

Firelight Newsflash! 12 January 2008 - Focus on Advocacy

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is an organized effort to influence decision-making. It is a process to bring about change in the attitudes, actions, practices, policies and laws of influential individuals, groups and institutions that have the power to better the lives of the people. Advocacy can bring about changes:

Increasingly southern community-focused organizations are developing advocacy skills to encourage national and local governments, their agencies and representatives to fulfill their duty in protecting children's rights. NGOs and CBOs have a crucial role in advocating for political and social leadership and in facilitating collective action to address children's issues. NGOs and CBOs can ensure that voices from the community-level are heard and that local experiences inform policy discussion and decision-making at local, national, regional and international levels.

WHY ADVOCATE?

To summarize it in a word: impact.

1. **Advocacy is linked to empowerment.** It can facilitate the process by which people, through articulating their own needs and desires, gain the confidence and ability to affect their own future.
2. **The opportunities for civil society to effect policy are increasing** for a variety of reasons, such as the rise of participatory and rights-based development approaches. In addition NGOs and CBOs are increasingly acting as an arm of the state, to fill gaps in the provision of basic services.
3. **Development work alone is unlikely to produce sustained improvements in the lives of impoverished people.** Many effective organizations start out providing great programs, but they eventually realize that they cannot achieve large-scale social change through service delivery alone. They come to realize the importance of changing the root causes that underlie the issues they are trying to address. So they add advocacy to multiply their ability to improve the lives of those they serve. Their advocacy increases awareness of the issues they are trying to address and increases the number of people or organizations who can help.

HOW TO WE CHOOSE ISSUES FOR ADVOCACY?

You can use the “**RIPE**” formula! An advocacy issue should be:

- **RELEVANT** (Is the issue linked to the mission, vision and experience of your organisation?)
- **IMPORTANT** (How many children and families are affected? Is their situation getting worse?)
- **POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE** (Are there viable solutions you can offer? Did you find allies? Is the issue already on the political or media agenda?)
- **EMPOWERING** (Does your issue empower children and families? Does it create opportunities for your organisation to build its expertise, credibility and advocacy capacities?)

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS OF UNDERTAKING ADVOCACY WORK

Benefits

- Challenging the structural causes of poverty; moving away from addressing the symptoms.
- More sustainable approach to achieving an 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 and credibility 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 overtly political.
- Creation of an internal elite of advocates.
- Distortion of message because of oversimplification.
- Conflict of interest with partners.
- Damage to reputation.
- Loss of external and internal legitimacy if programme work is displaced by advocacy.

CHECKLIST: Is your organization ready to take on advocacy?

When grassroots organizations are considering or planning advocacy activities, it is helpful to consider what organizational strengths or barriers might influence your success.

A quick assessment can be done by asking the following questions:

- What resources and strengths can our organization offer to advocacy work? What added resources are needed?
- What skills do our organization currently have to do effective advocacy work? What additional skills and competencies are needed?
- What are the benefits to our organization of doing advocacy work?
- What are the risks to our organization of doing advocacy work?
- How will advocacy work affect our organization's other main activities and mission?
- Under what conditions would our organization engage in advocacy work?

- Will our organization have to alter its mission and some of its programs to engage in more advocacy work?
- How will doing advocacy work affect our membership or relationship to our constituency or communities where we work? How could it strengthen these populations and relationships? How could it weaken them?
- Which other actors (NGOs, unions, universities, professional organizations, individuals, etc.) are our most likely allies based on current relationships and advocacy issues?
- With which other stakeholders do we need to build relationships to succeed in our advocacy work?
- Given the political context in which we operate, how will our advocacy work affect our organization's legal and financial standing?
- Does our organization have the reputation and credibility for other stakeholders to take us seriously? Do we have sufficient accountability mechanisms to withstand criticism?

HOW DO WE PLAN ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES?

In brief, when planning your advocacy activities you should follow **five steps**:

1. Analyse - Gather accurate information and having an in-depth understanding of the:

- *issue(s)*
- *people and organisations involved*
- *policies (factors involved in implementation or non-implementation)*
- *channels of access to influential people*

2. Plan strategy – Develop and focus on specific goals. Plan advocacy activities with a clear path to achieve those goals and objectives, including channels of communication and the ability to check progress on the issues. Consider the target group, the environment in which you are going to take action, and the resources you can allocate.

3. Act – Some advocacy activities could be:

- *Mobilisation / Public campaigning*
- *Alliance building / Organising or joining a network or campaign*

- *Communication / Documentation such as producing position statements*
- *Lobbying for policy change or resource allocation*
- *Enabling children, families, or community members to express their opinions publicly*
- *Speaking / Making presentations at key conferences, workshops, or meetings.*

4. Evaluate - Assess the progress and the impact of the advocacy activities. Gather and analyse information to determine if the advocacy objectives have been achieved. Adapt advocacy strategies or targets if needed.

5. Continue – Focus on long-term goals. Keep coalitions together. Update information and continue to develop strategies in line with changing situations.

