



Screenshot from the website.

The **Women's Rights Campaigning: Info-Activism Toolkit** is a new guide for women's rights activists, advocates, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations who want to use technology tools and practices in their campaigning. This toolkit was collaboratively developed by Tactical Technology Collective (TTC)¹ to support a community of activists and advocates and their organisations in their work, specifically the partners of the *New Voices New Leaders* project led by the feminist organisation CREA.²

Maya Indira Ganesh, see p. 172, Tactical Technology Collective.

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Case Study

WOMEN'S RIGHTS CAMPAIGNING: INFO-ACTIVISM TOOLKIT

by Maya Indira Ganesh and Lisa Gutermuth,
Tactical Technology Collective

Purpose/aim of the project: The aims of the project are to actively involve women leaders from the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa in processes of peace-building, security and reconstruction, and to enhance the participation of women in politics and public administration.³

Names of people/organisations involved: CREA and Tactical Technology Collective. The development of the Info-Activism campaigning toolkits is one of the activities within CREA's *New Voices / New Leaders: Women Building Peace and Reshaping Democracy* project. It has been developed by Tactical Technology Collective in coordination with: Forum for Women, Law and Development (Nepal), Nagarik Awaaz for Peace (Nepal), The Centre for Development Services (CDS) (Egypt), Naripokkho (Bangladesh), Women's Empowerment Link (Kenya), The YP Foundation (India). The Info-Activism Toolkit website and booklets were designed by La Loma,⁴ Berlin.

Geographic location: There are three regional areas of focus where the collaborative partners for the project are based: in South Asia (India, Nepal, Bangladesh), East Africa (Kenya) and the Arab region (Egypt). So, the toolkit has been translated into Hindi, Bengali, Swahili, and Arabic. However, the website remains online and therefore has worldwide outreach.

Supported by: This project was supported by CREA as part of their programme *New Voices / New Leaders: Women Building Peace and Reshaping Democracy*.

¹ TTC is an international NGO that works with human rights activists, advocacy groups, journalists and other political actors in using technology and information safely and strategically. More info <http://tacticaltech.org>

² CREA is a New Delhi based feminist organisation that builds the capacities of women's rights organisations in India and internationally through a series of learning institutes, publications and community-based projects. More info: <http://www.creaworld.org>

³ <https://www.womensrights.informationactivism.org>

⁴ <http://laloma.info/en>

Start date/Finish date: August 2012-December 2014.

Website or other online source:

<https://womensrights.informationactivism.org> and <https://creaworld.org>

BEGINNING

What triggered the project?

Tactical Tech's work has focused on developing resources for activists to use digital technology, such as social media, crowdsourcing, or mobiles in their campaigning. This project was based on an earlier resource developed by Tactical Tech which was then turned into something new, updated and relevant to a specific community. The original guides we produced were called *Message in a Box* and *Mobiles in a Box*.⁵ CREA approached us to update and customise our toolkits for women's rights communities, as there weren't any specialist toolkits about digital tools for advocacy and campaigning focused on the women's rights activism community.

What was your motivation?

Tactical Tech has worked on capacity building and using digital tools for activism for years. As online tools and technology develop quickly, our materials constantly need to be updated. Thus, it was a great opportunity to update our older material and to shape it for a specific community of activists.

How did the idea evolve and how is this reflected in the content produced?

Tactical Tech was looking for opportunities to update and revise our old toolkits and guides around the same time that CREA wanted to bring in a partner on the *New Voices New Leaders* project to provide digital campaigning resources – so it was a happy coincidence!

The central piece of the project is a website and a series of printed booklets. The website content is organised in the following way:

'Basics': this is about foundational aspects of campaigning, it was sourced and updated from a 2009 toolkit we produced called *10 Tactics for Turning Information into Action*.⁶ It describes the importance of mapping audiences and actors.

'Strategies': this describes different approaches to strategic thinking in campaigning by focusing on the outcomes campaigners want from their audiences – to learn

about and connect to an issue in different stages, from a general interest to a more specific engagement, 'Grab Attention', 'Tell a Story'; and 'Inspire Action.'

'Tools': is a set of detailed how-to profiles of technologies and digital tools that can be used in digital campaigning.

'Examples': this shows many ways in which the highlighted strategies and tools have been implemented in different settings, which could serve as inspiration for audiences.

The website is available in English, Swahili, Arabic, Hindi and Bengali to reach different ethnic and linguistic communities. Printed booklets in each of these languages are being prepared to accompany trainings and workshops done by individual project partners.

Target audience and network(s):

Women's rights activists, advocates, NGOs and community-based organisations partnering with CREA in three regional areas of focus: South Asia (India, Nepal, Bangladesh), East Africa (Kenya), and the Arab region (Egypt).

Key organisational aspects - Organisational structures:

A project starts with a discussion with the project staff on ideas, as well as the specific deliverables and commitments we have associated with the funding we receive. A Project Coordinator, with the support and guidance of the Programme Director, pushes the project forward and connects all of the different working parts – internal web development, production project team; writers, researchers and reviewers and editors; external designers and web developments; external translators and reviewers; external printing press; the funding organisation and partners.

