

A

framework
Collaboration

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



SEVEN ACTION POINTS FOR EFFECTIVE ACTIVISM

LESSONS FROM THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S ACTIVISM

July 2011



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Front: Amnesty International South Korea action against the death penalty, Seoul, 2009.

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Left: Sierra Leoneans interact with performers at the launch of Amnesty International’s campaign to end maternal mortality in the country, September 2009.



INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS BOOKLET?

Activism is vital to our campaigning work: it is transformative in the sense that, by taking action, we change our relationship to the world and the world changes as a result of our actions. We owe it to ourselves and to the world to be as effective as we can in the actions we take.

This short publication aims to be a practical guide on what makes activism effective. It aims to share key points and lessons learned from Amnesty International's Impact Assessment of Activism project.¹ It aspires to be a useful resource for Amnesty International staff and for activists who are responsible for leading groups and networks.

WHAT DOES IT DRAW ON?

- A process led by the movement for the movement.
- Experiences and reflections on activism from people across the movement – captured in over 60 Stories of Change, 29 individual interviews and six in-depth case studies.
- Key findings about effective activism, identified by a small group of International Secretariat (IS) and section/structure staff in a two-day workshop and shared with the International Executive Committee.

Left: Amnesty International activists protest at the death rate of women during childbirth in Lima, Peru, as part of the campaign to end maternal mortality, 2009.

SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- Every context is different – it is important to understand what will work in your specific setting, according to your specific needs and expected outcomes.
- It is important that those most familiar with the context have a say in shaping the activism contribution, but within a framework which ensures strategic overview and coherence.
- There are some things that ring true for all – these are presented as the seven action points below.

“The power of activism is that you can create a public outrage about something.”

(IS staff)



**The seven action points
for effective activism**



PLAN FOR IMPACT

WHY DO THIS?

“There is a very specific human force in activism that can’t be conveyed through lobbying etc... When young people are doing activism to influence a specific target, and when they are in situations where they are directly facing each other, it can be very emotional for the target and there can be a feeling of direct accountability... It can have an extra effect, extra push to the lobbying or other campaign techniques...”
(IS staff)

From its inception, Amnesty International has been a movement of ordinary people standing up for human rights and humanity. Activism is vital to our campaigning work and provides an “added value” to our work in different ways. It amplifies our message, provides legitimacy and builds a human rights constituency by helping people to engage directly in the actions for change.

Activism is at its most effective, with greatest potential for impact, when this added value is clearly identified within a specific campaign strategy or action plan. It is most strategic when the forms of activism are chosen because they are the most

Left: Members of the Sawhoymaxa community in Paraguay at a workshop with Amnesty International, 2008.

appropriate to the specific campaign objectives and to the context in which we are working, rather than because they are things we like to do or have always done.

“The decision to focus the public action on the secondary target as opposed to the primary target and decision-maker on this case (the Minister for Justice) was taken based on political intelligence as regards the personality and decision-making methods of the Minister... he is the type of person who, if he feels backed into a corner, will dig his heels in and resist any change.”

Amnesty Ireland Story of Change on the Counter Terror with Justice campaign

Rather than seeing activism as a separate activity, planning for impact requires the integration of activism into a wider set of planned activities within a campaign. Taking this approach allows us to combine activism tools and techniques in a strategic, contextually appropriate, creative and timely manner. It means being clear from the outset about the kinds of change we want to achieve, what needs to happen in order

to achieve that change and how activism will contribute to that change. In some instances, this may even mean saying “no” to activism that has no clear added value.

Illustrative cases:

- Amnesty Paraguay got the government to prioritize the issue of human rights and to set up an organizational structure for establishing and implementing the first National Human Rights Plan. Activism was brought in as a timely, complementary action alongside the other elements of the campaign:

“Following an internal analysis of possible activism techniques, Amnesty Paraguay chose those that could be implemented using its existing resources. A timetable for implementation that would fit in with national circumstances was drawn up in order to have as great an impact as possible on the whole population.” (Amnesty Paraguay case study)

- Amnesty Ireland succeeded in obtaining the resettlement of two Guantánamo prisoners. One key factor that contributed to this was the cohesive nature of their campaign strategy, which included the use of public campaigning in tandem with very high-level, behind the scenes, lobbying. (Amnesty Ireland Story of Change on Counter Terror with Justice)

HOW TO DO THIS?

