



ENGAGING, LISTENING, HEARING, CHANGING EXPLORING ASSESSMENT OF OUR HUMAN RIGHTS WORK: CASE STUDY IN ALBANIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document provides a summary of the key findings of the study carried out in 2007 by the Learning and Impact Unit at the International Secretariat, entitled *Exploring assessment of our human rights work – Case study in Albania*. The evaluation recorded the impact of Amnesty International's (AI) campaign on domestic violence in Albania: 'Changing a Mentality'. The study offered an insight into what AI achieved through the campaign and how the organization can increase its human rights impact in the future.

INTRODUCTION

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN ALBANIA: CHANGING A 'MENTALITY'

Domestic violence in Albania is frequently accepted, excused or justified by "tradition", even at the highest levels of government, police and the judiciary. Albanian women subjected to violence within the family rarely call the police. When they do, police often fail to investigate these allegations, and those responsible are rarely brought to justice.

In March 2006, as part of AI's Stop Violence against Women global campaign, a report was published entitled *Albania: Violence against Women in the Family: "It's not her shame"*. The report's recommendations called for the adoption of a draft law on violence in the family, its implementation and the full protection of women. AI members were asked to lobby the EU, Council of Europe and other international representatives working in and on Albania. The Albanian government and police were targeted through lobbying meetings and membership letter-writing during 2006.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment of the impact of the case study began with desk-research to identify and outline the project's working assumptions about how the change they were aiming for could be achieved. Comprehensive mapping of the project's stakeholders took place in collaboration with the teams involved. Stakeholders external to AI and in particular those resident in Albania were prioritised. A 'snowball sampling'¹ method was used to build the list or sample of people to whom we would then speak. Particular attention was given to striking a balance between different groups of stakeholders and an effort was made to interview individuals from different representative groups.

Data was gathered systematically, including on the sample's gender, location, role, organization and personal situation in relation to the relevant project. These criteria were used to assess the balance of the sample, but not as a basis for selection of the sample. The ultimate sample was also affected by the availability of participants, given time constraints as well as security issues in both countries.

¹ In this method, initial contact is made with a small group of people who are asked to suggest others to be interviewed. Given the difficulties of accessing a sampling frame for the thousands of women who may be affected by violence in Albania, this method was judged to be the most feasible approach for this case study.

Semi structured interviews were chosen as the main data gathering technique, which allowed for flexibility while ensuring some commonality across interviews. To enable analysis of the findings, the “Dimensions of Change”² framework was used with interviews based on questions under each of the framework’s four dimensions.

In the Albania case study, 41 people were interviewed in three towns. These included women affected by domestic violence, academics, government officials, health professionals, IGO and NGO staff, and members of the police and the judiciary.

Triangulation of information received took place across different groups. The data collected was then analysed and patterns identified. Views identified by more than five of the participants were deemed to amount to a pattern to be analysed and included in the lessons learnt. Only patterns independently identified by both interviewers involved in the research were taken into detailed consideration.

KEY FINDINGS

Nine months after the publication of AI’s report, the Albanian parliament passed the proposed domestic violence law, a step that was seen as positive by all of the participants interviewed. However, members of the judiciary criticized the quality of the law. The establishment of a police unit to work on violence towards children and women was seen as a positive outcome and was directly attributed to AI. All groups of stakeholders commented on how AI had raised the profile of the issue among authorities and the general public.

“I have seen an increase in the desire and courage of women to denounce violence”
– an interviewee in Albania

Government dialogue with local NGOs increased, particularly in relation to the new law, although there were concerns expressed at the lack of investment by the government in turning the law into practice. It was felt however that AI had been effective in holding the government to account. All stakeholders agreed that local NGO involvement in the issue had increased. NGOs reported that they felt supported by AI. AI’s campaigning strategy included membership letter-writing action but none of the stakeholders interviewed were aware of this activity. Moreover, the four chiefs of police interviewed (targets of the campaign) did not acknowledge receiving any letter on this particular topic.

The majority of participants felt that women’s ability to report and denounce domestic violence had increased. Within the limits of this study it has been possible to observe evidence of more women taking steps to claim their rights.

