

People Centred Advocacy

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Tool summary

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” ([Samuel, 2002](#)). In contrast to traditional approaches to advocacy that seek to effect policy change on behalf of marginalized groups, people-centred advocacy aims to effect social transformation fostering civic-engaged citizens who can negotiate for their rights in the process of fulfilling their basic needs. This approach is also referred to as citizen-centred advocacy, participatory advocacy, transformative advocacy and social justice advocacy.

What is it?

The key principles behind people-centred advocacy are (Samuel, 2002):

- *Integrity*: People-centred advocacy stresses the need for advocates to have strong integrity and legitimacy and for the advocacy strategies to be just and non-violent;
- *Rights-based*: People-centred advocacy works to challenge and change unjust and unequal power relations and mobilizes people against societal violations of human rights;
- *Democracy*: The approach is grounded in the right to democratic dissent;
- *Participation*: People-centred advocacy is based on participatory processes involving shared responsibilities and power;
- *Communication*: The approach uses communication activities that involve learning from people, sharing with them, and inspiring and being inspired by them.

In concrete terms, the approach uses grassroots organizing and mobilizing techniques to engage marginalized people in the advocacy process. This process may involve a range of advocacy strategies, including for example, using the media, lobbying decision-makers, educating the public, organizing constituency groups, conducting research and building coalitions with other groups ([Veneklasen and Miller, 2002](#)).

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The approach is used principally by public advocacy groups, particularly NGOs and grassroots organizations that have an interest in rights based and participatory approaches to advocacy. The role of these advocacy groups is primarily one of mobilization, capacity building and facilitation to enable the local community members to plan and implement the advocacy strategies themselves.

People-centred advocacy has been used to tackle a whole range of issues including problems such as inadequate health and sanitation services, inequitable land tenure policies, and discrimination against particular groups in society such as for e.g. women, lower caste groups, or those living with HIV/AIDS. The advocacy may focus on issues at the local, national, regional or global level.

The appropriate level of action and type of advocacy strategy will depend on the political, social and economic situation prevailing at a given point of time. In some countries and at some times, for example, it may be counter productive to organize national level advocacy efforts on controversial issues as it may provoke more repression or dangerous levels of conflict. In such situations, it may be better to focus at least initially on the local or international level ([VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002](#)).

How is it done?

This section draws directly from the main guidance document available for people-centred advocacy, namely [VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002](#). The authors of this guide stress the non linear process of planning people-centred advocacy initiatives. Therefore, while the steps are presented as a sequence of events here, they may occur as part of a more iterative process in practice.

1. *Planning phase:*

- Personal and organizational assessment: The organizers and advocates start by looking inwards, through a personal self-analysis and an organizational assessment of the vision, mission and strategies of this group.
- Contextual analysis: This involves understanding the political context at the local, country, regional, and global levels. It includes discussion of visible and invisible power dynamics that marginalize some groups from the political process.
- Problem identification and analysis: The advocates define and prioritize their problems for potential advocacy. This step involves important decisions for citizens and is the key for building the constituency.
- Choosing and framing the advocacy issue: The analysis of problems and exploration of possible solutions helps groups to slice a big problem into manageable advocacy issues. Framing the issue is about describing your cause in order to have a wider public appeal.

- Defining long-term and short-term advocacy goals: The long term goals specify the political, economic and social changes the advocacy efforts seek to accomplish. These goals establish the basis for setting maximum and minimum positions for negotiations with decision-makers. The shortterm goals describe the desired outcomes for the specific advocacy solution.
- Power mapping: This analysis helps planners identify the targets, allies, opponents, and constituents for their advocacy. It examines stakeholder interests, positions, and conflicts. It reveals hidden mechanisms of power that affect participation of marginalized groups as well as important allies within the decision-making structures. Power mapping is essential for planning, negotiating and calculating risks.
- Policy and situational research: This involves gathering information about the policies, laws, programs, and budgets shaping the issue in question and about its causes and the people it affects. This information will make the advocacy clearer and provide material for the media, outreach, lobbying, and negotiations.
- Drafting the advocacy objectives: With the power maps and policy information, you can draft a set of advocacy objectives. These will spell out the desired changes in policy and decision-making structures as well as how to use political space and strengthen citizen engagement. Finally, they indicate how the advocacy will ultimately improve people's lives. These objectives are continuously refined.
- Planning the implementation: Advocacy objectives help you define action strategies. The nature of the political environment, opponents and targets will influence the media, outreach, lobbying and negotiation tactics.
- Measuring progress and adjusting action: Continuous evaluation helps to ensure that advocacy responds to political opportunities and follows organizational priorities. Evaluation allows groups to adjust their actions to changing situations.

