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VOICES AT RISK

REPORT OF A TWO-DAY WORKSHOP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS & JOURNALISTS IN NIGERIA

ORGANIZED BY WITNESS & THE HIGH COMMISSION OF CANADA IN NIGERIA

DATE: 3 - 4 March, 2022.

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3 - 4 March 2022

Executive Summary

Civil society groups play a critical role in protecting democracy and promoting human rights. Unfortunately, the civic space across the world is rapidly shrinking and this is happening both online and offline. There is a decline of freedoms and liberties and a rise of authoritarianism, even in democratic societies.

In Nigeria, the clampdown on social media, attacks on dissenting voices, deployment of state forces against peaceful protesters, and arbitrary laws targeted at vulnerable groups, have all contributed to shifting the balance in favour of tyranny. Standing to defend human rights now comes at great cost to the personal safety of those involved.

Furthermore, the exponential spread of mis/disinformation presents a real threat to activists and human rights defenders. Also, the advancement of technology developed to mislead makes it increasingly difficult to verify content, thereby undermining the trustworthiness of video evidence and impedes access to justice. This is further aggravated by the emergence of deepfakes and other forms of synthetic media that enable more seamless, more accessible abilities to make someone appear to say or do something they never did, and manipulate audio and video.

It has therefore become imperative to create a gathering through which solidarity can be built among human rights defenders, while at the same time, effective strategies can be shared for how to stay safe (online and offline) while in the pursuit of justice, accountability, good governance and human rights.

Over the last three decades, WITNESS has led a global movement that empowers at-risk communities, including human rights defenders and activists to use video and technology to protect and defend human rights. This is also in line with the Canadian foreign policy which places great importance on strengthening international regulations that protect universal human rights, democracy, and respect for the rule of law.
The Voices at Risk workshop brought together human rights defenders, community-based activists, and journalists to achieve the following:

Objectives

1. To empower participants on how to leverage video evidence to expose violations and defend victims of human rights abuses;

2. To build the capacity of participants on effective strategies for staying safe from digital and physical attacks;

3. To facilitate the sharing of information about best practices for reporting human rights abuses and obtaining justice;

4. To foster solidarity and build a strong alliance among participants.

The workshop created a unique opportunity to identify gaps that leave frontline defenders vulnerable to attacks. Such gaps include;

1. The ways in which the commercialization of the media and poor remuneration of journalists contribute to the shrinking civic space in Nigeria.

2. The lack of intergenerational dialogue between budding and seasoned activists which has created a rift that impedes solidarity and collective action.

3. The de-prioritisation of safety and security training of human rights defenders, activists and journalists, which increases their risk exposure to attacks by state and non state actors.

4. The relative lack of a response strategy on misinformation and disinformation by human rights defenders which has introduced new threats while reinforcing existing threats.

Sanya Olujuwon

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1.0 Overview & Welcome Address

The Voices at Risk Workshop coincided with the March 3rd 1991 police assault of Rodney King – a violation that sparked outrage across the United States, and an incident that gave impetus to the founding of WITNESS. Since the founding of WITNESS in 1992, the organization has prioritised identifying critical situations and teaching those affected by them the basics of video production, safe and ethical filming techniques and advocacy strategies. With the emergence of new forms of technology the scope has expanded to include preparing frontline defenders for the potential abuse and misuse of technology, and other strategies to remain resilient while continuing to defend human rights.

The Voices at Risk workshop is one of the many gatherings through which WITNESS provides tailored guidance to meet the felt needs of communities and stakeholders. The Participants at the workshop were representatives of civil society organizations, grassroots communities, social justice movements, and the media.

1.1 National and International Legal Framework of Human Rights

The notion that the role of a human rights defender is reserved for a specific class of people whose responsibility it is to defend human rights is problematic. Defending Human rights is a collective responsibility. A human rights defender is anyone who takes an action to promote, protect or strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means.

After the horrors of the Second World War, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 which articulated fundamental freedoms attributed to everyone. [1]

Although the UDHR does not speak solely to human rights defenders, the understanding that anyone could be a human rights defender makes the UDHR one of the basic documents at the international level that enshrines and validates a set of rights for all individuals worldwide. Furthermore, the creation of the UDHR is also the bedrock from which numerous laws and policies have been developed concerning activities and beliefs that advance human rights and respect for human dignity.