In order to develop a strategic approach to activism, which allows us to explore the full range of activism tools and techniques, the IS and sections can:

- Refer to the Impact Assessment Toolkit for help with tools and approaches for planning for impact (available on the Impact Wiki on the intranet).
- Work with *Amnesty International's Dimensions of Change* (Index: POL 50/010/2008) to help identify the different kinds of change you are seeking.
- Identify the role, contribution and added value of activism when developing your theory of change (see the *Impact Assessment Toolkit* for a step-by-step guide on theories of change). Include the local level contributions in this.
 - In international campaigns, ensure that you make the issue relevant to the activists taking action locally by building in flexibility for national and sub-national teams to adapt the messaging and techniques employed to suit the local context and environment. However, ensure that your local activism is in line with the national and global priorities.
- Where appropriate, include activism experts in campaign and project planning from the outset and integrate them into cross-functional teams to design and implement the work.
- Ensure that there is detailed information on the context and the key actors so that appropriate and relevant activism contributions can be identified.
- Ensure that there are distinct parts in campaign plans and action circulars which address the contribution of activism.
 - Develop detailed activism plans covering:
 - How you will make the identified contribution (your capacity, resources and so on).
 - Who will be involved (including profile of activists needed).
 - Relationships with others relevant to the issue.

A “health warning” to the above: while the strategic framing of activism is critical, it is always important to remain open to opportunities that emerge along the way.



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ENGAGE WITH RIGHTS HOLDERS

WHY DO THIS?

Rights holders should be at the centre of our decision-making and campaign implementation. Rights holders are also fundamentally activists for change. A key to our success is to work in empowering ways – creating space for rights holders to express their opinions, voice their demands directly in front of the targets and decision-makers and ultimately generate change. This approach is about learning from each other and, where appropriate, enabling rights holders to strengthen their skills and knowledge so that they are effectively acting on their own behalf. To sum up, it's about working **with** rights holders, not working **for** them.

Examples of positive results of working in this way include:

- Creating a platform for slum dwellers at the launch of the campaign to stop forced evictions was cited as a contributing factor in the suspension of plans for forced eviction in Accra, Ghana. (Amnesty Ghana case study)
- Gaining experience and confidence in using a variety of Amnesty International campaign tools and strategies has

Left: An Amnesty International campaigner explains Amnesty International's work to Romani children in the Hungarian speaking Romani community in Miercurea Ciuc/Csikszereda, Harghita county, Romania, 2009.

empowered the Accra slum dwellers to take action to demand their rights. (Amnesty Ghana case study).

- The access to Troy Davis' sister and her presence in a European tour was cited by Amnesty France as a key factor in obtaining the Council of Europe's unanimous resolutions supporting Troy Davis and other high-level interventions by politicians, legislators, religious leaders and members of Parliament. (Amnesty USA case study)
- Young people from “at risk” communities in Toronto have said how they have become aware of their own rights, and of Amnesty's work, as a result of participating in the Art for Action programme. (Amnesty Canada staff)
- Amnesty activists went to Vilnius in Lithuania to take part in the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) Pride event. This participation made a big difference in getting police protection, allowing the Pride event to take place and thus enabling the rights holders to frame LGBT rights as human rights in Lithuania. (Amnesty Denmark Story of Change on Baltic Pride)

Illustrative case:

Amnesty Zimbabwe on their “Stop forced evictions” and “Human rights live here” campaigns

Before the lobbying meeting with the Prime Minister and the Mayor, Amnesty Zimbabwe talked to the rights holders who were going to make a presentation at the meeting. Amnesty Zimbabwe asked them what the key issues were that they wanted to convey, and encouraged them to talk to the authorities in the Shona language rather than English so that they could express themselves easily. The rights holders then talked directly to the Prime Minister and Mayor and handed over the petition to the Prime Minister themselves – this was much more effective than Amnesty Zimbabwe doing all the talking.

“The rights holders are at the heart of the issue and can speak about their feelings passionately. It's easier to convince the authorities when a rights holder is explaining eloquently the issues affecting them – the authorities can't ignore it. The involvement of the survivor groups in Amnesty Zimbabwe's campaigning work gives meaning to the campaign; otherwise the question the authorities ask is ‘who are you representing?’”

HOW TO DO THIS?

