
Iraqi Al-Firdaws Society
Campaign to Prevent Domestic Violence against Girls

May 2019 – June 2020





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New Tactics in Human Rights

New Tactics in Human Rights, a program of the Center for Victims of Torture, emerged as a creator of tactics, a leader of coalitions, and as a center that advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position – one of healing and of reclaiming civic leadership. Since 1999, New Tactics has created unique resources – organized around the analysis of potential solutions rather than that of specific issues, geographic regions, or target groups – that allow activists to clearly recognize the unique elements of their situation, and to seek promising approaches that have worked elsewhere in order to apply them to new regions or issues. Since the program’s creation, human rights activists from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have participated in New Tactics in Human Rights activities, including regional workshops, an International Symposium, web-based discussions, publication development, and more. These activists encouraged New Tactics to provide more focused training and resources in the region. In 2009, New Tactics launched an initiative to support MENA human rights activists. With the generous support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), New Tactics has been able to provide training and mentoring in human rights-based advocacy using the Strategic Effectiveness Method for activists since 2016. The campaign featured here was developed as part of this NED-supported work. For more information:

- <https://www.newtactics.org>
- <https://www.cvt.org>

General Overview

Advocacy Goal

An Iraqi society in which all girls enjoy their right to life.

Human rights–based focus area¹

Non-discrimination, Accountability & Protection

UDHR article

Article 3. Right to Life, Liberty & Security²

Geographic area

Local, particularly in the Nahr Saleh district in Basra.

Advocacy Components³

A challenge for many civil society organizations is distinguishing between being busy with activities and implementing tactical actions that strategically advance an advocacy effort. In order to help organizations better assess how to expend precious resources, this case study offers four action areas that are needed to conduct any advocacy campaign:

- Internal capacity building
- Research
- Mobilization
- Engaging decision-makers

Tactical Aims

New Tactics in Human Rights has defined four primary human rights-based tactical aims: prevention, intervention, restorative, and promotion. This case illustrates the following tactical aim:

- Intervention

Campaign implementation period

May 24, 2019 – June 1, 2020

Campaign Outcome Statement

As a result of the actions implemented by the Iraqi Al-Firdaws Society (IAFS), they the campaign hoped that parents would stop perpetrating violence against their daughters.

¹ Source: The information related to these four areas of rights are adapted from and found in Discover Human Rights: A Human Rights Approach to Social Justice Work, The Advocates for Human Rights. The New Tactics Method utilizes: safety and security; non-discrimination; participation; and protection–accountability.

NOTE: The rights listed in these four “categories” maybe placed in any area depending upon the context where the right is being violated.

For example, Article 23: Right to join trade unions might be placed in “Safety and Security” rather than “Participation” where organizing or joining a union is dangerous.

² Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

³ The identification of the four action areas outlined in the Legacy Tool comes from the advocacy experience of Mr. Faisal Abu Sondos, former Executive Director of The Royal Conservation Society of Jordan (JREDS). Mr. Abu Sondos has been a New Tactics Method Trainer since 2010 and Lead Method Trainer since 2011. While using the New Tactics Strategic Effectiveness Method in his own organizations’ advocacy efforts and coaching other civil society organizations in using the Method he identified these four action areas to assess progress. The benefits and drawbacks regarding the use of technology in each of these advocacy action areas needs examination in relation to the appropriateness for the intended target groups and goals of an advocacy campaign.

Background

Iraqi Al-Firdaws Society was founded in 2004 in Basra. (It was officially registered with the Organizations Department according to the Iraqi Civil Society Organizations Law No. 12 of 2012.) Since then Al-Firdaws Society has worked on many programs related to: women's rights and access to justice, women's roles in peacebuilding and transitional justice initiatives, domestic and gender-based violence, men's roles in societal change, capacity building for youth and women to participate in political life, and a program on mental health.

Al-Firdaws Society has also worked with government departments and institutions in Basra Governorate. They have worked to follow-up on government performance and democracy promotion programs through specialized monitoring activities. Al-Firdaws Society works to establish the principles of human rights and democracy. Al-Firdaws Society emphasizes the principles of justice and equality, rejecting all kinds of discrimination and empowering women and youth to participate in politics.

This campaign focuses on the issue of violence against girls in Iraq. The spread of domestic violence, especially against girls, has accelerated in the past five years. The security, social and economic events that Iraq society has experienced has contributed to this increase. The timing of the campaign was favorable given that a draft domestic violence law was being finalized for submission to Parliament for discussion. Al-Firdaws Society added their voice in favor of passing the law.

