

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S STRUGGLES!

OBJECTIVE:

Participants reclaim and affirm their histories of activism, understand the concept of Defenders and identify themselves as part of a global women's movement struggling for human rights.



**ESTIMATED
TIME**

5 hrs / 30 min

The Report of the Special Rapporteur states:

While often overlooked, women have been in the vanguard of social change throughout history. In 1956, 20.000 women of different backgrounds mobilized in Pretoria to protest apartheid. In 2016, on what became known as "Black Monday," thousands of women and children took to the streets in more than 60 cities in Poland and were able to end the total prohibition of abortion. In 2017, women and girls launched the powerful #MeToo movement, which continues resonating throughout the world.

Women from diverse backgrounds promote and protect rights in varying contexts. For example, there are women demanding gender equality, indigenous women fighting for land and environmental rights, rural women claiming social-economic rights, trans women speaking out against discrimination, lesbians calling for equality, migrant and refugee women defending their rights and security, homeless women demanding their right to housing, women seeking justice for the disappeared, women defending freedom of choice and corporal autonomy, women promoting rights related to digital technology, other-abled women struggling to lead an independent life, and women who are involved in peace processes.

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Women Human Rights Defenders.

MATERIALS

Flipcharts, markers, colored cards, music and materials for the River of Life (see below).

SESSION 1. 2 + hours

In celebration of our history and the women who have inspired us.

Activity: River of Life to reflect on our stories of activism.

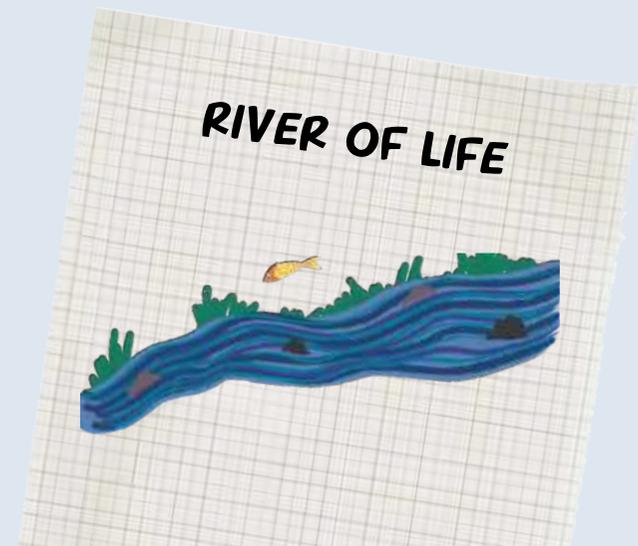


Introduction:

Throughout the world, women are defending their lives and those of their families, as well as the very existence of their communities, rivers, forests, and, indeed, the entire planet. This struggle is part of our identity, of who we are as individuals and as community. Our ability to draw on our personal and collective histories of struggle and the stories of women who have helped and inspired us is essential to developing the strength and power necessary for our work to bring about change.

Step 1.

Ask each participant to draw a river on a sheet of paper which will represent their individual "River of Life". Since our lives are never straight lines, the river will inevitably have some curves to it, some boulders, rapids, and a few quiet spots along the way.



Step 2.

Using available materials (colored markers, seeds, ribbons, or anything accessible) ask participants to identify some important moments in their history and place them along the course of the river:



- The moment when they first became concerned about human rights:

When and how did I begin defending human rights?

How did discrimination mark my life?

(as a woman, an indigenous person, a person, of African ancestry, a member of an oppressed class, a non-gender conforming person, a migrant, etc.)

- The most significant moments in their history as activists:

What local, national or global situations (an unfair or unjust situation, a war, a natural disaster, a popular uprising, etc.) marked my activism?

What organizations, activities or strategies in which I participated made me feel proud?



Step 3.

Participants form pairs and share their river drawings. Then, in plenary they present one or two reflections that arose during this conversation.

Step 4.

Continuing in plenary, the facilitator acknowledges the common elements and encourages reflection on the question:

What things from my own history did I discover or reaffirm?



Activity: Mural of Ancestors to deepen our stories.

Step 1.

