Coalition Building

Defining Coalitions

There are many ways that individuals and groups can work together toward realizing a shared vision and attaining common goals. They can share information, organize joint activities, and collaborate on setting-up an organization to further programmatic objectives. Experience from around the world has shown that among the available options for collaborative engagement, building coalitions is one of the most effective ways of achieving common objectives. Examples of successful coalition building efforts range from the community level to the international context, and can be found in various sectors of governance and development.

Coalitions have been defined as "self conscious, freely-organized, active and lasting alliances of elites, organizations, and citizens sharing partially overlapping political goals."[1]   As such, coalitions are structures of formal collaboration undergirded by a common vision, and facilitate shared decision making power, influence, and material resources among individuals, groups, and organizations. Formed to carry out joint or coordinated activities[2], coalitions can either be a time-bound or open-ended partnering to achieve a common purpose. In either case, sustaining gains arising from collaborative engagement should always be a serious consideration, to guard against the threat of counter-reform by vested interests.

The return to significant investments of time and energy is the higher likelihood of successful and sustainable reform efforts. Coalitions can achieve what one citizen or organization cannot do alone, making those who are perceived to be weak -- in government bureaucracies, nonprofits, and the general citizenry -- less vulnerable to harassment and intimidation of vested interests. For marginal and less resourced groups, coalitions serve as the "primary mechanism through which disempowered parties can develop their power base and thereby better defend their interests."[3] Thus, coalition members, deriving strength from each other, are emboldened to more vigorously pursue their goals.

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[1] Sahr Kpundeh, Strategy for Coalitions (add complete citation)

[2] Cohen, de la Vega, & Watson, 2001

[3] "Coalition Building" (Boulder, Colorado: Conflict Research Consortium, 1998, accessed on January 30, 2009); available through http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/problem/coalition.htm; Internet.

Coalitions are able to mitigate challenges by providing a shared platform for likeminded pro-change individuals and groups, leveraging the collective force of their members and influential allies, focusing the public spotlight on advocacy issues in the public arena, and applying pressure among leadership circles, within bureaucratic environments, and in the larger public sphere, toward the effective and sustainable implementation of reform.

How are coalitions formed?

Coalitions are products of deliberate, concerted, and painstaking efforts among those who understand that collective action is more powerful than disparate efforts carried out by lone champions and loosely affiliated groups. Structured and formal collaboration allow these societal actors to combine scarce resources and, by acting in concert, increase the power of their voices in the public sphere to effect positive change.[4] This paper cites some of the lessons learned from experiences in building strong and lasting coalitions that increase the likelihood of successful reform.

In the areas of governance and development, coalitions have served many purposes and have been formed in various ways. However, experiences from around the world suggest that there are some essential steps to coalition building that can be carried out in different sequences. The following coalition building stages do not comprise a comprehensive nor prescriptive list. That said, to increase the likelihood of success of change initiatives, it is imperative that reform leaders take stock of the ways in which coalitions have previously been successfully built and made sustainable. Drawing on a wide range of sources from the fields of leadership, communication, negotiation, and development, we find that coalitions are formed and strengthened through the following stages:

- *Issue Identification and Specification:* the overall objective of the problem is articulated and broken down for detailed analysis; policy options are defined in terms of a continuum of options (from minimum to maximum reform positions) that particular stakeholders may either support or find unpalatable

- *Relationship/Stakeholder Mapping*: significant actors are identified, positions toward key and related issues are plotted, especially in terms of the policy options identified in the previous step

- *Forming Core Membership*: the core of a coalition is convinced about and becomes self-aware of the benefits of change; core actors are organized, early leaders and champions are identified, and the joint agenda takes shape

- *Demonstrating Credibility*: coalition demonstrates it is knowledgeable about relevant issues, can act effectively, and is worthy of support from stakeholders

- *Purposeful Expansion*: a critical stage when a small organization builds a broader social and resource base while retaining coherence and effectiveness

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[4] http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/coalition_building/

- *Sustainable Transformation*: during which the coalition has grown and becomes polycentric, with initiatives on many fronts, drawing strength from many sources

The above-stated processes through which coalitions are formed and made sustainable have requisite research, networking, lobbying, and mass outreach activities. Communication between and among current and potential coalition members plays an important role in these activities, and should be key considerations in coalition building efforts. It is to the communicative dimensions of coalition building to which we now turn.

