

# Make Change Happen – Unit 2

## Stories of change from around the world

### Bolivia: Young people work to shift attitudes about romantic love...

Members of youth groups in Bolivia, with the support of Coordinadora de la Mujer, Colectivo Rebeldia, IFFI, Centro de Promoción de la Mujer Gregoria Apaza and Oxfam, decided to look at the ways in which current ideas about romantic love amongst young people were contributing to the high levels of control of and violence against women and girls in Bolivia, and how these could be changed.

Using surveys and focus groups led by young people discussing what could be very sensitive and personal issues, the group identified that the expression of jealousy was sometimes perceived as a sign of 'true love.' Jealousy could therefore be considered a 'good thing', and yet it was also a key driver of control and violence. The youth groups worked together to develop and test a campaign action to highlight the dangers of jealousy and to promote alternative behaviours and attitudes which treat partners with respect and show safe ways to express love.

This campaign, called 'ACTÚA Detén la violencia' ('Act to stop the violence'), first launched in 2017 and included online and offline actions such as street art; collaborations with reggaeton artists, skateboarders, and TV celebrities; a partnership with La Paz's public transportation system to reach thousands of passengers each day; coordinated actions with high schools; and the development of GIFs, memes and a Facebook and TikTok community. 70,000 young people signed up to be part of the campaign, 30% of whom were male.

In its continuing efforts to challenge harmful gendered tropes, the campaign also recognises that indigenous LGBTQIA+ Bolivians often have to leave their native communities in order to thrive. ACTÚA activists also worked with bloggers, authors and creators to mainstream messages of gender equality and inclusion among Bolivia's youth. Last Pride Month they partnered with an artist and activist Wilmar Montero, who portrayed queer joy as an indigenous family who is able to freely express their love and affection.

Find out more:

[Jealousy is no excuse for violence against women video](#), YouTube

## India: A grassroots organisation fights for the right to information...

In the 1990s, in Beawar, a small town in Rajasthan, India, a grassroots organisation began to campaign for access to government records as part of their efforts to secure minimum wages. Their success in extracting information from the government and in uncovering corruption led to a broader movement to advocate for every Indian citizen to have the right to information. The Indian social activist Aruna Roy felt that this transparency could be a powerful tool for advocacy on workers' rights, human rights, and environmental rights, making the government more transparent and accountable to ordinary citizens.

Advocacy groups joined with individual activists, including Shankar Singh and Nikhil Dey, to build a support base of farmers and villagers through the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) ('Workers and Peasants Strength Union'). They also built partnerships with the media, lawyers, and other civil society groups to show the cross-cutting nature of the issue.

Following a protest in the town which lasted for 44 days, the local, and eventually the national, government were forced to take action. The Right to Information Act was enshrined in law in 2005.

There is still a struggle to ensure that the law is followed in practice with many Right to Information Requests rejected or stuck in bureaucratic processes which are hard to understand and to access. Some people who have sought information under the act have been attacked and some have been barred. This continues to be the focus of the campaign.

### Sources:

['20 Years of the Right to Information Movement'](#), NDTV  
[Right to Information Act, 2005](#)

## Australia Growing in confidence to speak up...

Shaylem Wilson is a proud Ngarrindjeri woman living on Kurna country in Adelaide, South Australia.

As someone who grew up in a community which is overrepresented in the criminal justice system and the foster system while being underrepresented in political spaces, she strongly believes in self-determination and First Nation Peoples leading the way to affect change for themselves.

She says, 'I'm passionate about closing the inequality gap, but also giving First Nations people the knowledge and power to do it themselves.' As such she works within the Foster Care team at Lutheran Care, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC are connected to their culture. She has also been involved in the Uluru Youth Summit – creating a network of youth in South Australia who will be the next generation and so that Elders and older people have somewhere to pass their knowledge on.

Shaylem also sees it as very important that young Aboriginal women find their voice, including finding her own. 'I think if we look inwards to Indigenous communities, they are very male dominated, a lot of the males have previously led the way. I think it's important that equality is shared.'

