

## Advocacy and Expression of Citizens Voice

*The tools included in this category seek to amplify citizen's voice in the policy-making process through their direct participation.*

Advocacy is defined as “the active espousal of a cause or principle and actions that lead to a goal considered worthwhile by the people involved” ([Altman 1993](#)). A vast majority of people across the world are currently marginalised and excluded from voicing their opinions, concerns and needs in processes of public decision-making that significantly affect their lives. Advocacy, in this context, aims to amplify the voices of ordinary people and empower them to participate effectively in public policy and decision-making processes. Contrary to traditional modes of advocacy such as lobbying and policy analysis which is dominated by technical experts that seek to advocate “on behalf” of people, the tools in this section place emphasis on increasing the capacity of ordinary citizens to access information, mobilise, network and enhance their representation at the relevant forums to strategically influence governance processes.

However, the nature of peoples' participation in these advocacy initiatives ranges from being more passive to more active depending on the type of issues at hand and the spatial scope of the advocacy campaigns. Local/ community level initiatives, for example, emphasise social transformation and tend to elicit active participation at the grass-roots through community mobilization, whereas regional/national level initiatives might use tools like opinion polls or referenda in which people's participation, though direct, is rather passive.

### Tools for Advocacy and Expression of Citizens Voice

- ⇒ **Public opinion polling** is a large sample survey undertaken to capture and assess the thinking and policy preferences of the people, most of whom hold neither elective office nor senior appointive positions nor technical expertise other than membership in the society.
- ⇒ **Referendum** is a non-electoral process through which citizens are called upon to cast their vote either to indicate their preference over a difficult or sensitive issue or on a specific political, social, economic, environmental or a constitutional issue. Referenda can either be consultative or legally binding and may be initiated by the government or citizens.
- ⇒ **People-centred advocacy** has been defined as “a set of organised actions aimed at influencing public policies, societal attitudes, and socio-political processes that enable and empower the marginalised to speak for themselves”. In contrast to traditional advocacy approaches that seek to effect policy change on behalf of marginalized groups, people-centred advocacy aims to bring about

social transformation by fostering civic engagement of citizens to enable them negotiate for their rights in the process of fulfilling their basic needs.

⇒ **Evidence-based policy advocacy** is a form of advocacy that uses research-based evidence to advocate for policy reforms while evidence-based policy is construed as an approach that “helps people/planners/policy makers make well informed decisions about policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence from research at the heart of policy development and implementation” ([Davies, 1999a](#)).

## Benefits

- Enables people to question and fight social inequality and injustice while empowering and transforming them in the process at various geo-political levels.
- Helps promote and protect human rights.
- Promotes transparency, responsiveness and accountability in public governance.
- Promotes coalition building and solidarity amongst civil society organisations.
- Facilitates consensus on public decisions and promotes public policies that are not only responsive to and reflect people’s needs but are also driven by scientific research based-evidence.
- Strengthens citizens’ voice in terms of expressing their views, opinions and concerns on a wide range of issues pertaining to public governance.

## Challenges and lessons

- Advocacy initiatives are often time consuming and resource intensive processes and therefore sustaining the momentum and the interest of the constituencies being mobilized is a major challenge.
- Many of the groups initiating and facilitating advocacy may not have a clear or in-depth understanding of the political and social issues involved in effecting social change which impedes their ability to plan effective advocacy initiatives.
- Too many advocacy efforts focus exclusively on changing legislation and policies. Though this is important, it is not sufficient to reverse power relations. Due to excessive focus on policies and laws, many advocacy groups end up overlooking the crucial role of participation and leadership by the poor and the marginalized and find it easier to run the campaigns themselves.
- Policy driven advocacy often tends to ignore the need to strengthen the voice of the marginalized in decision-making.
- Advocacy methods such as public opinion polling and referenda can lead to the “tyranny of the majority”, especially when it comes to measures that would threaten or discriminate against minorities.
- One major lesson is with regard to striking a balance between effecting/influencing a change and empowering the marginalized. Besides policy analysis, research and lobbying activities, this calls for giving adequate attention to organization and mobilization strategies such as public education, awareness raising, leadership development, and coalition building etc.

