



# **BEFORE YOU BEGIN: BUILDING FOUNDATIONS**

**ADVOCACY STARTOFF  
POINTS**

● some key considerations you can make before deciding whether to engage in advocacy:

- Gathering policy and political information
- Assessing risk
- Building strategic relationships
- Establishing your credibility as an advocate
- Linking advocacy to country office priorities
- Maintaining focus

## *Gathering policy and political information*

Before you begin any advocacy initiative, it is crucial to understand how key institutions work and to identify decision makers for the sectors you are interested in. You also need to find out who can help you influence those decision makers.

# *Assessing risk*

- You do not need to become an expert in politics, but you are more likely to succeed, and less likely to expose yourself and others to risk, if you can answer the following questions:
  - What are the key political debates, and who represents each side?
  - Which issues (or people) have sparked political violence or community conflict in the past?
  - Which issues (or people) have succeeded in reaching across ethnic, social, or political boundaries?

- How is power exercised within the political system?
- Which groups in politics or government are respected and which are disrespected or feared?
- How do the policies you are concerned with relate to controversial topics?
- What are accepted forms of political dialogue and proper protocol for approaching policy makers?
- What are the policy concerns of the community?

# ***Building strategic relationships***

- Who are the key policy makers within key sectors?
- Are any major staff transitions planned that will affect who is in charge?
- Are any major policy reviews planned or underway? If so, will NGO input be sought? Could you play a role?
- Who do policy makers turn to for policy advice? What sources of information do they trust most?
- Do policy makers lack information for making good policy decisions?



## ***Establishing your credibility as an advocate***

- When you are recognized as an expert, or a respected spokesperson on behalf of others, your arguments will tend to carry more weight in advocacy and you will find it easier to prevail in policy debates.

# CREDIBILITY CHECKLIST

- Can you, or your colleagues, legitimately speak on behalf of those affected by the issues?
- Are you, or your colleagues, known and respected by the policy makers involved in the issue?
- Do you, or your colleagues, have information or expertise that is relevant to the issues?
- Will the policy makers involved be interested in your opinion or that of your colleagues?
- Are there people within the country office who can effectively lead an advocacy initiative on the issues you are considering?
- Are you, or your colleagues, perceived as objective and trustworthy, or politically biased?



# *Linking advocacy to country office priorities*

- What is your mission and vision as an organization?
- How does this sit with the advocacy work you want to engage in?

# *Maintaining focus*

you are more likely to succeed in advocacy if you focus on a limited number of policy issues at a time, than if you develop a long list of policy priorities.

- In advocacy, consistency and focus usually pay off. You may begin by identifying various policy themes you want to tackle, but ultimately, it is important to narrow these down.