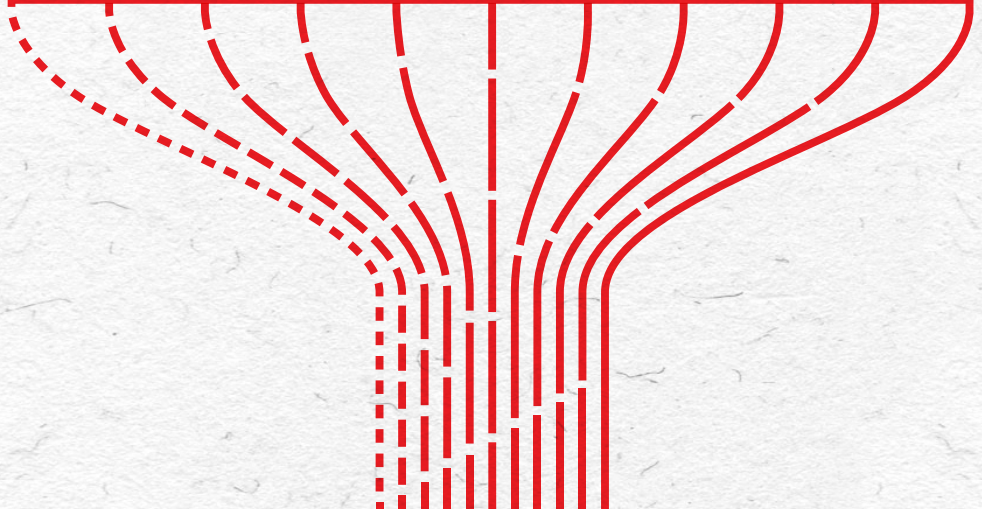


**CREATIVE
COALITIONS**

**A HANDBOOK
FOR CHANGE**

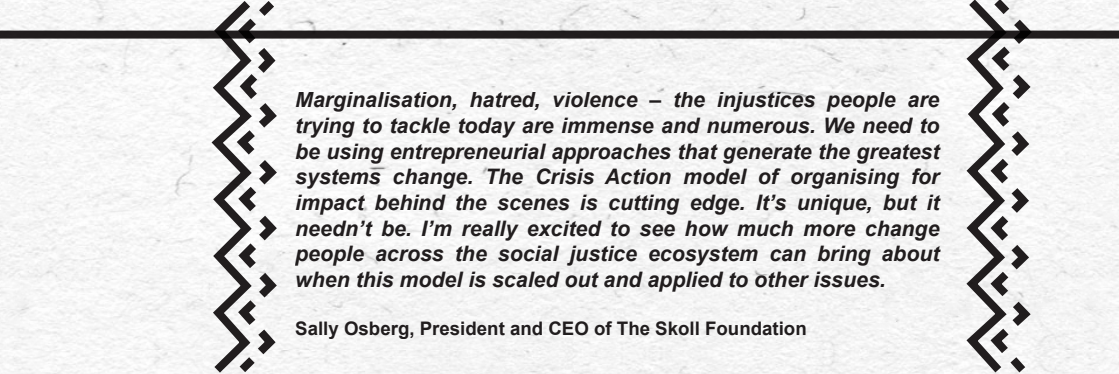




Crisis Action

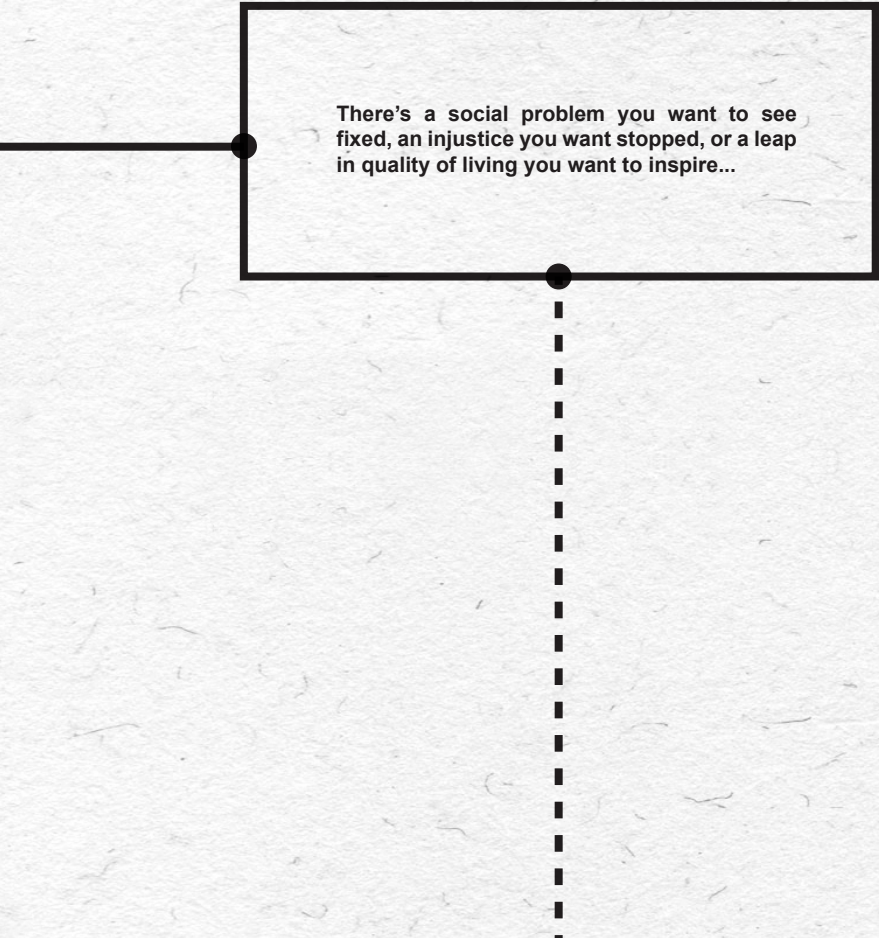
Crisis Action is a catalyst and coordinator for organisations working together to protect civilians from armed conflict.

**Written by
Nick Martlew**



Marginalisation, hatred, violence – the injustices people are trying to tackle today are immense and numerous. We need to be using entrepreneurial approaches that generate the greatest systems change. The Crisis Action model of organising for impact behind the scenes is cutting edge. It's unique, but it needn't be. I'm really excited to see how much more change people across the social justice ecosystem can bring about when this model is scaled out and applied to other issues.

Sally Osberg, President and CEO of The Skoll Foundation



There's a social problem you want to see fixed, an injustice you want stopped, or a leap in quality of living you want to inspire...



You know the change is possible – after all, experience across time and examples around the world show the power of smart collective action. Injustices result from human choices, so they can be addressed through human action.

But for all the energy that you and your allies are putting in, the change you need isn't coming.



You might be trying to take on climate change or inequality or failures in the education system. Or maybe you want to improve community cohesion or promote sustainable development. It can be anything.

You've tried the traditional means of organising and they're not working.



We must ask ourselves: **WHY IS CHANGE NOT HAPPENING?** Well, do any of these statements resonate with you and your situation?



You face a collective action problem. The change you're seeking requires action from many and often dispersed players, and existing modes of organising aren't producing unity of purpose.



You face vested interests. You know who you're trying to hold to account, but they have an interest in the status quo which you haven't been able to muster the external pressure to overcome.



Innovation is being stifled. Traditional decision-making and funding structures may be too rigid or centralised to encourage experimentation, even when the old approaches aren't working.



Traditional structures aren't providing a basis for legitimacy: they're not building or nurturing the breadth or quality of connections necessary to demonstrate a constituency for political action.

