



Supplementary Module

Threat Assessment and Security Planning – Introductory Overview

NGO organisational resilience in fragile contexts course

Agenda

- **Threat assessment and security planning – what and why**
- **What is a threat?**
- **Threats to NGOs – types and motives**
- **Threat assessment**
- **Risk assessment**
- **Threat and risk management**
- **Some tricky aspects in threat assessment (and threats)**
- **NGO security capabilities**
- **Challenges and considerations in NGO security**
- **Security collaboration with other organisations**
- **Discussion**

Threat assessment and security planning – knowing who wants to harm us, and planning and methods to reduce the risk of harm

To some people, organisations and groups, we represent...

- A problem or challenge
- A threat to their values
- An opportunity for wealth or gain
- An opportunity for violent gratification

They could try to harm us

- Physical attack or intimidation
- Detention, arrest, kidnapping
- Theft (assets, data)
- Reputation attack (fake news, rumours)

We learn

- Who threats are
- What they could do

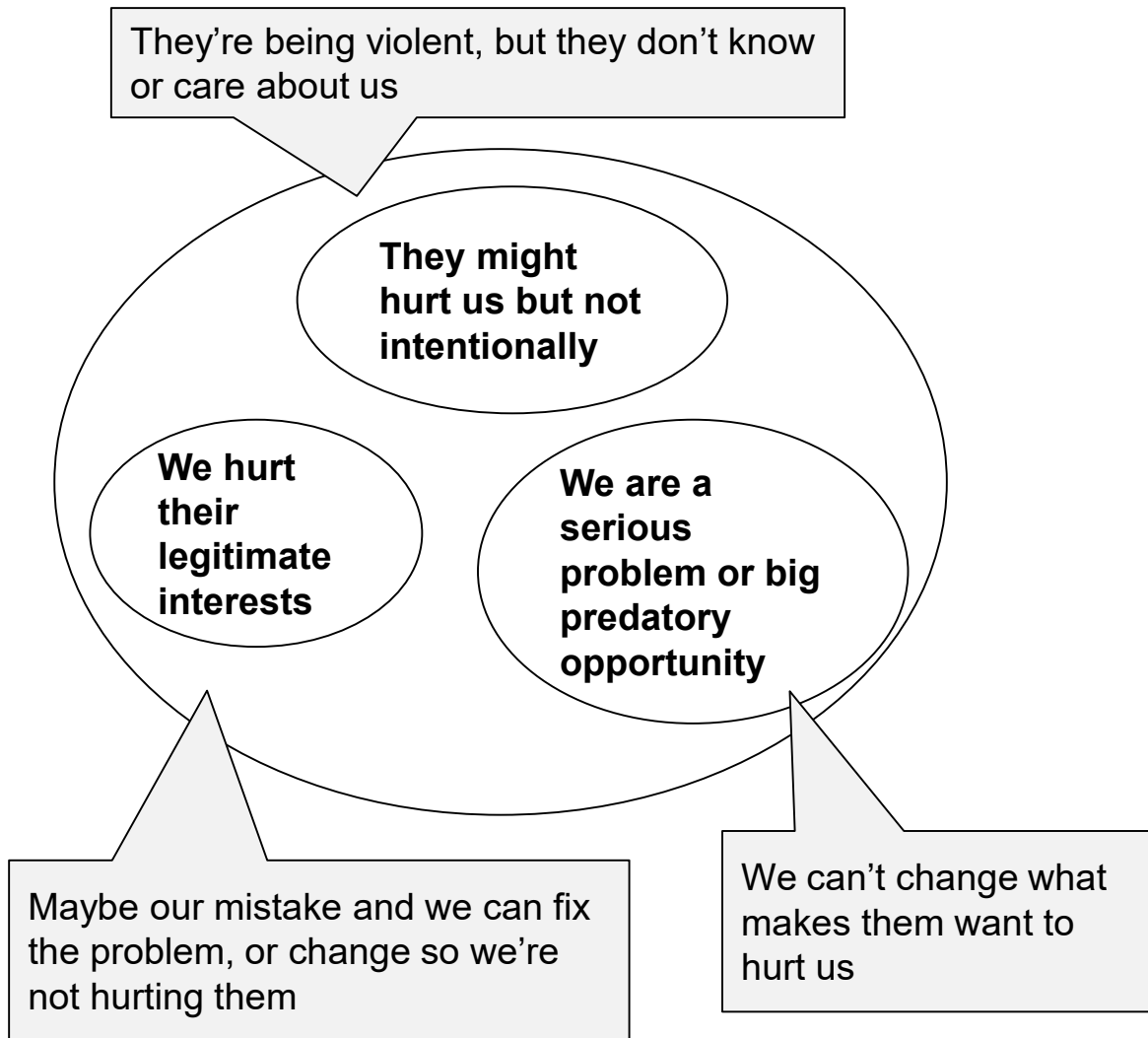
So we can...

