BUILDING AWARENESS

Making people — all people — in a community aware of human rights is the first step toward building a community that cherishes those rights. When people don't know their rights, abusive actions by the government, ruling class or other power may be accepted, tolerated or simply overlooked. The tactics in this section build awareness both of the larger concept of human rights and of the more specific issues of how those rights apply to individuals and communities.

The challenge faced in most of the situations described lies in making people see the relevance of human rights in their own lives. People in isolated communities may not feel that they have rights. They may not know about international conventions or national laws, or may not feel that such acts apply to them. Conversely, people in developed nations may believe that the very words "human rights," and the concepts they convey, belong only to faraway, impoverished nations.

Legal Education in Rural Areas: Teaching people in rural areas about their rights and connecting them to lawyers to defend those rights.

In communities isolated geographically, by culture or by custom, lack of knowledge may be the biggest obstacle keeping people from taking full advantage of their rights. A group in Thailand combines community education — through skits and seminars — with access to the legal system, ensuring that people are not only aware of their rights, but can actively claim them.

The Thongbai Thongpao Foundation (TTF) in Thailand brings free legal assistance to rural residents, along with training on basic human rights and laws affecting their daily lives. While Thailand enjoyed rapid economic growth in the 1990s, much of the improved standard of living was concentrated in metropolitan areas. Rural populations lag behind economically and have little awareness of the rights guaranteed by modern Thai law. This leaves them vulnerable to exploitation by corrupt officials and moneylenders.

TTF's Law to the Villages course targets teachers, students, community leaders, poor farmers and women. TTF staff and a team of volunteer lawyers hold weekend training workshops in the villages, usually at the request of villagers who are facing problems with state officials. Over two full days of training, participants learn about constitutional law, human rights, marriage, loans and mortgages, labor law and other legal issues that concern them. Dramatizations of court cases complement the lectures and discussion.

Participants receive photo identity cards with the name and signature of their personal lawyer after completing the course. The back of each card lists the rights of suspects: the right to silence, to legal assistance, to know the charges against them and to post bail. After the program, a local paralegal committee of five to seven people is set up in the village to ensure that human rights standards are followed and to help organize courses.

Rather than distant, abstract concepts, TTF teaches practical information and skills that villagers can use to assert their rights. The power of the business card given to each person should not be underestimated: knowing that you have someone to call in case of abuse is not only a psychological boost, it could also dissuade someone from violating your rights in the first place.

This tactic could be valuable in rural and isolated areas around the world where people are unaware of their rights or do not feel empowered to access the justice system. It also offers legal action as a possible recourse for victims in case of abuse. A similar tactic in Uganda educates people in outlying areas about their rights, and creates avenues for mediation (see page 136).

What other "tokens of power" (like the business cards in this example) might help people who are otherwise prevented from exercising their rights?

Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue
Asia	Civil Society	Society	National	General human rights

Theater Breaks the Silence: Using theater to break the silence around sensitive human rights issues and provide legal rights education.

In Senegal, a group provides information on legal rights to a sector of society that isolated not by geography, but by cultural norms.

The African Resource for Integrated Development (Réseau Africain pour le Dévelopement Integré, or RADI) educates women about domestic violence through theatrical sketches and informal, paralegal-led discussions about the protective legal resources available to them. Through the use of theater, RADI aims to break the silence around domestic violence in Senegal.

Domestic violence, especially of a sexual nature, is a taboo subject in Senegal, and is rarely reported to authorities. In a country where ninety-five percent of the Senegalese population are practicing Muslims and many believe that religious law permits some forms of domestic violence, RADI needed to find an effective way to raise awareness regarding newly passed legislation. Because illiteracy is rampant, and because theater has experienced a remarkable resurgence, RADI chose theatre as the means to enhance its ability to reach its audience, raise awareness on domestic violence issues and make people aware of available resources.

