is normal to feel fear or stress in a situation of threat. One has to allow for this in order to opt for change.




Impetus for this de-normalisation can come from the donor organisation, for example when discussing the joint project, or through specific guiding questions in joint workshops.

Raise awareness of the psychosocial impacts of threat. Perceiving reality through the lens of the psychosocial approach allows us to detect the psychosocial impacts of threat at different levels: at the individual, family and organisational level. At the individual level, these may be emotions such as fear, anger or anxiety. At the family level, the impacts of threat can lead to ruptures in relationships, alienation, conflicts with the partner, or effects on the children. At the organisational level, they can mean a weakening of the organisation, polarisation and conflicts within the team, firefighting in response to emergencies at the expense of time spent on strategic issues, and the feeling of being overwhelmed and no longer able to respond.



We have seen that acknowledging the impacts within the whole HRO team is key for sensitisation, because the priorities of day-to-day work will only change when decided on collectively with the whole team. Establishing spaces for confidential and open communication within the team and with the donor organisation is essential for this process. Through these communication spaces, such as the dialogue on the joint project, the donor organisation can be sensitised to what is happening in the HRO team, not only with regard to work but also to impacts on individuals.



We have noticed in the MAPA process that awareness of the impacts of threat also has to be raised within donor organisations.

There are several workshops and tools available (→ Measures) that can be of help in looking inside oneself, listening to oneself, talking about emotions, and exploring different perceptions, insecurities and experiences of how threats affect us. While you do not need extensive knowledge of psychosocial issues, it may be helpful to gain some awareness of them in order to understand impacts in their different dimensions.

Acknowledge the benefits of integrated management of threat. In order to bring about a change in attitude, it is key to have a clear understanding of the benefits of dealing with threats in an integrated manner, looking specifically at the psychosocial impacts of threat – and to be able to explain what this change is good for. In order to recognise the benefits, one option for HROs is to check how it has served other organisations or to directly experience small advances – “quick wins” – for example, realising the usefulness of a team meeting to vent and talk about emotions such as fear or anger.

An important benefit of a psychosocial approach is that it can be preventive because it helps to foster sensitivity and to undertake measures before an incident occurs, thus creating more wellbeing in the team.



Recognising and confronting the impacts gives a team more scope to take their work forward. Without adequate management of the impacts of threat, HROs can incur high emotional, physical or financial “costs” and their projects may not turn out as planned.



For donor organisations, such costs on the part of their partner organisation may mean that specific objectives for the cooperation cannot be reached. Beyond this, security incidents involving their partner organisation can have emotional and financial impacts on the donor organisation, whereas prevention through integrated management of threat involves many options that are less costly.



Strengthen trust. We have learned that strengthening trust through open and horizontal dialogue within and between HROs and donor organisations is fundamental during the sensitisation process. If there is little trust it is difficult to talk about personal and sensitive topics such as emotional wellbeing. For the donor organisation, strengthening trust can mean communicating that psychosocial impacts of threat are not “weaknesses” that could hinder a possible collaboration. In order to be able to communicate openly about psychosocial topics, it may be useful to establish a shared understanding and discourse on the psychosocial approach. This helps to avoid misunderstandings. Having spaces in which members of the HROs and their donors can communicate about co-responsibility and roles in the management of

psychosocial impacts is key. We have learned that it is crucial to highlight that managing the impacts of threat must be a joint effort. It is important to avoid creating the impression that the HRO is dependent on the donor organisation, keeping in mind that cooperation with a donor organisation is often time-limited whereas the management of the impacts of threat continues. Focused questions from the donor organisations can be very encouraging for the partner organisations and motivate them to speak openly about how their situation affects them.

2.2 Analysis and assessment

What do we need – and what do we already have?

Before acting on a threat situation, it is important to explore what is happening, as the basis for any appropriate action is a minimum of clarity on what surrounds and affects us. Analysis and assessment help us to be clear on what we need to know to manage threats well. The objective is to consensualise information on the context, threats, their impacts, capacities and vulnerabilities of the organisation, and on the prevailing risk. Only a collective look at the situation within the HRO's team can point us to sustainable options on what to do. It is important to remind ourselves throughout the process that decisions that are taken (or not taken) at the organisational level affect each individual within the organisation.