To successfully engage with rights holders, you will need to take care to use participatory approaches in the different stages of the campaign cycle, such as in the design of processes, strategies and materials, ensuring appropriate language and accessibility. This means you need to:

- Identify from the outset if, and how, engagement with rights holders may contribute to the achievement of the campaign objectives.
- Where relevant, involve rights holders in the development of the campaign strategy, and if appropriate in the development of campaign materials and activism tools at the local level.
- Identify key moments when the “voice” of the rights holders will have greatest impact.
- Whenever appropriate, support rights holders in developing their campaigning and influencing skills.
- Ensure that the materials you produce use appropriate language and are accessible to a diverse audience.
- Invest in enhancing staff and activists’ understanding of the value of a participatory approach, and build their capacity to work in ways which facilitate engagement with rights holders.
- Talk to other organizations who have a strong track record in this approach.

- Link in with the current Active Participation and Human Rights Education initiatives to share relevant ideas and experiences on how to use empowerment approaches in your activism. (See the “For more information” section at the end of this booklet)

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Above: Morgan Tsvangirai receives a petition in 2010 from representatives of Operation Murambatsvina survivor groups, who were among thousands of people forcibly evicted from their homes in Zimbabwe in 2005.



GAIN ACTIVIST 'OWNERSHIP'

WHY DO THIS?

This is about how Amnesty International works with human rights activists in any specific campaign or initiative, bringing them right into the centre of campaign implementation. It is about:

- Engaging activists in campaign planning, strategy and tools development where appropriate.
- Providing the opportunity for activists to be at the forefront in engaging with decision makers or other targets, when this is identified as being a strategic use of their contribution.

This means allowing “*space for self-generated activism and not be afraid to let go a little...*”

In Amnesty USA's work on the Stop Violence against Women campaign:

A network of members in many states was formed. They were responsible for following the campaign and being able to enhance and encourage activism in their respective states. The members were enthusiastic, feeling some ownership of the campaign, and could support really concrete actions. They were

Left: Amnesty International activists in India spell out the word “justice” as part of the Beijing Olympics Aerial Art Global Day of Action, July 2008.

able to generate educational events, and to increase activism and actions taken by the public, including making phone calls to members of Congress. For a politician to take action, Amnesty needs to create political will. The more citizens contact their local congressmen, the more political will is created. They are expecting some new legislation to emerge from this work.

Further examples of positive results of working in this way include:

- Activist lobbyists in Norway succeeded in getting local politicians to commit to a plan of action against violence against women in their municipality and/or to earmark money for the setting up of safe shelters. (Amnesty Norway Story of Change)

- Amnesty Mali's youth network activists took the lead in using theatre to engage with rural rights holders around the issue of access to education in their poor rural community. Together, they were effective in obtaining from the Ministry of Education the reconstruction of the primary school and funding for two teachers. That village

gave Amnesty Mali its first rural pre-group which continues to be active to this day. (Amnesty Mali Story of Change)

- The engagement of the African American community through canvassing efforts in Savannah, Georgia in the USA was described as "empowering" and helped to create a more receptive environment for the Troy Davis campaign. (Amnesty USA case study)

Right: Amnesty International UK activists demonstrate outside the offices of Vedanta Resources in London, 2010.



© Simone Novotny



Above: Asia-Pacific Youth Network members with Pacific War sexual slavery survivors, 2010.

Illustrative case:

Asia-Pacific Youth Project (APYP) on the Justice for Pacific War Sexual Slavery Survivors campaign

“The youth team members developed the campaign plan and selected or created the activism tools themselves after consultation with a range of stakeholders. Each country team developed their own country action plan and was free to use whatever activism techniques they believed would have the most relevance locally. As a result most of the youth team members had a strong sense of ownership over this campaign and the activism tools.”

This strong activist-led approach was identified as a significant contributing factor to some of the changes achieved in relation to the campaign’s accountability objective, levels of activism and mobilization and in the area of building relationships with other actors:

“There were more youth-initiated collaborations and more goodwill generated than was expected... the changes were significant not only in the context of this short campaign, but also with regards to some of the NGOs’ longer-term campaigns... they are likely to contribute indirectly to long-lasting differences, such as some NGOs actively seeking to engage youth, or it is possible that this campaign will have inspired others to initiate new cross-regional campaigns.”

HOW TO DO THIS?

In working to engage activists and give them ownership, section staff should:

- Generate commitment and ownership by developing a shared understanding among activists and staff on the importance of working for impact via a strategic approach and prioritization.
- Be sure you understand the nature of your activist base, its culture and where it can support or create barriers or obstacles to effectiveness.
- Use entrance records, skills audits, work histories and so on to profile your activists. Capture this data in a systematic and accessible way so that you can easily identify the best use of your activist base, for example activists with a business background to work on corporate sector targets.
- Create supporter journeys for activists, mapping out different levels of engagement. Be sure to record data to re-engage activists and to help integrate activism with fundraising.
- Ensure that your activists have the appropriate skills, resource materials etc. to be effective – invest in capacity-building.

