



# **ADVOCACY**

**FOR**

# **HUMAN RIGHTS**

Right to Life Human Rights Center

# **Bolstering Advocacy Capacity for Human Rights Defenders**

## **A Training Module**

**Right to Life Human Rights Center**

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## Contents

Foreword.....	5
<b>Module 1: Introduction to Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Human Rights Defenders (HRDs): Definition and Key Characteristics.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Global and Local Work of HRDs: Focus on Right to Life Human Rights Centre.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Legal Frameworks and Protections for HRDs.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Challenges Faced by HRDs in Sri Lanka.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Interactive Session.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Module 2: The Importance of Advocacy for HRDs.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Definitions of Advocacy and Its Role in Human Rights Work.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Distinguishing Advocacy from Activism: Advocacy as a Constructive, Relationship-Based Approach.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Advocacy Within the Context of Human Rights Law: Impact on Public Policy, Legislation, and Societal Change.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Activity: Discussion on Successful Advocacy Campaigns in Sri Lanka.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Module 3: Developing an Effective Advocacy Plan.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Introduction to the Advocacy Planning Wheel.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1. Identifying and Analyzing Issues.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2. Setting Goals and Objectives.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3. Mapping Stakeholders (Power/Influence and Interest).....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>4. Developing Strategies, Selecting Tactics, and Messaging.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Practical Exercise: Developing a Basic Advocacy Plan.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Module 4: Advocacy Tactics and Tools.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Identifying Stakeholders and Building Relationships.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Lobbying, Media Engagement, and Networking.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Social Media for Advocacy: Maximizing Online Platforms (Focus on Internet Freedom under the Online Safety Act).....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Developing Advocacy Materials: Reports, Infographics, and Videos.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Interactive Session: Practical Exercise.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Module 5: Risk Management in Advocacy.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Understanding Security Risks for HRDs and Journalists.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Mitigating Political, Legal, and Security Risks.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Digital Security for HRDs: Protecting Sensitive Information and Personal Safety.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Practical Exercise: Case Study on Managing Advocacy in Challenging Political Conditions... </b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>





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To human rights defenders, I say: thank you for your courage.

The United Nations is on your side.

I am on your side.

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**“To human rights defenders, I say: thank you for your courage. The United Nations is on your side. And I am on your side.”**

- Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General

## Foreword

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) play a crucial role in advancing justice, equality, and the protection of fundamental rights across the globe. In Sri Lanka, where HRDs often face significant risks, from legal restrictions to physical threats, their work remains vital in advocating for the marginalized and holding institutions accountable for human rights abuses. In an increasingly complex and restrictive environment, particularly with the emergence of laws like

the Online Safety Act, it has become more important than ever to equip HRDs with the skills, tools, and strategies necessary to carry out their advocacy work effectively and safely.

This training module is designed to bolster the advocacy capacity of HRDs, helping them navigate the challenges they face while maximizing their impact. The modules within this program address the critical components of successful advocacy, from understanding the role of HRDs and the global and local challenges they encounter, to developing strategic advocacy plans, engaging key stakeholders, and mitigating risks in hostile environments. Each module is crafted to offer practical solutions and real-world insights, ensuring that HRDs can confidently continue their work under difficult conditions.

The importance of advocacy in human rights work cannot be overstated. Advocacy not only holds institutions accountable but also drives the legal and policy reforms needed to protect vulnerable communities. This training acknowledges that HRDs, often the last line of defense for human rights, need support in crafting effective strategies, engaging with decision-makers, and managing the inherent risks of their work.

By the end of this training, HRDs will be equipped with the knowledge and tools to advocate for human rights more effectively, ensuring that their voices are heard and that they can continue to promote justice and equality even in the face of adversity. We hope this module serves as a valuable resource for HRDs in Sri Lanka and beyond, empowering them to continue their courageous and essential work.

## **Module 1: Introduction to Human Rights Defenders (HRDs)**

### **Objective:**

- Understand the role and significance of HRDs in Sri Lanka's human rights landscape.

### **Content:**

- Definition and key characteristics of HRDs.
  - Overview of human rights defenders' work globally and locally, focusing on Right to Life Human Rights Centre's efforts.
  - Legal frameworks and protections for HRDs under international and Sri Lankan law.
  - Challenges faced by HRDs in Sri Lanka (e.g., legal barriers, security risks, political interference).
- 

## **Human Rights Defenders (HRDs): Definition and Key Characteristics**

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) are individuals, groups, or organizations dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights. They work across various domains, advocating for freedoms like speech, fair trials, gender equality, and the rights of marginalized or vulnerable communities. HRDs use peaceful, non-violent means to hold governments, institutions, and corporations accountable for human rights violations, often risking their own safety in doing so.

