



# Campaigning with Grassroots Comics

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WORLD COMICS INDIA

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## **Campaigning with Grassroots comics**

Sharad Sharma

Pages- 28

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## Campaigning with Grassroots comics

Many people think that comics are mainly for children. However, what we call "Grassroots comics" is a powerful medium for ordinary people's expression and reading. People can tell their own stories using the comics format, i.e. storytelling with a combination of images and texts. These kinds of comics have been produced in several workshops, but this effort is not an end in itself. Only when the comics are distributed in the society, they make an impact. People become informed of new ways of thinking, and at best, the messages in the comics create local debate.

Now, in 2009, there are several examples where comics have emerged out of the workshop halls and become part of people's campaigns. The power of grassroots comics is evident in campaigns such as the "Rajasthan's Rights for Our Daughters Campaign" or the "Goenkar Changemaker's Campaign" in Goa, or "Chadi Ke Laagal Hathkadi Campaign" against corporal punishment in Uttar Pradesh.

How comics can help in establishing public participation and making a campaign will be outlined in the following pages.



## Grassroots Comics

Using grassroots comics as the main tool in a campaign is not very common. Until now, only India, some other countries in South Asia, Africa, Middle East, and Europe, have experimented with it.

Grassroots comics are comics which are not prepared by professional artists, but by socially aware people themselves, based on their own views. These comics are also important for initiating local debate on different issues. Furthermore, making grassroots comics is relatively easy and does not require heavy duty technical expertise of any kind. All one needs is a story, paper, pen and access to photocopying.

These comics are prepared for distribution at a local level, which is the main factor that differentiates them from other campaign material. After photocopying, the grassroots comics are pasted up in places where people gather leisurely, and in schools, at bus-stops, in shops and offices, on notice boards and even on electricity poles. Most of the times, the readers are aware about the organisation that has put up these comics.

The close connection is the most important point here. The readers and the people who have made the comics are not very different from each other. Common people of the society, who feel strongly about some issues, prepare the campaign material themselves, instead of getting them done by an artist from the capital or abroad. One of the most important things for people is the fact that when a wallposter comic is on view, not only a message is conveyed, but also debate takes place.



## **People's participation makes the campaign**

The process of informing, delivering messages or creating awareness among people, or a special group of people, in a systematic way, is called a campaign. A campaign can include slogans, songs, posters, photographs, films, plays, etc. The most important task during a campaign is to convey one's message to the people. This requires that attractive and interesting activities are consistently carried on.

Running campaigns by using comics as a medium is a new concept. Generally, people's participation is the biggest challenge faced in mainstream campaigns using other media. Generally, the materials used in a mainstream campaign are prepared by professionals with the help of good artists and writers sitting in other cities. The material produced will often lack a local touch, local language and local culture. This problem can be solved if the campaign materials are prepared by local people themselves. Also, the people who prepare the campaign material usually get help from their family, friends and colleagues.

Grassroots comics help local people to bring forward their own issues and experiences by framing them in a visual story. Once the technique of making comics is understood by people, then they can prepare comics on almost any issue in a very short time. The power of being able to share their views to other people fills them with enthusiasm.

