Vision, Strategy and Actors

Carrying out a situational analysis, as above, often highlights the trends in our society that we see as negative or unjust. In this context we strive to affect changes in our society which can include civil and political rights and economic, environmental, gender and social justice, among many other forms of justice. As human rights defenders, we are accustomed to identifying injustice and responding to it. It is important, however, to have a defined vision of the change we wish to engender and a strategy to achieve it. Based on this strategy and an understanding of how we will implement it, we can identify the threats we face and build a comprehensive and appropriate security plan.

Thinking critically about our strategy becomes even more important if and when we act as a group or an organisation. Being internally transparent and open about the changes we want to achieve and the strategies we use can also prevent difficulties and conflict within the group and those outside it.

Establishing our vision and activities

Identifying a problem we want to resolve is often our first step as human rights defenders and this is hopefully accompanied or followed by envisioning the successful result of our work. If you don't have an already established vision, answering the following questions may help:

- What is the problem, or the problems, that you hope to address?
- What change do you wish to see?
- How would your community be different afterwards?
- What would be different about the relationships between people if you succeed?
- Who are the other individuals, groups, institutions, etc. involved in this issue and how do they react to your activities?

Activity mapping

Once we have established our vision, we must consider the methods we can employ to realise it. We may carry out very diverse activities as individuals or organisations in order to achieve our goals. What are your 'areas of work' or the activities you carry out?

It is important to explicitly list them and consider, in the first instance, whether or not they are appropriate for achieving the objective we have set. Our work does not take place in a vacuum, but rather in a rich and diverse context, often with some characteristics of conflict. Our activities are our 'interface' with this conflict and with the State and the society that we are trying to influence; they are our means of attempting to change the situations, the perceptions and behaviours of a diverse set of actors (individuals, institutions and organisations) around us. Some of these actors will benefit from, believe in and support our activities. Others, however, will feel that these activities are not in their interest and will attempt to close our space for work.

Actor mapping

Building your strategies helps to identify the entire range of actors (individuals, institutions, organisations, etc.) who are the 'players' in the current situation. They may be working to sustain or challenge the status quo, or neither, or occasionally both. Identifying all the actors means you can prioritise appropriate actions for your engagement with each type of actor, such as how to shift their opinions of your work, change their habits or stop them from behaving a certain way. Keep in mind that your opponents as much as your allies develop their own strategies and actions based on the perception they have of your position and activities. This perception might differ from your own.

    Therefore, understanding the actors involved and spending time on collecting information and reflecting on dynamics is crucial to your security planning. Deeper knowledge of our allies and opponents also helps us decide which acceptance, deterrence or protection strategies to employ in order to maintain our socio-political space for working, which are discussed further in **Section III | Strategise**.

Work Space

△ Acceptance

△ Protection

△ Deterrence
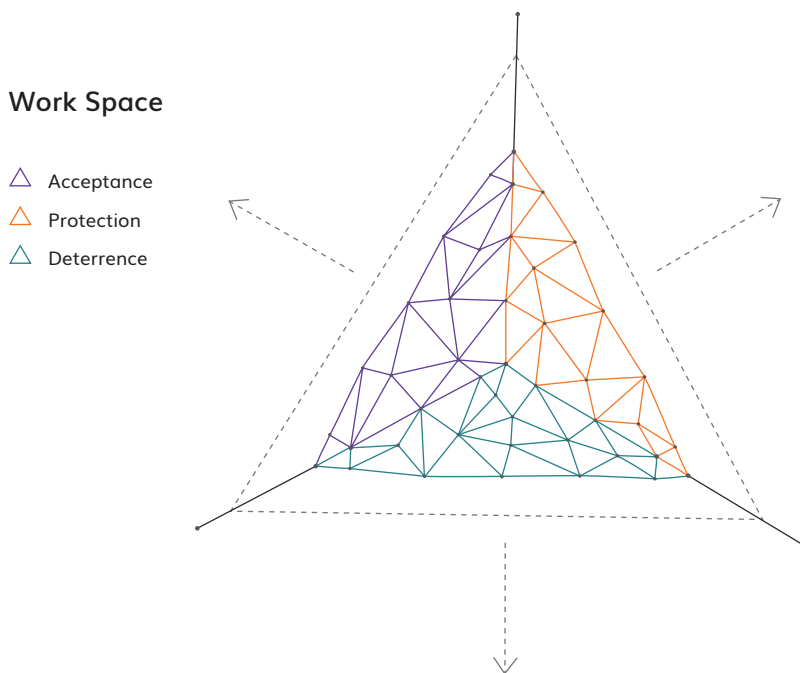
One helpful way of starting this process of actor mapping is to carry out a visual brainstorm of all the the actors in the field and the nature of the relationships between them, as demonstrated in the following exercises.

Exercise

Purpose & Output

The idea of this exercise is to begin a process of visualising yourself, your group or organisation, and your relationships to the other actors around you, including direct, indirect and potential future connections.

In this part, we suggest that you focus on brainstorming who the actors around you are and the intensity of your relationship with them (direct, indirect, or potential).

