

INTERVENTION TACTICS

I have been fortunate to be involved in several campaigns to intervene on behalf of victims of human rights abuses. I have observed many other successful campaigns around the world. In the late 1980s, I helped launch Rugmark, the first effort to discourage the use of child labor in rug manufacturing through voluntary labeling. My organization, Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA)/South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS), has rescued and rehabilitated more than 65,000 children from bondage and brought the problem to worldwide attention through the 1998 Global March Against Child Labour.

Around the world, other consumer campaigns, including the Carpet Consumers, Clean Clothes and Foul Ball campaigns, have also tapped into the power of consumers to help end abuses. At the same time, mass mobilization campaigns — for labor rights and a clean environment in Latin America, for example, and for women’s rights in Africa — have demonstrated opposition to ongoing abuse and disrupted the perpetrators’ ability to continue it.

What these campaigns have in common is that they were initiated at the grassroots level. While the numbers and extent of laws and regulations are increasing, people are living in the same or worse conditions than ever with regard to human rights. The truth is that we cannot realize human rights through laws alone. People on the ground need to intervene when rights are under attack or when abuses are being perpetrated.

In this chapter you will read about individuals and organizations who have worked to stop ongoing human rights abuses through campaigns like these and through other innovative tactics. I hope that you, like me, will be inspired to continue standing up to human rights abuse.

— Kailash Satyarthi

Chair
Global March Against Child Labour
South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude (SACCS)
Global Campaign for Education (GCE)
New Delhi, India

The tactics here have been used to intervene in situations involving ongoing abuses and the denial of human rights. For this reason they are among the most challenging — and the most inspiring. People here are operating in crisis situations. They are fighting entrenched power, trying to overturn the status quo. They are challenging long-held expectations and beliefs, and questioning local traditions. And they are standing up to corruption and abuse that have become accepted as cultural norms.

Very often they are operating from the bottom of the power structure — and drawing on remarkable resources to do so. Sex workers have banded together to save young girls from being forced into their profession. Child workers have formed unions to protect their own rights. Landless peasants have started to farm unused land. Local governments have spoken out against laws and policies put forth on the federal level.

You will also find here, however, a few noteworthy and laudable examples of businesses — perched atop the power structure — using their own power and influence to intervene in situations of ongoing abuse.

In many of these tactics people take the tools of those in power and turn them around to fight abuses of power. They study budgets and laws and publicly hold governments to their promises. They draw on the strengths of traditional cultures and respected leaders to hold their communities to higher standards for the protection of human rights.

The tactics in this chapter are divided into four sections:

- 1 Resistance tactics demonstrate opposition to abuse.
- 2 Disruption tactics use direct action to influence a perpetrator to end the abuse.
- 3 Persuasion tactics use respected leaders or nonconfrontational institutional mechanisms to negotiate an end to violations.
- 4 Incentive tactics provide alternatives to human rights abuse.

RESISTANCE TACTICS

Resistance tactics demonstrate op-

position to ongoing abuse or the denial of rights. These tactics serve two important functions: They make abuse visible — whether locally, nationally or internationally — to those who are affected by it, to those who have the possibility to change it and even to those who are perpetrating it. They also set the stage for further tactics that can effect changes.

These tactics can be deceptively simple. A tactic in Turkey required just the flicking of a switch — well, in the end, millions of switches! — while another in Estonia began as a choral gathering. They can also involve the sophisticated use of complex mechanisms such as budgets and laws, mechanisms that have not been thoroughly exploited in the past.

With the Flick of a Switch: Creating a single mass expression of protest based on a simple activity that citizens can safely carry out in their own homes.

TACTIC

In Turkey, the participation of large numbers of people in a campaign not only provided a measure of safety, but encouraged more and more people — millions, ultimately — to become involved.

The Campaign of Darkness for Light mobilized 30 million people in Turkey to flick their lights on and off as a public demonstration against government corruption. Corruption had been an open secret and yet the public felt apathetic and powerless to end it. With many citizens afraid to participate in political action, organizations needed a tactic of low personal risk that would help overcome the sense of isolation that comes with fear. The Campaign gave people an easy and no-risk action everyone could take — simply turning off their lights at the same time each evening — to show their displeasure with the lack of concerted action against corruption.