Participants divide into small groups of no more than three persons and discuss the following question:

What woman inspired my struggle and commitment to justice, life, and human rights? How?

Each participant writes that name on a colored card.



Step 2.

In plenary, share the name and a brief explanation of each inspiring woman. Designate a dedicated space to post their names and create a mural. Collectively reflect on:

Why is it important to recognize the contributions of other women who preceded and inspired us in our struggle?

The mural can be left in a fixed place and complemented with photographs, quotes, or additional items that help others get to know and honor these women.

To delve further into a discussion of Ancestors, you can find the Mural of Ancestors tool developed by JASS in English and Spanish by typing "Mural" in the We Rise search box at: <https://werise-toolkit.org/en/search>

The mural features the word **WOMEN** in large purple letters at the top center. To the left of this word is the word **STRENGTH** in maroon letters, accompanied by a pink square and a blue marker. Below **STRENGTH** is the word **GRANDMOTHER** in black letters, with a red square and a yellow marker nearby. The mural is decorated with several photographs: a black and white photo of a woman in a white top, a black and white photo of an elderly woman smiling, a black and white photo of an elderly woman with a scarf, a black and white photo of a woman in a yellow top pointing, a black and white photo of a woman in a hat and scarf, a black and white photo of a woman holding a sign that says "VOTES FOR WOMEN", a black and white photo of an elderly woman with a headscarf, and a black and white photo of two women in long dresses. There are also several colored squares (pink, red, yellow, green) and a pair of red scissors at the bottom right.

SESSION 2. 1 hour / 30 minutes.

Are we human rights defenders?

Activity: Creating statues to begin forming a definition.

Step 1.

Who is a human rights defender?

With their bodies, each participant forms a statue that reflects an important attribute of a human rights defender. One by one, the group tries to guess the meaning of each statue. Afterward, the participant explains what they meant by their statue.

Step 2.

The facilitator writes the ideas on a flipchart and asks if there are other important attributes that may be missing.



Activity: Group reflection to deepen the definition of a Human Rights Defender.

Step 1.

Participants read the following text, either individually or as a group. While reading the text, these questions should be considered:

How do these reflections on the nature of defenders relate to the group's ideas that were expressed in the previous discussion?

What is similar?

What is different?



Are we human rights defenders?¹

Today, many women activists identify themselves as human rights defenders. Others combine this form of identifying themselves with other designations, such as a land rights defender or environmental defender. Still others prefer not to use the term rights defender at all. They may want to heighten the visibility of their movement (trade unionism, feminism, anti-racism, etc.) or perhaps, in their context, defining themselves as a human rights defender or activist does not convey the full meaning of their work or the term may be risky.

While all these options are valid, we want to share with you what the definition of human rights defender means and how it can be used to strengthen your work and protection. This way, you can have additional criteria to decide whether to use it or not and in what contexts it may be useful.

Defending human rights is a right. The definition of a human rights defender is based on the recognition that the promotion, defense and protection of human rights is a right in itself, as set forth in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. All persons have the right to express their opinions, speak out, organize and denounce injustice.

Who is a human rights defender?

Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, offers some important elements:

The term “human rights defender” refers to any person who, individually or with others, acts to promote and protect human rights. For example, a defender may:

- Take action to raise awareness of human rights;
- Insure that human rights are respected and fully enforced;
- Prevent and/or respond to a human rights violation.

Human rights defenders are defined, first and foremost, by what they do, by their actions, not by who they are. No specific training is required. There are, however, some minimum criteria: carry out non-violent action, accept the universality of human rights (someone who defends certain rights, but denies women’s rights or discriminates against certain minorities cannot be considered a defender) and defend rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other instruments of the universal system of human rights.

¹ Michel Forst. How are human rights defenders defined? <https://www.protecting-defenders.org/en/content/how-are-human-rights-defenders-defined>
Alda Facio. Activist, Feminist or Defender? Or: Activist, Feminist and Defender! (text in Spanish)

What is the usefulness of this definition? Calling oneself a human rights defender can be useful in certain contexts and for certain purposes. Alda Facio, the Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice, offers us some ways to use and leverage this definition to strengthen and protect our activism:

- Calling yourself a defender is not incompatible with recognizing yourself as an activist, feminist, trade unionist, lesbian, transgender or other identity. It implies also connecting oneself to a human rights framework that women themselves have built.
- It implies taking action with the knowledge that the State has a legal obligation to protect all persons who defend the most diverse rights, as well as the obligation to protect us and not attack us for our work. It allows us to use the existing international regulatory framework and protection mechanisms for human rights defenders when we are subject to threats or attacks because of our work.
- It gives us the opportunity to use a common language among those of us who defend human rights, which strengthens our struggles.