- Strengthen your growth strategies with a reinforced activism dimension and by identifying new profiles and new kinds of activists that might be needed.

In the implementation of your campaign strategies:

- Seek out “champions” who can promote strategic activism at regional/local levels or who have activism expertise in a particular area.
- Tap in to activists’ skills and experiences to produce “user-generated content” where appropriate. This encourages ownership and can contribute to cost-effectiveness:
“More and more people have time and expertise to give (when asked to help generate the materials)... it’s a better way of doing activism... makes use of new technologies and involves people and leads to more innovation in activism.” (IS staff)



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MAKE RELATIONSHIPS COUNT

WHY DO THIS?

In many contexts, Amnesty International cannot achieve the desired changes on its own. Building and nurturing a range of collaborative relationships enables us to have a greater reach. We can have access to a wider range of people, an expanded realm of influence, and can build a greater constituency for human rights.

Having strong relationships with others can help us achieve more and offer more opportunities for human rights activists to engage, as we pool our resources and skills:

Amnesty Zimbabwe relies on coalition partners for specific activism tools and techniques. For example, one partner performs public road shows in which a vehicle travels around the country accompanied by music, singing and dancing, followed by discussions on human rights issues with people who gather around. The section doesn't have the resources to do this kind of activism itself, but encourages its members to join the coalition's activism, which has been very popular.

Left: Global Day of Action for Myanmar in Trafalgar Square, London, UK, October 2007.

Investing in relationships can also strengthen Amnesty's profile: "Networking and partnerships play a big role in making Amnesty credible in certain issues." (Amnesty Philippines staff).

Collaborating with others can strengthen Amnesty in other ways too. Our activists can learn new skills, gain new ideas and grow in confidence through collaborative efforts: "It was good for them not to do just what Amnesty tells them, but to think for themselves and talk to other NGOs about how to campaign on the issue." (Asia-Pacific Youth Project, APYP – case study)

Further examples of positive results of working in this way include:

- Providing a platform for non-political, cross-regional (Asia-Pacific) collaboration possibly influenced a senior official of the Japanese Foreign Affairs Ministry to agree to meet the youth representatives in the case of the Justice for Pacific War Sexual Slavery Survivors campaign. (APYP case study)

- The personal contacts of coalition partners facilitated access to a key decision-maker for Amnesty Zimbabwe and their coalition partners. (Amnesty Zimbabwe's Story of Change)

- Gaining the freedom of an individual at risk in Qatar was greatly helped by investing in the relationship with the Qatari Human Rights Commission. (Interview with IS staff)

- Attracting media attention and generating a "buzz" around the Troy Davis campaign was helped by others taking on the more "edgy" tactics when Amnesty couldn't. This collaboration shielded Amnesty from the risks without stifling the creative and passionate energy of supporters. (Amnesty USA's case study)

Right: Mozaika, the Latvian LGBT organization, leads the Riga Pride march, May 2008.



© Amnesty International/Kaare Viemose 2008

■ One of APYP's partner NGOs reported increased levels of activism and mobilization and said that they were motivated by seeing younger people being active in the Justice for Pacific War Sexual Slavery Survivors campaign. (APYP case study)

© Brian Shin



Illustrative case:

Amnesty France's Cluster Munitions campaign

Our partnership with Handicap International (HI) was our trump card in ensuring success in getting our recommendations accepted by the AXA Group insurance company and the government... The strength of our partnership lay in the juxtaposition of the names of two well-known and respected organizations, which gave major credibility to our campaign: Amnesty France, because of its human rights expertise, and HI, because of its experience in dealing with the issue of mines and cluster munitions. Amnesty was able to mobilize an activist network to ensure the action's success with the general public. HI contributed its technical and political expertise on cluster munitions and its parliamentary network. Furthermore, pooling resources to carry out press work extended the range of campaign contacts.

Korean World War 2 sexual slavery survivor, Gil Won Ok, watches as the words "Say Sorry" are written in the sky above Parliament House, Australia, 2009, in a campaign urging Japan to acknowledge and compensate survivors.

HOW TO DO THIS?