One of the initiators of the project knew and had worked with CREA as a consultant and partner many years before. More recently, CREA was interested in partnering with Tactical Tech because they liked our work and wanted to find a way to promote and support technology and information activism for women's rights activists and feminist actors. When CREA was applying for this grant (for the *New Voices New Leaders* project), they reached out to us at Tactical Tech to ask if we wanted to partner with them and be supported to develop toolkits for the women's rights activists who were the other partners on the project. This invitation came at a time when we, at Tactical Tech, were trying to figure out how and if we should be developing our older toolkits like *Message in a Box* and *Mobiles in a Box*. We realised that the technology was outdated and that they needed some new lease of life and identity to respond to changes in how activists are using technology. The CREA support therefore came at a very opportune time.

Is/was the organisation informal or formal?

Tactical Tech is a 'formal' medium sized non-profit NGO.

⁵ www.messageinabox.tacticaltech.org and www.mobilesinabox.tacticaltech.org

⁶ <https://informationactivism.org> (see archived old site for original 10 tactics)

ACTING & DOING

What are/were the key activities?

In this project, we went through the following phases with the support of these different people: the Tactical Tech project team, an external technical consultant who edits FLOSS manuals⁷ for NGOs, our internal web development team, an external web design team, external translators and reviewers, local partners and designers and printers in Bangalore, India.

- Spot assessments with the target audience(s) and partner organisations to understand their context, needs and current technology use patterns and campaign contexts.
- Reviewing content of old toolkits and guides for relevance to the women's rights campaigning context in East Africa, South Asia and the Arab Region.
- Reviewing technical content of old toolkits and guides for relevance and suitable changes
- Developing an organising principle for new content online and translating this into the Information Architecture (IA) for a website; identifying specifications for the website for the present and the future, where four other language versions will have to be developed.
- Researching, writing, re-writing new content; editing content.
- Developing a design brief based on ideas for the IA.
- Reviewing designs for the IA.
- Build and development the website, and uploading content onto the new website and testing the website; website styling as needed.
- Internal soft launch of website for review and comments from other staff and colleagues; building in comments; final proofing and review of content.
- Website launch, ongoing outreach and communication with partners and other audiences online and offline.
- Working on new language content – reviewing content for cultural specificity; translating into other languages and then having the translated content reviewed by a different set of reviewers.
- Relevant technical tweaks for new language versions and uploading new language content onto website.
- Promotion, outreach and communication with new language versions.
- Discussing ideas for print toolkits; we had to rationalise how much content we could put into print.
- Reviewing content for print – tweaks and edits to the content as needed.

⁷ FLOSS Manuals is more than a collection of manuals about free and open-source software, it is also the community. The contributors include designers, readers, writers, illustrators, free software fans, editors, artists, software developers, activists, and many others. Anyone can contribute to a manual – to fix a spelling mistake, add a more detailed explanation, write a new chapter, or start a whole new manual on a topic. More info: <http://www.flossmanuals.org>

- Design and layout with designers.
- Print and distribution.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the reception of the printed booklets.

What are/were the key approach & methods?

This project involved updating and **upcycling** older toolkits and content we had produced for entirely new audiences, and producing new language versions. In addition to re-framing old content for new audiences, we also created a new organising principle for the content. Most importantly, the content had to be relevant and useful for audiences whose experience with digital technologies and campaigning is minimal. The main approaches and methods were listening to and responding to audience needs, balanced out by our own design and technical ideas and inspirations.

How did you get people participating?

The partners were already in place from the onset of the project. When one has partners at the regional or local level, an exchange already exists, where we can ask each other for input or advice on certain steps in the project, and we already have our established networks to share with.

What is/was essential for practical matters?

It was essential to have a network of translators available, graphic designers, web developers, good internet connectivity, and a supportive network of knowledgeable people to ask for input and advice.



Screenshot from the website: Tools.

What are/were the key communication channels and methods?

Email, VOIP,⁸ etherpads,⁹ dropboxes.¹⁰

THERE WAS A DEFINITE TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP ONCE THE WEBSITE WAS TRANSLATED

Media use and efficacy?

The website was shared on social media, and there was a definite transfer of ownership once the website was translated. The partner organisations, as well as other civil society organisations in those regions picked up the toolkit and shared it widely with their networks.

It was also featured in publications such as *Global Voices*.¹¹

What are/were the outcomes with reference to the target audience?

The toolkits still have to be printed and distributed before we will really start to do focused evaluation, but the reactions and excitement about the website are very encouraging.

It has been featured in blogs and publications as discussed, but what is very encouraging is that according to web analytics, individuals feel inspired to share it directly with their peers through email and social media. Some tweets include:

"Brilliant, thorough and clear set of campaign, storytelling and activism tools for women's rights" from @info_activism

"Beautifully designed women's rights campaigning toolkit" from @info_activism and CREA

"Amazing tools for #activists now translated in #Arabic, #Kiswahili, and #Hindi", @info_activism".

