

Exercise Power Walk or Climb
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Large group game

<https://www.unicef.org/tdad/jjpowerwalk.doc>

Give each of the participants a piece of paper with a character written on it. The characters are listed in Section A. If there are fewer than 25 participants, reduce the number of characters, making sure you do not take out too many one from one group (e.g. all the powerful ones, or all the vulnerable ones)

Request the participants to join at an open space for the exercise

Ask participants to stand in a row

Give an instruction to participants to take one step forward if the statement applies to his/her given character. If possible we suggest conducting the activity on a staircase with participants starting at the bottom of the staircase. Read the statements following statements:

For a more legal international

If I am arrested, I get legal representation
I would be confident if I had to speak directly to a magistrate
If I was put in a cell, I could defend myself if a fight broke out
If I was arrested, I could afford a K50 bail
If I was hungry, I could buy food
If I am arrested, I would not be treated violently or roughly
If I wanted to complain about how the police treated me, I know who I could go to for help
If I want to appeal my sentence, I know what to do
I went to secondary school
If I got into a fight, people would ask for my side of the story
I can name some of the laws in the country
I know a little bit about the constitution
If I was arrested, someone would immediately be told
When I am in jail, my family is likely to come and visit (if I want them to)
I can read and understand legislation

For a US public health group

I can influence decisions made at the national/municipal/local level
I can regularly read newspapers that interest me
I have time and access to radio and TV stations of interest to me
I would never have to wait to meet municipal and administrative officials

I have access to credit
My opinion is important within my own ethnic group
I can afford to buy food I like and go to restaurants
I can afford HIV/AIDS medication
I can pay for treatment at a private hospital if necessary
I can buy condoms
I can negotiate condoms use with my partner
I can afford to boil drinking water
I went to, or expect to go to, secondary school
I will be consulted on issues affecting young people in our community
I eat at least two full meals a day
I have access to plenty of information about HIV
I am not in danger of being sexually harassed or abused
I can question expenditure of community funds
I can afford to travel to conferences and meetings held by international organizations
I have a basic understanding of my rights under the law, or can access a lawyer to ensure that those rights are upheld
I have access to knowledge about basic health care
I do not have to fear the police or the government

After reading the statements ask those who have come forward and discuss why they are at the front, what those who remained at the back feel about those moved forward. Explain that these are people normally meet when at community. Also ask people at the back who they are and why they did not take steps. Explain that these are people who deserve attention.

Discuss the outcomes of the power walk and its implication on our community level activities. Also assess what capacities people at different level need to listen to others.

Some key questions that facilitators may want to ask:

Why are some people at the back, and others are at the front?

How did the people at the back feel when the others were stepping forward?

How did the people at the front feel when they moved ahead of the others?

Can the participants who take none or only take a few steps have their voices heard by those at the front? How could they be heard?

What is the position of girls, boys and women relative to others in the power walk?

The distance between participants symbolizes lots of real distances or inequities in communities. What are they? (Socio-economic, cultural, rural/urban, status, etc.)

The Powerwalk was included as an exercise as part of a package of training materials for UN country teams on a human rights based approach (HRBA) to development called the common learning package on HRBA. Most UN agencies were involved in developing this package, and UNICEF was certainly at the forefront in conceptualizing HRBA. Helena Krug adapted the Powerwalk for health and introduced it into WHO's regular and online training (with InWent, Germany) which we ran for over a decade several times a year.

There are many layers to this activity.

Helena noticed is that it really yielded interesting results in terms of mirroring societies. For instance in Bangladesh, participants would end up at both ends with very few in the middle which reflected the lack of civil society and middle-class. It also brought out very interesting conversations about the roles and responsibilities of the various actors involved, including opening questions about WHO's mandate and what it means to be a WHO staff member in a country (people working in the same organization had very different understandings of what they could or should do in relation to those being left behind at the back).

Dabney developed several new Powerwalk characters over the years, a mix of specific characters drawn from contemporary issues and vague/non-descript characters where the person completing the activity must fill in some gaps about context. She often does this exercise on a staircase to give a physical demonstration of the distance and heights to which certain characters rise and also ask people to observe their position. They then debrief, discussing, for example, how each group felt (for example guilt at being privileged, anger at being left behind, a sense of competitiveness etc.). For those assuming the non-descript characters they discuss the assumptions they had to make about the character/role they were meant to represent.

A protestor in Syria

Survivor of Haitian earthquake

Minister of Health at the national level

Director of a foundation which awards funding
for human rights research and programs

Director of a non-governmental human rights
organization

Journalist covering local and national politics

College Professor doing research on human
rights issues

22 year old torture survivor

45 year old homeless and schizophrenic man

30 year old Muslim male student

15 year old Latina

19 year old (brought to the US as a child) illegal
immigrant in Georgia

16 year old African American male

HIV positive gay male

Female, undocumented migrant worker

Incarcerated African American female with
diabetes

High ranking government official

17 year old male sex worker from a neighboring
country

High ranking government official

An unemployed victim of foreclosure in Metro Atlanta

A Zambian mine worker in a Chinese owned mine

A young man in southern Mali

A detainee in Guantanamo Bay

A female sex worker in Brazil

An underage girl experiencing sex trafficking

A Rohingya woman in Bangladesh

A disabled member of the white house press corps

A scientist working at the EPA on climate change

An analyst at the US State Department working on gender equality

A scientist at the CDC working on vaccines

A young Latino participating in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program(DACA)

An African American professor specializing in race studies working at a public university in the midwest

A Syrian refugee in Turkey

A Muslim American woman in the US

A person whose health insurance comes via the
Affordable Care Act

A coal miner in West Virginia

An anti-abortion activist in Mississippi

A pediatrician in rural Texas

A transgender woman at the Women's March
on Washington

An African American man in New York City

A pregnant teenager in rural Georgia

A 19 Nicaraguan girl who has been raped

An indigenous adolescent in rural Peru

A Tibetan monk living in occupied Tibet/China

An Iranian adolescent seeking asylum in
Sweden

A schizophrenic homeless man in New Orleans

A girl of “marriageable age” in Ethiopia

An Atlanta teenager who is being sex trafficked

A gay man in Uganda

A gun rights advocate in Tennessee

A native elder living near the proposed Dakota
access pipeline

A Catholic gay activist working for Breitbart
news