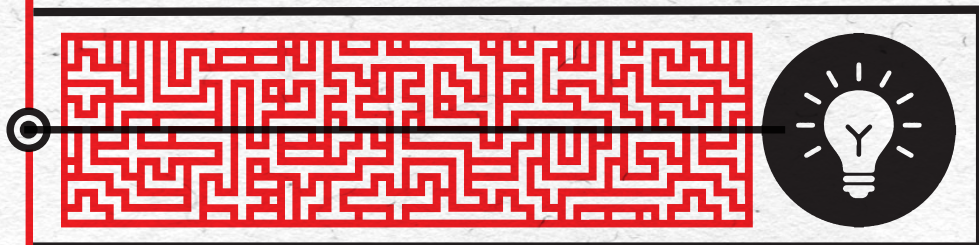
If challenges like these are stopping you from having the impact needed, the response can't be to continue with business as usual. Every drop of effort invested in a model that doesn't work is effort stolen from those people seeking change.



Something must change in the way we organise.

This Handbook describes a new way to organise for impact. It sets out a unique model for organising powerful, clever coalitions. Crisis Action has developed the model - and proven its value - in campaigning for civilians to be safer from harm in war zones.

Now we want to share it to help you and your network achieve even greater impact.



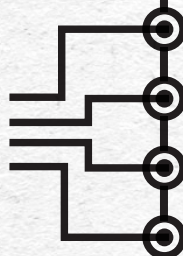
THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

This idea of how to organise for impact was born out of failure. In 2003, the anti-war movement in the United Kingdom (UK) mobilised one million people from all walks of life and political persuasions to march against the invasion of Iraq. And yet, despite the largest public demonstration recorded in the country, the UK government was undeterred. They invaded Iraq anyway. In the eyes of one brilliant young campaigner, Guy Hughes, this had been an outpouring of opposition and emotion without the calibrated strategy for collective action that would cut straight through to the heart of decision-making. It was mobilisation without smart organisation.

And so Guy founded Crisis Action. It was deliberately a small outfit that would work solely behind the scenes to bring together a range of organisations and individuals to influence power. It would build coalitions that would not be based on consensus, something he believed to have a malign impact on ambitious goals and clear purpose. Crisis Action would instead utilise a new 'opt in' model of organising (this idea is explained in Component 1/Pg 13).

With the support of Amnesty International UK, Oxfam GB and other founding partners, Crisis Action began to grow and develop its unique model of clever coalition building.

In 2005, tragically, Guy died in a mountain climbing accident. But his vision of world class clever coalition building and campaigning continued: he left the blueprint and foundations for the organisation Crisis Action is today, and the methodologies we share with you in this Handbook.













ACKNOWLEDGMENTS


Crisis Action would like to thank the Skoll Foundation for making the production of this Handbook possible. Many people helped us articulate the model, but special thanks go to the Aspen Ideas Action Forum, to Richard Jackson and Natalie Jeffers of Matters of the Earth, who also did the development and design work for this Handbook, and to Gemma Mortensen, our former Executive Director and constant inspiration.

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This is a Handbook for how in your work you can apply the model of impactful organising trialled and tested by Crisis Action. There are a number of components for this model, and the model only works when all those components are in place: the value of each one relies upon the others. You can put all the components in place – a strategic convenor, not seeking public profile, building clever coalitions with creative tactics – and we believe this model will help you and your network have greater impact.

We at Crisis Action believe in the strength of this model because we have seen the very real impact it has had for people across the world living in fear for their lives. You don't have to take our word for it: throughout this Handbook we share examples of what this model of organising for impact has meant for people who have been protected from fear and attack even in active war zones such as Syria, Sudan, and the Central African Republic.

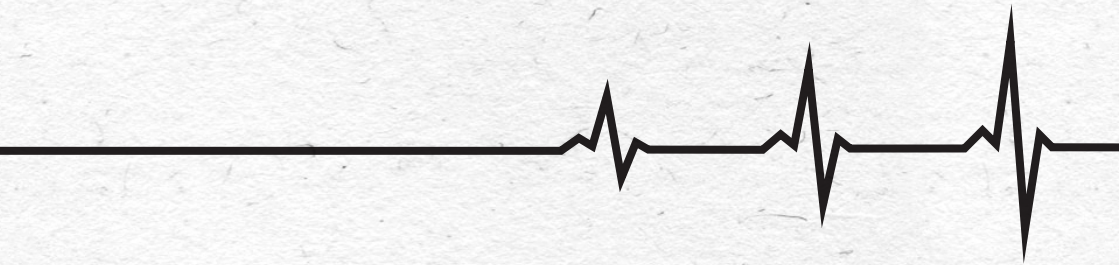
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What inspires me about this model of campaigning is how it not only maximises the impact of those already working on an issue, but also really smartly engages new allies to work alongside the traditional actors. I believe this model could help us have so much more impact in mobilising support for tackling climate change – and I see massive potential for how it can help other sectors have greater impact, too.



Christiana Figueres, Former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)



COMPONENT 1: CLEVER COALITIONS



Imagine a country's Olympics team getting all mixed up. The swimmers end up in the sprint and the cyclists are handed javelins. There's a wrestler on a horse and a gymnast with a tennis racket. It might look funny, but it doesn't work: the special expertise of each athlete is being wasted, so the whole team fails.



The same applies to organising for impact: each individual or organisation you're working with brings something special to the coalition, but each one of them will not be able to support in every area. In recognising and engaging with that diversity we can find immense power.

STEP 1: OPTING IN AND BUYING IN



The first step in building clever coalitions is to engage with potential coalition members around the question '*what is the specific change we need to see?*' There may not be universal agreement on this. That is ok. What you are seeking is a *critical mass* of coalition members that agree on what success looks like.

Too often, traditional coalitions sacrifice their power in the pursuit of consensus. In too many cases trying to get everyone to agree produces one of two results; either:

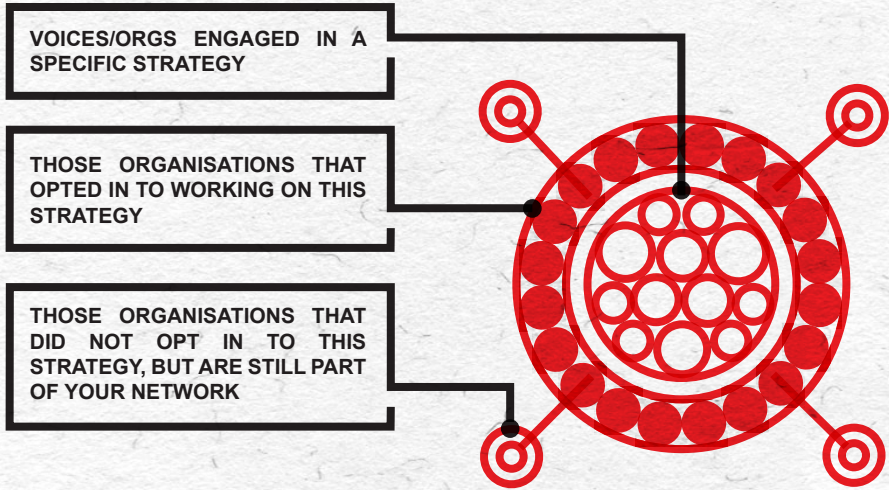
The messaging is diluted to the lowest common denominator so it doesn't bring about the needed change: in putting universal agreement before impact, the coalition is serving itself; not the cause

The coalition doesn't do anything at all: the coalition is able to move all together or not at all – so it doesn't have the impact needed.

As the coalition convenor, your role is not to seek universal agreement or even to minimise disagreement; you are seeking active commitment to bringing about a specific change.

Organisations don't opt out; they opt in. This is a crucial principle of clever coalition building. Opting in brings so much more power to the coalition than trying to minimise the number of organisations opting out.

As long as there is a critical mass – a committed group of sufficient talents to make a difference and who share a vision for what needs to change – you can move forward.



STEP 2: CROWDSOURCING STRATEGY

The next step is to develop the strongest strategy for how the collective can achieve that change. It will almost never be the case that the solution to a social justice problem will be simply: 'organisation X can fix it', no matter how powerful organisation X is. The problems we're dealing with are far more complex than that. So the organising principle at this stage is not 'what can I do?' but: 'who can make this change happen?'

