Challenging pillars of power   2 h 45 min

About the exercise

TARGET AUDIENCE
Best suited to civil society organisations, human rights defenders and faith leaders.

PURPOSE
- To enable participants to deepen their understanding of a specific freedom of religion or belief (FORB) violation in their context by applying key concepts from the theory of non-violent struggle.
- To help participants develop strategic action planning skills.

DESCRIPTION
A groupwork exercise in which participants critically analyse sources of power and 'pillars' of power that perpetuate a specific violation of FORB in their context and strategize ways of tackling the violation by weakening those pillars of power. Prior to this exercise, participants should have identified some specific FORB problems they wish to analyse/develop action plans for, for example using 'The problem tree', page 158 or the 'What's the problem', page 175.

knowledge

attitudes

skills
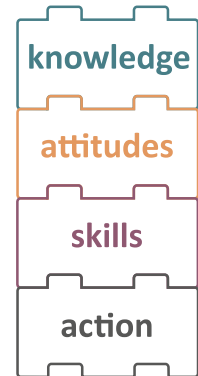
action

Instructions

> **RESOURCES**
>
> - Flipchart sheets and marker pens in different colours.
> - Handout/poster materials on human rights tactics / non-violent methods.
>
>   Find the handout and posters at
>   www.forb-learning.org/exercises/pillars-of-power.

ADVANCE PREPARATION
- Prepare a knowledge input on the theory of non-violent struggle (suggested contents provided below). Make sure to have in mind two or three contextually relevant examples of 'pillars' of power and their sources of power.
- Prepare a brief input on human rights tactics/non-violent methods with the aid of the following materials (or other materials of your choice): 'Talking tactics' posters and presentation or the '198 non-violent methods' handout.
- Four pre-prepared flipchart sheets with the diagram below.
- Pre-prepared flipchart sheets with the six steps of the process (see below) written up. Keep these covered at the start of the session, and only reveal them one by one.
- Choose which framework for tackling the problem you will use with your target audience (non-violent methods, human rights tactics, or another framework illustrating strategies), choosing the framework that best matches the organisational vision and mission. Prepare your knowledge input and handouts/posters accordingly.

TIP! Revealing steps in a process one-by-one prevents participants from becoming overwhelmed and keeps them focused on the task at hand.

THE PROBLEM
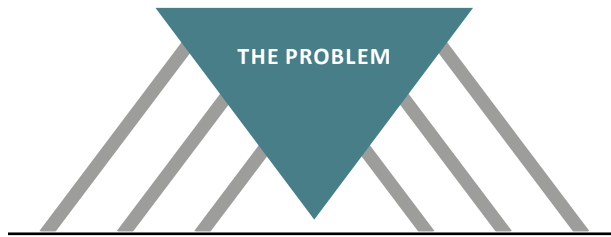
HOW TO INTRODUCE THE EXERCISE   14 MIN

Give the following short input while drawing/referring to the diagram:

Human rights violations can only persist because power structures support, enable or tolerate them. If power structures in society didn't at least tolerate human rights violations, violations would only ever be small scale and sporadic because systems would be reformed to prevent them and those who commit violations would be punished.

So, who has power in relation to violations in our context? A key concept in the theory of nonviolent struggle is the concept of 'PILLARS OF POWER'. Society has many structures, or pillars, of power. These pillars are comprised of institutions, groups of people and ways of thinking – attitudes. In relation to FORB, institutions could, for example be state or religious institutions and the majority group might have attitudes that accept or justify discrimination against minorities.

SHORT TALK

Every society has its own pillars, which operate at all levels of society. For example:
• Police and security agencies
• Military, and other coercive structures
• Political parties
• Judiciary
• Civil service and bureaucracy
• Educational system that produces and controls knowledge
• Organized religion – leadership structures as well as ideas and values
• Media – who manage the provision of information to people
• Business community
• Student unions, workers unions, labour organisations.

These pillars have different SOURCES OF POWER by which powerholders ensure cooperation or obedience:
• Authority and legitimacy: The ability to issue a command and people obey – law, status or practice that ensures allegiance, support and loyalty. The state often holds authority and loyalty, but other actors can also have this type of influence – for example allegiances to religious leaderships and institutions.
• Human resources: Strength and power lies also in the number of people. Numbers count.
• Skills and knowledge: Practical and technical know-how and understanding is a source of power.
• Material resources: Weapons, money, other assets such as buildings, equipment, land, natural resources – for example, controlling water is power.
• Sanctions: Capacity to enforce or threaten with punishment or approval physically, politically, economically, and/or psychologically.
• Intangible factors: Symbols (flags, emblems) cultural or religious beliefs and other psychological, traditional, ideological, religious or cultural factors that make people obey and assist and respect.