Step 2.

After reading the text, form groups to reflect on the following questions:

How does this text relate to the ideas that were expressed in our previous discussion?

Do we feel identified with the definition?

Why or why not?

In our context, would it be helpful to call ourselves human rights defenders or something else?

What other terms do we use to refer to persons who fight for equality, peace, justice, etc.?

Step 3.

The facilitator summarizes the core ideas and creates an initial definition with which the group feels identified.



HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDER

**A WOMAN HUMAN
RIGHTS DEFENDER
WHO INDIVIDUALLY OR
WITH OTHERS, ACTS TO
PROMOTE AND PROTECT
HUMAN RIGHTS.**

SESSION 3. 1 hour / 30 minutes.

We are part of a global movement!



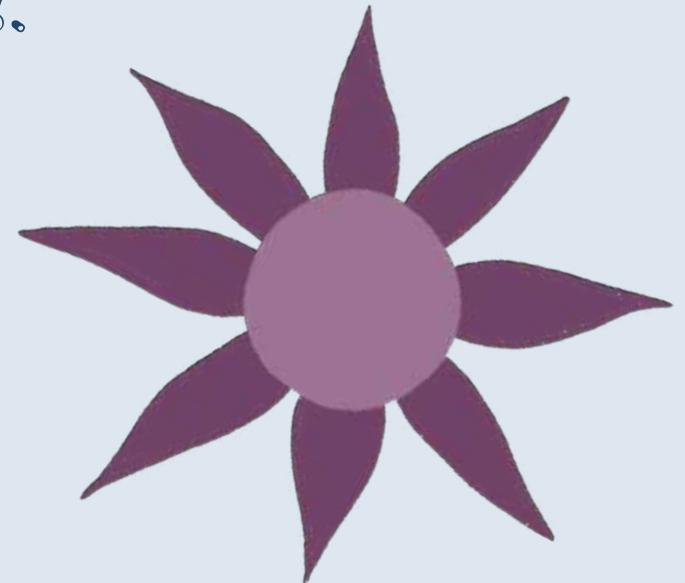
Introduction:

Today it is crucial that we recognize the stories of women's struggles not only in our own countries but around the world as well so that we can appreciate and learn from them. Affirming the long history of women's struggles, current efforts take on different forms of activism that drive various agendas for change. Over the centuries, we have come together with the commitment to improve our societies.

Activity: The flower of our struggles.

Preparatory step.

The facilitator draws a big flower, with a large center and equally large petals, leaving space to place cards within each of them.



Step 1.

