

The Nangchen Vegetable Boycott

SUMMARY

From February 2011 to July 2012, Tibetans in Nangchen boycotted Chinese vegetable sellers because of their exorbitant prices, and also created an alternative source for vegetables. After initially trying and failing to negotiate with the vendors, Tibetans appealed to the police who refused to intervene. After meetings, discussion, and planning, community members then decided to stage a boycott. They approached business owners in Nangchen who agreed to import vegetables and other foods from Xining for an affordable price. By April 2011, the majority of Tibetans were participating in the boycott. Chinese vendors complained to the police, who refused to intervene again, but who warned the Tibetans not to associate themselves with the Dalai Lama or Tibetan independence. Some Chinese vegetable sellers left the area and other Tibetan villages were inspired to try similar boycotts. However, the system of having volunteers truck food in from Xining wasn't sustainable in the long-term, and some high-priced vendors returned.

ISSUE	Unaffordable, exorbitant prices for vegetables
WHO	Residents of Nangchen county, 98% of whom are Tibetan
WHERE	Nangchen County, Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kham (Qinghai)
GOALS	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Affordable vegetable prices2. Shut down price-gouging Chinese vegetable sellers
STRATEGY	Boycott existing vegetable vendors and create alternative sources of vegetables
PLANNED OR SPONTANEOUS?	Planned
How did they organize?	At least one community meeting
How did they get started?	Unknown
ISSUE FRAMING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unfair vegetable prices, especially compared to other areas• Avoided links to political issues

LEADERS, PARTICIPANTS, ALLIES INCLUDING ELITES	No identifiable leaders Majority of residents participated Tibetan business leaders
TARGET	Chinese vegetable sellers
OPPONENT(S)	Chinese vegetable sellers
TACTICS	<p>First Phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation with vendors • Dialogue with police <p>Second Phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created alternative Tibetan-owned businesses and imported products for them • Stopped buying from Chinese businesses
Low-risk or high-risk tactics? Dispersed or concentrated?	The boycott action was low-risk and dispersed. Police never intervened and no one was harmed.
RESPONSE BY OPPONENT	Chinese vendors requested that police get Tibetans to buy from them.
MEDIA & MESSAGING Did they have a clear message? What was it? Did they reach out to media?	The message was clear: "Chinese vegetable sellers are charging unaffordable, unfair prices." There was no obvious media outreach.
Was there media coverage? If so, what role did this play?	There was coverage by Radio Free Asia. While the boycott spread to Jyekundo, Dzatoe, and Surmang, it is unclear how or whether the media coverage played a role.
What kind of strategic judgments did the group make and how?	Unknown

OUTCOMES

- Tibetans successfully created an alternative source for vegetables at reasonable prices.
 - Vendors charging high prices moved away after losing business.
 - However, the alternative source of vegetables was unsustainable because it relied on volunteers to bring vegetables from larger cities. Some high-priced vendors returned.
 - Villagers gained experience of planning and implementing a very successful boycott campaign.
 - The success of the boycott demonstrated that Tibetans have the power to change the local economy.
 - The boycott inspired other villages to try similar boycotts, showing potential for larger-scale changes to the economy.
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