Our partners have been very positive and communicative about planning different ways to use the toolkit in workshops once it is printed and sent.

⁸ VOIP: Voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) is a methodology and group of technologies for the delivery of voice communications and multimedia sessions over Internet Protocol (IP) networks, such as the internet. Other terms commonly associated with VoIP are IP telephony, Internet telephony, voice over broadband (VoBB), broadband telephony, IP communications, and broadband phone service.

⁹ Etherpad allows you to edit documents collaboratively in real-time, much like a live multi-player editor that runs in your browser. <http://etherpad.org>

¹⁰ However, recently we have tried to move away from Dropbox, www.dropbox.com, as there have been leaks and breaches of their system, and the information on Dropbox is open to surveillance and monitoring. We encourage the development of custom solutions with OwnCloud, <https://owncloud.org>, or SpiderOak, <https://spideroak.com>, for more secure file sharing.

¹¹ Global Voices: We are a borderless, largely volunteer community of more than 800 writers, analysts, online media experts and translators. Global Voices has been leading the conversation on citizen media reporting since 2005. We curate, verify and translate trending news and stories you might be missing on the internet, from blogs, independent press and social media in 167 countries. <http://globalvoicesonline.org> and <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2014/10/05/introducing-the-womens-rights-campaigning-info-activism-toolkit>

What are/were the impacts – target audience and wider?

High numbers of visitors access our website from countries represented by our partners (Egypt and Kenya), where the issues are most pressing, but there is also a lot of interest from visitors from India, Germany and the USA where there are large online audiences engaged in these topics.



World map of website visits from January-August 2014.

REFLECTING & SUSTAINING

How is/was the project sustained?

Tactical Tech has a very vibrant network that has built up over many years of work, which allows us to promote new products and materials. However, outreach is just one part of getting our work out to the right audiences. Materials around digital campaigning need attending too, for updates and revisions, as this field moves really fast. Funding is also a challenge, especially when certain themes or issues are no longer topical. All this said, this case study is an example of how an older project found a new lease of life in a new avatar. We took an opportunity for support and turned it into something that helped create something new while we were able to sustain and take forward something old!

THIS CASE STUDY IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW AN OLDER PROJECT FOUND A NEW LEASE OF LIFE IN A NEW AVATAR

What kinds of 'capital' did you use to sustain the project?

Lots of human capital, as well as financial, social and technical.

Is it self-sustaining now or will it be in the future?

When the toolkits are distributed to the partners, they will work on the outreach in their own areas. The website is an educational platform that is accessed by many different communities. We find that our projects continue to receive interest from new users and communities because of our well-established network.

Are you happy with the project?

Yes, it has been really well-received and it provides a lot of useful information and recommendations for effective campaigning. It also made us aware of how little there is by way of digital tools for campaigning for the women's rights activism and advocacy community worldwide.

Would you change anything?

More funding always helps!

Was the project as you expected or did you encounter anything unexpected?

It was essentially as expected. However, the positive response to it has been overwhelming.

Is the project scalable?

Yes, and in fact it is licensed with a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.¹² Thus, it can be shared, translated, and re-mixed for different audiences as long as Tactical Tech is credited. This project is in itself a good example of how something old got remixed and upcycled into something new.

What are your future plans?

Future plans are still to conduct monitoring and evaluation, and see if at the end of this project period there are new opportunities within the realm of women's rights digital advocacy.

OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES

What were tangible outputs of the project? For example, what was 'produced'? How many people were involved?

There will be a toolkit, consisting of four around forty pages booklets in five languages (English, Hindi, Arabic, Bengali, and Swahili). These will be based on 'Basics', and the three groups of Strategies: 'Grab Attention', 'Tell a Story', and 'Inspire Action'. The website is already published and used by individuals and organisations working in the field of women's rights.

¹² <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

To produce this there were eight translators (four to translate, four to review), three coordinators at different phases in the project's life-cycle, a programme director, two web developers, six designers, one printer, one copy-editor, and probably about fourteen people from the partner organisations to test the content and give us advice at different stages of the production.

What are the key outcomes and impacts? What capacity did you build? How did you change people's lives?

We're yet to do the project's monitoring and evaluation, and the print booklets are not ready yet. The online response has been phenomenal though.

Did the project meet the initial purpose and intentions?

Yes.

