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**Preserving the Ancient (Perennial) or Rare Rumi Olive Trees in the  
Town of Tibneh/Irbid Governorate**

*Tibneh Charitable Association*

**Jordanian Civic Activists Toolkit II:  
Case Studies of Jordanian Advocacy Campaigns**

Civil Society Capacity Building in Jordan  
USAID Civic Initiatives Support Program  
2013 – 2018



<sup>1</sup> Source: The information related to these four areas of rights are adapted from and found in Discover Human Rights: A Human Rights Approach to Social Justice Work, The Advocates for Human Rights (<http://bit.ly/1TmOp6v>). The New Tactics Method utilizes: safety and security; non-discrimination; participation; and protection-accountability. NOTE: The rights listed in these four “categories” may be placed in any area depending upon the context where the right is being violated. For example, Article 23: Right to join trade unions might be placed in “Safety and Security” rather than “Participation” where organizing or joining a union is dangerous.

<sup>2</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 25 (1): Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

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

## **Overview**

### **Advocacy Issue**

The right of the population to enjoy and preserve the ancient Rumi olive trees as a historical, ecological and natural legacy.

### **Human Rights-Based Focus Area<sup>1</sup>**

Protection / Accountability – (UDHR – Article 25<sup>2</sup>)

### **Scope of Advocacy**

Local: Tibneh area in Al-Koorah District, Irbid Governorate

### **Advocacy Action Areas<sup>3</sup>**

A challenge for many civil society organizations is distinguishing between being busy with activities and implementing tactical actions that strategically advance an advocacy effort. In order to help organizations better assess how to expend precious resources, the Legacy Tool offers four action areas that are needed to conduct any advocacy campaign: internal capacity building, research, mobilization and engagement with decision makers. This case provides insights into all four action areas:

- internal capacity building
- research
- mobilization
- engagement with decision-makers

### **Tactical Aim**

New Tactics in Human Rights has identified four primary human rights-based tactical aims: prevention, intervention, restorative and promotion. This advocacy for Rumi olive trees demonstrates the following tactical aim:

- intervention

### **Campaign Period**

May 15, 2017 – February 28, 2018

## **Brief Summary**

This campaign marked the first time for Tibneh Charity Association<sup>4</sup> to work on a rights-based issue rather than charity work. This is considered a paradigm shift in the life of the Association. This shift emerged as a result of the Association's participation in the USAID CIS Advocacy Support Fund grant process. A primary component of the grant process included an advocacy training using the New Tactics in Human Rights Program's **Strategic Effectiveness Method** which facilitates the collective identification of locally-defined priorities. As a result, the Association launched the *Preserving the Ancient (Perennial) or Rare Rumi Olive Trees in the Town of Tibneh/Irbid Governorate* campaign.

It has been observed in recent years that the number of ancient (perennial) and rare Rumi olive trees is constantly decreasing. This constitutes a red flag and warning sign that this legacy is threatened with extinction. After analyzing the main factors causing the decline in the number of trees in the study area, "Tibneh", it was found that the most important factor is the lack of enforcement of the relevant legislation and laws which state that olive trees can only be removed or cut with the consent of the Minister of Agriculture, and under the most difficult circumstances. The lack of knowledge of relevant stakeholders with regards to these legislations has also contributed to many infringements. The problem has manifested in Rumi olive trees being uprooted and transferred from their natural habitat to make way for new roads and public buildings on agricultural land in the villages. In addition, trees were being sold as firewood or to be used for the decoration of gardens and houses.

The campaign process began by documenting the extent and magnitude and seriousness of the problem. This revealed the rapid decline in the number and cultivated area of the ancient Rumi olive trees due to the ongoing attacks and absence of any official monitoring or enforcement of the relevant *Instructions*. As a result, the Association was able to clarify the importance of olive trees as a natural and historical legacy, as well as their economic importance to the community. The campaign contributed to breaking two stereotypes: On the one hand, the perceived lack of cooperation from government agencies and their staff with local communities; and on the other hand, and the seemingly weak role of civil society organizations and community-based organizations in local development.