Success markers

Progressive success markers are identified so that the campaign team is able to know and demonstrate that they achieved the intended outcome. Success markers are specific and fixed standards of success for outcomes that can be compared with what actually happens after action is taken.



Enough (a modest success that is realistic to achieve): At least 10 girls will have no more violence perpetrated on them in Al-Madina district in Basra. (Achieved)



Full Success Marker (a slightly more ambitious success that is realistic to achieve): At least two girls will convince their parents to visit the health center to learn how to reduce violence as a method of upbringing. (Achieved)



Overflowing (a much more ambitious success that could happen but would be very surprising if it did): At least five parents help to promote the campaign. (Not yet achieved)

Achievements

Reaching the target group:

Given the conservative nature of the community in Basra governorate, specifically in the targeted area, it was challenging for Al-Firdaws Society to reach out and approach young girls experiencing violence at home. Nahr Saleh district is a rural and remote area with strong societal traditions against women. The target group of this campaign was young girls (age 6-12) experiencing violence or other forms of abuse at home. They also were experiencing barriers to pursuing their education. In some cases, these girls were married, with violence perpetrated by their husbands. In other cases, the violence was perpetrated by fathers. (For example, if his daughter refuses to get married or wants to leave her husband or husband's house.)

Al-Firdaws Society's social researcher conducted extensive exploratory procedures and coordination with women in the region. Through this effort, the research team was able to initially identify young girls who

had suffered abuse. It was still difficult to meet with the girls and their parents to convince them to participate. It was challenging to find ways to include the parents and assist in connecting the girls to health and psychological services. Al-Firdaws Society's network of partners helped to overcome these challenges. In addition, the role of the social researchers and coordinators helped in building trust between families and Al-Firdaws Society.

As a result, the experienced team received referrals for girls who were experiencing violence at home. They were then able to work with parents in order to contact and support these girls. The team was able to stay in touch with the girls and provide them with needed support in order to enroll in

school, such as purchasing school uniforms and supplies. In partnership with the health center, Al-Firdaws Society also set up a hotline for girls experiencing violence at home to report on their own case or other cases in the region. The number is answered by one of Al-Firdaws Society's female staff members. This reassures and comforts the callers who are able to talk with more ease. Callers can give an accurate description of the violence they are exposed to or have witnessed

Al-Firdaws Society was able to refer ten girls to a healthcare center for both healthcare and psychological support.

Legislative discussion with stakeholders:

Six meetings were conducted with parents, tribal leaders, and representatives of the local government and the Iraqi Parliament to discuss the importance of drafting a new law to stop violence from being perpetrated against young girls and women in Iraq in their own homes.



Figure 1: The implementing team meeting with the target group of the girls.



Figure 2: Al-Firdaws Society staff meeting with stakeholders, including parents, tribal leaders, and local government representatives.

Providing recommendations for the law to decision makers in Parliament:

As a result of the six stakeholder meetings, a list of recommendations regarding the proposed law to stop violence against young girls and women was compiled by Al-Firdaws Society for key decision makers in Parliament. The draft law was included in the list of laws to discuss during the 2021 parliament sessions. The draft law was read twice and discussed in the Iraqi parliament.

The draft law would guarantee adequate protection for girls and women, but the challenge was in understanding the law, interpretations of the text, and its application by law enforcement agencies. The law was not enacted in the current parliamentary session due to political disagreements. Part of Iraqi society believes the law will be in opposition to the religious legislation that permits beating and discipline of a wife and daughter. They believe the law will call for the emancipation of women and a departure from the authority of parents. As a result, the draft law was not approved due to political differences and inconsistencies about the provisions of the law and its implementation mechanism. Discussion of the draft law was suspended for further discussion in the upcoming session.

There are a number of significant factors that contributed to the success of this campaign:

- An existing database that consists of statistics for the number of domestic violence cases in Basra governorate;
- Strong connections with legal officials, tribal leaders, and the healthcare center staff in the targeted area, who are key players in this campaign
- The wide network of relationships engaged by Al-Firdaws Society enabled them to reach the target group, implement activities and facilitate other procedures; and
- A skilled and experienced team who were ready to face any challenges in implementing the proposed campaign activities.