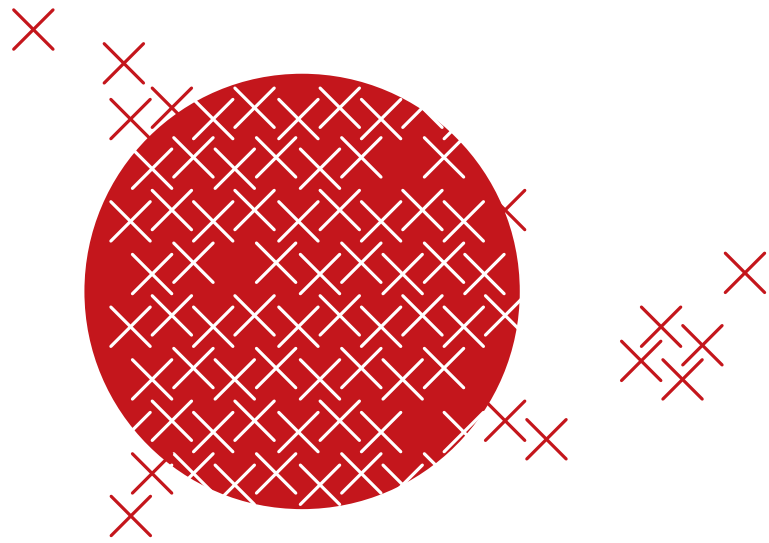
LESSONS LEARNED

What are the lessons learned?

There was a learning curve to realise the scale of the project and the amount of work that it would take to produce essentially five websites and five toolkits within a small time frame with limited capacities. That said, there were changes that could have been made early on to make the building process a bit more to size with the resources that were available. The upside is that for the user, the toolkits became very comprehensive and detailed.

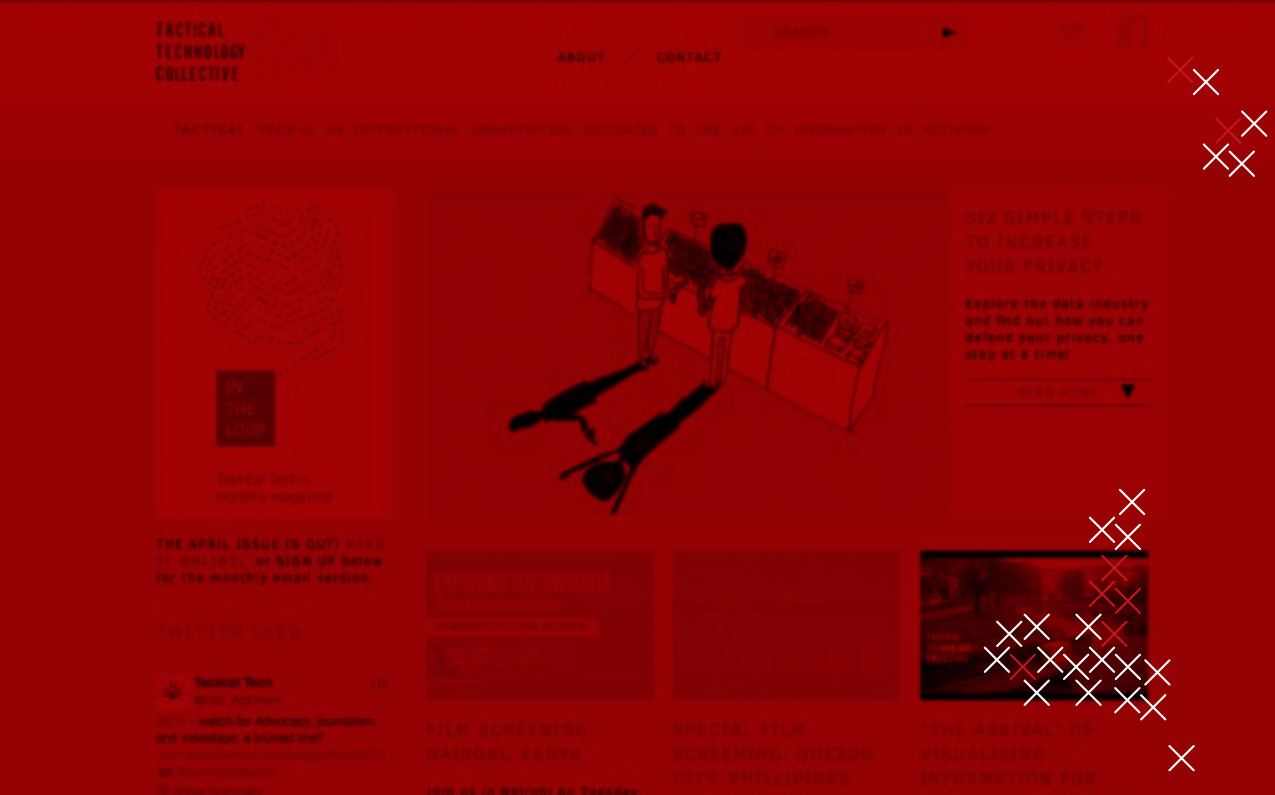
What can be given as advice for the readers?

When conducting any project with specific timelines, is to be as clear and precise as possible with those that you're working with. This includes having and keeping clear deadlines, making listed expectations and deliverables, and sometimes 'showing' what you mean rather than telling. For example, showing screenshots can be more helpful than a fifteen minutes conversation describing them.



SHARING

Acts, actions or reciprocal relations between individuals, groups and communities to enjoy and enrich something together (time, objects, experiences, etc.) based on respectful mutuality, interdependency, openness and generosity.



