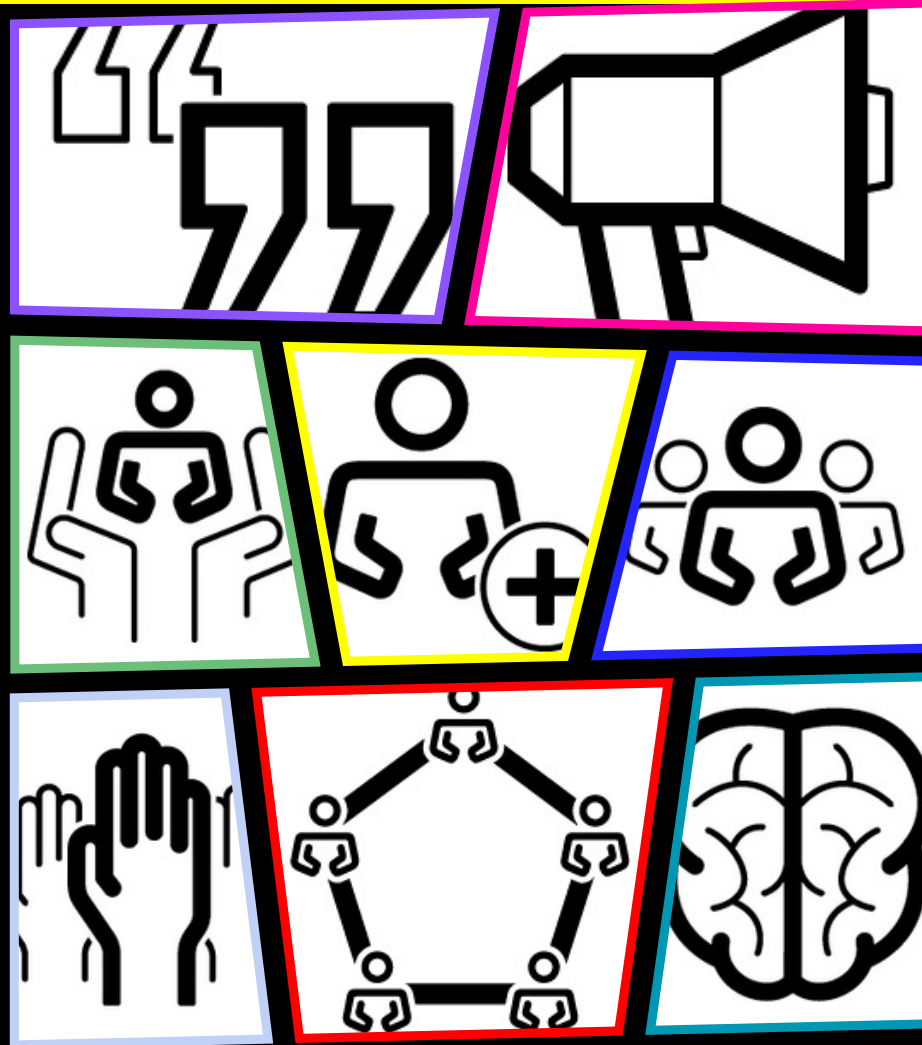


POWER UP RIGHTS

8 PRINCIPLES TO BUILD PEOPLE POWER WITH EQUITY



ABOUT THIS PLAYBOOK

Amnesty International adopted a clear focus on building people power in its 2022-2030 Global Strategic Framework, to achieve greater human rights impact. By centering people affected by human rights violations, introducing activist-led approaches, adapting our ways of working to better collaborate with other movements and partner organizations, we're tapping into new levels of activism and depth in people's engagement.

Since 2022, a group of activists and Amnesty staff members from across Europe has been working in 'Power Up Rights', a collaborative project set up to explore creative ways of building people power with equity. The team interviewed a dozen of grassroots movements, organizations and Amnesty sections in the region, to ask about their best practice for building power with people. The team's key findings have been summarized into 8 'principles' in this 'playbook'. We are sharing it 'as-is' for learning and inspiration.

These 8 principles are created with the input from staff and activists from Amnesty International sections in Belgium, Hungary, the Netherlands, the UK and the Europe Regional Office.

These principles could offer guidance when exploring people powered activism.

However, working with these approaches is a never-ending learning process. So let's keep on sharing our learnings, 'aha' moments and successes with each other.

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“LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE AFFECTED”



Activists, organizers, campaigners and all those fighting for change – so that includes you and I – are often motivated by a feeling of indignation or even anger, awoken by various forms of injustice, inequality or discrimination.

These are powerful motivators that provide the necessary energy and fire to fight systems of power. At the same time, it sometimes tends to push us forward too fast.

To achieve successful and impact-driven activism, we need to start by analyzing the current situation, map power imbalances and identify the useful pressure points to achieve real impact and success. At the start of this process, we should never forget to listen to the people most affected by the issue.

The concept ‘Nothing about us without us’ – from a rights-holders perspective – should always be at the heart of our joint work to achieve social change, and should be rooted in the campaign strategy and its design process from the start.



The First Step



- Go outside and start talking to people more!
- Start by listening, not by explaining your own goals or strategies.
- “If you want someone to care about what you care about, you have to show that you care about what they care about first.”




EXAMPLE #1: EUROPEAN SEX WORKERS' ALLIANCE

In 2002, a small collective of sex workers started fighting against the increasingly repressive legislation and policies against sex work.


Today, the ESWA has grown into a grassroots, sex worker-led organization working on the European level and represents their 100+ member organizations in 30 countries across Europe and Central Asia.

Their main goal is to decriminalize sex work, but this is considered as a first step in the fight for sex workers' rights, not the final step.

WHAT WORKS



As a membership organisation, ESWA will always be sex worker-led, with projects and programmes designed to meet their needs and fight for the rights of all those in the community.



ESWA intentionally puts the needs and voices of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups at the heart of their work.

CHALLENGES



ESWA is actively working on sex workers' rights in 30 countries. That means varying local contexts and a lot of simultaneous battles.



