

# 3

## Selection of Issues

### Issues for Advocacy

Advocacy is relatively a new concept practiced in the development arena. As part of the rights-based approach, it functions as a tool to protect individual and group rights which are denied by some other actors. Good governance is closely linked to the rights-based approach to development, which argues that development is a process of realising fundamental human rights and freedom<sup>3</sup>. In the absence of these elements in the community, there is a need for advocacy to attain these in a respectful manner.

The first and most crucial step of each advocacy activity is to identify the contextual theme and scale of the issue to be addressed. In connection with the rights-based approach, the difference between problems and causes is important. Understanding of the terms 'problems', 'causes', and 'issues' is often difficult. Using the tree as a symbol (Figure 3.1) one can distinguish between the openly visible problems (e.g. the branches of the tree) and the root cause of such problems (the rotten roots of the tree). The roots of the problem tree are all issues for advocacy.

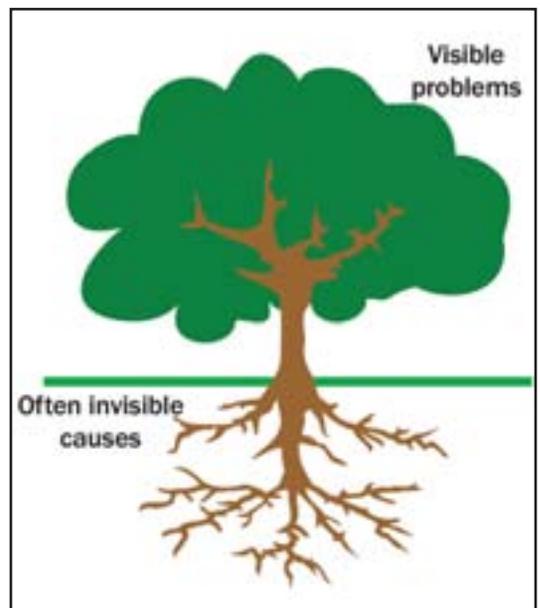


Figure 3.1: Problem Tree

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Philippines (2002) *Rights Based Approach to Development Programming, Training Manual*. Available at [www.unphilippines.org](http://www.unphilippines.org)

It is clear that like the roots of a tree, not all root causes are equal in size and not all have the same importance. Therefore, it is necessary to balance the gravity of the selected cause and the capability of the initiator to bring changes<sup>4</sup>. A small CBO can identify a genuine root cause, but addressing it could be beyond its capacity. In such a case, advocacy cannot be effective in bringing changes to the communities. If a particular agency does not have the capability to deal with a bigger root cause, addressing several smaller causes linked to a big cause is an option so that the bigger root causes of problems can be weakened step by step<sup>5</sup>.

Service delivery projects often focus more on mitigating problems (symptoms) by aiming to provide relief for those who are suffering at present. Advocacy tries to address the root causes of poverty and marginalisation, like access to rights and services and not poverty by itself. There are many cases where development agents identify and start advocacy for change for all root causes at the same time and fail because the consequent drastic changes in the society are not manageable<sup>6</sup>.

## Types and Forms of Advocacy

Advocacy is raising voices on behalf of the voiceless. If human rights and the minimum life standard of the voiceless are denied, there should be someone to speak against the elite and authorities which are responsible for maintaining the equitable livelihoods of the people as citizens. Human rights and livelihood standards are vague terms. There may be several issues of human rights and livelihoods if we dig out the roots of the denial. Some of the issues are connected to the attitude and behaviour of duty bearers, some issues are connected to existing policies and other issues are connected with the bigger political system. People normally understand 'advocacy' as the process of raising voices on all issues. Therefore, there is sometimes confusion and misunderstanding about what kind of, and what level of, advocacy we are doing. This chapter presents some clarifications based on practical examples from various organisations located in the Himalayan region and working for capacity building in advocacy.

Three main forms of advocacy are differentiated: people-centered advocacy, policy advocacy, and political advocacy. Their characteristics are summarised in Figure 3.2.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.advocacy.org/communicate/>

<sup>5</sup> Keeling, S.J. (ed.) (2001) *Pro-poor Governance Assessment, Nepal*: pp. 197-199. Kathmandu: Enabling State Programme

<sup>6</sup> Tondon, R. (2002) *Voluntary Action, Civil Society and the State*, pp. 49-50. New Delhi: Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)

