

## PERSUASION TACTICS

Persuasion tactics are used to end human rights abuses without confrontation, without demonizing the abusers or those facilitating abuse. Often abusers simply need support and encouragement to end their participation in human rights violations.

While intervention tactics are often associated with protest and resistance, some of the most dramatic successes in ending human rights abuses have resulted from negotiation and persuasion. Through pressure that is at times quiet and at times more visual, advocates are able to make significant improvements in human rights, often very quickly. These tactics use nonadversarial relationships with governments and businesses, even offering assistance to help end the abuse. They put respected community leaders in the forefront of negotiations or education efforts. They operate within an atmosphere of collaboration.

People and relationships are an essential resource to consider when evaluating the range of tactics available to you. Who is close to your target? Who has their respect?

Who can influence your target?

## The Power of the Airwaves: Using the power of the media to send targeted messages to people in a position to end abuses.

Journalists can use their position in society to raise awareness of human rights abuses and to influence those in power to make changes. Through the use of radio, journalists in Burundi were able to persuade key leaders to end human rights abuses occurring in hospitals.

African Public Radio (APR) used its power as a media entity to influence individuals and groups who could help fix the situation in Burundi's hospitals, where poor people were being held against their will because they could not pay their bills. Eventually, in partnership with local NGOs, APR successfully pressured the government to order the people's release.

In war-stricken Burundi, many cannot afford needed medical care. Adding to the problem, a general system breakdown in the 1990s reduced the state's capacity to support the health system. Facing a budget crisis and growing debt, hospitals began to detain people who could not pay their bills. Because the hospitals felt they were being wronged by those who would not pay, they did not see this as a human rights issue.

After gaining access to detainees and winning their trust, APR secretly interviewed them and broadcast their testimonies. The broadcasts included messages targeted to specific groups and individuals who had power to fix the situation. After the first broadcast, APR joined forces with national and international NGOs, hosting a *café presse* — an elaborate press conference — on health care with government officials and other influential people. The final discussion addressed the detentions themselves and put moral pressure on the government to respond.

In April 2002, the Council of Ministers forbade hospital detentions and ordered the hospitals to free all detainees. The government also created a commission to examine the larger issues of access to health care and reforms of national health policy.

A key element of this tactic was identifying the target of the broadcasts: What group or groups would have the power to change the situation in the hospitals and at the same time be receptive to the message? In this case it was government officials, who were morally bound to act after the stories became public. This tactic also demonstrates the power of stories. The victims' stories, once in the hands of individuals with access to a podium, changed national policies.

The tactic could have backfired, however, as some had feared, if the hospitals had decided to deny future care to patients who had appeared on the radio program. It might also have resulted in embarrassment for those patients if there were any stigma surrounding their illnesses. To be successful, this tactic requires that journalists be engaged in and willing to work for the advancement of human rights issues.

***How might radio be used to inform people about your human rights issue and to pressure for change?***

## Enlisting Local Leaders to End Harmful Customs: Engaging local leaders to use their influence to help end abuse.

When looking for allies in a campaign to end abuse, community leaders are a natural choice. They might be tribal leaders, elders, religious leaders, local politicians or just individuals with charisma and influence.

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice in Ghana solicits the support of respected community leaders — chiefs and queen mothers — to address the problem of *trokosi*, a system in which women and young girls are kept in fetish shrines without their consent. Families give their girls to the shrines to atone for the sins or crimes committed by a family member, and to thereby end or reverse a family's bad luck.

The Commission has the power to enforce laws against *trokosi*, but it took this tactical approach because it recognized that the tradition is based on deeply held beliefs and, if not transformed voluntarily, might simply go underground. To prepare for the campaign, the Commission researched the beliefs behind *trokosi* and built an alliance with International Needs Ghana, an NGO that counsels and rehabilitates former victims of *trokosi*. Together they host meetings with the victims and the fetish priests at which everyone is encouraged to share their views.

