

12.0 Developing politically sensitive communications for the promotion of human rights

The purpose of our writings is to achieve our aims, which are inherently linked to the political developments in the countries we work. The people who read our material have their own political sensitivities; it is by relating to those sensitivities that we are able to communicate about the issues that we are interested in. If we want other people to become interested in the same issues that we think are important for the betterment of people's human rights, we must be able to tap in to their interests and attract their attention.

Our specific aims in the human rights field are to help instigate the changes necessary for a country to honour its obligations to the UN human rights conventions. In other words, to make UN conventions real by domestic implementation. To achieve domestic change and implementation necessitates an involvement in domestic debates. Through our writings and communications, we participate in these domestic debates so as to achieve the changes required.

The way human rights problems in each country are portrayed is unique. One country may face large scale illegal detentions, while in another, illegal detention may be linked to the issues of torture and corruption. The issues in each country are different due to a variety of factors. Addressing those unique issues is the way to grab the attention of local people. That same issue may not have a similar impact in another context or country.

The issue of local sensitivity is a very complex one. By not paying attention to it, we will become irrelevant to our audience, despite having a wealth of information useful to them. Our special reports, documentation and experience on various human rights issues will not become part of the local debate if our knowledge is not articulated in a way cognisant of the sensitivities of our audience.

Different audiences

Many issues that are relevant to a particular country need to be communicated to external audiences with the view of building understanding and solidarity amongst the international community. In talking to an international audience, the methods of communication can be and in fact, need to be, different. It is thus important to make a distinction between material produced for local audiences and that produced for international audiences.

When no distinction is made, and when common material is produced for the two audiences, that material loses its value. There is a lot that is written but not read by many. To overcome this, it is necessary to maintain separate distribution channels for the two audiences. This will enhance both our local and international reception.