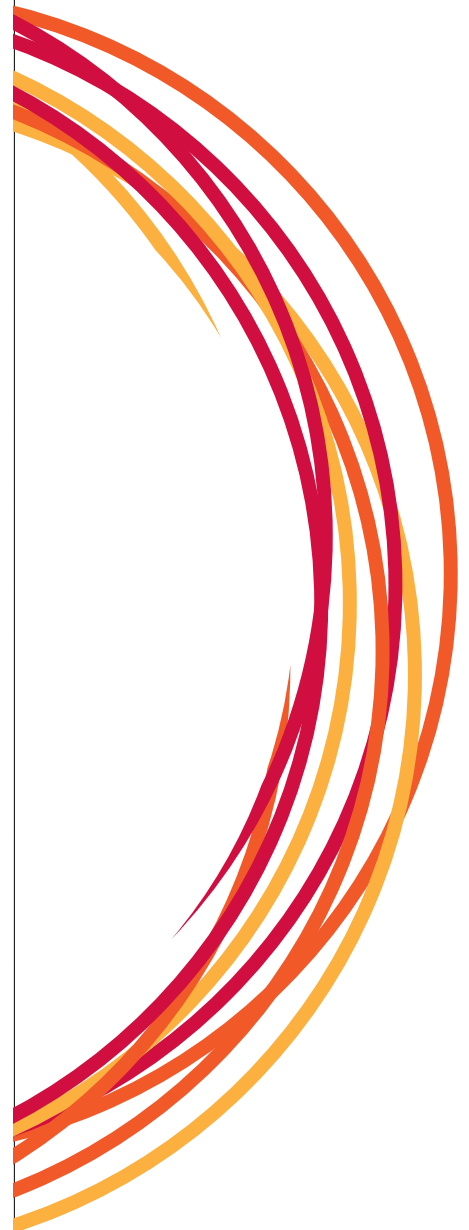
Main campaign components

Advocacy action areas

Internal Capacity Building

This action area requires attention to an organization's capacity to carry out advocacy including commitment, structure, mobilization, leadership and decision making.

Al-Firdaws Society implemented their campaign using the New Tactics in Human Rights [Strategic Effectiveness method](#), which provides a five-step incremental process for developing a strategic pathway (also called a journey of change) for the campaign. This strategic path helps to track campaign progress and observe its development, see the illustration below in Figure 3.



"The [New Tactics] methodology provided us with something new and clear. It helps us a lot in understanding our issues and how to build campaigns according to the five steps method."

Al-Firdaws Staff

The method begins with group work to identify a clear and specific problem statement. This is an important foundational step for any campaign. Al-Firdaws Society's identified problem statement was: "Due to the failure to implement the Domestic Violence Law within the Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969, as amended, underage girls from 6 to 12 years old in Al Madinah district, Iraq suffer from the problem of domestic violence and the denial of the right to life."

Mr. Ahmad Younes, the campaign manager, attended a New Tactics training on the Strategic Effectiveness method in Sulaymaniyah in 2018. Following a Training of Trainers (ToT) model, he then transferred the knowledge he gained to his team at Al-Firdaws Society, which guided the development and implementation of this campaign. The core team consisted of five members, including Al-Firdaws Society's President and her Deputy. The team acquired the legal paperwork and necessary approvals to support and implement the planned campaign activities. The group worked in three teams in order to coordinate the campaign with the healthcare center, to acquire approvals from legal officials and produce the final campaign reports.

