

# **ROOTED ADVOCACY**

## **Building community for rooted advocacy**

Advocacy that attempts to increase the capacity of local communities is sometimes called 'rooted advocacy'. It describes giving a voice to communities, particularly those who are disempowered and vulnerable. In essence, it means involving local communities and local leaders as much as possible in advocacy work. Rooted advocacy enables people to articulate their own needs and desires, giving them the confidence and capacities to influence decisions that affect their own future. For NGOs in particular, rooted advocacy is vital. Most actively demand that local communities have a stronger voice in the issues that affect them, so NGOs themselves must involve local communities in their advocacy.

Rooted advocacy means giving national and local civil society groups the support they need to build their capacity, in order to advocate for themselves. It depends on communities having leaders that are able to articulate – sometimes forcefully – On behalf of the people they represent, as well as the means through which those leaders can communicate this information to those with power to change policy. It also depends on good information flows. Communities need to be informed, by governments, agencies and other actors, about the issues that affect them, and about the processes that enable their involvement, and that exist so that their voices can be heard.

Of course, rooted advocacy is not easy or straightforward. It depends on community leaders having the inclination to participate, as well as the information and channels they need to do so. Formal structures for consultation, such as community forums and consultation documents, are vital. Decision-makers will rarely wait to be approached with opinions from communities. Rooted advocacy demands, therefore, that different platforms for approaching them are

provided as part of the policy making process. Such platforms need to be wide and accessible enough that differing community interests, for example those of women, can be voiced.

## **PLANNING FOR ADVOCACY**

Once you are clear on what advocacy is, the context in which advocacy can take place, and the important issues of community involvement, you can move on to planning your advocacy work. The principles of planning advocacy are similar to those of planning any other programme, with the need for being clear about objectives and targets, and of course monitoring and evaluation. However, because advocacy often involves a political context, with stakeholders and targets each having their own agendas and influences, it can be somewhat more complex. The advocacy planning cycle aims to identify the factors that might influence the outcome of advocacy. It also prepares NGOs to account for factors that have not been identified, as they arise. A systematic and analytical approach to advocacy work, which properly researches the issues, identifies targets and desired outcomes, and which is clear about the key messages it wishes to get across, is most likely to result in a dynamic and effective advocacy strategy. This section aims to show you how to develop an effective advocacy strategy, based around workable action plans. It offers practical techniques and a systematic framework for developing your own advocacy strategy.

**Planning** is necessary because we:

- have limited resources;
- have a limited timeframe in which we want to accomplish certain objectives;
- want to be increasingly accountable to our constituents and partners;

- must achieve some concrete results as well as a systematic process;
- operate in changing and sometimes unpredictable environments;
- Need to have a clearly articulated common aim to minimize conflicts and differences.

### **What Is Advocacy Planning?**

Advocacy planning is about the development of:

#### **An Overall Change Strategy**

This is usually a long-term plan that embodies your vision and reflects where you are, where you want to go and how you can get there.

#### **A Campaign**

This is a medium-term plan with activities aimed at influencing the policy environment and public opinion. The activities are intended to achieve some of your advocacy strategy objectives.

#### **Tactics, Actions, or Activities**

These are usually short-term activities within a larger change strategy, designed for a specific moment and opportunity. They could include research and media work to shape the campaign and capture the attention of people in power in relation to your issue. These activities are often referred to as strategies as well.

#### **Impact Assessment**

This involves monitoring your impact so you can change your strategy, campaign, and activities as necessary. However, planning for advocacy is more than just a set of tools and steps for improving impact. Participatory approaches to planning further advocacy goals by putting into practice more equitable power relations and more inclusive citizenship. Participatory planning for citizen-centered advocacy:

- Builds organization and networks. Participatory analysis and decision making help strengthen leadership and communication within and among organizations.
- Promotes political education. It involves new knowledge about power and politics and experiences that develop citizenship.
- Strengthens planning for negotiation. The process delineates a clear map of interests and levels of power among the key actors.
- Builds constituencies. When we involve many stakeholders—and particularly the people most affected by the advocacy issue—more people will be informed and motivated, and the campaign will have more legitimacy and clout. Advocacy planning is a continual process. If some groups have not been involved in the initial stages of planning, they can be included later when plans are being reviewed and modified.

### **How Advocacy Planning Differs from Other Types of Planning**

The temptation to follow donor trends and be project-oriented has made many organizations reactive rather than proactive. Advocacy planning, on the other hand, needs to be strategic. Being strategic means making careful choices about how to use and leverage scarce resources. It is about achieving both our short-term aims (such as educating citizens about their legal rights) and our long-term vision for social change (for example, respect for human rights and more

consultative public decision making). Being strategic demands a careful analysis of external opportunities and constraints and internal organizational resources for addressing a problem. However, since advocacy involves maneuvering in a complex political system where power dynamics generate conflict, planning for advocacy differs from traditional strategic planning tools in key ways. Citizen-centered planning includes a variety of other features:

- It is not seen as value-neutral. Values and commitment are just as important as ‘facts.’
- It is not a linear set of steps with predictable outcomes. It is an iterative process of examination and adjustment. It gives direction to action, yet is also geared to responding to unforeseen opportunities.
- It should, if possible, involve the people most affected by a particular problem in planning and action—from setting the agenda to leading the campaign.
- It draws upon and strengthens the analysis, awareness, and organizational clout of marginalized sectors.
- It involves conflicts and negotiation.
- It places equal value on expertise and experience and seeks to integrate knowledge from different disciplines into a holistic strategy. Unlike many approaches to strategic planning where goals, objectives, activities, and evaluation are presented as a seamless and logical pattern, advocacy planning acknowledges that there are hidden agendas, different values and ideologies, incomplete information, and conflict. Further, planning and doing advocacy happen side by side. After every action it is often necessary to adjust goals in planning our next step. So assessment is a continual task in advocacy, rather than a step at the end of the planning sequence. Strategic planning for advocacy is always a work in progress.

