

CONNECTING WITH MEDIA HANDBOOK



TIP SHEETS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY
AND ACTIVISTS



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ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Media plays a very important role in society, shaping and influencing how people think about, understand and perceive issues - from the global to the personal. For civil society and activists, media is an important part of how we shape opinions, provide information, and advocate for change. But to harness this influence, we need to know how the media works, how to connect with journalists, and how to “speak their language”. This handbook comprises a series of tip sheets designed to help better connect with media, and to know how to turn issues into news.



This handbook was produced by CIVICUS, global alliance for civil society, and TV News London, with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of CIVICUS and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union

TIP SHEET

1

APPROACHING THE MEDIA

Getting your messages into media means knowing how media works and what they would be interested in – before you approach the media, consider your story and how you will get media interested.

1 WHAT MAKES SOMETHING NEWSWORTHY?

The media is a 24-hour global business. Journalists are always looking for good strong stories but they are constantly receiving huge amounts of information. Why should they pick your story?

Before you contact the media:

- Have you checked/Googled how much your story has been covered before? How recently?
- Create your own newslines: what does your research show that we didn't know before?
- Is this a first?
- What superlatives can you use in your headline and copy? For example: for the first time, biggest, newest, only one of its kind, one of very few, etc.
- You can also use international days as a good news peg or use them to republish 'evergreen' content e.g. Women's Day on 8th March.

2 KNOW YOUR TARGET MEDIA

Do your research – are you approaching the right person? Is this the right media outlet for your story?

Understand the topics the journalist covers and ensure your story is relevant to their publication.

Media databases are a great resource for finding journalists and their contact details.

UNDERSTAND THE TOPICS THE JOURNALIST COVERS AND ENSURE YOUR STORY IS RELEVANT TO THEIR PUBLICATION.

3 YOUR PRESS RELEASE - PICK YOUR DATE

Then double check your date.

Check there are no other big announcements or events, such as elections, on your chosen date. If there are, pick another date when your chances of coverage will be better.

4 PLAN YOUR PRESS RELEASE TIMING

Send your release at least one week before with an embargo for your publication date. Without an embargo, your information can be used at any time.

Sending your release out early increases your chances of coverage because it can get into the forward planning system and be put on the list of stories for your release day.

Follow up your press release the day before launch by email, telephone or a message via social media.

Follow your targets, make contact requests via Twitter and LinkedIn.

SENDING YOUR RELEASE OUT EARLY INCREASES YOUR CHANCES OF COVERAGE BECAUSE IT CAN GET INTO THE FORWARD PLANNING SYSTEM AND BE PUT ON THE LIST OF STORIES FOR YOUR RELEASE DAY.

5 YOUR PRESS RELEASE LAYOUT

- Ideal length: 1-1.5 pages.
- **At top:** HEADLINE in the middle; logo in top right hand corner.
- **Next line:** embargoed release date.
- **Next line:** 3 bullet points summarising the story.
- Strong opening paragraph with summary of story.
- Leave lots of 'white space' i.e. don't write long paragraphs.
- Use active not passive verbs.
- Explain any jargon phrases or acronyms.
- **At end:** BACKGROUND INFO, YOUR CONTACT NUMBER & PEOPLE AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW.

6 EMAILING YOUR PRESS RELEASE

The email SUBJECT BOX is very important. If you don't make this interesting, journalists will never bother to read your press release.

You can put your headline plus add extra information:

- Case studies available;
- Spokesperson available for interview;
- Photos, graphs & video available.

Don't attach your press release. Put it in the email. Make it easy for journalists to read immediately.

7 INTERVIEWS

Make sure your spokespeople are free for interviews throughout the launch day. Different media outlets – TV, podcasts, radio – broadcast from morning to night.

Journalists often prefer to talk to a case study i.e. a person on the ground who has real life experience of the issues you are highlighting. If you have case studies available, promote them in your media outreach.

IF YOU HAVE CASE STUDIES AVAILABLE, PROMOTE THEM IN YOUR MEDIA OUTREACH.

8 CONTACT INFORMATION

Is your website media friendly? Is it easy to navigate and find basic information about your organisation and its work? Is it easy for journalists to find someone to email or phone at any time? Is there a mobile number listed? Will someone answer it? Is it connected to common instant messenger services (Whatsapp)?