The community responded positively, forming the Olive Trees Advocacy Civic Coalition and creating the Friends of Rumi Olive Trees Committee. The Committee has taken on the role to monitor any infringements, whether by individuals or government agencies. One specific intervention occurred during the closing ceremony of the campaign when the Association handed over a petition, signed by community dignitaries and leaders (Mukhtars), to the Irbid Director of Agriculture. This enabled the campaign to activate the protection and accountability role of decision makers, making rights-based demands that serve the public interest of all the people of Tibneh, rather than playing the

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<sup>4</sup>Tibneh Charitable Association is a charitable association founded in 1982 with the aim of helping the poor and the needy, creating development projects, caring for women and their affairs and caring for persons with disabilities. In the past, the interest of the Association was limited to charitable programs and the distribution of aid and assistance to the needy. In their first step towards rights-based work, the team submitted an application to the donor organization to implement a human rights-based advocacy campaign to address the phenomenon of violations and attacks against the Rumi olive trees in Tibneh area.

traditional role of making tribal or personal demands on behalf of their people. The campaign stressed the need for accountability based on the enforcement of the rule of law, manifested by enforcing the relevant legislation and laws represented by *Instructions (G2)* of 2016.

Government agencies also responded. The campaign successfully engaged government agencies (Public Works departments, Municipalities, Governorate, etc.) and the Ministry of Agriculture staff (Irbid Directorate of Agriculture – Forestry Division). Government agency staff members received training on the newly issued *Instructions*. These *Instructions* pertain to the mandate of Forestry Division staff which was extended to include ancient trees and were no longer restricted to forest trees. Significantly, following the training, approval was given by the Ministry of Agriculture to grant all staff of the Forestry Division the capacity of the judicial police to stop these violations against olive trees. In this way, the campaign worked with official stakeholders to lobby the government to fulfill its role as the party accountable for human rights violations related to the protection of the natural and historical legacy that the people of Tibneh. This natural and historical legacy has been inherited from their parents and grandparents for hundreds of years, with the campaign's intention to ensure that this legacy is protected and passed to coming generations.

## Achievements

This campaign raised great interest in its cause within the Tibneh and surrounding areas. The Association mobilized support from all stakeholders. Despite the small size and limited experience of the Association, it nonetheless was able to implement an organized campaign through which the first civic coalition was established, comprising seven charitable and specialized associations in Al-Koorah district.

This mobilization and engagement of decision makers resulted in the campaign achieving its main goal – the **enforcement of *Instructions (G2)* of 2016 issued under the Jordanian Agriculture Law**. These *Instructions* are called the “removal and transfer of fruit-bearing olive trees of rare or ancient Rumi varieties for 2016.” These *Instructions* make it difficult to remove or cut the Rumi olive trees without the consent of the Minister and only under the most difficult circumstances.

The success of the campaign and the enforcement of these *Instructions* manifested in several ways:

- **Increased knowledge and understanding of government staff:** The Association trained the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and other ministries on the *Instructions* and the foundations of uprooting and transferring of Rumi olive trees. Numerous violations occur as a result of wrongful permission granted to uproot and transfer the trees. The training increased their knowledge of the *Instructions* and how to implement them and protect Rumi olive trees from violations.
- **Increased accountability and power of government staff to enforce the law:** A critical aspect of enforcement of the *Instructions* has been the approval by the Ministry of Agriculture to grant all staff of the Forestry Division the capacity of the judicial police and to include olive trees under their authority as well as forest trees.
- **Allocation of special protections:** The campaign succeeded in gaining the first piece of land allocated to receive the Rumi olive trees and to prevent their cultivation outside the town of Tibneh. It is worth mentioning that

there are some Rumi olive trees, which, upon reconciliation with the municipality, will be cultivated in the allocated land in cooperation with the Association and Irbid Directorate of Agriculture.