While the UDHR is a milestone document in the history of human rights, it must be noted that it is a declaration and has limitations as it does not express the duties and responsibilities of states in the protection of human rights. To further express the importance of the rights in the UDHR and give it additional backing, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights treaty was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966. This then means that States that have ratified are bound by the provisions in the treaty and commit state parties to respect the civil and political rights contained in the UDHR. While the UDHR and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights do not directly address human rights defenders, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders[2] is an exemplary document that specifically addresses human rights defenders in the context of their work. The UDHRD is a powerful document that articulates existing human rights in a way that makes it easier to apply them to the situation of human rights defenders however it is not legally binding. The African Charter for Human and Peoples' Rights (which is part of the components of the African regional framework of Human Rights) is an applicable legal instrument that has been praised for its progressive provisions including ones that seek to protect human rights defenders. Nigeria has ratified and domesticated the ACHPR, thereby making it a national law.

At the national level, chapter 4 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria contains the bill of rights which recognizes most civil and political rights set out in the international human rights framework, despite that, the 1999 Constitution has the inclusion of the clause which states that;

"Nothing in sections 37, 38, 39, 40 and 41 of this Constitution shall invalidate any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society

(a) in the interest of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or

(b) for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom or other persons"[3]

This was a key concern for many participants as they cited a plethora of scenarios whereby law enforcement agents obstruct protests on the supposed grounds that they posed a threat to public safety and order or on the basis of national security. This is quite ironic, as police and other law enforcement agencies are meant to protect peaceful protestors.

Similarly, punitive financial measures have been used to stifle civil movements notably, the #ENDSARS. This contradicts the Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa[4] which Nigeria is signatory to, and further stresses the need to hold states accountable to the commitments stated in these treaties.

Equally vague is the use of the term "public morality" which creates a gray area around what is deemed as moral, especially as Nigeria is a pluralistic society. This has also given authorities the freedom to criminalize the rights of sexual minorities.

Thus, it was generally agreed that to prevent these clauses from being abused, it is necessary to advocate that they must be applied within a narrow framework. In addition, the application must be legal, necessary and proportionate. In cases where human rights defenders and protesters have concerns that disagree with the assessment of law enforcement agents/institutions on the safety of a protest, it should be left for a court of competent jurisdiction to determine the reasonability of such a scenario.

[1] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

[2] The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/srhrdefenders/pages/declaration.aspx

[3] 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria: https://publicofficialsfinancialdisclosure.worldbank.org/sites/fdl/files/assets/law-library-files/Nigeria_Constitution_1999_en.pdf

[4] Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa: https://www.achpr.org/sessions/resolutions?id=419

1.2 Key Points from Experience Sharing Session

Several participants shared their experiences on challenges they had faced during the course of their work, and some of the approaches they took to remedy those challenges. This was an informative aspect of the workshop as it allowed for an exchange of ideas and best practices.

A journalist shared their experience on how they were arrested, assaulted and threatened with rape for using video to document the brutality by members of the Special Ant-Robbery Squad (SARS). The participant's experience helped to shed light on the dangers faced by journalists and media practitioners in the course of their work. This underscores the need for a right to record law in Nigeria which would protect the right of citizens to film public officials including security operatives in the line of their work. Video evidence has become increasingly relevant in proving crimes of police brutality. In 2021, the Lagos state judicial panel of inquiry on SARS[5] confirmed what credible video evidence has revealed all along: that Nigerian Security Agents shot and killed peaceful protesters at Lekki Toll Gate on the night of October 20 2020. The panel also relied on video evidence in reaching its findings.

