



THE HOW AND WHY OF ADVOCACY

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is the process of using information strategically to change policies that affect the lives of disadvantaged people. It often involves lobbying northern development and political institutions. Increasingly southern NGOs are developing advocacy skills to challenge local, national and international policies.

This involves strengthening the structures through which poor people can participate in the formulation of the policies that control their lives, for example developing strong local networks and representation on local and national civic institutions. Projects which involve the people affected by policy change in developing, implementing and monitoring advocacy work are more likely to achieve concrete change on the ground.

Definition of Advocacy

Edwards (1993) provides the following definition of advocacy. "The aim is to alter the ways in which power, resources, and ideas are created, consumed and distributed at a global level, so that people and organisations in the South have a more realistic chance of controlling their own development".

He suggests that NGOs attempt to change policy in two ways. These are not mutually exclusive - in fact the most effective strategies will probably use both methods.



1. Abolitionist approach

This targets the political level of institutions. This approach attempts to influence global processes, structures and ideologies. This approach takes on massive interest groups and requires a huge base of support if it is to achieve its aims. It is likely to be confrontational and publicly critical of dominant ideology.

2. Reformist approach

This targets the technical and regional levels of institutions. This approach attempts to influence specific policies, programmes or projects. It involves targets which are more open to constructive dialogue but requires a high level of technical knowledge based on practical experience if the views of the NGO are to be taken seriously. Advocacy in this form is likely to take place behind closed doors and is co-operative.

WHY ADVOCATE?

In the early 1990s, leading northern NGOs became aware that the impact of their work was temporary and small-scale. As a result they identified strategies to scale up their impact.

1. Development and emergency work alone are unlikely to produce sustained improvements in the lives of impoverished people. Advocacy is a tool that can draw on programme experience to show the impact existing public policies have on the poor and to suggest alternatives.

2. Advocacy, especially southern advocacy, is linked to empowerment. A means to an end that can facilitate the process by which people, through

articulating their own needs and desires, gain the confidence and ability to influence decisions which will affect their own future.

Strategies to scale-up Impact

- Co-operation with government
- Operational Expansion
- National & International Lobbying
- Operational Expansion

3. The opportunities for NGOs to effect policy are increasing for a variety of reasons - the rise of participatory development, work with partners and the rights-based approach makes working with southern counterparts easier. In addition many NGOs (in the North and South) are increasingly expected to act as an arm of the state to

compensate for cuts in expenditure and therefore have a more direct involvement in policy development. (Adapted from OXFAM guide, 1994)

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS OF UNDERTAKING MORE ADVOCACY WORK

Benefits

- Challenging the structural causes of poverty; moving away from addressing the symptoms.
- More sustainable approach to achieving organisation's mission.
- Greater continuing impact on the living conditions of beneficiaries.
- Increased awareness of the issues.
- Better informed and enabled supporters.
- Involvement in civil society, acting on ethics by encouraging action.
- A more informed and committed donor constituency.
- Opening up new sources of funding.
- Increased profile of organisation.
- Improved links with other organisations through networks and coalitions.
- Wider relations and improved dialogue with decision making bodies.
- Better understanding of our organisation and its role in wider policy debates.

Risks

- Diversion of scarce resources.
- Over extend capacity.
- Loss of organisational focus.
- Duplication of effort amongst agencies.
- Alienation of existing support by becoming overly political.
- Creation of an internal elite of advocates.
- Distortion of message because of oversimplification.
- Conflict of interest with partners.
- Reduction in partner security.
- Damage to reputation.
- Loss of external and internal legitimacy if programme work is displaced by advocacy.

ADVOCACY - WHERE TO START

There is no 'right' way to design an advocacy strategy and every one is different. In this document, a number of key tools for structuring your thinking about priorities and actions are presented, and these can be used in your campaign. But the order in which a campaign uses these tools will vary. For instance, a very participative campaign might not place 'participant analysis' in one box; the principle might feed into all areas of work. Also, the lessons learned as you go through these processes will feedback new information. The process of developing an advocacy strategy is therefore a circular one involving constantly revisiting assumptions and decisions made earlier in the process.

1. Analyse your organisation

A **SWOT** analysis of your organisation is one way of identifying issues to work on. Assess the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats of developing advocacy work for your aims and mission.

2. Set your objectives

Identify and research the issue you will be working on. Set **SMART** (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime bound) objectives for the short, medium and long term.

3. Analyse stakeholder

Identify all stakeholders. Who will be affected? Define targets, allies, adversaries and internal stakeholders. Prioritise key stakeholders.

