

3

Outlining Advocacy Strategies

This chapter presents a simple guideline for outlining advocacy strategies, the second step in the advocacy initiative planning framework given earlier. This step includes selection of the issue, selection of the target audience, setting a policy goal, and identification of allies and opponents. This chapter highlights the way that all information collected through the process presented here can be moulded.

From the previous chapter you may have realised more clearly that poverty and discrimination are connected directly or indirectly with policy considerations. Identification of the root causes and effects of this connection gives you the opportunity to select advocacy as a tool to overcome or minimise the broader problems that mountain people are suffering from.

After identifying all causes and affects, you may be ambitious. You may want to deal with several issues in order to resolve the variety of problems faced by the communities you are working with. However, a realistic evaluation will probably convince you that you cannot deal with all the issues that you are interested in. Therefore you have to maintain a focus only on certain issues (Figure 3.1).

The following steps will help you to maintain your focus as you develop the basic outline for your advocacy strategy.

- Select the policy issues that can be effectively addressed through advocacy and which will have the greatest impact on the problem.
- Select as target audiences those who can support you in your attempt to influence policy makers.

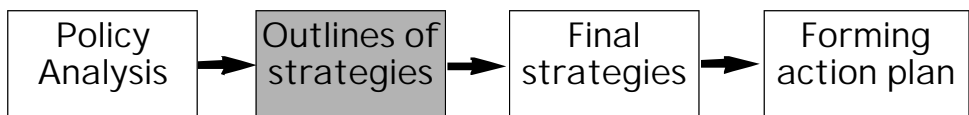


Figure 3.1: Stage two in the horizontal framework

- Set a specific policy goal for your advocacy initiative.
- Identify potential allies and opponents.

Selection of Policy Issues

As a result of analysing one problem, many policy issues may be identified. Some policy issues are very distant from the current problem. For example, in the problem tree presented in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.3), infant mortality is apparently very far removed from the issue of corruption in the government bureaucracy, but as your analysis has shown, it is actually well connected.

Traditional development programmes used to concentrate only on the symptoms of the problem because that is where the suffering is immediate. As a result, they were often not able to affect or change the root causes. For example, one project would introduce different vaccines to reduce the infant mortality rate, while another organisation would train local people on safe drinking water and sanitation aspects. However, a sufficiently deep analysis would indicate that in the case of infant mortality for example, more than one policy issue exists that underlies the problem. However, you may not be able to deal with all issues related to the problem. The following tips will help you select an appropriate issue for your advocacy initiative.

Direct contribution to the problem: Some policy issues contribute to problems directly. For example, in the infant mortality rate example, a labour settlement policy can directly contribute to the problem. Your problem analysis gives a clear indication of the extent a policy issue influences the problem. Therefore you have to be able to select those issues which contribute most directly to the problems at hand.

Key criteria for selecting policy issues

- Direct contribution of the policy to the problem
- Visible impact on a large number of people
- Likely to be successful with the capacity that you actually have
- Potential for working in coalitions with other like-minded organisations
- Risk assessment indicates a manageable risk
- Potential for your organisation to advocate effectively

Impact on a large number of people:

Policy issues usually have an effect on a large number of people. If you are able to make a small change in one carefully-chosen area of policy this can generate impact on a wider scale. Traditional needs-based development could not produce such impacts in the communities concerned because it tended not to touch the underpinning policies. Therefore, it is recommended that advocates should select only those issues that can generate benefits for a large number of people.

For example, if an advocacy initiative brings about a labour settlement policy in Koilapahad, its impact can be felt by more than 40 000 labourers in a sustainable manner. But if on the other hand an organisation initiates two drinking water schemes in the labour area, the benefit will only be felt by a limited number of people for a certain number of years, the project not being sustainable. The analysis of the infant mortality problem led to the identification of four policy issues, but not all of them will give equivalent benefits to a large number of people.

Likelihood of success: It is essential to estimate how far one's advocacy effort targeted at policy change is likely to succeed. Since advocacy work in itself is usually a very drawn-out process, if a frank estimation of success is not made, people could lose hope and give up the struggle. While making a logical estimate of the likelihood of success, several factors can be reviewed. For example, if policy makers are established in an environment that allows for advocacy, the likelihood of success becomes high. If the policy makers face heavy opposition from other political parties to the proposed changes, the likelihood of success is low. Therefore you have to be able to assess the likelihood of all options based on your policy analysis and must select those options which carry the most likelihood of success.

Potential for working in coalition: The capacity of any organisation to change policy can be enhanced when it joins with other organisations in advocacy. Therefore, opportunities for working with different levels of partners and alliances should be taken into account when selecting the issue. If you think no one will be interested in joining hands to take on the issue, the likelihood of success becomes low. If you find that there are several like-minded



organisations willing to work together, this could indicate that this is a more appropriate option.

Risk assessment: An advocacy initiative is not one hundred per cent risk free. Therefore, you must assess the level and gravity of the risk. The risks arising from your advocacy efforts in one area may also affect other programmes running under your organisation. Your organisation’s relationship with the government may be damaged, your credibility may be lost, your staff can be blacklisted, and your organisation may lose the benefits it presently receives from different sources. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out a benefit-harm analysis while selecting the options.

Potential for your organisation to advocate effectively: You should assess yourself and decide in your team whether you are a legitimate, capable, leading organisation, and visionary in taking the lead in any advocacy initiative. Remember that organisations or advocates cannot deal with all the issues seen/identified in the community. An analysis of the situation based on the above-mentioned criteria can be presented in matrix form (Table 3.1). The area of labour settlement in Koilapahad is taken as the context for this example.

Table 3.1: An example of selecting a policy issue

| Criteria | Policy issue 1 No clear policy to regulate mining companies on labourers’ settlements | Policy Issue 2 No sincerity among local authorities to enforce laws |
|---|---|--|
| Direct contribution to the problem | This issue has a direct link with the main problems of the area of labour settlement | This issue also has a direct relation to the problem. However, sincerity entirely depends upon individuals. |
| Impact on a large number of people | Policy on labour settlement area touches entire labour force working in the mining area. | This issue also covers all labourers but a monitoring mechanism does not exist. |
| Likelihood of success | Political leaders and the general public are apparently interested in introducing such a law. | No one is interested in changing the mindset and traditional practices of individuals. |
| Risk assessment | It looks low risk because everyone wants a systematic labour settlement in the area. | Possibility of developing resistance at an individual or collective level. |
| Potential for your organisation to advocate effectively | This issue matches with organisational vision, mission, and goal. The organisation also has enough staff members to deal with this issue. | It is very difficult to go for an invisible reformation. It may take a long time and much energy to change the individual working attitude of staff members. |
| Potential for working in coalition | The organisations working around the mining hills are also willing to join hands. | No coalition looks possible to work on this issue. |

This is an example for learning purposes. In this case, you can choose policy issue 1, because it has elements that are applicable to the majority of the criteria. You can also have your own criteria for selecting an appropriate issue for advocacy in a real-life situation.

