

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND NONVIOLENT CIVIC ACTION TO FIGHT CORRUPTION

CALL FOR INFORMATION/CASES FOR NEW RESEARCH PROJECT

Shaazka Beyerle, Senior Advisor
International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, Washington, DC

*...And we noted that an empowered citizen is the best tool we have for fighting corruption...
We must strive to reach and mobilise people from all quarters, and from all age groups.*

*“The Athens Agenda: Corruption and sustainable development,” Outcome of the 13th
International Anti-Corruption Conference, November 2, 2008.¹*

Corruption remains one of the greatest stumbling blocks to good governance, rule of law, social and economic development, and human rights. A 2004 report of the UN Secretary General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change states that “corruption, illicit trade and money-laundering contribute to State weakness, impede economic growth and undermine democracy. These activities thus create a permissive environment for civil conflict.”²

Around the world, anti-corruption advocates and other civic actors are mobilizing the general public to use nonviolent strategies and tactics to improve accountability and transparency, and to enhance prospects for rule of law, rights, civil liberties, economic and social development, and peace. Civic action campaigns have also been found to reinforce “traditional” anti-corruption strategies and legislation, such as the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), and support those within government institutions attempting reforms and change.

However, many campaigns and movements are not known outside their immediate circles. Thus, their challenges, strategies, tactics, and general lessons learned are not circulated widely. Nor can others draw inspiration from the ingenuity, courage and resilience of those engaging in nonviolent civic action, who often face intimidation and repression.

KINDLY CONTACT ME IF YOU HAVE INFORMATION ABOUT:

- Possible initiatives, campaigns or movements addressing corruption that included the mobilization of citizens and/or nonviolent civic action at the local or national level. Cases may have taken place in the last two decades or be presently ongoing. Corruption may be the sole focus, or it may be linked to other forms of injustice, such as peacebuilding, authoritarian rule, organized crime, discrimination, poverty, workers rights, environmental destruction, state service provision, or other issues.
- Suggestions of other people, organizations to contact that could potentially have knowledge about cases or get the word out about the study;
- Recommendations of networks through which others can be notified about the project, including e-newsletters, websites, virtual groups, social network sites, etc.
- Reports, books or articles that refer to citizen initiatives and nonviolent civic action to fight corruption.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

During this 12-month research project, I shall:

- Identify, document and analyze diverse cases from around the world of citizen participation and nonviolent civic action to fight corruption at the local or national level. Cases may have taken place in the last two decades or be presently ongoing. Corruption may be the sole focus, or it may be linked to other issues, such as peacebuilding, authoritarian rule, organized crime, discrimination, poverty, workers rights, environmental destruction, state service provision, or other concerns.
- Distill from the cases general lessons learned and best practices.
- Develop a practical educational curriculum.
- Collect the above in a book for publication, for use by the anti-corruption, human rights, and peacebuilding communities, and international development organizations.

The focus of this research is on the skills, strategies, objectives, and demands of nonviolent civic campaigns and movements, rather than the phenomenon of corruption itself, or the conditions under which it occurs. This project is made possible through a grant from the United States Institute of Peace and support from the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. *Please note that this announcement is not a call for proposals, papers or researchers.*

EXAMPLES OF NONVIOLENT CIVIC ACTION TO FIGHT CORRUPTION

Armenia: Anti-corruption advocates, environmental activists, and youth groups are using humor, video, animation, and creative nonviolent street actions to protect the environment from illegal building and commercial development, protest against the violation of freedom of expression and other civic rights, and support political prisoners and victims of repression.

Columbia: Begun in 2006, OCASA (“truth” in the Chibcha indigenous language) uses the internet and social networking--including discussion fora, training, Facebook groups and databases--to educate and mobilize youth to fight corruption.

Egypt: Founded by women in 2005, Shayfeen.com (play on words meaning “we see you” in Arabic) increased public awareness about corruption, fostered citizen participation, monitored the government, broadcast election fraud in real time via the internet, and proved their activities were valid under the UNCAC, to which Egypt was a signatory.

Guatemala: A local citizen’s movement emerged in Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa in the aftermath of the civil war (1960-1996) to recover the community from the hands of drug lords and organized crime, prevent electoral fraud, maintain resilience in the face of violent repression, defend victories, and foster social and economic development.

India: Established in 2007, the “Fifth Pillar” targets bribery with innovative low-risk actions such as passing out “anti-corruption” zero-rupee notes, petitioning, and anti-bribery pledges.

Kenya: MUHURI (Muslims for Human Rights) is empowering communities to fight poverty by curbing misuse of community development funds. It conducts local education and training in social audits, while using nonviolent tactics, such as street theatre, marches, and site visits.

Kuwait: In May 2006, a group of young men and women, communicating through SMS, launched the “Orange Movement” against political corruption. Their nonviolent tactics,

including leafleting the parliament, enlisted public support and participation, resulted in early parliamentary elections in which legislation to change electoral districts (to prevent corruption) became a major campaign issue and was later adopted.

Philippines: Launched in 2003, an ongoing campaign to curb corruption in the elementary and secondary education system annually organizes about one million boy and girl scouts to count textbooks and conduct quality inspections.

Turkey: In 1997, the “One Minute of Darkness for Constant Light Campaign” mobilized approximately 30 million citizens in synchronized low-risk mass actions to pressure the government to take specific measures to combat corruption.

KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

Civic realm - collective non-state, bottom-up initiatives and relationships in a society. This includes: nonviolent civic campaigns and movements; civil society organizations (CSOs); nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); civic coalitions and alliances; unions; professional organizations; grass-roots networks, committees, and collectives; local citizen groups; activists, community organizers, and citizens.

Civic power - power that comes from significant numbers of people organized together.

Nonviolent civic action - the expression of civic power through the use of nonviolent strategies and tactics. It is also called civil resistance, nonviolent struggle, and nonviolent conflict.

Nonviolent tactics – the methods of nonviolent civic action.

Scholars have identified over 200 nonviolent tactics, and most campaigns and movements create new ones. They include varieties of civil disobedience, noncooperation, protests, petitions, vigils, strikes, boycotts, monitoring of authorities and spending, social networking technologies, blogging, coordinated low-risk mass actions, displays of symbols, creation of independent institutions, social/economic empowerment initiatives, street theatre, songs, humor.

Civic power is wielded through the sustained, strategic application of a variety of nonviolent tactics that are designed to:

- Strengthen citizen participation and campaign capacity;
- Disrupt the status quo within systems of corruption;
- Weaken the sources of support and control for unaccountable and corrupt powerholders; entities, systems, and their enablers; and/or
- Win people over to the civic campaign or movement.

Civic campaigns and movements – emerge from the civic realm and include the participation of ordinary people united around common goals and demands.

Contact info: sbeyerle@nonviolent-conflict.org/1 202 416 4720

¹ http://www.13iacc.org/en/IACC/Conference_Agenda

² A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, UN Doc a/59/565 (December 1, 2004), www.un.org/secureworld.