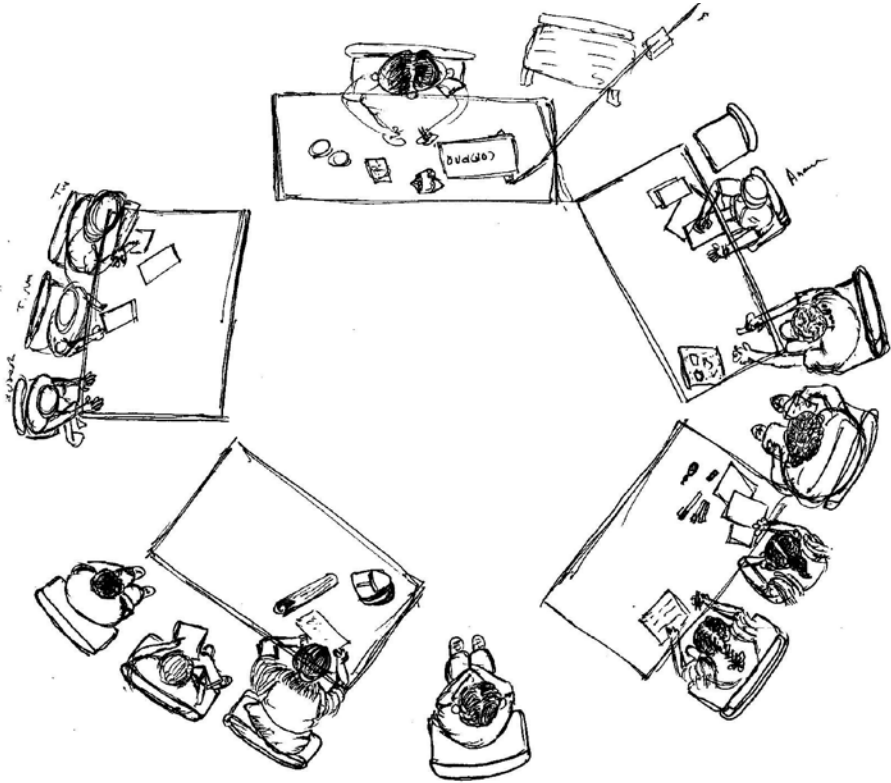


## Examples from Grassroots Comics campaigns in India

### ***Aapni Dikri Ro Haq Campaign, Rajasthan***

This campaign began in 2005 in Barmer District of Western Rajasthan on the issue of Girl Child Rights. The ratio of female population in comparison to the male is very low in this belt of Rajasthan due to foeticide and infanticide. The Purdah system, child marriage and not sending girls to school are other problems prevailing there. To bring a change to the situation, a series of grassroots comics workshops were conducted in Barmer District.

More than 300 wallposter comics were prepared by children and youths on these issues, and distributed among people, and discussions were raised. A selection of these wallposters were circulated in more than a hundred villages with the help of a motorbike rally. Meetings were held, slogans sung and this gave rise to serious debates. People took oaths of not killing female children and committed themselves to bring change to the situation. Barmer Comics Manch, a local initiative, now continues with the campaign.



### ***Goenkar Changemaker Campaign, Goa***

Tourism is increasingly becoming important as a livelihood for the common people of Goa. But the tourism industry has also brought along some negative side-effects with it. A large number of children works in shops, hotels and beaches here, and many are subjected to sexual abuse by tourists. These children belong mostly to the migrant groups who come for labour work in Goa.

In 2006, a campaign was initiated to spread awareness about the problems among the local people and bring about a will to change the situation. More than 200 students from four colleges of Goa prepared comics on these issues and distributed them among the people. Local government department for Child and Women Welfare helped to exhibit these comics in more than 60 villages. The students formed a group "Goenkar Changemakers" and organised a series of comics workshops together with various local organisations.



### ***Chadi Ke Laagal Hathkadi Campaign, Uttar Pradesh***

This campaign began against corporal punishment that is meted out to children in schools and homes. It started in Maharajganj district near the border to Nepal in Uttar Pradesh in the year 2008. Here 18 members of the local group “Babu Bahini Manch” of Village Planning Centre were trained as comics trainers. Later, these new trainers conducted comics workshops in their own villages. The series of workshops continued for many months and hundreds of comics were created “against the stick”.

The comics were published in the form of wallposters, postcards, stickers, and small booklets. Local Bhojpuri singers composed new songs using the stories shown in these comics and a true people’s campaign emerged. The comics were distributed in schools and villages in the midst of rallies, songs and slogans. Many people took pledges with light in their hands and advocated against corporal punishment and signed on oath-banners. Comics are still being created in Maharajganj District and “Babu Bahini Manch” plays the role of a vigilant over corporal punishment.