RADI brings in well-known actors who select women from the audience to join them in 10-minute improvised sketches portraying scenes of domestic abuse. The spontaneous actions of the women and the audience members reveal their familiarity with these situations. The sketches are left unresolved in order to allow the paralegals to facilitate discussions on possible remedies and options that can be taken to address the domestic violence situation. The paralegal also makes sure to present the legal resources available and the penal and civil penalties for violence.

RADI draws on two important cultural resources in its tactic. First, theater is already a widely accepted and well-understood method of teaching in Senegal. Second, the programs are organized around *mbottayes,* traditional informal gatherings of women that generally guarantee very good attendance at the group discussions. RADI reports that most participants in the theater and discussion sessions not only learned more about their own rights but also passed this information along to family members and friends.

Many groups have used theater and performance to promote human rights, but RADI combines law and theater in a unique way. Part of the reason RADI succeeds in reaching its audience is that it uses the existing social structures of the mbottayes. The theatrical aspect offers further incentive to participate — it's entertaining — and offers the participants a layer of protection that facilitates conversation without asking them to discuss personal situations.

What are the cultural traditions in your community that create barriers against speaking out on certain human rights issues? What cultural traditions could be engaged to overcome the barriers and break the silence?

“ ” *The number of women presenting themselves to denounce cases of violence has increased and on the same note in some cases women have been leaving [marriages] and seeking annulment.*

— Deputy Public Prosecutor of the Republic, Senegal

New Tactics in Human Rights	BUILDING HUMAN RIGHTS CULTURES	Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue
	Building Awareness	Africa	Civil Society	Society	Local	Women's rights

Reclaiming Tradition: Using the arts to connect human rights to local culture and tradition.

Human rights may seem like something imposed from outside or above. A regional human rights institution at work in the Arab world is strengthening human rights by demonstrating that they are already a part of the region's cultures.

The Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) in Egypt uses arts and literature to demonstrate that human rights are, and have long been, celebrated in Arab cultures. Although many Arab states supported the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), several have since portrayed the UDHR, and human rights protection more generally, as a Western concept.

CIHRS uses a variety of approaches to illustrate the roots of human rights in Arab Islamic societies — in their folklore, literature and film. Artists are invited, for example, to monthly film screenings at which guest speakers discuss the films within the context of human rights. The film director or critics are often present at the screenings. This Cinema Club for Human Rights is one of the first experiences of its kind in the Arab world.

In addition, CIHRS publishes a series of booklets entitled *Human Rights in Art and Literature* that highlights the role of art and literature in disseminating the concepts of human rights; they have so far published ten books. Artists are always encouraged to present, in an engaging manner, their own experiences related to positive human rights values.

Through the Cinema Club and booklets, CIHRS has built a network of artists with an interest in promoting human rights, encouraging them to create projects that promote human rights in contemporary society. At times CIHRS also chooses a specific theme or issue, identifying how artistic approaches could play a role and then approaching network members who could successfully address that theme through a variety of artistic media.

Through all of these approaches, CIHRS has contributed to a greater awareness of the cultural relevance of human rights in Egypt and the Arab world.

CIHRS is using film, art and literature to help people throughout the region claim ownership of the principles of human rights, refuting claims that human rights is foreign and making it possible to build a base of widespread support for a human rights movement.

This approach is long-term and unlikely to cause any rapid changes in a community, and it is most likely to appeal to people already drawn to the arts. But if deeply-rooted cultural examples are chosen — ones to which most of the population feels directly connected, such as national epics and children's stories — it could reach a larger segment of the population.

Local cultural traditions, myths and text can also be used as educational tools, as readily understood examples of the principles of human rights. The Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI), currently based in Canada, uses an informal education model that helps Muslim women easily identify universal human rights concepts in local cultural terms. SIGI developed a series of manuals that can be used anywhere women gather, both in public and in private. The manuals encourage discussion of human rights concepts in terms that have relevance in the women's daily lives.