2

HARD-HITTING HEADLINES

A headline is a boiled down, simplified version of a story. Ask yourself every time – If you can't sum up your news release in a headline, do you really have a story?

Thinking like a journalist means creating a compelling story that hooks the reader from the headline onwards. Look at the headlines that your target journalist and outlet are using. What headlines are being used about similar topics?

A news story has a hierarchy of information, beginning with the main points at the top of the piece, setting the scene for the rest of the article. Journalists do not work up to their main points. They state them at the start and then provide evidence to support them.

1 SUPERLATIVES

Journalists and the public are interested in superlatives.

For example:

- World's tallest building.
- World's oldest dinosaur egg.
- The coldest place in the world.
- The worst country to be a child.
- What superlative can you use to pitch your story?

2 DON'T BE WORDY

Less is more. Be concise and clear about your story.

News is very competitive – sell your story clearly and simply.

3 QUESTIONS TO ASK

Is this a first? Is it one of the first? Is it the first time in xx years? Where is it a first (e.g. South Africa, Africa, or the world?) If it's not a first, can you use another descriptive word to make it sound newsworthy?

4 USEFUL JOURNALISTIC WORDS INCLUDE:

record-breaking, ground-breaking, extraordinary, unusual
unique (be careful when you use this)
huge, enormous, immense, colossal
innovative, pioneering, leading
breathtaking, exciting, spectacular, awe-inspiring
scientific breakthrough, revolutionary
new technique
cutting edge research/technology
futuristic, visionary, far reaching

5 USE PLAIN LANGUAGE

You must avoid overuse of acronyms. Explain acronyms when you first use them. Always try to write plainly and clearly. Pretend you are talking to your friend in a coffee shop – how would you explain the story to them?

6 WATCH YOUR VERBS

Avoid passive verbs and use active verbs.
Active: when the subject does the action
e.g. The student wrote the essay.



TIP SHEET

3

DIFFERENT WAYS TO PRESENT CONTENT

1 OP-EDS/OPINION ARTICLES

You can engage with the media by placing articles or blogs called ‘Op-Eds’ giving your organisation’s point of view.

These articles are independently written and are intended to create discussion among readers. They are useful for social media campaigns.

THESE ARTICLES ARE INDEPENDENTLY WRITTEN AND ARE INTENDED TO CREATE DISCUSSION AMONG READERS. THEY ARE USEFUL FOR SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS.

Good news hooks for an Op-Ed:

- Comment on a developing news story.
- An International Day e.g. International Workers’ Day on May 1st.
- Releasing a new report that has a compelling ‘top line’.

Pitch your article to the Op-Ed Page Editor at least 1 month ahead. News websites usually have an email address for submissions.

Do not write your Op-Ed before you have placed it with a media outlet. Instead, write a short pitch and see if the editor is interested - then start writing.

Your pitch should have:

- Suggested title (around 10 words).
- The name, title and bio of the author + links to their previous articles.
- A brief outline (few paragraphs) explaining your position.
- The date by which you could write the Op-Ed e.g. ‘We could have a 800-1000 word draft sent to you by 15 January’.

Your Op-Ed must have a clear opinion/call for change stated at the beginning and end.

2 LISTICLES

These are articles with lists of practical information, advice and positive examples of people making a difference. They are a great way to highlight organisations or members who are doing important work.

For example:

- 5 youth activists making a difference.
- How to protest safely during COVID-19.

Listicles are easy to plan and write.

They are popular and great for social media content.

LISTICLES ARE EASY TO PLAN AND WRITE.



3 VIDEO

On social media people are more likely to click on a video than a photo or article.

TV, radio, newspapers, and online news websites are all interested in original video content.

For example:

- Video diaries from people that help to personalise a story.
- Individual statements edited together.
- Personal video statements of people talking directly to the camera.
- A short film containing voiceover, graphics and different interviews.

4 EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS

Can you offer the media an exclusive interview with a compelling interviewee?

For example, the spouse/family member of a jailed human rights defender?

Journalists like to interview real people at the crux of a story.

5 WRITE A LETTER

Read something you didn't agree with? Feel so incensed about it that you want to say something?