Parameter	People-Centred Advocacy	Policy Advocacy	Political Advocacy
Key actors	Affected people themselves	Social activists, NGOs and government agencies	Political parties, social leaders and ideologists
Core objective	Changing behaviours and attitudes of duty bearers	Changing policies, laws and systems of instruction for public affairs	Macro-political system, checks and balance of power and mode of representation
Focus areas	Grassroots institutions and stakeholders responsible for public affairs	Policy making institutions at the macro level – ministries, parliament, others	Overall political system at the macro level
Approach	Self-starting, people-centred, and demonstration on a small scale	Mass awareness, lobbying, and campaigning	Mass mobilisation based on party interests and ideology
Kind of advocacy	'Advocacy of the people'	'Advocacy with the people'	'Advocacy for the people'
Process	Bottom-up	Sometimes bottom-up and sometimes top-down	Mostly top-down
Position of activists	They remain within communities	They remain close to communities but not within them	They remain far from communities but try to represent community interests
Mode of communication	Person to person – close interaction by informal media and interactions in smaller groups	Activists to individuals by using mass media and interaction programmes	Politicians to people, mostly by using mass media
Level of participation	Inclusive, effective and meaningful	Sometimes superficial and sometimes inclusive	Mostly superficial and top-down

**Figure 3.2: Different Forms of Advocacy**

## People-centred advocacy

Advocacy, as it is generally understood, is to amplify the voice for a definite purpose of change in policies and behaviour. From this point of view, advocacy has been understood as a systematic process of influencing decision makers at any level. However, who is speaking and whose voice has been heard and whose voice is not heard are often not clear to many advocates. Likewise, there may be good policies at different levels. Deep-rooted social value systems are the main causes of creating and sustaining inequality and injustice in society, and they cannot be changed by changes in policies alone. People should focus on the root

causes along with achieving expected policy change. Therefore, people-centred advocacy is a process of changing behaviour, attitudes, and society's value system and making the nearest stakeholders accountable<sup>7</sup>.

The ideal spirit of democracy is the main driving force for people-centred advocacy. It is a socio-political process that enables and empowers marginalised people to speak for the protection of their rights. After all, people-centred advocacy is, 'of the people, by the people and for the people'. This approach of advocacy acknowledges the critical role of citizens in safeguarding human rights – including social and political rights. The practical behaviour of power holders says that there should be a partnership between the state and citizens in public affairs. Power brokers in society are still reluctant to keep people – regardless of class and caste – on the apex of the state system. People-centred advocacy ensues that there is no demarcation between the state and citizens because the state mechanism is virtually made and owned by the citizens. John Samuel points out that people-centred advocacy is about mobilising the politics of the people to ensure that the politics of the state is accountable, transparent, ethical, and democratic<sup>8</sup>.

### *Features of people-centred advocacy*

People-centred advocacy is a concept which focuses on changes in policies, including policy enforcement, and aims to make a difference in the real-life situation of the affected communities. This is more focused advocacy, and often starts from the grassroots. Normally, people-centred advocacy is initiated by those who are the sufferers. If they need supporters and facilitators, either they have to develop such skills from the community itself or get support from those activists who have organic relations with the real-life situation of the poor. Social mobilisation processes successfully practised in Pakistan believe that such activists must be promoted from the same communities. There may be several contextual features for this kind of advocacy. Some are presented below.

**Maintaining a clear ethical ground:** People-centred advocacy strongly believes in the 'self starting approach' of social transformation. The integrity and legitimacy of advocates provides ethical grounds for speaking up about certain issues. John Samuel has precisely pointed out in his work that people-centred advocacy seeks to bridge the gap between words and actions, theory and practice, and rhetoric and real-life experience. This advocacy approach challenges you – unless you challenge and change yourself, you cannot change others. Advocacy is an effective means of safeguarding rights and achieving good governance at all levels, but unjust means can never be used for just ends. In other words, if people want social justice, the processes applied when demanding justice must

<sup>7</sup> CII (2005) *Advocacy and Networking Manual*, p.3. Antigonish (NS, Canada): Coady International Institute

<sup>8</sup> Samuel, J. (2007) 'Public Advocacy and People-centred Advocacy: Mobilising for Social Change'. In *Development in Practice*. 17(4/5), 615-621

be just, ethical, and legitimate. If these parameters are not working because of unjust power relations, you need to start advocacy to change such culture before going into the real cause.

**Following the rights-based approach to development:** People should be regarded as active creators of opportunity for their right to live with dignity. The civil society sector at present is increasingly recognising that the ‘project approach’ to development is not going to solve the problem of deep-rooted poverty. Greater democracy, transparency, and accountability are likely to achieve long-term sustainable change for poor people<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, people should get legitimate rights to demand distributive justice in social affairs. Responsible stakeholders set for public affairs must recognise that the citizens are the owners of the state mechanism. At the end of all public work, the state mechanism must be accountable to citizens. People-centred advocacy intends to mobilise people and civil society against violations of human rights and an increasing trend of inequality at the community level because of accountability being ignored. The integration of advocacy with rural development programmes is a process of awakening people on their rights, which promotes the sustainable transformation of the society<sup>10</sup>. The rights-based approach clears the ground to initiate the process of bottom-up change. This approach argues that changes in macro-level policies can make a big difference; but that all policies made by macro-level initiatives, taken mostly by politicians, might not be in the interests of the people. Therefore, a rights-based approach adds the value of people’s meaningful participation to the decision-making processes.