4. Build alliances

If appropriate to bring more resources and support on board.

5. Participatory planning

Involve participants in identifying the issues and planning the strategy.

6. Assign roles or responsibilities to each stakeholder.

7. Identify your target audience

Spell out who it is that can make the changes laid out in your objectives.

8. Analyse the target

How do they make decisions? Who do they listen to?

9. Define your message

Decide what information you need. Do you need more research to prove your case to the target?

10. Identify media

Which media will be most useful in getting to your target? What 'spin' do you need to put on your story to get it in?

Golden rules for managing an advocacy project

- Set up a multi-skilled team that covers all key areas.

- Get support from senior management and trustees.
- Keep internal and external stakeholders informed.
- Clarify work roles of all team members.
- Feedback to supporters - let them know the influence of their input.
- Start where people are - give everyone an entry point and a next step.
- Take advantage of short-cuts which present themselves.
- Set very clear objectives for your work.
- Use networks carefully - share of expectations and objectives.
- Focus on what you share, and how you can achieve shared aims.
- Be patient in your planning.
- Beware of creating celebrities who could marginalise other voices.
- With both allies and targets, focus on individuals, not organisations.
- Keep a balance between researching, planning, doing and evaluating.

Action plan

- Prepare a timeline and list external and internal events and opportunities you could use as pegs.
- List the activities to be carried out
- and find an appropriate mix of 'tools' for your audience. Direct lobbying, public campaign, media etc.
- Define responsibilities for carrying them out.
- Analyse any problems and position of key players. What might change in the future.



Key Points to Remember

("NGO Advocacy in the European Union. The search for impact and relevance in a complex environment". Presented by Christian L. Freres, AIETI, at the NGOs in a Global Future Conference, January 1999.)

- Public awareness is a key component. Take advantage of every opportunity to raise the profile of your issue.
- Objectives should be realistic. Success may be limited to maintaining an issue on the agenda.
- Lobbying should involve multiple strategies at all levels and be aimed at different target audiences.

PARTICIPATIVE ADVOCACY

Participative advocacy (sometimes known as southern advocacy or stakeholder advocacy) is a process by which people, through articulating their own needs and desires, gain the confidence and ability to influence decisions which will affect their own future.

Participation is a complicated process which has revolutionised development work. At its core lies an idea that the power relationships between North and South need to be challenged, and that the best solutions to poverty and inequality will be defined by those whose lives are most directly affected. However, it means many different things to different people.

Defining the political agenda

- Advocacy work doesn't have to be centralised and hierarchical.
- Participation can be used to build consensus amongst people with different vested interests. However, participation is not always about consensus. Where people have different views it can mean agreeing to speak with a majority voice.
- When dealing with delicate political situations, participation can become 'the art of the possible' seeing how far you can go/what you can say, whilst keeping a delicate coalition together.

Creating sustainable change

- Changes brought about on behalf of people in the south, however well intentioned and well planned, are unlikely to be sustainable without some sort of mandate from them.
- Building advocacy capacity in the south enables poor people themselves to analyse their problems, identify pathways to solving them and in the long-term, bring about the sorts of changes which will be sustainable for them.
- The credibility of the advocacy group is key to having sustained influence.
- Joint efforts are likely to have greater impact, but too large a group loses agility and may be unmanageable.

- Information and analysis are key resources for NGO advocacy.

- Advocacy involves considerable time and resources, including skilled personnel.

- Campaigns in the North should involve partner organisations in the South. This is not just a question of maintaining legitimacy, but also of being in constant touch with local realities.

- Participation need not always be about Northern NGOs 'finding partners to work with'. There are southern communities and networks doing their own advocacy work who are looking for partners based in the north to assist them in changing policies and raising awareness.

Building legitimacy and accountability

- Southern involvement lends legitimacy and credibility to a campaign: policymakers have shown themselves more open to the voices, opinions and desires of southern communities than of those in the north presuming to act on their behalf.

- Equal partnerships are best built by using systems of mutual accountability, where both partners are open and honest with each other about what they are gaining from the partnership and how they are using resources provided by the other. Unstated agendas destroy trust.

Making the most of available resources

- The whole is more than the sum of its parts, if managed competently.
- Partners have different skills and can achieve things in different ways.
- Different groups have access to different policy makers.
- Working together with like-minded institutions and individuals allows the comparative advantages of each member to be identified and exploited, and duplications avoided.
- Participation allows different groups of people to define their own roles, to tell you what they want to do, what they can do, and what they think you could do.
- Participants should not be exploited as a resource, either for their 'legitimacy' or for their labour.
- Northern NGOs learn from experienced and skilled advocates in the south.