The analysis is very important in order to respond to the HRO's needs and specific situation. Perceptions of risk and needs vary across countries, regions, cities, organisations and members of a team. Therefore, HROs have to analyse their context and their own role

within it in order to find their way of dealing with threats and their psychosocial impacts, later expanding the analysis to a broader and more general context.

Although the categories to be analysed are general, the result of each analysis is subjective. It is key that the analysis is made and discussed by the organisation itself, with the perspectives and knowledge of its members, as each member of the team has different perceptions, is exposed to different threats and lives with different impacts of threats.



Analyse the socio-political context and patterns of violence. For HROs as well as donor organisations, it is essential to analyse the socio-political context, with its actors, their interests, and the interrelations between them (Protection International 2009a, p. 17ff.), and the factors that divide and connect them within a conflict (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects 2010). They should conduct a systemic analysis of factors and their dynamics (Berghof Foundation for Peace Support 2006). Here, it is important to differentiate actors and groups

according to gender, age, culture, region, etc. and to recognise patterns of violence and how they are reproduced. If we do not understand what is happening, it will be difficult to confront the situation. The questions outlined by *Front Line Defenders 2011*, p. 69 for a context analysis can serve as a tool.



For donor organisations, we would recommend seeking to gain a complete picture of the context in which their partner organisations work. Joint analyses with other donor or partner organisations may be an option. Here, it may be useful to identify possible sources of threat for partner organisations, given that the cooperation with the donor may well increase the exposure of, and therefore the risk to, the HRO (→ Anticipate unintended effects). It may also be useful to initiate an exchange with other organisations that have worked in the region, in order to identify patterns of violence.



Identify threats and analyse impacts. Another dimension of analysis is the identification of threats (*Front Line Defenders 2011*, for example, propose five steps for

assessing a threat, p. 28-29) and the analysis of its psychosocial impacts on different dimensions: individual – organisation – network – society (see for example *ALUNA Acompañamiento Psicosocial 2015*, p. 20, in Spanish). This means recognising that threats have an impact on us. Naming and analysing them helps in finding a more conscious and collective way of coping with them.



For donor organisations, it is also important to acknowledge the impacts in HROs, because it will help them take better decisions on what to support and what form this support should take.

Identify capacities and vulnerabilities for analysing risk. If threat, capacity and vulnerability determine risk, as Koenraad van Brabant has established (*Humanitarian Practice Network*, p. 43):

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Threats} \times \text{Vulnerabilities}}{\text{Capacities}}$$

it is important to examine our capacities and vulnerabilities. A capacity in terms of dealing with threat could, for example, be a strategy of self-care or an informal dialogue space; a vulnerability could be the high visibility of an organisation, poor internal communication, or mistrust within the team. This identification is the basis for strengthening capacities and reducing vulnerabilities, and hence minimising risk. Drawing attention to existing self-care strategies (physical exercise, yoga, going for a walk, meditation, etc.) and informal dialogue spaces can help to harness options and routines that already exist instead of creating new ones. Other possible capacities include allies, clarity on the political project, etc. (For options on how to identify capacities and vulnerabilities and carry out a risk analysis, see Protection International 2009a, p. 27ff., Protection International 2009b, p. 39ff. for LGBTI human rights defenders, and Tactical Technology Collective, p. 117ff.).

In our experience, lack of economic and human resources is often identified as a vulnerability. Although this aspect is important, many other vulnerabilities and capacities play a role (→ iceberg graph).



Here, experienced members of the team or donor organisations can stimulate a more profound analysis by asking specific questions. Also, it is often difficult to identify vulnerabilities, not only in the physical or digital dimension, but especially in the psychosocial dimension, so it is important to take the time to ask questions, reflect and listen in spaces of open communication and a trustful atmosphere (→ Acknowledge underlying factors).



We have learned that one role of donor organisations that have already worked on introducing integrated threat management with a psychosocial approach could be to **analyse previous experience** and on this basis **ask targeted questions** that can facilitate the analysis within HROs and guide project planning.