The campaign was originally conceived in response to a scandal that revealed extensive connections between government officials and organized crime. In the month prior to the event, organizers launched a massive publicity campaign. They formed alliances with grassroots organizations and unions, asking them to fax petitions and information on the protest campaign to their members, who in turn would send the fax on to their friends and contacts. They also enlisted columnists, radio personalities and TV broadcasters to post public reminders.

Organizers initially proposed that citizens turn off their lights for one minute each night. People then began to blink their lights on and off. By the second week, communities began to improvise, initiating different street actions, including banging pots and pans. By the time organizers halted the action, the campaign had gone on for more than a month.

Although some of the officials implicated in the scandal remain in parliament, there has been a great deal of political and legal change since the campaign, including the trial of several businessmen, police, military personnel and mafia leaders, campaigns within parliament against corruption, and the replacement of many politicians who failed to deal with state corruption.

Read more about this in a tactical notebook available at www.newtactics.org, under Tools for Action.

ONLINE

The action people were asked to take was extraordinarily simple. It required no preparation and very little commitment, encouraging wide participation. The tactic is thus conceptually easy to adapt to other situations. In fact, similar tactics have been used in many situations around the world. People in Zambia honked their car horns at a given time every Friday to protest the president's decision to change the constitution in order to remain in power. People in Chile protested the Pinochet regime by blaring their car horns, banging pots and pans in their apartment windows and marching in the streets. Common to each campaign is the attempt to make the widespread nature of public concern evident to a population which has been ruled by fear and feels isolated, alone and defeated.

Tactics of this nature have the virtue of making the invisible visible. They should be measured by their ability to stimulate a sense of solidarity in a population and to help redefine new political space in which more citizens are willing to act together.

But, while these tactics may be conceptually simple, their success is not easy to replicate. Organizers were not able to revive their tactic on the same scale just months later, despite the existence of many of the same issues and mechanisms. Once achieved, the momentum of such a tactic needs to be harnessed to drive the movement forward.

***When might you use such a tactic?
Is there an abuse in your country that people know of, but, through fear or apathy, do not speak out against?***

Singing Revolution: Asserting cultural identity en masse to express opposition to an oppressive regime.

In Estonia, in the 1980s, those who opposed the Soviet regime invited people to come out and sing publicly the songs sung in their homes and among friends all their lives.

In June of 1988 hundreds of thousands of Estonians (by some estimates, as many as 300,000, or one-third of the Estonian population) gathered for five consecutive nights in the capital city of Tallinn to sing forbidden or politically risky folk songs. Similar festivals were held that summer in Latvia and Lithuania. This “Singing Revolution,” as it became known, was an important step toward the independence of all three Baltic states from the Soviet Union in August 1991.

The Soviet system actively sought to destroy people’s connection to their own national identities. Some elements of this identity had been preserved openly in ways that the regime deemed innocuous (such as certain folk songs); others had been hidden (such as references to “Estonia” rather than “the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic” and the observance of pre-Soviet national holidays) but still remembered by some. Those who had preserved these traditions used them to remind their fellow Estonians of their identity, motivate them to protect it and, in the context of glasnost, give them a safe way to express it.

The song festivals galvanized and popularized the nascent resistance movement by using powerful folk cultural symbols. Many participants came to the stadium wearing traditional dress and sang songs that emphasized their Estonian identity. Under a regime that had used the homogenization of culture as a tool of repression, the festivals gave Estonians a chance to stand up publicly as Estonians rather than Soviet citizens. The presence of 300,000 compatriots took some of the risk out of such a stance.

The festivals were organized by the Estonian Heritage Society (Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts), an unofficial organization that took advantage of the relative openness of the glasnost era to push for public celebration of important national anniversaries and to revive key pre-Soviet national symbols, such as the blue-black-and-white Estonian flag and the national anthem. In the nearly bloodless battle for independence in the Baltics, these symbols were among the most powerful weapons.

