

SESSION 6:

Core Constituency Building

(Approx. 4 hours in total)

Session Objectives

- To identify strategies for building a core constituent base
- To explore the risks and advantages of deviating from the viewpoint of one's core constituency
- Raising funds from base supporters

6.1

Exercise: One Million Constituents

(Approx. 20 min.)

Choose a volunteer or two from the group to read aloud the following descriptions of the *One Million Signatures Campaign* in Iran.¹³



The One Million Signatures Campaign officially launched on August 27, 2006. Its participants are collecting one million signatures in support of a petition to the Iranian Parliament asking for the reform of current laws that discriminate against women. One of the main aims of the Campaign is to educate citizens and particularly women about the negative impact of these discriminatory laws on the lives of women and society as a whole. Those who agree with the Campaign can support it by signing the petition. Those who are interested in becoming more engaged can join local groups working on the Campaign.

The Campaign uses a face-to-face education approach to promote awareness of the laws. Campaign activists, after going through a training course on Iranian laws

¹³ Excerpted from <http://www.sign4change.info/english/> and *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story*, by Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, 2009.

and the campaign's face-to-face approach, can begin collecting signatures from fellow citizens. To date, nearly 1,000 individuals have been trained, and there are countless others who have downloaded the petition from the Women's Learning Partnership site www.learningpartnership.org, or have received it from friends and who are engaged in signature collection.

The founders of the One Million Signatures Campaign learned from thirty years of revolutionary tumult preceded by more than a decade of ideological in-fighting to set aside ideological differences and emphasize specific, concrete demands to attract the support of women from a variety of backgrounds and belief systems. Agreement need not be total. It can be centered on incremental changes and reforms that are thoroughly plausible.

This issue-based approach to feminism not only won the campaign legions of supporters, but also helped it to form a coalition of women's groups that were able to push back parliamentary passage of a discriminatory Family Law in 2008.

During the presidential election campaign in 2009, women activists decided to take advantage of the election campaign process, which provided opportunities to participate in demonstrations, meetings, and press coverage, and to connect with other networks and expand their own. Subsequently, six organizations and 700 individual activists prepared a list of women's demands for presentation to the presidential candidates. This effort mobilized many women who had boycotted the previous election because they were unhappy with the regime's pre-selection of candidates and the consequent lack of choice.

The mass mobilization of women, begun during the activists' campaign for reform of discriminatory laws, using door- to-door awareness-raising, street theatre, email, text messaging, and Web sites, paid off in political clout. Thanks to activists' demands, the two front-runners among the pre-approved candidates in the presidential campaign, Mir Hussein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, shifted their public positions toward gender equality. The campaigns of both men also then vowed to support ratification of the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)—a document that Iran's Guardian Council has rejected as “anti-Islamic.”



Questions for Group Discussion

- What are some recent information campaigns that have taken place in your community? Was there a campaign to promote health? Resolve environmental problems? Help another community struggle with a disaster? Where was the information posted? Where did you learn about the issues?
- Can you recall a legislative campaign (an effort to change, block, or reform a law) where you felt you really understood the issues and had a strong sense that the legislation would make a difference in your own life? How did you learn about the law and its potential changes?

- Have you ever participated in mobilizing a constituency? What was the message that you were trying to deliver? How did you go about educating people?
- What do you think of the strategy the campaign adopted? What are its positive aspects? Negative aspects? Can it be improved? Given the cultural and political milieu where you live, is the approach that the campaign adopted optimal?

6.2

Exercise: Who Cares? (I)

(Approx. 30 min.)

Share with the group the following information about the Equality without Reservation Campaign:

The Equality without Reservation Campaign

The Equality without Reservation Campaign is a regional campaign in the Middle East and North Africa. Its aim is to lobby states in the region to lift their reservations on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratify the Convention's Optional Protocol, and commit to the full and immediate implementation of the Convention.

Circle Activity

Write on individual cards:

- Mother of three boys who is not employed
- Male banking executive
- Male who lives near a munitions plant
- Father of three boys whose wife is a stay-at-home mother
- Male zookeeper
- Female flight attendant
- Teenage girl applying to colleges
- Male social worker
- Male doctor
- Female teacher
- Widowed mother of two girls
- Grandmother whose husband is ill
- Male sports newscaster
- Male librarian
- Female owner of a small grocery store
- Female women's rights lawyer
- Female parliamentarian

- Female street-cleaner
- Male street-cleaner
- Female who owns her own hair salon
- Female who is not married, has no children, and attends a house of worship regularly
- Unemployed father whose four children sell food at a stall with his wife
- Male religious leader
- Male farmer
- Female who runs a domestic violence shelter

Distribute a card to each participant. Then, starting with yourself, show your card to the participant sitting to your right. She must explain to you why you (as the person described on your card) should support the Equality without Reservation Campaign.