2. Implementation phase:

Any people-centred advocacy initiative will include a combination of different strategies to mobilize support and effect change. Choosing the type of strategies will require taking into account the political context at a given point in time, the capacity and resources of the advocacy group, and the political and social risks that may be involved. The following strategies are available for people-centred advocacy:

- Pilot or model programs: Where it is difficult to influence the public agenda, a successful model/pilot intervention can demonstrate to the government a better way to solve a problem.
- Collaboration: When there is compatibility and agreement between NGOs, grassroots groups and government, then civil society groups are likely to

collaborate directly with government to design and/or implement legislation or state services.

- **Protest:** Demonstrations, marches, boycotts, vigils, hunger strikes and other forms of protest can be effective if they involve sufficient numbers of people to gain attention and make an impact. These activities are sometimes a tactic of last resort where more conventional strategies of influence fail to open up the doors for a policy dialogue.
- **Litigation:** A well publicized legal suit can draw public attention to a problem, and sometimes leads to legal reform or fairer enforcement. Some countries have a legal mechanism called “class-action” where groups of people affected by abuses of power can use a court case to fight collectively for justice.
- **Public education and media:** Education and media strategies build public support which may influence policymakers. Strategies include providing data, articles and alternative policies to the media as well as creative messages using music, videos and songs. Alternative media strategies using theatre, posters and pamphlets are especially useful in countries where fewer people have access to radio and television. In some countries NGOs organize public dialogues to discuss issues.
- **Research:** Positions and proposals based on solid information increase the credibility of advocacy. Research provides the necessary information for planning, message development, policy alternatives, and lobbying. Depending on the methodology used, research can also strengthen alliances, build constituencies, and help develop citizenship skills. Where information is hard to obtain, research efforts can evolve into “right to know” advocacy campaigns.
- **Lobbying and negotiation:** Lobbying involves efforts to meet face-to-face with the decision-makers to persuade them to support an advocacy issue or proposal. Negotiating involves bargaining to seek common ground or minimally, a respect for disagreement.
- **Organization and constituency building:** Effective advocacy requires alliances between organizations and with key individuals for leverage, legitimacy, and implementation. Organization depends on effective decision-making, shared leadership, clear roles, communication, and members and staff with analytical skills and confidence.
- **Empowerment:** Empowerment strategies are geared towards strengthening people’s confidence and the understanding of power dynamics.

Benefits

The evaluation of people-centred advocacy has gained some attention in recent years. Several papers and guides have been produced, looking at how the process and impact of such initiatives can be assessed. For more information, refer [Chapman and Wameyo \(2001\)](#) and [Chapman et al. \(2005\)](#)..

The potential benefits of people-centred advocacy include:

- *An enabling process:* By focusing on empowering and mobilizing local people and particularly the marginalized groups to help them speak up for their rights, the approach can yield wider benefits in terms of social equity and political participation of these groups.
- *An effective process:* While people-centred advocacy is a value-driven approach that seeks to promote social equity and human rights, it also has a pragmatic angle to it, in that it can help achieve the public advocacy objectives. Grassroots activists with sufficient expertise and mass support have indeed often proven to be better lobbyists than professional experts (Samuel, 2001).
- *A sustainable result:* By building a constituency of engaged citizens and forging alliances with different groups often working at different levels, the approach can have a sustained impact as these citizens and groups are motivated to keep working and to follow up and then may choose to take on other issues in the future.