In the next step of the exercise, you will extend the visualisation or map to include the types of relationship you have with them.

Input & Materials

If you want to carry out this activity in a group, you will need:
- butcher-block or flip-chart paper
- coloured markers or pens
- sticky-notes / Post-its.

Format & Steps

Written/drawn visualisation

In this exercise we suggest that you use sticky-notes or post-its, each with the name of one actor in your context, to visually map them and the relationships between them.

1. Start with yourself or your organisation as an entity and brainstorm and identify as many actors related to your work as possible. This can include individuals, groups, organisations or institutions. Consider local, regional, national and international actors where necessary.

2. Once you have identified as many of the actors as you can, place them on the wall or sheet, with yourself (and/or your target group, if they are identifiable) in the centre.

3. Consider the following categorisations for these actors:
   - **Direct:** People, groups, organisations, institutions that have direct contact with you on the issue you are trying to impact. For example, you probably have a direct relationship to the

target-group you work for, and some entities directly opposed to your work who directly challenge or confront you.

You may also want to include members of the community around you including your family and friends who may support or oppose your work in one way or another.

- **Indirect:** These can include people, groups, organisations or institutions that are one step removed from you. In the example above, if your target group has a direct relationship with you, they may be in direct relationship with others. These become indirectly connected to you.
- **Potential/Peripheral:** People, groups, organisations and institutions which relate to the issue, but with whom you don't (yet) have a connection or relationship. Examples of these include international bodies which are supportive of your issue, but aren't (yet) active in your context.

Note: Actors and information

Although it may not have occurred to you, you may want to include actors on whom you rely to manage your information and communication. These can include:

- your telephone service provider
- your internet service provider
- social media account providers
- email account providers.

We will explore these actors in more detail in the next exercise.

In the next and subsequent Chapters, we will expand our knowledge of these actors and use them to build our analysis of threats. Once you have finished this exercise, it's a good idea to keep a list of these actors for future reference and elaboration.


Expanding our knowledge of actors

Once we have established the actors in our environment, it is helpful to categorise, to the best of our knowledge and ability, the nature of the relationships between ourselves and these actors, especially their stance regarding our vision, their interests and the amount of resources at their disposal.

We might roughly categorise the actors into three groups:

- **Allies:** these are actors with strategic alignment to our goals. The strength and longevity of their support may fluctuate over time. They may include fellow human rights defenders and organisations, the community we work for, friendly elements of the State, embassies, and our friends.
- **Adversaries or opponents:** these are actors whose strategic interests are opposed to ours, or somehow oppose our goals for various reasons. The intensity of opposition or disengagement may vary with changing circumstances. For some human rights defenders, especially those working on gender and sexual rights issues, these may also include family members.
- **Neutral parties:** these are actors who neither support nor oppose our cause. However, their role may change depending on the changing situation.

It may be useful to imagine or visualise these actors as a **spectrum:**

Spectrum of Allies

active allies   allies   neutral parties   opponents   active opponents
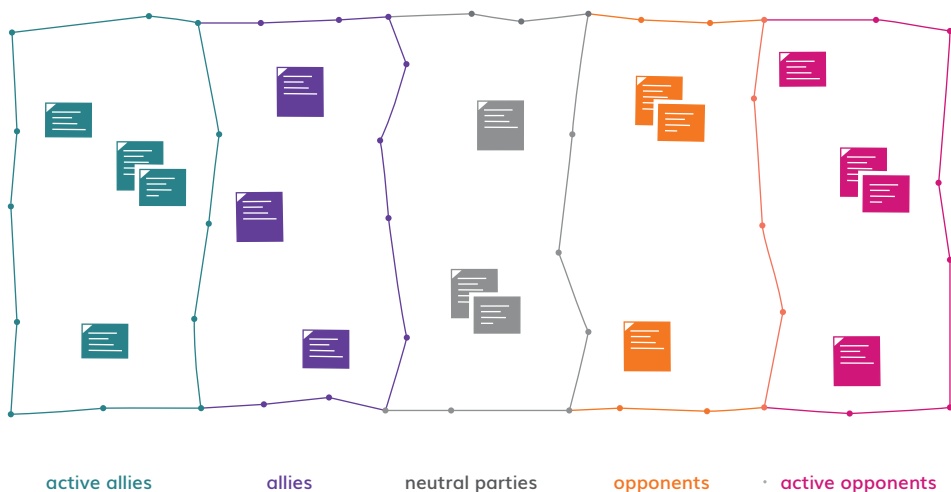
The 'spectrum of allies'[8] demonstrated above is often used in an action campaign design, in order to identify the key sectors of society which we wish to influence so that they move in the direction away from the position of active opposition and towards the position of active alliance. This can also be used in security planning and promoting acceptance and tolerance of our work among different elements of State and society.

Mapping relationships between actors

The next step in our visual actor mapping exercise includes analysing, identifying and specifying the nature of relationships between actors. This step is particularly useful in identifying actors whose motivations may lead them to threaten us or our work, as well as allies who can be relied upon to help us work more securely.