Screenshot from the website of Tactical Technology Collective.

Maya Indira Ganesh started at Tactical Tech in 2009 as a consultant determining how documentation of violations against sex workers in India and Cambodia could be used in advocacy. This was a natural progression from her work as a researcher, activist and writer with women's rights organisations in India and internationally. Now she is the Director of Applied Research, a new team that reflects Tactical Tech's focus on creative and 'field-building' research. She has Masters degrees from Delhi University, India, and the University of Sussex, UK.

Gabi Sobliye worked, prior to joining the team of Tactical Tech, at Transparency International, contributing to data projects such as the *Global Corruption Barometer*, and for *The Guardian* newspaper in London. Gabi holds a Masters in Human Rights from University College London. At Tactical Tech she works on visual persuasion areas central to our book *Visualising Information for Advocacy*.

Interviewed by ALH.



Interview

TACTICAL TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE

with Maya Indira Ganesh and Gabi Sobliye

Tactical Technology Collective (Tactical Tech) is an organisation, which has its focus on the use of information in activism. With data visualisation tools and technology Tactical Tech is empowering activists to use information powerfully to communicate evidence to effect changes in social, environmental and political matters. Besides that they have a strong emphasis on providing information in digital security and privacy risks.¹

Maya, could you tell us a few words about yourself and Tactical Technology Collective, its history, when it was founded, by whom and your involvement with them and other projects?

MIG: Tactical Tech started in 2003 as an organisation that was working with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and groups enabling them to use free and open source software in their advocacy work. In fact, one way to chart the development of the organisation is through a history of the various visual, digital and print products we have created. The projects reflect the areas and type of issues we focus on. We are not a static organisation, we change a lot, because what we work with is information and technology areas that are constantly evolving and developing. Because we are an organisation that seeks out practical responses to the problems we see around us, we focus on making things that could offer our audiences agency in a process of change.

What are some example projects, activities, and processes of Tactical Tech, what is their aim?

MIG: We did for example *NGO in a box*² in 2006-2007. It's a set of 3 CDs and

¹ Tactical Technology Collective, <https://www.tacticaltech.org>

² *NGO in-a-box* is a collection of tools for the day-to-day running of small to medium-size NGOs. Produced by Tactical Tech in association with WomensNet, this toolkit aims to make it easier to set up base, find the right software and learn how to use it.

it introduces different ways of using technology in NGO work, publishing and infrastructure.

Then we had some more *in-a-box* series, there was *Message and Mobiles in a box*,³ done around 2008. These are basically tools for creating and amplifying your message, in the digital world. *Message in a Box* was online and available offline, it visually includes everything which was relevant in 2008 from audio to print to introduce it on a global level to NGOs and activism groups. This is always a focus for us to translate materials globally, to open up the processes, share them and say Hi, make your own version of it, or Can you build on this?

We made this website which contains the updated content of: *Message and Mobile in a box* in a new format, now named: *Info Activism How to Guide*.⁴

We built up a women's rights version⁵ of this how-to website, as a campaigning info-activism toolkit. For this, we had a partnership with an NGO in India. So we customised it to the context of *their* NGO, working in conflict regions of south-east Asia, east Africa and the Arab region. The website is quite similar, but it is better organised. That's the evolution of the *in-a-box* toolkits. The focus was on how you use digital campaign. What is right for your processes? What are the strategies and tools to organise your campaign? Workshops often help with the implementation, but how can they use it by themselves?

This was what I was going to ask you, how does your 'target' group/audience implement the information and tools?

MIG: For example, with the women's rights page, we suggest ways in which they can use the tools, resources online and offline. It has been translated into four other languages – Kiswahili, Hindi, Bengali and Arabic.

The reason why I mentioned that is because we like to look at things, and see how they can be reinvented and improved. Sometimes it works and sometimes

it doesn't. We have some groups who look at older material and want to build something new from it, which was how the women's rights toolkits I just mentioned happened.

Now, we may have moved on already but looking at legacy and sustainability is an issue for an organisation that has been around for ten years. Sustainability is about sharing, saying you

can use it, repurpose it, translate it, and remix it.

SUSTAINABILITY IS ABOUT
SHARING, SAYING YOU CAN
USE IT, REPURPOSE IT,
TRANSLATE IT, AND REMIX IT

³ *Mobiles in-a-box* from the Tactical Technology Collective is a collection of tools, tactics, how-to guides and case studies designed to help advocacy and activist organisations use mobile technology in their work. *Mobiles in-a-box* is designed to inspire you, to present possibilities for the use of mobile telephony in your work and to introduce you to some tools which may help you.

⁴ A how-to guide to strategies and tools for digital campaigning. More info here: <https://howto.informationactivism.org>

⁵ <https://womensrights.informationactivism.org>

Now I move on to talk about another very big project we did in 2009, *10 tactics*. *10 tactics*⁶ is based on an event: the *Info-activism*⁷ campin 2009, we did another one last year in June. One output was a film: *10 tactics for turning information into action*.⁸ It's an educational documentary on activists around the world, showcasing how they use digital tools and activism to leverage their advocacy. Along with the film came this very beautiful pack, the *10 tactics pack*, with 10 cards and a DVD. Basically, it is repurposing the ideas of *Message in a box*. It has *10 basics* and *10 tactics* card. So we also had people doing screenings around the world for a year and a half.