Anticipate unintended effects. Even the most well-intended ideas or measures can cause damage. Therefore, HROs and donor organisations should reflect on possible unintended effects that can arise during the collaboration (see AWID 2014, p. 12ff., for female human rights defenders). For HROs,

this can mean, for example, anticipating what will happen if the leader of the organisation temporarily leaves to escape immediate risk, or if a decision is taken to put a sign with the name of the organisation on the vehicle. It is important to remember that with each decision that is taken regarding security measures, implicit messages are being sent. If only one house in the street has a fence while the other houses have none, it indicates that there might be something valuable inside, something that has to be protected, such as sensitive information. This attracts attention and sends clear signals of delimitation.



For each donor organisation, it is key to conduct a “do no harm” analysis of its interventions and funding (possible implicit messages, the transfer of funds, etc.) and to communicate openly with partner organisations (see CDA Collaborative Learning Projects 2013 and Fastenopfer & Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC). While a “do no harm” analysis is important for all aspects of cooperation in general, it is crucial when dealing with threats. One point raised during the

workshop concerns the possible implications of supporting a leader’s absence from the organisation or country, in order to ensure his or her physical security. One unintended consequence is that threats may have an even stronger impact on the rest of the team: team members may feel more exposed, the absence of leadership is reflected within the dynamics of the organisation, and there may be confusion over responsibilities or how to continue with specific tasks. Being far away from family may also have a strong impact on the person who has left.

It is essential to evaluate and reflect on the implicit messages to other actors in this context. Visits by the donor can be consciously used to show external/political support (→ Measures); conversely, they may increase the level of danger by drawing unwanted attention to the HRO’s work. This option should therefore be carefully analysed.



Analyse the demand and existing offers. For HROs, it is important to consider their specific demand and the existing offers of support (e.g. literature, exchange,

workshops, advice and accompaniment, consultancy). This involves analysing the needs of the organisation and each member, and checking whether offers are accessible to everyone, for example to people without literacy skills or people with children. There are many organisations which specialise in providing support on security and protection, and an increasing number of them focus on the psychosocial approach.



For donor organisations, it is important to analyse the partner organisation's demands in order to support it in an integrated manner and avoid transferring concepts from one context to the other or offer something that already exists. Again, we would emphasise that exchange between HROs and donor organisations, also across different countries or regions, helps in the identification of an individual approach to managing threat in an integrated manner. It is important for offers to be sustainable in the sense that they create medium- or long-term processes. Sometimes support is limited to one-off workshops, with no assistance for at-risk organisations during subsequent implementation.

2.3 Measures

What can be done? How can we take action?

After having analysed and assessed the situation, the next step is to identify ways of dealing with threats and to take appropriate action. There are various ways of managing threats; depending on the threat, we can draw on different measures for the physical, the digital and/or the psychosocial dimension. It is about identifying and combining the appropriate measures to respond to a threat situation, either preventively or following specific threats that have already been received. For example, a fence is of no use if sensitive information can be acquired digitally. **It is not about choosing between the physical, digital and psychosocial dimensions: all dimensions of threat and its management have to be considered because they are interrelated.**

For example, if a human rights defender is under stress (psychosocial dimension), it is more likely that he or she will forget to lock the office (physical dimension) or send sensitive information through an insecure medium (digital security). So the padlock or encryption programme, as sophisticated as it may be, is of no

use. On an organisational level, conflicts within the team, polarisation among the team members, a lack of communication, or mistrust may mean that we fail to share information relevant for security, make poor decisions, or are not sufficiently vigilant. In other words, we become more vulnerable to threats from outside.

During the process, we learned that although sensitisation has taken place, connecting the psychosocial dimension with physical or digital security remains challenging in many cases. In this section, we therefore emphasise the importance of considering the impacts of threats on a psychosocial level and their interaction with other measures. In the same way, it is essential to consider the psychosocial measures that address these impacts and understand them as part of security management.

In emergencies, people seek quick solutions in order to change the situation as rapidly as possible. We have learned, however, that it is very helpful for HROs and donor organisations to first pause and

share perceptions, then analyse, develop different options, make a plan, take action, and evaluate. Taking the time to reflect on and analyse what has happened is essential in identifying appropriate responses to impacts and particular needs. If we do not know what has happened, we may waste time and resources on measures that are not suitable.