Amnesty staff and activists across the movement should consider the following:

- Have a clear idea of who the key actors are when first starting to develop a campaign plan. Identify those with whom a collaborative relationship will provide the opportunity to increase the impact of your activism.
- Check that the mission and values of the actors you want to collaborate with are compatible with those of Amnesty International.
- Be clear about Amnesty's position on the issues being worked on and the framework Amnesty is working within. The clearer you are about what Amnesty can or cannot do, the better the co-operation will be.
- Be clear on Amnesty's "added value" when entering into collaborative relationships or partnerships:

"Other organizations are working hard but don't engage the youth as they don't have time, so we added this value. They are experts on peace or non-violence at the NGOs but they don't engage the youth. The Asia

Pacific Youth Network and Amnesty International were able to engage the youth. Not just Korean youth, but regional youth." (APYP case study)

- Create space in the action plans to develop opportunities for collaboration.
- Anticipate risks – produce guidelines to mitigate their impact.
- Put in place well thought-out exit strategies to manage relationships and expectations. If you don't, you may damage the relationship and negatively affect the sustainability of the campaign.
- Recognize and manage the "dynamic tension" of branding issues. It may be better to step back as Amnesty International when it is more about increasing the broader human rights constituency.
- Invest in building the appropriate skills and enhancing the experience of staff and activists in order to successfully nurture relationships.
- In the end, we don't need to do it ourselves all the time. There are occasions when it can be more effective giving support to the activism of others.



INNOVATE AND TAKE RISKS

WHY DO THIS?

“Get creative... if we stay static in our activism, most authorities stay static in their response to it.”

(Amnesty USA staff)

Effective activism often involves taking that “extra step” – moving beyond the comfortable and the familiar. Identifying the action that is most appropriate to achieving your desired change could involve challenging yourself to act in new ways, or test the limits you may be setting for yourself.

In Amnesty France’s case study on their Cluster Munitions campaign:

The Amnesty France team took an innovative perspective on activism when they identified the potential impact of activists taking action as clients of the banking and insurance industry. Sending postcards condemning investment in cluster bombs was an action which challenged the interests of the targeted banks and insurance companies:

Left: Amnesty International Australia activists demonstrate outside the US consulate to mark the sixth anniversary of Guantánamo Bay. Sydney, January 2008.

“The choice of a postcard campaign was particularly appropriate because of the risk it posed to the image of financial actors who were anxious to preserve that image in a competitive sector – everybody is free to switch banks or insurers. Finally, what was at stake and what changed the position of our targets was the immediate danger to their image...” Some activists took an additional “risky” step by withdrawing their accounts as a kind of boycott (although Amnesty France did not initiate the action).

Creative and innovative actions play a key role in attracting media attention, raising general public awareness of the issue at stake and helping to achieve the necessary “critical mass” of petition signatures needed to have an impact on decision-makers.

“Public actions which are non-traditional: we are using ways of being more attractive or eye-catching (flash mob, fiesta mobilization [street parties]).” (Amnesty Philippines staff)

Examples of positive results of working in this way include:

- Obtaining access to lobby the Nigerian Ambassador on a death penalty case was achieved as a result of the attention generated by a creative dance performance held outside the embassy. (Amnesty Austria Story of Change)
- The media in the Czech Republic was attracted by an innovative action of writing names in chalk on the road in front of the Iranian Embassy. This produced long-term coverage of the issue, and Foreign Affairs Ministry officials invited Amnesty International to discuss the human rights situation in Iran. (Amnesty Czech Republic Story of Change)

Right: Banner designed by Amnesty International Hungary for “Day for Darfur”, Budapest, Hungary, September 2007.

MAGYAR KÖZTERÜLETI REKLÁM SZÖVETSÉG

200 000

DAKIFUR



Illustrative case

Belarus Individual at Risk campaign – the paper cranes

Through a web action, Flickr and other web-based tools, individuals across the world were asked to construct paper cranes, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Belarusian prisoner of conscience Zmitser Dashkevich, to be sent to the target Ministry of Internal Affairs:

“The web action was accompanied with an animated ‘how to make a paper crane’ video (produced by the Media Programme at the IS) and online gallery for people to share images – we hoped it would mobilize more people and inspire people to get involved. The Flickr gallery images were very inspiring.” (IS Story of Change on Belarus individual at risk).