Remember that human rights violations only persist because the pillars of power support, enable or tolerate them. So how do we change that? The theory of nonviolent struggle is based on the idea that all these pillars of power – all political relationships and systems of power, from the national to the grassroots-level – rely on the obedience, cooperation or acceptance of individuals, groups, and organisations. Power holders have no power if people do not give them power. Non-violent campaigns try to end human rights violations by withholding or weakening the sources of power that institutions, systems or groups rely on.

Different pillars of power (institutions, groups or majoritarian ideas) rely on different sources of power – for example the business community has material resources, while religious leaderships often hold legitimacy and influence people's ideas and behaviour. Power is pluralistic, taking different forms and changing over time. So different kinds of actions – from protests, to boycotting companies, to social media campaigns, can help weaken different sources of power and the weaken or change the institutions, groups and attitudes that rely on them.

Before running the exercise, check the participants have understood the key concepts by asking for examples of actors and attitudes that constitute the pillars of power in their context and what their sources of power might be.

HOW TO RUN THE EXERCISE   2 H 30 MIN

- **GROUPWORK – ANALYSIS**   (40 MIN)
  Divide the participants into four groups. Give each group a pre-prepared flipchart sheet and marker pens. Point to the flipchart sheet with the steps of the process written up. Reveal step one and explain the following:
  STEP 1: Identify a specific FORB problem that you want to tackle. Write this in the triangle space.   5 MIN

  Ask each group to discuss and agree one specific problem they want to work on and write this up in the triangle on their flipchart diagram. (Ideally, the participants should have identified specific problems they would like to work on in prior exercises).
     Remember to encourage the group to be as specific as possible in defining the problem. For example, instead of saying that the problem is 'intolerance' they could say:
  – Minority children are being bullied at the local school, or
  – Local religious or political leaders or local media are using hate speech.
  Instead of saying minority (or all) women are vulnerable, they might say:
  – High rates of school dropout among (minority) girls,
  – Street harassment, especially of minority women, or
  – Early and forced marriage.
  And instead of saying government discrimination they might say:
  – Local police do not investigate crimes against people from minorities properly, or
  – Community X can't get permission to build a place of worship.

  After the groups have completed this step, reveal step 2 on the flipchart sheet:
  STEP 2: What would you like to see instead of the violation? Try to be specific in describing the solution. Write this up on your flipchart sheet.   5 MIN

  After the groups have completed this step, reveal step 3 on the flipchart sheet:
  STEP 3: What pillars of power (institutions, groups or ideas) prop up this problem and what are their sources of power? Write these in two different colours (one for pillars, one for sources) in the diagonal pillars.   30 MIN

- **KNOWLEGE INPUT**   (10 MIN)
  Before introducing step four, give a brief overview of approaches to tackling the problem i.e., non-violent methods, human rights tactics, or other strategies that fit within the organisational vision and mission.
    You could share handouts of '198 ideas for non-violent action' or use the ready-made Local Changemakers Course PowerPoint presentation 'Talking tactics' and put the accompanying tactics posters up on a wall for participants to look for a few minutes.

SHORT TALK

- **GROUPWORK – IDENTIFY METHODS / TACTICS / STRATEGIES**   (50 MIN)
  Continue the groupwork with the following steps, revealing one at a time:
  STEP 4: What could your group do to change the power structures upholding this injustice? Identify methods/tactics/strategies they could use to weaken or bring down each pillar and list these under each pillar on your diagram.   30 MIN

  STEP 5: Which pillar is most significant? Is there a pillar that would be most strategic for your group to tackle first, due to your capacity/expertise/resources? Highlight this on your diagram.   10 MIN

  STEP 6: Which method/tactic/strategy would be the best starting point for tackling that particular pillar? Who could be your allies on this? Expand on this under that pillar.   10 MIN

  Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson who will briefly present the problem, their solution, the most significant pillar and sources of power, and their chosen method/tactic/strategy for tackling this along with allies.

  TIP! Why not schedule a break or introduce an energiser at this point? Check out the 'Icebreakers and energisers' section on page 10 for inspiration.

- **GROUP PRESENTATIONS AND PLENARY DISCUSSION**   (50 MIN)
  Invite each spokesperson to present their group's work (5 min/group, plus 5 min question and answer session from the rest of the participants).
    Lead a brief plenary discussion with the following questions:
  — What reflections or insights about your context are you taking away from this exercise?
  — Which of the tactics / methods / strategies proposed by the different groups did you think would be most effective? Why?

HOW TO CONCLUDE THE EXERCISE   1 MIN
Thank the participants for their hard work and ideas. Say that you hope they have been inspired to put some of their ideas into action!

Source
Adapted from Pillars of Power https://turningtide.org.uk/toolkit/pillars-of-power/ and Non-violent struggle – 50 crucial points by CANVAS (2006).