Why don't you write a letter to the editor on behalf of your organisation and see if it gets published?

6 NEWS REACTIVE

Being available for expert comment on the news (TV, radio, podcasts).

Email newsdesks 2 weeks before and say that you have an expert available to comment on a scheduled big event, for example, a general election or a specific date such as Human Rights Day. Then follow up with a phone call and get your expert booked to comment. This can also work for breaking news – email news desks and let them know that you have spokespeople to talk about the developing issue.

7 CARTOONS

Cartoons are a great way to generate social media interest as the message is contained in one powerful image.

E.g. This [cartoon](#) was used to publicise the imprisonment of journalist and human rights defender Hopewell Chin'ono in Zimbabwe.



8 RING INTO A RADIO SHOW

Listening to a segment on a radio show that covers your expertise?

Why don't you ring in on behalf of your organisation and comment.

SELECTING SPOKESPEOPLE

1 AVAILABILITY

Are they willing and able to be interviewed both during and outside their work hours?

The media is a 24 hour global business and international broadcast interviews will not all be within working hours. Getting up early and staying up late are part of a spokesperson's role.

THE MEDIA IS A 24 HOUR GLOBAL BUSINESS AND INTERNATIONAL BROADCAST INTERVIEWS WILL NOT ALL BE WITHIN WORKING HOURS.

2 MEDIA TRAINING

Have they been media trained? Do they understand how media interviews work and are they willing to take the time to prepare for their interview/s?

3 PRACTICE

Who is going to go over the messages? Who can practice interviews with them? Is there someone in your team who can do practice interviews with your spokesperson to ensure they are on top of their messages, understand what they want to say and how they are going to say it?

4 PEACE AND QUIET

For radio and TV interviews – Do they have a quiet place where they can be interviewed at home or in the office without being disturbed?

5 TIME

Are they willing to do several interviews on the same day, from breakfast until night-time?

If you can get a lot of coverage, this is great news, but not if your spokesperson is only available for a couple of interviews.

6 SUITABILITY

Are they the best person to be the spokesperson? Sometimes the biggest expert is the most nervous or dislikes giving interviews, so they may not be the best person to put forward for media interviews.

7 CONNECTION

Check your spokesperson's level of reception for broadband. It is no use offering an expert if the broadcasters can't get hold of them or can't get a good signal.

Also, check the load shedding schedule at your spokesperson's office – electricity blackouts will compromise WIFI connectivity.

8 FOR TV INTERVIEWS

Do they know how to frame and light themselves? See tip sheet 10 for more information on this.

9 RADIO CAN BE IN VISION TOO

Some radio programmes are streamed online with pictures, so be careful what you wear, even for radio.



TIP SHEET

5

NEWSPAPER INTERVIEWS

Essential advice for preparation and delivery of print interviews, whether on the phone, videoconferencing, or face to face.

1 PREPARE BEFORE INTERVIEW

Journalists like to tell you that they 'just want to have a chat'. But talking to a journalist is never 'just a chat'. A journalist is your gateway to a mass audience. Talking to a journalist is an important use of your time and you should always prepare what you want to say and how you want to say it, before you talk to them.

TALKING TO A JOURNALIST IS AN IMPORTANT USE OF YOUR TIME AND YOU SHOULD ALWAYS PREPARE WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY AND HOW YOU WANT TO SAY IT, BEFORE YOU TALK TO THEM.

2 EDITORIAL CONTROL

When you talk to a print journalist, you have to accept that you have no control over what they will eventually write. Most journalists will not give you editorial control over their material. However, it is possible to influence them, and you can do this by telling them something interesting that they want to write about.

3 PREPARATION IS KEY

If you don't prepare, you run the risk of making a blunder and you may even damage the reputation of your organisation.



4 THERE ARE TWO MAIN WAYS JOURNALISTS CAN APPROACH YOU AND YOUR ORGANISATION

1. They may contact you because you have sent out a press release. In this case you should be ready with your comments.
2. They may approach you about a current news story and ask you for a comment. In both of these cases you will need time to sort out your response – at least 1 hour.



5 UNEXPECTED PHONE CALLS

If a journalist rings you unexpectedly, refer them to your comms team – if you have one.