Selection of Target Audience

The target audience is the persons or group of people who are responsible for bringing the policy change that you hope to achieve at the end of your advocacy initiative. Whether it is a new policy or the proper enforcement of an existing policy, it is essential to identify decision makers. Your target audience could be the direct decision makers as well as those who are not direct decision makers but who influence decision making. The target audience can be grouped into two categories.

Primary audience: People in this category are responsible for taking direct decisions on the issues that you are dealing with. For example, the state minister for mining could be directly responsible for taking policy decisions in regard to the settlement of labourers working in the mines. The minister of forests is directly responsible for taking forest-related decisions in the case of the tax imposed on CFUGs in Nepal. People believe that parliamentarians are directly responsible for the formation of rules and regulations. However, concerned ministers and their secretariats are the ones primarily/directly responsible for preparing drafts and submitting them for final approval. Therefore, the bureaucracy of that particular ministry and the ministers are considered the primary target audience in most advocacy cases.



Secondary audience: People in this category do not take decisions themselves but influence the decision makers to a great extent. For example, all contractors who are taking benefits from mining contracts are members of the secondary audience in the case of the Koilapahad labour issue. Similarly, all timber-related business holders belong to the secondary audience in the case of forestry in Nepal. Sometimes, parliamentarians themselves could be the secondary audience because they may be willing to change certain policies but do not have enough of a majority in parliament.

Sometimes, the secondary audience can be the best route of reaching the primary audience because these are the people who maintain a closer relationship with the decision makers. For example, if you want to meet and talk to the minister of a certain ministry, you have to go through that minister's personal assistant (PA). In this case, you can consider the PA to be a member of the secondary audience.

Knowing your audience is critical when planning an advocacy initiative. The policy analysis gives you a clear indication of the audience that you have to deal with. The primary audience is easy to identify. However, identification of the secondary audience is not so clear-cut. You will be faced with a series of secondary audiences for any one issue. Therefore you should focus on those people with the greatest ability to influence your primary audience. Figure 3.2 gives an example of target audiences for the Koilapahad case.

Primary audience

Remember that audiences are always people, not institutions. The primary audience are those people within institutions who have the authority to take decisions. For example, the general manager of a factory is the primary audience if the changes you want to bring are within that factory. If you want to bring changes to a hospital management, the general administrator of the hospital will be your primary audience. If you want to bring changes to national education policy, the minister of education is your primary audience. You can cite several examples according to your case.

Selection of Policy Goal

Selecting goals at different levels before starting any intervention is a way of doing things in a systematic way. Such goals should be very specific so that all stakeholders involved in the activity have the same understanding. If the goal is described in vague terms, different people will interpret it differently. Therefore, a goal set for advocacy should be based on the 'SMART' principle.

S = Specific **M** = Measurable **A** = Achievable **R** = Realistic **T** = Time-bound

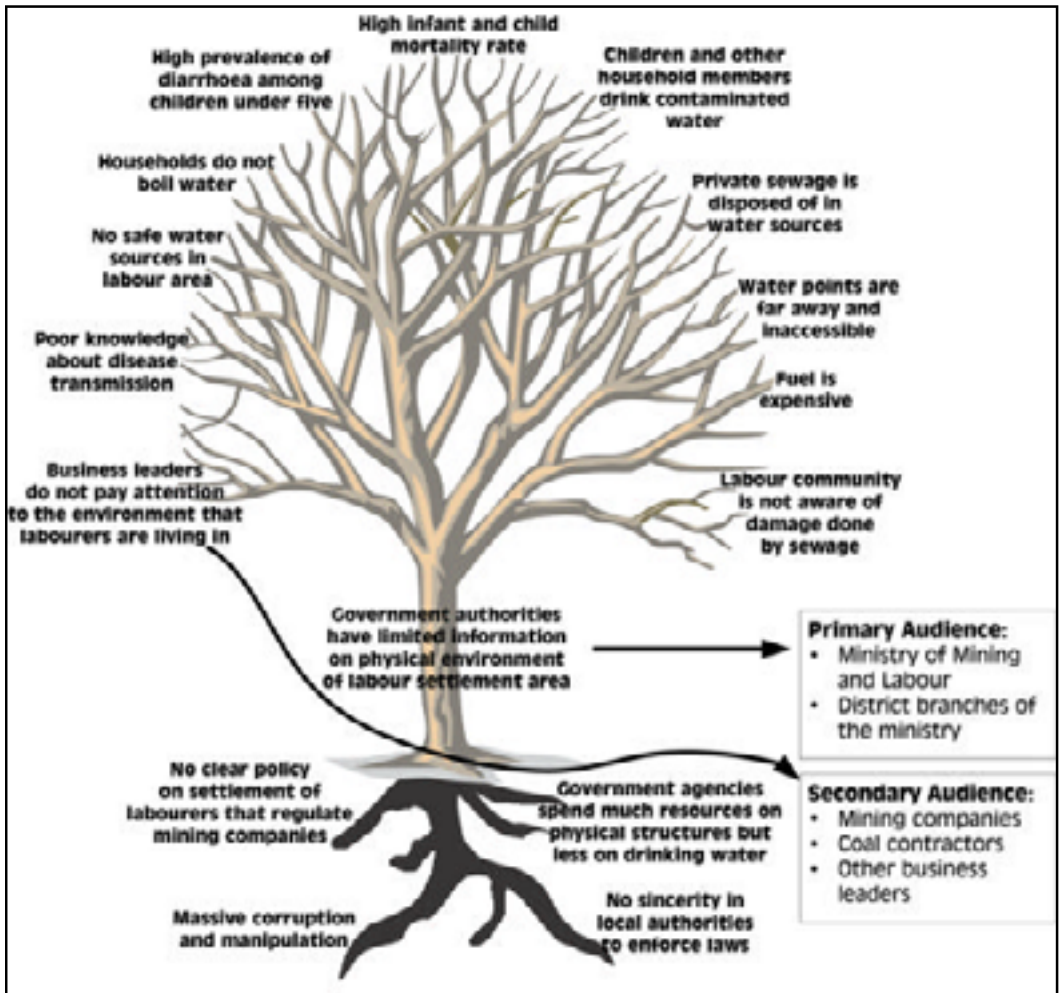


Figure 3.2: An example of target audiences in the Koilapahad case

In other words, an advocacy goal should be able to indicate what will change, who will make such changes, what degree of change is expected, and by when the changes will take place. Different goals can be set for different levels. See the following examples, and Figure 3.3.