Challenges and lessons

Some of the challenges of people-centred advocacy as articulated in [Chapman et.al., 2005](#) include:

- *Weak understanding of issues of power, gender and social change:* Many of the groups initiating and facilitating people-centred advocacy do not have a clear understanding of the political and social issues involved in effecting social change which impedes their ability to plan effective advocacy initiatives.
- *Dynamics of power:* The power relations at work in the advocacy context can interfere with the achievement of social change. This can take many forms such as by reinforcing views of inferiority, superiority and patriarchy within the participating groups thus helping maintain the status quo or allowing those in power to control the political agenda by manipulating information and dismissing certain grievances as not appropriate for public debate.

- *A focus on law and policy making:* Too many advocacy efforts focus exclusively on changing legislation and policies. This is important but not sufficient to reverse power relations. Policy driven advocacy tends to ignore the need to strengthen the voice of the marginalized in decision-making.
- *Controlling the process:* 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. This is particularly the case in international advocacy efforts, since the voices of social movements are not easily heard.

Some of the lessons learnt from experiences across the globe are encapsulated in the form of a set of criteria for success ([VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002](#)):

- *Appropriate:* Does the strategy match the vision and capacity of the advocacy group and is it compatible with the conditions in the community involved?
- *Adequate:* Will the strategy (or combination of strategies) be sufficient to address the issue at hand and do they justify the effort and resources needed?
- *Effective:* Is the strategy capable of achieving the agreed objective and addressing the problem?
- *Efficient:* Does the strategy make the best use of the resources, time and energy available?
- *Sensitive to side effects:* Will any negative consequences of using the strategy be counterbalanced by the positive benefits? For example, how can any resistance from traditions or religion be minimized or what will happen if violence breaks out?

In order to help ensure that the advocacy effort has a meaningful people-centred focus, it may be useful to reflect on the following issues ([Chapman et al., 2005](#)):

- *Staffing:* Rather than recruiting the staff primarily with policy related skills and experience, aim for a balance of policy, organizing, facilitation and popular education skills. The staff also need to have the kind of values and attitudes necessary for supporting and collaborating with popular movements and organizations.
- *Balance between influencing change and empowering the marginalized:* In addition to policy analysis, research and lobbying activities, give adequate attention to the organization and mobilization strategies such as public education, awareness raising, leadership development, and coalition building.
- *Cultural change:* To be effective, people-centred advocacy needs to influence traditional authorities, relations, customs and values within the society, community and family. These include issues of patriarchy, caste and other

forms of discrimination that undermine human dignity and participation and ultimately affect policy implementation.



Key resources

Action Aid

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).

Chapman, J., and Wameyo, A. (2001). Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study. ActionAid USA.

<http://www.actionaid.org/assets/pdf/Scoping%20advocacy%20paper%202001.pdf>

- ☞ This paper documents the evaluation frameworks developed by different groups to assess the value of their advocacy efforts, and outlines numerous exercises and techniques for assessing policy influence, capacity-building and empowerment impacts.

Chapman, J., Pereira, A., Prasad Uprety, L., Okwaare, S., Azumah, V. and Miller, V. (2005). Action Research on Planning, Assessing and Learning in People-Centred Advocacy: Summary of Learning. Working Paper 1, Advocacy Action Research Project. ActionAid USA.

<http://www.actionaid.org/assets/docs/final1.pdf>

- ☞ This working paper provides a summary of the lessons and insights gained during Action Aid's action research effort on people-centred advocacy. The paper outlines some of the main challenges of people-centred advocacy and the tensions involved in such work, and highlights some of the insights gained about what's needed for effective advocacy planning, action and learning.

Clark, C. (2003). Making Change Happen: Advocacy and Citizen Participation. ActionAid, IDS and Just Associates.

<http://www.justassociates.org/MakingChangeReport.pdf>

- ☞ A report of a workshop on this theme, that includes useful lessons learned and recommendations for effective advocacy.

Cohen, J., de la Vega, R. and Watson, G. (2001). *Advocacy for Social Justice: A Global Action and Reflection Guide*. Kumarian Press, Sterling, US.

This book is not available online but can be ordered from or (discounted) at the following websites:

www.kpbooks.com

www.amazon.com.