Local leaders then help the Commission emphasize the need to abandon the practice and use their position in the community to convince the fetish priests to free the women and girls. Liberation ceremonies bring the community together to publicly recognize the priests' decision and help fulfill the community's spiritual needs. These ceremonies are covered by the media, demonstrating to the broader public that the local leaders support ending the practice. This tactic has freed about 3,000 women and girls.

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

Calling for an end to a traditional practice without addressing the underlying beliefs and structures that keep it in place, or without proposing an alternative that allows those beliefs and structures to be transformed, can drive communities to hide the practice rather than end it. This tactic depends upon the respect of a community for its leaders, and the willingness of those leaders to set an example for the community to follow. To end the *trokosi* practice, it is essential that communities be convinced that they do not need to relinquish their family members to the priests in order to atone for their sins. The liberation rituals and the reassurances from community leaders are essential in alleviating fears of reprisals from the gods and in building trust within the community.

This tactic could be useful in helping to transform or eradicate other traditional or entrenched social practices that violate human rights, such as female genital cutting or domestic violence.

## Follow the Money: Examining budgets to reveal social and economic inequities and persuade the government to rectify them.

Sometimes individual leaders hold moral and political sway over governments, and sometimes numbers and data speak for themselves. Budget analysis can uncover inequities in the fulfilment of social and economic rights, can be a tool to help persuade governments to rectify these inequities and can help hold governments accountable to their commitments.

The Children's Budget Unit (CBU) at the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) uses national and provincial budgets to reveal whether the government is meeting its commitments in protecting the rights of children and to provide evidence and recommendations for rectifying the failure. South Africa's constitution states that every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, health care and social services. However, millions of children go hungry, do not have the material means to attend school or receive health care and find it impossible to live healthy and secure lives.

The CBU first determines the government's obligations based on the constitution and international commitments. It then measures the extent of child poverty. This is followed by a comprehensive analysis of budget allocations and expenditures and of the delivery of key services to children, revealing the government's fiscal priorities. This analysis and compilation of the budgetary facts allows CBU to clearly illustrate where the national, provincial or local government is not meeting its obligations. It also provides solid facts and data from which to make recommendations and strongly pressure for change. In some cases, local governments do not even collect this data and welcome the information that IDASA provides as a way to improve their own work.

This tactic has resulted in new legislation and better relationships with key government institutions, some of which now request information from the CBU. The tactic has spread globally, with similar monitoring units being opened in parts of Asia, South America and across the continent of Africa.

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To monitor government programs the CBU gathers information that the government itself is either unable or unwilling to obtain. This tactic merges two historically separate discourses — of budget analysis and of human rights — to improve budget transparency, accountability and good governance practices. Rather than becoming an adversary, the CBU persuades the government to accept, use and even request this data in order to improve the lives of the children in the community. The CBU also maintains its monitoring role to ensure that the information gathered is credible and can be used by the country's human rights lobbyists. To do its work, the CBU needs access to budgets, which may not be available in less open societies. The first step in using such a tactic, then, is to ensure that local laws allow public access to budget information and to pressure for this access if it does not exist.

This tactic can be used to monitor national and local government commitments, donor commitments, foreign aid and Poverty Reduction Strategy Policies, as well as conditions governments must adhere to in order to access certain types of donor funding from institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The budgeting approach can also show what progress is being made on a wide range of human rights issues, including disability rights and the rights to education, housing and health.

*The budget is government's operational plan to deliver a better life for our people. It sets out what you will pay in taxes, how we will spend that money and what we will deliver. It is a synthesis of all our government policies. The budget is our contract with the nation.*

— Trevor Manuel, Minister of Finance, South Africa

| INTERVENTION | Region | Initiating Sector | Target Sector | Focus | Human Rights Issue |
|--------------|--------|-------------------|---------------|-------|--------------------|
| Persuasion   | Africa | Government        | Society       | Local | Slavery            |

| Region | Initiating Sector | Target Sector | Focus    | Human Rights Issue | INTERVENTION |
|--------|-------------------|---------------|----------|--------------------|--------------|
| Africa | Civil Society     | Government    | National | Children's rights  | Persuasion   |

## Civilizing the Bureaucrat: Building collaborative relationships with government officials to promote change from within the system.

