



## CONCEPT NOTE

# Advocacy: Promoting policy change in favour of disadvantaged and threatened people

## Background

Wherever policy change needs to occur, advocacy has a role to play when disadvantaged or threatened groups must be protected, supported to claim their rights, and achieve policy improvements. Whether you want new policies to address child malnutrition, equal remuneration of women, laws to make primary schooling accessible or promote human security and the respect for humanitarian principles, advocacy is one of the strategies **to influence the policy making process**.

Therefore, advocacy is a **genuine political process** to gain incidence in decision making. It can be exercised by individuals and groups to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions. Advocacy can include a range of strategies including media campaigns, social media, public events, commissioning and publishing research or conducting social research to produce evidence on a felt lack of justice. Lobbying is a form of advocacy where a direct approach is made to legislators on an issue which plays a significant role in politics. There are overlapping fields with the so-called international principle of the *Responsibility to Protect (R2P)*<sup>1</sup> and the *Human Right Based Approach (HRBA)*<sup>2</sup>.

## The Concept of Advocacy

There is a wide range of definitions of the term advocacy. To advocate means to defend, protect, support, uphold, safeguard, shelter, empower and represent discriminated, threatened, marginalized, disadvantaged and defenceless people. In this effort, advocacy and empowerment have common ground. In the development context the advocacy concept is understood as a political strategy to influence decision-makers and opinion-formers (individuals and organisations) for changes to policies and practices that will work in favour of disadvantaged and defenceless people. Advocacy, at its core, is an **action-oriented process**. It plays an important role in determining social justice and the advancement of social protection systems, political and civil liberties, and in giving voice to citizens and historically marginalised group. At its best, advocacy expresses the power of an individual, constituency, or organisation to shape public agendas and change public policies, including the institutions that sustain them.

<sup>1</sup> The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a proposed norm that state sovereignty is not an absolute right, and that states forfeit aspects of their sovereignty when they fail to protect their populations from mass atrocity crimes and human rights violations. It commits states to take action to prevent genocide, and atrocity crimes when they know or should know that populations are at grave risk. The R2P is a doctrine of prevention and action with three pillars: (i) A state has a responsibility to protect its population from mass atrocity crimes, genocide, and ethnic cleansing. (ii) The international community has a responsibility to assist the state to fulfil its primary responsibility. (iii) If the state manifestly fails to protect its citizens from mass atrocities and peaceful measures have failed, the international community has the responsibility to intervene through coercive measures such as economic sanctions and, as last resort, military interventions. The norm of the R2P was borne out of the international community's failure to respond to tragedies such as the Rwandan Genocide in 1994 and the Srebrenica massacre in 1995.

<sup>2</sup> The Human-Rights-based Approach is a strategy promoted by many development agencies and NGOs to achieve a positive transformation of power relations among the various development actors. This practice blurs the distinction between human rights and socio-economic development factors. There are two stakeholder groups in rights-based development — the rights holders (who do not experience full rights) and the duty bearers (the institutions obligated to fulfil the holders' rights). Rights-based approaches aim at strengthening the capacity of duty bearers and empower the rights holders to respond effectively.

In a broader civil society strategy, advocacy-oriented action goes beyond specific objectives to providing the means **to mobilise society, knowledge and resources** in an effort to bring about democratic change or its consolidation. In this sense, the major **long-term aim of advocacy** is to increase informed participation in political decision-making by strengthening the citizen's confidence, knowledge, skills, and organisation necessary to be involved and define their advocacy effort themselves.

## Different Forms and Issues of Advocacy

There are several **forms of advocacy**, each representing a different approach in a way to initiate political changes in the society and to influence institutional reform processes. One of the most popular forms is social justice advocacy. Although it is true, some advocacy activists don't encompass power relations explicitly, one can assume that all advocacy strategies aim at change in power relations and institutions (the rules of the game). Therefore, generally spoken advocacy is a threat for powerful elites and dominant coalitions that shape, sustain and control extractive institutions.<sup>3</sup> Based on a vision of a just society, the main corridors to incidence<sup>4</sup> are (i) the claim and defence of rights, (ii) the broad access to evidence based knowledge, (iii) the informed participation of disadvantaged groups in consultations and decision making, and (iv) the incidence in the political negotiation processes, e.g. influencing stakeholders and their coalitions.

Advocacy represents a series of **actions** taken and **issues** highlighted to change policy processes and institutions, to build a more decent and a more just society. Those actions, which vary with the political, institutional and socio-economic environment in which they are conducted, have several points in common. They include, for example,

- Questioning the way political reform processes are conducted
- Monitoring and criticising the implementation and administrations of reforms
- Participating in the agenda setting to raise significant issues
- Targeting extractive institutions because they are not responding to people's needs
- Insisting on inclusive procedures of decision making on political issues
- Questioning the effectiveness and sustainability of social protection systems (in sectors like health, nutrition, age, education)
- Proposing sector policy options
- Opening up space for public debate

According to particular issues and needs, the advocacy process focus on specific topics and the organizations providing these advocacy services acquire a specific profile.

- Budget advocacy: Ensuring proactive engagement of CSOs with the government budget to make the government more transparent and accountable to the people. Budget advocacy also enables citizens and social action groups to compel the government to be more alert to the needs and aspirations of people in general and the deprived sections of the community.
- Interest group and legislative advocacy: Lobbying to influence decision makers inside the institutional setup (parliament, legislative process, government) and outside in the society at large (powerful representatives of different sectors, editors, mass media). Drafting and disseminating well focused policy briefs.
- Bureaucratic advocacy: Insisting on citizen's rights and effective public service delivery, decent handling and equal access to rights, resources and opportunities. Evaluating the effects of public policies and institutions. Providing expertise on administrative and managerial topics.