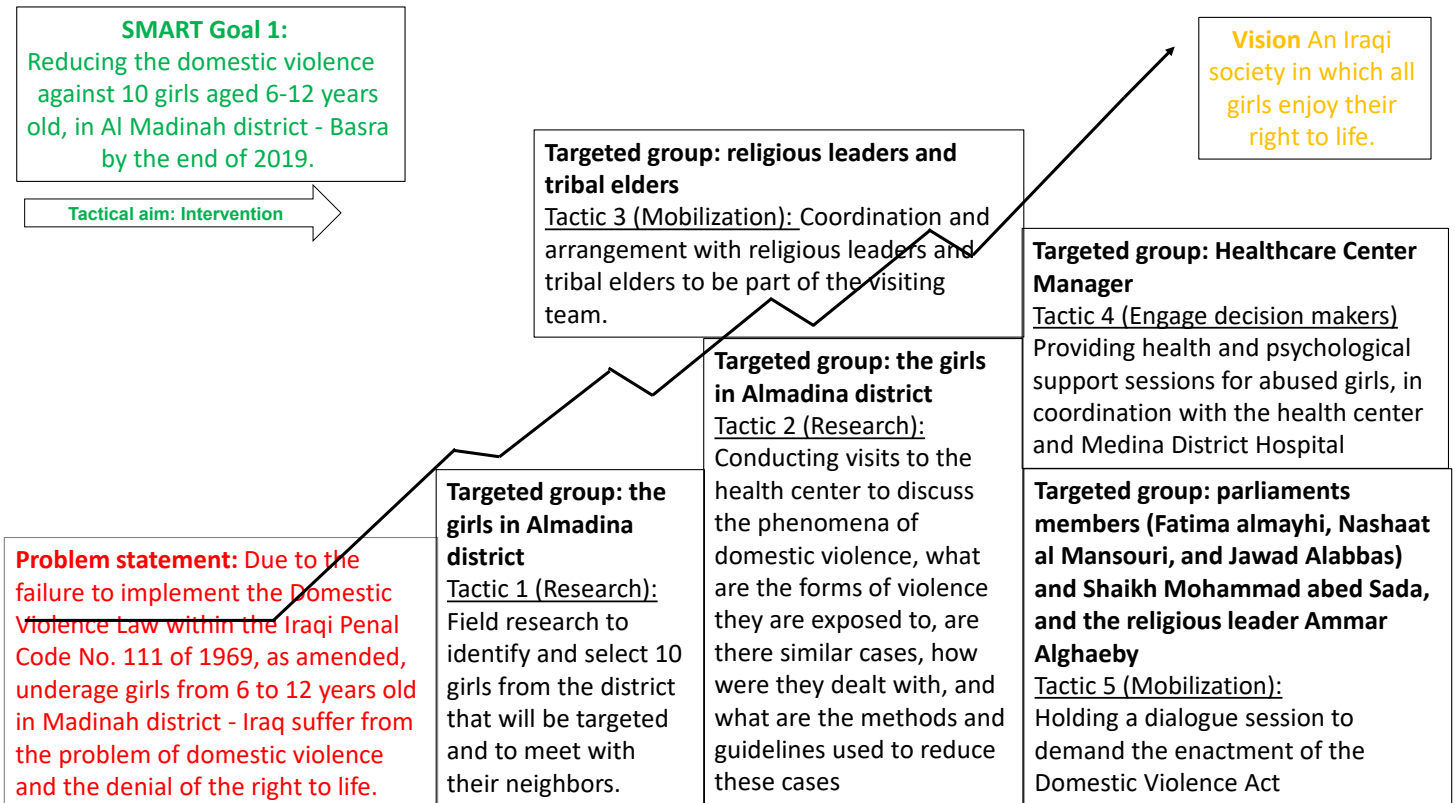


Figure 3: The writing in red is the problem statement which is at the bottom of the mountain, where we are today and which addresses the right that is being violated. The vision is the writing in yellow which goes beyond the mountain as we seek a world where the violated right is one that is being realized. What is written in green, is the SMART goal which is what the campaign is trying to achieve through the implementation of all the five tactics listed in the black boxes on the same image.

Research

This action area requires attention to gathering information, data, and analysis to develop recommendations for actions on an issue and regarding each of the other components (internal capacity building, mobilization and engagement of decision makers) before, during and after taking action on an issue.

Because the campaign aimed to reduce violence against 10 girls (ages 6-12) in Nahr Saleh district, the implementing team needed to identify and select the beneficiaries being victimized by domestic violence. In order to select ten girls, Al-Firdaws Society approached the Governorate of Basra to inform them about this activity. They gathered some information about girls who have been subjected to domestic violence. The team also approached a school principal in the targeted area. He had great knowledge of practices and incidences of such violence that have happened to girls both in his school and community. Interviews were then conducted with the parents of identified girls to obtain additional information regarding girls subjected to violence.

The team faced difficulty when meeting with the parents and with the girls. It was very difficult for the girls to answer the team's questions. Initially, the young girls were unable to provide adequate information for fear of being questioned by their parents or their husbands. Some of the girls in the target group had already been married as child brides. However, due to the team's experience and the number of repeated visits (including from a specialized female doctor), they were able to communicate with the girls and make them feel safe and comfortable.

One of the beneficiary girls reported: "I had left school when I was age 11 because my father did not want me to complete my studies. But after he attended with you the dialogue sessions, his opinion changed. He began to sense my right to pursue my education along with my other rights to health and be free from any violence and receive health care. And now I was able to convince him, but not easily, and I was able to return to complete my studies in middle school."

Al-Firdaws Society observed a noticeable development among the 10 selected girls as a result of the activities. The girls were comfortable discussing their issues freely and were experiencing less violence at home.

Mobilization

This action area requires attention to engaging and bringing together individuals, organizations and institutions in a collective effort on an issue.

The implementing team targeted the local health center as they envisioned the center providing the needed rehabilitation support for the girls. The health center could provide the girls with a safe space to talk about their cases confidentially and comfortably.

The team visited the health center in June 2019 and held a dialogue



Figure 4: The implementing team visiting the local health center partner.