Impact goal: The final or ultimate impact goal of an advocacy initiative is not very different from the goal of a normal project. Ultimately, changes in policy should bring positive changes in people’s lives. This could be in terms of reducing poverty, discrimination, increasing access and opportunities, and attaining more rights. If policy changes do not bring any improvement in people’s lives, advocacy for these kinds of changes do not make much sense to poor people. Therefore, the final goal of advocacy must be able to address the core problem that you have identified. An example of the ‘impact goal’ related to the labourers’ area of settlement in Koilapahad could be as follows:

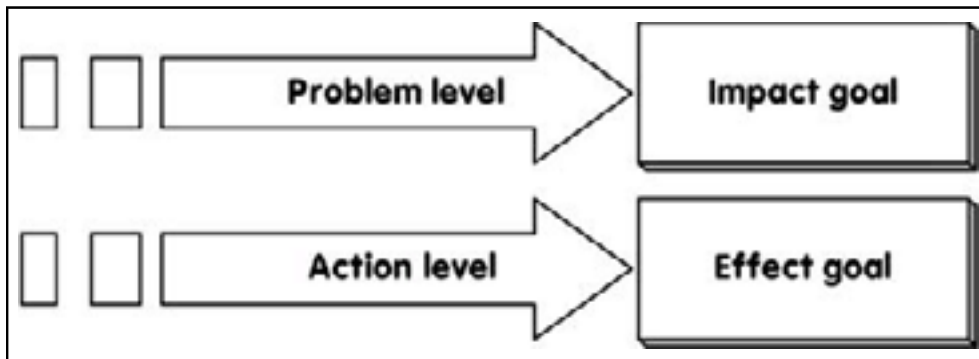


Figure 3.3: Examples of different goals



“By the end of 2006, the infant mortality rate of 20 000 labourers living in Koilapahad decreased by 30% from baseline status.”

Effect goal: Suppose you are asking policy makers to take certain decisions. If they take such decisions, these actions are related to your effect goal. In other words, your voice influenced them very much. These actions may not have generated much impact on people’s lives but they have taken action, as you were demanding. These

actions could be in terms of setting a policy, changing something in the existing policy, changing working styles, changing behaviours, etc. An example of the ‘effect goal’ in relation to the area of labour settlement in Koilapahad could be:

“By the end of 2004, the State Ministry of Labour and Housing passed the labour settlement area management act and enacted it in the Koilapahad labour settlement area.”

You can take the same example of problem analysis as was presented in Chapter 2 in connection with the effort to set goals at different levels. For a clear understanding, the following matrix (Figure 3.4) can be used. You can prepare this kind of matrix in your own context for a real-life advocacy planning effort.

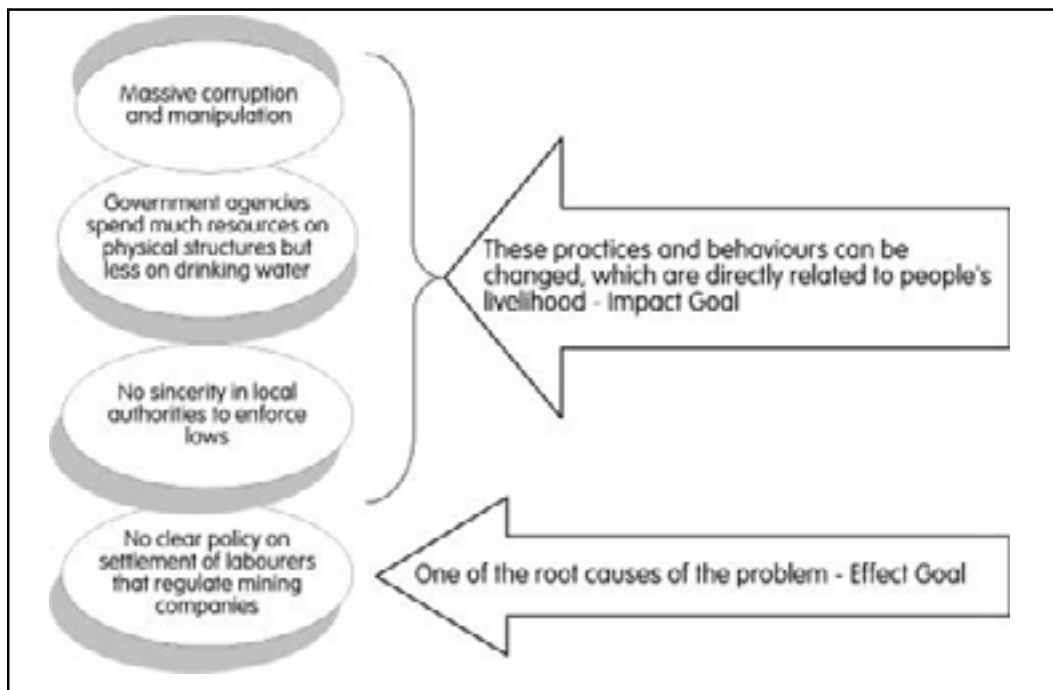


Figure 3.4: Example goal in labour settlement Koilapahad issue

Based on the above facts, you can outline an advocacy strategy for Koilapahad as follows below.

The case of Koilapahad is an example based on information collected during field visits and is presented here only for learning purposes. When you are planning your advocacy initiative, the following table (3.2) might help you to create similar matrixes to plan your strategies.

Identification of Allies and Opponents

In a general sense, your allies are your supporters and your opponents are those people who are against your proposal for policy change. However, not all of your supporters will be interested in working with you. Some people are willing to give support but are not willing to join in actions. But some of the supporters will be interested in joining your advocacy initiative and would also be interested in taking credit for any successes. These latter individuals are the people whom we can really call ‘allies’ in advocacy.