You will get a far stronger answer to this question – and so a much more powerful strategy – by crowdsourcing contributions. Key elements to the strategy are:

- Setting Objectives: The change that you want to see
- Undertaking a Power Analysis:
 - Who has the power to make the change?
 - Who or what can induce them to make that change?
- Developing Theories of Change: You may already have a model for a theory of change, but we articulate this as a formula: *[G, your goal] will happen if [x, target] does [y, action that brings about goal] and they will be induced to do this by [z, tactic/approach]*. Change is of course never as certain as a mathematical formula; the approach you take will be more of a well-informed bet. But articulating the change you want to see in this way will help the coalition stick to the approach you think is most likely to have impact.

All these elements of your strategy will be more robust when enriched by the inputs from the diversity of partners: activists, affected communities, analysts, researchers, media experts, creatives – each of them bringing their own particular expertise to serve the cause.

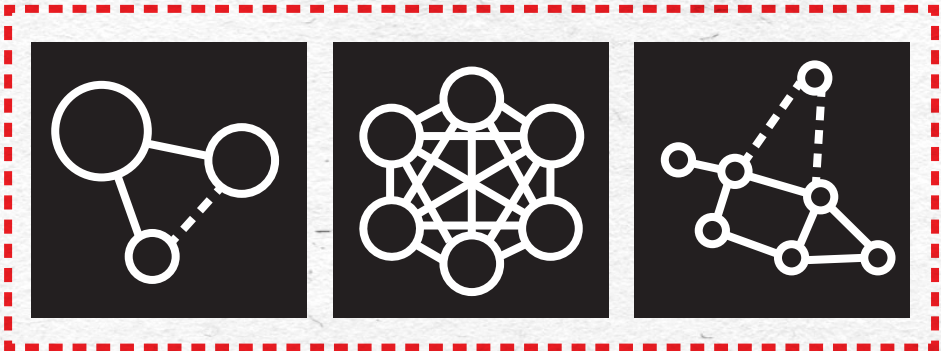
STEP 3: BESPOKE COALITIONS

The third step in this component rests on the premise that, for the greatest impact, the right expertise needs to be applied strategically, where it can maximally contribute to the overall goal.

Think back to the Olympics analogy where the hurdlers are hurdling and the canoeists are canoeing (see Component 1/Pg 13): the solution may well not be for every member of the coalition to take part in every activity.

Again, the opt-in principle applies. If the theory of change says that the Minister will change her mind if she hears that the current policy is bad for national security, then you will need to build a bespoke tactical coalition of people with credibility on security matters. If the power analysis shows that the legislator is seeking to shore up her credentials as a voice of workers, then build a tactic that labour unions can opt into.

Sometimes the 'coalition' for one tactic may be 100 organisations; sometimes it will be one person voicing a particularly powerful story – either way, your role is to make sure all talents are allocated where they can best serve the change the coalition is seeking.



STEP 1, 2 AND 3 (AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN).

This process of strategising and seeding new coalitions never stops. A further strength of clever coalitions is they repeatedly crowdsource information and intelligence around a specific social problem. Based on this evolving analysis, you can adapt your theories of change and the composition of the coalitions to give the best chance of achieving the shared objective even as the situation changes.

HOW TO CHOOSE WHERE YOU PUT YOUR EFFORTS.

Crisis Action decides on which conflicts to prioritise by applying five core criteria. These are:

IMPACT:

You must be ambitious for the people you serve, but you need to be sure that there is the potential to influence a given situation. Can you influence the person or organisation who can bring about the change you're seeking? Only if impact is possible should you devote energies to the campaign.

POLICY CONSISTENCY:

You are not seeking consensus between all members of your network. However, there does need to be a clear campaign proposition and level of policy consistency among partners to make your work viable.

CRITICAL MASS:

You need the engagement of a committed group of sufficient talents to make a difference and who share a vision for what needs to change.

ADDED VALUE:

If there is already enough facilitation or you would be replicating work then you don't need to step in.

CAPACITY:

Don't spread yourself across so many issues that you can't do the job properly. It's best to do less, and do it immaculately.

CASE STUDY: A NEW AND INSPIRATIONAL CLEVER COALITION TO END THE RISK OF GENOCIDE

Following a coup in early 2013 in the Central African Republic (CAR), horrific ethnic cleansing spread rapidly throughout the country, with mass atrocities being committed by both Muslim and Christian groups. By March, 90% of the capital Bangui's Muslim population had been either killed or forced from their homes. It was clear that local authorities had no ability to stop the killings. The level of atrocities began to prompt calls for action to prevent a possible genocide.

Crisis Action and our human rights and humanitarian partners working on the ground identified that, without a UN peacekeeping force, the loss of human life would be catastrophic. So we brought together a new coalition who could reinforce and complement what the human rights coalition was doing and bring home to policy-makers the extent of the crisis and the urgent need for international intervention. This was a powerful inter-faith delegation consisting of CAR's most influential religious leaders, Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga, Imam Omar Kobine Layama, and Reverend Nicolas Guérékoyamé-Gbangbou.

We worked with these three leaders on a letter to the UN Security Council and joint opinion pieces in France's *Le Monde* newspaper and the *Washington Post* in the US. This coalition of inspirational individuals proved to be uniquely effective in advocating for improved protection for Central Africans: their words were repeated by the US Congress and Security Council members thanked them for their leadership.

Seeing the impact they were having, we stepped up our support for the faith leaders' media work – facilitating appearances in *TIME* Magazine and CNN's *Amanpour* programme – and advocacy with, among others, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, French President François Hollande, and all 15 Security Council Ambassadors.

In April 2014, the Security Council authorised the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force to CAR in a resolution that also specifically paid public tribute to the role of the country's faith leaders in preventing violence. Only six months earlier, senior UN officials had ridiculed the notion that the Security Council would approve a force to CAR, given its lack of geo-strategic importance. According to UN ambassadors, the faith leaders' briefing to the Security Council had convinced them to act.

ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS WORK WERE: ○

A strategy that Crisis Action, acting behind the scenes, crowdsourced from many unseen partners, their insights being instrumental in crafting a strategy to see Central Africans safe from harm

Securing strategic agreement that existing efforts and the usual voices were not enough

The creation of a new, bespoke coalition of three inspirational faith leaders who were hitherto unknown outside their country, but ultimately were uniquely influential in securing a peacekeeping force in CAR.

—

+

“Crisis Action harnessed the power of three uniquely authoritative religious leaders from CAR, bringing them to New York at a critical decision-making moment to appeal to the United Nations Security Council to authorise a UN Peacekeeping Operation to protect civilians at grave risk of atrocities. The leaders’ compelling testimony clearly influenced the Council and helped to galvanise a stronger international response to the crisis.”

Adama Dieng, Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide



COMPONENT 2: A STRATEGIC CONVENOR



CLEVER COALITIONS ARE NOT NATURALLY-OCCURRING PHENOMENA; THEY NEED A DELIBERATE DESIGN.

Without smart curation, coalitions can be co-opted by the interests of one member or group. Or, just as bad, the members seek consensus, avoiding the hard discussions that make for stronger strategies and bigger change. Someone needs to catalyse clever coalitions: there must be a strategic convenor.

The crucial thing about being a strategic convenor is this: you are serving the cause, not the coalition, and not an institutional interest. Your role is to **maximise the impact of collective action**.

You are part talent scout, part orchestra conductor, part sports team coach:

You spot, coordinate, and deploy expertise and resources.

You demonstrate humility and deference to others' wisdom.

You demonstrate the audacity to rally coalitions to higher goals than the members would set for themselves individually or could achieve with traditional coalitions.

You demonstrate the value of clear prioritisation and decision-making.

In short, you *listen and lead*.

LISTEN AND LEAD

For a strategic convenor, listening and leading are inseparable. You will need to draw on others' insights and guidance to make decisions about where best to focus your efforts. Potential coalition members must be willing to collaborate. By offering a compelling vision of what can be achieved in coalition rather than by working alone, you as the strategic convenor will inspire trust. Coalition members will invest power in you to make an independent decision based on your calculations of what constellation of actions will have the greatest impact*.

