THE ADVOCAY PLANNING CYCLE

Planning advocacy work is similar to any other project planning. It involves identifying what your objectives are, and how to achieve them. That leads to defining the activities you will carry out, and assigning responsibilities for making them happen. The advocacy planning cycle is a useful method of organizing your material, and the work you need to do. It will take you, step-by-step, from identifying the core issues you need to work on through to drawing up a specific action plan to implement your advocacy work.

The cycle can be split into two distinct parts – the first steps are more strategic in nature, the second develop that strategic background into a workable action plan.

Advocacy planning is a *cycle* because although there are some sequential steps, some steps run in parallel with others, or may change sequence according to progress. It is also a repetitive process: ongoing monitoring and review will lead to updating and adjusting the plan, as will different reactions to the advocacy among your targets.

Researching the issues

The first step in planning advocacy work is to identify the issues you need to tackle.

To do that, however, you need to be able to prioritize the issues that concern you, and demonstrate their relative importance to those you aim to represent. To identify the key issues you want to focus on, you may need to narrow down a shortlist, examine each of these and prioritize them. Research can also assist you to build alliances, as you seek assistance to gather the information you need from other organizations and individuals. Indeed, working together on research with, for example, policy analysts and policy makers, can help forge close ties at a very early stage that can be useful at a later stage when you move into lobbying.

And if you work with organizations and communities to gather the information you require, you will also be helping to develop their capacity and citizenship skills – a key aspect of good advocacy.

Quick and useful: What is a 'good' advocacy issue?

Use the following checklist to identify which advocacy issues you should prioritize.

Will working on the issue:

• result in real improvement in people's lives?

• give people a sense of their own power?

• be widely and deeply felt?

• build lasting organizations and alliances?

• provide opportunities for women and others to learn about and be involved in politics?

• develop new leaders?

• promote awareness of, and respect for, rights?

• Link local concerns with larger-scale, even global, issues?

• provide potential for raising funds?

• enable the organization to further its vision and mission?

• be winnable? Does it have a clear target, timeframe and policy solution?

Key idea: The importance of research

A detailed understanding of the issues you will be doing advocacy work on is vital in the earliest stages of the advocacy planning cycle. Only with research can you create a really rational argument, and provide the evidence to back it up. Research gives your advocacy positions credibility. It provides the information you need to do proper planning, develop your messages, and carry out your lobbying. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) calls research ―a systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge. It can also be described as ―the systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of information. It is certainly important that your research is well structured and systematic and focuses on the critical issues. For every source of information, you need to analyze its credibility. It must be properly recorded in a useful way and an evaluation should be made of its usefulness to the issue under consideration. In advocacy work, your research should certainly cover three vital aspects:

• Analysis of the issue

• Analysis of the context in which the issue takes place

• Understanding the timeframe to which your advocacy on the issue relates

Quick and useful: Credible research

Research should be:

• Objective, not biased

• Representative of the whole group on whom it is focused, not a single viewpoint

• Accurate and reliable

• Methodical and systematic

There are some key stages in good research, which you should apply to gathering information before you begin your advocacy programme:

• **What information do you need?**

It is useful to think of this in terms of what questions you need answering. Where are the gaps in your knowledge? Breaking down the required information into parts will help you plan to research it, particularly helping you to distinguish between information that will be easy to obtain, and that which requires more effort.

• **Where can you find the information?**

You should identify sources where information already exists, gathered by other researchers, perhaps laid out in reports, government consultations, statistics or project plans. However, you should identify whether this secondary information is credible, reliable and up-to-date. In other cases, you may have to collect primary information yourself, from original sources. You might identify the need to carry out a field survey, or interviews, for example. Primary information can be gathered from a variety of sources, ranging from a survey of village residents to an investigation of the policy making process implemented by government.

• **Who will contribute to your research?**

If you are to carry out primary research, you will need to identify who to interview or survey. For your research to be credible, you will need to ensure the groups you research are a representative sample. You should attempt to have as broad and representative a sample of interviewees as possible, depending on your time and resources. It should offer an accurate reflection of the whole population, from which you can draw your conclusions.

Will your sample simply be a randomly chosen percentage of the population you are analyzing, or will you attempt to survey everyone in one particular area such as suburb? When defining your sample, you will want also to identify its key characteristics, such as water use, age, gender, household situation, as these may influence responses to your research.