Key characteristics of HRDs include their commitment to peaceful advocacy, their focus on universal human rights, and their vulnerability to risks such as harassment, violence, and legal challenges. Despite these challenges, HRDs play a crucial role in advancing human rights globally and in local contexts, often acting as the voice for those who cannot advocate for themselves.

## **Global and Local Work of HRDs: Focus on Right to Life Human Rights Centre**

Globally, HRDs operate in diverse and often hostile environments, advocating for rights in regions experiencing political repression, armed conflict, or significant legal challenges. Their work ranges from legal advocacy and public awareness campaigns to providing direct support to victims of human rights abuses.

In Sri Lanka, the Right to Life Human Rights Centre (R2L) exemplifies the vital role of HRDs in advocating for justice and accountability. Established in 2003, R2L has focused on fighting state-perpetrated human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture. R2L provides critical legal assistance to victims, engages in public advocacy, and creates awareness about human rights violations through its network of Human Rights First Aid Centers (HRFACs) across the country.



R2L also amplifies the voices of HRDs through multimedia platforms, highlighting human rights abuses in Sri Lanka. This local work is part of a broader global effort to defend human rights and provide a platform for victims of rights violations to seek justice.

## **Legal Frameworks and Protections for HRDs**

Internationally, HRDs are afforded protections under frameworks like the **United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998)**. This declaration outlines the rights of HRDs to promote human rights, seek protection, and operate freely without facing intimidation or violence. The UN also provides oversight through the **Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders**, which helps address threats to HRDs globally.

In Sri Lanka, the legal protections for HRDs are more limited. While the constitution guarantees fundamental rights, including freedom of speech, expression, and association, these rights are not always upheld in practice. The introduction of the **Online Safety Act** adds further restrictions, particularly concerning digital advocacy and freedom of expression. This law targets online communication, making it more challenging for HRDs to operate freely in digital spaces.

Moreover, Sri Lankan HRDs have limited access to legal recourse when faced with threats or violence, which weakens their ability to effectively carry out their work. Although international frameworks offer some level of protection, the lack of robust local mechanisms puts HRDs in a vulnerable position.

## **Challenges Faced by HRDs in Sri Lanka**

HRDs in Sri Lanka confront numerous challenges that hinder their ability to advocate for human rights. These challenges include:

1. **Legal Barriers:**

The **Online Safety Act** and other restrictive laws curtail the ability of HRDs to freely express opinions or mobilize public support for human rights causes. These laws are often used to silence dissent, leading to self-censorship among HRDs who fear legal repercussions.

2. **Security Risks:**

HRDs face constant threats of harassment, intimidation, and violence from both state and non-state actors. Physical threats and surveillance are common, especially for those working on politically sensitive issues like corruption, extrajudicial killings, or police abuse.

3. **Political Interference:**

Government authorities in Sri Lanka frequently view HRDs as adversaries, leading to crackdowns on their activities. HRDs advocating against state-perpetrated human rights violations often face political interference, including legal action or public discrediting of their work. The political environment makes it difficult for HRDs to engage in advocacy without facing retribution.

4. **Lack of Resources and Support:**

Many HRDs work with limited resources and little institutional support, making it

difficult to sustain long-term advocacy efforts. R2L's efforts to support HRDs through training, legal assistance, and grassroots mobilization are crucial in bridging this gap.

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## **Interactive Session**

### **Case Study Discussion:**

Participants will analyze a real-life scenario involving the struggles and successes of HRDs in Sri Lanka, particularly focusing on the work of R2L and the impact of the Online Safety Act on their advocacy efforts. This will help participants understand the real-world challenges faced by HRDs and explore practical solutions for overcoming these barriers.

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## Module 2: The Importance of Advocacy for HRDs

### Objective:

- Grasp the core principles of advocacy and understand why it is crucial for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).

### Content:

- Definitions of advocacy and its role in human rights work.
  - Distinguishing advocacy from activism: Advocacy as a constructive, relationship-based approach.
  - Advocacy within the context of human rights law: Its impact on public policy, legislation, and societal change.
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## Definitions of Advocacy and Its Role in Human Rights Work

Advocacy is the process of actively supporting, promoting, or arguing for a cause, policy, or idea with the objective of influencing decision-makers and bringing about positive societal changes. In the context of human rights work, advocacy plays a pivotal role in advancing the protection and fulfillment of human rights at local, national, and international levels. HRDs utilize advocacy to challenge injustices, hold governments and institutions accountable, and push for the legal reforms necessary to protect vulnerable populations.