One measure participants shared to remedy the challenges mentioned above is the concerted effort amongst media personnel and civil societies to amplify cases of abuse of power and collaborate to seek for justice. An example of a scenario where this approach was successful is in the case of Agba Jalingo, a journalist who was awarded compensation by the ECOWAS court for the ill-treatment and torture he was subjected to whilst in detention.[6] To create awareness about the case, organisations like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) consistently voiced support for the release of Agba Jalingo and concern over the detention and use of laws to criminalise journalists for critical reportage about the government. [7]Likewise, the Socio-Economic Rights And Accountability Project (SERAP) filed a lawsuit against the government of Nigeria and the governor of Cross River state Governor Ben Ayade before the ECOWAS Court over the prolonged, arbitrary detention, unfair prosecution, persecution, and sham trial of Agba Jalingo.[8]

Another example is that of Jones Abiri, a journalist and publisher of Weekly Source Newspaper in Yenegoa, Bayelsa State, who was arrested by Nigeria's Department of State Services in July 2016 and accused of being the leader of the separatist group Joint Revolutionary Council of the Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force.[9]

[5]Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry on Restitution For Victims Of SARS Related Abuses and other matters.
https://lagosstatemoj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Report-of-Judicial-Panel-of-Inquiry-on-Lekki-incident-investigation-of-20th-October-2020.pdf

[6]https://guardian.ng/news/agba-jalingo-ecowas-court-awards-n30m-damages-against-fg/

[7]Nigerian publisher Agba Jalingo charged with treason:
https://cpj.org/2019/09/nigerian-publisher-agba-jalingo-charged-with-treas/

[8]ECOWAS Court awards Agba Jalingo damages:
https://serap-nigeria.org/2021/07/09/ecowas-court-awards-n30m-against-buhari-govt-for-torture-of-journalist-agba-jalingo/

[9]https://cpj.org/data/people/jones-abiri/

However, a report by the CPJ shows that Abiri's family believed his arrest was prompted by a controversial article that was republished by the Weekly Source. For over 2 years, Jones Abiri was held incommunicado at an undisclosed location and denied access to his family or a lawyer. It was only after local journalists and rights groups persistently raised Abiri's case with officials that he was brought to a magistrate's court in Abuja.

Both Jones Abiri and Agba Jalingo's cases reveal that;
1. There is power in solidarity action when it is unified and sustained.
2. There should be a joint effort by lawyers, activists, civil society organisations, and media personnel to explore judicial mechanisms in obtaining justice.
3. The judiciary must ensure that trials are free, fair, and transparent.

Participants also shared various levels of security protocols that they practice in order to keep safe. Some measures include, Sharing locations with trusted civil societies and allies before going to the scene of an incident, live tweeting and live streaming.
Other concerns which participants identified were social media trolling, typically from bot or faceless accounts. The anonymity of the persons behind these actions further makes accountability evasive. This often drowns out their voices, demoralizes them and tarnishes their reputation.

Figure 1 is a picture shared by a participant which shows a citizen educating law enforcement agents who appear to be receptive. This led to the participant raising the challenge of the existing relationship between citizens, human rights defenders and law enforcement agents. Participants shared that it is important that the civil society engage meaningfully with law enforcement agents through training and workshops. They were of the opinion that it would cause the needed shift and a decline in state violence.

(Fig. 1)

On the contrary, another participant raised the challenge of chain-of-command which essentially is the hierarchical structure of law enforcement agencies. This ensures that officers are not at liberty to question commands from their superiors even when they run contrary to the law. They further reiterated that the challenge with the violent conduct of law enforcement agents in Nigeria is not necessarily a question of ignorance of the provisions of the law but the absolute authority the commanding officers wield. These officers often prioritise political and personal interest over the protection of the citizenry. The insights shared by participants give credence to the myriad of challenges faced by human rights defenders. The threat level varies depending on their geographical location and thematic focus. The major perpetrators of violence against human rights defenders oscillate between state and non-actors depending on the context. Particularly, in the Niger-Delta region of the country, non-state actors including militants and thugs pose a threat to human rights defenders because they are equally culpable of rights violations.

1.3 Judicial & Non-Judicial Mechanisms for persons at risk

To mitigate the risks associated with defending human rights, proactive measures are essential. A detailed security plan limits the confusion that arises when an emergency situation occurs. An effective security plan should include having an emergency contact, a committed lawyer/legal team, a support network of allies and partners. A security protocol should also be in place and should be updated regularly to meet the changing times.