That's how we build and sustain contacts and networks. It got translated into more than eighteen languages, we used something called *dotsub*⁹ to allow people to translate/subtitle in many languages, it's a free open source tool.

That's the other thing that is really important to us, that things are open source, freely available, not proprietary, and accessible in different languages. We had a network of volunteers translating it into many different languages. Through that process, it became something of their own. You see, it needs a lot of infrastructure to make things happen.

Our projects all get developed into different areas and we try to constantly keep up-to-date with our online materials, so there is another website besides the main information activism site, called *unstitched*.¹⁰ *Unstitched* contains all of the old case studies that were in *10 tactics* with a lot of new ones. And we even have an Arabic version that takes the *10 tactics* cards and puts them into a different format.

For the Arabic version, we also had a small grant to translate it. However, the grant unfortunately – or fortunately – came when the revolution started in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, so this really made us think: 'What are we trying to do here? Do we want to tell them what to do, because they were in the middle of a revolution and organising their own stuff. So what we made was a suite of new, locally contextualised self-learning materials on digital activism in Arabic, campaigning and working with data and evidence in advocacy together with different partners.

We went to well-known NGOs in the Arab area to do some workshops with them, let them choose and work with our toolkits, ask for feedback and allow them to do upgrades.

One of our most popular product also made in 2009, is *Security in-a-box*.¹¹ This is all the other work that we do around digital security and privacy, and training people to be able to be safer and smarter in their use in technology. *Security in-a-Box*

⁶ <https://archive2013.tacticaltech.org/act/project/10-tactics-turning-information-action>

⁷ <https://camp2013.tacticaltech.org>

⁸ If you check www.informationactivism.org you will see the original *10 tactics* project.

⁹ *Dotsub* is a browser based, one-stop, self-contained system for creating and viewing subtitles for videos in multiple languages across all platforms, including web-based, mobile devices, and transcription and video editing systems. It's easy to use, nothing to buy or download, and it's fun. More info: www.dotsub.com

¹⁰ <https://informationactivism.org/en/unstitched>

¹¹ *Security in-a-box* is a collaborative effort of the Tactical Technology Collective and Front Line. It was created to meet the digital security and privacy needs of advocates and human rights defenders. *Security in-a-box* includes a How-to Booklet, which addresses a number of important digital security issues. Further info: <https://securityinabox.org>

ALL THE POSITIVE THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH DIGITAL ADVOCACY ALSO ALWAYS BRING CERTAIN RISKS

now gets nearly two million views a year. All the positive things you can do with digital advocacy also always bring certain risks. *Security in-a-box* is an online and offline resource available in fourteen languages. We also customise it and create contextual versions for different organisations, such as for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) communities in the Arab region,¹² women's human rights defenders, environmental activists and other marginalised communities who are at risk and under certain threat online.

So you encourage organisations to make their own versions and connect it with you, and let the material grow beyond your resources?

MIG: Yes absolutely, we encourage that.

So besides that, what was happening at that time was that we grew stronger into the area of visualisation, how it works in **advocacy** and activism. We started looking at visualisation tools for large amounts of information as a way to get through, what we call, the '60-page-syndrome'. NGOs have the tendency to write and publish vast reports, which then nobody reads. But for advocacy, you need to get the message out in a clear and easily digestible way to your audiences who will most likely not read such long reports. So, we wanted to enable them to present that information in a nicer way.

For those issues, it became very popular to use visualisation tools. Therefore, we continued sharing and demystifying digital tools for advocacy, and collected them on the website *Drawing by Numbers*.¹³ And then we started the book *Visualising Information for Advocacy Guide*.¹⁴

The book started as *data and design notes*,¹⁵ which people are still using for practicing and training. Though most of the content is now subsumed within the book, the online chapters are still being used by people for training workshops. You sometimes never know how things are used by your audience.

This was also one question I had, do you think, as you have a great mix of media, that you reach a broader audience and are successful in engaging people with your tools and products?

MIG: Yes, this works in different ways, and we are not always sure how it works in different places for different kinds of products we create. So in some places, people only want to read online or have iPad versions, as we saw for the *Visualising Advocacy*

¹² <https://securityinabox.org/en/communities/01>

¹³ <https://drawingbynumbers.org>

¹⁴ *Visualising Information for Advocacy* is a book about how advocates and activists use visual elements in their campaigns. This 170 page guide features over 60 case studies from around the world to provide an introduction to understanding visual information and a framework for using images for influence. More info: <https://visualising-advocacy.org>

¹⁵ <http://drawingbynumbers.org/notes>



Visualising Information for Advocacy Guide. © Tactical Tech.

advocacy book. and they want a print copy. Actually, a lot of people like the print copy because it is a book about visuals. In some cases, I think people just want to get free stuff. If we set up a stall at a conference or workshop and give out our materials, people just pick them up because they look pretty and because they're free. That is not to be cynical, it's more to say that we don't always know how multi-media engagement and outreach works. In fact, this is something we are going to be working on expressly now, to find out more about what works and what doesn't.