The practice of advocacy often involves a range of activities, including research, coalition-building, strategic messaging, and direct engagement with key stakeholders. HRDs and advocacy organizations engage in advocacy by raising public awareness, influencing policy, and ensuring that human rights violations are addressed. Through advocacy, HRDs are able to bring attention to human rights abuses and push for systemic changes that promote justice, equality, and protection for all.

## Distinguishing Advocacy from Activism: Advocacy as a Constructive, Relationship-Based Approach

Although advocacy and activism are closely related and often overlap, they differ significantly in their methods and objectives. **Advocacy** is generally constructive and relationship-based, focusing on dialogue and collaboration with decision-makers to achieve change within established systems and institutions. Advocacy typically involves non-adversarial approaches such as lobbying, policy engagement, and building partnerships with key stakeholders to influence public policies or laws. HRDs use advocacy to work "within the system" to address human rights violations, proposing solutions and reforms through structured communication and constructive engagement.

In contrast, **activism** often involves more direct and confrontational actions aimed at raising public awareness or pressuring authorities to address specific social or political issues. Activists may organize protests, civil disobedience, or other non-violent actions to bring attention to a cause. While both advocacy and activism are critical for promoting human rights, advocacy tends to prioritize long-term relationship-building and working within formal systems, whereas activism focuses more on grassroots mobilization and public demonstrations.

## **Advocacy Within the Context of Human Rights Law: Impact on Public Policy, Legislation, and Societal Change**

Advocacy within the realm of human rights law is a powerful tool for shaping public policy, reforming legislation, and influencing societal change. HRDs and advocacy organizations often use legal frameworks to push for the advancement and protection of human rights. This may involve advocating for the ratification of international human rights treaties, repealing unjust laws, or developing new legislation that upholds the rights of marginalized communities.

In Sri Lanka, for example, advocacy efforts have successfully led to significant legislative reforms, including the passage of the **Right to Information (RTI) Act**, which ensures greater transparency and accountability from public institutions. Advocacy campaigns were also instrumental in the **repeal of criminal defamation laws** in 2002, which had previously been used to silence journalists and restrict freedom of expression.

Effective advocacy campaigns can influence the policies of governments and institutions by engaging with policymakers, legal experts, and civil society organizations. Such efforts ensure that human rights standards are integrated into legal frameworks and that the rule of law protects individuals from violations. Advocacy's impact extends beyond legal reforms to affect public attitudes and norms. Through sustained campaigns, HRDs can raise public awareness, educate communities, and mobilize individuals to demand justice and human rights protections. This process fosters a culture of respect for human rights and contributes to lasting societal change.

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### **Activity: Discussion on Successful Advocacy Campaigns in Sri Lanka**

Participants will engage in a discussion focusing on real-world examples of successful advocacy campaigns in Sri Lanka. Case studies may include:

- **Right to Information (RTI) Act Campaign:** A decade-long advocacy effort that resulted in the passage of the RTI Act in 2016. The act increased government transparency and improved citizens' access to public information, contributing to greater accountability.
- **Advocacy for Freedom of Expression:** A campaign that led to the repeal of **criminal defamation laws** in 2002, removing repressive legal provisions that had been used to intimidate journalists and stifle freedom of speech. This advocacy victory significantly improved press freedom in Sri Lanka.

Through this activity, participants will analyze the strategies, tactics, and challenges faced in these campaigns, allowing them to understand the various components that contribute to successful human rights advocacy. Participants will also explore how these campaigns have shaped public policy and contributed to societal changes, serving as models for future advocacy efforts.

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## Module 3: Developing an Effective Advocacy Plan

### Objective:

- Equip Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) with the skills to craft strategic and practical advocacy plans.

### Content:

- Introduction to the Advocacy Planning Wheel:
    1. Identifying and analyzing issues.
    2. Setting goals and objectives.
    3. Mapping stakeholders (power/influence and interest).
    4. Developing strategies, selecting tactics, and messaging.
- 

## Introduction to the Advocacy Planning Wheel

The **Advocacy Planning Wheel** is a strategic framework designed to guide HRDs through the essential steps required to create and execute a successful advocacy campaign. Advocacy is inherently a cyclical process where planning, implementation, and evaluation continuously inform each other. This tool breaks down advocacy into a series of manageable steps, ensuring that each phase is strategic, deliberate, and targeted toward achieving measurable outcomes. The Advocacy Planning Wheel helps HRDs systematically address critical components, including issue identification, stakeholder mapping, and message development, ensuring that every advocacy plan is well-rounded and effective.

