

## Reflection on Strategies for Promoting Change

*“World peace through nonviolent means is neither absurd nor unattainable. All other methods have failed. Thus we must begin anew. Nonviolence is a good starting point. Those of us who believe in this method can be voices of reason, sanity, and understanding amid the voices of violence, hatred, and emotion. We can very well set a mood of peace out of which a system of peace can be built.”*

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Consider these three broad categories of approaches to making change:

**Formal systems:** All societies are governed by defined institutions, systems and processes. Laws are made and enforced and disagreements are resolved in some fashion. In a democratic system, these processes are regulated by constitutions or other documents that ensure the people have a voice in how laws are made and define the limits of governmental authority. Therefore, citizens have proscribed channels through which they can work to change regulations and how they are interpreted.

**Direct action:** Individuals and groups participate in direct action to achieve political, economic or societal change outside of formalized channels. These actions seek to either obstruct something to which participants are opposed or demand something that is not being adequately addressed by current power systems. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., direct action is meant to, “create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue so that it can no longer be ignored.”

**Community dialogue:** Community dialogue aims to change the relationship between ordinary people and those in power to empower people to engage in the issues that affect their lives. It brings together coalitions of people through increased mutual understanding and communication to identify and address common problems. This approach taps into the experience available within a community and promotes education and discussion to foster justice, equality and social inclusion.

## Reflection Activity

**List of nonviolent strategies:** Arts, Boycotts, Civil Disobedience, Cross-Community Work, Courts, Education, Elections, Information Campaigns, Legislation, Street Demonstrations, Strikes

|   | Formal Systems | Direct Action | Community Dialogue |
|---|----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Which strategies fall in this category?                                 |                |               |                    |
| What are the benefits of this approach?                                 |                |               |                    |
| What are the drawbacks or risks?  |                |               |                    |
| Under what circumstances would this approach be most likely to succeed? |                |               |                    |
| Provide one contemporary example of this approach in action.            |                |               |                    |

**Discussion Questions:** *Which of these approaches is most effective and why?*

*How do these three approaches complement each other? Can one approach be pursued in isolation?*