How much feedback and knowledge do you have about the implementation of your tools?

MIG: Part of our monitoring and evaluation is also asking people and organisations how they use the material, and this feeds into how we rework it. For example when we are working with organisations in workshops, we gather feedback or give them advice on how to use our material, and we let them give us feedback later on what could be changed and done differently. Feedback is very critical, but we try to get it while we are working with people. Afterwards it's really hard to get.

How many people actually work for Tactical Tech?

MIG: Now we are about thirty people. But we have only been that many for the last few years. The numbers have been steadily increasing...!

How are you sustained financially?

MIG: We have project, program and organisational funding, and there is a list of our

main funders in the 'about us' section of the website.¹⁶ We get Foundation funding and mostly funding from European governments. We have a few rules, for example we don't take any money from companies or corporations. We credit them on the materials most of the time, except when it could be potentially risky to do so.

How do you get your audience involved, what is the best way for you to engage them with your tools? Do you have a main audience you target at? If so, what do you think is your impact on the target group? Do you think that with the actions and projects you mentioned you are able to empower and activate people to more actions and advocacy work?

GS: One thing is the network itself, created by sharing all the materials online, another thing is doing a lot of offline events and workshops. With *Security in-a-box (SiaB)*, for example, we do security trainings on the ground with different organisations. SiaB is the main resource that supports trainees after the event, as a sort of reference guide. Or we do very big events, such as the *info-activism camp*¹⁷ mentioned before. So this is very important for us as we bring together our networks and new people working in that field, which is very interesting for us, also to find new work.

Our audience is very broad, consisting of activists, political activists, advocates and journalists around the world, and it's different for different projects. Sometimes they invite us to do a workshop for example.

How important do you see the role of open design in your work, and have you dealt with reluctant designers when they hear you will offer these open source tools?

GS: When the concept of *Tactical Technology Collective* was first established eleven years ago a founding principle was for the organisation to use and promote open source tools and to release all of our material under a **Creative Commons license**.¹⁸ This means that there were a lot of adaptations, customisations and translations of our work.

For example the project *10 tactics*, is a good way to see how our initial concept was transformed into something different: *10 tactics* is a short film and a series of cards for creative campaigning that was translated into twenty-three languages. We managed the translations ourselves with volunteers and reviewers. *10 tactics* was then adapted into the *how-to.informationactivism.org* website.¹⁹ We then worked with a women's rights organisation in India, CREA,²⁰ to adapt the website for women's rights groups in three regions together with seven partners – ranging from Kenya to Sudan. We produced a women's rights campaigning toolkit,²¹ which

¹⁶ <https://www.tacticaltech.org/about>

¹⁷ <https://camp2013.tacticaltech.org>

¹⁸ www.creativecommons.org

¹⁹ <https://howto.informationactivism.org>

²⁰ <http://www.creaworld.org>

²¹ <https://womensrights.informationactivism.org>

was based on the feedback from these organisations. The Guide has been translated into four languages and has been printed and distributed by these partner organisations, as the communities are often remote and have no access to the internet.

Or, for example, our *Visualising Information for Advocacy* book is now being translated into Georgian by volunteers at the Georgian organisation Jump Start Georgia,²² which is great for us as we rarely have the funding for all the translations, but it's very important for outreach.

Regarding the designers and programmers we work with, we usually have it written into our contracts with them that the code will be open source and the designs will be published under a Creative Commons licence. There is a group of programmers in Berlin whom we work with a lot. They only do work for social issues, they are called Sinnwerkstatt.²³

Another project that highlights our translation and customisation work was when we met up with five organisations in Beirut to brainstorm ways in which our range of info-activism resources could be adapted for use by activists in the Arab region. Our partners on this project were Dawlaty,²⁴ SMEX,²⁵ and AltCity²⁶ all based in Lebanon, 7iber²⁷ in Jordan and the Development House²⁸ in Yemen. We wanted to go beyond straight-up translations because we felt that these partners had a lot to contribute in terms of their own ideas and experiences, so we suggested that they either translate, customise or 'remix' our materials in a way that they thought would be useful to their communities and their own interests.

So this was a workshop in a different location?

GS: Yes, this was a workshop in Beirut. Our partners chose four resources we offered. They customised our resources in the way it felt useful to them and translated it into different languages. One such customisation was by a Syrian organisation, customising *10 tactics* on the subject of the Syrian revolution. They highlighted 51 case studies and tactics in the Syrian revolution.

This refers also to the technical side, to copy and use it for their issues?

GS: Yes, exactly. This also relates to where we are aiming to go in the future. What we are trying to become much better at is researching and writing on the go. Usually, we have our in-house teams working on things. So once we finish, we release it. But sometimes that means we are silent for quite some time and people are less aware of what we are working on. So we are trying to do this *live research* more actively and tell people what we are working with at the moment, where we are struggling and challenges we have overcome.