- Manage threats (reduce intent and capability to harm)
- Manage risks (detect, avoid, block, respond, recover)
- Adapt our routine security to cover the main threats and risks (reduce vulnerability)

All threat management has a similar basic logic, but it is adjusted for certain contexts and assets (e.g. cyber security / info sec, counter-fraud...). Our focus will be on **personnel security**.

What, or who, is a threat? It's not always black and white

The set of actors who could hurt us



All violence and political activity is undertaken by actors, and we might make enemies by accidentally hurting someone's legitimate interests.

But specifically, a threat is:

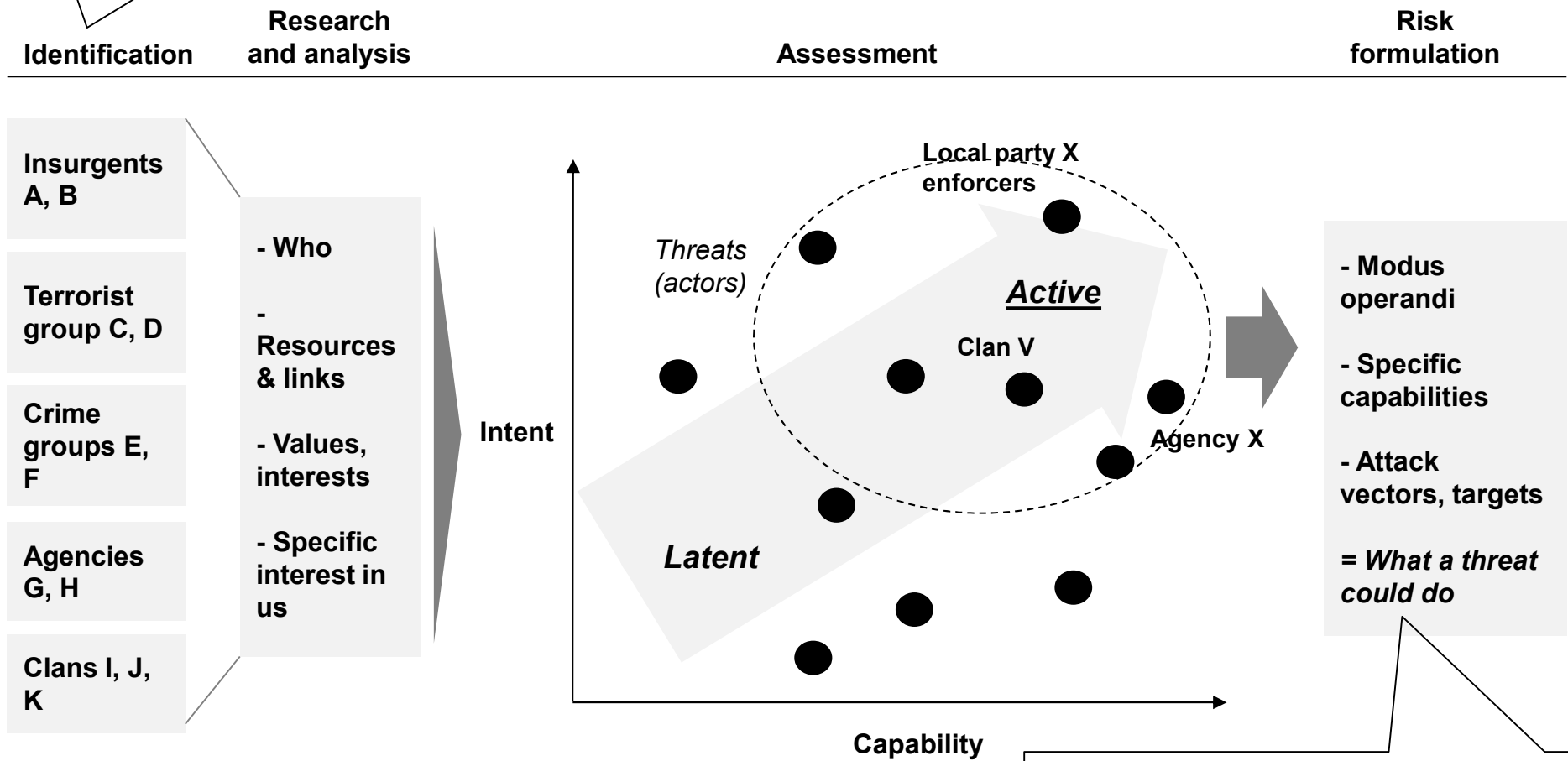
- A stakeholder
- Unconditional bad attitude to us – they want to hurt us because of who we are or what we represent
- Their harm is directed at us, not just happening near us