The decriminalization of sex work is a long-term battle. To have repressive legislation overruled often requires a long legal fight that can last for several years or even decades, requiring sustained resources.



An intersectional approach: much of the violence, stigmatisation and discrimination sex workers face occurs from, and is reinforced by, connected issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability and religion.



Partnerships: to counter divisive dynamics like gender inequality, racism, and the dominance of western colonial perspectives, ESWA fights alongside movements for feminist and racial justice.




EXAMPLE #2: AMNESTY ITALY

Amnesty Italy teamed up 6 of their staff members with 11 activists from different movements and organizations (including LGBTI-rights, gender justice, climate justice, migration, trade unions) to develop a campaign together on the criminalization of protests in Italy during a 4-day campaign design workshop.


It was a powerful process, led by participants with lived experience of criminalization, including charges, repression and stigma.

The activists' engagement at grassroots level was highly meaningful to shape the campaign.

WHAT WORKS



Relationship building with activists, also beyond the framework of the Protect the Protest campaign, is key. The team invested in a creative mindset to develop ideas and plans together.



Amnesty Italy became more aware of the different organizations' and movements' streams of work and challenges. The collaboration led to informed decisions based on grassroots/movement level.

CHALLENGES



It's challenging to keep the people or partners outside your own team (or office) actively involved and up to speed.



After the workshop, it was difficult to find time to follow up and share experiences with the organizations, especially with movements.



It's impossible to rush this approach. Building relationships and trust takes time and resources. If you lack these, your team will need to come up with creative solutions.



The team invested sufficient time and resources. It took several months to build relationships, identify relevant groups and collectives from across the country to participate in the campaign design detail the process in advance and manage participants' expectations.



PROTECT THE PROTEST

Go and participate in protests that are being organized by other activist groups, join marches or visit occupations.

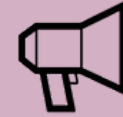
Start talking with protesters, listen to their biggest concerns and capture this information. Their input is highly valuable to identify where you can provide the biggest added value.

Every time your team decides to explore a piece of work or project in the PtP campaign, hold each other accountable and install mechanisms to start by listening to the communities most affected or people with lived experience.





SHARE & AMPLIFY



This principle focuses on sharing resources and platforms with activists, movements and organizations, to strengthen our collective power.

It strongly relates to the principles of fostering leadership and trusting others, building relationships and creating space for the agency of activists.

Amnesty is a powerful movement with many resources: knowledge, tools, trainings, skills and expertise. The movement also has access to material resources and spaces to gather, such as national offices and conference rooms, space and materials. It can be impactful to share these, in small or big ways, with allies and other movements or initiatives that we collaborate with to build our collective power.

Amnesty is also a well-known movement with global recognition. This means we have a powerful platform and access to decision-makers, media and diverse audiences. We should share our platform more with different groups, in order to amplify their voices and experiences, especially those who may not have the same power or access to such audiences, as well as share important initiatives who we are (or could be) collaborating with. The more we work together, the more we can engage with different audiences, build our collective power and have more impact.

Let's be generous, share our power and learn from each other's experiences!

What could you do?

- Share skills, knowledge and resources with local activists inside and outside Amnesty
- Build expertise, share platforms and collaborate with like-minded organizations
- Develop and nurture relationships with different groups
- Facilitate spaces for sharing, learning and connecting

The First Step



- Invite partners and allies to trainings and events you organize.
- Develop toolkits and guidance and share
- Share your office space and meeting rooms
- Convene and facilitate spaces for listening, sharing and connecting with key people within your campaign, project or area of work, focusing on those you aren't already engaging, especially marginalized groups.



EXAMPLE #1: GREENPEACE SCHOOL OF ACTIVISM

The aims of Greenpeace Spain's school of activism are:

- **Strengthen activism networks**
- **Train activists and enhance their leadership skills**
- **Build civil society's capacity to act**
- **Training on non-violent direct action and legal frameworks**

The school belongs to Greenpeace Spain and Novact (a non-profit association dedicated to conflict transformation and peacebuilding) and is a space to train different organizations and movements.

It is funded by Greenpeace and led by the person who used to run their internal training programme. There is a clear strategic direction, which is to look for activist leaders, identify their training needs and accompany them to achieve a multiplier effect.

They offer trainings and events at many levels: campaigning, facilitation, conflict resolution, ecofeminism, decolonization and more. The most valued are those that are very practical (e.g. how to behave in case of arrest); those that open conversations about issues that are not frequently discussed or cannot be found elsewhere, or simply create spaces in a context of strong eco-anxiety and eco-social crisis; and those that offer ideas about different forms of activism.

Greenpeace Spain also organizes activism camps for children resulting in a good talent pool of like-minded and committed young people.

WHAT WORKS



Sharing expertise of a large organization AND learning from smaller movements and their struggles



Sharing internal capacity building programmes with external organizations



Building connections and relationships with allies

CHALLENGES



Requires dedicated staff and budget



Might require additional budget for subsidized or free spots



IMAGE: Greenpeace



EXAMPLE #2: EUROPEAN SEX WORKER'S ALLIANCE: BUILDING POWER THROUGH SOLIDARITY AND INTERSECTIONAL NETWORKING IN EUROPE

The European Sex Worker's Alliance (ESWA) is a grassroots, sex-worker led organization working on the EU level to represent more than 100 member organizations in 30 countries across Europe and Central Asia. The main strategic goal of the organization is to decriminalize sex work, but they see this as the first step in the fight for sex workers rights.

They work towards their goals by supporting their member organizations (raising awareness for their events, providing financial support, etc.), building capacity within the community (e.g. by offering relevant workshops to professionalize their activism or their policy making), and developing and maintaining an international network with partner organizations and communities that intersect with sex workers concerns (e.g.: AIDS organizations, queer organizations, mental health organizations, migrants rights organizations, etc.).

Developing strong relationships with related social justice movements is of particular importance to ESWA, because they find that their biggest strength is working WITH different movements. This strategy based on networking and collaboration was also presented as a way for them to acknowledge and uplift all members intersectional identities and struggles – e.g.: although ESWA is not an organization primarily working on anti-racism, anti-racism is inevitably necessary to adequately support and represent their racialized community members.