Box 1: Example of a routine: How to proceed if an incident occurs

An organisation should have standard procedures for responding to security incidents. The following is an example:

- reconstruct what has happened;
- analyse actors and their interests;
- name, accept and respect the different perspectives, perceptions and feelings;
- evaluate the risk, for example if sensitive information has been lost: identify which information possible aggressors already have or may have, and which other communication mediums are being used, such as email;
- assess one's own experience with similar incidents and perception of the current one;
- keep in mind that personal decisions can affect the whole group and vice versa;
- develop scenarios;
- discuss the options and their possible effects;
- reach joint decisions about what action to take; for example, consider alerting external actors or seeking their support.

Additional points to consider in the assessment of an incident include identifying the resources invested by the aggressor (planned/accidental), determining whether there have been previous incidents, considering the logic of the aggressors, and examining the personal and organisational context and the capacities and vulnerabilities of the organisation and its members regarding a possible threat (→ Analysis and assessment).



Physical security measures are those which first come to mind when thinking about dealing with threat. Based on the analysis and assessment, the most appropriate response to the threat is opted for. There are different areas that should be kept in mind; security can include CCTV cameras and alarms for the office, or forms of transport that are used. Another option may be to adopt security protocols on how to behave in or handle specific situations, for example when working out of hours, or how to manage visits (see *Protection International 2009a*, p. 83-108, also for physical security measures for female human rights defenders, for security incidents, or when working in areas of armed conflict).



Another component of integrated threat management is **digital security**. This refers to measures to protect oneself against the interception of mobile communications and includes issues such as how to carefully handle sensitive information in the social networks or send encrypted emails (see *Tactical Technology Collective*, p. 72ff., *Security in-a-box*, Association For Progressive Communications, Protection

International 2009a, p. 113ff.). Digital security depends on which communication media are used. Acquiring knowledge and abilities to confront situations such as espionage or censorship are fundamental aspects of digital security.

Psychosocial measures

From the psychosocial approach we derived a number of measures in order to provide some ideas for its implementation in HROs and donor organisations. We understand the psychosocial approach as a lens and the measures as options for acting on what we see through this lens (→ What are we talking about?). The psychosocial measures presented here are based on the lessons learned from the MAPA process and input from ALUNA (*Claves hacia el acompañamiento psicosocial y Documento Político Aluna*, in Spanish). They are not exhaustive, nor can they be applied to every organisation, as the impacts of threat vary across members of the team, organisations, countries and regions.

Identifying the impacts of threat (→ Analysis and assessment) is the basis for any psychosocial measure. Impacts such as fear affect the individual human rights defender as well as the organisation as a whole, creating mistrust or conflicts within the team, for example. The psychosocial measures presented here seek to address these impacts at the individual as well as the organisational level.

Box 2: Example of managing the impacts of threat - how to cope with fear

One way of coping with an impact is through a series of steps which we elaborated on the basis of an exercise by ALUNA during the MAPA process.

To cope with fear, it is important to

- acknowledge the fear and name it, as fear of something unknown or diffuse is difficult to deal with;
- deconstruct and analyse it, which includes identifying what the bases of the fear are, and identifying the different forms in which fear is expressed, such as emotional blocks or irritability;
- differentiate between fear and the actual risk that what one is afraid of will come true. A risk analysis helps to assess the probability of the threat being put to action and to clarify that the imagined risk is not the actual risk;
- sharing feelings of fear with others helps us to recognise that we are not alone and that fears are probably mutual. Working through the previous steps collectively is an important aspect in coping with fear (→Sharing impacts with others);
- identify options for action, such as prevention measures, then reach agreements and integrate them into the security strategy.



Sharing the psychosocial impacts with others is an important way of coping with them. Collectively, one can recognise and analyse the impacts and the incidents, understand why an incident happened and confront feelings of guilt. Appreciating what has been achieved and emphasising what one *can* do, can be of great help in coping with emotions such as frustration or impotence. The practice of active listening (Team FME, p. 6) helps in identifying, valuing and strengthening what individuals already have and can do, making us stronger in confronting threats. The ideal result of sharing psychosocial impacts of threat with others is co- responsibility, in which the responsibility for dealing with impacts does not lie solely with the individual but is the responsibility of the team and organisation. The logical next step is the development of a strategy outlining how to address the impacts (→ Development of a collective security strategy). It is essential that the spaces for sharing impacts within the organisation are characterised by a trustful atmosphere and open communication, are informal and ideally involve small groups.