PARTICIPATORY ADVOCACY - WHERE TO START?

1. Identify your objectives in sufficient detail to present stakeholders as a basis for discussion.
2. Make a list of all stakeholders who you might want invite to be involved.
3. Analyse the potential advantages and problems of working with those identified.
4. Identify, for at least one key stakeholder (a) the expectations which you imagine that stakeholder has of your advocacy work (b) the responsibilities which imagine that stakeholder will be willing to take on.
5. List ways in which each of the parties could be supported in their advocacy work to strengthen the Overall campaign.
6. Identify communication channels which would

enable stakeholders to be kept to informed and to participate actively in all appropriate stages of the project (e.g. meetings - how to regular? What language? Where? How funded? Email, newsletters, 3. fax etc).

7. Prepare for the first meeting by analysing what your organisation can contribute to the campaign, and what role you might have? you

8. Establish early on how subsequent meetings / information sharing processes will be managed and who will take responsibility for keeping things moving (this should probably be a rotating responsibility so that



WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS?

Stakeholders in advocacy work are those individuals who have an interest in seeing the goals of the advocacy work being reached, or not. It is useful to break this large group down into smaller categories of like-minded people in order to recognise where participants fit into the campaign.

Allies

People who are 'on your side' either because they will benefit directly from the changes you are trying to bring about, or because they want to help you bring about these changes as part of a broader movement.

Beneficiaries

People whose lives will be improved by the successful achievement of your advocacy goals. Individuals in this group could also be called 'allies' because they have a vested interest in seeing the end result but a beneficiary is often a more passive stakeholder than an ally.

Adversaries

People who are opposed to what you're trying to do. These people could become allies in time, with greater understanding of the issues, or could be standing in the way of what you're trying to do. Adversaries can become targets of your advocacy project if you are planning a series of activities to 'win them around'.

Internal stakeholders

A grouping used to define people within your own organisation or network or alliance who are actively collaborating on the design, management and execution of your project. They will not necessarily all be allies because some people within your own organisation will be sceptical about doing advocacy work at all, and reluctant to lend their time to it individuals in this group are usually people with whom you have regular contact need to be moving people between the boxes, ie. turning adversaries into tools, allies into tools and tools into participants. People can be in more than one of these categories at any one time.



Categorising and Prioritising Stakeholders

Once you've broken down the lists, rank the importance, to you of each of the stakeholder groups. This will stop the list from looking like a daunting / impossible challenge and will help shape your work plan.

Using the different categories of stakeholders, you need to be moving people between the boxes, ie turning adversaries into tools, allies into tools and tools into participants. People can be in more than one of these categories at any one time.

Dangers & Pitfalls

There are both benefits and risks in involving other people in your advocacy work. Working particularly takes time, can be often don't get to do everything your own way and rarely allows you to be opportunistic. but there is a moral imperative to be participative because more often than not you are advocating for change in the lives of other people and your actions and messages will affect their lives somewhere down the line. In addition, participative advocacy increases the credibility and legitimacy of your work. It can bring greater resources to bear on your objectives and has the potential to bring enemies on board.

Logistical nightmare

Participating in a project with partners operating in different countries, at different levels, to different priorities can be frustrating, cumbersome and expensive. Keep focused on your role within it and be clear about what you want from others and what you

can contribute to their activities in return.

Conflicts of Interests

This occurs both within an organisation between management who can think of advocacy as an element of corporate communications and project staff who think of it as a dangerous diversion from more concrete work and between different organisations. try to steer a balance between these extremes.

Finding the right collaborators

Southern participants in international advocacy work need the capacity skills and resources to participate in advocacy work or they need to acquire these elements in order to participate. If you don't already have partners in the south, identifying possible collaborators from a distance can be difficult and unrewarding for all concerned: use existing networks and organisations with pre-existing knowledge of who is good at what to help you make connections. There is a risk that speaking on behalf of individuals and communities in the south further disempowers them.

Make sure you have a clear mandate before taking on the task or representing others and ensure that there are clear transparent procedures for identifying messages and goals.