The creative action enabled the target of 10,000 cranes to be surpassed and the action took off globally, with sections, groups and individuals making a vast range of paper cranes, some of which were sent directly to the prisoner, giving him a feeling of solidarity. In an interview with Amnesty International in September 2010, he said that the

cranes provided huge moral support for him, to know that he and his work had not been forgotten. He adds that the attitude of the staff changed when they saw all these letters² [from Amnesty and other organizations] arriving every day. He said for a year and a half he was receiving about 150 letters a day and this amount of post changed the (formerly negative) attitudes of prison staff. He believes Amnesty’s campaign helped bring about his early release:

“I am sure that there are two decisive factors in my early release – internal Belarusian pressure and international pressure... the work of Amnesty International in this regard is immeasurable... I would attribute my early release, in the first instance, to international pressure.”

The authorities have since stopped imprisoning people using the Article of the Criminal Code under which Zmitser Dashkevich was convicted (which is not to say they have stopped harassing activists by other means) due to the international attention the case received.

Examples of a critical mass of petition signatures obtained by innovative actions:

- Using a photo mosaic technique in the street. (Amnesty Slovenia Story of Change)
- The collection of 100,000 signatures for the Campaign against Torture was mainly due to the direct email contact to members helped by a funny email that went viral. (Amnesty Denmark Story of Change)
- The use of artists, high-quality visuals and “guerrilla marketing”³ techniques and so on was felt to have played a key role in attracting people to sign a petition in the form of an art book. (Amnesty Mexico Story of Change)
- Consistently creative and visual rallies and marches in Georgia in the USA and worldwide in support of the Troy Davis campaign. (Amnesty USA case study)

HOW TO DO THIS?

Encouraging innovation and risk-taking in a responsible manner means you need to:

- Create the space for creativity.
- Invest in research, development and skill share of new tools and techniques.
- “Move with agility in uncharted waters” – be aware of opportunities that arise in unexpected ways.
- Anticipate potential risks and their impact but don’t let them hold you back unnecessarily. Put in place a risk assessment and management process to reduce any negative repercussions.
- Identify if others working on the issue can take the action if you can’t.



ADOPT AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

WHY DO THIS?

We can achieve so much more by integrating the different strengths of Amnesty International – for example, working in project groups from the outset of a campaign. These can be made up of people involved in, for example, activism, campaigning, fundraising, media, and web teams. Effective activism means working closely with a team of colleagues – listening to each others’ perspectives, understanding how we can all help each other reach our objectives.

“Seamlessly integrating our campaigning objectives, freedom objectives [intended human rights change] and fundraising objectives into one narrative giving the campaign a more powerful impact, which

will more likely allow it to get picked up in the media.” (Amnesty UK staff)

Effective project team working implies knowing how and when to communicate with each other, how to plan and co-ordinate the tasks that we ask the activists to do, and how to use our resources in the most efficient ways.

Left: “I am Troy Davis”: ACAT-France and Amnesty International France’s “Die In” to highlight the death penalty in the USA, 2008. The event was attended by Martina Correia, Troy Davis’ sister.

Examples of positive results of working in this way include:

- Amnesty France reported that a factor for their successful cluster bomb campaign was the “clear internal working methods, based on a small but very committed team regularly conferring in order to ensure the campaign’s coherence.” (Amnesty France case study)

- The positive results achieved by the Bangla online community in a short period of time were facilitated by the effective joint working between two individuals from different functional teams. (IS Online Communities Story of Change on the “Crossfire” campaign, Dhaka, Bangladesh)

- In Amnesty Mexico’s Authors for Peace in Darfur campaign “There was a core group of people which developed a “*química*” (chemistry) - interpersonal dynamics with energy – led by the Director, Head of Mobilization, Head of Communications, the two PR agency people, head of volunteers, plus volunteers in the office”. (Amnesty Mexico staff)

- Effective co-ordination was identified as key to achieving the desired results in the following:

- The use of volunteers (activists) in gathering street petitions in Mexico was effective due to the clear identification of different roles to be played in the street.

- Proper co-ordination of international efforts, such as directing letters to the Atlanta office for delivery by local figures and not directly to decision-makers, was seen as creating a positive impact in the Troy Davis campaign.

- A small staff team in Ghana, supported by another section and by different teams from the IS, effectively co-ordinated the delivery of the campaign plans. “This sustained the interest of the members (activists) to rally for effective activism towards the attainment of our collective objectives and overall goal.” (Amnesty Ghana case study)

- The strong communications and appropriate use of new technologies were cited as critical for effective “virtual” activism team-working in the Asia-Pacific Youth Project case study.