The Singing Revolution drew on cultural traditions that were particularly deep in the Baltic countries, including public song festivals with a history that went back formally more than 100 years and informally for many centuries. Other cultures may have similarly strong traditions of song, dance, theater or other forms of art or symbolic expression. Families of the disappeared, for example, have used a traditional folk dance learned by all Chileans and danced in pairs. When a spouse danced with a missing partner in a traditional paired dance, others could visualize the missing person and his place in the family and community.

When you want to mobilize large numbers of people, the challenge is often making them feel safe enough to speak out and providing assurances that they will not be alone. The organizers of the song festivals were counting on safety in numbers: The presence of hundreds of thousands of fellow singers offered some measure of

safety for participants, though by no means was that safety assured.

In a case of repression, what cultural traditions might draw people in your community together?

Comparing Paper with Reality: Creating people’s platforms (public hearings) where citizens can publicly challenge officials on the difference between promises and reality.

In India, a group is holding the government accountable by organizing public hearings on public expenditures. Organizers prove that even funding allocations, usually a technical topic, can draw a crowd.

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) organizes public hearings in India to expose acts of corruption, such as the embezzlement of funds dedicated to development projects, through a comparison of official records to actual events and to reports by villagers in attendance.

In India, as in many countries, corrupt officials and rural elites can manipulate development schemes to their own advantage. This prevents projects from benefiting the poor and perpetuates poverty and social inequality.

MKSS activists and area residents investigate allegations of corruption in villages or districts, often at the initiative of local residents who feel they have been cheated or abused. At the village council or at higher levels of government they request copies of relevant official records. Most often, despite a legal entitlement, the process of obtaining the required information is a struggle with many hurdles. Once obtained, the accounts are cross-checked through site visits and interviews with villagers.

MKSS then holds public hearings that are attended by hundreds of villagers. Organizers invite the press, government officials and those suspected of corruption. MKSS activists, most of whom are from the area, read and explain the official documents claiming, for instance, that a certain health clinic was built in the village, or that laborers in a construction project were paid a certain amount. These documents are then contrasted with actual events. Activists present the results of their research and attending villagers provide their own testimony. The hearings last several hours, as organizers review one development project or instance of corruption after another. More recently, public hearings have also been organized around the operations of a local hospital and the public health system and around the functioning of food security schemes and the public distribution system.

While the impact on transparency and accountability issues has been dramatic, the effects on follow-up official action have been mixed — a few officials have been arrested and government investigations have started to move forward. In some villages the corrupt local officials attending the hearings have voluntarily agreed, when faced with the evidence, to cooperate with the investigations and even return the funds. Usually, however, MKSS activists must follow the public hearings with continued agitation and pressure in order to ensure official action.

Essential to MKSS’s work is access to government records, including records of public expenditures. MKSS used a series of tactics to convince the state of Rajasthan to pass a right-to-information law. The organization mobilized villagers from several districts, staged sit-ins and generated publicity around the issue. As a result a law was passed that compels officials to provide, upon request and at a nominal price, copies of documents on any sphere of government activity, including development programs, public resources and expenditures. This also sparked a national right-to-information movement that has led to the passage of similar laws in several other states, and to a Freedom of Information Bill in the national parliament.

What tactics can be used to ensure your local government spending is helping uphold the rights of the local people?

“We have used the demand for information as a means to assert the people’s democratic right to ask questions and demand answers. The demand for specific information is being used in different ways

by people in different parts of India to control corruption and the arbitrary use of power. It is eventually a demand not just for information, but a share of governance.”

— activist, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, India

New Tactics in Human Rights						
INTERVENTION	Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue	
Resistance	Europe	Society	Government	National	Cultural Rights	

New Tactics in Human Rights					
Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue	INTERVENTION
Asia	Civil Society	Government	Local	Corruption	Resistance

All Politics are Local: Encouraging local governments, organizations and individuals to oppose, through the use of education and resources, federal legislation that endangers human rights.

As demonstrated here, local organizations and local government can work together to resist legislation made on the federal level.