The experiences of frontline defenders who have been detained by law enforcement agents show that prolonged detention often leads to further human rights violations and even extra-judicial killings. This underscores the relevance of putting in place safety measures and precautions. As a human rights defender, it is important to assess the likely risks and available judicial and non-judicial remedies available.

Human rights defenders should be conversant with international, regional and national non-judicial remedies that exist to ensure justice. At the international level, there are charter based bodies and treaty based bodies that respond to state parties' reports and individual complaints or communication. At the regional level, the African Commission On Human And Peoples Rights, delivers non-binding judgements that ensure the protection of human and peoples' rights in Africa. At the national level, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC ACT) has quasi-judicial powers to summon persons, evidence and to award compensation and implement its decisions. Petitions to Police and other relevant authorities including the Parliament, Ministry of Justice are potential mechanisms that can be explored.

While non-judicial mechanisms may influence court decisions, only courts of competent jurisdiction can issue binding decisions on civil or criminal cases. This is a key point that lawyers must be mindful of when defending human rights defenders. If a human rights defender is charged with a criminal offense, a desired outcome should be a discharge, or an acquittal. The inability to achieve this would cause a conviction which could lead to undesired repercussions for the human rights defender.

1.4 Role of Video Evidence in Protecting Voices at Risk

Grassroots communities and human rights defenders are increasingly turning to video and technology to stand up to the powerful and demand change. Thanks to the wide proliferation of mobile phones, millions of people across Africa now carry a video-enabled cell phone in their pocket. These are among the most powerful and accessible tools frontline defenders have at their disposal to protect their rights – amplifying voices, capturing evidence of violations, leveraging support, and exerting pressure on key decision makers.

Empowering human rights defenders to use video effectively and safely in the defense of human rights is at the core of WITNESS' work. The video evidence documented by Bukeni Waruzi, a beneficiary of WITNESS' training led to the conviction of war criminal Thomas Lubanga by the International Criminal Court (ICC). On March 14 2012, the first-ever ICC verdict was made and Thomas Lubanga was convicted of the war crime of enlisting and conscripting children under the age of 15 years and using them in armed conflict. Thereafter, he was sentenced to a total of 14 years imprisonment.[10] Video footage played a role at the trial and Honorable Mr. Justice Fulford the ICC Presiding Judge stated that "We were unable to dispute the visual images or deny the sound, the evidence presented to us were credible and outstanding." [11]Video Evidence also significantly contributed to defending the land rights of the Endorois community, an indigenous group in Kenya. The Africa Commission ruled in 2009, that the Endorois' eviction from their indigenous land for tourism development violated their human rights.[12]The decision created a major legal precedent by recognising, for the first time in Africa, indigenous peoples' rights over traditionally owned land and their right to development. In 2021, video evidence helped in the conviction of Chance Muhonya by the Military Court of South Kivu. He was sentenced to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity by murder, rape and other inhumane acts but also for war crimes by recruiting and using child soldiers.

Furthermore, video evidence has also become a tool for protecting human rights defenders from imminent danger. There are numerous instances where video evidence helped spark public consciousness, build solidarity and establish the truth. One of such example is that of Treasure Nduka, a Nigerian woman who was arrested for filming an incident of police brutality during the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria. Her arrest was caught on camera by a citizen witness who later shared it on social media. The video became an advocacy tool that led to Treasure's release from police detention.[13]

A key challenge to leveraging the power of video is the lack of legal protection for citizen witnesses. The right to record is internationally recognized but not universally enforced. This emphasizes the need for increased advocacy around the right to record, especially as cellphone footage video evidence becomes more widespread.

