INTRAC
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M&E Paper 4

Tracking Progress in Advocacy: Why and How to Monitor and Evaluate Advocacy Projects and Programmes

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Introduction

This paper introduces the scope of, and rational for, engaging in advocacy work as part of development interventions. It then focuses on the issue of monitoring and evaluating these efforts – offering reasons why and when these processes should be planned and implemented, what's involved, and who should be engaged in the process. It concludes by looking at some of the particular challenges and opportunities that the monitoring and evaluation of advocacy work presents. It also offers some helpful considerations to those who are designing or implementing these processes.
The paper relies heavily on previous publications produced by INTRAC, based on work in advocacy with organisations such as DFID, Plan, Transparency International, PSI and also on a Save the Children publication, *Advocacy Matters*[1].

What is advocacy?

In recent years it has been recognised that social development projects only have limited success if they are conducted within a local and global environment of gross inequality in power and wealth. As a result, many organisations are addressing these inequality issues through advocacy projects and programmes which either complement their other development efforts or which have become their primary strategy. Organisations which apply rights-based approaches automatically include advocacy in all of their programme strategic plans.

Each organisation will have its own nuanced definition of advocacy. Essentially, advocacy is the strategic use of information to influence the policies and actions of those in positions of power or authority to achieve positive changes in people's lives. Advocacy projects and programmes target human rights in an effort to improve quality of life

Advocacy should be based on the experience and knowledge of the families and communities it aims to support .It should be empowering for those individuals and communities.

What does it include?

Within development organisations, advocacy strategies are likely to involve members of staff, their partner organisations and members of the community in working towards changes in legislation, policy and/or the law; enlarging democratic space so that civil society groups can operate successfully in society; and/or supporting people centred policy making and confronting local grievances.
Advocacy work is carried out through activities such as lobbying, campaigning, awareness raising, direct actions and working with the media. It can be targeted at different levels:

- International levels, including international conventions and treaties, and donor development policies

[1] *Advocacy Matters: A Save the Children Alliance Guide to Advocacy*, Gosling L, and Cohen D, 2007

- Regional levels, including regional institutions' policies and strategies, and national policies which are common to a geographical region
- National levels, including national legislation and government policies, resource allocation, and institutional structures
- Local levels, including local implementation of legislation, debate on the distribution of resources, access to services, local policies and strategies.

An essential central element of any advocacy strategy is civil society strengthening, which includes building the capacity of key stakeholders – local NGOs, community based organisations, partners, grass roots movements etc – so that they are able to campaign for and represent the interests of their communities more effectively

Organisational approaches to advocacy

In line with their understanding and definition of advocacy, some organisations have developed their own clearly identified approach to facilitating changes in people's lives through this strategy. For the most part, these approaches either a staged progression, as for example Oxfam does:

- Heightened awareness
- Contribution to debate
- Changed policies
- Policy changes implemented
- Positive changes to people's lives

Or they work to achieve changes in identified "dimensions of change", as the Institute of Development Research does:

- Policy outcomes
- Civil society outcomes
- Democratic outcomes
- Individual outcomes

Annex 1 provides further examples of organisational approaches to advocacy, and documents the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

In developing advocacy strategies, clear goals and outcomes and logical steps to achieving them are a pre-requisite at the outset of any advocacy project (although, over time and in responding to developments in the project, some objectives will need to be adapted).

Why monitor and evaluate advocacy projects? What's involved?

The goal of any advocacy project or programme is to improve the lives of ordinary citizens. For development agencies, this means ordinary citizens in the global South. The key question that agencies need to ask is to what extent do advocacy programmes effectively achieve this goal?

Monitoring

Each advocacy project should be monitored on a continuous basis over its lifetime. Reasons for this include to:

- assess to what extent the strategy is successful – and to adapt it accordingly
- be able to respond to unpredictable events
- provide regular opportunities to communicate, work together and share experience – build relationships
- document the process in order to be able to learn from experience to improve future work in advocacy

- demonstrate the results to donors, supporters, policy-makers, and other stakeholders.