The Communication Dimensions of Coalition Building

Coalition building requires tackling a complex array of challenges, one of which is getting the communication dimension right. Effective communication efforts range from facilitating networks among likeminded political elites; fostering deliberation, dialogue, and debate among multiple stakeholders, especially public sector middle managers; measuring and informing public opinion; and building support among various interest publics as well as the general citizenry.

Effective communication efforts in support of coalition building help secure, strengthen, and sustain political will at various bureaucratic levels. Both decision-making elites and public sector middle managers require support of likeminded individuals and organizations that will provide political cover when unpopular decisions need to be made in the public interest. The leveraging of shared resources allows coalitions to more effectively inform and cultivate support among publics. Inclusive and participatory approaches made possible by coalitions create a consensus for reform which increases the likelihood of success and sustainability of change efforts.
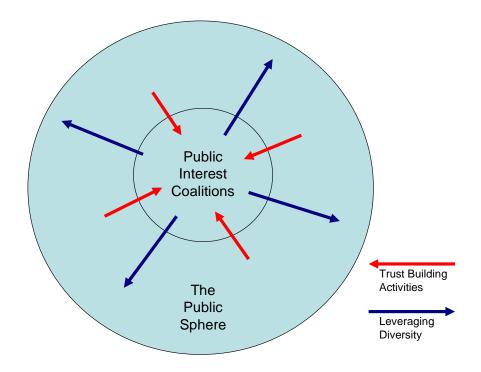
While there may be no one way to build strong coalitions, experiences from around the world suggest that effective communication is an essential component that needs to be deployed judiciously in different combinations and sequences, depending on the needs and stages of formation of particular coalitions. Each of the coalition building stages listed above implies communication activities, as listed here under each stage:

- *Issue Identification and Specification:* communication efforts should focus on gauging public opinion and consulting with policy experts to determine the national mood[5], public discourse, and policy options surrounding the reform initiative *(use public opinion research methods and key informant interviews)*

- *Relationship/Stakeholder Mapping*: communication efforts should focus on listening to actors and key informants, including using and analyzing public

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[5] Jeremy Rosner (2008). Communicating difficult reforms: Eight lessons from Slovakia. In S. Odugbemi & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *Governance Reform Under Real-World Conditions: Citizens, Stakeholder, and Voice* (pp. 395-396). Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

opinion data to determine positions of general public as well as subgroups *(use public opinion research methods, key informant interviews, and network analysis)*

- *Forming Core Membership*: communication efforts should focus on lobbying and persuasion of influential individuals and key targets, as well as deepening understanding of their positions and trade-offs *(use lobbying and persuasion techniques)*

- *Demonstrating Credibility*: communication/messages should focus on successes to date (even small ones), but framed as much as possible in terms of the interests and incentives of core membership and key stakeholders; coalition should also demonstrate mastery of the issues surrounding the reform *(use issue framing and media relations techniques)*

- *Purposeful Expansion*: the target of communication efforts should shift toward addressing the interests of broader relevant issue and policy networks *(use framing for collective action and networking approaches)*

- *Sustainable Transformation*: communication efforts should broaden and include appeals to the general public, especially in terms of addressing social norms *(use framing for collective action and media relations techniques)*

While the contributions of communication to coalition building in support of reform are multi-faceted, successful efforts from around the world suggest that these initiatives can be boiled down into two categories: communication efforts that either **build trust**, especially during early formative stages, and **leverage diversity,** to make the most of a coalition's broad membership. Finding a balance between trust and diversity which exert pressure in opposite directions, much like centripetal and centrifugal forces, strengthens a coalition's orbital rotation around a particular issue and enhances its influence in the public sphere.

