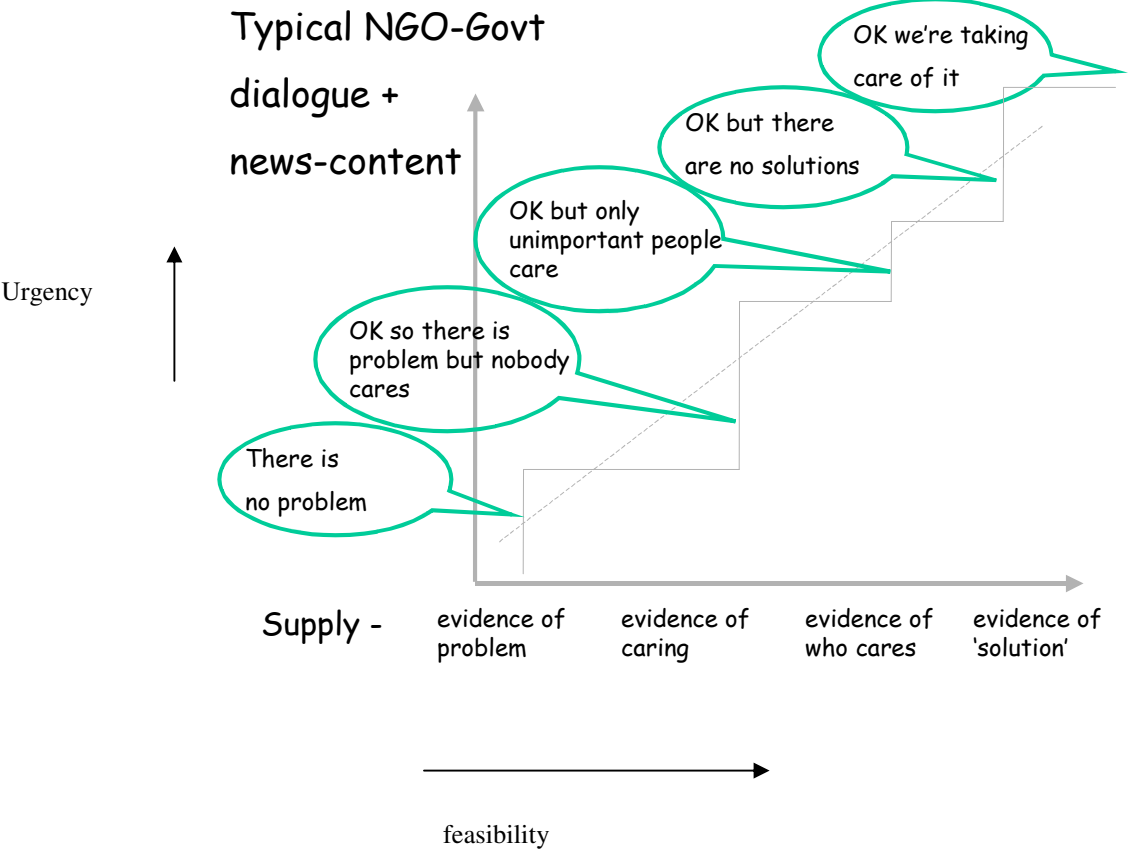
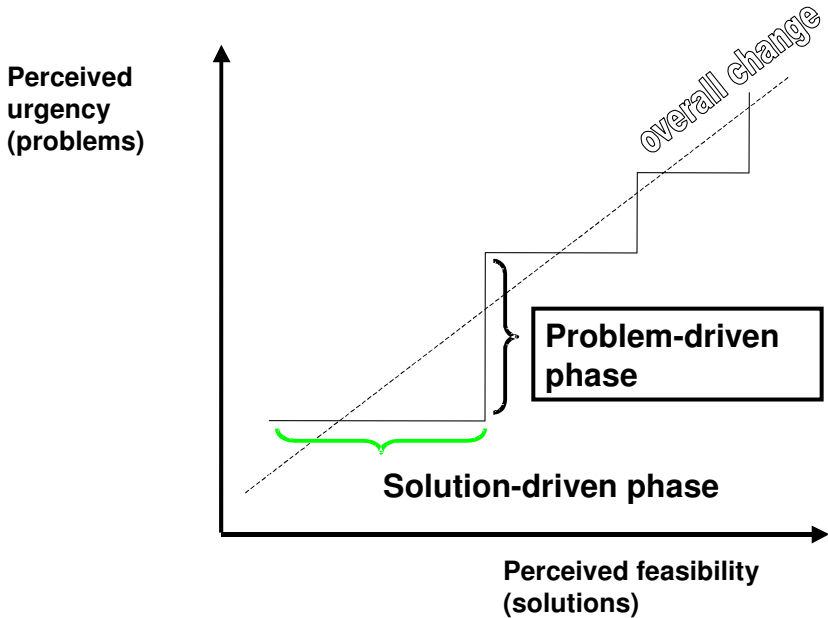


## Problem Phase And Solution Phase

All campaigns need to exist in two modes: problem-driving, and solution-driving. Change tends to be alternately driven by the problem and the solution. This is how the media helps us all make sense of change, and lack of change. In a problem driven phase, lack of change is explained if “not enough people care”. In a solution or feasibility-driven phase, change is halted if “it’s not economic” or “no solution exists” or “it’s not possible”.