Monitoring should be the responsibility of those in charge of managing the advocacy project. This will normally include project staff, but might also include partners' staff in many situations. It will involve collecting information on pre-defined – or previously not defined – indicators as set out in an M&E plan. Mechanisms for monitoring often include meetings, minutes, telephone calls and project records.

Advocacy monitoring also involves constantly collecting and analysing information on wider issues. Monitoring might cover information on:

- **internal issues***:* this includes how well staff (and partners) are working, and how well activities are being implemented
- **external issues***:* this covers key changes in the external environment, and what else is happening (or what others are doing) that might affect the results of the advocacy project
- **collaborative issues***:* how well the project is linked into and able to cooperate with relevant alliances and coalitions, or how well are any capacity building activities being carried out; and
- **progress towards objectives***:* what progress is being made towards the ultimate goals and objectives of the advocacy project?

It is essential to recognise the values and opinions of those directly involved in the advocacy project at all levels. The most important aim of monitoring is to identify when plans need to be changed because things are not going well, challenges are being faced or new opportunities have been identified.

Review and evaluation
Whereas monitoring is an ongoing process, reviews and evaluations take place at a specific moment in time – either part way through a piece of advocacy work (mid-term review) or at its completion. In addition to the reasons cited for monitoring advocacy, project reviews and evaluations enable organisations to:

- evaluate the progress of the project against its stated objectives
- learn about what works well and what needs adapting
- demonstrate innovative and effective strategies
- demonstrate the results and impact to donors, supporters, policy-makers and other stakeholders
- generate financial and political support for advocacy work.

Formal reviews or evaluations should ideally include representatives from all stakeholder groups, both internal and external. This would include staff and partners, but could also include other allies, those with whom the project will be advocating (duty bearers), and those who will benefit from successful outcomes (the rights holders). The review or evaluation can be internal or external. External reviews (which use external facilitators) are useful in providing more objective views, but they can take time to arrange and are costly.

In addition to focusing on changes brought about by the advocacy project, any review or evaluation should concentrate on the lessons learnt from the exercise, and how these can be applied in the future. These should be clearly documented and shared with the staff, partners, community members and donors as appropriate.

While the terms of reference for each advocacy evaluation will be specific to that piece of work, the main questions that an evaluation addresses include:

- To what extent were the original objectives achieved? Or were they the right objectives in the first place?
- How did objectives change and evolve throughout the advocacy project, and why?
- What impact did any change have on the lives of communities (if at all)?

- What factors contributed to success or failure?
- Which specific approaches worked and which did not?
- What should have been done differently given hindsight?
- What needs to be changed in the future as a result of this evaluation?