"There is a great refusal for the girl or woman to go to the health center or the court to file a complaint against the violence she is exposed to as behavior as such is considered offensive to the clan and their customs."

Al-Ferdaws Staff

session to explore the possibility of working together to achieve campaign goals. Attendees discussed organizational coordination and activities to raise awareness of available health and psychological support for the girls. Ultimately, a joint program was agreed upon. Following the June 2019 meeting, the health center started preparing training materials on psychological and social support, mental health, and the negative impact of domestic violence against young girls. The health center also agreed to hold awareness sessions for both boys and girls in schools in collaboration with Al-Firdaws Society.

When the team visited the health center, they noted a section for health and psychological support. The health center's administration shared the mechanisms of how this section works and how cases are identified. They also noted there was a record documenting cases of family violence. Staff shared that there are cases that have been monitored, but girls have not been able to file any complaints. This is due to tribal custom, the authority of their parents, fear of being punished, and their reputation in the region.

After Al-Firdaws Society's visit, the health center set up a hotline and the girls were informed of the number to communicate and report any practices and violence they experienced. The communication line assists in any health or psychological support in the future that would reduce cases of violence. [This video](#) is a short documentary of the team's visit to the health center.

Al-Firdaws Society also cooperated with other Iraqi organizations that support women's rights, including the Iraqi Al-Amal Association, Al-Nama'a Center for Human Rights, and the Iraqi Women Media Forum. They launched empowerment and literacy programs, as well as conducted joint activities on digital security, promoting women's political participation, peace building, and conflict transformation.

Towards the later stages of the campaign, there was a noticeable development among two of the selected girls. They were able to talk in complete comfort with Al-Firdaws Society staff, as well as the psychological support providers and the doctor who provided their health support. Some girls mentioned that they also noticed improved relationship and increased acceptance by their parents. They reported that their parents are now respecting their right to education and life.

Engaging Decision Makers

This action area requires attention to understanding and applying power dynamics and decision-making processes to positively affect change on an issue.

Al-Firdaws Society used the New Tactics [Tactical Mapping Tool \(TMT\)](#), which equips activists to collaboratively expand their understanding of relationships. Activists are able to develop strategic and effective action by diagramming the relationships that surround human rights abuses. This aids in identifying a list of target stakeholders to engage. Al Ferdaws identified stakeholders in order to prevent violence against young girls. The stakeholders they primarily engaged were abused girls, parents, healthcare centers, tribal leaders, school principals, and parliamentarians.

"The majority of men are adherents to tribal traditions and customs and considered it a legal thing that girls should never leave the house without the permission of their father or brother."

Al-Ferdaws Staff

Al-Firdaws Society conducted two meetings in June 2020 with parents, tribal leaders and representatives of local government, and the Iraqi parliament to introduce the campaign and address the reasons behind the ongoing violence against young girls and women in the governorate of Basra. They also addressed the need to have a law that limits these practices and reduces cases of violence against girls. In these meetings, the team noted that most of the male participants were adherents to tribal traditions and customs. This meant that they consider young girls and women leaving their houses to go to school as contrary to customs and traditions. For example, some of the male participants view early marriage for girls as providing protection and safety for them. They believe that going to school and pursuing their education will not be beneficial since girls will only end up at home with their husband and children.

As a result of these stakeholder meetings, a list of recommendations regarding the proposed law to stop violence against girls and women. These recommendations were compiled by Al-Firdaws Society for key decision makers in Parliament. The draft law was included in the list of discussions, and read twice, during the parliament session. Al-Firdaws Society will continue to advocate for the passing of a law.

“There has become a sense of responsibility towards what girls are exposed to, and we – the campaign’s implementing team - have noticed that parents and tribal leaders are calling for a law that guarantees the rights of girls and all.”

Al-Firdaws Staff

Long-Term Impacts

The impact of advocacy on the organization

Al-Firdaws Society continued working on this initiative even after its formal engagement with New Tactics had concluded. They continued providing support for the 10 selected beneficiaries to make sure the violence has stopped or decreased. Al-Firdaws Society is committed to following up with the girls and closely monitoring the status of the proposed law to stop violence against young girls and women.

Al-Firdaws Society also utilized the Strategic Effectiveness method to plan and implement another campaign that aims to draft a law for human rights defenders and activists to protect them from the violation of their right to life. This campaign intends to prevent any killing, threats or arbitrary repression and displacement that forces human rights defenders and activists to leave their cities and homes due to a lack of protection and security. This draft law is being revised in preparation for introduction during parliament’s next session.