*(See the section on the Power of Exceptional Networks/Pg 27, for more on how to build relationships of trust that exist beyond the transactional nature of interactions around any one piece of work.)

HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR HOW TO LISTEN AND LEAD:

BUILD YOUR DREAM TEAM: identify who's got the strongest information on the social problem or insights into those who have the power to fix it: where and when will decisions be made, on what basis, and what are the best pressure points? If there's a long list of people with those insights, think of the key organisations that will bring others with them or that have the greatest capacity to deliver on a track of work. You want them in at the start.

GO DIRECT TO THE POLITICS YOURSELF: though the best-connected members of the network will have great insights on where policy-makers are, you add immense value to the coalition by seeking advice and testing campaign propositions with high-level friendly policy-makers directly. (See the Power of Exceptional Networks/Pg 35 for how you can build these connections.)

FOCUS ON ACTION: the situation you're facing is probably very complex. But analysis is only useful insofar as it guides judgements on what actions will improve the situation.

BILATERAL VS. MULTILATERAL: at early stages, insights from partners are most likely to come from one-on-one consultations with particular individuals. You should move quickly through this stage to organise short, sharp multilateral discussions. By convening some of the brightest and best allies together you can enable them to test campaign angles, hear others' insights, brainstorm, and ultimately yield better ideas than consulting one at a time.

'GOOD ENOUGH' INSIGHT: consultations should not be exhaustive. You're aiming to have enough of a grasp to be able to go to members of your network with a solid plan to refine further with them.

THE SNOWBALL EFFECT: focus on doing a few consultations quickly to start generating ideas, get a draft plan and then go to a wider group to build enthusiasm and commitment to a particular approach. But remember, you don't always need huge groups to have impact: if a small and strategic coalition is delivering the impact you're seeking, there's no need for it to grow.

KEEP THE WIDER COALITION'S 'SKIN IN THE GAME': even if some organisations won't be directly involved in delivering a particular action, it's good to keep them informed about plans, so they feel that they are part of the campaign at each stage. Identify and draw on what partners can contribute, and provide periodic succinct updates to all members of the wider coalition on the campaign plan and its progress: any success is shared success, and you should be at pains to emphasise this.

LOCK IN AGREEMENT ON YOUR DESTINATION: it is critical to get complete alignment within the coalition on what success looks like, down to the specific language of your objectives. They will provide the reference points by which all future decisions will be made i.e. 'will it serve the objective?', rather than 'will it serve the coalition?'

Throughout all of this, keep in mind: listen and lead. It is through this alchemic process that you will arrive at a strategy more ambitious and more viable than any single organisation or a traditional coalition operating by consensus could achieve.

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COMPONENT 3: STAYING BEHIND THE SCENES



One of your most important contributions to changing the world is for the general public to have no idea who you are. Yup, you read that right.

The convenor must be modest for themselves, committed to working behind the scenes at the service of the network's goals.

Specifically, you must explicitly avoid:

Adopting policy positions that are independent of those recommended by coalition members

Recruiting and registering your own supporters from the general public, either as donors or as your own constituency of activists who will campaign in your name

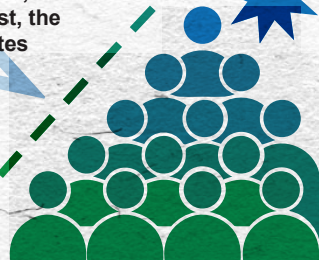
Any namechecks in the media.

This is nonsense, you might think. How can we contribute to change without people knowing who we are? (Well, some people will know who you are – see section Going Beyond The Usual Suspects/Pg 29 for more on that.)

This humility is invaluable. Being behind the scenes will dramatically increase the trust potential allies put in you.

Remember: it is the voice of the coalition that matters. The members of the coalition bring the expertise and the credibility. Your role is to make them more powerful by ensuring they serve a robust coalition strategy. You can best play that role when you maximise the trust and power the coalition puts in you.

When publicly-known organisations create coalitions, even with the best will in the world, there is often some doubt: are they co-opting the network to serve their own vision of change, or advancing their own position, or seeking funding for themselves? At best, the perception of mixed incentives creates friction. At worst, the coalition is not serving the mission but serving a narrower, selfish goal.





If you seek public attention as the convener, you undermine the trust that your partners put in you. By being behind the scenes, you make it clear:

- You are organising for impact, not for ego.
- You can remain a neutral mediator, an honest broker whose only concern is for impact.
- You are not competing with partners.
- You devote your energies to the voice and impact of the coalition – not yours.

ORGANISING PUBLIC WORK WITHOUT PUBLIC PROFILE

That is the case for *why* you should rule out having a public profile. But there's still the question of *what* this looks like in practice.



The first point is that while the strategic convener must be behind the scenes, the coalition needn't be. Influencing people in power will often require public work. That makes strategic sense, but doesn't affect your strategic role.

MEDIA: if, for instance, vested interests stand in the way of the change that's needed, you might want to use the media to expose them. You can compile and send the media materials to journalists; you can be the contact person to link them up with spokespeople, but be explicit: **YOUR ORGANISATION MUST NOT BE NAMED IN ANY MEDIA REPORTS.**

POPULAR ENGAGEMENT: if politicians haven't yet felt that there's public support for a particular policy change, you may look at organising public demonstrations or mobilisation online. You will need to:

AGREE WITH PARTNERS WHAT THE BRANDING IS: for greatest impact the mobilisation could be in the name of all the coalition partners; or under a new umbrella identity; or both. It should not be in your name, as the convener.

CONVENE AND GUIDE THOSE ORGANISATIONS THAT CAN REACH SUPPORTERS DIRECTLY. You should not be engaging with the general public directly. This is a coalition partner role.

DIRECT ADVOCACY: You learn that a major player - let's say the Prime Minister - may be making decisions based on partial information, lacking some key piece of the puzzle that members of your coalition can provide. So, you draft a letter or talking points for a meeting with the Prime Minister that you help set up, you negotiate with the coalition on the text to minimise how much the messaging is watered down, and then you ask for organisations in the coalition to opt in: to sign on to the letter or agree to use the talking points in the meeting.



HOW PUBLIC

IS TOO PUBLIC?



Obviously, you cannot be completely invisible. It is who you know that forms your network, from which you will build coalitions: that is your greatest asset. The strategic connections that you make across your network are essential to your added value. So some people will need to know who you are: the organisations and individuals that will form your coalitions, journalists, politicians, donors and more. Component 4/Pg 27 on the Power of Exceptional Networks gives guidance on how you can build these connections without the need for a public profile: new relationships will open up to you, and existing ones will reach new strengths, *specifically because* you're not seeking public profile.

CASE STUDY: WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES TO EXPOSE THE HARM DONE BY SAUDI RAIDS IN YEMEN

Violence in Yemen escalated rapidly following the start of a Saudi Arabia-led bombing campaign in March 2015. Both sides were breaching international humanitarian law (IHL) by failing to distinguish between civilians and combatants. Crisis Action built a coalition focused on increasing the pressure for a ceasefire, particularly by focussing collective efforts on one of Saudi Arabia's main allies: the UK.



In order to put the UK government under sufficient political pressure for them to change course, Crisis Action orchestrated a concerted media campaign, building bespoke coalitions to show very publicly that the UK's support for the Saudi abuses in Yemen was:

- **Harming civilians:** in public statements, online activism, as well as new research that Crisis Action helped make into front-page news, Yemeni and international human rights and humanitarian organisations reiterated the harm all sides were doing to civilians in Yemen.

- **Making the UK less safe:** the military campaign was creating the conditions for violent extremism to flourish. We helped Major General Tim Cross (retired) and Nawal al-Maghafi to make this case in two high-profile opinion pieces, the former using his military experience in Iraq, the latter speaking to her experience inside Yemen.