Impact

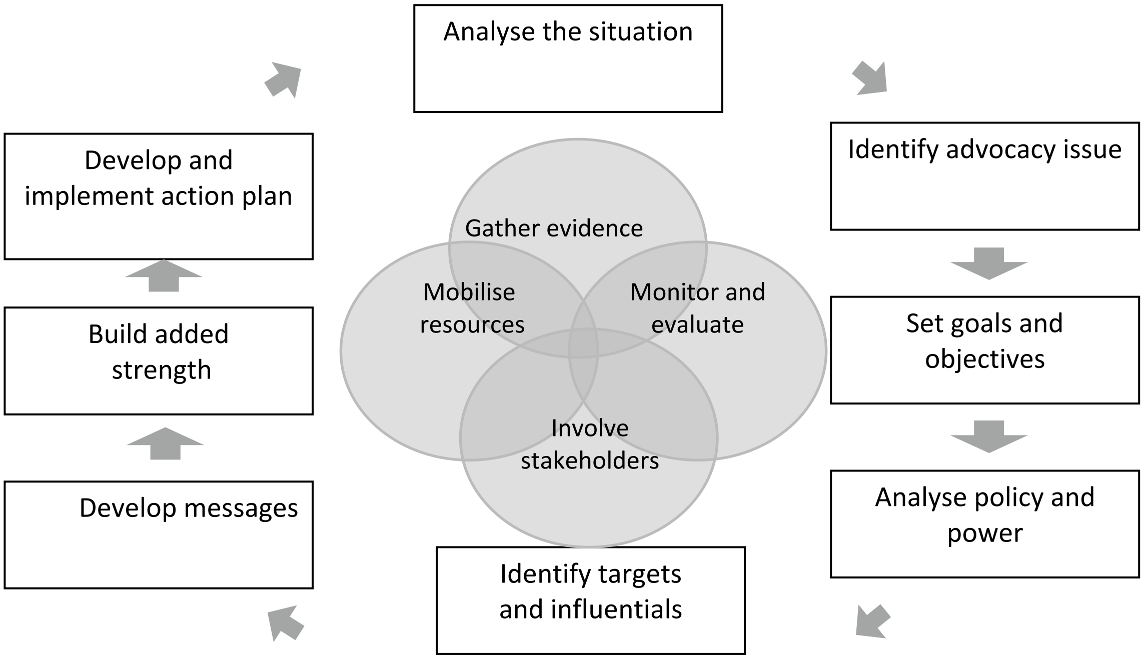
The impact of advocacy is notoriously difficult to assess for numerous reasons (see section on challenges below), but development practitioners have an obligation to assess what is changing, or has changed for whom as a result of their organisational advocacy strategy. The reason for this is that although advocacy projects may result in policy changes, they are not always – or even often – translated into improvements in people's lives. For example, a policy change around inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream schooling has huge implications in terms of training and resources. If the policy change is not backed up with these resource provisions, it will not result in improved educational opportunities for the children in question. An impact assessment – conducted some time after the completion of the advocacy effort – will assess what changed, for whom (and how significant these changes were), as a result of that intervention. It is worth noting that, even if the overall goal has not been realised, the project may have resulted in other positive (or negative) changes for the target groups (e.g. more people are aware of the issues of children with disabilities being excluded; children being able to advocate for change themselves) . Smaller changes at the grassroots level should also be looked for, recorded and their significance assessed.

When to plan for M&E of advocacy

An M&E plan needs to be in place at the beginning of any new project or programme. This will include the identification of clear and staged objectives and indicators that will enable staff and other stakeholders to track progress towards achieving these objectives

The following diagram, adapted from one devised by Louisa Gosling[2], illustrates where monitoring and evaluation fit into a project or programme cycle for advocacy. Together with gathering evidence, mobilising resources and involving stakeholders, it is central to all stages of the cycle and must therefore be built in to each stage.

[2] *Advocacy Matters: A Save the Children Alliance Guide to Advocacy*, Gosling L, and Cohen D, 2007



Challenges, opportunities and guiding considerations

Monitoring and evaluation can be difficult to do well in any context. Within advocacy work there are a number of recognised challenges that can add complications. However, there are other facets of advocacy work that can make it simpler to monitor and evaluate. These are summarised below.

Challenges	**Opportunities**
• The chain of cause and effect between the actions of an organisation and eventual advocacy outcomes can be long and complex. • Organisations often work within partnerships and networks, which can make it difficult for any individual organisation to say exactly what its influence has been. They are not able to attribute change to their efforts. • Attribution is further complicated by the fact that these organisations and partnerships are operating within existing systems and situations which, themselves, are potentially contributing to change. • The objectives and focus of advocacy projects frequently change over time, which makes it hard to measure progress against initial objectives. Even if the project is deemed successful, the affected target groups may not recognise change has happened.	• Traditional M&E is often based on a rigid model of pre-set objectives and indicators. These are often unrealistic. Advocacy allows more scope for changing objectives and tactics on a regular basis. • Monitoring and evaluating advocacy work relies more on simple common-sense than the adoption of complex tools and techniques. • M&E for advocacy recognises the need for organisations to be subjective in their assessment of change, and the factors that contribute towards change..

Guiding considerations

The following considerations may helpfully inform the design and implementation of M& E plans for advocacy:

1. Advocacy goals and objectives should be clearly defined

In order to be clear about the goal and objectives of an advocacy project, it will be necessary to have specific answers to the following questions:

- What changes does the project want to bring about?
- What is going wrong - what must stop, what must change, what alternative solution should be adopted?

The **goal** is the overall purpose or reason for the programme or project. It should be a broad statement of what it is trying to achieve in the long-term. In terms of advocacy, a goal will usually go beyond changes in policies and practices to look at the potential benefits that it is hoped will be seen by individuals, communities and populations.