Identification of allies: Advocacy for policy change is not possible through a single individuals or a lone organisation’s effort. Experience from many advocacy initiatives indicates that the joint efforts of several organisations and individuals are more likely to minimise risks, draw the attention of policy makers to key policy issues, and get the expected results. Therefore, it is your

Table 3.2: An example of tabulating different audiences

| Policy issue | Lack of labour settlement management policy for coal mining labourers in Koilapahad. |
|---------------------|--|
| Primary audience | Ministry of Housing and Mining, the State of Meghalaya, India (This is an example for learning purposes. Name of the ministry could be different in a different state/ country). |
| Secondary audience | Business leaders, coal mining contractors, and other contractors in coal business. |
| Impact goal | By the end of 2006, infant mortality rate of 20 000 labourer families living in Koilapahad decreasing by 30% from baseline status. |
| Effect goal | By the end of 2004, State Ministry of Labour and Housing passing labour settlement area management act and enacting it in the Koilapahad labour settlement area. |

challenge to identify those who are interested in working with you for the same purpose. If you are able to work in coalitions, you will have the following advantages:

- Increased resources, experience, credibility and visibility
- Increased likelihood of success
- The opportunity to develop the capacity of less experienced members
- Collective strength for all members
- A feeling of security in case of risk

A coalition of like-minded organisations and individuals can be formed based on the issue and goal you have selected for policy change. After achieving results in a specific issue, such a coalition can be discontinued or can be continued to take up another issue of a similar nature. Recently, the tendency of issue-based coalitions has emerged as a viable way of functioning in different countries. In order to create a coalition, you must not assume that until your initiative came on the scene nothing has happened with regard to the selected issue. There may be others working for the same purpose already. You have to pay attention to the following questions:

- Are other organisations working for the same issue?
- If yes, at what level and in which location are they working? Do coalitions exist already for the same purpose under someone's leadership?
- Are they willing to invite you to be a coalition member?
- Can you contribute to that coalition? Or is it a problem for you to join that coalition?
- What roles do these organisations want to give to you?
- Can you figure out the advantages and disadvantages of joining with them?
- Do other organisations see you as a 'value adding' partner?

If there is already a coalition, you can join with them if the roles given to your organisation are acceptable to you. There is no need to form a new coalition for

the same purpose. Duplication of the coalition is more harmful than not having any coalition for advocacy. If you are forming a new coalition, you have to pay attention to the following questions:

- Are you confident with regard to the credibility of your allies?
- Do they add value to your advocacy mission?
- Do they agree with your value, vision, and mission of advocacy initiatives?
- Are they ready to share the potential risks?
- Do you find acceptable the conditions of resource sharing during advocacy?

Identification of opponents: This is as important as the identification of allies. This is the process of knowing your opponents and analysing the reasons why they are opposing your proposal of policy/practice changes. If you do not know the people and the grounds of opposition to your proposal, your advocacy message may proceed in the wrong direction. Your target audience may not be the correct one. Advocacy carried out in this situation is likely to produce fewer or no successes.

In some cases, your opponents could be your secondary audience for advocacy initiatives. Your ultimate aim should be to change your opponents into supporters. If you cannot get them to support you, at the very least, you should try and change them into a neutral force in terms of their influence in decision making. However, you have to follow fair, just, and intellectual ways of dealing with them. In particular, you should consider the following questions:

- Have you prepared a list of organisations or influential individuals that oppose your proposal?
- Have you investigated the reasons why they oppose your idea?
- What is their logical argument? Did you listen to them and analyse their logic?
- Have you analysed the opinions of opponents?
- Do you know the political or ideological biases of your opponents?
- Have you assessed the power poles of your opponents?

When considering the above questions, the person who is willing to analyse the policy environment must carry out research in an unbiased manner. However small the issue, you need to carry out systematic research on its policy environment. Information in relation to the above questions is not available from formal sources. For example, while talking to someone, you may feel that the person is very supportive but in reality the person may be playing a dual role.

In a real-life situation, you will find people have different interests. You cannot categorise them into only two categories – supporters and opponents. The following power diagram plays a vital role (Figure 3.5).

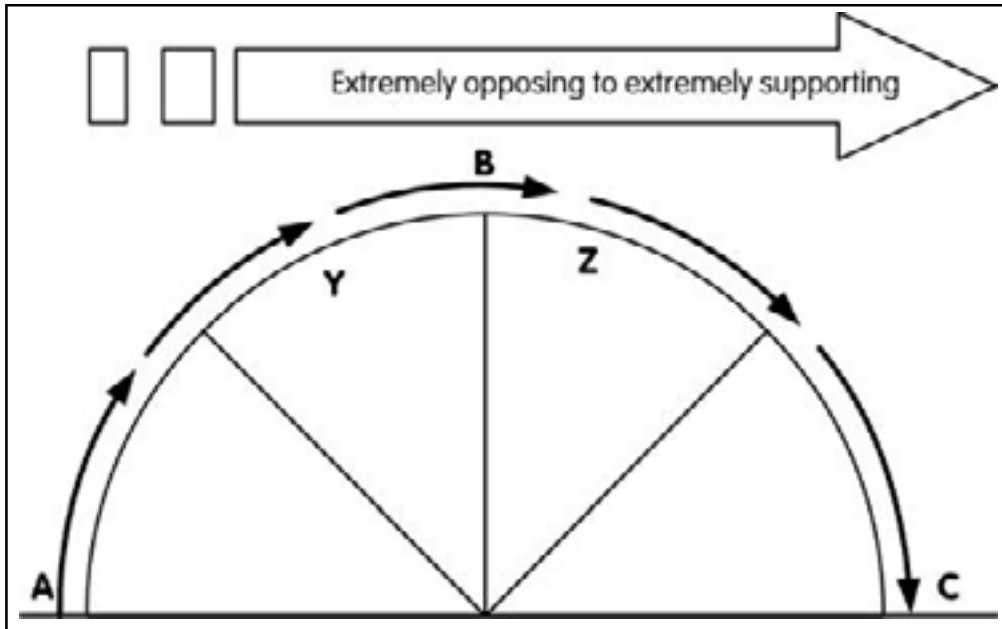


Figure 3.5: Social force analysis

- A** = people in this area are very much opposed to your proposal
- B** = people in this area are completely neutral about your proposal
- C** = people in this area are fully supportive of your proposal
- Y** = they are not active but tend to support the opposition
- Z** = they are not active but tend to favour your proposal

Therefore, in reality, you will get only a few supporters and only a few opponents. The majority of people stay in the Y and Z areas. Sometimes, if you cannot pay proper attention, Z can be converted into Y. Sometimes, if your strategies are strong, Y can be converted into Z or C. The movement of people from one camp to another is a continuous process. Another reality is that the majority of people always remain in Y+Z areas, which are safer zones for them. Therefore, you have to keep these realities in mind while identifying opponents for your advocacy initiative.