- **Safe uprooting and transfer:** The Ministry of Agriculture issued an “invitation to tender” for the purchase of a specialized machine for the safe uprooting and transfer of Rumi olive trees in case there is an urgent condition to remove a tree.

As a result of the campaign, the local community has gained a deeper understanding of the issue of the declining olive trees, the forms of violations against the Rumi or ancient olive trees, and avenues for protection and accountability based on relevant laws and regulations. It is important to note that significant campaign achievements took place during, and following the closing ceremony. The seriousness of the demands was exerted through united community pressure on decision-makers. The area’s dignitaries and *Mukhtars* submitted the campaign’s findings together with a signed petition and relevant recommendations to the closing ceremony patron – the Director of Irbid Directorate of Agriculture, for submission to the Minister of Agriculture. The united community pressure achieved the campaign’s goals. Following the closing ceremony, the campaign team was able to coordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture to train their staff, increasing their knowledge of the *Instructions* and how to implement them and protect Rumi olive trees from violations. This, in turn, led to the Ministry of Agriculture to issue an “invitation to tender” for the purchase of a specialized machine for the safe uprooting and transfer of Rumi olive trees when necessary to do so.

## Advocacy Action Areas<sup>5</sup>

The Advocacy Action Areas in this campaign provide insights into the challenges and lessons learned from the experience of Tibneh Charitable Association throughout the implementation of the campaign to preserve the ancient and rare Rumi olive trees in the town of Tibneh.

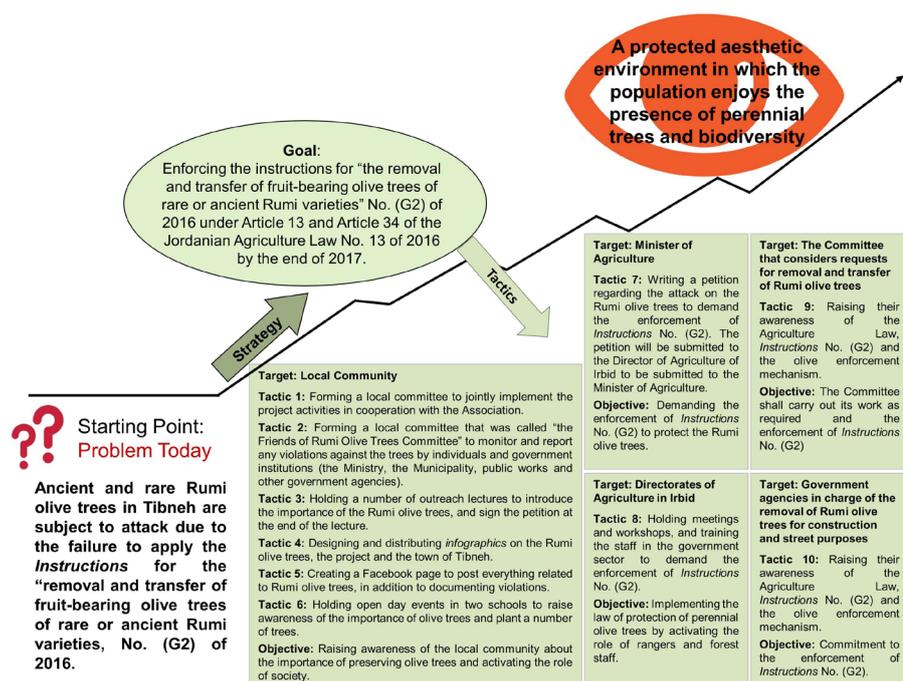
### Internal Capacity Building

The Association built their internal capacity through the USAID CIS sponsored advocacy training using the *New Tactics in Human Rights Strategic Effectiveness Method*. The five-step method begins with a collective process to identify a clear and focused problem statement. This foundational step is critical for any campaign (see Research). The Association identified the problem as: *The Ancient and Rare Rumi Olive Trees in Tibneh are subject to attack due to the failure to apply the Instructions for the “removal and transfer of fruit-bearing olive trees of rare or ancient Rumi varieties” No. (G2) of 2016 under Article 13 and Article 34 of the Jordanian Agriculture Law No. 13 of 2016.*<sup>6</sup> The **Strategic Effectiveness Method** provides a step-by-step process to develop a strategic path – or journey of change. This strategic path helps to also track and monitor progress (see Figure 1). The Association’s campaign team was also trained on lobbying and the tools used in that context, skills that would benefit the Association not only in the case of advocating for the Rumi olives trees but also in any rights-based issue of importance to Tibneh.