If not, find out what their deadline is and ask can you ring them back. Or if they are happy for you to email a comment.



6 PHONE INTERVIEW VS EMAILED COMMENTS

Written answers involve less risk than a phone interview.

You have more control over a written response and can make sure your comments are perfectly tailored and 'on message'.

YOU HAVE MORE CONTROL OVER A WRITTEN RESPONSE AND CAN MAKE SURE YOUR COMMENTS ARE PERFECTLY TAILORED AND 'ON MESSAGE'.

7 INTERVIEW TOPICS

Before you talk to them about an unexpected topic, you need to try to find out what areas they are interested in. Can they provide questions?

At this stage you have to make a quick decision as to whether it is in your interest to comment. Is it going to be useful to you and your organisation to give opinions on the unexpected topics the journalists want to cover?

If you decide yes, you must decide before any media interviews the 3 main headline points you want to get across. Have bullet points in front of you, so you can refer to them. Then you will have a good chance of getting your points into print.

8 'OFF THE RECORD'

Never say anything 'off the record' or talk casually to a print journalist. Most reporters will record your interview and they may use your unguarded comments because they have them on tape and they can prove you did say that.

A journalist is looking for a story not a friend.





TIP SHEET



RADIO & TV INTERVIEWS

1 PREPARATION

Always take your radio interview seriously and commit at least one hour to prepare. You would always prepare to speak at a conference. A radio interview has a much bigger audience.

Think about the questions you will be asked and practice engaging responses.

2 BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW

- Research the programme:
- What style of interview do they do? Relaxed and chatty or confrontational?
 - What sort of audience does the programme have?
 - Will you adjust your content for the audience?
 - Will the producer give you questions beforehand?
 - What time is the interview and for how long?
 - Will other people be interviewed at the same time?
 - Work backwards from there and make your interview plan.

RADIO INTERVIEW PLAN – ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS:

1. HEADLINES

Have 3 main headline messages. Don't hang around – introduce your message in the first question – set the scene and give the big picture.

2. INFO TO INCLUDE

- Facts & figures e.g. dates, money.
- Stories about real people. These stories will bring your message to life.
- Avoid jargon including acronyms.
- Try to use active not passive verbs.
- Talk conversationally and not like a written report.

3. REFER TO YOUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WHERE RELEVANT

4. REMEMBER TO PLUG YOUR ORGANISATION BY NAME A COUPLE OF TIMES

And have a phrase that explains what your organisation does.

5. NEGATIVE QUESTIONS

Always prepare answers to negatives and how to bridge away from them. Ask yourself: 'What's the worst question I could be asked?' and prepare for it.

HANDLING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

USE BRIDGING & THE ABC FORMULA:

ADDRESS – address and acknowledge the difficult question

BRIDGE – use a bridging phrase to lead away from the question

COMMUNICATE YOUR AGENDA – get back to your 3 headline messages

Always rebut questions which are wrong or inaccurate. Move away from negative questions. Never repeat negatives because this gives them power.

Examples of responses:

- “Yes but...” For example, you can use a bridge like: “Yes that is an interesting point, but we think the central issue right now is...”
- “Yes, I know a lot of people do think that, but our research shows...”
- If really stuck, you can bridge to ‘what I can tell you’. For example: “Well I don’t have the figures on that, but what I *can* tell you is that ...”

3 DURING YOUR INTERVIEW

- Speak up DON’T speed up! Talk with confidence and energy.
- Vary your tone and pace. Don’t be monotonous.
- Have your interview plan in front of you but don’t read from notes as it sounds unnatural. The only exception about reading is when you are interviewed about a court case or a change in the law and must quote some specific wording.



AVOID BECOMING CLICKBAIT

Don’t get angry or annoyed. Always stick to your agenda.

RADIO CAN BE IN VISION TOO

So be careful what you wear, even for radio.

DURING YOUR TV INTERVIEW

Take a few slow, calming breaths before you start. Get focused. For an online interview, keep your eyes on the camera throughout. Don’t look down or look sideways at your own picture on screen.

TV STUDIOS

If you’re going to TV studios, for interviews face to face, always look at the interviewer throughout the interview.

For remote TV studio interviews, always look at the camera throughout the interview.

4 AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW

Remain still for several seconds. HOLD YOUR POSE.