When the opportunity arose, she took part in Straight Talk, a program which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to make positive changes through political engagement. Through her participation in summits, connecting with others and sharing knowledge and skills she has found the confidence to speak up on issues that directly affected her or her people, and is less concerned about other people – whether it's aboriginal men, white men, or white women – judging her.

Shaylem says, 'Before coming to Straight Talk I didn't have a lot of knowledge about political systems. My knowledge was only about how it disadvantages First Nations people. It's been good to learn from other Indigenous women about their journeys as politicians, or their journeys within the political system, how they've used it to further themselves and further their people. It's been amazing to hear from them and learn from them.'

Find out more:

[Oxfam Australia Straight Talk](#)

## Ghana: Raising public awareness to influence government spending decisions...

Despite representing 60% of Ghana's economically active population, the voices of small-scale farmers are often marginalized in the country's policy and budget processes. As a result, many do not have access to improved seed varieties, fertilizer, irrigation, financial services, credit or the expert support they need to improve production and add value to their produce.

To help tackle this problem 10 civil society organisations in Ghana, including Oxfam, launched the Oil4Agric campaign to advocate for small-scale agriculture to be one of the Government's top priorities for the investment of oil and gas revenues. The campaign called for spending on agriculture to increase from 8.5% to 14.1% of GDP and to be focused in areas which would have most benefit for small-scale producers.

The campaign mobilised huge levels of public support across the country. A simple Oil4Food mobile phone petition was promoted in newspapers, TV, radio, at public events such as student forums and farmer rallies, and by celebrities on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Farmer organizations gathered over 20,000 signatures from 300 communities across 30 districts—visiting them to explain the campaign and ask for support, and making a paper 'thumbprint' petition available to those not able to read or write.

The Ministry of Finance, parliamentary committees and MPs were directly engaged and the campaign contributed to the National Budget Preparation Process – highlighting the potential benefits which this investment could bring for economic growth, food security and poverty alleviation. As a result, the 2014 Budget maintained agriculture as one of the four priority sectors to invest oil revenue and allocated 15% of expected oil revenue (\$409m) to agriculture with the majority to be spent on 'poverty-focused agriculture'. In addition, the Government of Ghana passed legislation to ensure a permanent transparent system for disclosing, managing and allocating oil revenues. Now the campaign is focused on securing the passage of a similar law to ensure that revenues from the mining sector are allocated to support smallholder agriculture.

## USA: Working with the law to change hearts and minds...

The campaign to win marriage equality for same-sex couples in all U.S. states was, in part, a legal campaign that began with a dismissed case in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1972 and then gained traction in the courts in Hawaii in 1993 and later in other courthouses and legislatures across the U.S. On June 26, 2015, history was made when the U.S. Supreme Court made marriage equality the law of the land.

Some important lessons were learnt during the campaign.

It became clear that victory across all the states would only come by gaining wide public support. From that point on, the movement changed its message. Gay marriage was not solely about rights and responsibilities, it was about love. The most effective messengers were not same-sex couples, but parents or grandparents of LGBTQIA+ people who had been married for decades. It was a strategy that resonated with everyone. The marriage equality movement had found a way to move hearts and minds.

The campaign was taken forward by a strong network of diverse organisations including a consortium of funding foundations, campaigning groups, such as the Freedom to Marry campaign and Marriage Equality USA, tenacious leaders and advocates, straight allies, elected officials, celebrities, and most importantly, hundreds of thousands of people at the grassroots level.

However, while this historic victory benefitted those wishing to marry someone of the same gender and thereby secure the legal rights and privileges inherent in doing so, when viewed through an intersectional feminist lens, the fight for marriage equality – though significant – had less material impact on the circumstances for LGBTQIA+ people experiencing poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of discrimination that can make them more vulnerable to a range of social harms. The message of ‘love is love’ resonated, but for many in the community, racial and economic justice were arguably more urgent and largely absent from the mainstream conversations about marriage equality. The campaign’s priorities ultimately reflected the priorities of those who funded it and led it which, while not unusual, can still be a risk for many campaigns that seek social change on behalf of a large and diverse population.

Fortunately, key players in the campaign – like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) – have built on the momentum and resources generated by the marriage equality fight to speak out about social inequities that still plague members of the LGBTQIA+ community. The strong consensus suggests it is one less fight they’ll have moving forward, and a key precedent upon which to build future legal battles for LGBTQIA+ rights in the U.S. and abroad.

