

BOND Guidance Notes Series 4

Participative Advocacy

This is the second in [a set of four](#) advocacy guidance notes, which can be read as a series or separately.

*And with the best leaders
When the work is done
The task accomplished
The people will say:
We have done this ourselves.
Lao tzu, China, 4000 BC*

What is participative advocacy?

Participative advocacy (sometimes known as southern advocacy or stakeholder advocacy) is a process by which people, through articulating their own needs and desires, gain the confidence and ability to influence decisions which will affect their own future.

Participation is a complicated process which has revolutionised development work. At its core lies an idea that the power relationships between North and South need to be challenged, and that the best solutions to poverty and inequality will be defined by those whose lives are most directly affected. However, it means many different things to different people.

Defining the political agenda

- Advocacy work doesn't have to be centralised and hierarchical;
- Participation can be used to build consensus amongst people with different vested interests. However, participation is not always about consensus. Where people have different views it can mean agreeing to speak with a majority voice.
- When dealing with delicate political situations, participation can become 'the art of the possible': seeing how far you can go/what you can say, whilst keeping a delicate coalition together.

Creating sustainable change

- Changes brought about on behalf of people in the south, however well intentioned and well planned, are unlikely to be sustainable without some sort of mandate from them.
- Building advocacy capacity in the south enables poor people themselves to analyse their problems, identify pathways to solving them and in the long-term, bring about the sorts of changes which will be sustainable for them.
- Participation need not always be about Northern NGOs 'finding partners to work with'. There are southern communities and networks doing their own advocacy work who are looking for partners based in the north to assist them in changing policies and raising awareness.

Building legitimacy and accountability

- Southern involvement lends legitimacy and credibility to a campaign: policymakers have shown themselves more open to the voices, opinions and desires of southern communities than of those in the north presuming to act on their behalf.
- Equal partnerships are best built by using systems of mutual accountability, where both partners are open and honest with each other about what they are gaining from the partnership and how they are using resources provided by the other. Unstated agendas destroy trust.

Making the most of available skills and resources

- The whole is more than the sum of its parts, if managed competently.
- Partners have different skills and can achieve things in different ways.
- Different groups have access to different policy makers.
- Working together with like-minded institutions and individuals allows the comparative advantages of each member to be identified and exploited, and duplications avoided.
- Participation allows different groups of people to define their own roles, to tell you what they want to do, what they can do, and what they think you could do.
- Participants should not be exploited as a resource, either for their 'legitimacy' or for their labour.
- Northern NGOs learn from experienced and skilled advocates in the south.

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Who are the stakeholders?

Stakeholders in advocacy work are those individuals who have a vested interests in seeing the goals of the advocacy work being reached, or not. It is useful to break this large group down into smaller categories of like-minded people in order to recognise where participants are in the campaign.

Allies: people who are 'on your side' either because they will benefit directly from the changes you are trying to bring about, or because they want to help you bring about these changes as part of a broader movement.

Beneficiaries: people whose lives will be improved by the successful achievement of your advocacy goals. Individuals in this group could also be called 'allies' because they have a vested interest in seeing the end result but a beneficiary is often a more passive stakeholder than an ally.

Adversaries: people who are opposed to what you're trying to do. These people could become allies in time, with greater understanding of the issues, or could be standing in the way of what you're trying to do. Adversaries can become targets of your advocacy project if you are planning a series of activities to 'win them around'.

Internal stakeholders: a grouping used to define people within your own organisation or network or alliance who are actively collaborating on the design, management and execution of your project. Not necessarily all allies (because some people within your own organisation will be sceptical about doing advocacy work at all, and reluctant to lend their time to it) individuals in this group are usually people with whom you have regular contact.

Categorising and prioritising stakeholders

Breaking your enormous stakeholder lists down into various categories can be a very useful discipline. Once you've broken down the lists, rank the importance, to you, of each of the stakeholder groups. This will stop the list from looking like a daunting/impossible challenge, and will help shape your workplan.

Using the different categories of stakeholders, you need to be moving people between the boxes, i.e. turning adversaries into tools, allies into tools and tools into participants. People can be in more than one of these categories at any one time.