Never rush off or sigh with relief that the interview is over. Even a second of this shown on screen will break the spell of your authority. It’s not natural or normal, but it’s part of the grammar of TV interviews.

***See tip sheet 10 for technical advice during TV and radio interviews.**

CRISIS MEDIA INTERVIEWS

When a crisis hits, protecting your organisation’s reputation is vital. Your aim is to come across as a caring, competent, and well-prepared organisation. In order to do this, it is important to have a crisis plan and a crisis media plan which are updated every month in terms of people and roles.

Being interviewed during a crisis when your organisation is under pressure is always a challenge. However, if you prepare your messages and stick to them, you can handle a crisis media interview professionally.

PLANNING

When a crisis hits your organisation, you must act fast, create a crisis plan and assign roles. Clearing diaries is essential.

- Who is the person in charge of managing the crisis operationally?
- Who are the key groups in charge of decisions both operationally and in terms of public relations?
- Where and how will they work? When is their first meeting to consider the issues?
- Who are the key spokespeople? Who is briefing them – have all messages taken in the survivors’ viewpoint as well as the organisation’s?

IF YOU PREPARE YOUR MESSAGES AND STICK TO THEM, YOU CAN HANDLE A CRISIS MEDIA INTERVIEW PROFESSIONALLY.

CRISIS INTERVIEW FORMULA

The formula that works for Crisis Media interviews is the 3 R’s. These are Regret, Reason, Remedy.

REGRET

It is vitally important to express regret at the start of a crisis interview. This can be an apology if the organisation has done something wrong, or regret that people have suffered.

For example:

“We are very sorry that this has happened, and our thoughts are with those who have been injured and their families.”

If you can say that nothing like this has ever happened before, it’s very important to include this. If not, it is important to come across as sympathetic and focused on survivors, not on what the crisis means for your organisation. It’s important to realise that you are not taking the blame legally, but offering a human response to a difficult or sad situation.



REASON

Explain what has happened as far as you know at this stage. Stick to what you have decided to say, no matter how many questions journalists throw at you. Repeat the same answer(s) if it means staying ‘on message’.

Provide reassurance that your organisation is on top of the situation. It is very important to get your version of the situation out into the media as soon as possible.

Countering criticism and misinformation is essential.

REMEDY

Explain the processes that you are putting in place to remedy the situation and prevent it from happening again.

If you have commissioned a report/ investigation whether internal or independent, it is important to say so.

PROVIDE REASSURANCE THAT YOUR ORGANISATION IS ON TOP OF THE SITUATION. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO GET YOUR VERSION OF THE SITUATION OUT INTO THE MEDIA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

NO COMMENT

In a crisis media interview, unlike in a normal media interview, you can say you can’t comment, or can’t comment further at this stage. At the start of the crisis you should say that you are not able to comment on the cause as it is currently being investigated.

AT THE START OF THE CRISIS YOU SHOULD SAY THAT YOU ARE NOT ABLE TO COMMENT ON THE CAUSE AS IT IS CURRENTLY BEING INVESTIGATED.

TIP SHEET

8

APPEARANCE DURING INTERVIEWS

The most important thing to be aware of when preparing for media interviews is that you do not want to look memorable.

Why? Because, if people are taking a lot of notice of your clothes and your appearance, they are not listening to what you are saying.

And while they are mentally decoding your clothes or tidying you up, they are not hearing your important messages.

1 AVOID DISTRACTIONS

You need to avoid giving them distractions which give them the opportunity not to listen to you. For example – no sunglasses or badges.

2 WEAR SMART CASUAL OR SMART CLOTHES WITH:

- No fussy patterns or frills
- No tiny patterns with dots or stripes. Tiny patterns will ‘strobe’ on camera

PLAIN COLOURS ARE BEST

Block colours can be very effective e.g. royal blue, red. But all-black or all-white can be difficult to light.

If you wear a tie, it must be pulled up tight and look smart.

Avoid crumpled shirts or blouses that the audience will mentally be ironing for you. Fitted shirts look the smartest.

3 DON'T BE TOO SHINY

In hot countries, and under TV studio lights in all countries, there can be a risk of looking shiny and sweaty. To avoid this, you can use anti-shine make-up.