A Russian organization has shown that persuasion tactics can promote change from within. In other words, you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

Citizens' Watch identifies democratic Russian officials who are supportive of human rights and reform and provides them with opportunities to strengthen democratic processes in Russia. The legacy of Soviet rule and totalitarianism left extremely challenging conditions for the development of democracy in Russia. Government officials had no experience in being responsive to the public, an essential practice in a democracy.

Citizens' Watch carefully monitors the actions of leading government officials, including individuals in the Interior Ministry, police and judiciary. They then identify officials who demonstrate an interest in a more democratic government and support for human rights — people they also believe will be open to change — and tailor their approaches to suit each individual, always being respectful and supportive. In some cases, this involves translation of international documents that support democracy and respect for human rights or are otherwise useful to the bureaucrat's job. In others, Citizens' Watch invites officials from abroad for seminars or supports the travel of Russian officials to meet with colleagues in other countries. During Soviet rule, few officials had opportunities to travel and learn of the democratic work of colleagues abroad. Citizens' Watch therefore uses travel and exchange opportunities both to train government officials and to entice them to actively seek change.

The group's hope is that access to these international documents and exposure to international colleagues will help illustrate the possibilities, and even prestige, in government collaboration with citizens and in work to uphold human rights. It also provides government officials with concrete information and examples of ways to improve government and human rights in their own country.

As a result of these efforts, Citizens' Watch has formed numerous collaborative relationships with government officials and institutions. Approaching officials in a variety of fields, and supporting them in their efforts to reform their departments, helps strengthen civil society and creates a more democratic relationship between the government agencies and the community.

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Citizens' Watch is trying to remind officials that they are citizens first, with constitutional rights that must be respected, and only next are they governmental servants. What we can learn from Citizens' Watch is that, even in government systems with no tradition of engaging with the public or working in a democracy, there are openings for change. Other organizations hoping to take advantage of such openings in their countries will need to keep in mind that this approach requires a high level of individual diplomatic talent, along with a fairly deep pool of resources. These diplomatic skills and resources are also essential to another key aspect of the tactic:

providing continued support to those who do want your assistance to advance human rights.

### What tactical approaches can you use to turn adversaries (or potential adversaries) into allies?

“ ” | *Heavy authoritarian traditions don't die easily and sometimes get the upper hand for a time, throwing us a few steps back down the ladder. For example, in March 2004, Citizens' Watch, along with justices of the peace from several Russian regions, organized a two-day conference to discuss problems in developing courts in the Russian northwest and other regions. We invited a couple of Supreme Court judges who, to our knowledge, had been most active in this process, as well as administrators from St. Petersburg and other population centers in the region.*

*Two weeks before the conference, we were informed that the Supreme Court superiors had forbidden the judges to participate in our conference or in any events organized by NGOs. But the local judges showed themselves to be worthy of the independent status they were given in 1992: They showed up in force to the conference, which took place in the St. Petersburg City Court — also a supporter of the initiative. The judges who came were brave enough to publicly denounce their higher-ups — proving that we had not been working in vain.*

— Boris Pustintsev, Citizens' Watch, Russia

## Shareholder Power: Presenting shareholder resolutions to press companies to adopt more socially responsible business practices, including comprehensive human rights policies and practices.

Shareholders and investors are often overlooked as potential actors who can improve human rights protections in businesses.

The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), a coalition of 275 faith-based institutional investors in North America, promotes shareholder resolutions to change unjust or harmful corporate policies and practices. As of 2003, the current combined portfolio of ICCR member organizations was estimated at about \$110 billion.

ICCR members examine the social and environmental performance of the companies in which they invest. Rather than selling the stock of companies whose practices are harmful, the ICCR uses their financial holdings as a tool to pressure the companies to change their practices.

