

## BUILDING HUMAN RIGHTS CULTURES AND INSTITUTIONS

Every society defines human rights a little bit differently, shaped by its own traditions, culture and economic realities. But every society, no matter what its values, needs a common place where individuals, government agencies, civic institutions and people and groups of all sorts can come together to share responsibility for the collective well-being and to lay down the rules for acceptable behavior and conditions.

We can call this civil society, we can call it the public domain. This is the place where we have the opportunity to build cultures and institutions that respect human rights. In some countries — primarily in the West — this common space is strong, but even there it is not entirely safe from abuse. In other parts of the world, it exists but is not yet a permanent part of people's daily lives. In certain societies that public space is very weak; it is over-regulated by the state, squeezing out individuals who then retreat and hide in their own private lives, rather than getting involved. Without this civil society, without this public space, there is no civic activity and human rights become an arbitrary affair.

But as you will see in this chapter, more and more people are getting involved and working to advance and protect human rights locally, nationally and internationally. They are using new tactics to strengthen that public space and build strong human rights cultures. Some of them are starting small — in their own schools or village governments or focused on a single issue — but when people can successfully achieve modest aims they then have the spirit to dare to do something bigger, something better. And this is where new tactics can play a crucial role, giving people the tools they need to go that extra step.

— **Murat Belge**

President

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly

Istanbul, Turkey

Human rights advocates come in many forms. Whether they are working to alleviate hunger, to clean up the environment or to clean up politics; whether their focus is on children, women or minorities, the common thread is that all are working to build a world in which all human beings live in dignity and security.

The international agreements, conventions and treaties signed in the past few decades are a positive step, but they alone are not enough. Individuals and communities need to understand the rights codified in those agreements — the rights, for example, to equal protection before the law, freedom of movement or freedom from torture — and how to claim them.

Other tactics in this workbook focus on abuses that are imminent or ongoing, or on repairing the damage of past abuses. The tactics in this section are, for the most part, longer-term approaches, ones that strengthen the human rights culture and respect for human rights. They do this by getting new people and groups involved in human rights work, which not only increases what we are able to accomplish, but adds legitimacy to the movement. They do this by getting the right people and groups together, people who, as allies, can do more than the sum of their work as individuals. They do this by giving people the skills they need to do their work. And, finally, they do this by creating a broad awareness of the existence of these rights and their violations and persuading people to recognize abuse and define it as unacceptable in a civilized world.

Some of these tactics address a particular problem or focus on a particular right, but many have a broader goal: building the groundwork, institutions, alliances, awareness and attitudes that make possible the protection of all human rights.

*The tactics in this chapter are divided into four sections:*

- 1 Constituency-building tactics involve new groups in human rights advocacy.
- 2 Collaboration tactics are used to develop new and effective partnerships for change.
- 3 Capacity-building tactics create institutions and training systems to promote human rights.
- 4 Awareness and understanding tactics educate about human rights.

**BUILDING CONSTITUENCIES** Human rights messages

are often directed at people already familiar with the issues, people who have already expressed interest and support. Reaching out to new people and involving them in human rights work strengthens the potential for more effective action. It brings in fresh energy, fresh ideas, fresh resources and fresh contacts. The more diverse the group of people acting as advocates on a particular issue, the better able it will be to adapt to changes and the more difficult it becomes for abusers to defend their actions. A diverse and active constituency creates a far more resilient human rights movement.

The tactics in this section all build new constituencies for human rights issues. They reach out to individuals and groups who may never have had the chance to become involved in these issues — young people or local legislators, for example — or to those with particular authority in a community, such as religious leaders, who have great power to influence and engage others.

Discussion groups, forums and workshops are all common tools for raising awareness of an issue and getting new people involved, but these tactics may not be dynamic enough to catch the attention of certain target groups — namely, young people. An organization in Poland has zeroed in on two effective ways to reach young people and hold their attention: music and sports.

Nigdy Wiecej (Never Again) is using pop culture to build an anti-racist youth network in Poland. At rock concerts and soccer matches the group reaches out to large numbers of young people and makes them aware of the problem. It then recruits some to join a network of correspondents who monitor and report on the activities of neo-fascist and racist groups in their hometowns.

As part of its rock campaign Music Against Racism, Nigdy Wiecej organizes concerts and publishes compilation CDs featuring well-known Polish and foreign rock bands. At the concerts and inside the cases of the CDs, Nigdy Wiecej educates the audience about the seriousness of the problem of racism in Poland and calls on audience members to become active agents of social change.

Poland's soccer stadiums had been almost completely dominated by a xenophobic subculture before Nigdy Wiecej started its Let's Kick Racism Out of the Stadiums campaign. As part of the campaign, the group publishes *Stadion*, an anti-racist magazine for soccer fans, has released a CD, organizes amateur soccer tournaments and provides banners and leaflets used during games to show their presence to other local anti-racist groups.

