Advocacy Evaluation Update

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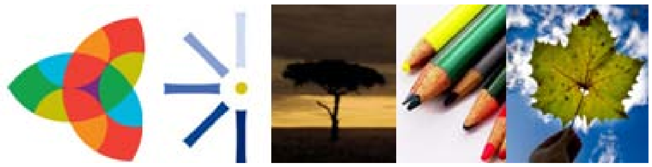

In This Issue:

We define ***advocacy*** *as "a wide range of activities conducted to* ***influence decision makers*** *at various levels." This means not only traditional advocacy work like litigation, lobbying, and public education, but also capacity building, network formation, relationship building, communication, and leadership development. –Innovation Network*

Welcome!

We want to feature your work!

If you are interested in writing for the *Advocacy Evaluation Update*, would like us to feature a new resource, or have suggestions for future content, please contact me at **jcoffman [at] evaluationinnovation [dot] org**.

- Julia Coffman, Editor
Director of the Center for Evaluation Innovation

Feature

Advocacy Evaluation in the Developing World

By Rhonda Schlangen

Editor's Note: The author discusses the role of advocacy evaluation in developing countries based on her own experiences working on reproductive health and rights advocacy in Africa. The article does not generalize to all developing countries or to all issues, but is intended as one thread in a larger, longer-term conversation.

The ability of citizens to act in an organized and public way to influence the laws and policies under which they are governed is a fundamental right. This article focuses on advocacy in developing countries where resources are particularly constrained and political space and freedom of speech are often contested. In these environments, advocacy by individuals and nongovernmental (NGO) organizations is often high risk, but when successful, is also high impact. For this reason, advocacy evaluation can be a critical tool to help strengthen, support, and refine those advocacy efforts, and ultimately can help to build civil society.

This article uses two advocacy scenarios to illustrate observations about advocacy and its evaluation in developing countries. The first example illustrates the role of advocacy in a state in northern Nigeria where religious authorities are the arbiters of public policy. The second example uses the case of an advocacy coalition in Kenya to discuss how evaluation could have strengthened its high-stakes efforts to change national reproductive health policy.

NIGERIA: *Evaluation that Illuminated the Importance of Advocacy*

Nigeria operates under three legal systems—Sharia or Islamic law, constitutional law, and common law. In the religiously conservative North, Sharia law is the main body of civil and criminal law, and is interpreted by religious authorities. Advocacy in this environment is localized, highly contextualized, and constrained by political and religious tensions. While it appears informal because it is often conducted through personal channels and contacts, it is highly sophisticated.

Before an adolescent reproductive health services and education program in part of a predominantly Muslim state could begin, the program director first had to meet with the Imam and other religious authorities to gain their permission to work in the community. Failure to secure this permission was unthinkable. Not only was their assent critical for the staff's security, but vocal support from the Imam would translate into community members seeking health services. There was little documentation or discussion of this advocacy work, in large part because the project's donor was primarily interested in supporting health services, not advocacy.

About five years into the project, a formative evaluation was conducted. Because the project was positioned as a health delivery project, the Nigerian academics engaged to conduct the evaluation focused on the delivery of services. However, the evaluation's design allowed the advocacy work to come to the forefront, and illuminated it as a critical but unfunded project strategy. Use of appreciative inquiry, which engaged a range of community stakeholders beyond health service clients in questions about the project's achievements, enabled the evaluators to connect the ongoing advocacy with religious and community leaders as critical to the project's success.

Although a theory of change was not developed and communications strategies were not defined, the project team did have a clearly defined advocacy goal or outcome—maintaining the support of religious leaders and eliciting community members' support. This was critical in this cultural and political context where laws are defined and interpreted by religious leaders. The "policy" forum was the de facto forum of religious and public opinion. The proxy measure of this outcome was whether the religious leaders and community members permitted the project to operate and community members, particularly women, to seek health services. The program staff used sophisticated and innovative strategies to engage the religious leaders and community leaders, all the while not recognizing what they were doing as "advocacy." The significance of their advocacy success is best illustrated by one community outreach worker who commented "Before this project, I would have been stoned for talking about condoms. Now, no one will stone you for talking about condoms."