LESSONS LEARNT

‘BRAND’ VALUE: When it comes to working with others, AI may not be making the most of its biggest asset: its brand and reputation. Other look to AI to be more courageous particularly in lending its brand in support of local activists so as to complement and strengthen the human rights work they are already doing.

CAMPAIGN AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: AI’s approach to campaigning for change may be too formulaic. More creative approaches to communications are needed and AI should take into account the specificities of the context in which its interventions occur. Membership-based actions may have little impact in some contexts.

MEDIA PENETRATION: AI is not fully embracing the power of the media, noting however that media coverage may have both positive and negative impacts. It is essential to understand the character of the media in a particular context and for each particular issue.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION: AI should engage individuals not only to understand the “problem” but as active participants in the “solution” too.

² The Dimensions of Change is Amnesty International’s (AI) policy on impact assessment. It is a framework for measuring AI’s results and added value, and it is based on AI’s vision and mission as defined in AI’s Statute.

RESEARCH APERTURE: AI’s research focus should widen beyond identifying only problems. Researching and drawing attention to solutions is as important as analysing and reporting on problems.

NEW PERSPECTIVES: AI does not talk to the full spectrum of local stakeholders. It should consult more widely, while remaining aware of power relations.

JOINING THE CONVERSATION: AI should move beyond taking oppositional positions only and should acknowledge progress and engage constructively with authorities when appropriate.

SUSTAINABILITY: AI’s interventions do not take long-term sustainability into account. AI cannot assume that its traditional way of working will lead to long-term changes.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: The case study demonstrates that impact assessment can be a catalyst to improve performance. It shows that progress indicators help to verify whether change is occurring and that in some cases it is possible to identify AI’s contribution to change. In future, attention should be focused on further developing techniques for identifying AI’s contribution more directly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

EMBED ACCOUNTABILITY: AI should strive for greater excellence in its accountability to (external) stakeholders. This requires more than explaining publicly what AI does and is more that denouncing human rights violations. AI should also maximize opportunities for two way communications with stakeholders and, in the context of project work, it should consult with a wide range of stakeholders at different stages – i.e. during planning, implementation and evaluation.

EXPLORE NEW WAYS OF PARTNERING: AI should explore new ways of relating to other organizations so that the potential of its brand is fully utilized for solidarity and human rights impact. This involves identifying ways of contributing to local initiatives and more innovative types of partnerships such as joint research and sponsorship of initiatives.

EXPAND THE BOUNDARIES OF RESEARCH WORK: AI should take greater account of root causes and solutions when examining human rights issues. This involves for example, addressing its recommendations beyond authorities, to include other spheres of society. AI’s field work should incorporate dialogue with primary stakeholders, applying rigorous sampling methods and updating standard protocols and codes of conduct.

STRIVE FOR CUTTING EDGE AND CONTEXT-SPECIFIC CAMPAIGNING: AI’s campaigns and actions should not follow prescribed formulas; each should be looked at in light of its specific context. A more methodological approach is needed to understand what dynamics trigger specific change in particular contexts. Alternative models of change should be researched and tested. AI needs to create spaces for innovation and test new initiatives, so allocating time for reflection and experimentation and being ready to learn from mistakes.

ADAPT THE MESSAGE BY ENCOURAGING PROGRESS AND HIGHLIGHTING POSITIVE STORIES: AI should acknowledge more often the progress made by key actors as a way to encourage further change. It requires recording and publicizing stories of positive change, which is a medium for empowering primary stakeholders and champions for change. On a case-by-case basis, AI should consider taking a more conciliatory approach when talking to those that are usually considered campaigning “targets” – i.e. policy makers or authorities,

ENHANCE PROJECT AND PROGRAMME WORK: AI should do more thinking about the long-term sustainability of the changes it is seeking, for example by placing sustainability at the core of its partnerships. An important element of this is to monitor systematically the implementation of AI’s recommendations and invest more in their follow-up.

INVEST FURTHER IN IMPACT ASSESSMENT: AI should mainstream the Dimensions of Change across its strategic and operational plans, develop organizational functions to build capacity, help embed learning and continuously review this framework. In particular, there is a need to develop a common understanding about the quality of evidence. AI should mainstream prospective impact assessment into its work and look at ways of managing potential risks.