For all of the above, it is essential to have a **clear and shared political project**, an aspect emphasised by ALUNA during the MAPA process. It means having clarity on the identity, mission and vision of the organisation and each person's commitment to it, and having a clear idea of who we are and what we do. As a result of the circumstances in which many threatened HROs operate, many of them fall into a dynamic in which they merely *react* to security emergencies instead of being able to *act* in pursuit of their vision. Remembering why and for whom we are doing this work helps us to concentrate on the bigger picture, make space for the re-prioritisation of the project, and thus regain control. This also helps to reframe the threat experience, from seeing oneself as a victim to understanding oneself as an agent of change who has been threatened. Additionally it helps to foster the recognition that guilt should be attributed not to the individual but to the socio-political dynamics that one seeks to change through one's work. Communicating the political project through awareness-raising campaigns

about one's work or about specific topics related to it can lead to greater legitimacy or more acceptance of one's work in society.

Different strategies of **individual and collective self-care** help in dealing with exhaustion or stress, for example. During the MAPA process, physical health was a recurring aspect, underlining the fact that it is often related to mental and emotional wellbeing. If we are exhausted, we are more likely to become ill. If we take care of ourselves, we are generally stronger and better able to cope with the demands of everyday life, above all emotionally. Therefore, physical health should be taken up as a preventive measure and understood as a quality aspect by HROs and donor organisations. Self-care is an organisational and political topic beyond the individual's responsibility. It means making sure that a person's resources are maintained and strengthened as part of their home and work life. Through self-care, a healthy balance is sought between work and rest. One has to keep in mind that what benefits one person can be very

different from what benefits another: spending time with family, physical exercise, a healthy diet, cultural activities – strategies of self-care are very individual. Taking care of oneself can also mean separating private time and space from those of work, for example turning off the cell phone or taking regular vacations (see *Front Line Defenders 2011*, p. 42-47).

Capacity development on physical and digital security, but especially the psychosocial approach, helps in acquiring knowledge, facilitates discussions and opens one's mind to new valuable inputs. Reading publications and informing oneself through the internet are also part of this. In order to be effective, capacity development must take place at four levels: learning and change at the individual level, at the organisational level, at the level of interaction between diverse actors, e.g. in networks, and at the level of the political system (see *GIZ*, p. 7-8). For the individual and organisational level, which we are addressing here, it is about strengthening knowledge and

skills (technical, thematic and methodological knowledge, reflection and learning) and the capacity for organisational management based on the creative and efficient use of available resources. In this line of thinking, processes to foster capacities for integrated management of threat with a psychosocial approach imply drawing on existing capacities, look for the best way of closing gaps and focus on the applicability of the content. It is no use handing out manuals that are not read or introducing tools that the organisation does not have (→ Analyse demands and existing offers).



Forge alliances. Allies and networks allow us to exchange knowledge, experience and strategies on integrated management of threat in general and on dealing with its psychosocial impacts in particular. This applies to HROs and donor organisations. The exchange of good practices and lessons learned helps in expanding the HR community's room for manoeuvre. Establishing alliances is also essential for drawing on support networks in security incidents and helps to prevent feelings of isolation among HROs or human rights defenders.



Collective development of a security strategy. A security and protection strategy or plan integrates all physical, digital and psychosocial measures in one document. Collective development of and agreement on the plan are crucial. To ensure that it is realistic, it is also important to critically assess what can actually be implemented and to adapt the strategy continuously, taking account of lessons learned during its implementation. It should, as far as possible, reflect the organisation's day-to-day reality and internal dynamics (→ Mainstreaming at the organisational level). For guidance on developing a security strategy and for a list of aspects that should be included, see *Protection International 2009a*, p. 75ff., and *Front Line Defenders 2011* p. 55ff.