- ☞ The book is the result of a three-year collaboration between the Washington based Advocacy Learning Institute and Oxfam America, and provides a comprehensive guide for advocates for social and economic justice. Intended for practitioners, trainers, teachers and students, it explores the elements of advocacy and offers a toolkit for taking action, comprehensive case studies, and hundreds of resource listings.

International Institute for Environment & Development-IIED (2002). *Advocacy and Citizen Participation*. Participatory Learning and Action Notes 43, February 2002. IIED, London, UK.

http://www.planotes.org/pla_backissues/43.html#pla04312

- ☞ This edition of PLA Notes looks at participatory approaches to advocacy and includes case studies from South Asia, Central America, East Africa, Southeast Asia and North America.

Lowe, S. (2003). *Toxic Waste Victory in Mozambique*. Oxfam News February 2003. Oxfam Australia.

http://www.oxfam.org.au/oxfamnews/february_2003/mozambique.html

- ☞ This brief web article outlines a successful case of people-centred advocacy in Mozambique.

Pergerakan

www.pergerakan.org

- ☞ Pergerakan (People-centred Advocacy Institute) is an Indonesian NGO, founded in 2002 to serve and provide capacity building support systems for advocacy actors for social changes in Indonesia. The website is currently available in Indonesian only although an English version appears to be planned.

Prasad Uprety, L., Rai, I. and Prasad Sedhain, H. (2005). *People-Centred Advocacy for Land Tenancy Rights in Nepal: A Case Study of The Community Self-Reliance Centre's Grassroots Campaign*. Working paper 6, Advocacy Action Research Project. ActionAid USA.

<http://www.actionaid.org/assets/docs/final6.pdf>

- ☞ This paper describes the process and impacts of a people-centred advocacy effort focused on enabling tenant farmers in Nepal to obtain tenancy rights and ownership rights for the land they farm.

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

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.

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.

Zulminarni, N. (2002). Grassroots women's advocacy programme. PLA Notes, 43: 35-38. IIED, London, UK.

http://www.planotes.org/documents/plan_04312.pdf

- ☞ This article outlines the process undertaken by a local Indonesian NGO to empower women to fight for gender equality.

Case studies

Campaigning for tenant farmer rights in Nepal

Traditionally, all land in Nepal is owned by the state and agricultural tenancy is common. There have been numerous land policies introduced over the last forty years to improve tenant farmer rights and enable them to claim ownership. Unfortunately these policies have been flawed or poorly implemented.

Community Self-Reliance Centre (CSRC), a local NGO, began working in 1994 on this issue in one district in central Nepal with support from Action Aid International Nepal, Starting with a Participatory Rural Appraisal in two villages to learn about the problems of tenancy rights, CSRC then embarked on a ten year campaign working with local partners, tenant farmers and their community based organizations. The campaign activities included legal awareness training for local farmers to build awareness on their rights, a receipt campaign to highlight the importance of receiving agricultural rent receipts as proof of cultivation, media advocacy and public demonstrations targeting government offices. The campaign succeeded in enabling thousands of tenant farmers to be granted land tenancy rights, and also resulted in stronger leadership and capacity of local farmers' organizations and improved economic and perceived social status of farmers.

Through successful expansion and publicity of the campaign, the issue is no longer a local one. A National Action Group has been established and campaign activities to be extended into eight new districts and allowing the scope of the campaign to widen to cover all land rights issues.

For more information on this case study, see Prasad Uprety et al. (2005) which is the source of this case summary.

Tackling gender inequality in Indonesia

One of the main obstacles to increasing gender equality in Indonesia is the fact that public dialogue and advocacy on gender issues is mostly carried out by elite groups such as NGOs, women activists, mass organizations, political parties, or government institutions. Grassroots people are not actively engaged in these processes.