- **Illegal.** This argument was made in two hard-hitting broadcasts on the BBC's *Newsnight* programme, one opinion piece by the UK's former Ambassador to the UN, and a legal opinion that Amnesty, Saferworld and others had commissioned from respected lawyer Philippe Sands QC. In response, the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee Crispin Blunt MP committed to an inquiry into UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia, which was launched in March 2016.

- **Represented an outsourcing of UK foreign policy:** former International Development Secretary, Andrew Mitchell, argued that the UK had effectively given Saudi Arabia licence to wage war in such a way that caused unnecessary civilian casualties.

Crisis Action played a significant role in all the elements of this sustained, coordinated media campaign - but we were not publicly associated with any of them. This shows what's possible working behind the scenes, and how powerful it can be: amplifying a series of different voices speaking out from their own experience can carry more weight, be more authentic, than the same coalition repeating the same message.



The campaign had the impact we were seeking. On 15th December, a ceasefire was agreed between the Saudi-led coalition and the Houthis in UN-mediated talks. We heard directly from the UN's envoy on Yemen, and from policy-makers in the UK and the League of Arab States, that the coordinated public pressure had been instrumental in getting the UK and Saudi Arabia to push for a ceasefire.



Fighting resumed some months later, but during that ceasefire bombs were not dropped, lives were not taken. That is the impact smart coalitions can have.



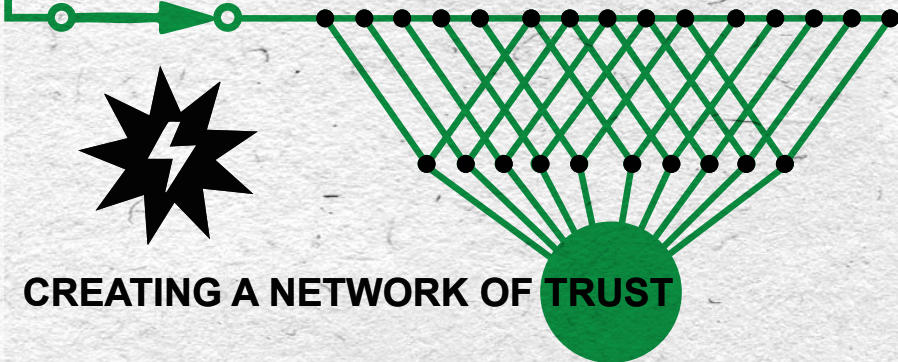


COMPONENT 4: THE POWER OF EXCEPTIONAL NETWORKS

Your role as the strategic convener is like wiring an electrical circuit: you make the connection between diverse elements into a circuit that maximises the voltage surging through them. As well as having the savvy strategic sense to design the most efficient, powerful circuit, you also need to have access to the right elements to make the circuit work.



For instance, if you need to build a coalition of doctors, you will need to have connections to the medical world. If legal or military voices will have influence, then you will need connections with people in those sectors. The greater the size, diversity, and commitment of your network, the more impact you will have.



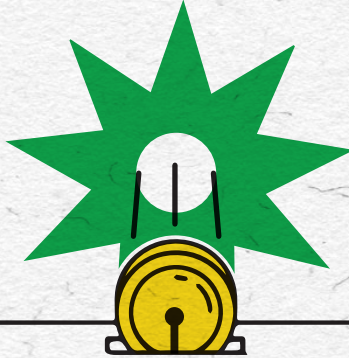
CREATING A NETWORK OF TRUST

Organisations from your network that opt in to a specific coalition will be involved in its success, building their commitment to this model of organising for impact. By the very nature of clever coalitions, though, not every member of the wider ecosystem needs to or will opt in to every tactic or even strategy you work on. Some may not opt in because their priorities lie elsewhere at that moment. Others may not opt in because they do not agree with the approach you're proposing: that is inevitable and perfectly legitimate. People have different views on how to make change happen, and your goal is not to get everyone to agree but to have impact.

Left untended, relationships can sour due to a sense of exclusion or being ignored. Yet at some point down the line, you may need to work together because your collective impact will be less if you don't. So you must constantly nurture relationships so they can endure periods of disconnection and withstand specific disagreements.



HERE'S HOW CRISIS ACTION DOES IT.



Crucially, we seek buy-in. Literally. Crisis Action's partners – the foremost human rights, humanitarian, and peacebuilding organisations in the world, sharing the goal of civilians in war zones being safe from harm – pay a small contribution to Crisis Action as their partnership fee ⁽¹⁾. The total partnership contributions from all our partners come to less than 10% of Crisis Action's income: the value is more about securing commitment to collaboration than it is a source of revenue.

The partnership must be win-win. In our case, on top of the impact partners contribute to in any specific coalition, the benefits they gain include:

Closer relationships with distant peers and new allies around the world through the Crisis Action network

Access to decision-makers, policy-makers, creatives, journalists, or other useful contacts through discussions that Crisis Action convenes

Regular intel updates, based on information entrusted by decision-makers to Crisis Action as a behind-the-scenes connector

Being able to influence which conflicts Crisis Action works on, and so multiply the impact that one organisation would otherwise have.

(1) We do not seek any contribution from organisations from the Global South.

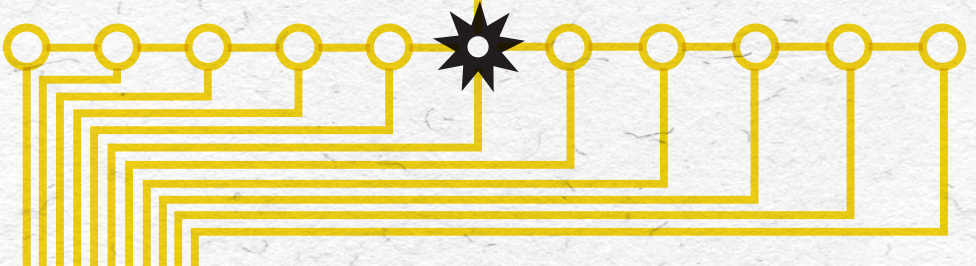


GOING BEYOND THE USUAL SUSPECTS

As the Syria Case Study on Pg 33 shows, the usual good people saying the usual good things is not usually enough to change hard political calculus, especially in matters of war and peace. Think of a school playground: when the goody-two-shoes says, 'play nicely', or even shouts it, or even writes it in a strongly-worded letter, the bully won't necessarily put the stick down.



To have impact, the strategy will probably need complementary coalitions. And to build those coalitions means being able to activate connections beyond the usual voices. This can be tricky when you've got a big public brand behind you; it might sound impossible when you're behind the scenes (Component 3/Pg 21). But far from it. In fact, being behind the scenes means you can build relationships in a way that others may find harder. Below are some more pointers for building relations with three categories of potential allies. These should give you a sense of how to approach others you might need to engage.





MAKING FRIENDS TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE

One overall tip for building a fantastic network: be generous with your connections. Link people together, suggest potential allies. By being helpful to your allies you will become important glue that connects distant people and organisations together. You will create new, powerful collaborations but also goodwill, so new recruits become connectors for you, introducing you to new people. Be helpful in turn to them, and they can become allies and connectors, too. And so your network grows.

MEDIA:

Although you shouldn't be quoted in the media or be quoted in political debates, you have a lot to offer journalists and politicians. Some of them will be surprised or confused about you saying, 'We are seeking no public profile'. 'Why don't you want credit for what you're doing?', they may ask. 'What are you hiding?' But...

You can build trusting collaborations with JOURNALISTS because you:



ARE NOT PUSHING AN ORGANISATIONAL PROFILE: rather than always pitching the same voice and the same angle, you can find voices from your network – the interesting, often unheard stories delivered by powerful voices that journalists can't find alone and that will serve your mission.



CAN CONNECT THEM WITH LEADING EXPERTS, voices from 'the ground', and other spokespeople.



Are a **ONE-STOP SHOP** to connect them with briefings, analysis, and recommendations sourced from your network, as well as the latest intelligence on private political discussions.