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Example: ActionAid's Campaign on Food Security and the World Trade Organisation

Advocacy Targets	Adversaries
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WTO Secretariat • EU Commission • UK Government • Other key EU Governments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US Government • Cairns Group of richer agricultural exporting countries • Multi-national seed companies • Other TNCs (supplying agricultural inputs, biotech, grain trade . . .) • US / EU Farm lobby
<p>Allies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Southern Governments, e.g. India, South Africa • Environmental movements • Southern rural community-based organisations • Southern NGOs working on food, rural livelihoods, biodiversity • Other International NGOs, esp UK Trade Network of NGOs • The South Centre, representing southern interests at the WTO in Geneva • Academics 	<p>Internal Stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ActionAid International Food Rights team (staff in 12 countries working full time on food rights issues) • ActionAid Country Programmes • ActionAid Trustees • ActionAid Supporters (campaigners and donors) • ActionAid UK staff (range of interests from Policy, Campaigns, Marketing)

Dangers and Pitfalls

There are both benefits and risks in involving other people in 'your' advocacy work.

Working participatively takes time, can be frustrating, is often bureaucratic, means that you often don't get to do everything your own way and rarely allows you to be opportunistic. But there is a moral imperative to be participative because more often than not you are advocating for change in the lives of other people and your actions and messages will affect their lives somewhere down the line. In addition, participative advocacy increases the credibility and legitimacy of your work. It can bring greater resources to bear on your objectives; and has the potential to bring enemies on board.

- Logistical nightmares: participating in a project with partners operating in different countries, at different levels, to different priorities can be frustrating, cumbersome and expensive. Keep focused on your role within it, and be clear about what you want from others and what you can contribute to their activities in return.
- Conflicts of interests: this occurs both within an organisation (between management, who can think of advocacy as an element of corporate communications, and project staff who think of

it as a dangerous diversion from more 'concrete' work) and between different organisations. Try to steer a balance between these extremes.

- Finding the right collaborators: Southern participants in international advocacy work need the capacity, skills and resources to participate in advocacy work - or they need assistance to acquire these elements in order to participate. If you don't already have partners in the south, identifying possible collaborators from a distance can be difficult and unrewarding for all concerned: use existing networks and organisations with pre-existing knowledge of who is good at what to help you make connections.
- There is a risk that speaking on behalf of individuals and communities in the south further disempowers them: make sure you have a clear mandate before taking on the task of representing others, and ensure that there are clear, transparent procedures for identifying messages and goals.

Ways of supporting southern partners to be more effective advocates

<i>Generic work</i>	<i>Specific areas</i>	<i>Tools and techniques</i>
Education and training	<p>The opportunities for advocacy work (such as international conferences / consultations)</p> <p>The processes and procedures of such events</p> <p>The issues (including 'creating / catalysing' new ideas)</p> <p>The capacities of Northern partners to carry out work (i.e. letting people know what's on offer).</p> <p>Writing funding proposals</p>	<p>'Introductions' to specific individuals.</p> <p>Accompaniment,</p> <p>Mentoring</p> <p>Joint lobbying</p>
Building networks within countries	<p>To enable stakeholders to speak with one voice</p> <p>To educate other stakeholders about one another</p>	
Building networks between countries	<p>Linking processes internationally to share lesson learning</p>	<p>Workshops, e-mail exchanges, newsletters, putting people in touch, staff exchanges</p>
Doing research into	<p>Decision making processes, specific issues, case studies</p>	
Funding research into	<p>Decision making processes, specific issues, case studies</p>	

Stepping stones to engaging participation

- A. Identify your objectives in sufficient detail to present to stakeholders as a basis for discussion.
- B. Make a list of all stakeholders who you might want to invite to be involved.
- C. Analyse the potential advantages and problems of working with those identified.
- D. Identify, for at least one key stakeholder (a) the expectations which you imagine that stakeholder has of your advocacy work (b) the responsibilities which you imagine that stakeholder will be willing to take on.
- E. List ways in which each of the parties could be supported in their advocacy work to strengthen the overall campaign.
- F. Identify communication channels which would enable stakeholders to be kept informed and to participate actively in all appropriate stages of the project (e.g. meetings - how regular? What language? Where? How funded? Email, newsletters, fax etc).
- G. Prepare for the first meeting by analysing what your organisation can contribute to the campaign, and what role you might have? Establish early on how subsequent meetings / information sharing processes will be managed and who will take responsibility for keeping things moving (this should probably be a rotating responsibility so that no one person dominates).