## How to prepare a campaign

A campaign always starts from the objective of creating awareness of a particular issue. In most cases, local organisations initiate such campaigns. Sometimes campaigns are also initiated at the state or national level. Here we will concentrate on campaigns that can be run on a small scale in one area only.

Local organisations play a very important role in such campaigns. Let us take the example of an organisation that wants to create awareness of Water Conservation, HIV/AIDS, etc. The organisation would require a medium that is influential, entertaining, as well as cost effective. The medium should be able to bring forward different aspects of the issue. For this grassroots comics are ideal.

No campaign can be successful without people's participation and therefore the campaign medium must be able to engage the public, both in the creative phase and in the local debate that will follow the campaign.



It is important to plan the geographical area and the duration of the campaign according to the resources available to the local organisations.



## Identifying the local organisations and the issues

Before starting a campaign, it is necessary to have a concrete plan of action in hand. The stronger the plan is, the better the results will be. Geographical area, campaign duration, available budget and other resources have to be determined.

The main participating organisations in the campaign have to be decided. The key persons must be appointed and named. Cooperating organisations and institutions also have to be recognized. It is important to identify the responsibilities and tasks of all participating organisations. The roles in the campaign of the key persons of participating organisations must be informed to everybody.

## Partner responsibilities

For the smooth running of the campaign, it is good to form a core team and have all duties described; such as who will be the trainers in the workshops, who will co-ordinate them, who will be assigned to documentation, who will be looking after still and video-photography, and who will be the office in-charge. A special place has to be allotted for collecting all workshop documents. Each person in the campaign will have his or her own assignment; who will keep the budget record, who will look after the campaign blogs and website, who will identify suitable buses, trains, etc.



## First basic comics workshop

The campaign you are about to begin will be lead through comics; therefore a comics workshop is the first step to take. Prior planning is very important. First, you have to select 20-25 participants. They will be the key persons in the campaign. They will make the first comics and then spread the idea in their own background groups.

If the campaign is focused on a child rights issue, the local child welfare group will play an important role, as the group "Babu Bahini Manch" did in the Chhadi Ke Laagal Hathkadi Campaign. Here eighteen members of the group participated in the comics workshop. One had to keep in mind that some of the important responsibilities of the campaign could not be handed over to the children's group alone.

In this campaign, it was necessary that some of the activists of the organisation were included to fulfill these responsibilities easily. In this campaign four youth activists of the main partner organisation (GNK) were also included in the workshop. These activists performed the task of establishing coordination among the local organisation, children's group and the community.



After the selection of participants for the comics workshop, a five-day training programme is prepared (Kindly check Comics Manual for more details on this).