ALWAYS MAKE SURE YOUR HAIR IS TIDY.

4 EYE MAKE-UP

Use mascara to provide definition, but don't have heavy eye makeup.

Lipstick or lip gel is useful in making your lips feel less dry and you're less likely to lick your lips due to nerves.

5 GLASSES

Glasses can cause glare on camera. But only take them off if you feel comfortable.

TIP SHEET

9

CREATING A HOME STUDIO

WORKING FROM HOME...

... means you are the Producer and Director not just the Presenter of your messages. The sound and vision need to be of a professional standard for TV and radio. Here are the 7 steps to success for preparing yourself and your setting at your home or office:

1 APPEARANCE

Check everything that will be in the shot. Make sure your appearance is professional.

2 BACKGROUND AND SHOT COMPOSITION

Look at your shot and check your background. Is it very 'busy'? Avoid:

- Lots of books with large writing on the spine
- Lots of puzzling kitchen utensils
- Lots of pictures on your walls
- Lots of personal pictures
- Do you have a door handle growing out of your ear?!

Will your audience spend more time looking at what's behind you than listening to what you say?

3 FRAMING

Use the **RULE OF THIRDS** as used by professional photographers and camera operators. [Click here](#) to see more about the rule of thirds.

4 LIGHTING

Have you got light on your face? If using natural light, don't sit by a window, sit in front of it. Be prepared to put a lamp behind your computer screen pointing towards you or put table lamps on either side of your screen.

Don't have too little light, or too much light, or light on just one half of your face.

DON'T HAVE TOO LITTLE LIGHT, OR TOO MUCH LIGHT.

5 SOUND

Consider investing in a good quality microphone.

6 EYELINE

For TV Interviews, try to keep your eyes on the camera. Keep your head up. Don't look down.

To avoid the unflattering up-the-nose shot, always place your laptop or tablet so that the camera is level with your face, never looking up at you.

7 AVOID INTERRUPTIONS

Make sure you have a quiet place where no dogs, cats, parrots, or children can interrupt. If not using your mobile phone for your media interview, put it in Airplane Mode.

NEWSWORTHINESS – HAS YOUR STORY GOT IT?

A story isn't news just because your organisation is saying it's news.

The basic aspects of newsworthiness: timeliness, novelty or rarity, proximity, conflict, controversy, human interest, relevance and impact.

1 TIMING AND NOVELTY

Always ask yourself questions before you send your story out:

- How new is this?
- Has anyone else talked about this recently?
- A first? How rare? How unusual?
- Is it something that's one of a kind or one of very few?
- Is it a new twist on an old story?
- Plus, never forget: news moves fast. It's news when it's new. Not when it's too late.

2 PROXIMITY

Who does this news affect and how does it affect them? The closer the story is to home, the more newsworthy it is. People are interested in human rights abuses in their own town/country/region. But proximity isn't just about geography. Stories from countries with which we have a particular bond or similarity will engage us.

3 CONFLICT AND CONTROVERSY

Journalists often use the word 'row' because it's a useful short word that fits well into headlines. It's used every day by journalists, illustrating the fact that conflicts make news stories.

4 HUMAN INTEREST – PEOPLE

Individual stories are very important in highlighting the bigger picture.

Do you have people who can give interviews and bring your story to life?

People are interested in stories about people. We like unusual stories of people who have amazing achievements or come through a life crisis. For example, if you are telling a story about thousands of people in a refugee camp not having enough food or shelter, the story of just one family and their children can make things much more vivid and memorable for the public.

5 RELEVANCE AND IMPACT

People are attracted to information they feel is relevant to their own lives.

If you're looking for a job, the business news is relevant. If you're interested in the environment, you'll read about climate change.

Always ask yourself:

- Who is this story relevant to?
- How can I make it matter to people?
- How does this story relate to people outside the country where it takes place?

Every line of work has its own jargon using acronyms and phrases.