**In public centered advocacy we do the following:**

- Resist injustices, human right violations
- Engage public institution
- Apply tools and methods
- Persuade policy makers

**The effectiveness and success of advocacy efforts depend on how efficiently the following techniques and Strategies are employed:**

- Identifying and framing the issue
- Collecting information
- Mobilizing interested people
- Networking
- Forming alliances
- Forming and sustaining coalitions
- Planning campaigns
- Involving the media
- Building pressure on the legislature
- Establishing contacts within the systems.

**In people centered advocacy we target the following:**

- People-directly or indirectly affected

- Public at large for changing public perception
- Decision makers: Members of Parliament, MLAs, Collectors, Judges, Bureaucrats
- Other institutions like National Commissions, Nodal agencies, Trade union, the Media etc.

**The following are the key principles in people centered advocacy**

- Listening to people
- Constant dialogue and counter questioning
- Patience
- Knowledge about systems, acts and rules (this gives you power)
- Mobilizing people for the cause (not for project) and other resources
- Readiness to face consequences (availability of an alternate strategy)
- Appropriate knowledge, skills, information, tools and techniques
- Perfect timing (when the system is opening)
- Strategic planning

The following 5-step advocacy plan can be useful for both short-term and long-term strategizing.

The five steps are as follows:

- Define issue, plus delineate your interest in it
- Identify your audience
- Frame your message
- Develop your plan
- Evaluate your plan

## **I. DEFINE ISSUE, PLUS DELINEATE YOUR INTEREST IN IT**

Start by isolating and defining the issue you wish to address most.

### ***Questions to Ask:***

- What is the problem? Ask yourself: who does what to whom?
- How are you affected? For how long and with what impact?
- What are the possible causes of the situation you wish to change?

Consider as many perspectives as you can. For example: Laws?

Attitudes?

Social traditions? Religion?

Government?

- What can be done to improve the situation? What kind of change would YOU want to make?
- What differentiates you from others with respect to this problem, and your initial proposed solution?

### ***Desired output:***

A one sentence description of the problem you wish to address.

A one sentence explanation as to why this problem matters to you.

## **II. IDENTIFY YOUR AUDIENCE**

Your advocacy strategy depends on who you want to reach.

### ***Questions to Ask:***

- Who do you wish to reach with your message about the problem you have identified? What are your initial impressions?

- Who is the person, group or organization that has the power to make the change being requested?
- Who is the person, group or organization that has the power to influence the person, group or organization that has the power to change being requested?
- To what extent do you wish to address the media? [See Appendix A, —Using the Media)].
- Coalitions? [See Appendix B, —Guidelines for Successful Coalition Building]] and/or
- Legislators and policymakers?

***Desired output:***

A list of up to three audiences, with a one sentence description of each, arranged in declining order of importance. A discussion as to why each potential audience member should care about the problem you identify.

### **III. FRAME YOUR MESSAGE**

Framing your message<sup>ll</sup> requires you to think about *what* you want to say.

***Questions to Ask:***

- What are 2-3 of the most important messages that you need to communicate to your audience?
- How do you want your audience to think about the issue? What frames of reference should they use?
- Can you tell your audience why they should care about the problem?

***Desired output:***

A message with four components:

**1. Problem Statement:**

A description in plain language of the problem.

**2. Relevance:** Why and how are the problems relevant for the policy makers and the wider society?

**3. Policy proposal:** This is the suggested solution.

**4. Proposed action:** What your audience should do and how and with whom they should do it.

#### **IV. DEVELOP YOUR PLAN**

—Developing your plan requires you to think about *how* you want to deliver and use your message.

***Questions to Ask:***

- In what way should these messages be communicated; what tools are you going to use?

Newsletters? Special events? Publicity campaigns? Internet Blogging? Other Internet forms of Communication?

- To what extent do you want to use your message for —Agenda- Setting, that is for bringing a new or neglected issue to the attention of the media and to policy makers?

- Can you link your message to a major news story and/or trigger event?

***Desired output:***

The outline and timetable for developing and using your message.

#### **V. EVALUATE YOUR PLAN**

It is important to monitor and keep track of your actions. Record your progress on the action

planning forms and celebrate your successes!

***Questions to Ask:***

- Did your audience act in the manner you had anticipated? If you met your goal:
- What factors contributed to your success?
- How can you build on this success?
- Should you repeat this strategy? If your goal was not met:
- How could your advocacy be improved?
- Is your message clear?
- Did you identify the right audience to which to deliver it?
- Did your audience receive the message? What are your next steps for action?

***Desired output:***

A constructive critique addressing the questions listed above.