An analysis by the Association conducted in terms of the technical requirements to conduct the campaign activities helped highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the team (see Research). Based on that, the Association recruited experts in specific fields. This led the team to become more diverse with complementing experiences and capacities. For example, the Association

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.qistas.com/legislations/jor/view/3878416>



recruited as a technical advisor an agricultural engineer specialized in olive trees and familiar with agriculture laws and regulations. He contributed significantly, by adding a strong technical angle of scientific knowledge of olive trees, the violations they are exposed to, and potential solutions.

Furthermore, it was necessary to recruit a researcher with experience in scientific research on olive trees to analyze the problem and draft a position paper. The team was able to recruit a person on a part-time basis, who drafted a solid position paper used for engagement with local leaders and decision makers. In addition, the researcher provided the results of a survey showing the extent of attacks on the Rumi olive trees in the area.

Figure 1: The strategic path developed by Tibneh Charitable Association for their campaign.

The Association was able to draw upon internal areas of expertise and support. The president of the Association led the team and contributed managerial and logistical support to the campaign. He also brought valuable knowledge of the town and its population. The secretary of the Association, served as the campaign coordinator, providing support to the president of the Association and the team through his distinguished relations with the local community, namely its dignitaries and leaders. An additional positive factor for the campaign was the president and secretary's close contacts with representatives of government departments and local government agencies in the governorate of Irbid in general, and in Tibneh in particular.

## Research

Perhaps one of the most important lessons learned in research is the need to allocate sufficient time to diagnose the problem and analyze its various dimensions in a participatory and scientific way. Then to document the findings in a position paper that can be used as an advocacy tool to highlight the issue. As a result, the Association was able to clarify the importance of olive trees as a natural and historical legacy, as well as their economic importance. The position paper specified the forms, magnitude, and seriousness of the problem. This revealed the rapid decline in the number and cultivated areas of the ancient Rumi olive trees due to the ongoing attacks and absence of any official monitoring or enforcement of the relevant *Instructions*. Feedback from all the stakeholders about the suggested recommendations and solutions was sought. As a result, the position paper stated the position of the team, members of the coalition and interested local people on the issue, as well as a set of agreed upon recommendations addressed to the relevant ministries, directorates, and civil society organizations.

During the implementation of the campaign, the team continued to collect information that served their cause. This included a survey and an inventory of the Rumi olive trees, and documentation of violations. Work is still in progress with the Directorate of Agriculture to reconsider the official numbers it had issued.

It is also worth noting that due to the various research methods carried out by the Association, the campaign team, and the local community gained a deeper understanding of the issue of the declining olive trees numbers, and the reasons behind it, clarification on the forms of violations against the Rumi or ancient olive trees, and the relevant laws and regulations.

## **Mobilization**

This campaign was able to generate great interest in its cause. The Association mobilized the necessary support from all stakeholders within Tibneh and various surrounding areas. Despite the small size and limited experience of the Association, it organized a campaign through which the first civic coalition of seven charitable and specialized associations in Al-Koorah district was established. The coalition considers the cause of advocating for olive trees a human rights cause: "The right of the population to enjoy and preserve the ancient Rumi olive trees as a historical, ecological and natural legacy," a right that must be protected and any violations against it deterred. The coalition is also seeking to transfer the experience to different areas in Al-Koorah as there are ancient or rare Rumi olive trees in those areas as well.

The campaign team succeeded in forming a committee from the local community – "the Friends of Rumi Olive Trees Committee." The Committee greatly contributed to disseminating information through social media, and supporting the team in workshops, trainings, and field visits to the stakeholders.