PPSW, an Indonesian women's NGO, has been conducting an intensive grassroots advocacy programme since 1997 to link the empowerment of grassroots women with advocacy. The advocacy activities carried out at the community level begins with facilitating a critical analysis of their social, political and cultural position, to help communities understand the power that influences their lives and develop their own vision for a better society. PPSW conducts trainings and workshops for grassroots women to improve their knowledge, skills, and capacity. The women then typically develop their own organizations such as

cooperatives, informal groups, religious groups, and traditional groups and PPSW helps to equip them with the skills and tools to manage their organizations. PPSW also identifies potential women leaders in the community and regularly conducts an intensive leadership and facilitation skills training course. Once these women gain experience and the trust of their communities, they become local cadres who voluntarily organize the communities on a day-to-day basis. Through this programme, PPSW has also motivated and organized several strong potential women leaders to move up to become formal leaders in their respective areas such as the Head of the Village and the Village Board.

PPSW works with women's groups and networks to identify and document their local issues and bring them to decision makers and leaders in the relevant areas. PPSW facilitates regular meetings and dialogues for the groups not only with formal leaders in government and parliament, but also with informal leaders such as religious leaders, who have decision-making power.

For more information on this case study, see [Zulminarni \(2002\)](#), which is the sole source for this case summary.

Mobilization against imported toxic waste in Mozambique

When a secretary in Mozambique noticed a news article about the planned incineration of obsolete pesticides in a local cement kiln factory, she contacted Greenpeace who asked for her help in bringing toxic waste experts to Mozambique to examine the problem. The Joint Oxfam Advocacy Programme got involved by bringing in another expert from South Africa and organizing a meeting of local community leaders, organisations and individuals to discuss the project and hear how it might affect their lives. Following the first meeting, a press conference was called and specific invitations sent to representatives of the Environment Ministry and the Danish government agency funding the incineration project. Neither came, but after the conference, those present decided to start a movement against the project. They had been kept in the dark, someone said, so the group should be called LIVANINGO – "shedding light" in a local language. From there the movement grew quickly combining international networking with a strong commitment to working with local people.

LIVANINGO organized public meetings and demonstrations near the factory and kept up the media campaign, especially through the small independent press. The group asked for a fresh and independent Environmental Impact Assessment. But neither the Mozambican nor Danish government were willing to listen. That's when the campaign went international. LIVANINGO sent a representative to speak to the Danish Parliament with funding from Oxfam and support from other international allies in the US, Europe and South Africa. After that, the Mozambican government opened up the door a little and after two and a half

years of campaigning, the government gave in and agreed to all of LIVANINGO's demands.

The government eventually adopted a "return-to-sender" policy, shipping 900 tonnes of the chemicals to Germany and the Netherlands for safer disposal. Even after they took the decision, LIVANINGO was following the process to the finish to make sure the government did what they promised.

For more information on this case study, see [Lowe \(2003\)](#), which is the sole source for this case summary.

Cleaning up air pollution in Russia

The city of Nizhnii Tagil, an industrial centre in Russia's Ural Mountains was extremely polluted in 1993 and its 440,000 inhabitants suffered the country's highest rates of lung and stomach cancers and twice the national average incidence of childhood bronchial disease. The Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC), a US-based NGO, began its work in the city by conducting public surveys and organizing meetings with community members, city officials, industry representatives, and a fledgling environmental movement. Together, they identified particulate matter as the most dangerous threat and the most practical starting point.

Working with the leaders of a newly formed NGO, Clean Home, the advocates first targeted a 120 hectare dump that generated a toxic dust cloud over the city. By planting vegetation, the group prevented 150 tons of the dust from becoming airborne annually. The next target was the local iron ore mining industry, an important source of particulate pollution. By installing a cyclone collection system to suck up the iron ore powder, the group prevented 1,300 tons of dust becoming airborne every year.

With increasing support from the local community, ISC and Clean Home moved on to tackle water pollution and trash collection, and initiated environmental education in schools. The advocacy groups also set up a small grant program to help local groups set their own priorities and find new solutions to the many pollution triggered problems in the city. Environmentalism is now firmly embedded in the school curriculum and local people continue to develop creative ideas to tackle pollution. Once sceptical of ISC's approach, the city's authorities, now regularly convene committees made up of a broad cross-section of citizens to solve a range of social problems.

For more information refer the following link which is the source of information for this case summary:

www.iscvt.org/how_weve_helped/nizhnii_tagil