Coalition members must enjoy a level of trust that will enable the ceding of a significant amount of autonomy, i.e., in sharing resources and decision making power). At the same time, each member's access to relevant policy networks and interest publics should be leveraged toward increasing the scope and influence of the coalition. It is toward building trust and managing diversity that effective communication is critical. The following chart renders the relationships among coalition building stages, their communication dimensions and a phased approach to building trust and leveraging diversity.

(PLEASE SEE CHART ATTACHED AS ANNEX "A")

What motivates people to join coalitions?

Convincing stakeholders to join a coalition requires crafting messages that resonate with the motivations of potential and current members. A recommended communication approach in this regard is called "framing for collective action," which essentially means finding a way to sell the coalition by tapping into the motivations of stakeholders. Two dimensions of human motivations (shared purpose and sought after rewards) are discussed below.

From the study of political psychology, we have learned that particular types of shared purpose play important roles in individuals' decisions to participate in social

movements[6]. An attempt is mad3 here to apply these shared purposes to our understanding of coalition building. Appeals for stakeholders to join can be crafted based on the following:

- *Identity* – highlighting identification with preexisting ingroups, such as those based on ethnicity, gender, profession, etc.

- *Ideology* – responding to an individual's search for meaning (e.g., to serve the marginalized or enhance individual liberty) and serve as a platform for expression of one's voice (e.g., coalition as a forum for deliberation and debate)

- *Instrumentality* – providing opportunities to influence the social and political environment in the direction of a potential coalition member's pragmatic goals

Shared purpose is often reflected in the stated objectives of the coalition, and is the most obvious reason for joining. It thus makes sense to communicate based on one or a combination of the shared purposes listed above. Effective communication, however, requires more than simply proclaiming whether a coalition's purpose is based on identity, ideology or instrumentality. Sahr Kpundeh argues that in addition to shared purpose, there are sought after rewards that drive the desire to join and maintain membership in coalitions. These include:

- *Material incentives*: rewards of tangible value, such as money, goods, or jobs – communicate in terms of material benefits to the ingroup, such as shared decision making power over the allocation of pooled resources and a fair share of the gains from joint efforts

- *Specific solidary incentives*: "… intangible rewards arising out of the act of associating can be given to, or withheld from, individuals – communicate a sense of belonging and prestige derived from membership

- *Collective solidary incentives*: "… intangible rewards created by the act of associating that must be enjoyed by the whole group, and restricted to group members – communicate a sense of fellowship and community derived from membership

Crossing categories of shared purposes with sought after rewards results in a more nuanced understanding of human motivations. This enhanced understanding can guide reform leaders in crafting messages that might appeal to various stakeholders, once efforts have been made to understand the motivations of particular stakeholders.

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[6] Bert Klandermans. 2003. Collective political action. In D. O. Sears, L. Huddy, & R. Jervis (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, pp. 670-709.

Sought After Rewards	Shared Purpose		
	Identity	*Ideology*	*Instrumentality*
Material (tangible)	Resources for ingroup	Resources for the cause, in general	Resources for specific projects and programs
Specific solidary (intangible)	Sense of prestige and belonging	Affirmation of personal beliefs and convictions	Political efficacy[7] (i.e., the individual's belief that she or he can make a difference)
Collective solidary (intangible)	Sense of community	Affirmation of shared purpose	Collective efficacy (i.e., the group's belief that it can make a difference)

Coalitions have the capacity to appeal to overlapping motivations of multiple constituencies. The broader the shared agenda among members and the larger the number of segments of society a coalition seeks to mobilize, the more potential motivations will be available for message crafting. However, sensitivity to **cross-purposes** among members needs to be managed by effective communication and decision making rules. While coalitions, by definition, serve a common vision, they must also cater to multiple motivations given their broad memberships.

A caveat. It should be noted that long term sustainability is not always an overarching goal of coalition building since it could make sense for coalition members to disband once their joint purpose has been fulfilled. However, there are long term policy and advocacy issues that require attention over time, especially in terms of applying pressure on decision makers and bureaucratic implementers to follow through on commitments. This suggests that sustainability should always be seriously considered to guard against the threat of counter-reform by vested interests.