“GOLDEN RULES” FOR MANAGING ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

- Set up a multi-skilled team that covers all key issue areas.
- Set very clear and realistic objectives for your advocacy work.
- Get support from your organization’s senior management and board.
- Clarify work roles of all team members.
- Keep a balance between researching, planning, doing and evaluating.
- Keep internal and external stakeholders informed.
- Use networks carefully - focus on what you have in common, and how you can achieve shared aims and objectives.
- Provide feedback to your supporters - let them know the importance of their input.
- Remember that advocacy involves considerable time and resources, including skilled personnel.

HOW CAN PARTNERSHIPS & COALITIONS ENHANCE ADVOCACY?

Working alone, organisations are limited by their human, financial, physical and information resources. But sharing and working together in partnerships with like-minded organization can increase the impact of organizations’ actions and strengthen each individual partner.

Advocacy requires a good understanding of the differences and common ground

between the partners involved. When identifying and choosing partners for advocacy activities, make sure that:

- you know about the partner's work - outside the field of advocacy as well as within;
- partner(s) are committed to the long-term objectives of the advocacy campaign;
- partner(s) are aware of the constant need to share, learn, and improve;
- partner(s) are ready to share responsibilities and risks; and
- the partnership is based on mutual trust.

HOW AND WHEN DO I KNOW IF OUR ADVOCACY WORK HAS BEEN A SUCCESS?

The advocacy environment is often complex and can be affected by many known and unknown factors. Impact is not immediate and advocacy timescales are potentially long and unpredictable. Decision making processes are often not transparent. And if a government adopts a new policy, this will not automatically mean that changes in practice follow. So identifying successes in advocacy is not always easy.

You can look for impact of advocacy activities at two different levels:

- **policy**: the changes in policy or practice that you want to make, such as the improvement of legislation, reform of institutions, resource allocation, etc.
- **beneficiaries**: the changes that you want the beneficiaries to enjoy.

TOP TIPS FOR ADVOCACY

- 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 people's skills, including communication, project management and research and analysis skills.
- Have very clear objectives. Link your activities very closely to those objectives.
- Base your advocacy in the experiences and views of disadvantaged children and families. Consider them as allies and not as victims, to encourage their participation and to include their knowledge and resources.
- An effective advocacy activity must address the root causes of violations of their

vulnerable children's and families' rights. Strive to improve the situation and condition for all children and families.

- Discuss and explore different stakeholders' perspectives on how an issue should be approached.
- Check that you are not kicking at an open door. Carefully identify stakeholders who are potential allies and potential opponents. Define your primary targets for advocacy as those people who are in the best position to achieve what you want done.
- Spend time nurturing relationships with targeted individuals in key institutions.
- Public awareness is a key component. Take advantage of every opportunity to raise the profile of your issue.
- Think carefully about the potential implications of your advocacy activities for your partners, especially if you're asking them to "stick out their necks."
- If your chosen strategy or route to the decision-makers is not working, take a step back and try another tactic.
- Follow-up on commitments you think people have made - in other words, beware of empty words and paper victories.

Adapted from: Bond Guidance Notes No. 2.1 "The How and Why of Advocacy" http://www.medsin.org/downloads/page_attachments/0000/2104/2.1howwhyadvocacy.pdf

and Quality4Children Recommendations for Advocacy Work, http://www.quality4children.info/ps/tmp/q4c_docudb/recommendations4advocacy.pdf

For more resources on advocacy, see the following manuals and training guides online:

Advocacy in Action: A Toolkit to Support NGOs and CBOs Responding to HIV/AIDS, International AIDS Alliance
http://www.aidsalliance.org/graphics/secretariat/publications/adv0602_Advocacy_toolkit_eng.pdf

The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation: Mapping Advocacy Strategies
http://www.justassociates.org/chap10_mapping_strategies.pdf

Tearfund's Advocacy Toolkit

<http://tilz.tearfund.org/Publications/ROOTS/Advocacy+toolkit.htm>

PACT Tanzania's Advocacy Expert Series: Community Mobilisation Manual

http://www.pacttz.org/downloads/aes/Community_Mobilisation.pdf

Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV/AIDS in Africa Advocacy Guide for Local Authorities

http://www.amicaall.org/publications/guide/Namibiaadvocacyguide_en.pdf

Advocating for Adolescent Reproductive Health in Sub-Saharan Africa (manual with case studies)

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/PUBLICATIONS/advocate.pdf>

An Advocacy Resource Book for HIV and AIDS in Zambia

<http://www.futuresgroup.com/Documents/3366ZMBadvo.pdf>

An Introduction to Advocacy: Training Guide

<http://www.aed.org/Publications/upload/PNABZ919.pdf>

Policy and Advocacy in HIV/AIDS Prevention, AIDSCAP

<http://www.fhi.org/NR/rdonlyres/ez77c2w6ilk7wgzli3tyu6gg4qrhtgripatbnwnngd7vi3a62o7zs5f7cn7yqaphag4gtehsuaia2a/BCCPolicyandAdvocacy.pdf>

Advocacy & Communication: A Handbook for CBOs

http://www.idasa.org.za/index.asp?page=output_details.asp%3FRID%3D1074%26oplang%3Den%26OTID%3D6%26PID%3D34

As part of the Firelight Foundation's Monitoring, Evaluation and Technical Assistance (META) Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at newsletter@firelightfoundation.org.