Overall change can be thought of as the resolution of two forces in the public consciousness: perceived urgency and perceived feasibility. Campaigners need to think about which phase their campaign is in now, or will be in next.

The conversation with society (or here, typically, with politicians in the news media) that this leads to, is something like this:



Psychologically, physiologically we are hard-wired to pay attention to problems first, with fright, flight and fear. “Look at how they sell pain relief, headache pills” a colleague pointed out some years ago. “It’s eighty percent problem, twenty percent solution”. Fire (page ) is news: urgent life-threatening problems get our attention.

At a deep level, the most urgent, most important news is always the bad news, the immediate problems. For security driven people this is usually the only important news – see page - and studies for the BBC for example, shows that they dominate regular news watchers, looking out for the next-bad-thing.

The public relations industry has become adept at using this to sell ‘solutions’ by wrapping them in a problem. PR Director Ed Gyde<sup>1</sup> says: “We call these ‘negative-positive stories’. Say you have a drugs information leaflet to promote to local parents. In it self that’s not news: it is boring. But if you survey parents and find 70% of them are worried that they don’t have enough information about drugs their children may use – then that’s local news. Suddenly your leaflet, a ‘solution’, is newsworthy”.

Problem alone soon becomes demotivating (see Communications Sequence page ). So any campaign design needs to paint the issue in characters of light and darkness, of solution and problem.

If we engage people with a problem and then abandon them without a solution, we’ve ‘led them up the garden path’: next time they won’t come. While working with Media Natura<sup>2</sup> I saw one study after another in which we interviewed people who had ended their subscriptions to campaigning NGOs or who were aware of the ‘issues’ and the problems but who were ‘turned off’. Usually their decision to leave or not to connect wasn’t because they disagreed with the cause, or, as was often assumed, due to dissatisfaction with the efforts of the group but because they wanted to ‘stop the flow of bad news’ and felt they ‘couldn’t do enough to help’.

Without an opportunity to take action, sympathetic people feel guilty, overwhelmed by the tragedy of the situation. In the end they have to disengage for their own protection. This is a good reason to start campaign planning with an opportunity to take action and work back from it.

For others, the lack of a feasible alternative is the watertight excuse they need not to take part. For those who don’t want to *appear* unsympathetic or uncaring, the fact that ‘nothing can be done’ is the most comfortable excuse, maintaining self-esteem while providing a moral hand-wash.

The speech bubbles (diagram ...) show what politicians say. Between each horizontal ‘step’ the campaign reverts to ‘problem—driving’. How the problem is

framed, changes at each step. Surmounting each step will be a project or a campaign in itself: this process is 'scale free'; it can apply from the level of the conversation between two individuals up to a wholesale revolution in national consciousness or behaviour. The role of the campaign has to change from supplying evidence of the problem, to caring, to who cares, to the solution. The 1970s – 1990s dialogue about the environment in the UK followed exactly this pattern<sup>3</sup> but it applies far more widely. It's no use sticking with showing how many people care, if the 'debate' moves on to *who* cares, or beyond that, to solutions. After these steps, the issue becomes one of enforcement and delivery.

Lastly, present only one problem at a time. Too many injustices at one time are indigestible. They can induce a state of denial, a mental and moral retreat not because of the impossibility of taking action on them<sup>4</sup>. In fundraising the usual rule is only to offer one action, at several different levels: typically three ways of doing the same thing. Too many options can induce indecision.

Some campaigners love to point to linkages but too many-problems-all-linked-together are hard to take in. What am I supposed to do? It's the woolly-blanket-problem. There's a problem in there somewhere, I can see the shape of it, or I thought I could but now there's another, and two more, and they're moving about, and as it twists and turns and gets more complicated, it gets snagged on one thing and then another until the original thing I was fixed on is lost, somewhere in a huge woolly bundle of smothering evidence and other problems. In the end, all it says is: "there's definitely a problem in here somewhere but it's surrounded by complications".

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<sup>2</sup> While I was director from 1988 to 1992 we undertook hundreds of projects for NGOs large and small. I have also seen similar results from other studies of NGO support

<sup>3</sup> It was this realisation that led Greenpeace UK to initiate systematic 'solutions campaigning' in 1993. See Rose, Chris, *Beyond the Struggle for proof, Environmental Values* 1994

<sup>4</sup> Take John Pilger's book and update of the imperialist 'great game', *The New Rulers of the World*<sup>4</sup>. Pilger is a journalist I have great respect for. In *The New Rulers of the World* for example I reached the bit about the continuing refusal of the Australian Prime Minister to apologize for the century of degrading treatment of Aborigines by the white Australian establishment, the theft of their land, the denial of human rights, the withholding of reparations called for by the British, the children torn from families by police in a programme to 'breed out' colour from mixed race families, the continuing under-funding of aboriginal health as opposed to whites. This came after the 1967 carve-up of Indonesia's economy by the US, UK and multinationals, doling out the tropical forests of Sumatra (mostly gone now) to American, French and Japanese companies, the copper, gold and bauxite to the Americans; and after the 35,000-strong CIA training programme Operation Cyclone, which helped form al-Qa'ida and the Taliban, the US Whitehouse activities of Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and others in planning 'total war' to 'let our vision of the world go forward' and achieve 'full spectrum dominance' of the planet; after the mass murders in Indonesia and East Timor for long disguised as good news by the media of Australia and the United States; after the use of 300 tons of depleted uranium in the 1991 Gulf War and the cancer wave that has followed – and there was more.