Every culture celebrates the values of justice, dignity, freedom, equality. Arts and literature help create a human rights culture. We approach the heart of the people, not just the minds, to make them aware of human rights. “ ”

— Bahey El Din Hassan, Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies, Egypt

Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue	BUILDING HUMAN RIGHTS CULTURES	New Tactics in Human Rights
Africa Multiple	Civil Society	Society	International	General human rights Women's rights	Building Awareness	

A New Way to Understand Social Justice: Training organizations to place their social justice work into the context of human rights, thereby providing advocates with a new set of tools and access to new alliances.

Because many people in developed countries see the term "human rights" only in relation to the developing world, human rights concepts and ideals can seem far-removed and foreign. This attitude can lead to a damaging complacency, something a group in the United States is working to combat.

The National Center for Human Rights Education (NCHRE) trains organizations in the United States to frame social justice issues as human rights issues. While many organizations in the United States work on social issues, few think of their work in terms of human rights.

In a 1997 poll conducted by NCHRE, over 90 percent of Americans did not know of the existence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To respond to this lack of understanding of human rights in the United States, NCHRE has created a human rights education curriculum for grassroots social justice organizations.

NCHRE also holds conferences, meetings and community events and has distributed nearly half a million copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In its training sessions, NCHRE emphasizes the universal nature of human rights by demonstrating that anyone can be either a perpetrator of abuse or a victim. NCHRE also teaches ways to protect human rights, particularly through education on the legal and technical aspects of human rights. Trainers then work with participants to develop human rights action plans to be used in their own communities.

Participants in the training sessions bring back to their organizations the ideas and skills learned in the workshops, increasing exponentially the reach of NCHRE's work. Since its creation, NCHRE has trained over 16,000 social justice advocates in human rights. A number of the groups trained by NCHRE have used a human rights framework to make positive changes in their communities. The Georgia Citizens Coalition on Hunger, for example, used human rights-based arguments to persuade the state legislature to pass the first minimum wage increase in more than 30 years.

NCHRE is countering a pervasive attitude in both the government and the general public that human rights principles are not relevant in the United States and that human rights problems, as such, do not exist there. To groups already fighting problems like hunger, poverty and homelessness NCHRE provides a new tactic. When these groups start framing their work in a new way, they may recognize new allies and may be able to attract new people to their cause.

“ ”

There are intractable problems [the United States], such as lack of health care, welfare reform, racism. The Constitution doesn't offer sufficient protection to the citizens in these areas. Our only option is to turn to the global framework of human rights that raises these issues to the proper level, that changes the nature of discourse and politics in this country.

**— Loretta Ross,
National Center for Human Rights Education, USA**

BUILDING HUMAN RIGHTS CULTURES	Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue
Building Awareness	Americas	Civil Society	Civil Society	National	General human rights

Making Your Point With Mapping: Visual mapping to create public awareness and pressure for policy change.

No matter what audience you are trying to reach, visual representations of the problem you are addressing can be a very strong asset. Greenpeace Lebanon effectively used mapping to illustrate environmental hazards along Lebanon's coast.

The Greenpeace Lebanon office mapped environmental violations along the country's coast in order to educate the general public about the problem of toxic industrial waste and to pressure the government to institute policies to remedy the problem.

The group generated huge public interest in the environmental condition of the Lebanon coastline by traveling to a new site each week in an inflatable boat, focusing its efforts on the coastline's most heavily populated and used areas. It highlighted the most egregious environmental problems at each site by using Geographical Information System (GIS) software to produce a map of testing results. The public followed the progress of the Greenpeace boat on TV, in newspapers, on the group's web site or even along the beach front, where maps were posted during testing. The boat's weekly progress generated a great deal of interest and even suspense: What would they find, people wondered, at the next site? By the end of the campaign, the map itself was a graphic illustration of the toxic sites and of the extent of environmental problems all along the coast.

Greenpeace used several other tactics in combination with the mapping project. Members lobbied politicians, government agencies, residents and business owners along the coast. One staff member was assigned to keep the media informed and interested and ensure that coverage was timed to maintain public interest. The group also attracted attention with radio spots, fact sheets, huge mobile posters and an animated television spot that illustrated the long-term effects of pollutants.