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### 1. Identifying and Analyzing Issues

The first step in crafting an advocacy plan is identifying and analyzing the core issues that require attention. HRDs must determine which human rights violations or social concerns are most urgent and relevant to their communities. This involves not only recognizing the problem but also understanding its underlying causes and potential solutions. The following key questions guide this process:

- **Is this issue aligned with our organization's mission?**
- **How does this issue impact our target communities?**
- **What evidence supports the need for change?**

A thorough analysis of the issue, backed by research and community input, is essential for laying a strong foundation for advocacy. This stage ensures that the advocacy plan is addressing genuine concerns that resonate with both the affected communities and broader stakeholders.

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## 2. Setting Goals and Objectives

Once the issue is clearly defined, HRDs must establish concrete goals and objectives. Goals are the **long-term outcomes** that the advocacy campaign seeks to achieve, such as legislative reforms or greater human rights protections. These should be aligned with the broader mission of the advocacy organization.

Objectives, on the other hand, are the **specific, short-term actions** that contribute to achieving these overarching goals. Well-defined objectives are:

- **Measurable:** Progress should be quantifiable.
- **Realistic:** Objectives must be attainable given the resources and time available.
- **Time-bound:** Set a clear timeline for achieving each objective.

Clear objectives help advocacy campaigns stay focused and provide metrics for evaluating success. For example, a goal might be to advocate for amendments to the Online Safety Act, while an objective could be organizing three stakeholder consultations within six months to gather input from affected communities.

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## 3. Mapping Stakeholders (Power/Influence and Interest)

Effective advocacy depends on understanding and engaging key stakeholders who have the power to influence the issue. Stakeholders may include government officials, policymakers, civil society groups, journalists, the media, and the general public. The **Advocacy Planning Wheel** emphasizes the importance of mapping stakeholders according to their **level of power** or influence over the issue and their **level of interest** in the outcome.

Stakeholders with **high power and high interest** are typically key players who should be prioritized. These might include lawmakers or influential civil society leaders. Mapping stakeholders allows HRDs to strategically tailor their advocacy efforts to different audiences, ensuring that the messages, tactics, and approaches are appropriate for each group. Understanding who holds the most power and interest in relation to the issue ensures that advocacy efforts are well-targeted and have a higher likelihood of success.

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## 4. Developing Strategies, Selecting Tactics, and Messaging

After identifying stakeholders, the next step is developing strategies and selecting tactics to achieve the advocacy goals. Strategies are the **broad plans** for how the advocacy campaign will work toward its objectives, while **tactics** are the specific actions used to implement those strategies.

Some common advocacy tactics include:

- **Lobbying:** Direct engagement with lawmakers and policymakers to influence legislation.
- **Media Engagement:** Leveraging traditional and social media platforms to raise public awareness and apply pressure on decision-makers.
- **Public Campaigns:** Organizing rallies, petitions, or public awareness initiatives.
- **Community Outreach:** Engaging local communities to mobilize grassroots support.

At this stage, **messaging** is also critical. HRDs must craft clear, concise, and compelling messages tailored to each audience. Effective messaging communicates the urgency of the issue, presents actionable solutions, and aligns with the values and interests of the target stakeholders. For instance, when advocating for amendments to the Online Safety Act, HRDs must emphasize the importance of internet freedom while proposing legal reforms that protect both national security and individual rights.

The Advocacy Planning Wheel ensures that HRDs approach their work in a methodical way, making the process more effective and impactful by breaking it into strategic, actionable steps.





## Practical Exercise: Developing a Basic Advocacy Plan

Participants will break into groups and collaboratively develop a basic advocacy plan on an issue relevant to their work. Each group will:

- Identify a key issue, such as internet freedom under the **Online Safety Act**.
  - Set clear goals and objectives for their advocacy.
  - Map relevant stakeholders based on their power and interest.
  - Develop strategies, tactics, and messages to influence those stakeholders.
-

## Module 4: Advocacy Tactics and Tools

### Objective:

- Explore practical tools and methods HRDs can use for effective advocacy.

### Content:

- Identifying stakeholders and building relationships.
  - Lobbying, media engagement, and networking.
  - Social media for advocacy: Maximizing online platforms (focus on internet freedom under the Online Safety Act).
  - Developing advocacy materials: Reports, infographics, and videos.
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### Identifying Stakeholders and Building Relationships

Effective advocacy begins with identifying the stakeholders who have the power to influence the issue at hand. Stakeholders can include a broad range of individuals and groups, such as government officials, civil society organizations, community leaders, media outlets, and the general public. Once these stakeholders are identified, it is crucial to assess both their level of influence and their interest in the issue.

Mapping stakeholders based on their power and interest helps HRDs focus their advocacy efforts on the most impactful individuals and groups. This strategic targeting ensures that advocacy efforts are directed toward those who are most likely to bring about change. Building strong relationships with these stakeholders is equally important. Advocacy often operates within existing systems, which means engaging decision-makers through dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration.