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Top Tips

- Committed individuals make effective advocates: ensure that individuals keep committed to the cause by ensuring everyone is clear about their roles and responsibilities from the outset, and that they are kept informed about progress as the campaign unfolds.
- Make the advocacy project focused: if it has lots of different components within it being undertaken by different participants, make sure that they are themselves focused and have explicit connections to the main advocacy project.
- Use different communications channels to make sure each participant has access to the information that they need to carry out their own advocacy activities but not so much that they are swamped.
- Build space within the campaign to be opportunistic and get a mandate from participants to allow you to respond to opportunities quickly without getting everyone's prior permission.
- Multi-disciplinary teams operating in different countries, at different levels, at different times but in concert with each other, build up a groundswell of opinion and momentum which is more likely to result in change than one group of people working on their own.
- It's never too late to engage participation!

Top tips on South-North Consultation for international advocacy networks

- Priorities and starting points are different;
- Pace of work is different;
- Different foci of NGOs (large, northern NGOs usually have multiple foci and their policy/advocacy work changes focus every 2-3 years. Small southern NGOs often have a

single focus, e.g. workers, fisherfolk, peasants, farm labourers, one area or community, and is long term).

- If you are a funder, your funded partners may be very different from the partners you have for advocacy purposes.

Trust is a key element in developing a joint advocacy strategy. Remember that consultation is not the same as partnership; that key stakeholders such as workers, peasants and communities are involved in developing policy proposals and advocacy plans and not just in providing information on 'the situation' on the ground; and that you develop a two-way process that ensures mutual understanding of advocacy needs. *(Prepared for BOND by Maggie Burns, ETI, based on the experience of joint advocacy for a Labour Standard Corporate Code of Ethics)*

Example: Strengthening advocacy skills of fisherfolk in Tanzania

The fishing communities living in Mtwara District of southern Tanzania were experiencing problems with aggressive dynamite fishing off their coastal waters. Their catches were declining and inadequate penalties for those caught dynamiting resulted in the problem escalating. In 1994 a meeting was held between some of the fishermen and District Fisheries Officers to discuss the problems and identify solutions. The discussions were recorded on video and played back to much larger groups of fisherfolk in the evenings to record their feedback. A 'Sudi-Committee' was established and they organised a video to be made from the various meetings held, to share their deliberations with other communities along the coast. The video was also shown to official meetings in the District and Regional headquarters, a number of government ministers, judges and the highest police commander. After each showing, comments were recorded and played back to the fishing community. In 1996, a week-long meeting was held to review progress and was attended by three members of parliament, a number of District Councillors and senior officers from relevant government authorities such as the police. The controversial video had created expectations for change, and the Sudi committee was increasingly seen as presenting a popular fisherfolk movement for environmental justice. An NGO with the name 'Shirikisho' was set up to overcome perceived problems, and the board tasked with showing the video to the parliamentary Environment Committee. They were received by the Prime Minister and MPs for their area, who promised to put a stop to the dynamite fishing. Stern warnings were issued and a number of rogue fishermen 'turned themselves in' to the Regional Commissioner. Then, in 1998, the Navy was sent in to clamp down on dynamite fishing.

In this example, the video acted as a catalyst for people to identify their problems and try to work together to find ways of overcoming them. It allowed large numbers of people to be kept informed of the debate, and to contribute their own views to it. It also enabled a group of people whose views are not normally heard at a national level, to gain the attention of policymakers at the highest level, and to motivate them to take action to help resolve their situation.

(Prepared for BOND by Dominik DeWaal)

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