

# GIS/Mapping

## Case Study: Relationship Mapping

*Written by Stephanie Lindenbaum  
for the OSI Information Program*



© 2006 Open Society Institute. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

## **OSI - GIS/Mapping Project**

**Case Study:** Relationship mapping

**Person Contacted:** Ali Gharavi, Center for Victims of Torture

*ISSUE: The Center for Victims of Torture tried to comprehend how torture continues to be widespread throughout the world - how, indeed was this possible?*

*SOLUTION: The group developed a new concept, 'tactical mapping,' which allows for a visualization of the many and complex relationships. Only then did they understand how mutually reinforcing the abusive relationships were as well as the many potential points for intervention.*

---

*(Adapted from interviews with Ali Gharavi, Technology Director, and Nancy Pearson, Training Manager, at Center for Victims of Torture)*

The Center for Victims of Torture initiated its New Tactics in Human Rights project as an effort to lend creativity and new perspectives to Human Rights issues. The New Tactics approach emerged out of CVT's experiences working with the Human Rights community, and the recognition that "no single approach can disrupt the complex systems that sustain human rights abuses."<sup>1</sup> Rather, by assisting the actors - and those trying to sever abusive relationships and links - to comprehend the multitude of contacts and parties involved, CVT believes they are then well positioned to create new and innovative strategies and tactics to combat torture and other human rights abuses.

Ali Gharavi, CVT's Director of Technology, understands that this concept - tactical mapping - can sound both foreign and irrelevant to many of the Center's constituents and partners. Having come from an engineering and software development background himself, Gharavi sees mapping as very much in line with strategic and analytical processes: "[Tactical mapping] is intriguing because a user should be able to, say, create software that renders this relationship and lets you navigate through the issue." Essentially, tactical mapping borrows from engineering's complex relationships and employs a visualization of these connections for an activist issue.

CVT understands that complex and technical issues frequently scare away non-technical groups and NGOs, and therefore has tried to make tactical mapping as user friendly and simple as possible. "We use the tactical mapping as a basic exercise - one of the first things we ask training groups to do is to create a tactical map of their own situation. They map out the terrain in which they're working- identifying people, organizations, government and private institutions, etc-and then what activities bring them to other groups, and how you achieve certain results by interacting with these groups."

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.newtactics.org/file.php?ID=940>

In order to be "as low-tech as possible" but remain relevant and engaging for each group, CVT has conducted tactical mapping with pen and paper, flip charts and markers, and computer-based with Microsoft Powerpoint or Visio. "Basically, we're mostly using Visio at the moment. You don't want to be overly technical and preclude some people from using it, but it can be simple enough. We're now in the process of engaging with partners in a number of pilot projects applying the tactical mapping process in countries ranging from Turkey, Liberia to Mongolia. Through these varied applications, we're seeking to come up with an electronic replicable tool to capture their paper-based maps electronically and then render them in a different perspective."

The response to New Tactics has been overwhelmingly positive - Gharavi sees the tool as popular in part due to its simplicity, and in part because it is "one of the most tangibly appreciative things that people talk back to us about." By creating a visual representation of what had previously been a nebulous concept, the project has "triggered new ideas in people and led to a better understanding of their own situations."

"CVT started by gathering a group of experts in the field of torture prevention, sitting down and identifying all of the players in a scenario," says Gharavi. "It started by identifying the relationship seeking to be changed: the perpetrator and the victim. Then following that relationship to the team of torturers, the police station, the judicial system, the government, the victim's family and his doctor, etc. It starts pretty localized and then grows -for example, in Turkey, they looked at this skeleton of relationship networks and saw that there was one area with a missing link, one part that had gone unnoticed. This was the medical field - so the advocacy group then approached the national doctors' association and together they came up with new and important ways of documenting the torture that had gone on."

Gharavi agrees that it is difficult, frequently, for people to suspend disbelief and accept that their position relates to another's that had initially appeared very foreign. "If you're a farmer in Botswana, it's hard to get you to listen about women's rights issues in Myanmar," but after the first leap of faith, it becomes one of the easiest concepts in identifying potential activity for Human Rights activists,

*We have found the Tactical Map an impressive instrument for charting a fresh terrain which will be used to update our strategy. Using it, we have been able to improve the listing of our project allies more than 300%. The bird's eye view of the clusters permits a visual appraisal that promotes quick judgment, as it offers a vantage point for planners to easily see how to build essential relationships. To our amazement...*

and one of the easiest concepts to grab onto. "The primary purpose of the New Tactics Project is to get people to think more strategically and to get more insight and tactics - action from a new angle."

