

Post #2: How to mobilise?

Watch [Anthony's video here](#)



A matter of tools?

Grassroot education is often credited with the almost magical virtue of being able to mobilise people around an action, an event or a project. It is said to have the know-how, tools and methods to "get people there". Mobilisation is therefore a question of tools and techniques.

By far the most effective method of mobilisation is **direct contact** between the "facilitators" and the people you want to mobilise, i.e. word of mouth. The rest - flyers, emails, posters... - work very little, except as a reminder (date, place, times) for people mobilised directly.

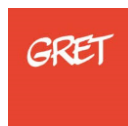
In this text, I am interested in the question of mobilising local people, or people who can be considered as the audience for our actions or organisations. A priori, these people have an interest in getting involved.

There are many other issues involved in mobilising partners, who sometimes have no interest in your projects or actions taking place! It is possible to propose a one-to-one meeting with these partners to understand the conditions for their involvement in your actions. This will no doubt sometimes mean approaching your partners' hierarchy. In this case, the strategies to be deployed are more likely to involve advocacy and lobbying, and therefore fall outside the field of grassroots education.

Mobilisation is first and foremost a **question of networking**, i.e. establishing **trust** between the players involved in a situation. Networking, building trust, is a **question of time** - it takes much longer to speak to people directly than to send an email or put up posters - **and above all of energy**: it takes a lot of energy to speak directly to people, and that's what builds trust! In a dialogue, it's clear that it's ineffective to recite a speech and leave it at that. Yet that's what we propose as a relationship when we send an email. And then you complain that people don't come...

Facing up to the problem

Mobilising means inviting people to take part in an adventure that you are proposing. If people decline the invitation, you might think it's their fault and that there's nothing more you can do. That may well be true, but it will never help to improve engagement. The starting point for mobilising is therefore to agree to understand why "people" decline the invitation.



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Think of "mobilisation" in the military sense: if you're not obliged to by law, you join the army to defend your country, because it's a cause you believe in, or for pay. For a citizens' organisation, it's very difficult to mobilise people who aren't sympathetic to the cause you want to mobilise them for: you can't force them and you can't pay them!

So why persist? Often because you are forced to by your superiors, your funders... It's hard not to fall into the trap of false solutions...

The opposite of mobilise is "immobilise". So it's easy to see how mobilising means "setting in motion". The false solutions to the problems of mobilisation have in common that they propose only passive forms of commitment, "immobilisation"...

To get things moving

Conducting the survey

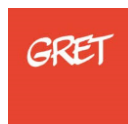
The best way to find out what people would be prepared to get involved in is... to ask them. Grassroot education processes therefore generally begin with a public survey phase, again favouring direct contact. By means of a questionnaire or door-to-door canvassing, you can quickly find out whether or not a subject is likely to mobilise people.

In terms of mobilisation, I helped to invent a rather easy and fun method of public enquiry: the Porteur de Paroles. It involves posting a large-format question in the public space, then collecting and posting the opinions of passers-by on this question. You can find [a video presenting this method](#) here, and here on my website is a page on this method with [a booklet I wrote, designed to help you get started](#).

Asking for help

When you don't see the role you could play in a situation, it's hard to get involved! In fact, if people feel concerned by a cause, the most effective way of mobilising them is quite simply to need them! This requires a number of things:

- that this is true, i.e. that we don't prefer to do things on our own, which is often simpler than doing them with others...
- be humble enough to ask for help and prefer this to giving orders, which is often demotivating for volunteers
- aim for the emancipation of individuals and remember Marx's words: "the emancipation of the workers must be the work of the workers themselves".



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Community organisation

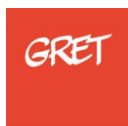
In terms of grassroots education, the approach most closely linked to mobilisation is undoubtedly community organising. Below are a number of links to find out more about this approach.

Some principles of community organizing :

- Use the vocabulary and, more generally, the cultural codes of the people you want to mobilise. It may seem obvious but, often for reasons of lack of preparation and convenience, we organise a meeting that we want to be as convivial as a council of ministers, with an agenda, a podium, asking for the floor before speaking, taking the floor at length, seriously and constructively, and so on.
- Increase the number of "1 to 1s" - basically face-to-face meetings - to build support.
- Build the mobilisation around the leaders of a community (whom you will have taken care to meet "1 to 1") because word of mouth will then be very effective! Meetings with these leaders are also an opportunity to "carry out the survey" through individual interviews, to complement the responses you can get from passers-by in the street, or from partners.
- Devote half your time and energy to celebrating successes throughout the project, action or campaign you are undertaking with people, because these are the moments that will unite you for the following moments

Further information

- The founder of community organizing is Saul Alinsky. Here is a summary of his main book, [Being Radical](#).
- A 10-minute video explaining what [community organizing](#) is.
- An interview with an example of community organizing: [Balai Citoyen in Burkina Faso](#).
- A training course on « [1 to 1 approach](#) » (in English) in ten 10-minute videos by an American organization.



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Problem	False solution	Before a meeting	During a meeting	After meeting
On the face of it, people are not concerned by the purpose of the mobilisation	Will seek to recruit rather than mobilise, using methods similar to marketing, at the risk of seeing people as customers to be retained	Carry out a survey of the people most affected by the project to find out about their concerns	Explain why we need them (so we need them...)	Clarify intentions, targets and objectives
People don't know	Seeks to inform rather than mobilise, using methods akin to comm', at the risk of treating people as receivers	1 to 1 meetings with leaders of the target community, who will recruit for you and educate you on how to do it?	Drawing up a mobilisation strategy together, listing allies	
People don't dare to come and are intimidated by the format.	Play up the prestige of attending this event, at the risk of treating people as spectators	Delegate functions, give positions and power to people / go to their homes rather than inviting them to ours / start in small groups	Use the codes of the target community: a meal rather than a meeting?	
People don't see their role, don't believe in the strategy, fear instrumentalisation	There are two options for persuading distrustful people: convincing, through rhetoric, or manipulating. At the risk of treating people as pawns	Involve people in the strategy, discuss upstream, be transparent about limits and room for manoeuvre	Discuss hot topics in complete transparency: funding, status, room to manoeuvre, objectives, limits, etc.	Clear traces of the process
People have come but they're not coming back	Highlighting representative methods and judiciously choosing indicators that mask demobilisation, at the risk of ignoring people who do not return	Carry out a survey to understand the reasons for demobilisation: this is what will enable us to adapt meeting formats, demands, strategies, etc. to the people we want to mobilise, rather than expecting the opposite...	Define together the follow-up to the meeting, involve the meeting in the decisions	Celebrating actions