• **How will you collect the information?**

If you are carrying out primary research, it is important to record data accurately and systematically. That means being clear about how you will collect information, such as through interviews, questionnaires, observation, statistical analysis or another data collection tool (see below).

Whichever method you use, you should ensure data collection is systematic, consistent, takes nothing at face value and can be cross checked. Additionally, your method needs to be flexible enough to record information if data findings move in an unexpected direction. Overall, your research methods must also respect people’s culture and privacy

• How will you analyze and present the information?

After collecting your information, it will need collating in a systematic way. Only this will enable you to analyze it properly, looking for patterns and deepening your understanding of the situation. You should then write up your findings, for yourself and for colleagues (even if it is only an internal document). The process of writing up your results will help you to analyze the information, and draw conclusions. Remember to include information on your methodology and sample.

Quick and useful: Using research consultants

Do you have time and resources to carry out the necessary research within your organization? If not, you might consider commissioning research from outside, such as from an academic institution, research institute or from another NGO. Even when you commission research consultants, you will still need to be clear about what you want to find out, from whom, and how you want the information to be provided. It is vital to draw up clear terms of reference for your consultant, outlining the purpose of the research, the key questions to be tackled, the timescale and budget. You should state how often you require a progress report, and how such updates are to be provided (face-to-face, reports, emails). Finally, you should state clearly what the product of the consultancy should look like, including its length and deadline for submission. You should also consider how you will manage that consultant’s work, and allocate resources appropriately. This should be drawn into the consultancy contract.

Tips for using consultants:

• Consider a tendering process, circulating the terms of reference and asking bidders to demonstrate their capacity to undertake the work.

• Agree a fee before work starts, and agree timescales start and end dates, termination procedures, how expenses will be covered and how the consultant should claim expenses and payment, and whether they will be liable for tax.

• Ensure the contract states that the consultant should be available immediately following completion of the work, in case there are any questions or modifications needed.

• Be clear that the research results and report will be the property of your organization, and cannot be used by the consultant without your permission.

• Draw up a contract, which both parties should sign. Attach this to the terms of reference, and make copies for each signatory.

Tools for analyzing the issues

Once you have identified the issues you are most concerned with, and have collected the relevant information about them, the next step in the advocacy planning cycle is to subject the issues to a thorough analysis. By analyzing your issues, you can identify how you can influence the issues and which stakeholders are best placed to attempt to bring about that influence.

There are a number of different ways of analyzing an issue, but each of them really attempts to do the same thing: to break the issue down into smaller parts. This aid understanding of the issue, the context in which the issue operates and how you can bring about change. Here we present four different tools for analyzing your issue, and where it fits into your advocacy work: The problem analysis framework, the problem tree, the RAPID framework and the PESTLE analysis.

The problem analysis framework

This method of analysis centers of splitting the issue under consideration into a list of subissues. Within each sub-issue, you will examine the consequences of the problem, its causes and any possible solutions.

The problem analysis framework

Problem tree analysis is one of many forms of project planning and is well developed among many development agencies. It is a visual method of analyzing a particular problem, based around mapping the different aspects of the problem on large sheets of paper. It works particularly well when analyzing an issue in a group. The 'tree' enables participants to visualize the links between the main issue and its resulting problems, as well as its root causes. The tree‘s trunk represents the core problem, its roots represent the causes of the problem, and the branches represent the effects of the problem.

• Draw the shape of the tree on a large flip chart, and write the focal or key problem or issue on the trunk of the tree

• On smaller pieces of paper or card, write down the causes of the problem. These are placed on the tree as its 'roots'

• On other cards, write down the consequences that result from the main issue. These are placed on the tree as its 'leaves'

• In a group, you can negotiate with each other using the tree as a discussion tool, about the priority and placement of different leaves and roots. The heart of the exercise is the discussion; debate and dialogue that is generated as factors are arranged and rearranged, often forming sub-dividing roots and branches. The next step in the problem tree process is to begin to break down the causes of the problem, so that you can see where you may be able to have most effect.

• Take one of the key root (cause) cards, and make that the tree‘s trunk (key problem). You can now analyze *that* problem‘s causes in the same way, perhaps showing areas where you may be able to have influence

• The final step is to use the tree to help you define your goals or objectives, why you should attempt to achieve your goals, and what you need to do to achieve them. You can convert the problem tree into an objectives tree by rephrasing each of the problems into positive desirable outcomes – as if the problem has already been treated.

