

SESSION 11

How Do We Share Responsibilities and Results?

Session Objectives

- To analyze how to create a culture of power-sharing and participation within and among organizations working together.
- To discuss strategies for capitalizing on the talents and experiences of individual partners in a joint campaign effort.
- To work as a team to create a hypothetical organization that embodies all of the positive characteristics examined throughout the workshop.

Suggestions for Facilitation

Read aloud the following story about how a number of organizations collaborated to pass Malaysia's Domestic Violence Act. Discuss among the group the organizations' strategies for coordinating their efforts and sharing responsibilities. The questions that come after may help guide the group discussion. Following the questions is an exercise designed to help participants imagine an organization, institution, or campaign of their own making that meets the organizational criteria they have identified over the course of the workshop sessions. In Session 12, participants will have the opportunity to share their hypothetical organizations with the whole group.

Facilitation methods for this session could involve holding the discussion with the entire group or dividing the participants into smaller groups (see Appendix B for further suggestions).

The Campaign to Pass a Domestic Violence Act in Malaysia

Malaysia was the first Muslim society to pass and implement legislation recognizing domestic violence as a crime. The interfaith effort to pass a domestic violence bill and the political will to make it operative law took eleven years. It was the result of the far reaching and tenacious grassroots efforts of thousands of supportive women and men. Ultimately, the fluid, democratic, and participatory processes engaged by the women's organizations and concerned individuals involved brought about the success of the Domestic Violence Act (DVA).

The story of the passage of the DVA begins in 1982 when Malaysia's Women's Aid Organization (WAO) opened the first battered women's shelter. The difficulties faced by the social workers and lawyers attempting to protect and assist women victims of violence quickly exposed enormous weaknesses in Malaysia's laws. That same year, the Association of Women Lawyers (AWL) began monitoring the Malaysian courts' increasing bias against victims of domestic violence and rape. The Women's Section of the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC), an umbrella organization of several trade unions, was experiencing its own difficulties prosecuting cases of sexual harassment because there were no laws to support such cases. The University Women's Association's (UWA) research on women in employment had recently revealed dire statistics showing that the increase in opportunities for women's employment had also exposed women, both urban and rural, to an array of exploitative situations. Meanwhile, an extensive study issued by the Selangor and Federal Territory Consumers Association (SCA) demonstrated the media's



significant role in perpetuating negative stereotypes and myths about women. Recognizing that their research and findings on violence against women stemmed from the same root causes, in 1985 these five organizations came together to form a joint action group (JAG) to work together on a common agenda to promote and protect women.

Soon after the formation of JAG, its members decided to convene nationwide consciousness-raising seminars, workshops, and exhibitions on violence against women. Each of the five organizations took on specific responsibilities relating to the coordination of the events. Because the WAO had well-equipped offices with phones and fax machines, it became the center of JAG activities, with WAO supervising much of the administrative work. The other organizations assisted by taking on a variety of key responsibilities. Members of AWL drafted a domestic violence bill while the MTUC, UWA, and SCA coordinated seminars and workshops and mobilized their constituencies to press legislators to support domestic violence legislation. Every March 8th on International Women's Day, JAG held exhibitions, signature drives, concerts, walkathons, and protests to draw attention to the issue of violence against women.

Soon other organizations and individuals joined the campaign, lending their time, ideas, personnel, and resources to JAG's advocacy and media strategies. In the early years of the campaign, meetings were often held in JAG members' homes, with participants gathering in each others' kitchens to write their letters and reports. As JAG grew, the complexity of coordinating its activities grew as well. With over 17 organizations and hundreds of individuals volunteering for JAG, eventually a full-time coordinator was needed. To meet the costs of covering the salary of the JAG coordinator, every month each organization contributed an amount to her salary.