Building and maintaining these relationships requires a foundation of mutual respect, trust, and transparency. HRDs must understand each stakeholder's role in the decision-making process and how they can contribute to advancing human rights goals. By developing long-term partnerships, HRDs can create powerful coalitions that amplify their advocacy efforts.

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### Lobbying, Media Engagement, and Networking

**Lobbying** involves direct, purposeful communication with policymakers and decision-makers to influence their stance on specific human rights issues. This advocacy tactic is critical for shaping laws, regulations, and public policies that protect human rights. Lobbying can take various forms, including formal meetings, presentations, or even petitions aimed at legislators or government officials. The goal of lobbying is to secure policy changes that align with the HRD's objectives, whether it be amending laws or introducing new human rights protections.

**Media engagement** is another powerful tool in advocacy. By working with media outlets, HRDs can raise awareness of human rights issues, pressure decision-makers, and shape public opinion. Advocacy campaigns can use press releases, interviews, articles, and opinion pieces to highlight their cause and reach a broader audience. Media engagement is essential in amplifying an advocacy message and ensuring that it reaches those who can drive policy changes.

**Networking** is key to building solidarity and sharing resources within the advocacy community. HRDs can connect with like-minded organizations, civil society groups, and international bodies to exchange best practices, provide mutual support, and strengthen their collective efforts. Networking allows HRDs to build a united front that amplifies their voice and increases their chances of success.

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## **Social Media for Advocacy: Maximizing Online Platforms (Focus on Internet Freedom under the Online Safety Act)**

Social media platforms such as **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **YouTube**, and **TikTok** have become indispensable tools for advocacy, allowing HRDs to reach a vast audience quickly and effectively. These platforms enable HRDs to disseminate information, engage directly with their followers, and mobilize grassroots support for human rights causes. In the context of the **Online Safety Act** in Sri Lanka, social media advocacy plays a critical role in defending internet freedom and digital rights.

The Online Safety Act introduces restrictions on online expression, making social media a battleground for advocacy efforts. HRDs can use social media to educate the public about the impact of the Act, share personal stories of those affected, and organize online campaigns to build public pressure for legal reforms. Social media campaigns also provide a space for dialogue between HRDs and the public, fostering greater awareness and solidarity around internet freedom issues.

By utilizing online platforms effectively, HRDs can navigate the challenges posed by the Online Safety Act while maximizing their reach and influence.

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## **Developing Advocacy Materials: Reports, Infographics, and Videos**

High-quality advocacy materials are essential for conveying complex human rights issues in a clear and compelling manner. Different types of advocacy materials serve different purposes, depending on the audience and the message.

- **Reports** provide in-depth analysis, data, and recommendations on specific human rights issues. They are essential for engaging policymakers, legal experts, and decision-makers who require detailed information to drive policy change. Reports should be well-researched and evidence-based, offering a comprehensive view of the issue at hand.

- **Infographics** transform complex data into easily digestible visual formats. They are particularly effective in public awareness campaigns where quick, impactful communication is needed. Infographics can summarize data, highlight key facts, and make complicated issues more accessible to a general audience.
- **Videos** offer a powerful medium for storytelling, capturing the emotional and human dimensions of human rights advocacy. Through testimonials, case studies, or visual representations of human rights abuses, videos can generate empathy, raise awareness, and motivate action. They are especially effective on social media platforms, where visual content tends to garner more attention.

These advocacy materials not only serve to inform and educate but also inspire individuals and institutions to take action. By using a combination of reports, infographics, and videos, HRDs can engage diverse audiences and maximize the impact of their campaigns.

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### **Interactive Session: Practical Exercise**

Participants will engage in a **practical exercise** where they will draft advocacy messages and select appropriate tactics for a real-world campaign. Each group will:

- Choose a relevant human rights issue (e.g., internet freedom under the Online Safety Act).
- Identify key stakeholders.
- Develop a communication strategy that includes reports, infographics, or videos.
- Select the most effective tactics for lobbying, media engagement, and social media use.

This exercise will enable participants to apply the skills and knowledge they have learned throughout the module, preparing them to implement effective advocacy campaigns in their own work.

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## Module 5: Risk Management in Advocacy

### Objective:

- Teach participants how to manage the risks involved in advocacy, particularly in hostile environments.