What are some examples of successful coalitions?

Some examples of successful coalition building efforts in support of reform are considered here, including anti-corruption efforts in the Philippines, improving water

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[7] Membership in coalitions can also give individuals a sense of political efficacy "or the sense that one's participation can actually make a difference (internal efficacy) and that the political system would be responsive to this participation (external efficacy)…" Michael X. Delli Carpini (2004). Mediating Democratic Engagement: The Impact of Communications on Citizens' Involvement in Political and Civic Life. In L. L. Kaid (Ed.), *Handbook of Political Communication Research* (pp. 395-434). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

services in Kenya, privatizing public enterprises in India, and judicial sector reform in Georgia.

Example 1: Transparency and Accountability Coalition in the Philippines[8]

In the Philippines, the Transparent Accountable Governance (TAG) initiative is a good example of successful pro-reform coalition building. In the late 1990's, The Asia Foundation was able to build a coalition for curbing corruption and fostering an improved environment for economic growth. Initially partnering with academic institutions to carry out research activities to examine the problem of corruption in the Philippines, the coalition was joined over time by other groups such as the League of Cities of the Philippines, credible NGOs and private sector partners. These additional coalition members increased the influence and ensured sustainable support for the program. In addition, creation of the TAG Web site (http://www.tag.org.ph) proved instrumental in empowering citizens and motivating them to participate by making their contribution visible in a publicly accessible space.

Unlike traditional, one-way communication, which keeps repeating the same simple message through the same channel, coalition building is about building trust. This, requires engaging people with credible messages, backed up by research and evidence and delivered by credible messengers. Vested interests are at a disadvantage in this new landscape. TAG has had significant achievements, such as textbook monitoring with the Department of Education, development of a feedback mechanism for procurement monitoring with the Office of the Ombudsman, and development of deployment software for civil society observers of the Bids and Awards Committee.

Example 2: Water Sector Reform Coalition in Kenya[9]

In Kenya, building broad coalitions around decentralized institutions led to successful implementation of water sector reforms. High-level policy makers and other stakeholders brought on board broad political and social support ensuring a transparent and accountable process. Because of a clear focus on the major issues in the country's water sector, the political momentum created with the incoming government (in 2003), and the renewed interest in water by the government's development partners, a coalition quickly coalesced around reforms. Guided by the interministerial Water Sector Reform Steering Committee (WSRSC), the Water Sector Reform Secretariat (WSRS) implemented the reforms.

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[8] Robert de Quelen (2008). Building Pro-Change Multisectoral Coalitions to Overcome the Resistance of Powerful Vested Interests. In S. Odugbemi & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *Governance Reform Under Real-World Conditions: Citizens, Stakeholder, and Voice* (pp. 233-247). Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

[9] George O. Khroda (2008). A Consensus-Based, Stakeholder-Driven, and Decentralized Approach to Building Broad Coalitions for Water Sector Reforms. In S. Odugbemi & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *Governance Reform Under Real-World Conditions: Citizens, Stakeholder, and Voice* (pp.219-231). Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

In the late 1990s, chronic water shortages had cultivated among the citizenry a sense of urgency for sector reforms. The Ministry of Water and Irrigation's role was, therefore, to build a coalition not only among people and groups who were disgruntled with the administration of water services to date but also among others who needed to be associated with such reforms, especially the new government that had campaigned on a platform of good governance and improved public service delivery. Under the new government, political awareness about water sector reform led to responsiveness to stakeholder demand for action and transparency in the reform process. The success of reform was due to broad-based consensus, stakeholder mobilization, the formation of a policy-making steering committee composed of key stakeholders, and the establishment of an independent implementation unit free of government manipulation or intervention.

Example 3: Judicial Reform Coalition in Georgia[10]

In Georgia, survey results and focus groups suggested that citizens thought very poorly of the judiciary and showed a strong mistrust toward the institution. Although the leadership of the judiciary was capable and reform oriented, changes in the system were not going to happen overnight, and when they would take place, they would be known only to those using the courts. Explaining those changes to the public was a challenge because of the judiciary's low credibility. Messages in support of judicial reform would be much more successful if they were to be communicated by a neutral third party.