<sup>3</sup> See: Basic Tools 03: Extractive and Inclusive Institutions

<sup>4</sup> See: Basic Tools 06: Corridors of incidence

- **Health advocacy:** Health advocacy supports and promotes patient's health care rights as well as enhance community health and policy initiatives that focus on the availability, safety and quality of care. By analogy, this kind of advocacy also applies to other sectors, for example in agriculture to advance environmentally friendly production of small farmers, in education with a specific focus on the educational rights of girls and students with disabilities.
- **Public debate advocacy:** Organizing public events, campaigns, demonstrations, protests, petitions, information dissemination to advance the ideas of disadvantaged people in the decision-making circles.
- **Media advocacy:** The strategic use of the mass media as a resource to advance a social or public policy initiative and institutional change.
- **Organizational advocacy:** Any type of empowerment and strengthening of groups and organizations to advance social justice and fair distribution of wealth and opportunities.

## Basic Modalities of Advocacy

There are many different advocacy modalities to advocacy. The following table depicts seven most common ones that usually appear as a combined set in a specific advocacy strategy.

Modality	Examples
Negotiate	Bargain with powerful stakeholders to improve the conditions for those affected by the situation.
Represent	Speaking and acting on behalf of the people affected by extractive institutions and ineffective and corrupt bureaucracies.
Accompany / support	Protect, empower, speak and act in favour and in cooperation with the people affected by deficient governance.
Empower	Enable people who are affected by lack of equal access to rights, services, resources and opportunities to claim their rights, voice and act for themselves.
Mediate	Facilitate direct communication between different stakeholders who are affected by a political reform option.
Network	Build alliances and coalitions to increase the leverage and outreach of policy protests, policy proposals, media campaigns, etc.
Demonstrate	Elaborate alternatives and evidence on the distributional effects of political reform options, and share the results with decision makers and the public.

## Basic Elements of an Advocacy Strategy

While specific advocacy techniques and strategies vary, the following elements are the basic building blocks for effective advocacy strategies. Before starting any advocacy process, the following issues should be discussed:

### (1) Role and Mandate

Before starting advocacy activities, the role of the advocacy provider has to be clearly defined. The advocacy process needs a certain legitimacy in terms of expertise, recognition, cross-sector relations, and acceptance. If no clear mandate has been worked out, you risk having no impact or – even worse – a negative impact. In addition, any advocacy strategy must observe the Do-No-Harm principle<sup>5</sup>.

### (2) Advocacy Objectives: What is the political goal? What are the corridors of incidence?

<sup>5</sup> The overarching Do-no-Harm principle distinguishes two groups of factors that influence latent or open crisis and conflict dynamics: connectors and dividers. The principle states that action should meet the minimum requirement that interventions in a given setup at least do not fuel or trigger tensions and conflicts, and that connecting factors (in terms of factors like shared infrastructure, cultural patterns or actors) are strengthened and the dividing factors are reduced.

The overall goal has to be narrowed down to tangible advocacy objectives. Who are the beneficiaries of the advocacy process? Beneficiaries, political issues, corridors and the modalities should be defined jointly with the beneficiaries.

### **(3) Strategic Options**

Depending on the context and purpose, there are different strategic options to reach the objectives. One has to decide what operational advocacy approach should be applied, for example:

- direct involvement of policy makers via formal or informal channels
- collaborating with likeminded partners to increase leverage and outreach
- mobilising the public to draw the attention of the policy makers to the issue at stake
- capacity development / empowerment of disadvantaged groups and organizations
- public events and working with the media to enhance the visibility of the issues at stake and stimulate discussion on different options and related effects

### **(4) Resources**

There has to be a secured commitment of resources for the achievement of the stated advocacy process. Do not underestimate resources and time needed for slow and arduous negotiation processes. Before starting, make sure that the necessary resources are available for the overall process.

### **(5) Advocacy Audiences**

Once the issue and objectives are selected, advocacy efforts must be directed to specific audiences. Each issue and objective may need activities in different arenas and working with different audiences of stakeholders or affected people, i.e., to people with decision making power over institutional questions or to the people who influence the decision makers or the media or CSOs or different affected groups.

### **(6) Advocacy Alliances**

Often the success of advocacy depends on the capacity to forge topic focused alliances to expand outreach and impact. This should be done with a pragmatic approach by looking at the palpable cooperation rent, i.e., the real benefits that emerge from a coalition.

### **(7) Evidence based knowledge**

The quality of political decision-making increases considerably when the process is nurtured with evidence-based knowledge, instead of guesswork and politically biased interests. Therefore, advocacy should partner with universities and social research institutes. In this regard, the comparative assessment of possible effects of different political reform options is key.

### **(5) Do-No-Harm Principle**

Doing advocacy always means walking on ice. Advocacy efforts can also unintentionally worsen a situation, trigger tensions and fuel conflicts.

### **(6) Monitoring and Evaluation**

The process is open and volatile, because of the many involved actors and stakeholders. Advocacy efforts should be carefully monitored to record progress and improve advocacy processes and adjust the course. A lot of specific context related knowledge about the process is derived from concrete experience. Effective feedback and knowledge management mechanisms have to be in place.

## **Literature**

The following links provide useful resources on advocacy:

[www.aed.org](http://www.aed.org) (an introduction to advocacy – training guide) / [www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org) (advocacy resources for non-profit organisations) / [www.aidsmap.com](http://www.aidsmap.com) (advocacy toolkit) / [www.careusa.org](http://www.careusa.org) (advocacy tools and guidelines) / [www.intrac.org](http://www.intrac.org) (advocacy and policy influencing) / [www.advocacy-net.ch](http://www.advocacy-net.ch) (Swiss advocacy platform)

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