Find out more:

[Freedom to Marry website](#)

[Proteus Fund website](#)

[Brennan Center for Justice website](#)

[Marriage Equality USA website](#)

## UK: Campaigning to give visibility to an unseen issue...

In 2018, Katy Styles was a full-time carer to her husband and, increasingly, to her mother. She recognised that this vital role was entirely invisible in the UK. Millions of people like her provide unpaid care to family members, friends or neighbours who have additional support needs due to disabilities, illnesses or old age – with women being more likely to take on this role and provide more hours of unpaid care. Despite their crucial contribution, unpaid carers remain widely unsupported and under-valued, with too many being put under incredible financial, physical and emotional pressure – carers from under-represented groups, such as Black and minority ethnic and LGBTQIA+ carers, face additional barriers and challenges.

She felt that work needed to be done to challenge this. She joined with others in a similar situation to found the We Care Campaign, a UK-based award-winning grassroots campaign with the aim to give unpaid carers a platform to achieve better rights and recognition: 'Together, we have a voice. Together, we are stronger. Together we can create change.'

We Care have successfully implemented a number of digital campaigns using a range of tactics. For example, in 2018, they led on a petition for a National Carers Strategy which gained support from carers support organisations, individual carers and decision-makers, and was presented in the UK Parliament.

We Care have also been utilising [craftivism](#) to get unpaid carers noticed by decision-makers. Their *Sticking Plaster Craftivism* focuses on the belief that unpaid carers are more than just a sticking plaster that holds health and social care systems together. Using a craftivism kit, We Care make it possible for carers to send a sticking plaster with a handwritten letter to their local Member of Parliament.

In 2022, We Care also created a powerful film to highlight the reality of caring and their call for change, which has been utilised to support their campaigns and mobilise more carers. We Care have also been engaging with decision-makers directly for example by submitting evidence to public inquiries. The movement has been growing rapidly and has gained visibility across civil society, media and decision-making spaces.

Find out more:

[We Care Campaign website](#)

## Philippines: Joining with others to enact a new law...

Juanday and Farhana were childhood friends and student leaders at college in Maguindanao, Philippines. Since school, they had witnessed early child and forced marriages and violence against women in their community. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in the Philippines, one in every six girls is married before the age of 18.

'We cannot deny that these issues are close to home, both in our communities and schools. We shared ideas with our friends, and we asked ourselves why not create initiatives to address these issues. With this, my best friend Juanday and I, both student leaders, decided to start an organization against child, early, and forced marriages,' said Farhana.

In November 2020, they organized the Maguindanao Alliance of Youth Advocates (MAYA), a network of student leaders in three municipalities of Maguindanao, a conflict-affected area with high cases of early marriage.

Juanday, Farhana, and their friends joined the Creating Spaces Project and took part in training and awareness sessions on child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) and violence against women. This helped them realize the concept of volunteering and creating actions for change, and it helped in the formation of the alliance and expand MAYA's youth membership.

'We started in 2020 as an organization, but we managed to spearhead advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives under the Creating Spaces project through various platforms. First is the power of social media – even if we are in our homes, we can still create content about our advocacy and share it on different platforms. Second is the opportunity to do radio broadcasting every Wednesday. And lastly, MAYA aims to visit each household, especially those in remote areas with no Internet connection and radio access,' emphasised Farhana.

MAYA became part of the 'Girl Defenders' Alliance, which has been advocating for the end of child, early and forced marriage for years. Finally, on 10 December 2021, the Philippines legislature signed into law 'An Act Prohibiting the Practice of Child Marriage and Imposing Penalties for Violations Thereof.'

After the legal victory the next challenge is to ensure that the law is enforced, and this will take time: 'the fight against child marriage is not an overnight success. We are doing this for the next generation,' said Juanday.

Creating Spaces Project, part of the United Youth of the Philippines-Women (UnYPhil-Women), is supported by Oxfam with funding from Global Affairs Canada.