The **objectives** are the specific changes that a project or programme seeks to achieve. In general it is useful to have a combination of short- and long-term objectives, so progress can be more effectively measured Short-term objectives will often be directly related to individual advocacy activities, such as disseminating information or media work, whilst longer-term objectives might result from a number of different types of activities.

When developing objectives for advocacy work it is critical to understand exactly what the current situation is, and what is realistically achievable over the period of the project.

Examples of advocacy objectives at different levels include:

- **Contributing to the debate***:* This includes simple media or development education work, which could result in having materials disseminated and used more widely, or issues increasingly covered in the media.
- **Raising awareness of an issue**: e.g. enabling more people to understand an issue, or enabling people to understand issues in greater depth.
- **Changing minds***:* persuading people of the need for change, or influencing people to change their minds on an issue.
- **Influencing decision-makers**: such as getting key personnel from targeted institutions to agree on the need for change.
- **Getting an issue onto the agenda***:* getting an institution to agree to a new proposal, or to set in motion a new policy. For example, an institution might agree to discuss an issue in a parliament or other legislative body.
- **Policy change***:* this could cover the actual changing of a policy or in some circumstances the introduction of a new policy. In theory, opposing a new suggested policy could also be seen as a change.
- **Policy implementation**: this could include changes in how a new policy is implemented or how an existing policy is being implemented.
- **Building capacity of partners and civil society organisations***:* so that they are able to advocate on their own issues and/or on behalf of their local communities

2. Stakeholders should be active participants in all stages in planning, monitoring and evaluating advocacy strategies

This is especially important for programmes in advocacy where organisations may be campaigning “on behalf of” a particular client group who may not even know that someone is advocating on their behalf or, if they do, may have very little influence on what is said by whom. The adoption of other peoples’ causes without their involvement and influence will undermine the whole advocacy process: wrong or inappropriate messages may be given; and the process will serve to disempower the very groups on whose behalf the campaign was launched. A stakeholder analysis at the early stages of the advocacy project will help to determine whose voices and opinions should guide the development of the project. These same people should be actively involved in the setting of indicators to track the progress of the project. For example, a project which aims to secure improved health rights for people living with HIV/AIDS, would involve key stakeholders in identifying policy (and other related) changes that would result in improved health provision for them; and then work with them to agree what evidence or signs would demonstrate that the project was on track and making progress (or not).

3. The development of milestones and some indicators makes the tracking of progress towards the achievement of objectives and the overall goal much easier

Setting a few specific indicators and milestones in the early stages of the project will be helpful in tracking its overall progress. These indicators can be set to measure progress towards objectives, or they might be set to measure what has been done and how well it has been done (outputs). There should be clarity about how the relevant information should be collected, how often and by whom.

It will also be essential to develop a list of different activities that might be undertaken as part of the advocacy project.

The chart below, adapted from Louisa Gosling, provides an example of the type of indicators that could be used against advocacy activities.

<table>
<tr><th>Advocacy activities</th><th>Short term and intermediate outcomes</th><th>Long- term policy change outcomes and impact</th></tr>
<tr><td>Meetings with X# of policymakers and officials on target issue</td><td>• # of co-sponsors on a bill
• Change in % of influential people who believe our message about target issue (survey)</td><td rowspan="4">• Changed policy or legislation
• Policy/legislation implemented
• Increased governmental funding designated for topic area
• (and in the very long term) positive change in people’s lives as a result of the policy/legislation change</td></tr>
<tr><td>Testimony at a hearing</td><td>Organisation’s statistics used in a formal meeting summary</td></tr>
<tr><td>Increased # of people on a constituency email list</td><td>Increased # of people taking action to send letters to elected officials</td></tr>
<tr><td>Advocacy training workshop</td><td>Change in individual members’ skills, capacity, knowledge, and effectiveness</td></tr>
</table>

However, it is important to bear in mind that, in responding to changing circumstances, it is quite likely that objectives and activities of an advocacy project may have to be adapted over time. If this is the case, then indicators for these revised objectives will also need to changed and adapted accordingly. Stakeholders should be involved in all of these processes and decisions

