Handout 17: Direct Action

Direct action is often used as a key campaign strategy in systems advocacy. It describes activities that are organised, in the public domain and that demand a response. Direct action often arises from community frustrations at being overlooked, by-passed, ignored and repressed. However, as direct action is a public activity, it has the potential to be misrepresented by the media thus creating a backlash that will undermine the very objective underpinning direct action as a systems advocacy approach.

Examples of Direct Action

- **Delegations**: To politicians primarily responsible for making decisions in the defined issue area.
- **Letters Campaigns**: Letters written by a broad range of people and are sent directly to the responsible minister. These can be in the form of previously formatted letters or preferably person letters that are sent to the minister at the same time to create the required effect.
- **Petitions**: These must be addressed and written correctly. It is also critical to get as many signatories as possible and send these at the same time with a covering letter.
- **Media**: Appropriate use of the media either print or electronic media is another useful way to create and galvanise community support and demonstrate the community’s political power.
- **Letters of Support**: from mainstream organizations including peak agencies.
- **Boycotts**: This is an activity that encourages people NOT to use particular services or purchase products.
- **Graffiti**: Humour attacks on the target. However, this form of action usually backfires and encourages negative attention.
- **Street Theatre**: Performance in public places to generate interest and promote the issue.
- **Blockades**: Of buildings, streets and other places. This approach usually requires information to be provided to the police prior to the activity.
- **Marches**: An activity that provides those affected and their supporters an opportunity to deliver their message publicly. Marches in public places require organisers to inform police prior to the activity.
- **Sit-Ins**: Are held in offices of government departments, local councils to confront decision-makers. These are not legal activities and can have negative outcomes.
- **Symbolic actions & vigils**: Memorial events to further create community awareness and further enhance community participation in the cause.
- **Green Bans**: (similar to black bans) refers to the refusal by trade unions to work on developing land which needs environmental protection.