Will **BUILD BESPOKE MEDIA PRODUCTS** with them, giving them advance notice, and bringing together quotes, opinion pieces, data, and images to suit the outlet.

Each time you provide another authentic story to journalists they will be reminded: you are valuable *because* you do not seek public profile for yourself.








POLICY-MAKERS:

To get a sense of political opportunities and moments, to inform what coalitions would be most influential, and to learn from what approaches have or haven't worked in the past, connections with policy-makers are invaluable.

You can build trusting relationships with policy-makers because you offer:

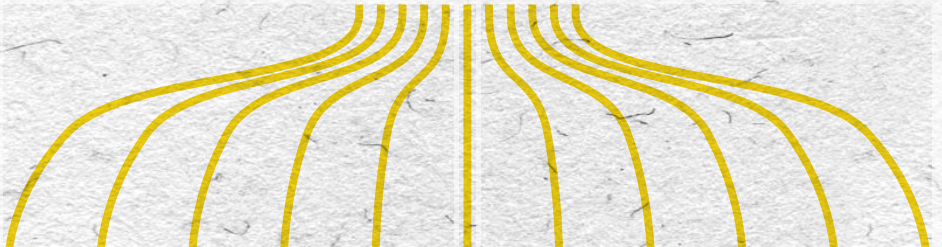
-  **EFFICIENCY:** you can bring together partners into one meeting or briefing, streamlining the process for policy-makers.
-  **QUALITY:** it won't always be the same organisation or individual who is best informed or the most creative. You can link them with the most appropriate voices for the conversation they want to have, while making sure it also serves the coalition's goal.
-  **POLITICAL SPACE:** through campaigns, media, and lobbying work that you coordinate, you can create political space – public or Parliamentary support, for instance – for ideas policy-makers want to pursue. You can strategise with political allies on what will build most energy around your shared goals.



**YOU SHOULD BE UP FRONT, THOUGH:
YOU DON'T WORK FOR GOVERNMENTS.**



There may well be times when you coordinate approaches that criticise the Government when they are acting counter to the goals of the coalitions you organise. You will triangulate the information they give you. You can be useful; but you will not be used.








FUNDING:





Most likely, you'll need some financial support to sustain your role as a strategic convener. You can be an attractive partner for DONORS because supporting you means they are:

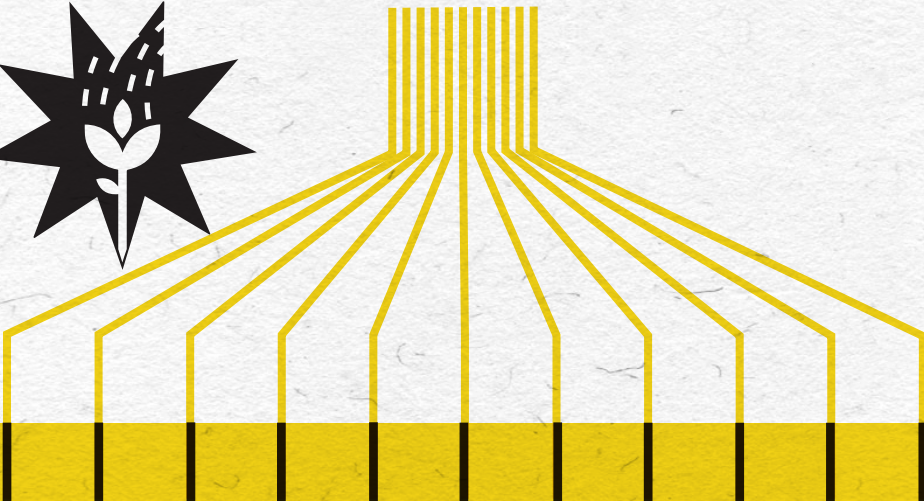
 Leveraging greater impact from their existing portfolios: donors may already fund some members of your network. The model of organising for impact leverages greater impact by enhancing the effectiveness of the broader sector.

 Catalysing a whole network, not just one organisation.

 Facilitating nimble work: in response to new opportunities or threats, you will organise bespoke coalitions that can move quickly, rather than waiting for everyone to agree to a course of action.

 Encouraging efficiency: as the strategic convener, you ensure that coalitions complement one another, enhancing the overall impact.

 Supporting campaigning that is informed by the best political and situational analysis: through your network of well-placed partners and policy-makers, you are helping the coalition make savvy judgements about what will have the greatest impact.

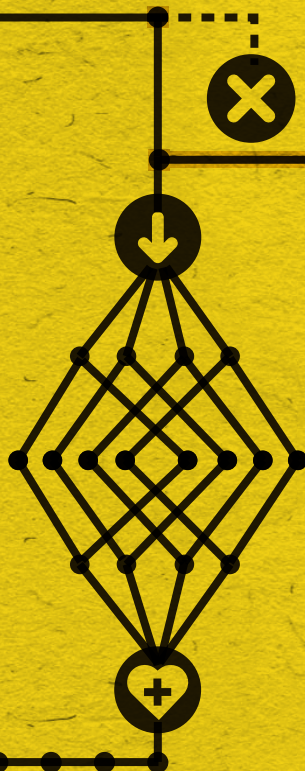


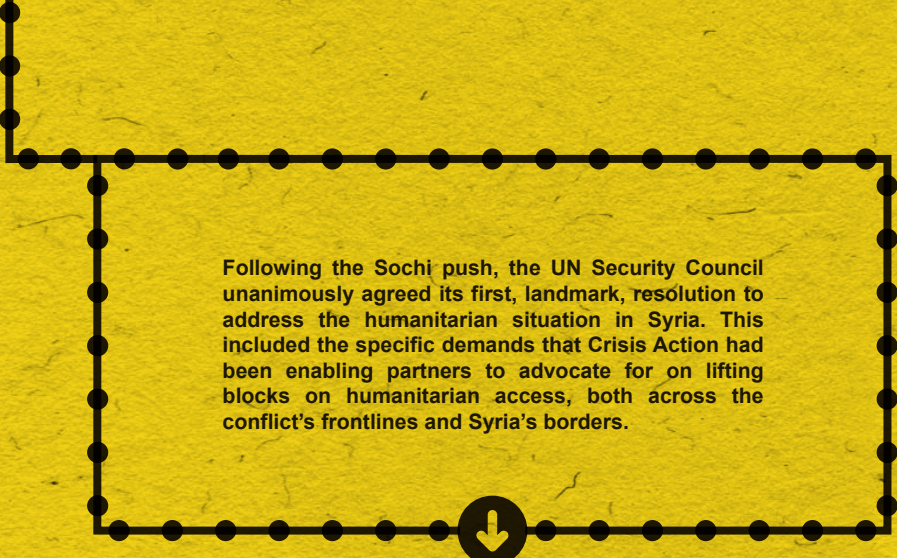
CASE STUDY: EXPLOITING EXCEPTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS TO GET AID TO STARVING PEOPLE IN SYRIA

Russia is infamously hard to influence. Yet on Syria they have been at the centre of the power analysis. In 2014, hundreds of thousands of people were in need of food and medical supplies in northern Syria. Some aid was getting over the border, but because the Syrian Government was denying aid agencies permission to cross from Turkey, the supply was a trickle, and vulnerable to attack. A UN Security Council Resolution would give the UN permission to take aid across the border. Agreement from Russia would be critical to securing that resolution.


There came a window of opportunity. Russia was to host the Winter Olympics in Sochi, in February 2014. The eyes of the world were watching the country and its President, Vladimir Putin.

Having identified this opportunity with our partners, Crisis Action had to mobilise voices that could appeal to President Putin's sense of global statesmanship and Russian stewardship. We reached out to allies like former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Deputy UN Secretary-General, Mark Malloch-Brown. Because they agreed with the theory of change and saw their role in seeing it realised, they not only signed a letter, but secured the support of a further 49 former top diplomats, philanthropists and human rights defenders, including former US Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, former NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, and former Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher. Their joint letter was published in Russia's *Novaya Gazeta*, the UK's *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, and France's *Le Monde*.