Illustrative case

Amnesty USA's Troy Davis campaign

The cross-functional campaign team (which included staff from the media, national campaign and regional field units) benefited from the expertise of each member's skills and their outstanding dedication to the campaign. They produced strong results by being given some flexibility in their roles and by taking strong ownership of the campaign. When inevitable tensions around personal and functional orientations occasionally emerged, team members were ultimately able to put the campaign goal of keeping Troy Davis from execution at the centre of their work. They also bolstered one another's spirits when individual members "hit bottom" after extensive campaigning. Amnesty USA's executive leadership provided strong support for the campaign, creating full organizational commitment and alignment, and allowing support from other units exceptionally quickly and easily. This collaboration offers an important contrast to the compartmentalization that often occurs and which prevents collective enthusiasm and widely based support for the work.

HOW TO DO THIS?

- Consciously check that you are including in your campaign or project team all the functions which can contribute towards achieving your objectives.
- Be clear on roles and responsibilities and be aware of interpersonal dynamics to get the most energy out of the team.
- Identify who has the lead on co-ordinating activists' efforts when dealing with international activism.
- Be clear on the resources and time needed to set up and maintain integrated systems, for example database, SMS and website. (Amnesty Denmark Story of Change)



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ENSURE IMPACT THROUGH REFLECTION AND LEARNING

WHY DO THIS?

None of our efforts will be complete if we don't learn from experience and improve our work as a result. Identifying **what** difference we're making and **how** is the first step to ensure this happens.

Standing back and evaluating the degree to which your activism contributes to human rights changes is therefore of vital importance. It is best to do this in a constructive way, taking a learning approach to looking at the impact of your work. This will help you build on what is working well and be aware of what is not. It is not something to be afraid of, and getting the views of others can bring fresh perspectives. For example, Amnesty Ghana found it a

positive experience to do the impact assessment exercise and “subject our activities to public scrutiny and listen to what others think about our work and how we do it.” (Amnesty Ghana case study)

Working with the Dimensions of Change framework can help structure your reflections. It enables you to understand the nature of the changes you are achieving, and identify how different types of actions you have taken are contributing to different

***Left:* Impact! President Barack Obama signs the Tribal Law and Order Act at the White House in Washington, USA, 29 July 2010, giving Indigenous women who have survived rape a better chance of obtaining justice.**

kinds of changes. Each specific campaign has its own characteristics, but drawing on past reflections about the contributions of different activism tools may help you in making future choices. This helps you move beyond doing something because you've always done it. It also challenges the assumption that signing a petition for example, **in itself**, will be sufficient to achieve the change in a rights holder's life.

Investing in systematically capturing and recording experiences and reflections also helps innovation and replication of ideas: "Knowing where the expertise lies within the movement allows us to build on the learning and not duplicate tools etc." (IS staff). This exchange of ideas and experiences entails reflecting on what has worked in one context, and identifying its relevance for another. For example:

- Amnesty Australia had successfully used butterfly cards – and had noted that the visual element appeared to play a major role in generating the support they received. They gave permission for the template to be adapted by the Asia-Pacific Youth Project

team in the Justice for Pacific War Sexual Slavery Survivors campaign. (APYP case study)

Taking time to assess the effectiveness of your efforts, reflect and identify lessons can help strengthen your ongoing work:

- Amnesty Paraguay learned that they had missed a critical opportunity to reinforce the positive outcomes of their campaign for a National Human Rights plan. They saw they could do more in the future to effectively communicate about the follow-up activities they have been engaging in. (Amnesty Paraguay case study)

- As a result of looking at the impact of their work, the IS team working on the Slovakia campaign on the right to education for Roma children, adapted their strategies to focus on a specific town. Later on, they adapted again, to focus on policy change at the national level rather than campaign on specific cases. In both cases, adapting strategies led to positive results.

Illustrative case

Amnesty USA's Troy Davis campaign

As a result of the case study, Amnesty USA's Campaigns Unit will apply lessons learnt from the Troy Davis campaign to other campaigns covering a range of human rights issues. The unit also intends to assess other campaigns drawing on the impact assessment tools used. The death penalty abolition team, in particular, has become more conscious of the need to seek information from decision-makers, even indirectly, about the impact Amnesty's activism is having on them. The Campaign Director is also more conscious about what is required to build a large-scale campaign and the importance of knowing the scale of action needed in order to positively influence a clemency appeal or death penalty legislation or policy. She intends to share some of the insights about campaigning on individual cases with the abolition movement partners.

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Martina Correia, sister of death row prisoner Troy Davis, at an event held in support of the Troy Davis campaign in Dublin, Ireland, 2010.