One of JAG's most important outreach efforts focused on the Malaysian press. Although negative portrayals of women victims still persisted in the media, over the years a groundswell of media support helped turn public opinion in favor of passing a domestic violence act. Moreover, members of Parliament were beginning to voice their support for such legislation. A number of Muslim religious authorities, representatives of the Malaysian government's Islamic Development Department and the members of Parliament who supported these factions' conservative religious views, objected arguing that a domestic violence act should not apply to Muslims who make up roughly 50 percent of Malaysia's population.

At all times JAG advocated for a domestic violence law that protected all women. The Muslim women's feminist organization, Sisters in Islam (SIS),

worked with JAG to develop advocacy strategies that responded to the Islamic authorities' objection. SIS used arguments from the Qur'an to make their case that nothing in the DVA violated Islamic principles. They charged that if the act were only to apply to non-Muslims, the government would in effect be supporting the idea that while it would be crime for a non-Muslim to beat his wife, it would be perfectly lawful for a Muslim to do so. Members of SIS held meetings with the Deputy Minister in charge of Islamic Affairs to press their support for the bill. In the end, the Deputy Minister agreed that passage of such an act was consistent with Islam. In 1994 the Act was passed and two years later it was fully operational.

Asked what advice she would give to others planning a multi-organizational campaign, founding member of JAG, Ivy Josiah replied, "Have a clear vision of your issue, discuss your plan among all your members, identify who is in charge of each activity, divide the work according to the skills of the representatives of the organizations, create task lists with timeframes, have a paid full-time coordinator, and work closely with the media—go to them with ideas, facts, figures, and the names of people they can interview . . . and also remember to have fun."²⁵

Questions for Discussion

- What issues did JAG's original members seek to address? How does the domestic violence legislation address these issues?
- Why was it so important for JAG to press for domestic violence legislation that covered both Muslims and non-Muslims? What might have been gained or lost by the passage of a bill that only applied to non-Muslims?
- How were the members of JAG strengthened by their joining the coalition? Could joining a coalition ever weaken an organization or its campaign efforts? If so, how?
- Why do you think the JAG coalition was so successful? What were the different factors that led to its success?
- What was the media's role in mobilizing support for Malaysia's Domestic Violence Act?
- How does the media in your community respond to women's rights issues? What are some locally relevant strategies that you could use to gain the media's interest and support for political, legislative, or economic campaigns that help women?
- Are there similarities between how a coalition of organizations must share responsibilities and how individuals within a single organization must share responsibilities?

²⁵ Based on materials sent by and telephone interviews with Zainah Anwar and Ivy Josiah on January 3, 2001 and January 4, 2001, respectively, by the Women's Learning Partnership.

- Can you think of another instance in which the creation of a coalition helped champion a cause? List its disadvantages and advantages.
- What elements must be emphasized at the individual and organizational levels for the creation of any successful coalition?
- What are the criteria you could use to measure its success?

Exercise: Building a Learning Organization (Part 1)

Allow approximately one hour and 15 minutes for this exercise.

1. Have the group break into teams of three or four to identify a social cause (local, national, or international) that all members of the team would like to address. The cause can be very broad, such as ending hunger or promoting women's rights, or it can be very specific to a place or time, such as the clean-up of a nearby lake or changing the length of the school day for students.
2. Once a common cause has been identified, team members should discuss how they would set up an organization, institution, or campaign to address the cause, and why they are making the decisions they are making. Among the issues to consider in the organization's establishment are its:
 - Name
 - Vision statement
 - Goals
 - Structure
 - Number and expertise of staff
 - Use of volunteers, if any, and how to make their efforts rewarding
 - How institutional decisions will be made
 - How institutional responsibilities will be divided
 - First project or activity
 - Second project or activity
 - Criteria for measuring success/effectiveness
3. A rapporteur should be chosen on each team to record the description of the organization and the process by which the team came to agree on its name, goals, structure, etc. In the next session, each rapporteur will be asked to describe her team's organization to the whole workshop group. Questions from the group about how and why certain decisions were made will be directed to all members of the team.

In a learning organization,
authority . . . is not mandated;
rather, it emerges as dialogue proceeds.

“The Building Blocks of Leadership”