²² http://jumpstart.geis_chapter1.pdf

²³ <http://sinnwerkstatt.com>

²⁴ <https://dawlaty.org>

²⁵ www.smex.org

²⁶ www.altcity.me

²⁷ www.7iber.me

²⁸ www.thedh.org

So the whole process shall become more transparent, so that people can pick up information in the middle and start working with it already?

GS: Yes, exactly. As I mentioned we are trying to work on being more open about the processes and challenges we face in order to add to the conversation and provide resources for others working in this area. For example, in the coming months we will feature two blog posts on the Visualising Advocacy²⁹ website that detail the process of making data visualisations from start to finish. Often viewers only see the slick result at the end and the creation of it is often mysterious and inaccessible. Our aim is to open up about our process and ask other visualisation artists to also contribute to the blog, thus adding much needed information on the realities of creating these projects.

What do you think are the most powerful tools, methods and platforms to reach your audience through the 'noise' of daily life? How do you get people engaged?

MIG: We spend a long time trying to define audiences. If we are working with a group, then we would work together to identify their audience, i.e. who are the people that would help them achieve the change they are trying to achieve and how to get people to care. Meaning that people care for things that are close to them, such as their family, loved ones and their community, and we are trying to extend this care to other people. We ask questions about what would make them widen their care. For this, we use the line of influence³⁰ which identifies five positions. First, you have 'active allies' on one side, willing to get active for your cause, the next ones are 'allies' – less likely to do an action but still on your side. Then you have 'neutral', an audience you'd attempt to convince and pull on your side, and then the 'opponents' and 'active opponents', which you can only change by force, such as a change of law. We work with organisations on identifying who their audience is and how to reach them, and then on creating a detailed profile of their target audience.

Regarding the 'noise' question, we are aware that it's hard to cut through, but it depends on the audience, the information, and how it is presented.

What I think is powerful is something unusual and creative, which does not always require money and capacity. For example, I, along with Rahul Bhargava from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) who is also on the board of Tactical Tech, recently held a workshop at the Open Knowledge Festival here in Berlin on low-tech data visualisation. The idea being that most of the world is offline, so if you want to reach communities that are offline or illiterate or if you have limited resources such as a small budget or low tech capacities, then an answer could be low-tech data visualisations in order to communicate information. One way is by exploring creative but easy-to-make graphs and charts, and thinking of them in an unusual way. I think creativity is key, though that's a hard thing to say to people since they often get scared of that term.

²⁹ <http://visualisingadvocacy.org>

³⁰ <http://beautifultrouble.org/principle/shift-the-spectrum-of-allies>

Regarding social media, it's a great tool as well, but you have to really look into your area of reach, as some countries use Twitter and others Facebook, it really depends.

How do you see your work or similar projects repositioning the consciousness and actions of design, designers and designing?

GS: After launching the book, we have had some interest from design schools, universities and lecturers, who are interested on behalf of their students in this area of 'designing for good.' Our book is one of few written in the area of information design and activism. A portion of our work is conducting workshops and training for organisations and activists, most of whom are not designers. So we are interested in talking to designers about advocacy and the way they think about messaging and the new ways of designing for advocacy purposes, but it's difficult to get funding for that. What we would hope for, of course, is to motivate future students to go and work in that area. As we are a multidisciplinary organisation that brings together design, technology and activism I see our work contributing to how young designers could work in the future, and from what I have seen there seems to be a lot of interest in this.

The book *Agents of Alternatives* strongly deals with the topic of agency and agents. What is your definition and position towards these terms, what does it mean to you?

MIG: How I would frame it is the work we have done with technology. It's about enabling people who are already agents, who see themselves already as 'agents of change' and just give them greater fluency with technology. So it's about how to support other people who are already active and influential where they are (here, I mean specifically political activists, advocacy groups etc.), how to make them more efficient in their work, conscious, strategic and smart with technology. Technology and information are kind of the lifeblood of activism today, so it is about enhancing the agency of people. And through things like translations or creative commons licensing, these things allow agency in terms of **ownership** as well. We don't want to be only an international organisation that produces things for others to consume, but we want to give people a kind of agency through ownership in customising, remixing, learning and translation. That's how we foster their agency, through ownership.

I also hope that by doing the hands-on events, everyone has something to teach and learn, experience skill-share lessons etc. You come not only as a participant, but also as a facilitator. I would say that we do not only foster agency in our philosophy, but also in our practice. For us, giving agency to people is very fundamental. This is how the network expands and grows, too.

TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION
ARE THE LIFEBLOOD OF ACTIVISM
TODAY, SO IT IS ABOUT ENHANCING
THE AGENCY OF PEOPLE

Thank you Maya and Gabi, a very inspiring conversation!

ENDNOTES

Credits

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Workshop Berlin: Preparing the crowdfunding video for the book. © AoA.