This campaign proved the importance of the role of dignitaries and *Mukhtars* in the success of any desired development process. The Association recognized that ignoring them and their role will thwart or impede the development process. A significant accomplishment was that dignitaries and *Mukhtars* of the area accompanied the campaign team during their visits to the decision makers to clarify the problem and stress the seriousness of the campaign's demands. This support of dignitaries of the area enabled the team to activate the protection and accountability role of those dignitaries and decision makers in making rights-based demands that serve the public interest of all the people of Tibneh, rather than playing the traditional role of making tribal or personal demands on behalf of their people. The biggest demonstration of the seriousness of the demands was when the area's dignitaries and *Mukhtars* submitted the project findings together with the signed petition and relevant recommendations to the closing ceremony patron – the Director of Irbid Directorate of Agriculture, for submission to the Minister of Agriculture.

The results that transpired following the closing ceremony revealed that exerting united community pressure on decision makers is a successful method. The campaign achieved its goals, and the team was able to coordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture to train their staff, increasing their knowledge of the *Instructions* and how to implement them and protect Rumi olive trees from violations. This, in turn, led to the Ministry of Agriculture issuing an invitation to tender for the purchase of a specialized machine for the safe uprooting and transfer of Rumi olive trees if necessary.

## **Engagement with Decision Makers**

Tibneh Charitable Association sought to build cooperative relationships with different decision-makers. Building a good rapport increases the probability of solving the problem and sustaining the solution in the long-term. The Association succeeded in building such relationships through various means, including traditional means of communication, such as meetings, official letters,

and continuous follow up after these meetings and correspondences.

The Association actively engaged decision-makers in the various stages of the campaign through discussion sessions on the *Instructions*, as well as awareness raising workshops for stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Agriculture staff (Irbid Directorate of Agriculture, and the Forestry Division) and other government agencies (Al-Koorah Directorate of Public Works, Deir Abi Sa'id Municipality, Al-Koorah Directorate of Education, Directorate of Forestry, the Governorate).

One of the results of building such cooperative relationships was breaking the stereotype amongst civil society organizations about government departments as being uncooperative and obstructive. The campaign proved that the opposite is in fact true. The relevant decision makers have also come to realize the nature and importance of the role that civil society organizations play in supporting the government's work to serve the interest of the country and the citizens.

Through this campaign, the Association facilitated opening channels of effective dialogue among the local community itself, followed by opening communication channels between the community and the dignitaries of the area, and finally opening channels with relevant government departments and decision makers. The Association utilized the position paper to provide concrete information on the problem and its causes. These dialogues - between the community and the community leaders on the one hand and the representatives of the government departments on the other - contributed to expediting the process of finding solutions. Decision makers acknowledged that the campaign was an organized effort with clear demands that had been agreed upon collectively by the community and its leaders. The unified presence of those leaders and dignities as part of the campaign had a positive impact on decision-makers due to their high social and political status.

## **Organizational Impact of Advocacy**

Perhaps the most important impact of this campaign on the Tibneh Charitable Association is the transition of the Association from charity work to the rights-based societal advocacy work. All the projects implemented by the Association in the past were of charitable nature, such as the distribution of donations, food parcels, and aid, a long way away from systematic efforts that aim at influencing decision makers to support a specific cause and creating change based on justice and equality.

*"The campaign led to the creation of a new state of affairs in the town of Tibneh."*

**- Engineer Ahmed Sweileh, Project Advisor, Tibneh Charitable Association**

*Before the project, we had not heard about the 'position paper'. Through the project, we had an opportunity to learn about the position paper concept, its importance and how to develop it and utilize it to achieve our goals."*

**- Mr. Khaled Bani Yasine, Program Officer, Tibneh Charitable Association**

*"I would like to thank Tibneh Association and the distinguished team because this project is very important for the preservation of a cherished tree, a great national wealth and a great historical legacy."*

**- Engineer Ali Abu Nuqta, Director of Irbid Directorate of Agriculture**