In the United States, the Bill of Rights Defense Committee (BORDC) creates tools and resources to help local advocates of the Bill of Rights educate members of local governments and communities about how federal anti-terrorism legislation and policies violate their rights. Many of the local groups work with their city, town or county governments to formally register opposition to violations of civil liberties, passing resolutions or ordinances upholding the Bill of Rights. These ordinances instruct local law enforcement and other government employees not to cooperate with requests to violate residents' constitutional rights.

The USA Patriot Act was signed into law in late 2001. It created a new crime, "domestic terrorism," and gave the federal government greater rights to wiretap phones; monitor emails; survey medical, financial, library and student records; and enter homes and offices without prior notification. Under this Act and other legislation, non-citizens can be deported and detained without judicial appeal. BORDC believes these provisions violate key civil and political rights provisions of the U.S. Constitution.

Recognizing that much of the work authorized by the Act and other antiterrorism policies and legislation is ultimately carried out by local law enforcement, a group of advocates (who would eventually create BORDC) held a community-wide forum in Northampton, Massachusetts. They circulated a petition to gain support for a city council resolution opposing key components of the legislation and requesting that local law enforcement refrain from carrying out any order that violates the civil liberties of community members. They received additional support by inviting businesses, individuals and organizations to participate in public forums. Many joined the activists, providing funding and helping distribute the petition, rallying support for the resolution at city council meetings, and lending it credibility by demonstrating its broad support and appeal.

The coalition convinced the city council president to sponsor a resolution. BORDC then began encouraging similar efforts in neighboring towns and across the nation. Their web site has been central to their organizing efforts. It explains in detail the steps taken to educate citizens and gain public support for passing municipal resolutions. It contains sample resolutions, petitions, press releases, fliers, FAQs and news articles. It also describes how their public forums were organized and provides alternative campaign approaches.

Resolutions have been passed in 267 cities, towns and counties and in three states (as this book goes to press), demonstrating growing momentum to revoke provisions of the legislation that could have an impact on human rights. The combined population of these "civil liberties safe zones" has topped 47 million. BORDC's web site also offers information to help students and faculty, religious groups, unions and professional groups organize.

BORDC members began by mobilizing for change in their own community and then decided to make their efforts national, sharing their experience with other communities. They helped cities and communities recognize that people can take a stand against deteriorating human rights, sending a strong signal to the national government. Although a particularly potent form of resistance in a political system with delineated and separated authority, this can be adapted to systems with even vertical political structures,

though the risks to local authorities may be much higher.

How would something like this work in your country?

“ ” | *It is the municipality's responsibility to ensure that its residents feel safe and protected by just laws from unfair treatment, invasion of privacy without probable cause and detentions without charges and*

in secrecy. When most local elected officials take office, they swear to uphold both the state and federal constitutions, including the Bill of Rights in their municipality.

— From www.bordc.org.

INTERVENTION	Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue
Resistance	Americas	Civil Society	Government	National	Civil and political rights

Petition Power: Organizing a large-scale petition drive to pressure the government to change.

A group in Argentina uses a little-known and under-utilized provision in the constitution to educate the public and mobilize for change, while at the same time convincing the parliament to pass legislative reforms.

In 2002, Poder Ciudadano (Citizen Power) collected signatures on a petition that, under a constitutional provision, the Argentine congress was then obligated to consider. The constitutional provision requires the congress to deliberate any proposed legislation brought before it by community members or organizations, as long as that legislation bears the signatures of 1.5 percent of Argentine citizens in at least six of 24 districts.

Poder Ciudadano was created in 1989 by a group of citizens concerned about the defense of civil rights in Argentina. Its petitions, initiated in the several years since the country's economic collapse, have focused on key problems of hunger and excessive retirement benefits for government officials. The petition related to hunger proposed to feed all impoverished pregnant women and Argentine children under the age of five. Over half of the Argentine population have been living below the poverty line since the economic collapse. Children represent the largest population in poverty and few social programs address hunger among children. The goal of the petition was not only to obligate the congress to address this problem, but also to propose solutions.