In figure 1 below, the different colors of the map represent different relational groupings. For example, as Gharavi stated above, the orange colored circles and arrows represent the relationship between the torturer, the torture team, the medical doctor that examines the victim in the police station where the torture is occurring and connecting back to the police education and training institutions which train the police for the field. These are all direct relational links to each other. The additional arrows represent other relational linkages flowing to and from these potential points of intervention and/or influence.

The tactical mapping process provides additional insights into other layers that can be explored, revealed and identified. For example, taking this initial map, an organization might choose to create a tactical map to follow the relationship flow in a specific police station in their community known or suspected to have a high incidence of torture. The organization may then identify a variety of tactics that "target" that police station for intervention or influence. For example, they identify the need to utilize tactics to gain entry into the police station, documentation tactics regarding the number of incidents of torture, or the chain of command, or personal and institutional connections to governmental institutions for creating access and policy changes. Other tactics could be identified regarding how this information can best be shared in order to influence identified parties through media and public pressure. The tactical map allows organizations to identify the many potential points of intervention and influence where tactics might best be applied to reach their goal. In this way, they can more clearly develop, pursue and adjust their strategy while choosing a variety of tactics to be employed and "targeted" toward impacting those relationships in the direction of their strategic goal.

Comments on tactical mapping  
from participants in the  
New Tactics Asia Regional  
Training Workshop, August  
2005

*The new learning of tactical mapping is useful to me and could improve the structure of my daily work.*

*Tactical mapping was very good. That helped me to clarify who is my target [and] what is more effective.*