In 2018, the 38th session of the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution in the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests;

"Paragraph 18: Underlines the necessity to address the management of assemblies, including peaceful protests, so as to contribute to their peaceful conduct, and to prevent injuries, including those that lead to disability, and loss of life of protestors, those observing, monitoring and recording such assemblies, bystanders, and officials exercising law enforcement duties, as well as any human rights violation or abuse, to ensure accountability for such violations and abuses and to provide victims with access to a remedy and redress;"[14]

(Fig 2 : A tweet made by the Kenyan Inspector General of Police)

Victoria Howard

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[10]Thomas Lubanga case: https://www.icc-cpi.int/drc/lubanga

[11]A Warlord Behind Bars: https://www.witness.org/success-a-warlord-behind-bars/

[12]276/03 Centre for Minority Rights Development (Kenya) and Minority Rights Group (on behalf of Endorois Welfare Council) / Kenya: https://www.achpr.org/sessions/descions?id=193

[13]Role of video evidence during the #EndSARS protests https://soundcloud.com/witnessorg/role-of-video-evidence-during-endsars protests?si=8f-5dca35ad624650a0602d488283361b&utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing

[14]https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1640460?ln=fr

2.0 The impact of mis/disinformation on social justice movements

With a fast-growing population of mobile phone users, and the popularisation of apps such as WhatsApp, misinformation has become much more pervasive across the continent. Research has shown that perceived exposure to false information is significantly high in Africa, yet citizens often share made-up news intentionally. To reduce the susceptibility to misinformation and disinformation critical thinking breaks the barriers to effective communication consumption. There is the high tendency to align more favourably with information that supports one's prior beliefs and ideologies. This tendency is exploited by disinformative agents to mislead and distort the truth. Social media algorithms are equally designed to present information that aligns with the preferences inferred by the digital footprints of users in order to keep users longer on the platform. This further drives division in the society, entrenches eco chambers and leads to a decline in civil debates that are necessary to advance democracy.

(Fig. 3 SIFT Framework)

In 2021 WITNESS launched a media literacy campaign named #VerifyBeforeSharing to help combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation. The resource-based campaign incorporated learnings from participants at its mis/disinformation West Africa convening and sought to build resilience in communities most at risk of mis/information by empowering them to push back against it. The campaign supported communities with the right skills and tools to identify the threats and prioritise solutions that are contextually relevant to the African continent.
One of the media literacy frameworks of the campaign is the 5 Cs of Critical Communication Consumption.

Credibility: Be aware that credible information would contain essential details that make it easier for others to verify.

Context: Critically consider the circumstances surrounding the claim of an information.

Compare: Compare the information with other perspectives, while testing alternatives.

Construction: Find other credible sources that give support to the claim of the information.

Corroborate: Check the bias in the information. Emotionally charged information often contain speculations and exaggerations.

Successful movements embody clarity of message and discipline. How do movements remain resilient and continue to mobilise when faced with delegitimizing narratives, divergent messages and infiltration. As a result of coordinated and sophisticated mis/disinformation, movements increasingly lose their mobilisation tools, cohesion and public support. This creates a vulnerability in movements that limits the possibility of success.

The targeted and coordinated disinformation campaign launched against the #EndSARS movement presented a form of threat that was unanticipated by the movement. The disinformation efforts against the movement attempted to criminalize dissent, depict activists as delinquents, take away the agency of the movement by framing it as a foreign infiltration, painting the movement leaders as corrupt, enemies of the state and individuals with selfish political interests.

The impact of the disinformation effort on the movement was far reaching. It caused direct threat to life, deligitimised the movement, demobilized its supporters, watered down the message and reduced public support. Some recommended strategies by participants to combat mis/disinformation in the context of social justice movements are;

1. Having a robust and centralized communication channel
2. Inoculation - pre-bunking strategies to mitigate the impact of targeted mis/disinformation
3. Developing a holistic disinformation response strategy
4. Developing a Central message for collective action
5. Clearly articulating what success/ justice would look like
6. Developing a collectively agreed set of principles
7. Funding strategy

2.1 Digital security - an activist's guide

Interconnectivity in a digital age means that if effective measures are not enforced, the personal data of individuals can be easily accessed – even through channels that appear harmless. Once the digital profile of an activist has been accessed by malicious users or compromised, they are vulnerable to online trolling, doxing, and even physical attack.

Techniques and tools were shared to educate participants on how to protect themselves online. These included the use of stronger passwords, password managing apps, two-factor authentication, encryption, and virtual private networks.

Though there are a variety of security tools and techniques available, the onus lies with activists to take precautionary measures whilst online, and physically guard their devices. Other precautionary measures such as the creation of a digital security plan, and staying informed of emerging technological risks were also emphasized.