Poder Ciudadano wrote the petition, recruited 250 volunteers around the country and trained them with crucial instruction sheets that explained who was eligible to sign, where to send the completed petitions and what information was needed from signatories. Most volunteers were recruited through the organization's web site and the project coordinator. The volunteers met at public locations in their communities to collect the signatures: markets, bookstores, pharmacies, newsstands and phonebooths. Poder Ciudadano partnered with several organizations and the media, including a prominent radio personality who gave the locations of signature collection tables on air and a major newspaper updating readers on the number of signatures collected.

The initiative was very well received by Argentine citizens and Poder Ciudadano presented it to the congress, which, by late 2002, passed the proposal with some modifications. The right-to-food initiative collected over one million signatures and was accepted by the congress as a state obligation. The program to combat hunger is currently in the early stages of implementation and the first food centers have recently opened.

Poder Ciudadano transformed widespread apathy into real change. People with no faith in government or its responsiveness to citizens were able to see their own voices have a direct effect on legislation. Poder Ciudadano built a strong network of volunteers, allied organizations and the media to spread word about the petition and gather the enormous number of necessary signatures.

Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue	INTERVENTION
Americas	Civil Society	Government	National	Right to food	Resistance

Bucket Brigades: Independently collecting air-quality data on the community level in order to pressure for change.

Communities can demonstrate opposition to abuse — in this case, environmental violations — by acting on their own to collect information.

Many communities across the United States have begun or joined “bucket brigades,” programs that teach people living near industrial polluters to build and use simple air monitoring devices, or “buckets,” which have been approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In the absence of strong environmental laws, standards or enforcement bodies, buckets give communities the means to independently monitor the air quality of their neighborhoods and provide them with evidence to pressure for change.

The bucket itself is a relatively simple and inexpensive air sampling device composed of a Tedlar sampling bag inside a five-gallon plastic bucket and a vacuum or tire pump used to suck air into the bag. The bucket brigade includes volunteer members in three jobs: sniffers, samplers and community bucket coordinators (CBCs). Sniffers are responsible for alerting the samplers to pollution incidents. Samplers keep the air sampling devices in their homes and take a sample when a pollution incident is suspected. They record where, when and why the samples are taken and call a CBC to retrieve the sampling bag and arrange for delivery to the analytical laboratory. Results are recorded in a database and provided to the community through local media, community meetings and other methods. Community members use the data at their own discretion to request further investigations on pollution from community groups, government agencies and health facilities. The brigade also provides residents with fact sheets on health effects associated with pollution levels.

Low-income, minority communities in the United States have been particularly receptive to the idea of bucket brigades and the tactic is gaining widespread acceptance. Media attention has helped to create change in many communities. Contra Costa County, California, adopted an “environmental justice policy,” reinforcing industrial pollution regulations, expanding occupational medical facilities and including residents in decisions regarding nearby industries. In Louisiana, air samples proved that the Diamond neighborhood, which was slowly being engulfed by the Shell Chemical plant, was no longer safe; the company eventually agreed to relocate the entire neighborhood.

This approach is useful when governments or businesses do not provide information about pollution or when communities are concerned that official information is false. Setting up a bucket brigade is a powerful public statement that chemical plants and government agencies do not have the right to control data on pollution and that communities can gather this evidence on their own, make it public and place pressure on a company to respond. The method is so simple that it has spread quickly from community to community, and beyond the U.S. as well, making possible something rather unusual: victims of abuse (rather than outsiders) documenting abuse as it is happening. This tactic has been adapted in South Africa, India and the Philippines.

Training Victims as Human Rights Monitors: Training victims of human rights abuses to monitor and defend their rights.

A group in Mexico trains indigenous communities to monitor abuses. Armed with new skills in documentation and legal defense, members of these communities are able to take their complaints to the highest levels.

The Chiapas Community Defenders Network (Red de Defensores Comunitarios por los Derechos Humanos or Red) trains young indigenous community members to monitor and defend their human rights.

The extensive military presence in Chiapas, as well as the increasingly paramilitary nature of the conflict between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government, has resulted in widespread human rights abuses, including illegal detention, military harassment of civilians (particularly at checkpoints), illegal killings and detention and sexual abuse of women by military and paramilitary groups.