What are relevant types of threats to NGOs? You can talk about your context, but to kickstart things, in other complex environments, they often include...

	<p>Threats to staff because of who they work for</p>	<p>Threats to individual staff (doesn't matter who they work for)</p>
<p>What they see</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NGO seeks change that hurts their status - NGO could expose or embarrass them - NGO's values challenge their own - They want the NGO to help them do bad stuff - The NGO looks like an easy target for money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An easy target for robbery / theft / extortion - The wrong social group membership – “the enemy” - An individual they don't like personally - Opportunity for violence for fun...
<p>Actor types</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influential factions and cliques (local and national) - Government agencies – secret police - Insurgent groups - Mafia / business-political groups... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual police (police corruption / brutality) - Faction / political party “street wing” - Opportunistic criminal gangs - Individual criminal - Someone you know...
<p>Action actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intimidation – physical, psychological - Arrest, detention, disappearance - Kidnapping - Attack (people and premises) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical or sexual assault / violent robbery - Stalking, intimidation - Arbitrary arrest in periods of high tension - “Express” kidnapping...
<p>Individuals can face threats that have nothing to do with their organisation, but the organisation can still help them to be more secure even when they are not “on the job”.</p>		

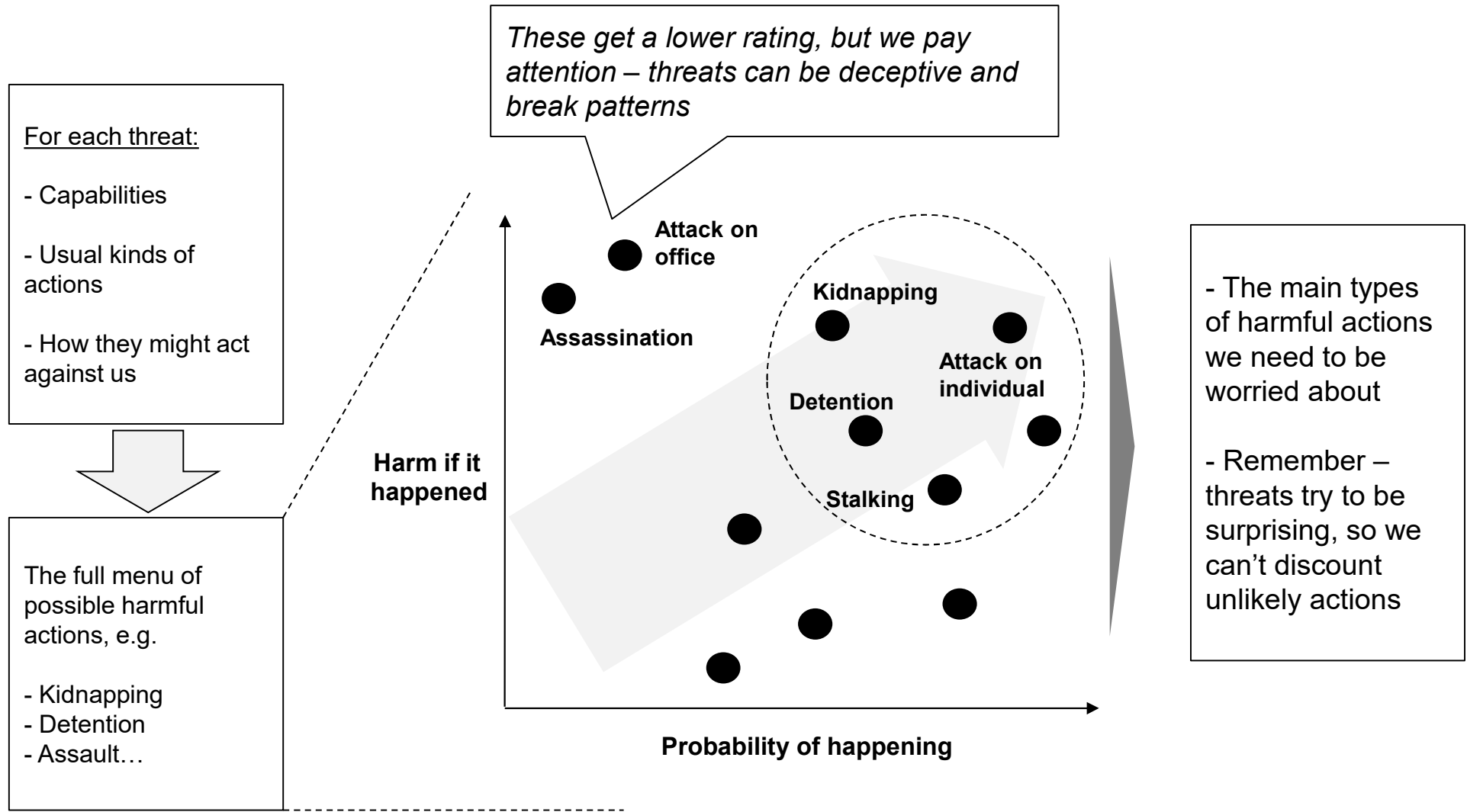
We identify and assess threats to understand who we might be dealing with – it's similar to stakeholder analysis but only focused on hostile or predatory actors

Like stakeholder ID – who would have a hostile or predatory interest in our profile?



Specific potential actions are risks – which we look at next

We know priority threats, but it helps planning to know the kinds of actions we could face, no matter who might do them



Security works on both threats and risks

Threat management

Reduce capability to harm

- **Not really an option**

- This would be like the police putting a computer virus into a mafia's network, or the army proactively attacking a terrorist group before it started bombing towns – we can't really start attacking threats

Reduce intent to harm

- **This is an option**

- Look for opportunities to be less problematic for them, if we can without sacrificing principles

- Deter – make it costly for them to hurt us (through influential friends, our high public profile and support, or legal action, and armed protection)

- Deceive – make them think we're not doing what they don't like, or that we have mean friends

- Expose them – then they need to back off because they have too much public scrutiny

- And maybe more ideas...

Risk management

Make ourselves **less vulnerable** – security systems, people move in groups, office in well lit / patrolled area, protection...

