

Short case study 2 on analysing power and choosing strategies

This is the second of two short-case studies written by Everjoice Winn intended for use in workshops where participants do not have time to read any of the longer more detailed case studies. It is fictional, but based around situations that are common in our work.

People's rights movement is a very well organised coalition of NGOs in Gao, a large country in Central Africa. Gao emerged from a 20 year liberation struggle, and its ruling party is very strong and well organised with structures and systems going right down to community level. At the top is the Politburo which is the major decision making body of the party. It meets at least once every two weeks, and is chaired by the State President. Gao has a parliament made up of 200 members, all of whom are elected through an election every four years.

Since independence from Russia in 1979, Gao has been ruled by the same party, the People's Revolutionary Party, (PRP), which has 90% of the MPS. The other ten percent are from four different parties. PRP's women's leagues and youth leagues are legendary. The President is elected separately from Parliamentarians.

The People's Rights Movement, (PRM), is currently doing advocacy aimed at influencing government policy on HIV and AIDS in the country. Almost one in every three people is infected. The government has put out a bill to be debated by Parliament, which provides for criminalisation of "knowingly" passing HIV to another person. In other words, anyone who knows their HIV status can be sent to prison for at least 10 years if they pass the virus on to another person. The PRM is incensed by

this bill as they believe it is against the human rights of those living with HIV, and it will damage work to prevent the spread of the virus. In particular it believes that it would affect women who are normally the first ones to know their HIV status in marriage – because they get routinely tested when they go to ante-natal clinics.

The law provides for 30 days in which citizens can give input before Parliament debates the bill. The PRM, mobilises its membership to give their views on the bill. They hold workshop throughout the country, discussion forums, media write ins and phone ins etc. Public awareness is raised through these spaces. A big part of this work is aimed at influencing members of parliament so that this bill does not become law.

Members of PRM, spent weeks lobbying individual members of parliament many of whom seem to agree that this is a bad bill. The Movement organises a series of workshops aimed at educating the MPs. However, many will not promise that they will vote positively on the day in parliament.

A week before the bill is due to come before parliament, the PRP holds its national congress. In his opening address the State President carries on about those who are killing our children, how they must be stopped by jailing them. Although he does not talk about the bill directly, many know what he is talking about. His own daughter is currently living with a well known radio DJ whose HIV status is known because he spoke about it on radio.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does formal power operate in this case study?

Who really has the power to make decisions?

2. Taking into account your answer to question 1, how effective do you think PRM's strategy will be?

3. What might you have done differently?