4. Simple, user friendly systems are likely to work better than more complex sophisticated ones

Too often, M&E frameworks involve staff and stakeholders in using a set of complex tools and forms in order to gather data and information. Valuable time and efforts are wasted in learning how to use the tools correctly and, often, the focus on the tool itself takes precedence over the findings. If the goal and the objectives are clear, and there are milestones and indicators to guide assessment of progress, there is no need to use complex tools. Much advocacy monitoring is informal or relies on already existing information. Other very useful information can be collected through semi-structured interviews and observation. That having been said, Annex 2, complied by INTRAC[3] provides a short list of tools that are often used in tracking the progress of advocacy. Essentially, it is important to build up a portfolio of evidence that can be used at the end of the advocacy project in order to be able to make a critical assessment of what has changed, and how that change came about. Equally, information that is triangulated will be more reliable than that which has been gathered from a single source. Information gathered from one source (e.g. government statistics) should be verified or tested by checking the same information from other sources (e.g. opinions on the ground, or direct observation). Triangulation suggests that three perspectives on the same information indicates that the information is reliable.

5. Time built in for intelligent reflection on progress is invaluable

Regular, intelligent reflection about which elements are (or are not) going to plan, and why (or why not) will be invaluable. This is not rocket science, but it is surprising how much time staff and partners devote to collecting vast amounts of information and how little time they use in analysing and reflecting on what they have found out. It is important to build in regular opportunities to reflect on the progress of projects with different stakeholders and to be prepared to adapt and develop plans accordingly. As a guide, reflection processes should provide opportunities for staff, partners and other relevant stakeholders to:

- update the information on indicators to show what progress is being made
- review any other information that shows progress or lessons learnt
- identify and record external factors that have changed
- reflect on progress and revise plans, objectives and indicators if necessary.

A final point

Because of what it is and does, effective advocacy can prove to be a very powerful and empowering strategy. By this same token, ineffective advocacy strategies can be hugely wasteful of time and resources and leave stakeholders feeling bewildered, disempowered or uninterested. The onus is on each of us, and our organisations, to ensure that we make these interventions as successful as possible.

[3] Monitoring and Evaluating TISDA Advocacy Projects, Simister N and Giffen J, for INTRAC 2009

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Advocacy Matters: Helping children change their world. An International Save the Children Alliance guide to advocacy, Gosling L, and Cohen D, 2007

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Closing the Circle: From measuring policy change to assessing policies in practice, Development Dialogue Team, Save the Children UK 2003

Impact Assessment for Development Agencies: Learning to Value Change, Roche C, Oxfam 2004

Is Your Campaign Making a Difference? (NCVO) – a comprehensive three part guide to monitoring and evaluating campaigns. Part A: Getting the basics in place is available as a free download: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigning-resources#difference

Monitoring and Evaluation of Advocacy Campaigns: Opportunities and Challenges, Kumar Y, INTRAC 2005

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Rethinking Monitoring and Evaluation: Challenges and Prospects in the Changing Global Aid Environment, Mebrahtu E, Pratt B, Lonnqvist L, INTRAC 2007

Sharpening the Development Process: A Practical Guide to Monitoring and Evaluation, Bakewell O, INTRAC 2003

Toolkits: A Practical Guide to Planning, Monitoring Evaluation and Impact Assessment, Gosling L, Edwards M, Save the Children 2003

Annex 1

The following chart, complied by Claire McGuigan[4], provides a brief summary of some of these approaches.