For this purpose, several NGOs active in the field of justice created a new organization—the Association for Legal Public Education (ALPE)—tasked to implement the communication program. Thus, four NGOs and a state body, the Council of Justice, established ALPE. The new organization was given the responsibility of walking a very thin line: while remaining an NGO with a strong, independent voice, it had to engage the judiciary to become more open and transparent while at the same time helping the judiciary to reach out to the public.

Example 4: Public Enterprise Reform Coalition in India[11]

Another successful coalition building effort was the controversial public enterprise reform in West Bengal, India. Many powerful and long established stakeholder groups opposed change, each with its own reason to preserve the current balance of power. In support of reform, government used a coalition to neutralize opponents. Those tasks

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[10] Jose-Manuel Bassat (2008). Building Support for the Rule of Law in Georgia. In S. Odugbemi & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *Governance Reform Under Real-World Conditions: Citizens, Stakeholder, and Voice* (pp. 397-411). Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

[11] Steve Masty (2008). Communication, Coalition Building, and Development: Public Enterprise Reform in West Bengal and Orissa States, India. In S. Odugbemi & T. Jacobson (Eds.), *Governance Reform Under Real-World Conditions: Citizens, Stakeholder, and Voice* (pp. 355-389). Washington, D.C.: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

required sophisticated deployment of communication techniques. In a low-key and transparent manner, government launched a broad, consultative dialogue among public enterprise managers, unions, and government: identifying problems together, drawing conclusions about the similar problems faced by the majority of firms in the public enterprise sector, and by exploring available options. This approach gave labor leadership a sense of shared ownership of the problems together with management and government.

The communication strategy followed logically from the political nature of the problem that communication was required to address. Once the decision was made for government first to work with core stakeholders and later to involve mass media, there was no large audience involved at the beginning, and the core stakeholders could meet more or less in one room. The most intimate, flexible, and credible medium, then, was face-to-face meetings; the second-most was written correspondence. These letters and minutes not only kept all core stakeholders aware of how the policy debate progressed, but also put stakeholder positions on the record and discouraged participants from backsliding or shying away from earlier concessions. Personal meetings and transparent statements on paper were effective means of building transparency, credibility, and trust.

ANNEX "A"

Key challenges: A Phased approach	Coalition Building Stages	Description of each stage	Communication dimension/s and recommended techniques
Building Trust	Issue Framing and Specification	Overall objective of the political problem is articulated and broken down; policy options are defined in terms of a continuum of options	Gauging public opinion and consulting with policy experts to determine the national mood, public discourse, and policy options surrounding the reform initiative *(use public opinion research methods and key informant interviews)*
	Relationship/stakeholder mapping	Significant actors are identified, positions toward key and related issues are plotted	Listening to actors and key informants, including using and analyzing public opinion data to determine positions of general public as well as subgroups *(use public opinion research methods, network analysis, and key informant interviews)*
	Forming Core Coalition Membership	Core of a coalition is organized, early leaders and champions identified, and agenda takes shape	Listening to, lobbying, and persuasion of influential individuals and key targets, as well as deepening understanding of their positions and trade-offs *(use lobbying and persuasion techniques)*
Leveraging Diversity	Demonstrating Credibility	Coalition demonstrates it can act effectively and is worthy of support from stakeholders	Messages should focus on successes to date, even small ones, framed in terms of the interests and incentives of core membership and key stakeholders *(use issue framing and media relations techniques)*
	Purposeful Expansion	Critical stage when a small organization builds a broader social and resource base while retaining coherence and effectiveness	Target of communication efforts should shift toward addressing the interests of broader relevant interest publics and policy networks *(use framing for collective action and networking approaches)*
	Sustainable Transformation	Coalition has grown and becomes polycentric, with initiatives on many fronts, drawing strength from many sources	Communication efforts should broaden and include appeals to the general public, especially in terms of addressing social norms *(use framing for collective action and media relations techniques)*