Identifying allies and opponents: a case from Nepal

In Nepal, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been managing an integrated poverty alleviation project known as 'Poverty Alleviation Through Social Mobilisation'. The project has introduced, tested, and implemented the concept in selected areas of Nepal since 1992. The main thrusts of the concept are organising people as people's organisations, and creating capital-enhancing skills to generate additional income at the grass roots. This concept is heavily influenced by the rural support programmes which are being implemented in different parts of Pakistan.

From the outset, this project has been working closely with government authorities at different levels – national, district, and village. Through UNDP the project advocated mainstreaming the concept as a national programme for poverty alleviation in Nepal. The project was also able to introduce some new regulations through the concerned authorities of the government. For example, the creation of a central fund for poverty alleviation and the creation of local development boards under the umbrella of district development committees.

Over the years, other donors willing to work for poverty alleviation in Nepal have expressed interest in joining the initiative at different levels. However, this process could not be fully realised. Some of the reasons given (from unauthorised channels) were that donors were not ready to be lost within the huge bureaucracy of UNDP and the government of Nepal.

Consequently, the concept remained largely within UNDP and restricted to some selected areas where the project was implemented for many years. It could not be expanded beyond this to those areas where most of the Nepal's poor are living. Although some US and European donors are also carrying out somewhat similar poverty alleviation programmes through other projects in various districts, correlation and coordination between these various efforts is not as effective as it could be.

Some of the community organisations created by the UNDP project have already amassed a huge amount of group savings. They are also distributing small loans to community members without much complication or demands for collateral. However, few of these groups could be developed further, and they remain as saving and credit organisations that barely cover even a small part of the regional area of focus of this concept. Thus a good concept, practically tested and proven in Nepal, could still not be mainstreamed as a programme for poverty alleviation.

Questions for discussion

- Can you work out who are the potential opponents?
- Which of the agencies mentioned in the case could be potential allies and why?
- What options has UNDP to mainstream the project in this current situation?
- Do you see any opportunity to convert opponents into allies?

Strategic Networking: A Tool to Influence

Decide to network

Use every letter you write, every conversation you have

Every meeting you attend to express your fundamental beliefs and dreams

Affirm to others the vision of the world you want

Network through thought, Network through action

Network through love, Network through the spirit

You are the centre of a network; you are the centre of the world

You are a free immensely powerful source of life and goodness

Affirm it

Spread it

Radiate it

Think day and night about it

And you will see a miracle happen;

The greatness of your own life,

In a world of big powers, media and monopolies

But of four and a half billion individuals

Networking is the new freedom, the new democracy, a new form of happiness.

Robert Muller

Background

The concept of the network came from electronic engineering and started acquiring prominence in the development field during the early 1970s because of an intense realisation among activists about the limitations of individual efforts in dealing with the complex development issues of contemporary society. The experiences of associations across voluntary organisations were not very encouraging, although several long-standing associational ventures were in existence even before the independence of India, such as the Association of Sarva Seva Farm, Bharat Sevak Samaj, and the Indian Cooperative Union. The Indian Adult Education Association, the All India Women's Conference and the YMCA and YWCA are further examples of national and international federations of local-level voluntary organisations in the country, but most of these associations either cater for the need of one issue or one section of the society¹.

¹ This article was written by Mr. Anil Kumar Singh, Voluntary Action Network India (VANI). Mr. Singh has been working in this network as Executive Secretary for more than 15 years. He also presented this paper during the Regional Meeting of the Working Group on 5-7 July 2004 held in Kathmandu. This paper is based on his experiences about networks of civil society organisations in India.

Pre-Independence, associations played a significant role in the freedom movement, but many such associations have not been able to make the kind of impact for which they were formed. Most of them have lost their relevance as associations today. The most prominent reason for their failure is that they could not keep their separate identity as associations. Since they involved themselves in implementing schemes, they created a situation where it was difficult to call them an association. In fact, the role of an association or federation is quite different from that of an organisation.

Needs of associations or federations

Networks, although a late 20th century phenomenon, have become part and parcel of the development scenario all over the world today. The word 'network' is defined as formal and informal institutional framework with loose or structured parameters, with detailed tasks and responsibilities for members, and so on. Networks help to link individuals, groups, and organisations from various walks of life and provide greater strength to people working for a common cause. Networks perform a wide range of functions – from sharing and dissemination of information to acting as a pressure group to influence policies. Members of a network lend valuable support to each other and help members in perspective building or developing innovative approaches to developmental activities. Networking denotes 'action', a process that would involve a number of actors and would create a dynamic relationship between and among the various actors of civil society.

Voluntary organisations want to associate with each other for three main reasons. Firstly, because most organisations work in small, limited, often remote, rural areas at the grassroots level; remaining focused on that particular socio-political context, which leads to feelings of isolation. As social change agents they find themselves more and more isolated and alone in the larger socio-political context.

Secondly, after some years of work at the micro level, in a limited set of villages and slums, many voluntary agencies begin to realise that they cannot move beyond their local and immediate context unless they find ways to influence the macro levels. As this realisation grows, attempts at association or federation start. Associations, through a process of federating, are seen as a way of developing collective strength among voluntary organisations to enable them to influence macro issues, policies, and frameworks.

Thirdly, voluntary organisations come together because of the need for protection. In situations where the state or other vested interests in society have posed a threat or made an attack on voluntary organisations, there has been a simultaneous response to come together, to associate, to federate, in order to protect the space, the role, the legitimacy, and the credibility of the voluntary

organisations. In situations of the tightening of regulatory procedures, harassment, or intimidation by government agencies and law-and-order machinery, or dominant control by donors, many attempts to come together and federate have been made.