Ultimately, the evaluation results became a useful tool for dialogue with the donor agency to demonstrate the importance of community level advocacy as a precondition for the health care work they wanted to support.

KENYA: *Evaluation's Potential for Informing Strategy*

In many developing countries, development assistance agencies and NGOs fund the work of domestic NGOs to implement projects aimed at promoting health, education, and other aspects of development. In these countries, the evaluation culture has grown up around international agencies' particular demands for accountability and evaluation approaches. Expectations persist that evaluation of this development work should be shaped around a particular set of methodologies—the "gold standard" of designs that use comparison groups, baseline or endline surveys, and outcomes focused on changes in measureable health or economic indicators. Designs that do not follow this formula are judged as less reliable and thus less desirable. This culture affects advocacy evaluation, which may require unconventional or innovative approaches. In response, national NGOs engaged in advocacy, familiar with acceptable evaluation practices emphasized by their donors, tend to avoid assessments of their effectiveness altogether and focus their limited evaluation budgets instead on methods that assess only whether they have implemented the plan promised to donors, an approach that does not advance their understanding of the advocacy work.

This is what happened to a Kenyan coalition of doctors, nurses, lawyers, and human rights advocates who organized around the need to reverse the dangerous trend of unsafe, illegal abortion in the country. One of the group's primary efforts was to draft legislation for a sweeping range of reproductive health and rights policies. Promoting policy change on this issue was a high-stakes proposition because the effort took place in the context of a crowded public agenda during a period of particular political and social volatility following 2008 post-election violence.

The group's donor funding included support for an external, formative evaluation of the coalition's work. The evaluation focused almost exclusively on the group's plans and commitments to donors and whether they had been fulfilled in a timely manner. It did not assess progress toward advocacy goals, identify strategic strengths and weaknesses, or otherwise examine whether the coalition's plan was appropriate for the political and social environment at the time. This was a missed opportunity to use evaluation for strategic learning, especially because the evaluation took place at a critical point just prior to a key policy action. The well-organized, highly functioning advocacy alliance could have used the evaluation to learn about the potential advantages and disadvantages of their approach.

Shortly after the evaluation was conducted, in a disastrous series of events, news of the draft legislation was shared by well-intentioned group members with virulently opposed politicians. Coalition members were subsequently pilloried in the media as "promoting birth control for children." Unprepared, the group scrambled for a response while their opposition framed the story that played out in the media for days. Politicians and church leaders publicly denounced the draft legislation that had not even been introduced in parliament. Ultimately, the political opportunity was lost, and in such a way that arguably weakened the position of the alliance. The legislation that was to help address the needs of the one in 39 Kenyan women who die of pregnancy-related causes never left the drafting table.

This example illustrates a lost opportunity with advocacy evaluation. While many factors contributed to this loss, a well-designed, well-timed evaluation that strayed from the prescribed traditional focus could have contributed essential learning to the coalition's efforts. For example, an evaluation that focused on the alliance's positioning, public perceptions related to key issues, and strategic use of the alliance's political capital, could have helped it define and organize strategies that would help it move beyond joint action to impact.

Conclusions

While the range of experiences, capacities, and political cultures of NGOs cannot be captured in a simple article, these case examples support several general observations about the potential contribution of evaluation to the advocacy efforts of citizens' organizations:

- **Evaluation is an essential tool for understanding the role of advocacy in societal change.** As the Nigeria example illustrates, evaluation can illuminate advocacy and related strategies in supporting program progress or the integral role it plays in creating the necessary conditions for the program to exist. Used in this way, it can both help community NGOs recognize what they are doing as advocacy and help them make the case to donors and supporters for including advocacy in the fabric of program funding.