Support, provide impetus, help generate new ideas. For donor organisations, the question is how they can support and create impetus for integrated management of threat and specifically psychosocial measures in their partner organisations. The role of donor organisations can be key in facilitating support

for immediate action, prevention and exchange. It is important to keep in mind the sustainability of such processes in the medium and long term, to work with other donor organisations in order to achieve coherence between the interventions, and to avoid parallel activities in specific regions or sectors. All of the above recommendations benefit from exchange, lessons learned from previous experience and the anticipation of unintended effects of the support (→ Analysis and assessment). Providing resources for psychosocial support or external consultancy on the topic can contribute to the development of collective self-care strategies or better communication within the HRO as part of institutional strengthening. Emergency funds, for example, enable a person immediately at risk to leave the organisation, city, or country, in all cases based on a “do no harm” analysis (→ Anticipate unintended effects).



By providing **political support** to HROs through dialogue and advocacy with politicians and diplomats, donor organisations can support the shared goals of the cooperation between HROs and donors and seek to expand

HROs’ scope for action. This includes sensitising their country’s decision-makers and diplomats to the high-risk context and the need for protection, prevention and contingency measures as much as creating support networks with public institutions and other organisations. This is why it helps if HROs do not just report on their specific situation but also conduct analyses and prepare joint statements as a basis for a shared advocacy strategy.

2.4 Mainstreaming in the organisation

What will we continue to do?

The integrated management of threat is a quality aspect and should therefore be an ongoing task within the organisation. Mainstreaming the management of psychosocial impacts as part of an integrated management of threat is an important element of organisational development and institutional strengthening.

If analysis and assessment and the measures identified as appropriate are not consolidated as part of the organisational dynamics, there will be no benefits in the long run. Institutionalising integrated management of threat with a psychosocial approach means having appropriate structures, mandates, responsibilities and the necessary capacities in place. During the MAPA process, we have learned that sensitisation and an initial assessment are easier to implement than the integration of the approach and its measures into the organisational structure, e.g. by setting up meetings on the management of the psychosocial impact of threats. Difficulties that we encountered in our process were the changing context, internal conflicts, human and

economic resource constraints, the normalisation of violence, resistance to change, emotions such as fear or guilt, and the difficulty of ensuring a clear understanding of the psychosocial approach among colleagues.

We also learned that integrating the psychosocial approach takes time – during our seven-month process, some organisations did advance considerably in the implementation, while others did not get beyond the assessment stage. Each organisation proceeds at a different pace. So it might be more realistic to allow more time or simply take into account that a psychosocial approach exists and that it will be incorporated at a given moment with small steps, instead of aiming for ambitious results that are then not achieved.

Both the analysis and the other themes have to be revised frequently and systematically. Each analysis and assessment (→ Analysis and assessment) is just a snapshot of a given moment in time. As much for HROs as for donor

organisations, it is important to bear in mind that the situation is constantly changing and that this change can happen quickly; new threats or opportunities may arise, new capacities may have been developed or new members might have joined the team.



Make integrated management of threat part of the criteria for identifying partners. We would recommend that donors include integrated management of threat as a criterion for identifying potential partner organisations and sensitising colleagues, in order to avoid choosing the “toughest” partners that are not willing to look into psychosocial impacts.



Integrate the psychosocial dimension into project planning. Psychosocial aspects should be an integral part of project planning and should be factored into budgets, workloads, timing and sequencing, etc. One option is to include it in the part of the work programme and budget that refers to organisational development or institutional strengthening. For donor organisations starting

a collaboration with a new HRO, it would be worthwhile to ask questions and provide impetus for sensitisation if this item is not yet included or to support it if it is already included. Allocating human and economic resources to the management of psychosocial impacts can help avoid resources being redirected to “urgent matters” and thus sends a clear message about priorities.



Assign mandates and responsibilities. It is key to have clarity about who is responsible for the issue. It may be the management itself, who can delegate it so that the organisation can rely on specific persons to promote the issue. We have learned during the process that assigning mandates and responsibilities for introducing a psychosocial approach can be difficult when it is seen as a major additional burden and not as an integral part of quality work. In general, HROs already have a very heavy workload and are hesitant to pick up issues that they do not perceive as relevant and useful. Therefore, it can be very revealing to analyse how much time is spent when one has to respond to emergencies

or to determine the costs of a team suffering from burnout, fear and impacts on their physical wellbeing. Generally, more time and resources need to be invested in mainstreaming at the start: it takes time to conduct a good first comprehensive analysis and identify appropriate measures. However, once structures and routines are established, it will be much easier to include them in the daily work.