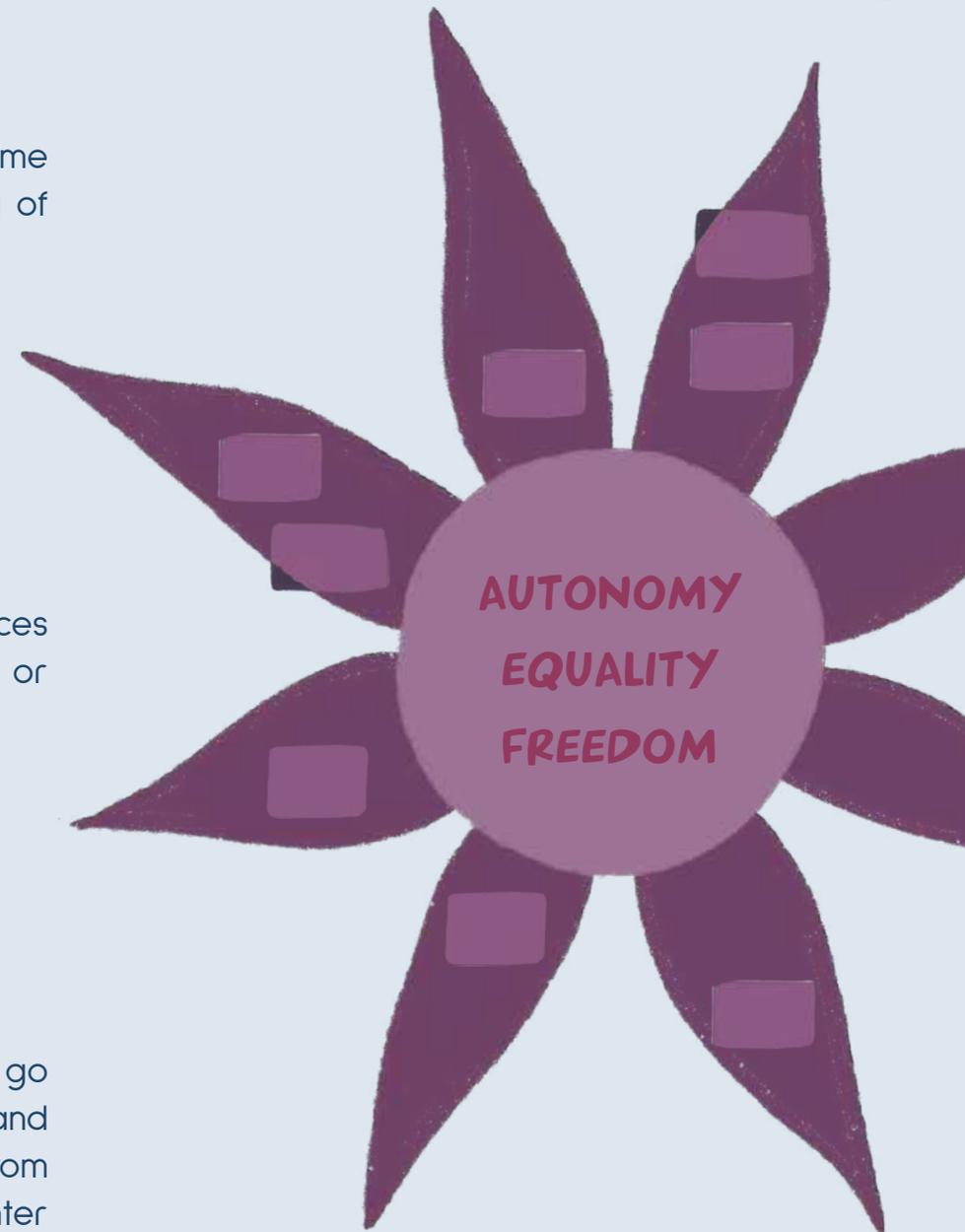
Individual work: On a colored card, each participant writes the name of a struggle that they believe has contributed to the strengthening of women's and human rights movements.

Step 2.

In plenary, each participant reads their card and the facilitator places it on the petals, seeking to place together those that are similar or refer to the same struggles.

Step 3.

After all the cards have been read, participants discuss what should go in the center of the flower to join the petals. What are the values and political commitments that link these various struggles of women from around the world? The facilitator writes the main ideas in the center of the flower and then summarizes.



Activity: Reflection on photographs

Step 1.

The facilitator shows the following photographs to everyone and gives them some time to look at them. To energize this moment, a song that is symbolic of women's struggles can be played in the background.



Millions of women in the Spanish state joined the demonstrations and the strike called by feminists for March 8, 2018.



In December 2019, thousands of older women congregated in Chile to sing "The Rapist is You", a song that decries violence against women and denounces patriarchy.



In January 2019, millions of women in India formed a 620-kilometer "human wall" to demand gender equality in that country.



In August 2018, thousands of South African women protested the violence toward women and the LGBTI community with the exhortation "Total Shutdown."



Step 2.

At the end, the facilitator asks,

How do these movements inspire us?

What does it mean to us to be part of a global women's movement?

Activity: Chants and songs.

To conclude, ask a few participants to share some of the chants or songs that they use in their demonstrations for women's rights or other causes. Everyone repeats the chants out loud to feel and express the energy of collective power!