Through these youth-focused campaigns, Nigdy Wiecej has recruited a network of 150 voluntary correspondents who are required to report monthly on racist and xenophobic activity in their communities. Nigdy Wiecej collects these reports, publishes them in its own monthly magazine and distributes them to the Polish and international press. The network and the publication help raise awareness of the problem of racism among a much larger cross-section of Polish society, well beyond young soccer and rock fans.

Read more about this in a tactical notebook available at [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org), under Tools for Action.

ONLINE

Nigdy Wiecej uses pop culture to get young people — a sympathetic, but otherwise often uninvolved constituency — involved in human rights work, but it doesn't stop at concerts and sports. Once people have expressed interest and a commitment to volunteering, the organization ensures that they have the chance to get more involved. Adaptations of this tactic could be used to overcome widespread apathy in a variety of situations, but the issue itself is important: it must be something young people can feel connected to, something that could potentially touch their own lives.

*The very existence of social problems such as racism and xenophobia is often denied by the authorities and the mainstream mass media in Poland, as it is in other Central and Eastern European countries.*

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— Rafal Pankowski, Nigdy Wiecej, Poland

## Making Human Rights a Local Issue: Passing international treaties at the local level to impact public policy and promote human rights standards.

Local legislators constitute a potentially powerful constituency that is rarely involved in human rights struggles. In some countries local officials are not accustomed to thinking of their work in terms of human rights; their day-to-day work centers around zoning decisions, permits and budgets. The Women's Institute for Leadership and Development (WILD for Human Rights) works with local government to help officials see the role they could play in shaping policies that protect human rights. They also engage local communities, the constituencies to which these legislators are accountable.

The Women's Institute for Leadership Development for Human Rights (WILD) has used the United Nations Convention to End Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to advocate for human rights at the local level.

In 1996, WILD for Human Rights began advocating for San Francisco to become the first U.S. city to pass a law promoting the principles of CEDAW. Discussing human rights standards in relation to discrimination and to setting up measurable community-based outcomes, WILD for Human Rights worked with government officials, public citizens and advocacy groups focused on domestic violence, poverty and health issues.

WILD for Human Rights held a public hearing at which community members were encouraged to record personal testimony relating to the rights of women and girls and to their pledges to uphold the principles of the Convention. Through this hearing, the group hoped to give community members and city officials a leadership role in the process, helping them feel personally committed to seeing the Convention's principles upheld throughout the city.

Testimony on the relevance of CEDAW in the lives of local women was presented to government officials at a public hearing in the fall of 1997. In April 1998 the city passed an ordinance requiring city departments to review budgets, employment policies and the delivery of services within the context of gender and human rights and allocating funds to help the departments put the ordinance into practice. The ordinance entered a new phase in 2003.

In response to the ordinance, the San Francisco city government has examined the Departments of Public Works, Juvenile and Adult Probation, and the Environment, as well as the Rent Board and the Arts Commission. And city departments have made a number of changes, creating, for example, nontraditional jobs for women in city government, and adding more streetlights in unsafe neighborhoods.

WILD for Human Rights is now extending its reach, and advising organizations in cities across the United States on how those cities might adopt the principles of CEDAW, as well as those of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

The people who testified at the public meetings may never have seen their experiences in terms of human rights, just as the local officials in San Francisco may never have considered their work in terms of fulfilling human rights obligations. But WILD for Human Rights helped them to put their work and their experience into that framework and drew them into the human rights movement.

This tactic could help change a national mindset, bit by bit, and eventually lead to the implementation and monitoring of human rights standards. Other groups working on a wide variety of issues may also decide that finding supporters and building constituencies on the local level can help them make more significant changes both locally and globally.

## Fighting Social Stigmas: Involving religious leaders in modeling behavior toward stigmatized populations.

In many communities religious leaders hold positions of great respect and influence; people look to them for cues on how to behave and what moral standards to uphold. Here, Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns fight the stigma of HIV/AIDS by modeling behavior toward sufferers who might otherwise be entirely ostracized.

The Sangha Metta project trains Buddhist monks, nuns and novices to provide practical and spiritual assistance to people with HIV/AIDS and to fight the myths, misconceptions and stigma surrounding the disease. The program now exists in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Bhutan, Vietnam, China and Mongolia and receives aid from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), AusAID, the Open Society Institute and the Burma Project.

While HIV/AIDS has become epidemic in the Asia Pacific region a lack of understanding about the disease's transmission persists, as does discrimination against those infected.