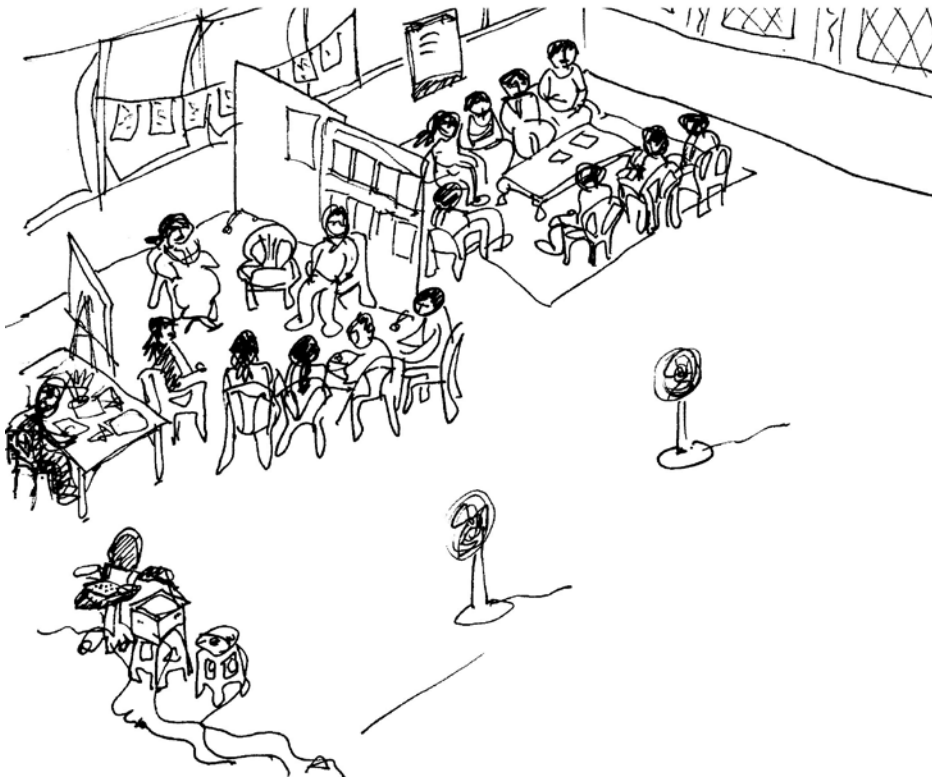
As the comics workshop is intended to initiate a campaign, it is important to share the programme, the campaign plan, the campaign methods, the key resource person lists, etc, with the participants on the first day of the workshop. It can be done with the additional help of films, drama, books, posters, websites, etc.

In the workshop, the participants will now make their stories on the issue into comics format by following this order:

1. turn message into a story
2. turn story into a visual script
3. discuss the scripts within the group
4. make corrections and then do the final artwork



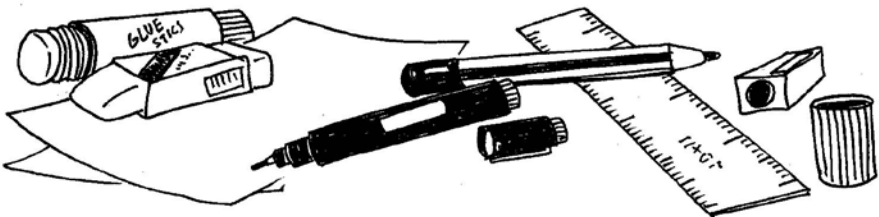
Each participant should have completed one comics by the end of the third day. The next comics are always easier to make, as the method is now familiar.



## Trainers' workshop, part I

On the last two days of the workshop, the participants will be trained to train others, i.e. they are groomed as trainers. (See the Trainer's Plan and/or book Grassroots Comics page 141).

Now these new trainers have to conduct similar comics workshops in their own areas or villages. For this, they need posters, books and other necessary materials, in a Trainer's Kit, which should be given to them at the end of this workshop.





## Independent workshops by the new trainers

Each trainer will go back to his/her respective area/village and inform friends or colleagues about the grassroots comics workshop to be held there. This can also be done by pasting 2-3 posters at important places or asking the local organisations and groups to send their members to the workshop.

Duration of the workshop : 3 days

Number of participants: 8-10

Material: posters, books and necessary stationery

Venue of workshop: Balwadi, Anganwadi, Chaupal, meeting hall or local school hall.

The main objective of the workshop is to spread awareness among the common people on the issue of the campaign, as well as to help more and more people to create their own comics, and share them with others. It is very important to make photocopies of the comics prepared in the workshop, and to distribute them among the people in the community on the last day of the workshop. The feedback from the people will reveal their reaction to the campaign.





## Trainers' workshop, part II

After the new trainers have conducted their own workshops, a follow-up workshop for the trainers is of utmost importance. Here the trainers can share their experiences and get a deeper understanding of how the problems they faced can be solved. In addition, the comics prepared in their workshops could be re-evaluated with all tutors present.