Necessity of networks

The traditional form of organising mechanisms neither provide space for individuals to interact freely with other organised entities nor do they allow a free flow of ideas. On the other hand, networks not only provide the opportunity but also encourage their members to interact, exchange information, begin dialogue, and initiate joint action among those who may be placed in different organisational settings. These settings might be voluntary organisations, government or academic institutions, trade unions, political parties, women's organisations, mass movements, or campaigns. Networks also create the possibility of individuals and organisations working on a similar issue, with somewhat different perspectives, to come together, share information, their knowledge base, expertise, skills, resources, and capacities in order to work together on specific issues.

The role of the network is important in fulfilling the needs of voluntary organisations and for creating an environment favourable to working towards the stated objectives, ensuring people's involvement, influencing the policy makers, and also providing a forum for taking up major issues concerning voluntary organisations.

Needs for networking

At the basic level, the purpose is of communication across parties with whom we would like to establish linkages that are necessary to overcome isolation. Networking allows the free flow of experiences and ideas across individuals and groups. Communication in a network can be initiated by anyone and received by anyone. This is the most crucial purpose of a network. The Internet is a classic example for this.

Secondly, solidarity across parties, the sharing of good ideas, and support during a crisis is very important for the existence of any network. Solidarity could be either material or emotional. In solidarity, there is an element of mutual accountability.

The third purpose is of influencing others – the public at large, the political parties, the media, the corporate sector, etc. The shared analysis and common vision among various actors of civil society form the basis of influencing public policy. Public policy in the contemporary context may be made by a local, regional, or national government; or a bilateral agency, a multilateral agency, or other actors such as multi-national companies at the national and global levels.

The fourth purpose is that of mobilising energy and resources, particularly among individuals. New ideas, designs, and perspectives emerge as a result of new ways of relating to each other. Networks emerging around socially difficult issues such as child labour, environment protection, violence against women, or human rights, are able to mobilise individuals, groups, energy, and resources among themselves.

Lastly, networks promote linkage building. Bringing together like-minded individuals, groups, and institutions around a shared development agenda can be facilitated through a network. The purpose is not to coordinate the activities of those individuals or groups but to facilitate through systematic communication, the sharing of information, experience, and ideas.

Networks can be used for variety of purposes. They can be used for achieving short-term as well as long-term goals. Different networks have been used to achieve different goals and different networks may be relevant for different situations. The relevance of a network can be briefly assessed on the following aspects.

- Networks can be used as a vehicle for identifying, articulating, and discussing issues of major concern which are difficult to deal with inside the existing institutional framework.
- Networks can become an alternative arena for the elaboration and sharpening of new ideas, visions, and perspectives. This is largely because new ideas entail a critique of and departure from the established modes. The existing institutional framework tends to curtail such possibilities.
- A network can provide support to grassroots organisations in times of hardship or when faced with retaliation from vested interest groups. A network can be especially useful for organisations working for awareness building, organising people for their rights, and for social change. These types of organisations inevitably invite retaliation from those with vested interests. Networks are also necessary for dealing with such retaliations as a political strategy.
- Networking can become a relevant strategy for resisting the increasingly diminishing democratic space and functioning at various levels in a given local, national, regional, and international situation.
- A network can be utilised to identify, encourage and revitalise individuals and small groups to support the cause of social transformation.
- A network can be used for the exchange of information, experience and vision across the culture, system, countries, and continents.

Besides these, a network could be the most efficient and flexible mechanism for sharing information, experience and ideas across people; from various ideologies, groups, and organisations spread geographically and working on diverse issues.

A network of voluntary organisations and people's organisations can play a major role in the collection and dissemination of information, highlighting people's analysis and viewpoints for building public opinion. Such a network can also lobby and undertake advocacy strategies with policy makers and elected representatives of the people, thereby building solidarity among voluntary organisations and/or people's organisations and preparing a strategy to put pressure on the government. A network's role is crucial because most of the time outside factors play an important part in deciding a country's developmental mode and direction, especially in developing countries.

Types of networks that exist in India

In India, five types of networks of voluntary organisations exist today.

- Issue-based networks
- Area-specific networks
- Ideological networks
- Funder-led or funder-driven networks
- Broad-based networks

Issue-based networks: During the 1970s and 1980s, several issue-based networks emerged to cater to the issue-specific needs of voluntary organisations, such as health, the environment, women, etc. These networks can further be divided into two categories – structured networks and loose networks. Structured networks are very effective in information collection and dissemination, lobbying/advocacy, and in articulating and developing alternative viewpoints; whereas loose networks mainly mobilise people for campaigns and movements. The constraint is that in practice, both the types of networks are antagonistic. Both are critical of each other, despite the fact that both realise each other's strength. Most of the structured networks receive funds from governments and international agencies and have good infrastructure. In contrast to this, loose networks mobilise funds from the public and their member organisations.

Area/region specific networks: The emergence of this type of network is a very recent phenomenon, although regional- state-level federations/associations have existed in some pockets of the country for some time. But after experiencing broad-based national networks such as VANI (Voluntary Action Network India), many regional- and state-level networks were formed by voluntary organisations with similar objectives and structures. This process continues in many parts of the country.

Ideological networks: In India's socio-political arena, certain ideologies play a prominent role, such as Gandhian, Marxist, extreme leftist ideology as taken up by the Naxalities; and religious groups such as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians etc. Different ideologies have tried and are still trying their level best

to make voluntary organisations follow them, or to bring them out on a common platform. There was a time when the Gandhian and Christian groups dominated the voluntary sector, but after the Sampurna Kranti movement led by Shri Jai Prakash Narayan and the failure of the Naxalite movement, a large number of them were attracted to the voluntary sector. Later, many of them formed loose networks to coordinate and organise their activities. These types of networks are not so effective in India because their prime objective is alien to voluntarism. Moreover, they promote a certain ideology, which again is against the very spirit of voluntary action.

Funder-led or funder-driven networks: In India, a large number of international funding agencies are actively working and providing financial assistance to voluntary organisations. Some of them have their offices in India with a number of branch offices. In the past, these agencies, and especially those having offices in India, tried to bring their ‘partners’ onto a common platform to monitor their activities. Likewise, Indian funding agencies (both governmental and non-governmental) also tried to set up nodal agencies to plan, organise, implement, and monitor activities supported by them. These nodal agencies also worked like networks. Experience shows that these types of networks do not last long because voluntary agencies associate themselves with such networks only for financial support. They do not try out any working relationship with them. These types of networks mostly do not like their member organisations to get associated with other funding agencies. Some of them even dictate their terms to the voluntary organisations. It often forces voluntary organisations to ultimately disassociate themselves from them.