One option for HROs and donor organisations is for the management to establish a focal point, or a committee, to jump-start the mainstreaming process. This focal point or committee can start by putting the issue on agendas for meetings and initiating a dialogue both within the HRO and with the donors. Once the focal point or committee has provided the impetus, the issue is incorporated little by little into the daily work, thus improving its quality. It is important to avoid a situation in which communication about managing psychosocial impacts only takes place between the corresponding focal points in the HRO and donor organisation, as this would limit the exchange, which would then not reach other organisational units.

According to our experience during the MAPA process, it is paramount to raise the management's awareness as early as possible and obtain its mandate, as dealing well with the impacts of threat is not a subjective issue for some individuals in the organisation but an integral part of quality work. During our process, many HROs started work on incorporating integrated management of threat by sensitising and seeking a mandate from the management.

Establishing routines, spaces and structures. For HROs and donor organisations, it is not only about assigning mandates and responsibilities, but about establishing routines, spaces and structures for the integrated management of threat. We recommend assessing the existing arrangements to see if they can be used to address psychosocial impacts as part of an integrated approach and if so, how this can be done. For HROs, this may mean creating or using existing spaces for an ongoing analysis of the context and impacts (→ Analysis and assessment), for the implementation of measures (→ Measures) and



for joint and continuous reflection (→ Reflection and Adjustment) about the process of raising awareness and managing impacts. It may also mean creating space for capacity development on psychosocial themes and team self-care, e.g. through workshops. One important routine would be a continuous exchange with other organisations and countries.



Donor organisations can establish routines, spaces and structures for their own continuous analysis, informed by the analyses of their partner organisations. The latter should be included in the budget. (→ Analysis and Assessment). They should also create joint routines, spaces and structures for dealing with security incidents, for reflecting on managing impacts of threat together with the HRO, or for sharing experience with other organisations from other regions. In addition, they can support mainstreaming processes in HROs by providing impetus and resources, such as training or external advice on the issue.

2.5 Reflection and adjustment

What can we improve?

No process or routine is perfect from the start – in a change process, we are learning by doing, even more so when it is a dynamic and non-linear process that takes place in a complex context. So we need to consciously reflect on which factors facilitated or complicated the process, and also on why we could not see those factors from the beginning as key elements of moving towards integrated management of threat. By asking ourselves what we can learn from what we achieved and what we did not achieve, we may gain insights into what to improve the next time around.

As in the spaces and conversations already mentioned (→ Mainstreaming; → Measures; → Analysis and assessment), combining different perspectives and ways of analysing reality can be quite enriching.



Monitoring and Evaluation. One of the routines that can be used for reflection are monitoring and evaluation (M&E) formats if they exist, complementing the other indicators

to assess how much progress has been made with regard to managing threat in an integrated manner. Donors can monitor their own engagement with the issue, and, with their partners, discuss indicators for change processes, such as integrating a psychosocial approach.