• Write your goal on the trunk of the tree – this will be a reversal of the negative statement that made up the cause of the problem, defined in step two. For example, _there are not enough boreholes in a rural area, would become _sufficient boreholes in a rural area.

• To clarify the purpose of your goals, write on cards the benefits that will accrue if this goal is achieved. These become the 'leaves' of your tree

• Now, write on cards the steps or actions you need to take to achieve that goal. These become the 'roots' of your tree

Again, you can convert the negative statements that made up the roots of your problem, into positive statements. For example, 'insufficient funds are provided for WSS in the rural area', can be converted into 'make sufficient funding available for WSS in the rural area'.

The RAPID framework

The Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) team at the Overseas Development Institute developed the RAPID framework to help develop an understanding of the policy and political influences on a particular issue, as well as identify that issue's stakeholders and policy actors. To do advocacy work effectively, NGOs need to understand the power relationships involved in a particular issue, as well as the decision-making processes involved. If, for example, an NGO is planning advocacy work on the financing of WSS services in poor urban areas, an analysis Is needed of exactly who makes the decisions about financing WSS services and how those decisions are made.

The RAPID framework helps to ensure that the right questions are asked to develop this understanding. This RAPID framework is set out on the following page. Once you have identified the answers to the key questions in the RAPID framework, these can be used to determine the next steps you need to take in your advocacy work, and how to go about it. For each answer to the questions, you should identify what action you might need to take in relation to the question, and how to go about it.

The RAPID framework

External environment

- Who are main international actors or donors?
- In the policy process?
- What influence do they have? Who influences them?
- What are their aid priorities and policy agendas?

political or social processes and trends?

- Are there exogenous shocks and trends that affect the policy process?

Political context

- Who are the key policy actors (including policymakers)?
- Is there a demand for research and new ideas among policymakers?
- What are the sources of resistance to evidence based policymaking?
- What is the policy environment?

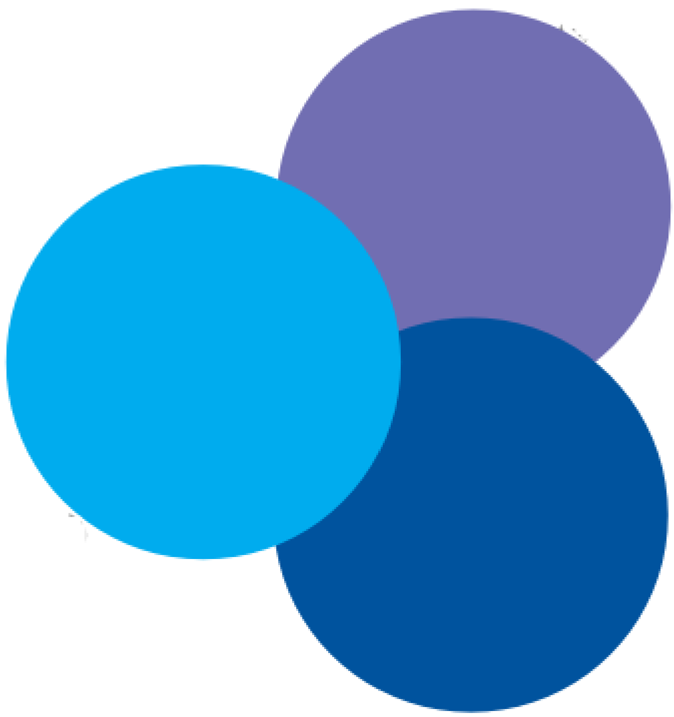
• What are the policymaking structures?

• What are the policymaking processes?

• What is the relevant legal/policy framework?

• What are the opportunities and timing for input into formal processes?

Political context



Who are the key stakeholders?

2. Who are the experts?

3. What links and networks exist between them?

4. What roles do they play? Are they intermediaries between research and policy?

5. Whose evidence and research do they communicate?

6. Which individuals or institutions have a significant power to influence policy?

7. Are these policy actors and networks legitimate?

8. Do they have a constituency among the poor?

Evidence

1. What is the current theory or prevailing narratives?

. Is there enough evidence (research based, experience and statistics)?

2. How divergent is the evidence?

. What type of evidence exists?

3. What type convinces policymakers?

b. How is evidence presented?

4. Is the evidence relevant? Is it accurate, material and applicable?

5. How was the information gathered and by whom?

6. Are the evidence and the source perceived as credible and trustworthy by policy actors? Why was the evidence produced?

7. Has any information or research been ignored and why?