

SEMI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE
NEW YORK CITY
JULY 13-14, 2010

Beyond the 60-Page Report: Conveying Complexity with New Media Tools

Tuesday, July 13, 2010, 1:30-3:00 pm

Facilitator:

Elizabeth Eagen, Program Officer, Human Rights and Governance and Information Programs, Open Society Institute

Panelists:

Tom Longley, Lead, Visualizing Information for Advocacy, Tactical Tech

Marek Tuszynski, Co-Founder and Director of Programmes and Technology, Tactical Technology Collective (Tactical Tech)

Jenni Wolfson, Managing Director, Witness



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Elizabeth Eagen facilitated an exercise in which participants were asked to stand in a line which would represent a spectrum structured on a continuum. One side would represent “Always Agree”, the middle “Indifferent,” and the opposite side “Never Agree.” Based on a statement read by Eagen the participants would place themselves within the spectrum which identified their opinion. Participants were then asked to explain why they had stood in that particular space. The following statements and answers are listed below:

Statement: A video that gets viewed by 10 million people has more impact than one viewed by 5 people.

Answer: Always Agree; Depends on what you mean by impact?

Statement: Visual presentation can make or break a report's impact.

Answer: Always Agree; People remember what they see.

Answer (Eagen): Sometimes visual presentation isn't necessary. It may depend more on other kinds of presentation.

Marek Tuszynski focused on visualization or a visual representation of information (not necessarily from human rights field) using examples and cases from the US and other countries. Currently in the US, the image is losing its importance and the text has been more effective. Until now imagery was usually used by church, government and other powers.

- *Why do we need a 60-Page Report?*

One approach for sharing information is a report with references. Another approach is social advertisement, an example of visualization, where one image tells the story.

- *Why is visualization important?*
 1. It can communicate a story instantly and evoke emotion
 2. Makes a problem easier to understand and provides space for individual interpretation
 3. Shows relationships and compares elements
 4. Reveals hidden patterns and grasps attention
 5. Illustrates complexity and enables exploration

Visualization makes complex information easier to read, understand, remember and explore.

- *Some advice...*
 1. Visualization requires the cohesion of mixed skills: data analysis, critical thinking, design, campaigning, etc. When data and information is complex, ensure that the team is analyzing and representing its experiences and has a diverse set of skills.
 2. Visualization is a creative process and requires a lot of experimentation. Secure resources and time to experiment. It will enhance and extend research and documentation.
 3. Engaging the information provokes discussions and help steer actions. Critical selection of information, solid evidence and clear language of a story is critical when using visual information.
 4. The traditional, linear process of documenting human rights incidents is being challenged by new tools and tactics. Look beyond the visual surface: is the information authentic; are the sources verified?
 5. The visualization process forces us to re-examine the coherency of our information / data and its uses. Encourage advocates to use visualization as a tracking and analysis tool.

- Case studies of visualization are available at Tactical Technology Collective.

Eagen continues the spectrum exercise by posing another statement:

The most impactful human rights message will have some sort of graphic information.

Eagen made the point that not all images are going to impact people in the same way.

Answer: Strongly Agree; Witness has documented graphically and has been the most effective in presenting information.

Jenni Wolfson started her presentation with a tag line: "Everyone has a story, every story can create change." She then discussed the complementary nature of text and video. Video has a different impact. Witness empowers local groups to use video equipment. She believes that video is a means to an end.

- *Five trends affecting human rights advocacy:*

- *Accessibility*: Greater degree of media literacy which allows people and NGOs to connect through media about human rights issues;
- *Participation*: Mass network can create and share content;
- *Accountability*: Issues of safety, security and ethics need to be addressed. We must think about the responsibility that goes along with uploaded information;
- *Amplification*: Expand the knowledge of human rights abuses;
- *Mobilization*: Influence smaller key groups and stakeholders.

Wolfson demonstrated the impact of video by using a case study discussing land rights in Kenya. The story was told by the community itself as an evidentiary purpose. Landmarks of a video advocacy campaign include safety, security and consent. For an advocacy campaign to be effective it must have the following: advocacy goal, target audiences, message, story, distribution, archive and impact evaluation.

Wolfson discussed another human rights issue, elder abuse, conveying how the campaign used videos in order to convey a message targeted toward key-decision makers.

- *5 Pillars of Video Advocacy*:
 1. Video made for a reason / not just about something.
 2. Video made for a specific audience.
 3. Video with a clear and doable request for action from the audience
 4. Video must have a strong message; What do you want your audience to do?
 5. Video that can be seen by many and / or the right people is essential.

Wolfson offered questions that organizations can ask about the video/media efficacy of strategies used in their own projects: Is the video the right choice; How is the organization dealing with informed consent; Who is responsible for new media in the organization; Who is the organization planning with; How will they monitor and evaluate the impact?

Questions and Answers

Q: Can you tell me a time where a video advocacy campaign didn't work?

A (Wolfson): I worked in Uganda with an organization where people were displaced by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and were subjected to human rights abuses. The organization took on so many issues and did not effectively screen the video they had created. Organizations should focus on incremental change and not try to take on everything at one time.

Q: How do you view the saturation issue or the bombardment of many forms of media in the general population?

A (Wolfson): A successful campaign must be attached to a story with a strategy or a message.

Q: Why is it so important for the human rights community to use these tools and how can we evaluate its success?

A (Tuszynski): It's very difficult to evaluate efficacy. Focus should be on building a network and turning a message into action.

A (Eagen): At this stage it is important to just do it rather than spend time on measuring the impact.