Centered on the moral and religious teachings of Buddhism, the Sangha Metta project was started in 1997 by monks in Thailand and has been a source of inspiration, training and technical assistance for Buddhist mobilization around AIDS. Sangha Metta arranges seminars, workshops and visits to AIDS hospices for Buddhist leaders, as well as leaders of other religions. In three- to five-day trainings, participants learn about prevention education, awareness-raising, social management skills and tools to encourage tolerance and compassion. Together they assess the problems in their communities and possible steps for combating them.

The Buddhist leaders then model behavior towards affected community members, eating, for example, food prepared and offered by people with HIV/AIDS. This simple, symbolic act has a powerful impact on community members by confronting their fears of transmission. The monks also guide meditation for people with HIV/AIDS, visit them in their homes, educate young people about the disease and care for children orphaned by it.

The monks and nuns working with Sangha Metta are helping to convince members of their communities to promote and respect human rights by modeling behavior — acceptance and tolerance for a group of people who had traditionally been outcasts. Temples in Asia are the spiritual heart of the villages and villagers see monks and nuns as respected teachers, confidants and examples of the purist way to live a Buddhist life. People are accustomed to seeing them as models for behavior. While it may not be as explicit in other religions or cultures, many people look to their religious leaders for guidance on how they should act. These leaders have the power to involve new people in promoting human rights.

Sangha Metta has now crossed religious barriers and is conducting workshops and trainings for leaders of the Christian, Hindu and Islamic faiths as well.

### How can you mobilize respected leaders in your community?

*I spoke to monks about what their role could be in regards to HIV/AIDS. I asked for their ideas and studied Buddhist scriptures with them. They came to the conclusion that HIV/AIDS was not*

*simply a health issue but also a socioeconomic one. As traditional and religious leaders in their communities, the monks saw their role as strengthening their communities and playing an active role in combating HIV/AIDS.*

— Laurie Maund, Sangha Metta, Thailand

## Going Door-to-Door to Find Allies: Using a nomination campaign to identify new potential allies for human rights.

Domestic violence is an issue that affects the lives of men, women and children, yet it is often seen solely as a women's issue. A group in South Africa uses a unique tactic to get men involved in curbing domestic violence.

The Everyday Hero Campaign of the 5-in-6 Project in South Africa asks women to identify men with a positive attitude toward women and then invites these men to become new advocates for women's rights.

The rate of violence against women in South Africa is the highest in the world among all countries not at war. Research shows that one man in six here abuses the women in his life. The 5-in-6 Project targets the other five men, those who do not abuse women. The project has developed the Everyday Hero campaign to find these men and involve them in the struggle. Volunteers go house to house to ask women for information about the good, positive men who live there. With nominations also sent by mail, more than 50,000 responses have identified the "best" fathers, uncles, brothers, grandfathers and male friends in the country. The names and recommendation forms decorate local churches, spreading awareness of the campaign and increasing its popularity.

Volunteers from this list of names are invited to meetings discussing "community problems," and involving men of various ages, experiences, social classes and financial situations. Meetings focus on developing collaborative, nonviolent solutions to the problem of violence against women. Additional workshops help men understand the power relations between genders, build self-esteem and find positive ways to deal with difficult domestic situations. Many participants have noticed dramatic changes in their level of consciousness about domestic violence, and in their ability to engage other men on the issue. For many, it is the first time they have ever spoken out on these issues and the result has been powerful.

By recognizing and honoring local male role models, the 5-in-6 project is able to connect with a cross-section of positive male role models in the community, engaging them to discuss and identify solutions to domestic violence and to see that it is an underlying part of the other problems faced in their communities.

This nomination campaign helps identify "potential allies"—people who care about a particular issue but are not actively involved in it. They may be uninvolved because they don't see it affecting them or simply because they have never had the opportunity to do so or because society has traditionally distanced them from the issue.

Once the 5-in-6 Project identifies these passive allies, it helps some of them become active allies and the effect grows: these active allies, given the necessary tools and information, talk to other men, creating more allies for women's rights.

**Who are your passive allies?  
What tactics can you use to gain  
their support and involvement?**

## Building Networks Through Text-Messaging: Using text-messaging to build constituencies for human rights action.

Modern technology can be used to create awareness about human rights and recruit large numbers of people, specifically youth, to be involved in human rights campaigns.

Amnesty International-the Netherlands uses text-messaging technology to attract new members — especially young people — to the organization, build awareness of its Campaign Against Torture and encourage people to respond quickly to urgent action appeals. More than 500 new members have joined as a direct result of the text-messaging recruitment and over 5,000 more have responded to urgent action appeals sent through text messaging.