When she is finished, she should turn to her neighbor sitting to her right and show that person her card. The new person must convince her neighbor to support the campaign. Repeat this exercise around the circle all the way back to the facilitator, so that everyone has a chance to campaign, shaping their arguments to match the interests and perspective of the type of person on her neighbor's card.



Questions for Group Discussion

- Which people were the most difficult to engage? Who was the hardest to convince to support the issue? Why?
- Which people were the easiest to engage with the issue? Why?
- Were there any people that you had trouble engaging in the issue, but you felt should share your concern? If yes, what else could have been said that might have persuaded them?

6.3

Exercise: Who cares? (II)

(Approx. 20 min.)

Make three columns on the board with the headings shown below. Ask the group to brainstorm what types of people might make up the core constituency for supporting the Equality without Reservation Campaign. Consider gender, age, type of employment, class, education level, religion, interest, family status, etc.

Types of people whom the issue directly effects and would naturally share our perspective	Types of people whom the issue may not directly effect, but are nonetheless likely to be sympathizers if they were well informed	Types of people who will totally disagree with our concern and might even work to counter our efforts

6.4

Exercise: The Frequent Flyer

(Approx. 30 min.)

Ask a volunteer to read the following story.



Nadia Al-Alawi was very active in a charitable women's organization, the Women's Vocational Centre (WVC), which recruited women professionals to provide basic secretarial and bookkeeping training to widows, rural women, and poor women. Ms. Al-Alawi was proud of WVC's success in training poor women and finding them well-paid work. She also felt that WVC's unique model of women supporting women could be replicated in other industries and for other causes.

High among Ms. Al-Alawi's goals was using WVC's network to support women political candidates in parliamentary elections. Therefore, she was shocked and angered to discover that WVC's registered status with the government would be revoked if any of its members participated in political campaigning. More galling still, only women's organizations were subject to the ban.

Ms. Al-Alawi had never noticed the ban on political activities in the organization's registration documents, and she doubted others involved in women's charitable organizations had either. In response, Ms. Al-Alawi designed a small flyer, 4" x 6", on which she printed in bold letters the language from the offensive law. Anonymously, she began posting the flyer inside women's restroom stalls in public buildings and the headquarters of large women's organizations.

At first the flyers were immediately removed. But after a story appeared in a major newspaper about them, other people began making copies of the flyers and posting them as well. Soon, in all major cities, and in some rural communities, one could not go into a women's restroom without seeing the flyers. They began appearing in public spaces frequented by men as well as women—on telephone poles, on community notice boards, and even on the walls of the House of Parliament itself. Embarrassed by the blatantly discriminatory legislation, Parliament quietly passed a repeal of the ban in the late hours of the night. Although members of Parliament did little to advertise the law's repeal, within days the media caught wind of the change, and covered the story extensively.



Questions for Group Discussion

- Are there laws banning political activities by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in your country? What are the pros and cons of NGOs getting involved in political activities? Are there limitations (legal or otherwise) to what women's organizations can do in your country?
- Do you think that Nadia Al-Alawi's secret action was a clever, thought-provoking strategy, or merely an ill-thought act that ultimately undermined the larger goal of demonstrating women's ability to conduct transparent, professional political campaigns?
- What were the advantages of Ms. Al-Alawi posting small flyers to educate people about the legislation? What were the potential problems? Consider the flyers' impact, expense, ability to be replicated, newsworthiness, chances of success, etc.
- What do you think motivated others to make and distribute duplicate flyers?
- How significant was the media in the flyers' success? Could the flyers still have influenced public opinion and swayed Parliament without the press coverage they received?

6.5

Exercise: Creating Slogans and Catchphrases

(Approx. 45 min.)

Ask a volunteer to read the following paragraphs on grassroots strategies to get the word out.



There are dozens of places to advertise your campaign, and each one is an opportunity to educate more people about why they should take action. Radio and television spots can reach a large audience, but they can be prohibitively expensive. If you are creative about where you post flyers, bumper stickers, signs, and flags, your message will get out. Remember that flyers can be mailed, faxed, emailed, and posted or linked on websites, as well as posted on walls and windows in public spaces. If you can find willing local merchants, shop windows are a great place to post your signs.

