



EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR USING VIDEO IN HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY

The key to an effective video advocacy strategy is to have a clear sense of your goals and audience, and to choose the most appropriate strategy for your needs. Each of the video strategies outlined below has its benefits and its disadvantages. Some reach wide audiences and help to raise general awareness about a particular issue, but the videos may not be seen by key decision makers. Some strategies will reach policymakers or judges, but will require additional efforts to reach a broader public. In all cases, do not necessarily assume that the best audience for your video will be the largest – in some cases, it may make sense to target a smaller or more important audience, and ensure that the video you produce is persuasive. *Please keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list and is only intended to be a sample of options, and that these strategies are not mutually exclusive. WITNESS partners often multi-purpose material to reach multiple audiences. WITNESS can share examples of successful uses of these strategies by partners.*

Many of the most successful campaigns incorporating video advocacy rely on multiple formats and audiences. So consider how you might use different video strategies in sequence, so the impact of one action builds on another. For example, coordinating the release of your material to television to build and increase pressure after you have had the opportunity to engage grassroots networks via screenings, and to show the video/present your report in a private meeting with decision-makers. The WITNESS ‘Video for Change’ book (www.witness.org/videoforchange) addresses many of these potential approaches in more detail.

- Video evidence before a national court, regional body, or international tribunal. Your unedited, or edited, footage can be used as a source of evidence in a court of law. But, in order for it be used, you must accurately record as much surrounding information and context as possible -- e.g. time and date of footage, name of videographer, location of recording etc. WITNESS provides information on how to film in an effective way for evidence, but please note that national law varies on the admissibility of this evidence, and it is not always easy to use.
- Submitting video reports before a UN treaty body, Special Rapporteur or Working Group. Video reports for the UN or other inter-governmental bodies can be structured in different ways: as a documentary on the particular issue being addressed; as a complement to a shadow report submitted to an UN treaty oversight committee; as direct, unedited testimonials by victims of a violation; as raw unedited footage of an actual violation or event. In most cases you will want to provide the material in tandem with written documentation and submissions, and to link the video content directly to the submission. Bear in mind that opting for this approach will require that you organize screenings of your video report along with question and answer periods that can properly inform the UN treaty body or other intergovernmental body viewing your piece.
- Presenting focused, action-oriented video to government, corporate or civil society decision-makers. Remember that in some cases reaching a key government committee or NGO or business decision-maker may be critical to your advocacy. Many top decision-makers are not regularly exposed directly to the voices of those affected by human rights abuses – bringing these voices directly into their offices can be powerfully effective when combined with sharing information for action.

- Using video as a grassroots education and mobilizing tool for communities, and as an organizing tool for solidarity groups supporting your work. With an appropriate distribution network and accompanying screening materials such as information packets, handbooks or manuals, many video formats can fit this advocacy purpose. But, you must think of this strategy separately and formulate your message according to the audience you are trying to motivate and inform. You must also develop guidelines and strategies for initiating discussions around the video. Remember that using video in this context works best when you are connected with existing grassroots networks through which to distribute.
- Video-blogging to build supporter engagement in a campaign. Using new online video sharing sites like the Hub (hub.witness.org) – provided your constituencies have internet access – you can maintain and build supporter engagement and participation in a campaign by sharing regular video ‘progress reports’ or short stories.
- Online video advocacy on sites including the Hub, YouTube and social networks. By creating and sharing short video clips you can create flexible, accessible tools for advocacy that your supporters can use online in support of e-advocacy, and also utilize in offline screenings. Sometimes, these clips can ‘go viral’ generating a splash of attention for your advocacy. New tools also allow you to support people to collaborate online in creating their own media in support of your campaign. As with all online work, you need both your constituency and audience to have internet access.
- Producing a video public service announcement. A short 30 to 90 second message can be an effective tool in your campaign to mobilize a broad audience around an issue. Bear in mind that producing a PSA (public service announcement) will usually require you to collaborate with someone experienced in the field of commercials and publicity, and that it is a good idea to identify potential outlets for broadcast or for widespread distribution through a civil society network before you expend the resources to produce a PSA.
- Producing a video documentary to reach a broader public. Documentary storytelling can be an effective way of educating a wide international and domestic public via broadcast and public screenings. However, bear in mind the expensive cost/time required for post-production (editing), and the difficulty of securing wide broadcast. If you do not have a potential broadcast outlet that will reach a relevant public consider whether the potential benefits are worth the investment and skills/resources required. A broadcast on a minor channel, or one that is not targeted to a key audience, may not be worth the effort. Also note that to produce a one-hour documentary, most film-makers shoot over 80 hours of raw footage. The more detailed your list of shots are prior to shooting and the more you prepare for your interviews, the less raw footage you will need to shoot to achieve the same length for your final piece.
- Video as source for news broadcast, and as an archive for b-roll. Your high quality unedited footage of a violation can at times be the only source of news or recording available to a larger public, or can provide a unique, otherwise inaccessible story. You will want to provide copies of your raw footage to local, national, regional and international broadcast outlets in a packaged format, showing the highlights, and providing background information as well as potential spokespeople. The feasibility of getting footage on local news will vary by your location. However, note that getting footage on international news is usually very difficult. You may also choose to try and place raw footage on television as b-roll (visuals that accompany a story) to accompany related stories. Here you are less likely to see your advocacy intent and story retained in the final story.
- Video as a deterrent to further abuse. In some cases, using a video camera as a monitor can help deter human rights violations. WITNESS works with its partners to help assess the risks and benefits of using video in different circumstances.