### Content:

- Understanding security risks for HRDs and journalists.
  - Mitigating political, legal, and security risks (based on risk mitigation strategies in current projects).
  - Digital security for HRDs: Protecting sensitive information and personal safety.
- 

## Understanding Security Risks for HRDs and Journalists

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and journalists often operate in highly volatile environments, where security risks are prevalent, particularly in countries where human rights violations are widespread and freedom of expression is suppressed. In Sri Lanka, HRDs and journalists face threats ranging from **intimidation** and **harassment** to physical violence and legal repercussions. These risks are particularly high for those working on sensitive issues such as corruption, torture, enforced disappearances, and abuses of state power.

State actors, political groups, and other influential entities often target HRDs and journalists because their work exposes abuses or challenges established power structures. This opposition can manifest in various forms, including **surveillance**, **arbitrary arrests**, and **physical attacks**. The recent **Online Safety Act** in Sri Lanka further complicates the situation, as it imposes new restrictions on online freedom, increasing the risk of **digital surveillance** and punitive actions against HRDs and journalists who use online platforms for their advocacy work. HRDs must therefore navigate an increasingly hostile environment, both online and offline, in their pursuit of justice and human rights protection.

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## Mitigating Political, Legal, and Security Risks

Mitigating the risks faced by HRDs and journalists requires comprehensive planning and the development of effective **risk management strategies**. Political risks, such as **government interference** or the volatility that comes with **regime changes**, can disrupt advocacy efforts, particularly during politically sensitive times like elections. To mitigate political risks, HRDs should engage in **constructive dialogue** with authorities, build relationships with **legal experts**, and establish alliances with **international human rights organizations** that can provide support and legitimacy.

**Legal risks** arise from restrictive legislation, such as the **Online Safety Act**, which curtails freedom of expression and criminalizes online advocacy. HRDs and journalists must be well-versed in these laws to navigate them safely and avoid potential legal repercussions. It is crucial to seek **legal advice** and ensure that advocacy activities comply with local laws while also pushing for reforms.

**Security risks**, including threats of **violence**, **harassment**, and **physical attacks**, can be mitigated through personal security training. HRDs should be trained in emergency response protocols, including how to secure safe passage during dangerous situations. In addition, creating a robust security plan that includes **contingency measures** for evacuations, legal support, and medical aid can significantly reduce the impact of potential security threats. Maintaining transparency in advocacy activities and cultivating **media allies** can also help minimize the risks of being targeted, as public visibility can act as a deterrent against violent or repressive actions.

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## **Digital Security for HRDs: Protecting Sensitive Information and Personal Safety**

In today's highly digitized world, **digital security** is essential for HRDs and journalists, particularly in countries where **cyberattacks** and **state surveillance** are common. Protecting sensitive information and personal safety in the online space is critical to ensuring the continuation of their advocacy work without exposing themselves or their networks to undue risk.

HRDs must adopt secure communication practices, such as using **encrypted messaging apps** (e.g., Signal, Telegram) to protect conversations from surveillance. Devices should be secured with **strong passwords**, and all software should be regularly updated to protect against **malware** and **hacking attempts**. HRDs should also avoid sharing sensitive information over unsecured channels and limit their public profiles on social media to reduce their digital footprint.

Understanding local **digital surveillance laws**, such as those outlined in the Online Safety Act, is critical. HRDs must ensure they are compliant while protecting their privacy. Social media activity should be carefully managed, ensuring that personal details and sensitive information are not inadvertently exposed. In addition, HRDs should create secure **backups** of important documents and data, both physically and in the cloud, to protect against data loss in the event of a digital breach.

Finally, HRDs should adopt best practices like **two-factor authentication (2FA)** on all online accounts to further enhance security. Training in **digital safety protocols** is essential for HRDs, enabling them to reduce the likelihood of online attacks and continue their work while maintaining the confidentiality of their communications and data.

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## **Practical Exercise: Case Study on Managing Advocacy in Challenging Political Conditions**

Participants will engage in a **case study** that explores how to manage advocacy in challenging political conditions, specifically focusing on **Sri Lanka's Online Safety Act** and its impact on HRDs and journalists. The case study will examine real-life scenarios where HRDs have faced political, legal, and security risks, and participants will be tasked with developing risk mitigation strategies.

Each group will:

- Analyze the risks faced by HRDs under the **Online Safety Act**.
- Identify key legal and security challenges, including digital surveillance.
- Propose mitigation strategies, including personal security measures and legal precautions.
- Develop a plan to safely continue advocacy efforts in a hostile environment.

This exercise will allow participants to apply the concepts learned in the module to real-world situations, enhancing their ability to manage risks and protect both themselves and their advocacy work in volatile settings.

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## Module 6: Gender Sensitivity in Advocacy

### Objective:

Understand the unique challenges faced by women and gender minorities in human rights advocacy and develop gender-sensitive strategies to address these challenges.