Following the Sochi push, the UN Security Council unanimously agreed its first, landmark, resolution to address the humanitarian situation in Syria. This included the specific demands that Crisis Action had been enabling partners to advocate for on lifting blocks on humanitarian access, both across the conflict's frontlines and Syria's borders.



"The Security Council had failed to address the humanitarian crisis in nearly three years of fighting. Crisis Action identified an opening to get agreement; and they engaged their network of contacts to bring together this incredibly impressive array of respected global figures. From people who were involved in the negotiations, we know this was influential in getting Resolution 2139."



Lord Malloch-Brown, former Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.



It still took a few months, but thanks to the collective efforts that secured this Resolution, UN aid trucks crossed Syria's borders for the first time.



COMPONENT 5: CREATIVE TACTICS



PICTURE THIS:

A government is about to sign a secret oil deal that will lay waste to land sacred to indigenous communities and precious for its biodiversity. The contract will be signed in two days' time. But then, out of the blue, something arrives on the President's desk: a private letter from a coalition of environmental charities asking them to stop. Does the President feel concerned, is their position weak, their resolve trembling?



PROBABLY NOT.

A number of things are wrong here. The scale of the effort does not match the scale of the threat. The theory of change seems pretty feeble. It's like putting David up against Goliath but not giving him a sling. These are strategic faults that the convenor should have worked with the coalition to address earlier on (as seen in Component 2/Pg 19).

But also at the tactical level, it smacks of business-as-usual. When international norms are under threat, when societies are grappling with division and anger, when many in power are increasingly distant from those affected by their decisions, we cannot afford to stick with business-as-usual. We need to get creative.



The toolbox available to campaigners, organisers, and activists is more jam-packed than ever before.

TECHNOLOGY:

The Saydnaya Project gave people the chance to take a virtual tour through the Government of Syria's torture prisons, accessing testimonies and audio-visual content mapped out in a true-to-life visualisation of Saydnaya detention centre. This was co-realised by Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture.



SMART USE OF CELEBRITIES:

Celebrities are often used in campaigning, but Greenpeace didn't want Paul McCartney's mass appeal. They partnered with him because they knew that Russian President, Vladimir Putin, was a big fan of the ex-Beatle: his appeal for the release of 30 activists and journalists protesting at exploitation of the Arctic for oil would be more effective than anything else Greenpeace alone could do. And it worked. The 30 were allowed to return home.



ART AND WAR:

In military slang, Predator drone operators often refer to kills as 'bug splats', since viewing the body through a grainy video image gives the sense of an insect being crushed. To challenge this insensitivity as well as raise awareness of civilian casualties, an artist collective installed a massive portrait facing up in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan, where drone attacks regularly occur. Now, when viewed by a drone camera, what an operator sees on his screen is not an anonymous dot on the landscape, but an innocent child victim's face, created and put in place by a collective of artists.



MAKING THE FRONTLINE GLOBAL:

Many Strong Voices (MSV) brings together small island nations with Arctic communities. They face a common threat: climate change. Through this initiative they are now part of a common movement, with a unique voice in climate talks.



DEMOCRACY OF IDEAS...

The strategic convener can connect members of your coalition with new ideas and new approaches, expanding the menu of tactical options to make the coalition as effective as possible. As described earlier, being behind the scenes can open doors to powerful collaborations. Use that licence to bring together artists, advertising companies, activists, whoever can help you and partners generate innovative, powerful ideas. Bringing new people into creative brainstorm adds huge value to the coalition.

...DICTATORSHIP OF DELIVERY

The ideal you're looking for is **DEMOCRACY OF IDEAS, DICTATORSHIP OF DELIVERY**: you have a vital project management role to efficiently bring the best ideas to life, ensuring responsibilities are clear, people are held to account, and delivery is kept on track.

This isn't a project management guide: there are plenty of other resources out there to help with that. But, what you should keep in mind is that members of your network have put their trust in you to help develop a robust collective strategy – and to see it through to delivery.

As the behind the scenes convener, you should continue to listen and lead throughout the strategy cycle:

CHOOSING WHAT ISSUE TO FOCUS ON: you can find tips for this in the Clever Coalitions and Strategic Convener sections.

DESIGN: as the strategic convener, you can decide when you have the critical mass of support for a particular approach, get the strategy agreed, and then set out an action plan. This should set out what will be done, who is responsible for each step, who will be consulted and informed, and what are the deadlines.

DELIVERY: implementation of the action plan, ensuring the whole team has a clear, common understanding of:

Who needs to do what by when, and alignment on why;

Where they can get what they need to deliver – whether information or support;

How to flag and solve problems, and a culture where this is encouraged;

What project management systems/tools are being used and how.

EVALUATION: you can help partners learn so that collective impact and efficiency are greater for every subsequent effort. You can lead on collective evaluations of impact against the original objectives, reflect on lessons, and ensure these are built into the next strategy. There's more on this in the next section.

CASE STUDY: AIMING HIGH MEANS YOU CAN'T BE AFRAID TO FAIL: THE STORY OF THE LIFE JACKETS...

There are times when big ideas are needed to shift the politics. To force action, you'll need to pull off campaign tactics that take you outside of your comfort zone. Here's an example of where Crisis Action ventured into the unknown, aimed for something way beyond what we'd ever done before – and we failed. And we'll also explain why we don't regret trying.

The G20 group of the leaders of the world's largest industrialised countries was meeting in Antalya, Turkey, not far from the Syrian border, but the Syria conflict was barely going to feature on the meeting's agenda. The absurdity of this was shocking: war was raging mere miles away from the conference venue; Turkey was hosting over one million refugees. Avoiding the Syria crisis and the regional refugee crisis was clearly a deliberate decision – one that would need bold action to reverse.



Our answer was...life jackets. Many of the Syrians and others who made the dangerous bid for safety in Europe had life jackets for the journey, life jackets they discarded when they landed in Greece and Italy. We set out to team up with a Syrian artist, provide him with some of these life jackets, each of them with their own poignant story, and create an art installation in Antalya that would grab the media's attention and confront the G20 with the human cost of Syria crisis. (The life jacket idea itself was later proved to be really powerful: other groups secured widespread media coverage over the next year later with a similar idea in Greece, London, and New York.)

The first stage went well – a Syrian artist had a fantastic concept for the installation. Then things got trickier. To collect the life jackets, one team member had to travel from Beirut to Istanbul to Thessaloniki to Lesbos in a couple of days of delays and cancellations. Life jackets secured and in a suitcase, he was ready to head to Antalya. But the Turkish government had tightened their restrictions on any campaign activity. Venue after venue was refusing to host the installation. And then the events company we were working with were given a police escort to the airport.

The bottom had fallen out of the plan.

There's plenty we learnt from this. Yet here's why we thought it was worthwhile trying – and sharing with you.

The impact we were aiming for was worth taking risks for: it had high potential pay-off at the G20 and beyond.

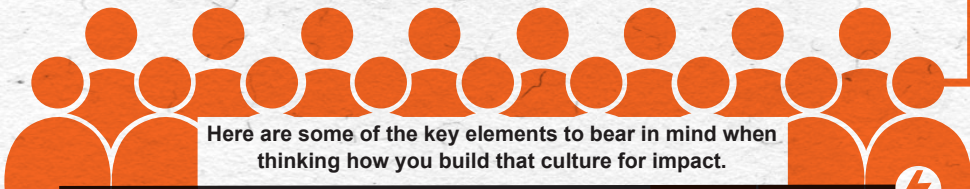
The opportunity cost wasn't huge: even in hindsight it was not clear what the team time and energy could have been used for more effectively at that moment.

Aiming high paid enormous dividends in team morale: pushing the boundaries of what's considered possible has a lasting impact. The team will continue to aim high.

COMPONENT 6: A CULTURE THAT'S HUNGRY FOR IMPACT



You are, we're guessing, a human being. We've made the second radical assumption that you're likely to work with other human beings. Connecting brilliant humans together is the culture of your organisation. Who you are, who you hire, how you inspire and what you reward – all of this can create a team that's not just organised for impact, but hungry for it.