## Key resources

### ActionAid

[www.actionaid.org](http://www.actionaid.org)

☞ Action Aid, a South Africa based NGO has published several useful resources on people-centred advocacy (some of which are listed below under the individual authors). From 2002 to 2005, ActionAid worked with partners in Brazil, Nepal, Ghana and Uganda to develop and share tools and participatory methodologies for assessing the impact of people-centred advocacy initiatives. The website includes case studies and discussion papers related to this work (type 'people-centred advocacy' in the search box).

Davis, P. *Is Evidence-Based Government Possible?* Jerry Lecture presented at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Campbell Collaboration Colloquium on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2004, Washington D.C,

<http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policyhub/downloads/JerryLeeLecture1202041.pdf>

☞ This lecture addresses whether evidence-based policy and evidence-based government is possible, and whether it is more than a rhetorical device. It attempts to define evidence-based policy and considers factors other than evidence that influence policy making and policy implementation.

International IDEA: *Hand Book on Direct Democracy*  
[http://www.idea.int/publications/direct\\_democracy/index.cfm](http://www.idea.int/publications/direct_democracy/index.cfm)

☞ This Handbook published by International IDEA delves into a global comparison of direct democracy mechanisms, including referendums, citizens' initiatives, agenda initiatives and recall. A detailed look into each of these instruments is discussed in a chapter by chapter analysis of each tool, including comprehensive definitions, how each instrument can be used to shape political decisions and an outline of the steps most often involved in planning any given procedure.

Initiative & Referendum Institute (IRI), Europe- Germany: *Guide Book to Direct Democracy*

<http://www.iri-europe.org/en/publications/guidebooks/>

☞ The IRI "Guidebook to Direct Democracy" (published in English, French, Spanish, German and Chinese) places the Switzerland's long history and experience with political tools for citizen's participation within the European and global contexts, where the rights of political co-decision making are being extended to more and more people in more and more countries.

Milani, C.R.S. *Evidence-based policy research: critical review of some international programmes on relationships between social science research and policy-making*, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil UNESCO, 2005.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001834/183415e.pdf>

☞ The paper throws useful light on the nuances of how social-science research can assist in framing public policies based on sound evidence

Overseas Development Institute, United Kingdom: *Key Issues Surrounding Evidence-Based Policy*

<http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Projects/PPA0117/issues.html>

☞ This section of the ODI website provides a comprehensive description of the various elements and steps involved in evidence-based policy processes

Renka, R.D. *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Public Opinion Polls*, October 2009

[http://cstl-cla.semo.edu/renka/Renka\\_papers/polls.htm](http://cstl-cla.semo.edu/renka/Renka_papers/polls.htm)

☞ This is a very useful manual for separating good polls from the bad ones, and the garden-variety bad from the truly ugly and has been prepared in the context of a public opinion poll boom.

Samuel, J. (2002). *What is People-Centred Advocacy?* PLA Notes 43: 9-12. IIED, London, UK.

[http://www.planotes.org/documents/plan\\_04302.pdf](http://www.planotes.org/documents/plan_04302.pdf)

☞ This article gives a good overview of the approach and discusses the four arenas of people-centred advocacy (people, public, decision-makers and network/alliance).

Samuel, J. (2001). *Public advocacy in the Indian context*

<http://www.ncasindia.org/public/AdvocacyPerspective/AdvocacyPerspectiveArticle.aspx?CatId=70>

☞ This web article provides a short overview of advocacy approaches and briefly outlines some of the characteristics of advocacy efforts in India, and the challenges they present.

Thompson, G & Conley, S. *Guide to public opinion poll Web sites: Polling data from around the world*, C&RL News, October 2006, Vol. 67, No. 9

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/publications/crlnews/2006/oct/opinionpoll.cfm>

☞ This compilation focuses on significant internet sites concerning general public opinion polls, especially those providing polling results in usable formats from all around the world.

University of Pennsylvania, USA: *Public Opinion Polls - Research Guide*

<http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/guides/polisci/polls.html>

☞ This is an online guide that describes resources and strategies useful for researching public opinion. In addition to identifying major reference works in print and electronic formats

VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2002). *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Just Associates, Washington, D.C. US.

<http://www.justassociates.org/ActionGuide.htm>

- ☞ This guidebook is the key resource on people-centred advocacy, providing detailed step-by-step guidance for those wishing to undertake such advocacy efforts or those involved in training others to participate in similar efforts. Select chapters are available online at this website.