### Content:

- Specific challenges faced by women and gender minorities in advocacy.
  - Gender-sensitive approaches in advocacy and risk management.
  - Case studies and examples of gender-based human rights challenges.
- 

### Challenges Faced by Women and Gender Minorities in Advocacy

Women and gender minorities often face distinct challenges in the field of human rights advocacy. These challenges can range from gender-based violence and harassment to systemic discrimination, both in physical and digital spaces. HRDs who belong to these groups are more likely to experience targeted threats due to their gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

#### 1. Harassment and Violence

Women and gender minorities in advocacy are disproportionately targeted with harassment, both online and offline. Physical violence, sexual harassment, intimidation, and threats of rape are common forms of gender-based violence that affect their ability to advocate safely. These forms of violence aim to silence and intimidate HRDs, making it difficult for them to continue their work.

#### 2. Digital Threats and Misinformation

Gender minorities and women are particularly vulnerable to digital threats. Online harassment, cyberbullying, and doxxing (the publication of private information online) disproportionately affect women and LGBTQ+ HRDs. Digital smear campaigns often target gender minorities with the intention of discrediting their work or spreading harmful misinformation about their identities or advocacy efforts.

#### 3. Legal Frameworks and Discrimination

Gender minorities and women face institutional barriers embedded in legal frameworks that marginalize them or deny them equal protection. Legal discrimination and inadequate protections under the law make it difficult for these HRDs to seek justice when they are targeted. Moreover, laws such as those addressing online safety or public order often fail to account for the additional vulnerabilities of gender minorities.

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### Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Advocacy and Risk Management

To address these specific challenges, it is crucial to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches into all levels of advocacy and risk management.



## 1. Integrating Gender Sensitivity in Advocacy Campaigns

Advocacy plans should consider the different needs and vulnerabilities of women and gender minorities. HRDs can ensure gender-sensitive advocacy by using inclusive language, amplifying the voices of gender minorities, and creating safe spaces for these individuals to share their experiences. Advocacy strategies should include specific calls to protect the rights of women and gender minorities, particularly in sectors such as digital safety, reproductive health, and protection from gender-based violence.

## 2. Risk Management Tailored to Gender Vulnerabilities

When developing risk management strategies, it is critical to address the gender-specific risks that women and gender minorities face. These strategies should include:

- **Personal Safety:** Women and gender minorities often face unique threats in public spaces. Risk management protocols should include safe transportation options for women HRDs and provide them with training on how to respond to gender-based threats.
- **Digital Security:** Since gender minorities and women are more likely to be targeted by online harassment, they should be trained in advanced digital safety techniques. This includes the use of encrypted communication tools, stronger privacy settings on social media, and methods to protect their digital identities from doxxing and cyber-attacks.
- **Legal Protections:** Legal advocacy should focus on pushing for reforms that protect gender minorities and women, advocating for stronger laws against gender-based violence and discrimination. Gender-sensitive risk management involves understanding legal gaps and providing HRDs with resources and contacts to access legal support in times of need.

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## Case Studies and Examples

### 1. Case Study: Digital Harassment of a Female Journalist in Sri Lanka

A prominent female journalist, who was advocating for greater press freedom in Sri Lanka, was targeted with cyber-attacks and harassment after she reported on state-perpetrated abuses. Online trolls bombarded her social media accounts with sexist and abusive comments, making personal threats and questioning her credibility as a journalist. The attacks included attempts to hack her accounts and smear campaigns that spread misinformation about her private life.

- **Response:** The journalist used encrypted tools and worked with digital rights organizations to strengthen her online security. Additionally, she partnered with local advocacy groups to raise awareness about gender-based online harassment in the media industry. Her advocacy led to greater public discourse on the need for digital safety measures for female HRDs in Sri Lanka.

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## Interactive Session: Practical Exercise on Gender-Sensitive Advocacy

Participants will engage in a practical exercise where they will:

- Identify a human rights issue that affects women or gender minorities.
  - Create risk management strategies that address the vulnerabilities of women and gender minorities.
  - Propose digital safety measures specifically designed to protect women and gender minorities from online threats.
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## **Module 7: Climate Change and Human Rights Advocacy**

### **Objective:**

Understand the relationship between climate change and human rights, and explore how climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable populations. Develop advocacy strategies that incorporate environmental justice into human rights work.