Here are some of the key elements to bear in mind when thinking how you build that culture for impact.

HIRING

You're looking for someone with first-class strategic sense, with audacious ambition in what they want to see changed in the world – and willingness to work behind the scenes at the service of the cause. You will not find that combination of attitude and aptitude everywhere. Such 'servant leaders' who put impact before ego are rare – but you shouldn't compromise on it. Hiring the right people is essential for bringing organising for impact to life.

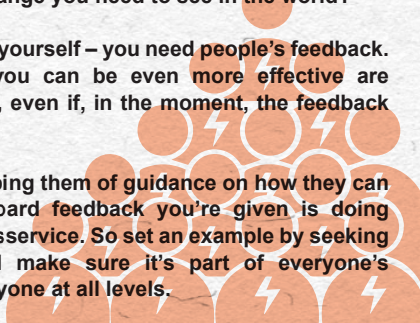


GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

If you hire a team, your shared guiding star is what impact you're seeking to have in the world. But sometimes you aren't sure if you're getting any nearer that guiding star, or drifting off course. Is the work you're doing contributing as much as it could to securing the change you need to see in the world?

You can't always answer that question yourself – you need **people's feedback**. Other people's reflections on how you can be even more effective are something to seek out and to cherish, even if, in the moment, the feedback can be hard to hear.

Not giving colleagues feedback is robbing them of guidance on how they can have more impact. Not taking on board feedback you're given is doing yourself, and the cause you serve, a disservice. So set an example by seeking out feedback and by giving it, and make sure it's part of everyone's responsibility to give feedback to everyone at all levels.





ORGANISE YOUR TEAMS AROUND IMPACT

Crisis Action has offices in eight countries. Everyone in those offices has office-related responsibilities, like building the network (see The Power of Exceptional Networks/Pg 27). You could call those our functional responsibilities. Each of us also has campaigning responsibilities as member of a team working on a specific conflict, say on South Sudan, or Yemen, or Syria.

We have multiple identities, therefore: in part we identify with our functions within the organisation, and in part we identify with external change we're seeking. That change is our guiding star, our organising principle. By organising teams around impact not just function, you will build people's loyalty to securing that goal above. You will inspire action towards that goal.



CELEBRATE IMPACT – AND FAILURE IN PURSUIT OF IMPACT

Celebrate impact! Ok, so some of the goals we're seeking are pretty massive. And you can't just wait for those to be achieved before celebrating impact. "What, you mean you haven't fixed South Sudan yet? Not good enough."

But the big changes can build up from a series of smaller wins, so take time and give space to celebrate each of them. Create a feel-good reward for the team every time they make progress towards the goal. The crucial thing here is celebrating progress, not celebrating work. Attending meetings, writing letters, they all create the impression of *doing something*, but if they're not *changing anything* then what are we celebrating?

Sometimes a well-thought through effort will fail. There's reason to celebrate that, too. It's a harmful illusion that organisations only have success. If a team sets audacious goals, makes a series of well-informed bets with how they allocate their time and energies and resources to achieve those goals, they may still fail. If you criticise that behaviour, the team will lower their ambition, and achieve less. Reward it, and they'll continue to aim high – and they will crack how to reach those ambitious goals.





IMPACT. IMPACT. IMPACT: MEASURING PROGRESS

In a culture that's hungry for impact, everyone will want to know how they can have more impact in the future. This means everyone seeking out feedback (see Pg 27), but also knowing what has and hasn't worked in the past. That learning process will make your team more effective.

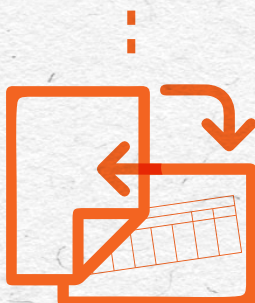
That's why it's so important to measure your impact: recording change, spotting correlations, and pursuing evidence for attribution. Crisis Action uses an 'evidence of change' database. In this we record any small shift in policy, the subtle concessions in private meetings, the tweets suggesting a new direction. In short, everything that gives an indication that change is happening. The big changes often come about from the accumulation of incremental changes, so track them all.

Measuring change and correlation with your activities isn't enough: you also need to know how the change came about and what your role was in it. Go to source: use your connections with decision-makers (see The Power of Exceptional Networks/Pg 30) to ask what is driving the impact, what influenced the decisions being made – to what can you *attribute* the change. And log this in your own Evidence of Change database.



It's by using this database that we can tell the stories like those dotted through this Handbook of how we contributed to life-saving changes.

More importantly, it guides us towards how we can continually be more effective.



EVIDENCE OF CHANGE DATABASE

EVIDENCE OF CHANGE DATABASE					COMMENTS	FOLLOW-UP
WHAT	WHEN	WHO	Identify which ACTIVITY/ OUTPUT GROUP this result is associated with	Identify which INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES this result is associated with	Identify which LONG-TERM OUTCOMES this result is associated with	State any reflections/ learnings. Identify if result was unintended or and what this means for the Campaign
A RESULT you have observed that indicates a change related to the Campaign	DATE or period of time in which this result was observed	Who was RESPONSIBLE from your team or from partner org?				Identify any follow-up/next steps

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Think of the social injustice you want to see ended. Think of how traditional, business-as-usual models have so far failed to have the impact you need to see. You know it's time to try something new.

Here's a reminder of how you can try something that can help you have impact even in the most complex of situations.

1

AVOID THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR BY BUILDING OPT-IN COALITIONS: What you're seeking is a critical mass of partners – a committed group of sufficient talents to make a difference and who share a vision.

2

SERVE THE CAUSE, NOT THE COALITION, and not an institutional interest. Your role is to maximise the impact of collective action. Staying behind the scenes means you can be the honest broker for building coalitions of maximum impact.

3

IT IS THE VOICE OF THE COALITION THAT MATTERS: you are the strategic convenor, building coalitions with the expertise and credibility to make a difference. If you seek public attention as the convenor, you undermine the trust that your partners put in you; they will question whether you are organising for impact or for ego.

4

CREATE BESPOKE COALITIONS: different decision-makers listen to different constituencies. Different arguments can be better made by different voices. The world isn't one-size-fits-all, so nor should your coalitions be.

5

LISTEN AND LEAD: bring together enough talent to create a robust strategy. Demonstrate humility to hear others' wisdom, audacity to rally coalitions to higher goals, and determination to propose the way forward that will achieve greatest impact.

6

YOUR NETWORK IS YOUR CURRENCY: look after it, nurture it, and try to make it grow.

7

ENCOURAGE A DEMOCRACY OF IDEAS; INSIST ON A DICTATORSHIP OF DELIVERY: you have a vital role to see the best ideas generated and then brought to life.

8

CULTIVATE A CULTURE HUNGRY FOR IMPACT: your impact won't just come about from structures, but also from who you hire, how you inspire, how the team learns, and what you reward.

Organising for impact in the way described here has brought real change for people in war zones around the world, as the examples within this Handbook have illustrated. From this experience, we are confident that this Handbook can strengthen impact around your work with people suffering so many other injustices, too. That is why we share this with you all.



This model of influencing supercharges the impact and efficiency you and your partners can have. Using this model you can help keep the network's focus on "execution" of the change you're all seeking. This is more effective than more commonly-used models that try to get everyone to agree a common position, which too-often dilutes the power of the coalition and takes longer than expected. As a strategic convener that doesn't seek public recognition, you can build a powerful and trusted network of both local and global actors, crowdsource the most respected analysis and thought leadership, and drive forward the most innovative, impactful and creative solutions.

Jacqueline Muna Musiitwa Founder and Managing Partner, Hoja Law Group, and member of Crisis Action's Board



This book is also available to read and print online - creativecoalitions.org

For further information on Crisis Action's work please go to crisisaction.org

This book was produced in collaboration with Matters of the Earth, an international collective of educators, creatives and practitioners who create materials for impact and action.

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