Prevention / avoidance

Reduce exposure – limit people's (and individuals') time in places where they could be attacked (where threats are, or where we lack protection)

Be capable of blocking an attack – can you detect early and get help quickly before or when an attack starts?

Crisis response

Be capable of recovering - helping people after an attack so they get the right care soon

Some tricky things about threats and threat assessment

They can use deception and break patterns

- Most times an organisation is hurt by a threat, the action was considered unlikely beforehand
- Threats cover their moves and intentions, and break patterns to make their attacks more successful

They can be irrational

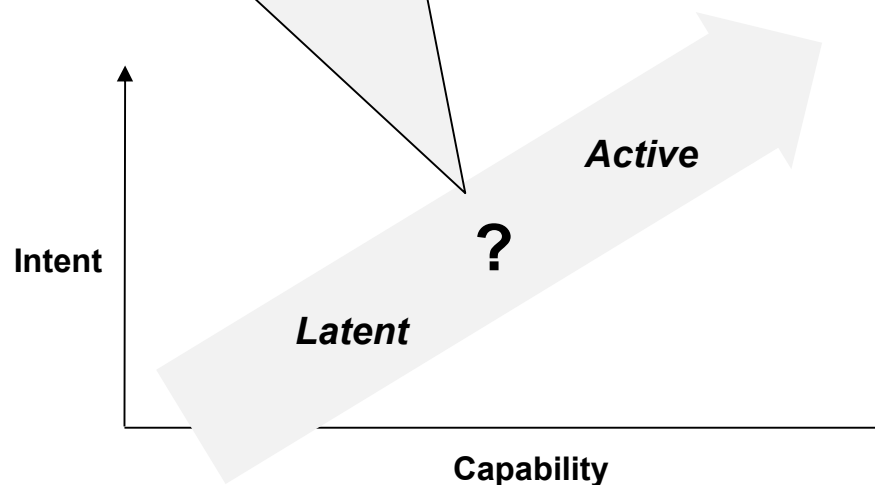
- A threat might not seem ready to attack us – they don't have the people, money, connections, strength...
- But they could anyway because they are desperate, unprofessional and hasty, or simply a little crazy
- Again, this makes it hard to predict what threats might do, and when

Latent: We fit their usual target but they haven't noticed us yet, or they notice us but they're not ready to attack yet

Active: They are hunting us, looking for vulnerabilities

Because of deception and irrationality, a threat can jump from latent to active very quickly.

Our assessment might be sound, but we need to always consider this possibility.



What does this all mean for an NGO's security capabilities? We tailor them to our knowledge of threats and risks, and can work on two general areas

"Non-security" methods

Stakeholder engagement

- Influential supporters who might be able to deter threats
- Supporters who are friends with threats and who can tell them that we're okay
- Actors who can help in a crisis – police, security officials, people with knowledgeable or influential connections who could help...

Communications and public profile

- Opportunity to reduce emphasis on values that threats don't like?
- For our threat context, is a low profile or a high profile better? Low avoids attention, but high makes it more costly to try to hurt us

Security methods

Routine security (reduce vulnerability)

- Information security – protect people's personal details
- Premises security (access control and exterior lighting, cameras...)
- Staff travel / movement policy – buddy system, itineraries, emergency contact numbers
- Staff home security
- Staff personal security awareness and self-defence training

Guards, escorts – security providers, armed or unarmed (premises, travel)

Crisis plans and practice

- The right help ready to move quickly
- Communications plans and abilities
- Logistics – transport, locations...

An example – the risk of kidnapping by a local clan mafia (the threat)

The threat

- Angered by NGO's advocacy work, which draws attention to illegal trade in antiquities
- Clan makes money from the trade
- Habit of kidnapping enemies to send a message (people can be returned unharmed, but some die or get injured)



Threat management

- Publicise the NGO's work so the clan will face pressure if they cause harm
- Make clear to government that antiquities are national asset, if the NGO is hurt then illegal trade gets worse – pressure on clan
- Build relations with other local clans who have influence over the hostile one...