To make your flyers and other campaign materials compelling, it is helpful to have a slogan or catch-phrase that you can reuse over and over again. For example, in the previous exercise, The Frequent Flyer, Nadia Al-Alawi takes a quote from an unfair regulation and prints it on hundreds of flyers posted around the city and surrounding environs. Her strategy brings attention to her cause, while further exposing the injustice of the law.

It is important that your slogan be easy to understand and easily recognizable. It should be short, memorable, consistent with your talking points, and supported by your data. For instance, a group that supports increasing the number of women in the judiciary might choose a set of scales as their symbol, signifying equality and justice. Their slogan might be “Women Judges Now! It’s Only Fair.”¹⁴

Break the group into teams of three or four. Ask each team to come up with at least one slogan for each of the following campaigns:

- **SUPPORTERS** of Faten Khatija are hoping that she will be elected to Parliament. She would be the ninth female parliamentarian—out of 114 members. Dr. Khatija was a prominent neurologist before she retired from medicine. She has spent the last decade of her life working on women’s rights and equality in the legal system.
- **STUDENTS** want to bring attention to the problem of young women being harassed and assaulted on campus by men who do not believe they should be

¹⁴ For further discussion about getting the word out, please see Appendix D: Mobilizing: Getting the Word Out Tip Sheet.

allowed to attend university. The students ultimately want the administration to impose stricter punishment on the young men who are carrying out the acts of intimidation.

- **PEDIATRICIANS** want to educate mothers about the health benefits (to babies and mothers) of breast-feeding over formula.
- **WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS** want to lobby the Parliament to endorse a petition to instate a 20% quota for women in the new electoral law.

When the teams have developed a number of slogans, reconvene the group. Ask team members to share their team's slogans.



Questions for Group Discussion

- What are some of the ways that slogans can be used? Where have you seen political slogans?
- If you created campaign flyers for the supporters, students, and pediatricians (above), where are some of the places you would want to post them? How else could you distribute the flyers?
- How could you use information technology to spread the word about your political campaign? Faxes? Emails? Web sites? Facebook? Other ideas?

6.6

Exercise: Broadening Our Appeal or Selling Out?

(Approx. 30 min.)

Ask a volunteer to read the following narrative from a woman grappling with the decision of how to broaden the appeal of her group's work to end domestic violence:



Last night I met with the Working Group to Eradicate Domestic Violence. I attend most of their monthly meetings, but not all. I really believe that we can get legislation passed to better protect victims of domestic violence and to get them justice in the courts.

At last night's meeting, however, one person kept pressing that we should try to attract more supporters to our cause by expanding our political platform. Her idea was that we should also be fighting to raise the tax on alcohol. She made a strong case that there is a connection between alcohol consumption and domestic abuse, particularly abuse aimed at children. Therefore, we should join forces with the anti-alcohol groups to get them to support our legislative initiatives, while we in turn can support theirs.

Another person at the meeting pointed out that the folks working to get alcohol banned are often the same folks objecting to women's equality. Many of them defend a husband's or father's right to "discipline" his family using corporal punishment. We were asked to vote on whether to extend our platform to include alcohol regulation initiatives. I didn't know which way to vote, so I abstained.



Questions for Group Discussion

- If you were the writer above, what would you want to know before you could vote to expand the Working Group's platform to include addressing alcohol regulation? How would you make the decision?
- When is it ethical to join with people or groups who are normally your opposition to get an important piece of legislation passed?
- Can you think of examples where opposing political forces joined together on some issues? What are they?
- Are there times when by supporting a certain candidate or piece of legislation or other issue, we are simply "selling out" in politics? If yes, what are examples?
- In weighing the decision to "bend the rules," step beyond one's traditional viewpoint, or compromise on an issue, what should an individual consider? How do you make such a decision? What factors should you weigh?

6.7

Exercise: Choosing Our Battles

(Approx. 20 min.)

Choose a volunteer to read the following description of a strategy used to avoid backsliding on women’s rights in the new constitution of Brazil, by Jacqueline Pitanguy,¹⁵ former president of the National Council for Women’s Rights:



“The National Council for Women’s Rights (NCWR) was created in 1985, as part of a general movement in Brazil towards democracy. In 1986, there were congressional elections and the newly elected members had as their main task to prepare a new constitution for the country.

“NCWR’s first major campaign and slogan was, ‘A constitution, to be worthy, has to have women’s rights!’ We put this slogan on billboards and posters in all of the capitals of the different states, led marches, and held a national meeting to bring together representatives from each state and from various sectors of the women’s movement. Out of the meeting came an important declaration, ‘Letter of Brazilian Women to the Constitutional Congress,’ which demanded women’s rights, family rights, labor rights and social benefits, maternal rights, protection from violence against women, and protections for rural women and domestic workers. We applied many strategies to inform the public and to put pressure on congress to support women’s rights. We used billboards, television, conferences, marches, and one-on-one lobbying of congressional members.