TOP TIPS ON SOUTH-NORTH CONSULTATION FOR INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY NETWORKS

- Priorities and starting points are different.
- Pace of work is different.
- Different foci of NGOs (large, northern NGOs usually have multiple foci and their policy/advocacy work changes focus every 2-3 years).
- Small southern NGOs often have a single focus, eg. workers, fisherfolk, peasants, farm labourers, one area or community, and is long term).
- If you are a funder, your funded partners may be very different from the partners you have for advocacy purposes.
- Trust is a key element in developing a joint advocacy strategy. Remember that consultation is not the same as partnership; that key stakeholders such as workers, peasants and communities are involved in developing policy proposals and advocacy plans and not just in providing information on 'the situation' on the ground; and that you develop a two-way process that ensures mutual understanding of advocacy needs.

MONITORING AND EVALUATING ADVOCACY

Monitoring is the collection of information about a project over time. It seeks to understand what is happening.

Evaluation is an assessment of the project at one point in time, including the successes and failures. It seeks to understand why what happened, and why.

Why Monitor and evaluate your advocacy work?

The initiative to begin monitoring and evaluating your advocacy work may come from a variety of motivations. The reason why you are evaluating your work will determine the techniques you use.

- 1) So you can produce credible funding reports.
- 2) To demonstrate to managers, colleagues and Southern partners that advocacy work is a cost-effective way of improving the lives of poor people.
- 3) To learn from experience.

What kind of monitoring indicators are there?

Try at least a couple of techniques and aim to monitor the change across a range of your stakeholders.

Monitoring your target

- Record and observe changes in the rhetoric of your target audience. Keep a file of their statements over time.
 - What are they saying about you and your campaign?
 - Are they moving closer to your position, adapting to or adopting any of your language or philosophy?

Monitoring your relationships

- Record the frequency and content of conversations with external sources and target audiences.
- Are you discussing new ideas? Are you becoming a confidante or a source of information or advice? **Monitoring the media**

- Count column inches on your issue and the balance of pro and anti comment.

- Count the number of mentions for your organisation.
- Analyse whether media is adopting your language.

Monitoring your reputation

- Record the sources and numbers of inquiries that you receive as a result of your work.
- Are you getting to the people you wanted to get to?

- How and where have they heard of your work?
- How accurate are their pre-conceptions about you and your work?

Monitoring public opinion

- Analyse the popular climate through telephone polling, or through commissioning surveys.

What to evaluate?

To evaluate the impact of your project you need to be clear about the model or process you are trying to follow and then decide on what information is available to enable you to assess each part of the process. Recent work by the New Economics Foundation suggests you think of the process as an Impact Chain. In each phase there are policy and grass roots activities, both of which need to be monitored. The relationship between these activities is also important, the more integrated they are, the more successful the project is likely to be.

Grass roots activities are likely to involve capacity building activities, such as:

- Group formation.
- Group activities.
- Group federation beyond village level.
- Movement launched which takes on vested interests.
- Groups of poor are involved in framing legislation. and have control over resources.

Policy activities focus more on raising awareness and changing attitudes. For example:

- Heightened awareness about an issue.
- Contribution to debate.
- Changed opinions.
- Changed policy.
- Policy change implemented.
- Positive change in peoples' lives.

Who defines success?

Different stakeholders will have different views on what success is, depending on where they are within the impact chain. To get an overview of how successful you were you need to solicit the views of a range of stakeholders, such as the ultimate beneficiaries, local people and their organisations, staff involved, target audience, journalists and outsiders.

Attribution is one of the hardest issues to face in evaluating advocacy work. It is very difficult to know precisely what causes policy changes and precisely what impact those changes have in reality - many different forces are at play in any situation.

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Top Tips

- Don't underestimate the time needed - advocacy is long term and policy change is slow and subject to reversal.
- Work as a team. Successful advocacy requires a range of skills, including research, communication, project management and policy skills.
- Have very clear objectives. Link your activities very closely to those objectives.
- Check that you are not kicking at an open door before taking up other people's time and setting up a confrontation.
- Work with southern partners from the start. This is essential if you are to root your advocacy in the experiences and views of disadvantaged people as well as understand and explain the impact that policy has on their lives.
- Think carefully about the potential implications of what you are doing for your partners, especially if you're asking them to 'put their head above the parapet'.
- But beware, successful advocacy work is complex, the numbers of stakeholders are often huge and each has a different perspective on how the issue should be approached. It is essential to establish early on whose agenda (North or South, within a coalition etc.) you are working to and what this means in practice.
- Define your primary targets, as those people who are in the best position to achieve what you want done. If your chosen route to the decision-makers is not working, take a step back and look for a new 'way in'.
- Spend time nurturing relationships with your targets. Think about targets in terms of individuals not institutions. Learn as much as you can about the individual, as well as organisation.
- Follow-up on commitments you think people have made - in other words, beware of paper victories and false starts.



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