Dealing with risk when claiming the Right to Say NO

When communities exercise their Right to Say NO (R2SayNo) to natural resources grabbing by mining and other extractive companies, there is always the threat of violence by the military, police, or company security. Community members who dare to exercise their power to say NO may be threatened, beaten, arrested, tortured, or assassinated. They are often told that their families and loved ones will be harmed to force them to abandon their struggles.

There are regular assassinations of activists who say NO to resource exploitation. Global Witness has recorded the killing of 227 activists around the world in 2020, the highest number recorded for a second consecutive year. This is very likely an underestimation of the number of people killed. Almost a third of these murders was “linked to resource exploitation – logging, mining, large-scale agribusiness, hydroelectric dams and other infrastructure.”

Risks are not peculiar to community activists and leaders. In communities impacted by extractive activities, ordinary people are often caught up in the generalised climate of violence and fear that the private security of corporations, the police and the military promote. Women from communities are raped, gang raped and sexually harassed by the police, military, and private security, as they go about their daily business of fetching water and firewood, farming, or selling wares. Artisanal miners – male and female – whose mining rights have been taken from them, face violence when they venture out to mine.

Yet, even in the face of these risks, women and their communities continue to stand up and say NO. This is the only way communities can ensure their survival, preserve their livelihoods, their way of life, their homes, their land, cultural heritage, sacred places, and graves. Resisting communities are defending the right of nature to exist, and that of future generations to survive and enjoy life. See information sheet 1: What is the Right to Say NO?

It is important that communities, and women especially, are aware of the risks that they may encounter as they continue to struggle for, and demand, the R2sayNo. Use the tool below to plan for, and manage risks, by building on established ways to ensure safety.

### Identify and rate risks

The first step is to identify where activists are most at risk:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
<th>PLACES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you received threats that harm will come to you, your sisters, or your family? This can include threats that are verbal in-person, via phone, email, text or heard through others.</td>
<td>Are there certain locations that you go to or journeys you take where you feel less safe? For example, walking home, walking to the market, or at meetings in cafes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are there any particular people that have caused you harm or you worry will cause you harm? For example, people who don’t like your work, are jealous of your work, who often cause you trouble. Think of individuals or groups like militia or the police.</td>
<td>Why do you feel less safe? For example, you are alone; there are military checkpoints; it is not well lit; there are many or few people around.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIMES / EVENTS</th>
<th>INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there certain times of the day / year or events where you feel less safe? For example, at night, on election day, New Year’s celebrations or when launching a new campaign.</td>
<td>What information do you have or keep that you worry could be used to harm you if someone else gets it? For example, personal documents, videos, phone contacts, research documents or conversations being overheard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why do you feel less safe? For example, you are alone; there are military checkpoints; it is not well lit; there are many or few people around.</td>
<td>What do you think they could do with this information?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that the risks that women confront may be different to those of men. Leaders of community struggles also may confront different risks as compared with ordinary community members.
“Resisting communities are defending the right of nature to exist, and that of future generations to survive and enjoy life.”

The second step is to rank the risks so people can identify the major risks they need to focus on in their mitigation planning (this is a tool you can use):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RISK RATING</th>
<th>MINOR (Minor or no injuries, small temporary disruption to activities)</th>
<th>SIGNIFICANT (Non-life-threatening injuries, medium-term disruption, or serious temporary impact on activities)</th>
<th>SEVERE (Loss of life or severe permanent injuries; severe disruption to activities)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIKELY</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSSIBLE</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNLIKELY</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rating the risk is an important part of the process for people to distinguish between the **risks that are present** and the **risks that they fear**. Both are valid and important to address but it is good to understand the difference, so women and community leaders can flag and assess the actual risks they face.

**Develop a risk mitigation plan**

This planning is undertaken by the collective that is under threat. Safety and security planning focuses on strengths, capacities and building on established successful practices to maximise safety.

**Keep mitigations as simple as possible.** If the list is too long it can be overwhelming and there are often simple steps that can be taken to mitigate many risks in one go. Some examples:

- Discuss risks or security issues with trusted sisters regularly to learn from each other.
- Avoid walking alone at night.
- Be aware of who is around you and what they can hear you say.
- Have a password on your phone.
- Delete or destroy any sensitive information that you don’t need to keep.

**Remember, safety decisions are made together in a survivor-centred approach which takes account of different fears and risks between men and women, and leaders and organisational members.**

After the collective planning has taken place, each participant can develop their individual safety plan. This can then be reviewed in a group, combined with debriefing on any concerns or emotions that the process raised for participants.
Other interventions that can be made to manage risk and support women and their communities

- **Linking community members with organisations that can provide legal support, solidarity, and urgent action responses** in the event these are needed. In some instances, community activists and their families may need to be extracted from their community or country to guarantee their safety. Documenting and bringing public attention to rights violations may minimise risk. This work must be driven by community groups, as publicity sometimes creates more risk. If people, especially women, are raped or physically violated, organisations can assist with medical assistance and trauma counselling.

- **Digital security training** may be important when digital tools such as websites, Zoom, Skype or social media platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter) are used in organising work and campaigns. While digital communication is useful in organising work, these tools come with security threats. Training is important to create awareness of the threats and build skills to ensure safety.

- **Training women and activists in self-defence strategies**, such as boxing, taekwondo, karate, and kickboxing, can build confidence and offer important protection in case of direct threat.

- **Healing circles**, especially where women have been subjected to sexualised violence and ongoing trauma, can become core to building collective risk and safety strategies in communities.

- **Wellness and stress management**, self-care and collective care are key to physical and psychological well-being. These are also critical for activists to cope with burnout and sustain their activism. Self-care is especially important for women community members who are generally focused on taking care of others, while spending little time caring for themselves.

This is one of 6 information sheets on the Right to Say No:

**Information Sheet 1:**
What is the Right to Say NO?

**Information Sheet 2:**
The Destructive Economic System Communities are Saying NO to

**Information Sheet 3:**
Laws and instruments communities may draw on to support their Right to Say NO

**Information Sheet 4:**
Why is the Right to Say NO a women’s rights question?

**Information Sheet 5:**
Communities say YES to the right to community decision making and the right to development that supports life

**Information Sheet 6:**
Dealing with risk when claiming the Right to Say NO