HOW TO DO THIS?

Working towards increased impact through reflection and learning means you need to:

- Consciously create opportunities for reflection and discussion.
- Invest in monitoring and data management to track changes as you take action (not just on what you have done, but on any resulting changes in attitudes, practices, policies or civil society engagement on the issue).
- Ensure that feedback is provided to relevant people by, for example, establishing mechanisms such as comments pages linked to campaigns to get immediate feedback and hear people's questions and concerns.
- Try to understand what makes decision-makers or other targets rethink or change their views or practices. If you can't hear from them directly, think about other ways to find out, such as asking other organizations or stakeholders who may know.
- Listen to different voices – including those who may not agree with you, as these people might have arguments that you need to address, to convince them and finally bring about change.

- If possible, establish a “baseline” of information on the situation before you start your campaign, in order to be able to assess changes. But don't stop the learning if this hasn't happened! There are many ways of overcoming the lack of initial information. (see resources list for impact assessment tools)
- Be sure that you are asking the right kind of questions to help you understand the **specific** contributions that your activism (and its different tools) has made to the changes.
- Share the lessons learned with others in the movement and with partners, and apply them in your future activities.
- Invest in this area – ensure that people have the appropriate skills, that time is allocated and money is available where necessary.

Right: A Women Of Zimbabwe Arise Valentine's Day demonstration, Harare, 2007.



A FINAL WORD OR TWO

In addition to the seven action points, you may want to consider some further steps to take in order to get the best results from your activism efforts:

- Combine tools and techniques – creating a “snowball” effect via a combination of different activism techniques in a timely way.
- Timeliness combined with location choice are key factors for effective public events. Choose the right location at the right time based on the nature of the target.
- Combine online and offline actions for effective digital activism, wherever feasible. This refers to the inter-related processes of

attracting individuals to take action; facilitating “virtual” and “on the ground” action by activists; communicating the outputs of the action in order to increase awareness and support and communicating the results of the action.

- Interactive tools appear to have impact, for example street theatre, where face-to-face debate can change opinions, and canvassing, where activists can encourage others to take action.
- Activist lobbying can be extremely effective in certain contexts – it is important to be clear when this may be the case, provide appropriate support to the activists involved and ensure follow-up.

- Ensure clarity of content and simple “asks” in the materials used by activists.

- Be aware of potential for “leverage”, for example when just the threat of carrying out a successful activity again can generate desired outcomes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are a full set of papers associated with the **Impact Assessment of Activism** project which can be found on Amnesty International’s intranet:

<https://intranet.amnesty.org/cp/activism.nsf/aac7d56ca8fd884b852563be00610639/c6ec4549c7f457058025785d004041cf!OpenDocument>

These include:

- ICM Circular 13 on Impact Assessment of Activism (Index: ACT 10/014/2011)
- Impact Assessment of Activism report (Index: ACT 10/017/2011)
- Six case studies
- Stories of change
- Toolkit (Index: ACT 10/013/2011)

For more information, please contact Natasha Sturgeon in the Activism Unit at nsturgeon@amnesty.org

A range of **impact assessment tools and approaches** can be found on the Amnesty International Impact Wiki:

<https://intranet.amnesty.org/wiki/display/IA/IMPACT+Wiki>

Information on working with the **Dimensions of Change** can be found in Amnesty International's Dimensions of Change (Index: POL 50/010/2008).

Information on **project planning and management** can be found at

<https://intranet.amnesty.org/wiki/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=53162705>

References and materials associated with **active participation** can be found on the Active Participation Wiki:

<https://intranet.amnesty.org/wiki/display/AP/Active+Participation>

For more information, please contact activeparticipation@amnesty.org

Educational resources, materials and discussion forums associated with **human rights education** can be found on Amnesty

International's Human Rights Education Network website: <https://hre.amnesty.org/>

Create your account at <https://hre.amnesty.org/en/user/register> or write to hreteam@amnesty.org for more information.

Endnotes

1 See the last page of this booklet for references to the Impact Assessment of Activism project and the materials that it has produced.

2 The paper cranes arrived in envelopes and all the cranes were then unfolded and checked by the prison before Zmitser received them. Other organizations supporting Zmitser also sent letters.

3 “Guerrilla marketing” – a term used by the interviewee to describe the street posters, leaflets and so on which were quickly spread around the area by the activists.

Right: More than 50,000 people added their pictures to the Million Faces Petition, The Hague, Netherlands, 2006.



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