*It is a great opportunity to be here for examining my*

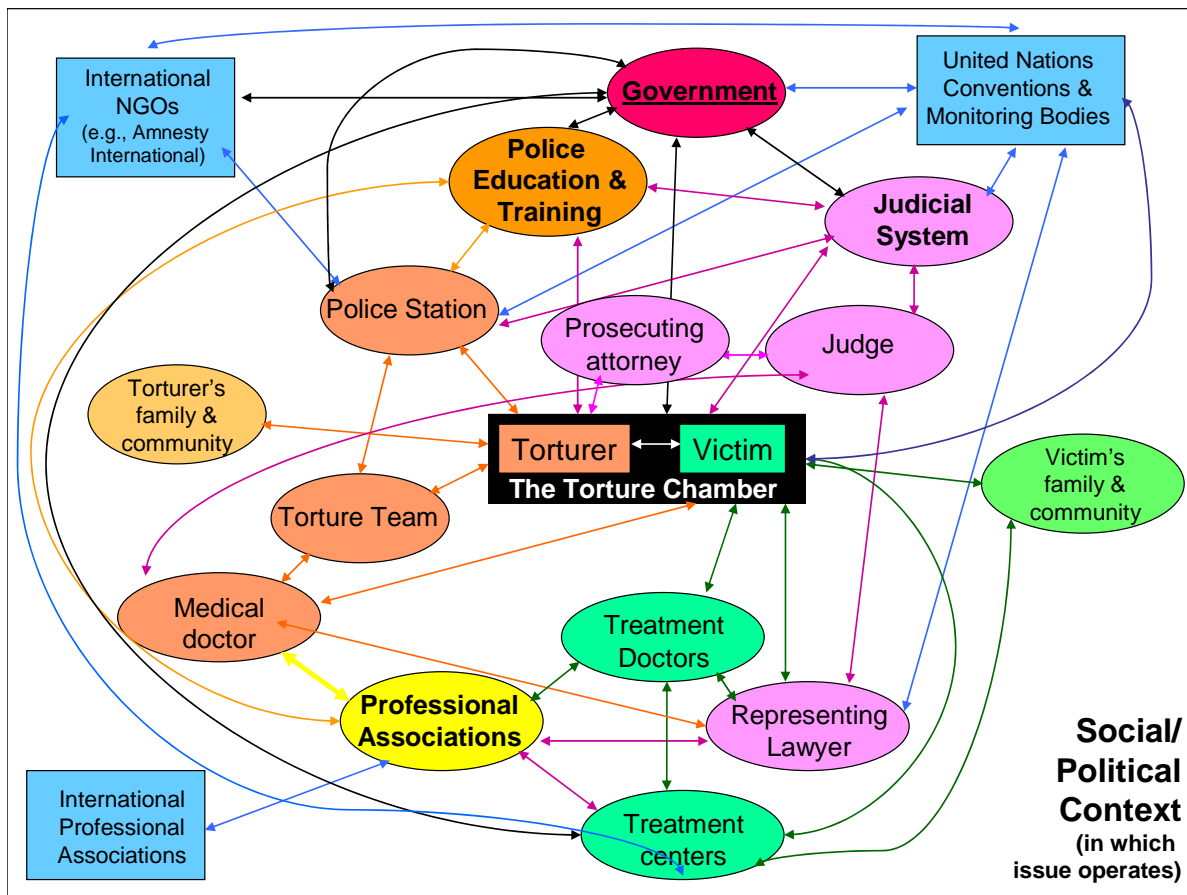


Figure 1: Simplified Tactical Map on the Issue of Torture  
(original map contains over 400 identified relationships)

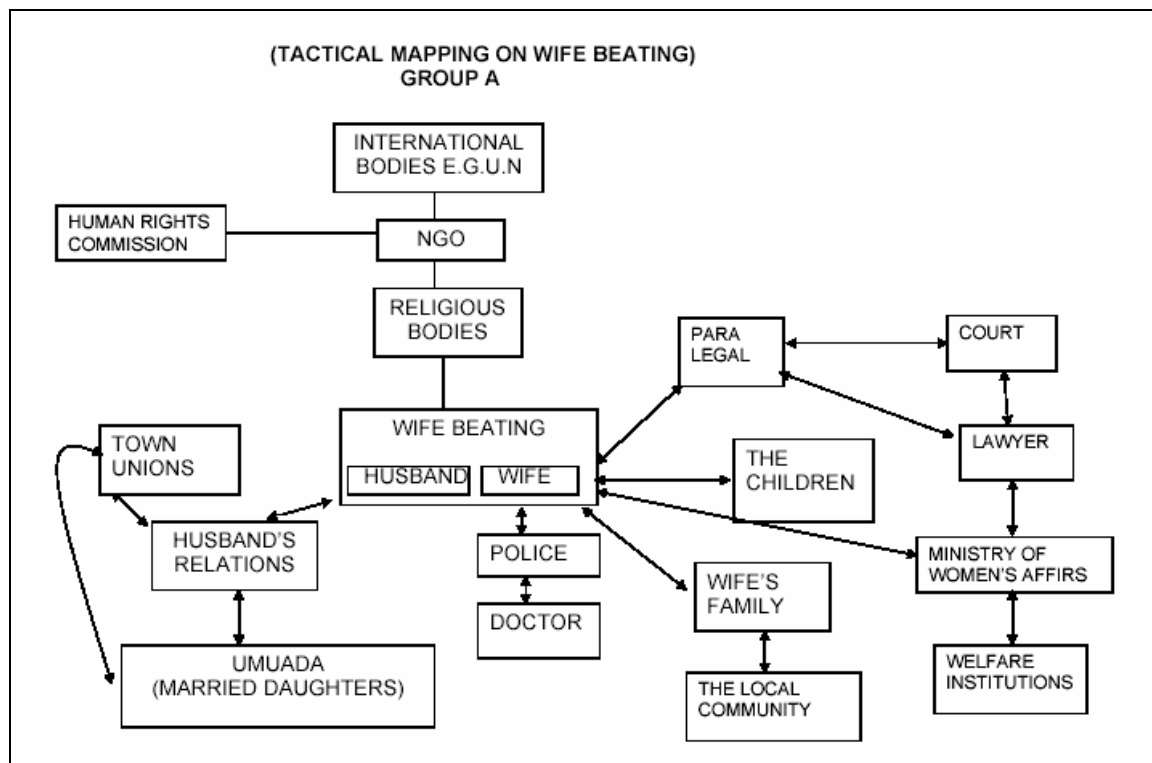


Figure 2: Tactical Map on Wife Beating developed by a group in Nigeria



Figure 3: Example of a "Low tech" tactical map

This map was created on domestic violence at the Asia Regional Training Workshop in Chiang Mai, Thailand, August 2005. Using the tactical mapping process in small groups of ten people, the New Tactics project utilized a "low tech" method of moveable pieces of paper. This allowed the group to discuss the relational elements and move around these identified relational aspects until they were satisfied. Then they added the directional arrows for further clarification of how these related to each other.

For an organization working on such an issue, taking this kind of "low tech" information from their brainstorming session and creating a computerized map would allow them to shift and change these relationships for future development and examination. They could maintain their original map, thus allowing another layer of mapping their own strategic process regarding their issue.