talking about our passion: Why I became an activist

Key Explanation Points:
explain that everyone has their ‘first’ story—the one we hold on the surface, the one that we are comfortable with. this is the intimate story we share on occasion, the one that becomes our history. But it is the other stories we want to unearth, the ones that reveal the deeper, truer reasons behind our activism—that help us to reconnect to ourselves, to the passion and those beginnings.

and when these deeper truths are shared in this space, we connect to each other on another level. We see that we have a lot more in common than we ever expected.

In addition, this helps us to form connections before ideological differences regarding our organisational or theoretical frameworks emerge—first we see each other as coming from similar places.

this exercise can then flow naturally into discussions about our identities: who we are as activists and what connects us.

No tests and variations:
this exercise can be used any time you want to encourage participants to leave their comfort zone and get to a deeper truth. you could, for example, ask for an example of a situation in which they were hurt or betrayed by another activist—then ask for a different story, in which they were the one to hurt or betray someone.

this style of ‘switching’ can be used in relation to other topics, but it should only be utilised once in a workshop, and with care and respect.

Summary:
1. Ask participants to take a few minutes to think about why they became an activist.
2. Once they are ready, and have that story in their mind, tell them to forget it—that is not the one you want them to talk about.
3. Ask them to tell the real reason they became an activist ...

Exercise:
Format: Group Exercise
Time: 60 minutes
Required Materials: None

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Session 5: Contextual Analysis: A Framework for Understanding Challenges

Activities:
presentation on context, followed by a group discussion.

Session Objectives:
• to consolidate and summarise the challenges and threats presented by participants on Day One; and
• to provide structure for developing practical strategies by identifying key challenges and threats.

Adaptation Notes:
This session can range from highly structured (with a semi-formal written presentation as shown below) to less formal (reporting back to participants).
Contextual Analysis:
A framework for understanding challenges

SUMMARY:
This is a summary of the threats and challenges presented on Day One – in a clear format, and ideally written up on a flipchart. After the presentation, participants should be given an opportunity to discuss and make comments.

FACILITATION NOTES:
This is a particularly useful process for groups that are struggling to shift from discussing the larger political aspects of their security challenges – that is, the underlying causes and drivers of insecurity in their context – to the specific challenges and threats that they, and their organisations, are facing. For example, while patriarchy, conflict and rising fundamentalism are key factors in the creation of an insecure environment for women human rights defenders, they are not the specific challenges that participants need to address at an integrated security workshop. Rather, the threat of rape, attacks on family members, aggressive slander in the media and/or kidnapping are the kind of very specific challenges that participants should seek to address on Day Two. An example of a contextual analysis prepared for the South Caucasus Integrated Security Workshop in 2009 is set out below:
**Contextual Analysis**

**What are the Key Contextual Challenges in our Overall Environment?**

- Historic ‘Waves’ *(Nationalism, Post-communism, The Rose Revolution)*
- Economic Pressures
- International Relations
- Conflict *(‘Post’ and ‘Pre’)*

**How do these Challenges affect our Operation Environment?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increasing</th>
<th>Decreasing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence Against Women</td>
<td>Financial Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Influences/Pressure</td>
<td>Community Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats to Independence and Freedom</td>
<td>Respect and Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom of Expression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What are the Priority Threats to Activists an our Work?**

**Legal and Administrative Pressure from the State**
- Restrictive NGO laws.
- Financial restrictions against NGO sector.

**Risk of Physical Violence**
- Beatings, rape
- Border Crossings
- Arrest, detention, hostage-taking, disappearance

**Stander/Defamation**
- Physical threats against family members: psychological pressure, economic pressure.
- ‘Criminalisation’ – calling activist spies, traitors, terrorists.

**Psychological and Physical Health**
- Uncertainty (don’t know the future, can’t plan), causes stress.
- Difficulty in establishing psychological boundaries in the face of violence.
- Effects on the psychical health.

**Threats to Family (and from Family)**
- Physical threats against family members; psychological pressure, economic pressure.
- Family members don’t agree with the work, try to restrict you.

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