- **Advocacy evaluation capacity and tools are necessary to expanding civil society.** Organizations with few resources and limited political capital cannot afford to expend efforts on ineffective advocacy. Greater advocacy evaluation capacity, supported by tools that assist in planning and monitoring progress as well as impact, are essential to support the brave and important work of these individual s and organizations. Particularly for young NGOs who are learning to expand political influence, evaluation can help them effectively plan strategies that are consonant with their skills, capacity and resources.

- **Interim outcomes may be the most important outcomes.** In some countries, particularly amongst NGOs who are in the early stages of development, policy change is an unrealistic outcome within a short-term timeframe. For these organizations, developing the contacts and nodes of influence, and gaining a seat at decision making tables, are significant interim advocacy achievements. In some environments, it may take several years of concerted effort just to focus public attention on particular issue, especially if it has a whiff of controversy. The issue of interim outcomes is particularly concerning for young

NGOs, who feel pressure from their international donors to produce policy change results. As Regina Thames, a human rights lawyer for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America who works with small NGO organizations throughout Latin America, notes, “Advocacy processes are not valued that much. Donors only care about policy change outcomes.”

- **Donor flexibility and support is also required.** International donors need to allow for evaluation methodologies that are suited to the learning needs of their grantees. Donors must recognize that methodological choices should be driven by the evaluation questions that are asked and the context in which they are asked, rather than assume that one approach is the best in all situations.

While advocacy evaluation in developing countries still suffers from many of the same reputational and methodological limitations that it does in the United States, the innovative, risk-taking nature of many developing country NGOs presents an exciting opportunity to help grow the advocacy evaluation field.

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Spotlight

System Mapping for Advocacy Planning and Evaluation

Andy Stamp of Innovation Network and Julia Coffman of the Center for Evaluation Innovation offer an overview of system mapping, a method for illustrating complex systems and relationships.

System mapping is a useful method for both planning and evaluating efforts that aim to change systems –that is, how people and organizations relate. Systems efforts might, for example, try to change or improve the way in which an organization functions, create collaborative relationships or networks, or change the context or environment in which social change occurs.

When used for planning, this approach involves first visually mapping the system of interest and then identifying which parts and relationships are expected to change, and how. This process can occur in various ways. For example, it may involve key informant interviews or other forms of data collection to capture what the system looks like and how it is functioning. Alternatively, it may be co-constructed using a facilitated group process.

When used for evaluation, system mapping has a third step—measuring or capturing whether planned changes have occurred (Bloom and Dees, 2008). System map development can then be repeated over time to illustrate how the system has changed. Used in this way, system maps function much like theories of change—they show where changes are expected and help frame and guide evaluations. They also serve as powerful illustrations when presenting results to evaluation stakeholders.

Three Types of System Maps

Steve Waddell of Networking Action suggests that there are three broad categories of system maps, depending on their purpose (Waddell, 2009):

1. Production System Maps

The focus here is an organization or group (e.g., coalition, network). The map models organizational relationships or how the organization does its work. Network analysis or mapping—a technique that explores whether connections or relationships exist between people, groups, or institutions, as well as their nature and strength—is included in this category.

2. Issue System Maps

These maps illustrate the systems that surround and affect the issues that nonprofits or advocates are trying to change. They show how a nonprofit or advocacy effort is one of many factors and entities affecting the issue of interest.

3. Mental Model Maps

These visuals describe how people (individuals, groups, organizations) think the world works. Mental models include theories of change, power analyses, and cause-effect models in general.

Examples of System Mapping

Examples of how the three types of system maps have been used in advocacy planning or evaluation efforts follow.

Production System Map: CARE

Innovation Network is using system mapping in an evaluation for the humanitarian organization CARE. CARE engaged in a project to improve the organization's *systems*—both globally and in the countries where CARE is located—for gathering, storing, and communicating evidence about CARE's work and impact. The project was designed to change CARE's evidence-related systems for the purpose of generating better data and information that could then be used more effectively in CARE's advocacy efforts. The project introduced several "interventions" to create the desired systems changes.