# **छड़ी के लागल हथकड़ी**

## फसल में उलझी पढ़ाई

एक अभियान



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प्लान



## How to run the campaign



### Choosing campaign material from the workshop output

It is necessary to have variety in the campaign materials. Some points to be remembered during the preparation of campaign materials:

1. All the important aspects of the campaign issue have to be covered. If some aspect has been left out, some participants could be assigned to work on them separately.
2. The comics should be clear and easy to read.
3. The four-panel comics are converted into different forms, such as posters, strips, and postcards. The 8-page booklets have been originally prepared in this format.
4. At least one comics of each core-team member should be included as a part of the campaign material.
5. Check that the partner organisations have no objection on any part of the campaign materials.
6. The names of all the partner organisations should be mentioned in the banner and other campaign materials.

After this, all campaign materials are ready to be printed, according to the plan and budget available.



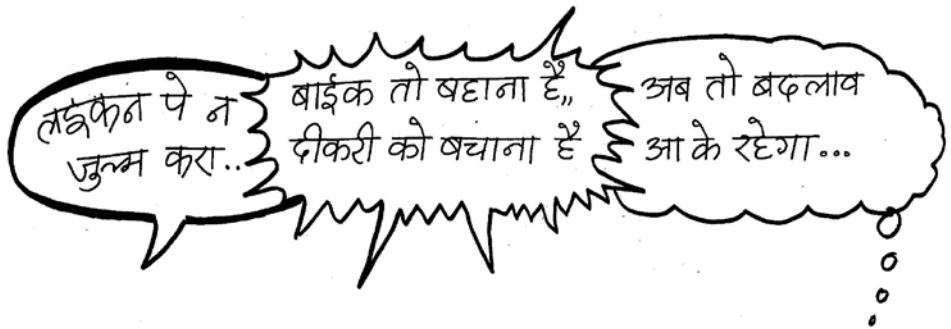
## People's participation

A campaign is incomplete without people's participation. It is the participation that turns a campaign into a people's campaign. It is important to have representatives from different groups of stake holders (like men, women, youths, children) in the campaign, and that they are all invited to the campaign meetings and also given a chance to express themselves. This will later on help to take the campaign further.

## Coordination with other media

To make the campaign more interesting and lively, other media than comics can also be included. The Motorbike Rally played an important role in the Girl Child Campaign while local Bhojpuri singers attracted the people in the Corporal Punishment Campaign.

Rallies and meetings contribute a lot in creating awareness on the issue. People will be motivated to participate in these rallies and meetings, especially if they see something interesting, attractive and out of the ordinary. Street plays, puppet shows, and film screenings can also be very useful in campaigning. But it is essential that they are of local importance and also integrated in the campaign plan.



## Slogans, Rallies, Oath Banners

Slogans and songs are the life of any campaign. The songs should have full relevance to the issue of the campaign, and they should be readily understood by local people and made in the local language only.

Oath banners project people's commitment to the issue. An oath banner has no legal importance, but it is a symbol of people's sentiments and strong resolution on the issue. Every person who signs the banner becomes a supporter of the campaign. Their signature makes them to be a witness to the moment when the seeds of change are being sown. This association is for CHANGE !





## Organizing meetings

To organize meetings is the most effective way to make the issue reach out to the maximum of people during the campaign. It is essential to plan the whole series of meetings for the campaign. As venues of the meetings, village *Chaupal*, main markets, school playgrounds, prayer halls, etc. could be used.

Prior to the meeting, the local people should be fully informed about it and their permission should be taken. The arrangements have to be made based on the number of audience expected in each meeting. The speaker might also require a microphone and loudspeaker if the audience is very large. The duration of each meeting and the main speakers should be decided in advance. Local speakers should be given more importance here.