2.3b Exercise

Visual actor mapping–part 2

Purpose & Output	This exercise builds on **Exercise 2.3a** by denoting relationships among the actors in the map, identifying the allies, opponents, and neutral parties. The resulting map can then be used to identify and analyse specific actors in your context who may represent intentional (or unintentional) sources of threats.
Input & Materials	• A basic actor map (from the previous exercise) • Paper and coloured markers or pens • Coloured dot stickers

8 Based on the "Spectrum of Allies" exercise from 'Training for Change' . A good deepening on engagement with actors from these categories can be found here: https://organizingforpower.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/allies-chart-new1.jpghttp://www.trainingforchange.org/tools/spectrum-allies-0

|	
Format & **Steps**	**Written/drawn visualisation** Considering all the actors you have brainstormed so far: 1. Denote actors based on the nature of their relationship to your work (ally, adversary, neutral, unknown). This can be done by assigning a coloured dot to each type of actor, different coloured post-it notes, or different locations (allies on the left, opponents on the right, neutrals in the middle, etc.). 2. Draw a circle around each actor on the map. Its size can correspond to its **power and resources** in the socio-political context (see legend). 3. Starting with yourself on the map, you can make connections to any actor with whom you have a relationship. Use the legend on the next page to represent the different types of relationships that exist between the actors on the map. Examples of relationships to include here are: • **Close relationships:** where actors enjoy a positive relationship with each other. • **Alliances:** where actors coordinate their activities with one another and act as one. • **Weak or unknown relationships:** relationships with little contact, or where the nature of which is unknown. • **Conflict:** where two actors have an antagonistic relationship with one another. • **Violent conflict:** where the relationship is characterised by physical (potentially armed) violence by one or both parties. • **Compulsion:** where an actor has power over another one and can make them do something, e.g. a paramilitary group which is controlled by the armed forces. • **Interdependent:** where two entities are bound to each other in some manner.
Remarks & **Tips**	It is useful to periodically revisit and reflect on the map you created and make any additions, subtractions or changes that occur to you. Remember, it is important that this is re-evaluated and updated regularly, especially before a new action.

Legend[9]

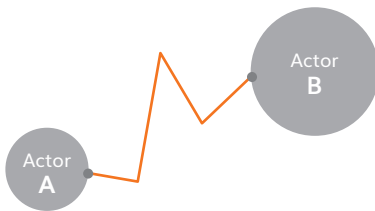Different sized circles represent differences in power
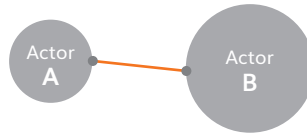
A solid line represents a close relationship
You can also 'break' the line (by crossing it in the middle) if there is a broken relationship
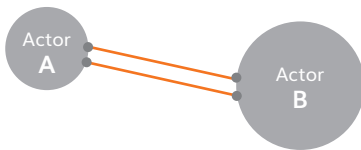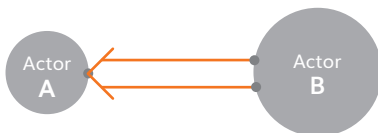
A double-line represents an alliance
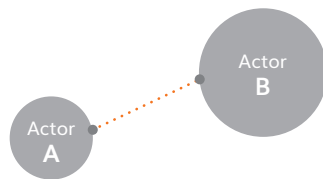
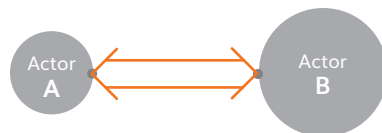A dotted line represents a weak or unknown relationship

A jagged line represents conflict or a bad relationship

A double jagged line represents violent conflict

A double-line with an arrow represents domination, control or compulsion (where one actor acts under orders of another)

A double-line with an arrow in both directions represents interdependence

9 Adapted from KURVE Wustrow (2006) Nonviolent Conflict Transformation. A Training Manual for a Training of Trainers Course. Centre for Training and Networking on Nonviolent Action KURVE Wustrow e.V., Wustrow. (pdf: http://www.trainingoftrainers.org/), pp.45-46.

Additional actor information sheet

For each of the allies and opponents (but prioritising the active ones), you can elaborate on the nature of their relationship to your work, and create an information sheet that provides further information on their motivations, their interests, the history of their relationship with you and their resources (material, financial, relational or other).

This information sheet will help you to:
- identify the underlying interests and relationships that motivate their stance. Why are they 'with' or 'against' you?
- identify the resources and strategies they possess and employ which they may use to help or hinder your work. Reflect also on their position within the broader socio-political context and which privileges and resources they might draw from that position.

It is important to note that these motivations and resources will change over time. This analysis should be updated regularly as new information emerges. Furthermore, it's very important to consider sources of information about this trustworthy: be it through personal contact, informal networks, local media or other.

Once you have completed a visual actor map for the first time, it may be useful to transfer the information to another format where it can be regularly updated according to your situational monitoring and analysis, and the ongoing changes in your activities.

In the next segment, we will consider the importance of information and how it moves between ourselves and the other actors on the map. In addition to exploring why we should pay attention to our own information, how we generate it, use it, share it, store it, etc., we will also explore what measures to take to protect our communication and information.