“When it came to protecting reproductive rights, we faced formidable challenges. The conservative bloc in Congress was very powerful, and the Catholic Church was lobbying political leaders for criminalization of abortion under all circumstances—including rape and risk to a woman’s life—and speaking out in Sunday masses across the country. At the same time, women’s groups were collecting signatures (275,000 were needed) to put an initiative on the ballot to decriminalize abortion.

¹⁵ Jacqueline Pitanguy, Chair of the Women’s Learning Partnership Board of Directors, is a sociologist and political scientist in Brazil. She is Founder and Director of Cidadania, Estudo, Pesquisa, Informação e Ação (Cepia), a WLP partner and non-governmental organization based in Rio de Janeiro. She held a cabinet position as President of the National Council for Women’s Rights (1986-1989), during which she designed and implemented public policies to improve women’s condition in Brazil. She is also on the editorial board of several health journals and has published numerous articles and co-authored four books. She has been awarded the Medal of Rio Branco, the highest decoration of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“NCWR felt that the signature movement would be no match against the conservative forces. We decided that the safest route to protect women’s reproductive rights was to keep abortion out of the constitution altogether by arguing that abortion was not a constitutional matter. With intensive lobbying, and the support of the women’s movement behind them, NCWR’s campaign was successful.

“During the campaign, I experienced feelings of fear in the face of the strong opposition to NCWR. But the fact that my commitment was to the women’s movement—where I came from and where I was going—and that I was not there trying to further my career, gave me the strength and courage to struggle. Looking back at the four years that I was president of NCWR, it was a period of exceptional political activity, democratization, and the creation of a new constitution. I experienced periods of profound joy and a sense of accomplishment.”



Questions for Group Discussion

- What do you think of NCWR’s strategy? What were its strengths?
- How did NCWR get the message out? How did it put pressure on Congress?
- How did the signatures movement help NCWR’s campaign?
- How did NCWR’s decision to take the middle road, between the signatures movement and the conservative bloc, help it to achieve its aims?

6.8

Exercise: Raising Hopes, Raising Funds

(Approx. 45 min.)

Choose a volunteer to read following description of a candidate planning her fundraising campaign.



Sara al Wazir was elated driving home from the state assembly house. Her party had just nominated her to run for state governor. She and her supporters had lobbied hard, and at 11:07 p.m. the party leadership unanimously voted to put her name on the ballot. She had assured the leaders that she could raise the funds to run a successful campaign.

Sara rose early the next morning, and began outlining her fundraising plan. It included going to her wealthy supporters and asking for funds outright, organizing auctions with donated items, running raffles, holding fundraising sales of baked

goods, car washes, craft items, and hosting gala dinners where guests would pay a fee. The trick was always collecting the best donated items for the sales, auctions, and raffles. She had a good friend who was terrific at convincing restaurants, movie houses, and various retail establishments to donate items or tickets. This time, she thought, she would also do a letter campaign, sending letters to all of her contacts to ask for funds to support her candidacy. Maybe some of the requests could go by email, which would cost practically nothing to send out. She jotted down the names of her supporters who would be the most likely to offer their support and could lead the fundraising projects. Then she began calling them one by one to ask for help.



Team Activity

Write on the board the following fundraising activities:

- Direct appeals for financial support
- Letter campaigns
- Gala dinners
- Auctions
- Raffles
- Sales (crafts, food, car washes)

Tell the group to imagine that they are going to raise funds for Sara's candidacy. Divide the workshop space into six work areas, one for each fundraising activity.

Ask participants to go to the area or activity that they want to participate in to support Sara's campaign. Each activity team, large or small, should develop a plan for raising funds through their activity. Teams should select a person to take notes on their plan and to report back to the group.

After about 15 minutes, reconvene the group, and ask each team representative to describe their activity/ies for raising funds for Sara.



Questions for Group Discussion

- Why is fundraising important?
- Have you ever donated funding to a candidate or political campaign?
If so, how were you solicited for funding?
- What sort of fundraising activities have you participated in before?
- Which types of fundraising do you find the easiest or most comfortable?
Why? Which types are the hardest?
- Do you need to have a well-planned budget before you ask people to contribute funds to your campaign? Why or why not?
- Did you hear any new ideas in today's workshop session that you had not thought about before?