The tactic was developed in 2001, within the framework of Amnesty International's Campaign Against Torture. When immediate action was required to protect someone from torture, the Dutch section of Amnesty International sent a text-message to the mobile phones of thousands of participants. These participants, who had signed up for a voluntary and free subscription to the SMS (text-messaging) campaign network, responded to the appeal, and within hours, Amnesty had collected thousands of protest "signatures" against a case or threat of torture. The organization then forwarded these protests by fax or e-mail to the authorities.

With a Tunisian man who had been both subject and beneficiary of an Urgent Action, AI-Netherlands introduced the technique on the most popular Saturday night television program, reaching 2.5 million people. Viewers learned that an Urgent Action is summarized in just 160 characters in the text-message. To respond, people need only respond with a 'JA' (Yes) to text-message number "4777." One minute later, participants receive another text-message to thank them and to tell them how many people have already sent a protest, and a later text-message informs them of the campaign's result, such as the release of the person from custody.

Although Amnesty International rarely claims direct responsibility for improvements in the situation of people featured in Urgent Action cases, about one-third of the cases have had successful outcomes: death sentences have been commuted, "disappeared" people have reappeared and the whereabouts of detained persons have been announced. The chances of torture have therefore been reduced, and the likelihood of seriously ill prisoners receiving medical attention has improved.

In addition, the campaign has convinced many — perhaps even thousands — of young people to join Amnesty's Urgent Action network.

All Amnesty campaigns direct a focused response to a place in the world where someone needs help, using simple actions in which large numbers of people can participate, and through which they feel they are making a difference. The campaigns also educate the public and build a global consciousness about human rights abuses such as torture. The text-messaging campaign generated a faster response to help the victim, while at the same time expanding Amnesty's educational impact into a new constituency.

The text-message campaign attracted new younger members into Amnesty in a way that other outreach and activities had not been able to do. Young people are the most frequent and numerous cell phone users, and it is the youth that Amnesty wants to reach. By using this popular tool of youth culture, Amnesty draws in new young activists who will add to its campaigning power for a long time to come.

## Transforming the Police Force: Teaching police officers about their role in defending human rights.

A Brazilian group uses a comprehensive training approach to persuade police officers to transform their relationships with the communities in which they work.

The Centro de Assessoramento a Programas de Educação para a Cidadania (CAPEC, or the Center for Advising Citizenship Education Programs) provides training to police officers in Brazil to help them understand the vital role they can play as defenders of human rights. The training, which includes a wide variety of courses, emphasizes the human rights of all citizens, including the police officers themselves. The role of police is transformed through this process, leading to improved relationships with the community and greater civic engagement.

Police brutality and torture are widespread in Brazil. Compounding this problem, police officers are poorly paid and corruption is considered rampant. CAPEC's goal is to create "interactive security," in which public security efforts are planned and organized together with community members and in which responsibilities are shared, resulting in policing that effectively responds to the needs of citizens.

The training courses are carried out in three two-day modules over six months. So that its message reaches as many people as possible, CAPEC asks police departments to recommend officers who can share their training experience with others when they return to work. Community members participate in the courses with the officers.

CAPEC's trainings focus on showing law enforcement officers how important their role is in society and how their work affects the lives of individuals and communities. Officers explore what they believe and feel and how they relate with other human beings. They also learn about the many advantages of interactive security, including more effective policing and safer conditions for officers.

Trainers use many stories, metaphors and examples taken from the experiences of the students and focus on educating rather than judging behavior. In this dialogue, officers feel appreciated while learning how they can improve human rights in the community.

CAPEC's training has so far been used in 25 states in Brazil and with more than 30,000 participants, mainly from the civil police, military police, federal police, traffic police and municipal guards. CAPEC has worked with the federal government, state and city governments.

CAPEC's tactic is especially interesting because it involves a group that has been responsible for committing or allowing abuse and transforms them into advocates for human rights. This approach not only contributes to a stronger human rights culture in Brazil, it also directly reduces ongoing abuses by creating a favorable environment in which the police and community are looking for joint solutions to the problems they face.

“ ” | *In interacting with their communities, officers can become educators, especially for those young people and children who have few heroes or good role models.*

*One episode in a neighborhood in the city of Macapá is particularly touching. This neighborhood was considered very dangerous because of the youth gangs that tormented the local population. When interactive policing was instituted in that neighborhood, a captain of the military police was assigned to the area. He found out who was the leader of the main gang and sent messages to invite him to come to speak with him. Finally the teen came and the officer began establishing a bond, as a caring adult and also as an educator and excellent role model.*

*It is possible that this boy had never had a similar role model before in his life. Today that teen is an ally to the police and through his leadership, many more also help the police. The neighborhood has become calmer and safer. This officer understood the importance of his job as educator and promoter of peace and by getting closer to the community where he worked he was able to have an impact.*

— Rosa Almeida, CAPEC, Brazil