

Risk Management

Advocacy and campaigning is a risky activity. Whether we adopt insider or outsider tactics, we are challenging power structures and therefore risk retaliation.

Organisationally, we risk criticism on our right to speak out (“being too political”) or a challenge to our accuracy. Whether founded or not, these can lead to a loss of credibility and a negative impact on our effectiveness in the future, as well as potential reductions in income and supporter numbers and a damage to morale. Operationally, we may find our ability to access or run programmes in a particular area or country is curtailed. Most seriously, we may find that we and our colleagues, along with staff or partner NGOs and our beneficiaries face intimidation and actual physical violence, possibly including assassination.

Part of the management and coordination role is therefore to assess and manage the risks that we are facing.

1. Risk Assessment

The first part of the process is to assess the risks that we face to produce a “risk profile”. This should be started at the very beginning of the planning process and continually updated as the plan develops and is implemented.

To do this, all the potential risks are brainstormed so that a comprehensive list has been created. These potential risks are then ranked according to two factors: the likelihood of the risk happening and the impact it would have if it does. Those factors can be scored according to an agreed scale. At a simple level this could be Low/Medium/High or for a more sophisticated approach a 5- or 10-point scale could be used.

If the Low/Medium/High scale is adopted, the results can be plotted on a 3x3 matrix to identify which risks should have priority attention:

Simple Risk Assessment matrix

	High	3	2	1
<i>Impact of risk happening</i>	Medium	4	3	2
	Low	5	4	3
		Low (unlikely)	Medium (possible)	High (probable)

Likelihood of risk happening

If using a 5- or 10-point scale, the scores for each factor as multiplied together to give an overall risk factor, with those risks having the highest scores getting the most urgent attention.

Risk Assessment Table

Description of the risk	Impact of risk happening	x	Likelihood of risk happening	=	Overall risk factor
		x		=	
		x		=	
		x		=	
		x		=	

Benchmarks should be assigned for certain impacts to help ensure that risk profiles are easily comparable and to reduce time taken in assigning them a score. For example, in a 10-point impact scale the risk of death would clearly have a score of 10, whereas risk of a 10% drop in income might only merit a score of 4. Consultation with affected parties may be necessary to properly assess the factors.

2. Risk Reduction

Assessment is only useful if it leads to some form of action. Starting with the highest ranked risks, we need to address three questions:

- i. What action can we take to reduce the likelihood of the risk occurring?
- ii. What action can we take (either now or in the future as a contingency plan) to reduce the impact of the risk if it does occur?
- iii. Is the risk still too high to continue with the advocacy campaign?

The risk management profile and our response should be documented and continually updated. It should form one part of the decision making and approval process, and will be a critical document in the event of any subsequent investigation or litigation.