What is normal and ordinary to you and your organisation, is not always easily understood by the general public. If you do use acronyms and jargon phrases, you should be prepared to spell them out and explain them.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES:

NGO

If a journalist or broadcaster asks you: “What does NGO stand for?” that isn’t too hard. But, if they then go on to ask you, “And what does Non-Governmental Organisation mean?” Are you still able to explain the role of an NGO clearly? NGO is one of those acronyms which the public is aware of but in many cases is not entirely sure what it means.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND CIVIC SPACE

It is important to recognise that phrases like ‘civil society’ and ‘civic space’ are not always well understood, so it is useful to give examples of some types of civil society groups and actions. For example: ‘When we talk about civil society and civic space, we mean we support organisations which are working to help people assert their democratic rights to debate, assemble peacefully and protest. This is currently not happening in many countries.’ Using the phrase ‘community groups’ can be helpful.

UNHCHR

For example: ‘The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has principal responsibility for UN human rights activities. The High Commissioner’s job is to respond to serious violations of human rights and to undertake preventive action.’

CIVIC RIGHTS

It is always useful to explain that this means the right to speak out, share opinions and take action.

ACTORS & STAKEHOLDERS

Try to avoid using these words when talking about people involved in difficult situations. The public does not think of governments or campaigning groups as actors.

UN

When referring to the UN, it is a good idea to use the full title, the United Nations, the first time you mention it. Parts of the UN and its policies also need to be explained.

HRC

For example: ‘This is the UN Human Rights Council. It is the key UN body responsible for human rights. The Council is made up of 47 State representatives and its job is to strengthen and promote human rights around the globe by addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them, including responding to human rights emergencies. The most innovative feature of the Human Rights Council is the Universal Periodic review. This unique system involves a review of the human rights records of all 192 UN member states once every four years...’

UNHCR

If you mention this, you should explain that this is the United Nations Refugee Agency not to be confused with the UN Human Rights Council (see above).

IDPS – INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

This is another acronym not in general use, so it is helpful to explain it. For example: ‘Most people think of refugees as people who have to leave their countries, but there are also millions of Internally Displaced People who are forced to leave their homes and live elsewhere in their own country.’

EXCLUDED GROUPS

Anything about excluded people needs to be made relatable. Explain why rights for these groups, if one is not a member of them, are important. What do we all lose? It is important to appeal much more to empathy than legality.

UN SDGS

Explain: ‘These are the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals or Global Goals. There are 17 global goals designed to be a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs were set in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030.’ Once you’ve explained the broad definition, you can highlight the specific goals you want to talk about.

STATISTICS

Always try to avoid using a lot of statistics. They can be confusing and can make you sound robotic and over-prepared. In radio and TV interviews, always round your figures up or down e.g. talking about ‘five and a quarter million dollars’ is much easier to understand than 5.28 million dollars.

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS – SPELL THEM OUT IN BROADCAST INTERVIEWS: AU (African Union); EU (European Union); GBV (Gender Based Violence); WHO (World Health Organisation).

GRASSROOTS ORGANISATION/ GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT

For example: ‘Generating support and creating groups at local levels to bring about policy changes at regional, national, or international levels. Grassroots movements are considered bottom-up, rather than top-down efforts – much in the way grass grows.’

MECHANISM

Mechanism: Often used in phrases describing ‘UN mechanisms’. If you use ‘mechanism’ explain what it means and how it works.

AFRICAN COURT ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES’ RIGHTS

For example: ‘The African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights is the judicial arm of the African Union and one of the three regional human rights courts together with the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human rights. It was established to protect peoples’ rights in Africa, usually by delivering judgements.’

HRDS/WHRDS/EHRDS

Human rights defenders; women human rights defenders; environmental human rights defenders. Explain who they are: ‘People who work to defend human/women’s/environmental rights and fundamental freedoms in a peaceful manner.’

INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION

Groups of governments or people from different countries working together to solve an issue that crosses country borders.

CONTACT US



civicus.org



info@civicus.org



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[@CIVICUSalliance](https://twitter.com/CIVICUSalliance)

HEADQUARTERS

25 Owl Street, 6th Floor
Johannesburg,
South Africa,
2092
Tel: +27 (0)11 833 5959
Fax: +27 (0)11 833 7997

UN HUB: GENEVA

11 Avenue de la Paix
Geneva
Switzerland
CH-1202
Tel: +41 (0)22 733 3435

UN HUB: NEW YORK

205 East 42nd Street, 17th Floor
New York, New York
United States
10017