WHAT WORKS

- ✓ Focus on intersectionality to support the diverse needs and concerns of the community, including capacity building
- ✓ Apply equity principles to prioritize support for those most marginalized - recognizing that the voices of those least privileged are crucial but often silenced or ignored.
- ✓ Develop relationships around common ground with other related social justice movements.

CHALLENGES

- ⚡ Finding common ground and including the needs and perspectives of all represented sex workers is a major undertaking, which needs intention and resources
- ⚡ Because sex workers are impacted by a diverse set of issues and challenges, ESWA addresses all these challenges by working on different themes including Gender, Migration and Anti-Racism, Justice Rights, Health Rights, Labour and Social Protection, Digital Rights, Legal Reform, and Research.



PROTECT THE PROTEST

We shouldn't underestimate the importance of making connections with grassroots organizations and smaller solidarity movements (at all Amnesty levels, from campaigning staff to local activist groups). Meet protest organizers, get involved with their work and actively listen to them. Join their meetings and their protests, understand the people behind the movement, understand their struggles more deeply and see how you could work together as well as what Amnesty could offer. While being honest with our boundaries, capacity and limitations and showing what Amnesty could do we might find small or big ways to contribute to their work and to take some load off their shoulders: from contributing with local or regional advocacy, getting access to authorities, lawyers and other stakeholders, creating new connections, supporting them if they get arrested, sharing materials and knowledge about rights and safety during protests.

Showing that we're actively listening will be appreciated and can already make a difference, even if we're not able to engage as deeply as we'd love to.

Amnesty Netherlands supports grassroots movements with workshops to learn more about how to demonstrate, what are your rights, how to lobby etc.

Amnesty Italy has developed a campaign on criminalization of protests together with grassroots activists directly affected, which has built strong relationships and a network that collaborates beyond the campaign.

Where to start:

Map and prioritize grassroots organizations in your country whose right to protest is particularly at stake, prioritizing marginalized groups.

Many won't have previous connections to Amnesty, they might see us as a big NGO and not trust us and see us as 'extractive' (i.e. taking something away without giving anything back or contributing).

Meet a few of them, listen to their needs and struggles and identify opportunities for collaboration.

Be clear and honest about why you want to meet, what you have and what you can offer (and what you can't).

Get out of your comfort zone and don't let the fear of not meeting their expectations or demands stop you seeking ways to work together.





REFLECTIONS

- ? How else could we share our resources and skills? Or amplify our allies' calls and actions? Or offer spaces on Amnesty platforms to amplify their voices?
- ? What are the risks of sharing resources and amplifying different voices? And what are the risks of not sharing / not amplifying enough? What can Amnesty gain and what can it lose? What can our allies gain and what can they lose?
- ? How do we currently operate? Are we trying to connect and listen and look for small ways to share? Are we staying in our comfort zone, or are we trying to innovate? Why and how?



Other related examples:

- Amnesty UK's Rise Up project (training and supporting cohorts of local individual activists active on issues they care about, focussing on marginalized or underrepresented young people)
- Amnesty Hungary's campaign against Gender Based Violence (in-depth transformational learning and activism journey for a smaller group of activists)
- Bolygó (support self-organized groups and provide a physical space and a platform for young people to engage, build networks, learn new tools, provide new perspectives, knowledge to feel empowered to make changes within environmental topics)



CREATE SAFE(R) AND INCLUSIVE SPACES



We come together for many reasons: to plan activities, discuss goals, facilitate various public events, protests, etc. To ensure that everyone can fully participate, feel valued, and contribute to our goals we need safe(r), equitable, and inclusive spaces to meet, share ideas, and work together. The strength of your activism lies in the diversity and well-being of the community.

But what does it mean for a space to be safe(r)? To be inclusive? To be equitable? The points listed below are just some broad outlines of how these terms could be defined, and it's important to create a shared understanding within your community that fits your context.

In a safe(r) space we can feel protected from physical, emotional, and psychological harm, where we all can express ourselves without fear of judgement, harassment, discrimination.

Creating a safe(r) space involves setting clear boundaries, addressing harmful behaviour promptly, and ensuring that the environment is respectful and supportive. It's important to acknowledge that there may be instances where ensuring the safety of some participants requires excluding others.

An equitable space ensures that power, resources, and opportunities are distributed fairly among all participants.

Equity goes beyond equality by recognizing and addressing systemic and other barriers that may prevent certain groups from having the same opportunities as others. It involves creating structures and practices that promote fairness and justice within the space.

An inclusive space actively seeks to welcome and involve people from diverse backgrounds, experiences, identities.

Inclusivity means making intentional efforts to ensure that everyone, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, etc. can fully participate and contribute.



HOW CAN YOU CONSCIOUSLY SHAPE THE SPACE YOU CREATE?

Develop a Code of Conduct collaboratively

ensuring that it reflects the values and needs of all.

Demonstrate inclusivity, respect, and fairness in your interactions

guide newcomers in understanding and adopting the shared norms and values of the group.

Accessibility should be a priority

Consult with participants to understand their needs, whether related to physical accessibility, language barriers, or other factors.

The well-being of all is crucial for long-term engagement

regular check-ins, one-on-one conversations, providing access to mental health resources and encouraging a culture of care.

Seek individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences

this enriches the group's perspectives and creates a more inclusive environment. Ensure that everyone's voices are heard!

Recognize that participants come from diverse contexts with varying challenges and focus on intersectionality

address the diverse and intersecting identities of participants, particularly the most marginalized. Consider factors such as time, availability, geographical location, and economic circumstances when planning activities. Also provide targeted support such as training and financial resources to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate.

Create opportunities for participants to connect in less structured environments, where they can get to know each other

informal interactions are just as important as formal meetings for building relationships, trust and managing motivation.

Encourage participants to take on leadership roles based on their skills and interests, and provide skill sharing opportunities, training to build their capacity in these areas

leadership is a shared responsibility, not a hierarchical position. Acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of activists and participants as well!