Agency	Description of model	Key characteristics	Pros and cons
New Economics Foundation (NEF)	***Stage model*** • getting issue on agenda • achieving policy change • achieving change in practice.	Stages are analysed at different levels (grassroots, national and international), looking at a variety of actors.	• clearly highlights need to work on different levels • useful planning and monitoring tool.
Oxfam	***Stage model*** • heightened awareness • contribution to the debate • changed opinions • changed policy • policy change implemented • positive change in people's lives.	Stages represent a hierarchy of change, though this is not necessarily linear as visually presented.	• emphasis is more on policy debate and policy outcomes.
Catholic Institute of International Relations (CIIR)	***Dimensions of change model*** • impact on the capacity of civil society organisations • declaratory policy impact • implementation impact.	The dimensions are analysed with regard to northern and southern advocacy outcomes.	• difference between rhetorical policy change and actual change is explicit • Northern and Southern outcomes are separated • capacity building of civil society accorded clear importance.
World Development Movement (see Coates and David, 2002 for this approach)	***Pathways of influence***	Campaign outcomes and decision-makers to be targeted are established. Pathways and advocacy activities to lead to these are mapped.	• useful visual representation • useful as a planning tool and for reviewing progress • useful for campaign-oriented approach.
Institute of Development Research (IDR)	***Dimensions of change model*** • policy outcomes • civil society outcomes • democratic outcomes • individual outcomes.	Analysis covers a wide range of actors and levels. Policy outcomes include both governmental and private sector changes with regard to policies and programmes. Individual outcomes include both tangible and intangible outcomes, which beneficiaries may identify as important (eg, awareness of rights).	• holistic approach to understanding processes of change • civil society and democratic outcomes have a central importance • stages of policy work and northern versus southern outcomes, less clearly highlighted.

[4] Closing the Circle: From measuring policy change to assessing policies in practice, Development Dialogue Team, Save the Children UK, 2003

Annex 2

There are a number of different tools and templates that have been devised by different organisations to help monitor different facets of advocacy work, in addition to standard M&E tools or techniques. These are available to be used or adapted as required. Some of these tools are described below. Most of them have been taken from 'A Handbook of Data Collection Tools',[5] developed by Organisational Research Services. Many further tools are also recorded in this manual. Another useful manual, as mentioned earlier is the Save the Children Alliance Advocacy toolkit.

Tool	Description
Focus group discussion	Focus groups are facilitated discussions with a small group that can allow an issue to be seen from community members' perspectives. Focus groups show how people see an experience, idea or event. They are intended to provide more detailed information than a single interview because of the interaction among members of the group.
Surveys	Surveys can be used in a variety of different circumstances. They are often useful for examining and recording what community members think and feel, and so can be used to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, practice and behaviour.
Meeting observation checklists	Meeting observation checklists can help to see how different advocacy issues are prioritised by communities, or other civil society organisations, or can be used to check how often, and how, issues are discussed. They are basically forms that are used to record how often particular issues are covered during meetings, what agreements were made and what action might be taken in the future.
Meetings documentation forms	These forms are based on a simple Word format and are used to record what happened at a meeting, what the objectives of the meeting were, and the extent to which those objectives were met. They help to ensure the results of any meetings are immediately recorded and analysed.
Activity recording	Activity recording sheets are routinely used to plan activities and record whether those activities actually took place. They help ensure that all activities relating to an advocacy project are recorded, however important those activities were felt to be at the time.
Logs	Logs can be used in a number of ways. One common way is to use them to record information on the involvement of organisations within an alliance or network. The log is basically a template to help record who does what, why, how and when.
Media tracking forms	Media tracking forms are used to record how particular advocacy issues or messages are covered in the media. Information recorded can range from the simple (such as how often a message was covered, or what type of media was used) to more in-depth information such as the tone of newspaper articles or radio interviews.
Policy tracking analysis	A policy tracking system can document the type of policies developed, and track them through a path until they are accepted or rejected. Information can include key processes leading to the

[5] A handbook of Data Collection Tools, Reisman J, Gienapp A, Stachowiak S, Organisational Research Services

	development of a policy alongside information such as who is supporting the policy, who is against, and how successful separate advocacy initiatives are in helping develop a policy.
Monitoring policy implementation	There are many methods available to help organisations monitor how well (or badly) policies are implemented.
Timelines	Timelines are often very useful for charting the progress of an advocacy project. They can be designed to show what you have done, what others have done, and what has resulted (both positive and negative). It may be a useful exercise both in setting objectives and identifying the rationale for your work if you backdate a timeline to show what has happened in the recent past. This will include important historical events and the events that led to your decision to carry out the advocacy project. The timeline can then be added to as your work progresses, and can be used at the end of the project to assess how far you have achieved your original objectives.
Quotes log	A quotes log is a simple log of quotes that can be collected at regular intervals from a range of different stakeholders within an advocacy project. The log would record the quotes, along with who said them, when, and on what occasion.

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