### मार खईले के डर



### जड़ी के लागल हथकड़ी

एक अभियान





## Distribution of materials

In the same way as the creation of campaign materials is a detailed and serious task, their distribution should be equally well organized. If all campaign materials are distributed at once, the campaign tends to lose momentum. Therefore, it is essential that showing of each poster or booklet is done in a planned sequence. In the Chadi Ke Lagal Hathkadi-campaign, the first wallposter to be distributed in the meeting place was about the campaign itself. At this point, the speaker introduced the campaign issues, and the other members of the team started to distribute the next poster on "What is corporal punishment". So each time when a new campaign aspect was discussed, the people had relevant posters or booklets in their hands. To make sure that the materials will suffice for each meeting, it is advisable to have all materials separately packed in advance, for every meeting.



## Exhibition

A comics exhibition is another way to bring the issues raised in the campaign out among the people. Different from an art-gallery exhibition, this exhibition is put up in a tent on the roadside and open to the common people. It can also be named “Comics Road Show”. The exhibition can be made by putting up a tent measuring 12 x 15 m on the main street of any small area or city. All the campaign materials can be pasted on attractive and colourful chart papers and displayed in the exhibition. Any by-passer on the street will get attracted to the exhibition, and also want to have a look, and perhaps take back some poster or booklet with him. It is an exciting experience to see how common people express their eagerness to join the campaign. A register could also be kept to note down their suggestions.

Another kind of exhibition could be organized at each meeting, and there is not always a need for a tent. An exhibition of the campaign materials can be done by having them affixed on coloured chart paper and pasted on a thin rope. This exhibition can be put up and removed just within a few minutes.



## Press conference

Local newspapers and media are good instruments to inform the people about the campaign and press meets can be organized at each phase.

It is important to have a press document providing all information about the campaign. If there are any photographs or videos of the campaign available, these could be shared with journalists. The journalists will appreciate ready material, especially pictures.

## Blog, web, etc.



All information and updates about the campaign have to be documented somewhere. It is good to have the documentation online, so a blog or website could be created for the campaign. The link of the blog or website can be sent to newspapers and magazines when there is new information. Furthermore, photographs related to the campaign could also be posted on Photo-Websites (Flickr, Picasa, etc.). Check the three links below for examples on campaign blogs.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/worldcomics> Campaign Picture's site

<http://www.halfworld.blogspot.com/> Aapni dikri Ro Haq, Rajasthan

<http://www.cpcwci.blogspot.com/> Chhadi Ke Laagal Hathkadi Campaign, Uttar Pradesh

# Follow-up on the campaign

## Creating a local organisation



A local organisation or an informal group can be started by the core team of the campaign. Here, new members who met during the campaign, and people who directly influenced the campaign (as teachers and parents in Chhadi Ke Laagal Hathkadi Campaign) can join hands. It is not necessary that this group must be registered as an NGO, it can function also as an informal work group. Its objectives would be to continue the activities conducted during the campaign

and to extend it to new areas. The work group could be calling meetings at regular intervals, preparing new campaign materials, and planning more campaign action, with time.

## Maintaining contact

After the comics workshops and main campaign events it is important to maintain regular communication with the local organisation or the newly formed informal group. If either of the two needs help with the continuation of the campaign, it should be discussed at this stage. Keeping connected with the campaign for a long term provides more strength to it. This is, however, possible only with constant contact, travel and exchange of email letters.

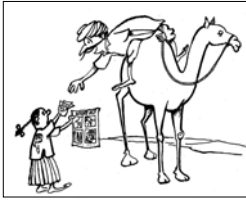
## Documentation – reporting

The main events of a campaign, its beginning, set-up, important phases, changes and current status should be documented. This can be prepared in the form of a campaign report and shared with organisations, institutions, persons and movements. The report can also be made available in the campaign blog or website.



## FACT SHEET

### CAMPAIGN ON GIRL CHILD RIGHTS, RAJASTHAN



**Main events:** the campaign started in 2005 with 75 participants in the first workshop which was held in Agarwal Dharmasala, Barmer. Several informal meetings were organised to develop the content of the campaign and the comics.