EXAMPLE #1: GREENPEACE SPAIN



Greenpeace Spain is an independent campaigning organization dedicated to caring for the planet, made up of people who contribute financially and through actions. They seek to collaborate with other collectives with a clear focus on social justice, accompaniment, and support. This leads to actions, meetings in each other's spaces, and exchanging requests.

Greenpeace Spain also created the Ministry of the Future, a space for young people to foster group diversity; several second-generation immigrants and refugees, and neighbourhood associations joined. They are invested in direct dialogue with the trans community to promote more diverse recruitment and a successful workforce. They believe that such investments are necessary and that they need to go beyond simply inviting people with different experiences into their spaces.

People live in different realities and dedicate a lot of time to training, taking time off work to participate in actions and risking their bodies or facing fines in the process. So Greenpeace Spain creates spaces for reflection, discussing short and long-term approaches and proposals. They have a purple group focused on gender issues and several commissions, but above all, they emphasize checking in with each other by asking, "How are you doing?".

WHAT WORKS



Creating a culture of care and a supportive environment, ensuring activists feel cared for and mentally safe



They recognize the physical and legal risks activists face during actions and create spaces for reflection, where participants can discuss strategies and approaches.



They work on diverse recruitment and breaking down barriers to inclusion in their spaces.

CHALLENGES



It's not easy to get people to come to a face-to-face event with an aim of group diversity.





EXAMPLE #2: BELGIË KAN HET "BELGIUM CAN DO IT"

België kan het "Belgium Can Do It" is an anti-racist activist movement that works to eliminate the use of blackfacing and other elements of racist stereotyping when portraying the figure of 'Zwarte Piet' during the annual 'Sinterklaas' festivities in Belgium.

The figure is clearly racist and is presented as the silly, funny and less serious helper of the old, white, wise and all-knowing Sinterklaas "Santa Claus".

Formed in 2016, the movement was inspired by similar efforts in the Netherlands, particularly the "Kick Out Zwarte Piet" campaign, and aims to transform the 6th of December celebrations into more inclusive events where all children feel safe and represented.

The organization conducts protests at local Sinterklaas events where blackface and other racist stereotypes such as exaggerated red lips and afro-wigs are still used. 'België kan het' promotes safety through measures such as pairing protesters in a buddy system and using a "white shield" approach, where members of the group who are considered part of the more privileged majority groups in society (white and/or male/able bodied) actively stand in more exposed areas of the protest, so that the other members who are considered part of the more marginalized groups of society (POC, queer, disabled...) are less at risk against racist attacks and police violence.

Mental health support is provided through debriefing sessions after protests to address the emotional toll on participants.

The group operates with a horizontal, open structure, allowing activists to take on roles that suit their skills and interests. They emphasize transparency, collective decision-making, inclusivity in its actions, and there is no formal hierarchy.

WHAT WORKS



The group collaborates with various civil society organizations and networks, like 'Kif Kif' and "Hand in Hand," to ensure broader representation and input.



Activists are allowed to choose how they want to engage, from protest participation to behind-the-scenes work (e.g., social media, police liaison). This flexibility accommodates different comfort levels and skills.



After each protest they hold debriefing sessions in neutral locations to help participants process the emotional and physical toll of the action. Additional online debriefs and well-being sessions are available if needed.

CHALLENGES



Activists frequently join and leave, making it challenging to maintain a consistent base of participants. This also means constantly re-engaging and training new people.



REFLECTIONS



How do you consciously shape the space you create?



Is power shared equitably within your space?



How do you accommodate the needs of members of your community?



Who are the people who created the space you are in now, and for whom was it created?





BUILD PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS



Strengthening and cultivating personal relationships is vital when it comes to working with activists.

It makes them feel connected to the cause and closes the gap between activists and workers at organizations.

In order to do this, leaders and organizations must provide a safe space and a comfortable environment for activists to build bonds and connections.

Amnesty International has centralised the ‘mobilizing’ method of activism. Although proven to be effective in spreading a message and getting support, this often leads to a disconnect between activists and organisers at Amnesty.

Therefore, to motivate and support activists effectively, a personal connection must be established between activists and activist leaders, and between activist leaders and staff.

Building and maintaining relationships takes time and energy which needs to be factored in, therefore personal relationships are fostered rather than created.

In this way, group leaders and organisers can successfully cultivate deeper understanding and bonds with activists which makes the movement/goal they are working towards more personally inspired and driven.

It is important to strike a good balance between mobilizing ("show the muscle") and organizing ("build the muscle") and invest resources in both areas accordingly.

In organizing the “moment of truth” is when two people have learned enough about each other’s interests, resources, and values not only to make an “exchange” but also to commit to working together on behalf of a common purpose. Those commitments, in turn, can generate new teams, new networks, and new organizations that, in turn, can mobilize resources over and over and over again.

The First Step



- Take small steps to cultivate trust and familiarity.
- Invest in ‘informal spaces’ where members are able to do team-building exercises in a more relaxed environment.
- Remove the negative perception of ‘fun’ and ‘humour’ in the activist space to help make connections.
- Encourage mindfulness and guidance to understand the needs of others; check-in with activists
- Organise events and activities to socialize outside the cause or the work, creating a sense of belonging and safety to build relationships



EXAMPLE #1: 'LETS TALK ABOUT YES', AMNESTY NETHERLANDS

The Lets Talk About Yes campaign advocated for a consent based law against rape. The campaign worked with the organizing method in which building relationships is an essential part.

By investing a lot of time in 1:1 conversations and coaching, personal connections were established between activists and activist leaders, and between activist leaders and organizers (snowflake model).

This led to strong involvement, commitment and growth of the activist in all roles within the campaign.



WHAT WORKS

- ✓ Students could share personal stories and experiences through the 'storytelling' step of the organising method. This allows activists to connect with one another quickly, cultivating relationships and building empathy.
- ✓ Spending time in having 1:1 conversations and active coaching of the activists deepened the personal bonds and commitment to the goals of the campaign. Activist stayed longer in the campaign.
- ✓ Members had fun together; potlucks and challenges as a way of having the group connect outside work.