As shareholders, ICCR members place resolutions on social issues onto company ballots to be voted on at the annual meetings. In one example, nine ICCR-affiliated institutions co-filed a shareholder resolution with Amalgamated Bank and several other institutions. The resolution urged Unocal to adopt new company-wide policies based on the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and was submitted to Unocal shareholders in 2002. The shareholders argued that Unocal's image was suffering because of questionable business practices in its Burmese pipeline project and that this was discouraging investment in Unocal. The proposed resolution received the highest vote on record in support of a human and labor rights shareholder proposal and caught the attention of the board and top management. In 2003, Unocal adopted policies based on the ILO declaration. In 2004, after ICCR members filed a resolution, Occidental Petroleum agreed to adopt a comprehensive human rights policy. ICCR publishes an annual *Proxy Resolutions Book* containing shareholder resolutions filed that year so that managers can make informed decisions about proxy voting and investors can see trends in corporate responsibility.

Each year ICCR-member institutions submit more than 100 shareholder resolutions on social and environmental issues. In many cases, these resolutions open the door for negotiations between religious investors and company executives.

While shareholder resolutions are not binding on companies, they do prompt company action when they receive support of a substantial number of shareholders. ICCR has been able to make its voice heard on important issues since 1971. Just as importantly, its tactic gives more people opportunities to participate in the advancement of human rights by changing the way they invest.

| INTERVENTION | Region | Initiating Sector | Target Sector | Focus    | Human Rights Issue |
|--------------|--------|-------------------|---------------|----------|--------------------|
| Persuasion   | Europe | Civil Society     | Government    | National | Corruption         |

| Region   | Initiating Sector | Target Sector | Focus         | Human Rights Issue   | INTERVENTION |
|----------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Multiple | Civil Society     | Business      | International | General human rights | Persuasion   |

## Mock Tribunals: Organizing mock tribunals to raise awareness of human rights abuses and influence public policy.

We don't have to wait until a particular form of human rights violation has ended to begin using stories for healing and reconciliation and to mobilize public opinion. In Nigeria, a group convened a mock tribunal focused on women's rights.

BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, along with the Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre, organized the first National Tribunal on Violence against Women. Held in March 2002 in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, the tribunal was unofficial and not legally binding, but the testimony was real. Thirty-three women testified, sharing their experiences in order to help the public learn about the abuses suffered by women in their homes, in their communities and at the hands of the government, including sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape and female genital mutilation.

The judges on the tribunal, all Nigerians, were selected based on their prominence and their concern for women's rights. They included two judges, one a Supreme Court justice, a former ambassador, a member of the National Human Rights Commission and a former attorney general. The tribunal was open to the public and the organizers took special care to invite journalists, police, commissioners, legislators and international observers. Different types of human rights abuses were grouped into different sessions. The panel of judges heard the testimony and asked questions, then convened in private. Afterwards, rather than handing down a sentence, the judges made public policy recommendations.

The tribunal and the media coverage around it created greater public awareness that abuses against women do exist and that they are serious. It helped facilitate the passing of state legislation on different issues affecting women and advanced a national bill on violence against women.

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Since the tribunals can raise awareness only when word spreads to the general public, BAOBAB's success required a good media strategy, along with strong leadership and a shrewd assessment of their political needs. BAOBAB chose, for example, not to invite any international experts to serve as judges, so the Nigerian government would have no opportunity to disregard its findings as "outside meddling." Others who wish to implement this tactic will also need to carefully tailor the make-up and scope of their tribunals in order to have the most impact on their intended audience. Tribunals such as these have been used in communities in many parts of the world for a number of purposes, such as recognizing abuses and raising public awareness.

*Finding people to testify was a very big challenge — both the search and the process of counseling and encouragement. Some people had religious and cultural beliefs that inhibited them from telling their stories. Some expressed fears that they would not want their identity*

*disclosed. The most common fear was of what their communities would think of them after giving their testimonies in the public. They were afraid of being rejected by their community. We responded to this by disguising them during their testimonies.*

— Mufuliat Fijabi, BAOBAB, Nigeria

| INTERVENTION | Region | Initiating Sector | Target Sector         | Focus    | Human Rights Issue |
|--------------|--------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Persuasion   | Africa | Civil Society     | Government<br>Society | National | Women's rights     |