CARE's system maps were developed based on internal document reviews and semi-structured interviews with CARE principals and key informants. A series of maps were created that depicted a) the system at baseline, b) where interventions would be introduced in the system, and c) the system post-intervention. Just like theories of change, the mapping process added value by helping to clarify and further focus CARE's systems change efforts. Once the system maps were produced, they were used to help set data collection priorities and to guide data collection planning.

>>To see a simplified version of the CARE map, see this handout, from a session at AEA 2009.

Issue System Map: Center for Victims of Torture

In its New Tactics in Human Rights Project, the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) uses a form of system mapping called *tactical mapping* (Johnson and Pearson, 2009). This method illustrates the relationships between people and institutions that surround, benefit from, and sustain human rights abuses.

Engaging in tactical mapping helps advocates shape effective interventions—the maps help to identify who should be targeted at what point in the system, and how the relationships in the system must change. Armed with a better understanding of the system, advocates can design new interventions or modify current ones. Because the tactical map illustrates a large issue system, multiple groups can develop it collaboratively and then use it as a planning tool to identify who will do what either independently or together. Such collaboration can be important. For example, CVT found that most organizations working on human rights issues were using only one or two tactics repeatedly rather than learning new tactics and adapting their approaches. Groups can also use the map to identify potential allies and opponents.

CVT's tactical mapping focuses on the relationships among individuals and institutions, rather than attempting to visualize all of the causes of human rights abuses. Symbols, colors, and arrows can be used to demonstrate various types and degrees of relationships. As envisioned by CVT, tactical mapping involves producing a database of maps that are updated frequently. Thus, tactical mapping is not only a brainstorming and planning exercise, but also a way to document changes over time.

>>See the Tactics in Human Rights website (www.newtactics.org) and resource page on tactical mapping (www.newtactics.org/en/tactical-mapping).

Mental Model Map: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT

Organizational Research Services (ORS) developed "theory of change outcome maps" for several nonprofits advocating for policies to improve the lives of children and families (Gienapp, Reisman, and Stachowiak, 2009). These nonprofits include Connecticut Association for Human Services, Children First for Oregon, Georgia Family Connection Partnership, and Action for Children North Carolina. Similar in appearance to many logic models, the outcome maps were designed to help the nonprofits communicate their theory of change and visualize the links between strategies and outcomes.

>>See examples of the KIDS COUNT grantees' outcome maps in ORS' guide on this topic.

Summary: Advantages and Disadvantages

System mapping has some clear advantages, including that it produces visual tools that can be rapidly digested by stakeholders. Since a system map quickly communicates relationships visually, it can be useful in soliciting information about those relationships from participants in interviews or focus groups. Also, a participatory process of producing a system map can help to challenge assumptions, improve understanding, and promote consensus among stakeholders (Waddell, 2009).

System mapping also has some potential limitations. Because most system mapping is qualitative, when developing maps it is important to acknowledge the potential for bias and limitations of perspective.

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Profiles from the Field

Center for Evaluation Innovation

Why was the Center started?

The last five years have been a tremendous opportunity for creativity and growth in the advocacy evaluation field. This growth has been fueled by pioneering funders, evaluators, and advocates who share a strong dedication to the field and are growing it through collaboration.

While this start-up phase has generated a great deal of momentum, there is much left to do. The field must expand beyond eager innovators and reach out to the much larger majority of individuals and organizations who know little about advocacy evaluation or remain skeptical about its value. In addition, the field must fill in some clear gaps in its infrastructure, particularly in the areas of communications, outreach, and training. Addressing these gaps requires a centralized and coordinated—but still collaborative and not competitive—effort to develop and execute a long-term vision and strategy for advocacy evaluation field building. The Center was created to fill that role.

Is the Center focused only on advocacy evaluation?