CHALLENGES

- ⚡ Lack of diversity within the activist group. Because of the negative perception of consent with young men in the country, it was difficult to get them on board. And a lack of intersectionality can make it difficult for marginalized people to form bonds/relationships.
- ⚡ Keeping activists motivated can sometimes be difficult when the goal is big and long-term. Set manageable tasks to keep activists connected to the cause, motivate each other and encourage a growth mindset.

EXAMPLE 2: PEOPLE POWER AT AMNESTY HUNGARY



Amnesty Hungary worked on building ‘people power’ by fostering relationships and guiding its activists. Amnesty Hungary partnered with activists who specialised in advocating against gender-based violence by speaking to schools and within the Amnesty Hungary section. They built power within activist networks by increasing activist involvement rather than typically only mobilising them.

Making activists the decision makers allows them to connect to workers at Amnesty on a more equal footing, which in turn allows them to build more personal and supportive relationships with one another. Furthermore, team relationships were cultivated by celebrating the achievements of their activists through team-building events which they have twice a year. They also included interactive workshops which motivated activists to learn more about human rights. These workshops are key to fostering relationships and building connections as they encourage team-building.

As well as this Amnesty Hungary included 1:1 guidance for their members as well as counselling and support in order to ensure that activists have a healthy mindset when it comes to working on serious cases. Personal relationships need to be forged in a supportive environment which is not overbearing.

WHAT WORKS



Amnesty Hungary ensured that activists were at the centre of their campaigns.



Amnesty Hungary worked with a lot of under-18 activists, so had guidance on how to work with them as well as having a child officer in charge of safeguarding. It is vital for an organisation to support their specific needs, in order for the young activists to feel comfortable in sharing their stories and connecting with others.



Motivational slogans and quotes are used to encourage activists “we are responsible for our community, and we have the power to change things” – “if one person is able to bring a different perspective to a community of ten people, a thousand people can do something big”.



Emphasis on community and the ‘we’ pronoun is key to encouraging relationships to foster.

CHALLENGES



Difficult to foster relationships in an unstable environment – some people would leave the campaign due to school/university, for example.



It’s hard to build personal relationships when people are not motivated by the cause; sometimes activists can choose to switch campaigns when they feel as though no work is being done.



PROTECT THE PROTEST

Start by fostering relationships with grassroots organisations that advocate for the cause. By connecting with organisations and activists in this way, they will feel less isolated and separated from the movement.

Finding local grassroots organisations that are concerned with the movement and connecting with them through workshops and interviews will allow the initiative to become more central and team building.

The union of activists and workers of Amnesty working with one another at an equal footing will allow small-step goals to be more attainable through the motivations and connection that participators of the movement will feel between one another.





REFLECTIONS



What shared experiences can your team build on and connect with?



How are you checking up on your activists? Are you incorporating enough team-building exercises?



Are you attempting to be innovative in how activists and workers interact? Is there a sense of community and connection between them? Or is there a clear divide between them?





FOSTER LEADERSHIP & TRUST



Let leaders lead

In every community, church, classroom and organization hundreds of people are taking on leadership roles, which is crucial to achieve positive human rights changes. But how do you create this leadership within your movement? And how do we define what leadership is?

“Leaders in a community are activists committed to change, willing to invite others to join them in the hard work of moving a campaign forward. This leadership doesn’t imply the traditional form of hierarchical power from one person over the other. No, the goal of effective leaders is to create more “power to others,” based on the interests of all parties”
- Marshall Ganz, Professor of community organizing and grassroots organizing

This means these activist leaders delegate responsibility to other dedicated, reliable activists, to create change. But to be able to do this within a community, these activist leaders should enjoy the TRUST to give responsibility to other dedicated, reliable activists. Only then, we can create effective leadership.

Giving up control to build power

To work with people power, it is necessary to hand over power to activist leaders.

This is not always very easy because it takes time and resources to let leaders lead. It is also not easy because many of us want 'the job done right'. And we're convinced this means we must do it ourselves.

The truth is: if we try to do it all ourselves, it can't be done well. We will be missing out on the diverse perspectives and contributions from our team members and get much less work done. The belief that total control ensures the best results is an illusion. So why not show some courage, let go of total control, find people with leadership potential and share the responsibility to lead?

The First Step



- Make sure that when you strategize, the people with lived experience are there and listen to their stories.
- Take time to search for committed activists to build a snowflake. Start with mobilizing events, ask the people to give their phone number and have a 1:1 conversation with each one of them to bring them on board.



EXAMPLE #1: AMNESTY HUNGARY: STAND BY ME PROJECT

The 2 year "Stand By Me" project brought together partners from Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and Poland to address gender-based violence (GBV).

This collaborative effort focused on combining human rights education with activism. A key aspect of the project was empowering young people directly affected by GBV, enabling them to identify challenges and develop actionable solutions. By involving these young people, Stand By Me went beyond raising awareness, fostering a proactive approach to tackling gender-based violence across the participating countries.

29 activist leaders were recruited for a period of 6 months taking the following steps:

- Building power by training activist leaders on human rights and gender-based violence in the Hungarian context (1 month)
- Activist leaders learned how to plan and organize actions, raise awareness and engage more people to take action.
- The activist leaders then self-organised human rights empowered actions: street actions; table discussion with 70 people; table discussion with social media experts.
- Activist leaders learned to draw conclusions, evaluate, assess and keep moving forward.

In between, the activist leaders received supervision and mentoring to make their actions and events go well and on how to best work with the other members of their activist teams.

WHAT WORKS

- ✓ Work with rights holders: young people who experienced the problem
- ✓ activist leaders develop their own project with autonomy, giving them ownership and responsibility
- ✓ Coaching the activist leaders between the steps helped them to stay focused
- ✓ activist leaders could capitalize on international forums, network, and gain inspiration from peers in other Amnesty sections.