Broad-based networks: Broad-based networking emerges out of the realisation that all issues or problems are interrelated and one cannot expect a positive result just by addressing one problem in isolation. VANI is perhaps the only network of this kind, although it does not claim to be so. Being the only such broad-based national network in India, it has members from all regions, states, and ideologies. In the recent past, some of the issue-based national networks also tried to address important issues other than their own, but their constraints such as objectives and structures did not allow them to work on these issues on a sustained basis. But VANI was formed with the objective of addressing all such issues, problems, constraints and so on in a holistic manner. Based on VANI’s experience, many broad-based state-level or regional-level networks were also formed in different parts of the country.

Challenges faced by networks

Based on the experience of the existing networks, it was found that many of them face certain dilemmas or challenges that must be addressed collectively for their continued effectiveness. Some commonly identified dilemmas or challenges are as follows.

Participation versus responsibility: Members are always interested in participating in a network to gain news, opinions, or experiences from others; but they generally hesitate to take any responsibility on behalf of the network. Networks should be a collective process where the members' participation and responsibility go hand-in-hand.

Coordination versus control: There is a very fine balance between coordination and control and the network should not attempt to control its members or their activities. By definition, the members of the network remain autonomous and the network should only ensure the promotion of communication between its members or all those who are directly or indirectly associated with it.

Linkages between the individual and the institution: There are two issues related to this dilemma. The first one is the person as an individual member versus being a member of an institution; and secondly linking a person (i.e., a chief executive) to organisational membership versus involving the whole institution as member organisation. Networks have enormous potential to enlist individuals as members based on their interest, commitment, and resources regarding the issues being addressed. But at the same time, the resources to continue an ongoing campaign also require institutional support and therefore both individuals and institutions are equally important. Ideas, experience, and energy is brought to the network by its individual members; but without the support, backing, and commitment of institutions it is not possible to sustain it; therefore it should be the responsibility of member organisations to involve their institution for the furtherance of the network's objectives. This seems lacking in most networks. Similarly secretariat staff should know the member organisation very well including their staff, capacity, resources, and style of functioning, only then will they be able to relate to the institution.

Information versus action: Information is to be shared in order to promote further action. Networks share information with their members or partners with the expectation that members will act upon that information, but generally find that this does not happen. Members expect that all information will be shared with them but hardly take any initiative to act upon the information shared. Similarly, the network secretariat receives a lot of information from its members without having any idea of what to do with such information. If members find that the secretariat is not using their information after a certain period of time for furthering their objectives, they stop sending information to the secretariat and vice-versa.

Focus versus inclusion: Issue-based networks are generally very focused. But the dilemma arises when they attract only those who are interested in that one particular theme, and work in a manner that excludes all the other organisations, who get left out even though they are influential and are effective

in their advocacy efforts. Broad-based networks, on the other hand, have the inherent characteristic of being able to attract a wide spectrum of members and people having varied interests and issues. However, the members of these networks want the network to address their issue on a priority basis and this results in the network addressing dozens of issues simultaneously and in turn losing its focus. 'Focus versus inclusion' is the strategic choice that every network has to make and has to stand by for its overall purpose.

Process versus structure: Networking is a process as well as an activity for achieving certain goals and therefore the focus should be always on that process. It is a fact that the institutionalisation of networks is needed to sustain this process, but the institution should not become heavier than the process, or this will hinder its functioning. The structure should be geared towards facilitating the networking process. Keeping a balance between the process and the structure is a challenge faced by most of the networks.

Working on an issue versus inclusion of new issues: With the changing socioeconomic and political scenario, new challenges are bound to arise, and if networks want to remain relevant for their partners and members, they need to take up new and emerging issues and challenges and work on them. Similarly, old issues which have become important issues for the sector and became integrated into the functioning of large number of member organisations should be dropped from the network agenda, otherwise it will be difficult to concentrate on the new issues and challenges at hand. The staff of the network secretariat need to develop their capacity for new, emerging issues on a regular basis, or look for other avenues to further their interest, capacity, and skill. Management also faces the dilemma of how to retain staff. The turnover of staff (especially professional) is very high in networks.

Static versus rotating leadership: Generally it is found that in some networks, leaders are static because of their personality, acceptability, and linkages – or perhaps there is no space for others. It has been the case that unless a person dies or vanishes from the scene, no leadership change takes place. This results in members losing interest because they never get the opportunity to lead the network. In the rotating leadership form of network, the leadership keeps changing — which bring freshness, innovation, and dynamism to the networking process. In a healthy network, every member should feel that some day they will get the opportunity to lead the network. However, too frequent changes in leadership also create problems, as continuity may be disrupted.

Solidarity versus programmatic action: In a crisis situation, it has been found that members do not have a problem showing solidarity with the affected person or institution. But if in a crisis a network decides to carry out programmatic action in support of that person, institution, or on the issue,

members tend to back out because of the fear of retaliation affecting their own organisation. This is not an affirmative course of action. The dilemma is that in times of crisis every member expects all network members to stand solidly behind them, but when others face a crisis they themselves back out from addressing the issue or extending solidarity.

Roles of broad-based networks

Experience suggests that all broad-based networks should have certain roles, as follows.

Information collection, analysis, and dissemination: Information sharing should be a two-way process. Networks should keep informing their members and others about various developments within and outside the networks, and members have to send regular information to the network for wider dissemination. Timely dissemination of information among the members and across the state is very important. Networks need to work as a data bank with broad information about the sector in that region. Access to the right kind of information has to be developed. Research and analytical capability and writing skills have to be acquired for proper needs-based and relevant documentation. There should also be access to electronic information such as the use of the Internet, email and so on. Networks should make their members aware of the new information technology for speedy and effective information collection and dissemination. There should be more open, clear, and friendly sharing at the state-, inter-state and national levels.

Perspective building: Perspective building on the issues the networks are willing to take up should be carried out among members and others working on that issue. All kinds of options should be invited and a consensus on the issue and its framing should be achieved through debate and discussion. Regular and frequent regional meetings with VOs on the other regional issues need to be organised for perspective building. Analysis of the trends, policies, programmes, and assertive public positions on the issues have to be studied. The issues at hand should be publicised by building programmes on participation in the political process; and its impact, good governance, the need for collective and collaborative actions etc., has to be organised.