"Vikalp", Barmer, and "Dream on Wheels", Delhi, were WCI's partner organisations. The campaign was funded by individuals and received also on-the-spot support in kind.

80 comics were produced, and the issues covered were infanticide, foeticide, girl child rights, education, water, dowry, discrimination. Of these, 12 were selected and printed for the campaign.

#### Comics formats

Wallposters, 8-page booklets, postcards, comics strips stickers. In total, 15,000 copies were printed by offset on coloured papers.

#### Distribution

In gatherings, during the motorbike rally (January 2006), which covered more than 100 villages of Barmer and Jodhpur Districts, through activists and individuals of organisations. The motorbike rally, led by Bittoo Bikewallah Sondi, together with local youth, grabbed a lot of attention. In some places torch processions were held.

#### Follow-up and current activities

Youths of the area were invited to participate in WCI's TOT workshops in Goa, MP and Jharkhand. The new trainers conducted several workshops on their own (about 15). New wallposter comics were brought out by local groups on a regular basis. The informal comics group "Barmer Comics Manch" was formed by local youth in 2007.

Many comics trainers in the area are still active and produce comics and run workshops.

#### More

A 19-minute documentary film, "Dariya Ki Kasam" (Swear by the River), on the campaign, was produced by WCI. The campaign is also described in the book "Grassroots comics – a development communication tool, pp 32-37. The book is also available in Hindi.

Campaign blog address [www.halfworld.blogspot.com](http://www.halfworld.blogspot.com)  
[www.worldcomicsindia.com](http://www.worldcomicsindia.com)

## FACT SHEET: GOENKAR CHANGEMAKERS CAMPAIGN



**Main events:** The campaign started in 2006 with around 200 participants in four workshops which were held in four colleges (Xavier's College, Salgaoncar College of Law, DMC college and Rosary college) in Goa. These workshops were focused on children's rights, paedophilia and migrant issues.

Metamorphosis in Delhi was WCI's partner organisation. The campaign was funded by UNIFEM.

250 comics were produced on the above subjects. They were laminated and exhibited at Kala Academy in Panjim.

### Comics formats

Wallposters, 8-page booklets. Of these, 2,000 photocopies were made and distributed.

### Distribution

A mobile exhibition was organised and a van took it to 60 villages of the state. The exhibition was supported by the Goa state commission of children.

### Follow-up and current activities

Selected students from previous workshops were trained in a TOT workshop in Goa. The new trainers conducted several workshops (about 15) on their own. New wallposter comics were brought out by local groups on a regular basis. The informal comics group "Goenkar Changemakers" was formed by comics trainers and registered as an NGO in February 2009. The group regularly organises comics workshops in the state for various organisations, schools and colleges. One of the main focus areas of the group are legal issues.

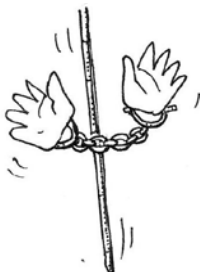
### More

A 17-minute documentary film "Goenkar Changemakers" was produced by Metamorphosis in collaboration with WCI. The campaign is also described in the book "Grassroots comics – a development communication tool", pp 38-41. The book is also available in Hindi.

Campaign pictures available on [www.flickr.com/photos/worldcomics](http://www.flickr.com/photos/worldcomics)

[www.worldcomicsindia.com](http://www.worldcomicsindia.com)

## FACT SHEET: CORPORAL PUNISHMENT CAMPAIGN



**Main events:** The campaign started in 2008 with a series of workshops, organised on the issue of corporal punishment in the Maharajganj district of Uttar Pradesh. 18 school children aged 10 – 18 participated. They were later trained as trainers and became the core team of the campaign. The aim of the campaign was to sensitise teachers and parents on all aspects of corporal punishment.