CHALLENGES

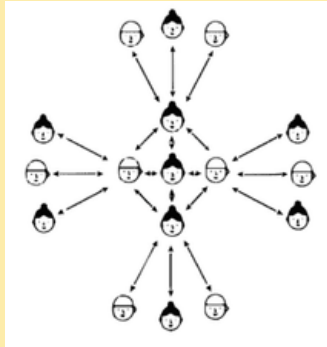
- ⚡ Keeping activists committed long term. Need to make them feel part of a team; ensure activists do not get overwhelmed; divide work fairly; make staff available to support in a reliable but sustainable way
- ⚡ Reliability and consistency are key: important for project managers to be on top of the processes, minimize delays, and be timely and transparent
- ⚡ When issues arose, the most motivated activists took on more while some activists became more passive. Advance discussions on how to work together fairly in crisis situations would be beneficial.



EXAMPLE #2: AMNESTY NETHERLANDS : LETS TALK ABOUT YES

Lets Talk About Yes was a campaign against sexual violence run by Amnesty Netherlands between 2020 – 2023. It used the people powered organizing model from Marshall Ganz. The goal was to persuade board members of higher education institutions to sign a manifesto against sexual violence among students.

The organizing method worked with a snowflake model (where leadership is distributed):



- 1.The organizer in the centre of the snowflake was coaching activist leaders & strategizing with the campaign team.
- 2.The activist leaders in the first ring of the snowflake were coaching the activists in their local teams & developing and implementing local lobby conversations and actions.
- 3.The activists of the local team were the third ring of the snowflake. They were responsible for 1 specific task like social media, event organizing, lobby.

The organizers trained the activist leaders, coached them on a weekly basis and trusted them to be able to lobby, take action and talk to the press. All activists acquired new skills by training, like coaching leadership, teambuilding, how to have 1:1 conversation, relationship building and storytelling. The organizing principle worked with the train & trust principle.

This approach resulted into 7 organisers and 30 activist leaders who were empowered to lead 30 new local activist groups working to get the manifesto signed. 41 institutions were targeted, 21 of them have signed the manifesto. 9 out of the 30 activist groups stayed within the Amnesty structure after the campaign stopped.

WHAT WORKS

- ✓ Working with rights holders, young people with lived experienced
- ✓ Having the activists develop their own local strategy with a lot of autonomy
- ✓ Coaching the activist between the steps helped them to stay focused

CHALLENGES

- ⚡ An awareness goal was not clear enough, required to keep activist committed
- ⚡ Good organizing takes time, but with two dedicated employees you can create a big snowflake
- ⚡ Management team needs to be on board with implementing the organizing strategy



PROTECT THE PROTEST

Once you have talked to the people with lived experience of the problem and together decided the goals you want to reach, the next step is to find the activist leaders.

Who in the grassroot organisations are potential leaders and are willing to be part of the Protect the Protest campaign?

Once you identified them, you provide them with the necessary training and coaching.

The activist leaders will take these learnings to their group of activists, e.g. the activists of their own grassroots organisation that experience oppression when organizing a protest.





REFLECTIONS



Are you willing and able to let go of control to let others lead? Do you give this trust to others?



What is the role of the activists in our campaign?



Do the activists have the power to decide for themselves which actions are the best in their local surroundings?



Do you train them and then trust them to take the right steps in a campaign?





MAKE SPACE FOR AGENCY OF ACTIVISTS



Making space for activists is about having activists enjoy full decision-making authority and ownership over a project.

It is about creating the tools and freedom for activists to do so. This means letting go of control. Giving up control to build power is not an easy thing to do. But the truth is: if we try to do it all ourselves, it can't be done well.

Making space for activists is also about having trust in the capacity of activists and believing in the power of the movement to reach shared goals.

Working with equity is the foundation of this principle. This means power, resources and opportunities are distributed fairly among all (paid and unpaid) participants of a project or campaign. The principle “creating a safe, equitable, and inclusive space” will elaborate more about this element.

Activist involvement can work on different levels. Think about involving activists in the decision-making process, in the creative & executive process and making space for activists in the evaluation phase.



The First Step



Invite activists at a very early stage into the process of developing your campaign. Invest in equity and make sure they have the same resources, power and opportunities that you have as a paid participant.



EXAMPLE #1: BOLYGO, HUNGARY

Bolygó (since 2021) is an open space for youth in Budapest, with the goal to build and support young communities to empower them to make changes within environmental topics. Bolygo is aiming to introduce a new culture, democracy, common action, green themes, and cultural change to young people. According to their mission statement, people power is not only communal but also individual. It includes that one feels has an influence on their environment.

Bolygo exists of self-organized groups of young activists that are provided with a physical space and a platform for them to engage. It is a platform to build new relationships & networks, to learn new tools and provide new perspectives. Activists organize themselves into groups/communities and experiences that they can change the world and can influence social problems. This has led to film screenings, lectures, workshops, excursions and conferences, to bring the community together.

“Bolygó is not a ready-made product, but a space that can be shaped by the community, so those who go there feel that it is up to them what becomes of this place, that they have influence in the development of the organization. Young people are impressed that they have an influence on the development of Bolygó and the space around them.”

- Bolygó

Bolygó organises programs and activities two to three times a week, including social evenings (to involve newcomers) and lectures. They also welcome groups and activists to develop and hold their own workshops with the support of Bolygó.

The engagement process in Bolygo starts from organising a social event to welcome new people, followed by young people getting engaged with a Bolygo community and start taking active participation in educational programs and projects and events organized by activists. This process can take several years.

WHAT WORKS



Young people are impressed that they have an influence on the development of Bolygó and the space around them.



Bolygó not only provides skills, mentoring, knowledge but introduces a new culture and perspective for the activists, where wellbeing and harmony are essential

CHALLENGES



It is a lot of emotional work to establish personal relationships with everyone, but this is necessary to map out skills (who is suitable for leadership roles).



EXAMPLE #2: AMNESTY SWEDEN, KOLLEKTIV SORG

Amnesty Sweden made the necessary budget and capacity available to launch and support an activist-led project. After publishing an open call for project suggestions (“What do you care about?”), Amnesty Sweden selected the Collective Grief proposal out of all the applications. The Collected Grief Platform was very innovative and the first to focus on grief caused by gun violence. The project joined forces with the Digital Disruptors team at Amnesty International’s global office to offer the best possible support to the activists’ project.