The risk

- Staff member kidnapped, probably while travelling alone, or maybe from home
- Detained while clan gives its warning
- Period of uncertainty, but if NGO does not stop then victim likely hurt or killed



Risk management

- Travel together and change routines – armed protection?
- Residential security, and work with police to ensure quick response to emergency
- Know who to turn to for help – who could put heavy pressure on the clan for safe release?
- Have a crisis plan – steps & communications

A security policy takes the same approaches to different problems and packages them together to make overall management easier.

But some threats and risks will need individual attention until they are resolved or reduced.

A few challenges and considerations in NGO security

Stakeholder engagement

- People with links to security agencies or “bad guy” groups might be able to help
- But we need to be careful about our independence, or being seen as taking a political side

Crisis plans and preparedness

- Simply put, NGOs don't invest enough time in this, especially practice (crisis simulations)
- Most crisis situations are in the “unlikely but big impact” category – they seem distant
- But as we said, threats use surprise

Security providers – guards and escorts (especially armed)

- NGO security theory emphasises making people like us as a way to reduce threats
- But sometimes we need protection – over time, or when a threat is actively hunting us
- Serious risks with armed security
 - > Accidents with guns
 - > Aggressive with people
 - > High visibility – association between NGO and armed guards
 - > Political connections – reporting on you / using their position as a cover for other activities
 - > Aggressive with you – can act like mafia

Carefully vet and select, develop and enforce standards, make sure you can always replace them or fire them without a backlash

Because security takes time (and sometimes money) and is a very sensitive area for an NGO, it could make sense to collaborate with other legitimate organisations

Examples from Iraq and Afghanistan during last wars

- International NGOs and local partners had a shared threat and risk monitoring system
- Pooled resources to help each other with security logistics, contacts, expertise
- Donor support and advice

What could be shared with other NGOs / CSOs?

- Threat and risk intelligence – different NGOs have different contacts and information sources
- Shared crisis management capabilities – like insurance, each member pays in with time, contacts and knowledge, and if one has a crisis the others help out
- Lessons learned and mutual advice, e.g. how to handle a kidnapping, or how to manage security providers
- Friendly contacts and sources of support

- Possible to get official support and involvement – donors and relevant domestic government agencies
- Some NGOs specialising in NGO security (e.g. Frontline Defenders, GISF) also offer guidance / risk intelligence

Discussion - open to you, but some suggestions in case

What threats and security problems do you have experience with?

What do you think are some of the more serious threats to your organisation or NGOs in general?

Do you think your organisation could do better with its security?

What might be some cost-effective improvements to make people safer?

Here is a self-test question for the organisation's security abilities:

If someone were kidnapped by an organised crime or militia group tomorrow, how ready is the organisation to respond, and what is the plan?

Anything else...?

A few resources for more on NGO security management

- Global Interagency Security Forum (lots of papers and guides)

<https://www.gisf.ngo/resources/?search=&topics=&types=guide®ions=&languages=&gisf=yes>

- Humanitarian Outcomes (their security papers are more for humanitarian aid NGOs but still useful)

https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/publications?work_area=3

- Frontline Defenders (NGO protection especially for human rights and advocacy, also provides training and can help in specific cases of arrest or threats)

<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/programme/risk-analysis-protection-training>

- A useful paper on security for fieldwork in hostile places – it's not for NGOs but it still has relevant ideas

[https://www.brookings.edu/articles/security-considerations-for-conducting-fieldwork-in-highly-dangerous-places-or-on-highly-dangerous-subjects/#:~:text=The%20full%20list%20of%20elements,supplies\)%3B%20keeping%20a%20low](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/security-considerations-for-conducting-fieldwork-in-highly-dangerous-places-or-on-highly-dangerous-subjects/#:~:text=The%20full%20list%20of%20elements,supplies)%3B%20keeping%20a%20low)