No. The Center was formed to help build the field of evaluation in multiple areas that are challenging to measure and where traditional program evaluation approaches are not a good fit. This includes advocacy and policy change efforts, but also includes other areas like systems change and communications. The main Center focus for now, however, is advocacy evaluation.

What does the Center do?

The Center is building the field of evaluation in hard-to-measure areas. This means:

- Conducting new research on emerging evaluation questions or challenges
- Sharing new developments in the field through newsletters, briefs, and other publications
- Developing training curricula and training opportunities
- Convening advocates, evaluators, and funders to discuss field developments
- Referring individuals with questions to helpful resources.

The Center does <u>not</u> do evaluation (does not bid on evaluation contracts). Also, collaboration is a key focus. While the Center is doing some things on its own, most work will be done in partnership with other organizations and individuals. For example, the Center is working now with Innovation Network on a research project to identify rapid response methods that can be used to generate real-time feedback. The Center is also collaborating with other organizations that include Independent Sector, Alliance for Justice, Organizational Research Services, iScale, TCC Group, and others.

Where is the Center located?

The Center is physically located in Washington D.C. Starting in the spring of 2010, the Center will share space with Innovation Network—the Center's strategic partner and fiscal sponsor—at 1625 K Street NW.

Who works for the Center?

Julia Coffman is Director of the Center for Evaluation Innovation. Because the Center is doing much of its work collaboratively, its staffing is intentionally lean and the Center then works with other organizations and individuals to help carry out its work and mission.

What does the Center have to offer right now?

The Center, in partnership with Innovation Network, is publishing the *Advocacy Evaluation Update* newsletter quarterly. In addition, the Center currently has two free publications:

- *Overview of Current Advocacy Evaluation Practice* by Julia Coffman (October 2009) offers an overview of current practice in the new and now rapidly growing field of advocacy evaluation.

- *Evaluating Advocacy and Policy Change: The Funder's Perspective* by Barbara Masters (October 2009) describes the key challenges and solutions several foundations have identified from their experiences evaluating their advocacy grantmaking over the past several years. It also offers ten tips for funders on what to communicate to their advocacy and policy grantees about evaluation.

What is ahead in 2010?

The Center has commissioned a series of new briefs on:

- Evaluating Community Organizing
- Measuring Public Will
- Evaluating Coalitions
- Evaluating Networks
- Internal Evaluation
- Strategic Learning and Evaluation
- Building Advocates' Evaluation Capacity

In collaboration with other organizations, the Center is planning training and learning opportunities in the form of webinars, conference calls, and other virtual or in-person meetings. The Center is also organizing presentations at many conferences and convenings in 2010.

The Center will also launch a standalone website in mid-2010 at www.evaluationinnovation.org. Right now, introductory information about the Center can be found here on Innovation Network's website.

Sign up here for periodic updates about Center developments, publications, and events. Contact Julia Coffman at jcoffman [at] evaluationinnovation [dot] org with any questions about the new Center.

Editor's Picks

Online Outreach Tools Guide

This quick-reference guide from Cause Communications is for groups considering how to most effectively use the Internet and interactive technologies to further their policy change agenda. Demystifying and decoding "high-tech" terms, the guide takes a high-level look at Web 2.0 tools like wikis, blogs, social networking sites, and Twitter, and their relative strengths and weaknesses for achieving different communications and policy objectives. The guide also suggests quantitative and qualitative metrics to use with each tool.
>>Download the *Online Outreach Tools Guide* (225 KB .pdf)

Feedback App

This free and easy web-based tool from Keystone Accountability is a simple way of getting feedback from your partners on what they really think about your work. The application starts by asking you to choose from a standard list of questions, like "How strongly would you recommend [your organization] to a colleague or friend?" Answers are on a scale of 1 - 10 or open-ended. You can add questions, as well. Then you provide a list of respondents to receive the short survey. Data are anonymous and confidential—you alone see the results on a private web page that is accessible when you need it. As more organizations use the App and a database builds up, you'll be able to compare your results to other similar organizations.
>>Try the Feedback App

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