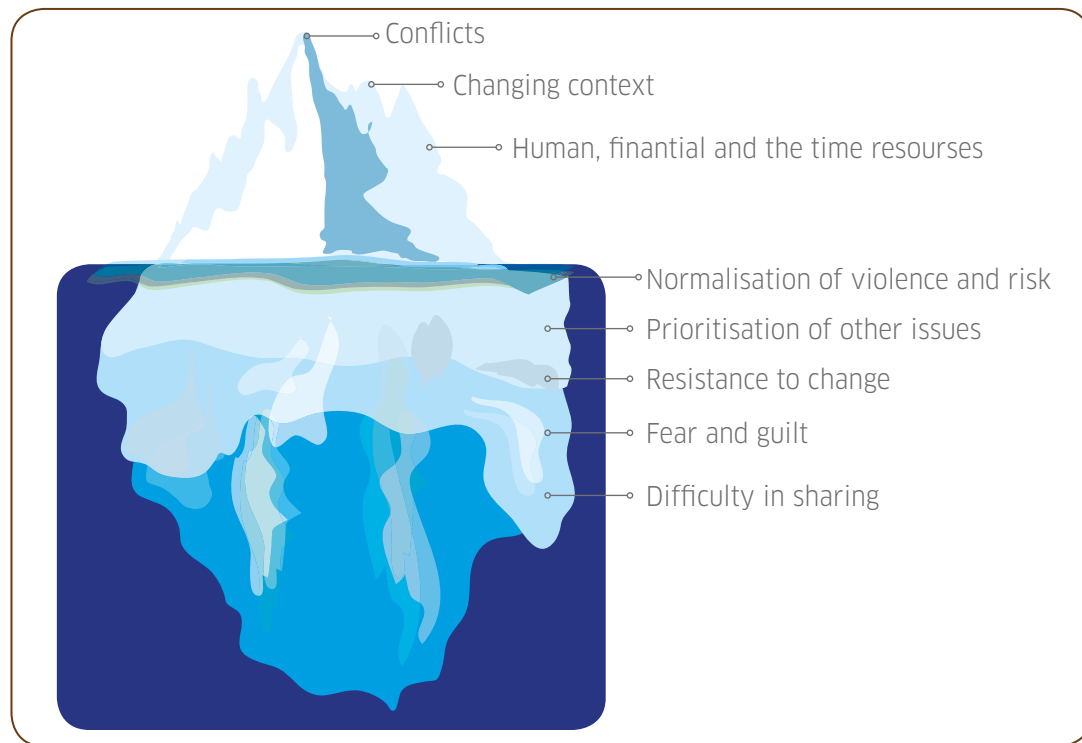
Reflection on the strategic level. If our plans were unrealistic or our strategies did not work out, we should ask ourselves why this was the case and deepen our analysis to include factors that have helped or hindered implementation, identifying possible blind spots and wrong assumptions we might have made. A team needs formats and spaces for this. Beyond the M&E spaces already mentioned, others, such as annual retreats, may be conducive settings for such reflection.



Acknowledge underlying factors. When reflection on the difficulties of integrating a psychosocial approach is started, brainstorming sessions might bring up factors such as “not



enough time” or “not enough resources”. However, if we imagine an iceberg with the issues that helped and hindered the process of dealing with psychosocial issues, these tend to be on the surface of the water (see iceberg graph).



Iceberg Superficial and underlying factors that hindered the integration of a psychosocial approach during the MAPA process

Only by engaging in a more profound reflection, perhaps with experienced facilitation and methods like circular questions (Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, p. 111), can we reach the less obvious factors, such as resistances to dealing with the issue in order to avoid the feelings attached to it, like e.g. guilt, or the feeling of or a sense of impotence. Donors



can provide **impetus** for this kind of deeper reflection.



Identify resistance. We have found it useful to regard the resistance to incorporating a psychosocial approach as normal in such processes and to engage with this resistance. A genuine interest in the perceptions and reactions of all team members helps to visualise, analyse and distinguish between factors of resistance and to find options for dealing with them. It may be the case, for example, that the procedures for managing impacts of threat have been decreed instead of agreed in a dialogue involving everyone. In that case, it is essential to seek a shared understanding and ownership of all involved on how to manage the impacts of threat.

Perceptions can be challenged; see, for example, the table on common stereotypes, their underlying reasons and possible responses for overcoming them (Tactical Technology Collective, p. 148-152). Ignoring or not identifying resistance can be quite destructive for the process. We have learned that even if only one person in the management is not convinced, this can hamper the integration of the psychosocial approach.



Adapt. After reflection, the necessary adaptations to routines or measures but also to the ways in which we organise ourselves and understand the world around us must be made to effect change. It may be helpful to rely on colleagues from peer organisations to undertake reflection, but it also helps to remind oneself to make time for it even during busy periods, thus escaping the all too frequent tendency to prioritise the urgent over the strategic issues.



For donor organisations, this means being flexible with regard to changes in work programmes.



Exchange and mutual support. Fresh ideas and perspectives are very helpful when experiencing exhaustion and a lack of creativity. Reflection and exchange on strategy and practical measures between donor organisation and HRO may be a good option.

3. And the process continues...

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Viktor Frankl (1905-1997),
Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist

It is not always in our power to change the context in which we work and the risks and threats it implies for us, for our work or that of our partner organisations. What we can change, however, is how much they weaken us and hamper our work.

We hope to continue to learn and improve as a community of organisations and individuals engaged in the topic in order to maintain the space and increase the resilience of organisations working for human rights and peace.

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