2.2 Documenting Human Rights

Globally, more people are turning to video evidence to demand justice and accountability. Currently, there is a lack of knowledge among critical human rights defenders turning to video and technology, on how to use these tools effectively and strategically to fight for human rights. WITNESS works to bridge this knowledge gap by building capacity and providing resource guidance that would make it possible for human rights defenders to demand accountability and realize justice.

In the presentation, steps were given on key consideration whilst documenting video evidence. It was agreed that before proceeding to document evidence, activists must ensure the scene is safe. Additionally, creating a collection plan for what type of evidence to document is essential to effective video documentation.

Furthermore, safety measures must also be observed before, during, and after documentation to prevent exacerbation of risk levels. Part of WITNESS' advocacy to technology platform Youtube[15] led to a face-blurring tool[16] that allows faces to be obscured in videos, thereby providing visual anonymity for witnesses, activists, and other at-risk persons, while still retaining the footage's integrity. More tools that can be used to safely document and share video evidence are; ProofMode which captures the metadata of images taken, the eyeWitness to Atrocities app, and ObscuraCam .

Priye Diri

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[15] Visual Anonymity and YouTube's New Blurring Tool: https://blog.witness.org/2012/07/visual-anonymity-and-youtubes-new-blurring-tool/

[16] Face blurring: when footage requires anonymity: https://blog.youtube/news-and-events/face-blurring-when-footage-requires/

2.3 Breakout Session

Participants were divided into three groups and were given the task of designing the following based on their given scenario;

1) A collection plan,
2) A physical safety plan,
3) A digital safety plan

Group 1: Reported oil pipeline leak

Group 1 designed a plan for an oil pipeline leak in a community. A breakdown of their plan analysis is shown below;

Collection plan: Determining that a violation has occurred against the right to life and livelihood would be the first point to establish in this scenario. Steps to establishing the authenticity of the spill, and who is responsible by interviewing sources of authority within the community would be carried out. Pictures of the spill, evidence of destruction of livelihoods, and video evidence of community members directly impacted by the spill would all be included within the collection plan.

Physical safety plan: Precautionary measures would be taken by team members to notify stakeholders and allies of their location. Additionally, a community guide would be consulted to assist in navigating the terrain.
Digital safety plan: All evidence obtained would be uploaded to the cloud and encrypted for extra security measures.

Group 2: Reported violation against peaceful protesters

This group was assigned the task of creating a plan for violation against peaceful protesters. Below is an overview of their plan;

Collection plan: Obtaining copies of medical reports and interviewing victims and witnesses are key to establishing the evidence that violations occurred. Video and pictorial evidence of the protest before the invasion by security officials would also help to corroborate eyewitness accounts that the protests were peaceful.

Physical safety plan: An agreement on when to retreat in the face of danger should be agreed upon, and movement throughout the protest should be done in groups. Mobile numbers of medical personnel and lawyers should be available and accessible should the need arise. Clothing/items that would easily identify protesters should be discarded.

Digital safety plan: Precautionary measures such as disabling fingerprint identification to prevent unauthorized access to devices would be taken. Creating secure communication channels to share information and evidence would also form part of the digital safety plan.

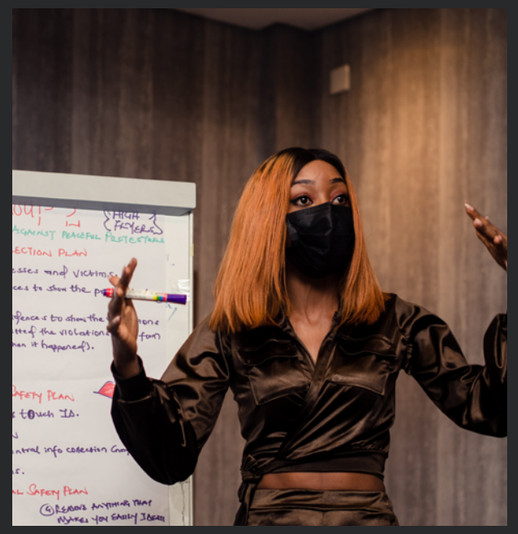
Group 3: Documenting Exonerating Evidence