The group of activists was trained and guided by using the Campaign Accelerator methodology. It was hugely meaningful for the activists that it was their own project, not created by Amnesty Sweden. They were in charge and took complete ownership over the project. This meant that the activists in the project team worked completely independent from Amnesty Sweden, enjoyed full decision-making authority and full ownership over the project.

Amnesty Sweden said: “At the start of the project, this felt very radical for us, as an Amnesty section but it turned out very well: the group addressed the issue from their perspective and we as Amnesty did the same.”

When the project ended, it was entirely up to the activists whether they wanted to become an Amnesty group and continue to receive support as an Amnesty group or whether they preferred not to be an Amnesty group but an entity on their own. That way, Amnesty could still support them as a partnership.

WHAT WORKS

- ✓ Creating a space for activists to propose projects and even opening this up to topics amnesty is not working on is truly activist based.
- ✓ The activists enjoyed full decision-making authority and ownership over the project. It was hugely meaningful for the activists that it was their own project, not Amnesty's.
- ✓ Following a Train & Trust model, and by guiding the activists in their campaign design using the Campaign Accelerator methodology.

CHALLENGES

- ⚡ Expensive. Amnesty Sweden could only repeat this project if external funding were to be found / or by using another organizing model.
- ⚡ Activists still need the support from the Amnesty section to, for example, organize demonstrations since they are not experienced yet in organizing this.
- ⚡ It initially felt very radical, but it turned out very well: the group addressed the issue from their perspective and Amnesty did the same. In the end, this proved to be a genius approach, it enhanced Amnesty’s brand, reach and promotion.
- ⚡ At the time of the project there wasn't a specific, planned focus on well-being. This was discussed as a learning during the evaluation of the project.



PROTECT THE PROTEST

Activists within the right to protest campaign are the people on the street protesting and they might have experienced repression while doing this.

Therefore, when starting your campaign, make sure the activists are part of the decision-making process of your strategy, so you get all the experience of the street into the campaign.

It is important to do this with equity, which means power, resources and opportunities are distributed fairly among all (paid and unpaid) participants of the right to protest campaign.

Step two is to invest a lot of emotional work to establish personal relationships with everyone, in order to map out skills who is suitable for leadership roles within the campaign.





REFLECTIONS



Are we willing and able to let go of control to make space for the movement? Do we give this trust to others?

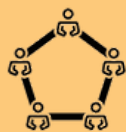


Are we willing to give full decision-making authority and ownership over a project to activists? What are your hesitations? And how might we overcome them?



Are you willing to invest emotional work to establish personal relationships with everyone, in order to map out skills (who is suitable for leadership roles).





BUILD COMMUNITY



Building community is essential for creating a safe and open environment for activists to share their stories and inputs with campaigns and organisations.

This includes incorporating group activities and providing support and guidance, in order to build a sense of connection and belonging among individuals.

With this in mind, it's important for group leaders and organisers to ensure that activists feel their visibility within projects through the fostering of community.

Instead of only focusing on the traditional 'mobilisation' technique (using activists as a method of circulating information and encouraging people to take action) used by leading NGO's, including Amnesty, building a community of people standing together to realize a common purpose allows to forge meaningful connections between activists and the organisation they work with as well as co-workers.

The First Step



- Small steps to guide group work towards building a community.
- Encouraging activists to take leadership roles and allowing them the opportunity to make decisions within projects, which in turn helped build community by allowing activists to come to mutual agreements.
- Simple but frequent team-building programmes and workshops as well as regular check-ins can ensure that activists can feel secure in their roles and support groups.
- Training in diversity and equity is vital for allowing members of campaigns to feel included and embraced in a movement.



EXAMPLE #1: AMNESTY UK - RISE UP

Amnesty International UK's Rise Up Campaign was used to enable 20 activists every year to campaign on something they felt very strongly about and meet other likeminded and passionate people. In the end of the year, they had created their own campaign pitches. They sought out individuals under-represented in Amnesty UK and who had less experience in activism in order to harness their confidence after receiving training. The programme consisted of 4 training weekends (residential) a year, with mentoring and online meetings in-between. Training as well as in-person events helped guide and foster relationships between activists with similar goals and vocations. Through the programme, activists felt 'trust in the group' and a 'sense of belonging'.



WHAT WORKS

- ✓ Built-in leadership skills during the campaign and allowed individuals to form connections through the learning process. There was a shift from just HR human rights language used in sessions, to an emphasis on 'how did it feel?'
- ✓ Establishing of clear rules and boundaries which would ensure the fair and equal treatment of new joiners and all individuals.
- ✓ As the trainings were in-person and stretched over a longer time period, this helped people develop deeper relationships and a stronger sense of belonging.

CHALLENGES

- ⚡ As the members of the Campaign had little experience with activism previous to joining, a lot more effort had to be placed on training and admin.
- ⚡ Upon reflection, making groups smaller would've made more impact on building connections (maybe running two parallel groups instead of a bigger group)
- ⚡ The time scale for this intense project seemed too long according to AIUK workers, 6 months would have been more effective in keeping activists motivated.



EXAMPLE #2: BOLYGO

Bolygó is an organisation which centres itself on climate action with the use of 'People Power'.

The main objectives of Bolygó are to assist self-organized organisations, to give young people a physical space and a forum for interaction, to create networks, to acquire new skills, to offer fresh viewpoints, and to impart information that will enable them to feel empowered to make changes in the environmental domain.

Bolygó's central aim is empowering its youth campaigners to influence the development of the organisation.

Bolygó organises programs and activities 2-3 times a week, from social evenings to free University lectures.

Furthermore, they also welcome groups and activists to develop and hold their own workshops with the support of Bolygó.