The new trainers then ran comics workshops in their respective areas. All of them were members of the local children's group called Babu Behni Manch (BBM). After this, another round of

trainers' workshops followed, and later workshops developing new comics on the issue.

Gram Niyojan Kendra (GNK), Maharajganj, was WCI's partner organisation. The campaign was funded by Plan - India.

More than 800 comics were produced, in the local Bhojpuri dialect, on corporal punishment, gender based violence, and the legal aspect of the issue. Out of these comics, 18 were selected, and printed in different formats for campaign distribution.

### Comics formats

Wallposters (6), 8-page booklets(8), postcards(2), and comics strips as stickers(2). In total, 12,000 copies were offset-printed on colour paper and distributed.

### Distribution

The comics were distributed in a systematic 10-day campaign. The core team of BBM, GNK and WCI visited two villages a day. Meetings were organised in schools and open places and there was a lot of public debate. The comic stories were also composed into songs by local Bhojpuri singers. Parents and teachers signed an oath banner at the end of the meetings saying "we will not commit any form of violence on children from today onwards".

### Follow-up and current activities

An informal group of parents, teachers and BBM core team was formed. The new trainers conducted several workshops on their own and even trained new trainers. Several new wallposter comics on the campaign issues were brought out.

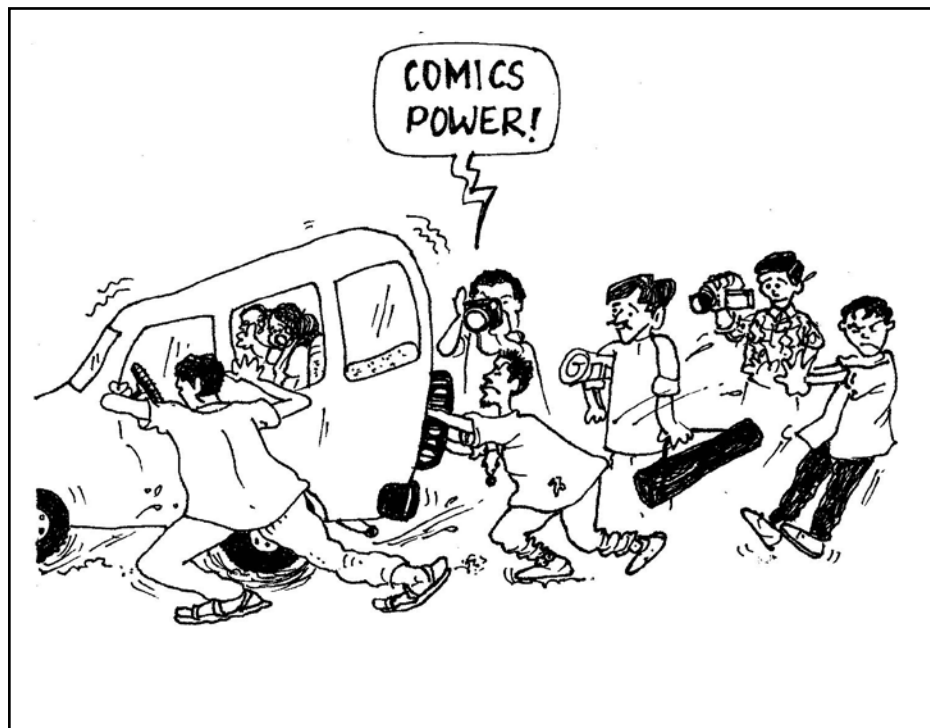
### More

A 20-minute documentary film Chadi ke lagal Hathkadi is being produced by WCI.

Some of the comics were compiled and published in a book form.

Campaign pictures available on [www.flickr.com/photos/worldcomics](http://www.flickr.com/photos/worldcomics)

Campaign blog: [www.cpcwci.blogspot.com](http://www.cpcwci.blogspot.com)  
[www.worldcomicsindia.com](http://www.worldcomicsindia.com)



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