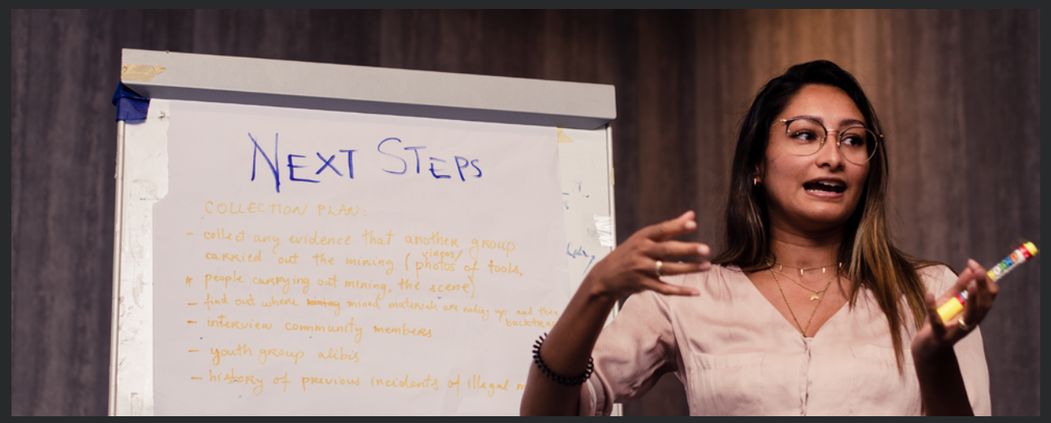
Whereas the scenarios of Group 1 and 2 involved proving that a violation occurred, Group 3's assignment was to provide exonerating evidence to prove the youth group they were representing did not carry out illegal mining in the community. Their group plan is discussed in further detail below;

Collection plan: In this scenario, videos, pictures, and tools that show proof of other groups carrying out illegal mining would be collected. If obtaining such evidence was impossible, an alternative would be to trace the mined materials to their source location. Likewise, there would be investigations to determine if there was a track record of illegal mining in the community. Interviews of community members would also be carried out, to corroborate the history of illegal mining, and youth group alibis would be established.

Physical safety plan: Informing family members, colleagues, and a legal team of planned movements and live location would form part of the security plan for this scenario. Private security would be hired during all site visits, and a community guide would be contacted to assist with navigation within the community.

Digital safety plan: Tools like the eyeWitness to Atrocities app would be used to document and share video evidence. Extra drives to store evidence would also be procured as a backup measure.





2.4 Circumventing Internet Shutdowns

Information is a powerful tool and when access to the internet – which is a major avenue through which information is accessed and shared – is denied, it is often in a bid to repress communities and prevent documentation of human rights violations.

With the cooperation of telecom companies, governments around the world are turning to internet shutdowns to render electronic communications inaccessible or unusable within a specific location. Hence, activists must prepare and equip themselves for offline documentation before a shutdown occurs. Measures that can be taken for offline documentation include; having an encrypted dedicated phone for documentation and downloading apps needed before an internet shutdown takes effect. Running operating system and app updates regularly is also important as it reduces vulnerability to hacking, surveillance, and other security vulnerabilities.

When downloading apps such as VPNs, considerations such as; the reputation of app developers, the existence of data laws, and the level of surveillance in the country where the app was developed should be thought of in advance to prevent susceptibility to digital vulnerability.

2.5 Conclusion

Presentations and discussions from the workshop show that we need to build and maintain a robust human rights network where insights, experiences, and solutions can be shared. Actionable steps that were identified from the workshop are as follows;

1. Advocacy for laws and systems that protect hu man rights defenders including the right to record.
2. Education for human rights defenders, activists, and journalists on tech and non-tech methods to combat mis/disinformation.
3. Training and guidelines for journalists on how to report peaceful protests and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.
4. The need for data protection laws and measures that have a bottom-up and top-down approach in safeguarding the data and digital identity of the citizenry.
5. Continuous education of activists and human rights defenders on how to continue documenting effectively even after an internet shutdown.

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