

Harmattan Risk Pro-bono NGO Training Course:

Political Risk and International NGOs – Mutual Discussion and Learning Workshop

Overview

September 2023

Harmattan Risk offers a one- to two-day pro-bono session on political risk in an international NGO context. Thus far the course has been delivered once, to members of Dochas, the Irish national NGO association. Participants included members of development, humanitarian relief, and rights advocacy NGOs, and all subsector representatives found common ground in the relevance of the concepts and issues under discussion.

The aim of the session is twofold. One is to introduce the concept of political risk and its practical implications and applications in an NGO context. The other is to provide a forum for structured, interactive discussion about key challenges that NGOs face, in order to share ideas and lessons on how these can be effectively understood and managed. Should the course be delivered to one NGO, that aspect of it would mainly focus on its own concerns and experiences, while still drawing on wider lessons for applicable insight.

Note that the following description is indicative, since the course remains subject to further modification and refinement.

1-Day option structure

- Introduction, rationale, objectives, format
- The concept of political risk in an NGO context: Conceptual boundaries, elements, exposures, dynamics, manifestations and effects
- Overview of political risk management in an NGO context: Learning and planning, political risk management strategies and approaches, distinctions from conventional risk management
- Country operation level challenges
 - o Drivers, actors, dynamics – how challenges form and manifest at country and local levels
 - o Overview of operational political risk management
 - o Menu of challenges for discussion – wary / hostile governments; sustaining acceptance in fractured communities; local partner challenges; security dilemmas; duty of care dilemmas; kidnapping; corruption; dilemmas in the decision to withdraw
 - Participants can agree on four to five challenges, and can substitute other concerns for the ones proposed
 - For each, there is a basic problem description followed by key questions as a way to kickstart discussion, and then interactive discussion around relevant experiences and lessons learned
 - o Wrap up and key learning points
- Global pressure on civil society space
 - o Trends, geographic distinctions, manifestations, effects
 - o Sources of the challenge

- Initial hypotheses to kickstart discussion
 - Team-based exercise to explain why and how the clampdown on civil society space started and spread
 - Group discussion aimed at understanding the drivers and motives behind the phenomenon
 - What to do? Global and country-level options, strategies and responses
 - Global-level team-based exercise to derive strategic options for NGOs to respond to pressures
 - Group discussion aimed at ideas on collaborative responses
 - Country-level team-based exercise to derive potential approaches to engaging with / influencing government attitudes to civil society space
 - Group discussion aimed at ideas on messaging and engagement responses at the country level
 - Wrap up: Key ideas to take forward for further investigation and for discussion with other NGOs and interested stakeholders, and an outline of at least an initial plan for a global-level response (as a thought exercise but initial hypotheses are a necessary first step)
- Political risk management capability
 - Key elements and processes at a conceptual, general level
 - As shared awareness, inter-functional focus and targeted collaboration
 - The options for a permanent capacity, from tacit to explicit, and pros and cons of each stop on the spectrum
 - Thought experiments and discussion on possibilities in participants' own organisations at HQ and country operation levels, discussion of relevant variables and considerations
 - Wrap up and final thoughts / key takeaways, Q&A

2-Day option

The two-day option would retain Day 1 as outlined above, but it would provide more margin for discussion, and would include an overview of a political risk intelligence and planning process which could usefully support the launch of a new country programme, or help it to adjust to changes in the socio-political environment.

The intelligence and planning process uses a hypothetical NGO programme in a conflict-sensitive country and city for illustration. Stages include hypotheses-setting, environment analysis, stakeholder analysis, political risk management planning, and scenario analysis and planning. After an overview, specific stages in the process, for example stakeholder analysis or planning, could be selected for more in-depth discussion and thought experimentation.

A closer look at intelligence and planning could also feed back into and expand on the discussion of a political risk management capability, since participants would now have a stronger sense of some of the specific activities which constitute political risk management.

What participants receive

- The workshop itself is the principal value, both for the new concepts and ideas that the instructor brings to the table, and the learning and ideas that participants generate and share

- The course slide set is provided for future review and reference, on the condition that it be retained within the participating organisation(s) and not disseminated more widely or made available online
- Session notes on key learning points, as recorded and edited by an assigned note-taker (see below)

Conditions and “customer” organisation responsibilities

While the material will not be significantly customised for each occasion, Harmattan will discuss aims and requirements with the prospective workshop customer and will make some adjustments to account for particular contexts and interests. Harmattan’s main role is then workshop delivery and facilitation.

The customer organisation is responsible for all administration and logistics, including a venue, participant invitations and confirmations (up to 15 people per session), a note-taker (we do not permit recording of sessions), room and facilities, any sustenance for breaks, and any printing of the course materials that participants may wish to have in the session.

Additionally, while Harmattan does not charge any fees for the session, the customer would be responsible for travel and accommodation costs (our policy is to arrive one to two days before a session to ensure that there is time to deal with any travel disruption, and to spend some time with organisation staff to break the ice before a session).

Finally, as noted, the customer will need to agree to keep the training material handovers within the participating organisation(s). The material is not meant as standalone documentation and any training material can be interpreted out of context if it is not part of a course experience.

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