### **Content:**

- The impact of climate change on human rights.
  - Vulnerable populations affected by climate-induced human rights violations.
  - Advocacy for environmental justice as a component of human rights.
  - Practical exercises to integrate climate change considerations into advocacy campaigns.
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### **The Impact of Climate Change on Human Rights**

Climate change is not only an environmental issue but also a significant human rights challenge. The adverse effects of climate change—rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and changing ecosystems—directly threaten the livelihoods, health, and safety of individuals, particularly in vulnerable communities. Climate-induced displacement, food insecurity, and increased exposure to natural disasters create conditions where fundamental human rights, such as the right to life, health, housing, and access to clean water, are compromised.

#### **1. Displacement and the Right to Housing**

As climate change worsens, many communities, especially those living in low-lying coastal areas or regions prone to natural disasters, face displacement. The loss of homes due to floods, rising sea levels, and droughts forces communities to migrate, leading to overcrowded conditions in urban areas and refugee camps. This displacement often results in violations of the right to adequate housing, as displaced persons struggle to find safe and affordable shelter.

#### **2. Access to Water and the Right to Health**

Extreme weather events such as droughts and floods disrupt access to clean water, putting the health of vulnerable populations at risk. Communities already marginalized by poverty or geographic isolation are often the most severely affected, with climate change exacerbating existing inequalities. The lack of access to clean water increases the risk of waterborne diseases, while the scarcity of water resources can lead to conflicts over water usage.

#### **3. Food Security and the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living**

Climate change disrupts agricultural systems, leading to food insecurity and the inability of vulnerable populations to maintain an adequate standard of living. Changing weather patterns, such as prolonged droughts and unseasonal rainfalls, diminish crop yields and reduce food availability. This impacts not only farmers but also communities that rely on local agriculture for sustenance. The resulting food insecurity can lead to malnutrition and hunger, further undermining the human rights of these populations.

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## **Vulnerable Populations Affected by Climate Change**

Climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including marginalized ethnic groups, indigenous peoples, women, and children. These groups are often located in regions most affected by environmental changes and have fewer resources to adapt to or recover from climate-related shocks.

### **1. Indigenous Communities**

Indigenous communities often rely on the land for their livelihoods, and climate change poses a direct threat to their way of life. Rising sea levels, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity degrade the ecosystems upon which indigenous peoples depend. These communities face both environmental and cultural losses, as their traditional lands become uninhabitable, and their cultural practices tied to the environment are disrupted.

### **2. Women and Gender Minorities**

Women, especially in rural areas, are more likely to be responsible for managing household resources like food and water. When climate change depletes these resources, women bear a disproportionate burden in terms of additional labor and health risks. Gender minorities may also face additional vulnerabilities, as access to resources like land and relief aid may be denied based on social norms or discriminatory practices.

### **3. Low-Income Communities**

Poverty-stricken communities often live in areas with inadequate infrastructure, making them more vulnerable to climate-related disasters. Without proper housing, healthcare, or access to resources, these communities are less resilient to environmental changes. Climate-induced displacement disproportionately affects these populations, forcing them to migrate to areas where they may not have access to social services or legal protections.

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## **Advocacy for Environmental Justice as a Human Right**

Climate change advocacy is intrinsically linked to the human rights of vulnerable populations. Advocating for **environmental justice** means ensuring that the burden of climate change does not fall disproportionately on those who are least responsible for it. Human rights defenders (HRDs) can address environmental justice by advocating for policies that promote climate resilience, protect ecosystems, and prioritize the rights of affected communities.

### **1. Example: Advocacy for Climate-Induced Displacement**

Advocacy campaigns can focus on protecting the rights of climate-displaced populations by pushing for the recognition of climate refugees under international law. By highlighting the legal gaps in the protection of displaced persons, HRDs can work to ensure that those displaced by environmental factors receive adequate housing, access to healthcare, and legal recognition in their host countries.

## **2. Example: Campaign for Sustainable Resource Management**

In regions where water resources are under threat due to climate change, advocacy can focus on promoting sustainable water management practices. HRDs can collaborate with local communities to develop solutions that prioritize access to clean water for marginalized groups, ensuring that the human right to water is respected, even in times of scarcity.

## **3. Example: Legal Advocacy for Climate Accountability**

HRDs can advocate for stronger legal frameworks that hold corporations and governments accountable for actions that contribute to climate change. Legal advocacy can involve pushing for corporate responsibility in reducing carbon emissions, promoting green energy initiatives, and ensuring that environmental regulations are enforced.

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## **Practical Exercises: Integrating Climate Change into Advocacy Campaigns**

### **1. Climate-Related Human Rights Violation**

Participants will read/ listen to a short story (Gan Wathura Kandawure Nayana, a short story in the short story collection Suduru Aba) and identify the human rights challenges created by climate change.

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# **ADVOCACY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

**The advocacy role not only holds institutions accountable but also drives the legal and policy reforms needed to protect vulnerable communities.**