In 1999, Red trained 14 people representing seven Chiapas regions and communities. In 2001, a second class of defenders began training. The defenders were appointed by their communities and actively involve community members in their work.

Defenders are trained through monthly seminars covering the theories and concepts of human rights work as well as the practical skills needed to ensure human rights violations are documented, reported and prevented. Through this process, they learn what constitutes a rights violation and how to document it through the use of video, photography and computers. They also learn various ways to respond.

Defenders present complaints to the government, give information to the press and human rights monitoring groups and seek the release or legal defense of people unjustly detained. They are able to locate detainees and present requests of habeas corpus (the right to be brought before a judge to determine if an individual was lawfully detained) when rights are in jeopardy. They know how to file a request for precautionary measures when human rights violations are imminent and who to approach to denounce violations when they occur. For cases that go before the courts or require long-term legal strategies, attorney advisors work collaboratively with the defenders.

At home, defenders engage in a range of work depending on community need. They collect testimony from victims and witnesses of human rights violations, gather video and photo evidence of abuse and determine appropriate ways to intervene when a violation has occurred. They also train other community members in this work.

This approach has led to numerous successes and has also increased the autonomy of indigenous communities by eliminating dependence on external actors such as NGOs.

The model of Red places communities and local leaders at the center of the struggle for human rights, with outsiders serving only as advisors. Training a network of local people to independently defend human rights in their communities can be done by organizations seeking to strengthen human rights advocacy in any region. The tactic of training victims of human rights abuses to monitor and defend human rights can serve to both increase human rights awareness and defense in indigenous communities as well as build those communities' capacity to function autonomously.

The defensores [defenders] do legal “first aid.” That is, they are trained to be the communities’ first line of defense. They know what a rights violation is, what is needed to document it and how to go

about doing so. As a result of this tactic, a stable group of indigenous community representatives have been prepared to carry out their communities’ legal defense and they are, in turn, training others.

— Miguel Angel de los Santos,
Red de Defensores Comunitarios
por los Derechos Humanos, Mexico

“ ”

INTERVENTION	Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue
Resistance	Americas	Civil Society	Business	Local	Environment

Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue	INTERVENTION
Americas	Civil Society	Society	Local	Indigenous rights	Resistance

Operation SalAMI used what it called a “Citizen Search and Seizure Operation” to pressure the Canadian government to release a secret draft treaty that members believed could undermine human rights. The group was able to generate public condemnation of the secrecy used to shield the government and the treaty from public scrutiny. **Philippe Duhamel**, an organizer and trainer, describes the operation:

“ ” | *For months, the government had adamantly refused to make public the draft papers for the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), a trade liberalization treaty being negotiated among 34 countries of the Americas. We announced our intention to pick up the hard copies of the FTAA texts at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade on April 1, 2001. First, we would hold a legal demonstration in Ottawa, where one of two things would happen: either we would joyfully pick up the boxes of documents given to us, or the offensive secrecy of the process would be made public. If the texts were not released, we would use a nonviolent blockade to shut down the building and attempt a “search and seizure” operation, a citizens’ raid to obtain the documents through a strictly nonviolent intervention.*

When the government did not comply, a group of citizens declared, “We ask you, police officers, to do your duty and help us retrieve the documents to which we have a right. Do not become accomplices of the secrecy and manipulation of this government. If you refuse to seek and retrieve the texts on our behalf, we will have no option but to attempt to retrieve those ourselves.” One by one, they then gave their names and said, “I am here to exercise my rights as a citizen. Please let me through.” Groups of two then proceeded to climb over the barricade. Close to 100 people were arrested and held overnight. No charges were filed. Across the country, people asked, “Why is the government refusing to give us these documents and choosing to arrest its own citizens instead?”

The action, and the vast campaign around it, were covered by virtually every media outlet in the country. The government was forced to act. One week after the Citizen Search and Seizure Operation, the Canadian government, after consulting the other negotiating partners, finally agreed to make the documents public.

ONLINE | Read more about this in a tactical notebook available at www.newtactics.org, under Tools for Action.