The public awareness generated by the campaign helped pass Law #444, an environmental code that included the right to access information.

Greenpeace Lebanon turned dry, technical information into a compelling picture — making facts understandable to members of the public while attracting and holding their interest in its work, and at the same time moving them to take action to remedy the problem. The problem of environmental violations had been largely hidden, so that the people affected weren't even aware of the abuse. By revealing it, Greenpeace created a new constituency to work against it. The key to this success — the raised awareness and the passage of the new law — was strong outreach and media coverage to highlight the mapping effort as the group also lobbied for specific policy changes.

GIS mapping is being used to illustrate and combat other human rights problems, such as sex trafficking. It could also be used to show reported incidents of torture at police precincts, illustrate widespread poverty by describing average household incomes in an area, or portray access (or lack of access) to vital services by showing the locations of wells, hospitals or schools to illustrate access. When we can see the extent of a problem, we are better equipped to respond to it.

"A picture is worth a thousand words." How can you use images to promote your cause?

Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue	BUILDING HUMAN RIGHTS CULTURES
Asia	Civil Society	Society	National	Environment	Building Awareness

TACTIC

Understanding How We Got Here and Where We're Going: Using the emotional power of a historic site and personal stories to raise awareness of current human rights questions.

Stories can help bring seemingly dry or distant human rights issues to life. The Tenement Museum in New York City uses stories from the past to generate discussion and awareness of current labor rights issues.

Recreating an 1897 apartment and dressmaking shop, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum brings together representatives from conflicting sectors of the garment industry to discuss what needs to be done — and by whom — to address the problem of sweatshops today.

The Tenement Museum restores the apartments at 97 Orchard Street, where more than 7,000 immigrants from 20 different nations lived between 1863 and 1935, and tells the stories of their struggles in America. In 1897, Harris and Jennie Levine, immigrants from Plonsk (now in Poland) operated a garment shop from their apartment, representing the very space the word "sweatshop" was first coined to describe. Today, there are more than 400 garment shops in the U.S. employing nearly 15,000 immigrant workers. The U.S. Department of Labor classifies nearly three-quarters of them as "sweatshops," but the debate still rages over what a sweatshop is, what should be done to address labor abuses and who is responsible.

The museum has transformed the Levine home into a center where people in the garment industry can exchange ideas about how to solve problems. For its first meeting, in 2002, it invited an unusual mix of participants that included representatives from Human Rights Watch, UNITE! (the garment workers' union), Levi's and Eileen Fisher (clothing brands), the King's County Manufacturers Association and more. Packed in an intimate circle, these leaders of what are often considered opposing sectors of the garment industry listened to the story of how this immigrant family slept, ate, raised a family and turned out hundreds of dresses in a tiny 325-square-foot space.

In conjunction with this meeting, the group held a day-long summit about the new perspective to be gained by looking at the garment industry's past and the new ideas it suggested for preventing sweatshop conditions in the future. Since the first meeting in 2002, the museum has hosted similar dialogues with dozens of garment industry groups.

ONLINE

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

It is crucial to have a strong facilitator and to carefully construct the dialogue so that people move from personal reactions to larger civic issues, appreciate and listen to opposing views and have the opportunity to exchange views in small group settings as well as large forums.

" "

These were people who refused to come together in other settings, but agreed to meet and talk at the museum. We had to emphasize that our interpretation of the past would be from multiple perspectives, raising questions for debate, rather than telling a single story.

In general, participants told us they felt comfortable coming together at a history museum while they would not feel comfortable in other settings. As one participant put it, "The environment here puts everyone a little off-balance, in a way that really opens discussion. It provides a wonderful opportunity to look at all these issues together."

— Liz Sevcenko,
Lower East Side Tenement Museum, USA

BUILDING HUMAN RIGHTS CULTURES	Region	Initiating Sector	Target Sector	Focus	Human Rights Issue
Building Awareness	Americas	Civil Society	Business Civil Society Society	Local	Labor rights

NOTES