WHAT WORKS

- ✓ Checking in on the mental well-being of activists through workshops "It is just as important that the participant is mentally well as that he is they are interested in environmental protection". They believe that the activists must be well mentally to be able to act in protecting the environment.
- ✓ Activists age 15-25 can organise their own events with the help of Bolygó, having an organisation so focused on group participation helps foster a community.
- ✓ The emphasis on their common goals for climate change helps activists feel a sense of belonging.

CHALLENGES

- ⚡ Difficulty with building a community of diverse members; Bolygó is aiming to reach more conservative young people but finds it challenging.
- ⚡ Building and maintaining personal relationships costs a lot of energy, therefore ensuring that activists feel emotionally catered to is crucial.



PROTECT THE PROTEST

Fostering a strong community of activists is essential in creating momentum in a large-scale movement such as Protect The Protest.

Building connections with local grassroots organisations and communities through training, workshops and storytelling activities allows the efficient transfer of information and opportunities between large-scale organisations and grassroots.

As well as this, offering support and training for diversity and wellbeing bridges the gap between organisers and newly appointed activists in the field.

By regularly checking up on activists during the mentoring process, they will be able to feel a greater sense of responsibility and leadership within the movement, enhancing their sense of community and wider support.





REFLECTIONS



How can we implement building community without overburdening our activist?



What are the limitations of attempts to build a strong community?





EMBRACE CULTURAL CHANGE



Intentional change in our ways of working or strategies doesn't come about spontaneously, and rarely does this process happen without friction.

Change can cause discomfort, confusion and objection. It might evoke feelings of anger, disappointment or protest.

When considering to implement new people-powered tactics or strategies, this may come across as radical ideas for the colleagues in your organization, group or movement.

Be mindful of the consequences these change-processes can evoke, and invest time to prepare your peers for a cultural shift so new ways of working are preceded by new ways of thinking.

The First Step



- When working on new tactics or preparing for new people-powered strategies, take a step back and think about the reasons that supports these choices. It's important to spell this out as clearly as possible, so you can share the 'Why' with all colleagues or team members and get their buy-in.
- Ideally, everyone – from the newbie volunteers to the director or board president – is well aware and convinced of the reasons why you are aiming to apply new ways of working.



EXAMPLE 1: GREENPEACE SPAIN

Greenpeace Spain has changed its mindset to a 'situational leadership approach'.

The aim is to intentionally choose on which occasions to visibly take the lead, when to accompany (or co-lead) or when to facilitate or support.

Greenpeace Spain is learning to mindfully position themselves between each of these 3 spaces depending on the situation.



IMAGE: Greenpeace

WHAT WORKS



GP has adapted to work with more autonomous projects, meaning local activists who are running their project more independently. Once the strategic direction has been established, autonomous projects show bigger agility, can adapt faster and allow room for collaboration. It requires less control but it's not necessarily easier to manage.



Responding to requests for support from others – so not Greenpeace activists - with a generous mindset, opens doors. It creates opportunities for GP to do their narrative work, especially with groups who don't particularly like GP or agree with their views.

CHALLENGES



Setting aside the brand causes tensions and is very difficult to implement at the national level. Greenpeace Spain is succeeding in finding common ground between people who feel very strongly about the brand and those who have no issues with letting go.



By showing a lot of support to others (facilitating), they sometimes struggle to find sufficient time to do their ongoing work.



EXAMPLE 2: KOLLEKTIV SORG

In 2019, Amnesty Sweden launched their Digital Disruptors Project (a Global Amnesty project supporting young activists to design and deliver their own disruptive, digital campaigns). From this, Kollektiv Sorg' (Collective Grief) was born; an incredible grassroots youth-led campaign tackling the root causes of youth violence.

Kollektiv Sorg was created by two young artists who had lost friends to 'youth violence', and their campaign explores collective grief that is felt at community level. It's now grown to a larger, national campaign that uses art to explore this complex topic.

Amnesty Sweden supported the Kollektiv Sorg using 'Campaign Accelerator methodology' along with other tools. Although Amnesty Sweden invested a lot of time and resources in guiding and supporting Kollektiv Sorg, the entire campaign was designed, coordinated and rolled out by youth activists.

It's very unusual for an Amnesty section to allow this kind of activist-led approach when planning new campaigns and it required a lot of trust, flexibility & new ways of working. Kollektiv Sorg challenged Amnesty Sweden to address systemic racism, something they hadn't done before – and the organisation's work has changed since.

Amnesty learned a lot about engaging with new target groups and understanding how to hand over control to others. One key takeaway was that Amnesty must remain humble in recognizing that we, too, have much to learn.

More recently, Kollektiv Sorg came to London in May 2024 to meet UK groups working on similar issues and there are plans for further exchanges – connecting incredible young activists personally affected by these issues and working creatively to tackle them.

WHAT WORKS

- ✓ Extensive training of the activists resulted in them showing independence and leadership: it was their project, not Amnesty's.
- ✓ The project's activists working in such an independent way worked as an amplifier, which enhanced Amnesty's reach and brand promotion.
- ✓ Amnesty Sweden created opportunities for youth activists by training them with the necessary skills so they could build campaigns they care about themselves.

CHALLENGES

- ⚡ The project was expensive, both in time and money
- ⚡ Activists were confronted with blind spots at a certain point – a lack of skills to accomplish the desired campaign goals. (e.g. practical organization skills for demonstrations).
- ⚡ In the project evaluation, Amnesty observed they didn't have a clear focus on activists' wellbeing.



PROTECT THE PROTEST

The Protect The Protest campaign includes a big piece of work on People's Movements, and Amnesty's ambition to adopt a stronger 'movement-oriented' mindset.

The proposed shift in our ways of working requires a shift in our mindset. It's very likely that this process will not be easy for all colleagues and activists in sections.





REFLECTIONS



Has the decision to change your traditional ways of working been made in a democratic, horizontal, supported way? If not, how can you get everyone on board?



Has everyone been sufficiently informed on what is about to change and why, and what the possible outcomes could look like? Both positive and negative?



Can you identify certain audiences/colleagues/partners beforehand that might be hesitant to embrace the change? If so, it might require extra time and effort to get them on board.



Have you considered the financial resources and capacity (=time) you would need to adapt to your new ways of working?