Find out more:

[Oxfam, 'Girl Defenders' alliance laud passage of anti-child marriage law](#)  
[The Future of BARMM: Students stand up against child marriage](#)

## South Africa: Students use social media to drive the political agenda...

#FeesMustFall is a South African student-led protest movement which emerged in mid-October 2015. Protests initially erupted at the historically white University of Witwatersrand in opposition to a proposed 10% hike in student fees. It quickly spread through social media to many black universities and the University of Cape Town. Students mobilized in the streets, occupied buildings, and met with authorities to express their grievances. Police deployment on campuses – and the violent way they often dealt with protestors – meant that peaceful protests often became violent. Many students were arrested or wounded and there was damage to property.

The movement initially displayed strong unity between different student groups, as well as energy and tenacity in engaging with authorities. It successfully raised public awareness and support and forced the government to respond. Students from many universities united to march on Parliament on 21 October 2015; soon after President Zuma announced that there would be no increase in university fees for 2016 and pledged more money to support poorer students.

The #FeesMustFall protests, having achieved policy change and shifted the national discourse on higher education issues, such as decolonisation of the curriculum, continued to provide some focus for activism beyond 2016. However, by 2019 most student protests on issues such as registration fees, accommodation and inefficiencies within the tertiary education system and broader issues on the country's financial aid scheme for poorer and working class students was taking place locally at some universities. Presently, the feesmustfall hashtag is no longer the rallying banner for protests across the country on these issues, as movements increasingly move from issue-based organising to more intersectional issues.

Find out more:

[South Africa's Student Protests: Everything to Know About a Movement That Goes Back Decades](#), *Global Citizen*, April 2021.

## Bangladesh: Working on the inside to respond to a tragedy...

2023 marks ten years since the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in which 1,132 people, most of them women garment workers, lost their lives. It was one of the world's worst industrial disasters. The Rana Plaza was a commercial building in Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital, which housed five garment factories. The tragedy highlighted the lack of safeguards faced by the Bangladeshi garment workers who make clothes for buyers worldwide. Textile products make up over 80% of the goods and services exported by Bangladesh, the second-largest clothing exporter after China.

Within weeks of the disaster, an international ['Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh'](#) was signed and delivered. A legally binding agreement between global companies, retailers, and trade unions, the accord mandates some astounding breakthroughs, such as an independent inspection programme; a commitment by signatory brands to fund improvements and maintain sourcing relationships; democratically elected health and safety committees in all factories; and worker empowerment through an extensive training programme, complaints mechanism, and the right to refuse unsafe work. Ten years on, there have been nearly 56,000 safety inspections across more than 2,400 garment factories in Bangladesh and more than 140,000 safety improvements made.

We can point to several factors to explain how this shocking tragedy drove rapid movement toward better regulation. A forum on labour rights in Bangladesh (the Ethical Trading Initiative) had already built a high degree of trust between traditional antagonists (companies, unions, and NGOs). Trust allowed people to get on the phone to each other right away.

Prior work had already sketched the outline of a potential accord; and the Rana Plaza disaster massively escalated the pressure to act on it and gave campaigners something to support and build on. Energetic leadership from two new international trade unions (IndustriALL and UNI Global Union) connected to the key individuals inside organisations and companies who could actually implement the desired change. Many of the companies themselves saw the accord as something positive in the face of their tarnished reputation and consumer pressure to take action.

Despite the apparent successes, campaigners say that textile workers in Bangladesh are still underpaid and can face labour rights abuses, for example harassment for being part of a union or lack of compensation for injuries sustained at work. Women continue to make up the lowest grade positions. Some estimates are that only 0.5% of management positions in the garment industry are occupied by women. A growing body of evidence also shows that female garment workers suffer regular sexual harassment and abuse at work. At the same time, factory owners struggle to meet the demands of the large brands, facing delayed payments, cancelled or dramatically reduced orders without notice.

### Sources:

['How Change Happens'](#), Duncan Green, 2016  
[Oxfam Canada graphic novel on the Rana Plaza tragedy](#)  
[Oxfam Canada's 'What She makes' campaign](#)  
[Updates from 'Abuses 'still rife': 10 years on from Bangladesh's Rana Plaza disaster'](#), *The Guardian*, April 2023