Alliance and partnership building: Networks should work towards enhancing interactions between various actors in civil society, such as the corporate and cooperative sectors, the media, donors, the bureaucracy, the intelligentsia, political parties etc., for broad alliance and partnership building. Here it is essential to differentiate between 'partnership' and 'relationship'. Whereas a partnership involves a definite give-and-take process with the partners coming together with a formed objective to achieve in collaboration; a relationship may or may not involve the element of mutual benefit. So in a partnership, either

bilateral or multilateral, the concerned partners have to be convinced about their benefits as a result of the partnership. When making alliances with any of these actors, networks have to look for issues in their areas of interest.

Policy analysis and influencing: Acquiring the skill of policy analysis is a prerequisite for influencing policy at the macro level. Networks need to have information about the different policies concerning their area of interest and involvement. The information has to be analysed in the perspective of the poor, downtrodden, and disadvantaged sections of society. The gap between policy formulation and implementation and alternative suggestions has to be assessed. Organisations continue working at the micro level for years but do not succeed in achieving major success because the policies at the macro level remain the same. Unless these policies are influenced, the desired results cannot be achieved. The network is the representative of the voluntary organisations, and as such, has to make a sustained effort to influence public policies. For this, networks need to have a sound foundation of knowledge in the existing laws and regulations affecting the sector.

Advocacy: Advocacy is a mode of social action to influence those who hold governmental, political, and economic power. It is, "...a tool, based on organised efforts and actions, that use, the instruments of democracy to strengthen democratic processes; such tools include election-related work, lobbying, mass mobilisation, forms of civil disobedience, negotiations and bargaining, and court actions." (David Cohen, AI). Access to information is a prerequisite for any advocacy initiative. Information about public policies – who makes them, how are they made, how to analyse and influence a public policy, how to lobby policy makers to obtain the desired changes – are all areas which lead to effective advocacy work. Knowledge about the laws, rules, and regulations governing the voluntary sector is also important. Networks need to build their capacity in these areas to gain maximum impact.

Capacity building: For effective advocacy, the capacity building of partners and associates, especially of those who are affected or going to be the affected party, is a necessary prerequisite. In the Indian subcontinent, the traditional belief is that people should lead their own affairs and therefore those fighting for their rights should lead the campaign. Voluntary agencies are mere catalysts and their role should be restricted only to educating, sensitising, motivating, and widening the perspectives and building the capacity of the people so that they can fight for their rights themselves. This is called the 'southern perspective' of advocacy. However, in today's fast-changing socioeconomic and political climate, networks risk losing their foresight and becoming irrelevant if they do not continuously build their own and their partners' capacity. Today the capacity building of a network's partners, associates, and members should form an integral part of its programmes and activities.

Interaction with the media: To build a positive image of the voluntary sector in the public at large, it is essential to develop a better understanding of the different types of media and the way they function. A collaborative relationship and regular interaction with the media has to be developed by networks to project the right image of the sector in order to educate, sensitise, and mobilise the public at large and to create public opinion and influence policy makers to achieve the broader objectives of the advocacy effort. The media is a very important element in the development process because of its wide coverage and vast reach. Networks should make optimum and appropriate use of the local and national print media as well as the electronic media as per the demands of the situation. Access to electronic media needs to be enhanced and information has to be disseminated to the media in the desired form.

Membership management: Any network gains its strength from its members. The challenge facing networks is to involve its members in its activities to the maximum extent possible. Often members' involvement remains at the level of participation, limited to attending meetings and seminars, seeking other's experiences, but not sharing one's own. Members need to contribute both energy and resources to sustain a network. There has to be a sense of responsibility among its members towards fulfilling the objectives of the network of which they form a part. As all the members of the network have their own agenda, objectives, issues, and area of operation, they are left with very little time and energy for the network. Networks have to develop a strategy to make their members active and contribute their best, without controlling or interfering in their individual activities. Leadership in a network is often collective, and clashes can occur due to different individuals' different ways of functioning. Networks need to work on strategies for conflict management, for nurturing leadership, and for cadre building.

Alternative funding: Networking is a process, and networks require a procedure to work. Often, due to lack of resources, networks take up a particular project for which funds are available for its sustenance and remain as implementers of that project and thereby become similar to any other organisation. Due to lack of resources, the network fails to maintain its procedures. Therefore alternative funding sources are required, as very few existing donors give funds for networks and networking. Even if some funds are available, the implications of being a funder-driven project cannot be ruled out. So for a network to sustain itself, and to be free from financial uncertainties, it is essential to look for alternative methods of fundraising.

The issues discussed above are some suggestions based on the experience of several voluntary organisations. Finally, an important aspect of networking is its dynamism. A network that is not dynamic ends up becoming an organisation

without much visibility. Also in this regard, it is important to underscore that for a network to be strong and visible, its members must be active in making it so.

The worksheet summarises all the steps and tips presented in this chapter. You can carry out a group exercise using this matrix with the same or a different case study in your training programme.

Summary worksheet for outlining an advocacy strategy

| Steps | Questions to explore | Your note |
|---------------------------------|--|-----------|
| 1. Selection of policy issue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which policy issue is critical to your problem? Which could be your best option? • How many people will gain benefits if you become successful in policy change? Is this a winnable option? • Do you see any opportunity for working together with other organisations? • What is the gravity of the potential risks? Can your organisation effectively advocate on this issue? | |
| 2. Selection of target audience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the potential target audience? • Who has the authority to make changes and who would be the primary audience? • Who has the greatest influence on decisions? – Secondary audience • Which primary and secondary audience will you select in this issue? | |
| 3. Setting of a policy goal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your policy goal based on the SMART principles of goal setting? • Can you articulate your impact goal? • Can you articulate the effect goal? | |
| 4. Identification of allies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are those who are already working on the issue? Do coalitions exist already or are you going to establish a new coalition? • How can you contribute if others have already started the effort? • What roles do these organisations want you to play in the coalition? • Do others perceive you positively as a 'value-adding' organisation? | |
| 5. Identification of opponents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the opponents? Are there any organisations or individuals that oppose your proposal of policy change? • Have you listened to the opinions of your opponents? • What can you do to convert your opponents into supporters? • What is a network and networking? What could be the roles and responsibilities of networks and other associated challenges? | |