**Value-driven approach:** The values of social justice and human rights are the core driving forces of people-centred advocacy. These values have to be reflected from households to macro-level organisations. People-centred advocacy strongly focuses on those individuals who are seeking to change such values. They need to demonstrate the same values in their individual and household-level actions. Then they will get many followers from the communities and the agenda can be moved towards the upper arena of social transformation – district-level, state-level, or national-level forums. This is people-centred advocacy in the true sense. This situation is beyond the idea of ‘advocating on behalf of the poor’ for pro-poor policies and behaviours, which is often carried out in the name of policy advocacy.

**Effective and meaningful participation:** Participation is the starting point of people-centred advocacy. It is not only important to have communication for consensus building or making a bigger voice for the same issue, but it is also

<sup>9</sup> Chapman, J.; Wameyo, A. (2001) *Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study*. London: Action Aid, available at [www.actionaid.org.uk](http://www.actionaid.org.uk)

<sup>10</sup> Khan, O. A. (2001) *Reflections on Strategies for Empowerment in Voices of the Marginalized*. Islamabad (Pakistan): Sungi Development Foundation

important to share power, freedom, legitimacy, and accountability. When people are ready to share these individual strengths, new heights of synergy emerge to take up the selected issue in public discourse. Olga Gladkikh<sup>11</sup> has explained that politics, power, and people are the key elements of advocacy, but power is the connector of the other two. It is also important to understand ‘power with’, ‘power within’, and ‘power to’ while analysing the importance of participation in people-centred advocacy.

**Power within:** This is an inner power of a human being, normally gained from socialisation processes. Sometimes one’s own inner potential is not known in the absence of sharing and socialising in social issues. Self respect, self esteem, individual commitment, looking for self-worth, and willingness to contribute for others are the driving forces to generate ‘power within’ at the individual level. When an individual shares his/her feelings with like-minded individuals or groups, the inner potential starts coming out and becomes converted into ‘power with’ for effective action.

**Power with:** This is the collective power of people when they agree to come together for common tasks. A composite form of power gained from a shared vision and mission gives a synergy effect in terms of influencing and making arguments more logical. The concept of ‘power with’ is different to the multiplication and building of individual talents. Synergetic strength is the product coming out of mutual support of many talents together.

**Power to:** This is a collective force gained by the people, which can be used for a productive action in terms of policy influence, influence to change behaviours, and other changes in communities. For example, a piece of metal has the potential power of communication if it is used wisely. There are similar other potential elements – plastic, colours, and so on – having the potential for communication. Let us say that the synergetic effect of all potentials is the production of a computer. Now the computer is in a position of ‘power to’ which can make a tremendous change in modes of communication.

In the sense of people-centred advocacy, we can gain a situation of ‘power to’ from the means of effective participation of all strata of the population. In present day politics, democracy at a superficial level is not very effective in generating or regenerating a dignified livelihood for marginalised people. An ultimate aim of advocacy is to contribute to achieving an inclusive democracy at all levels<sup>12</sup> so that all strata of the population can enjoy their rights. Achieving this situation is only possible by gaining ‘power to’ in communities.

<sup>11</sup> Gladkikh, O. (2002) *Democracy and Active Citizen Engagement: Best Practices in Advocacy and Networking*. Antigonish (NS Canada): St. Francis Xavier University

<sup>12</sup> Gurung, H. (2002) ‘Sociological Issues in Governance’. In, *Achieving Sustainable Development is Essentially a Task of Transforming Governance*. Kathmandu: Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)

**Power over:** This is a negative connotation of power. A few elite people are ruling the majority of the common citizens based on the principle of 'power over' because these elite are more powerful than other people. The power is used for ruling others to gaining individual advantage. The Rana regime of Nepal (1845-1950) exercised this principle very much on a national level. There are still many more such elite groups who are using 'power over' in local governance. People-centred advocacy is mainly initiated to replace such situations.

**Practical communication strategies:** Advocacy is a set of actions for communication from one party to another in a chain, which, at the end of the day, promotes social actions. John Samuel says that community, collectivism, and communication are closely interwoven phenomena. There are four important 'Cs' within the communication framework. All of these elements must produce positive results for moving the mission continuously in a successful direction. The four Cs are (1) communication to convince, (2) convince to change, (3) change to commit, and (4) commit to convert to the cause.

Communication in relation to advocacy is not only sharing knowledge and skills using certain language. A whole range of communication tools, techniques, and skills have to be considered. Selection of the message and the media used to get the message across is very important. For example, important types of media particularly useful for people-centred advocacy could be the creative use of symbols, picture, leaflets, and drama. Advocacy initiators must be able to learn from people by sharing experiences. Advocates can inspire people and should be inspired by the people. Finally, communication strategies designed for advocacy need to be consistent, continuous, creative, compelling, and convincing.

## **Policy Advocacy**

Policies are those norms applicable in the society which are obligatory to all individuals. Some such policies are made by the state using people's sovereignty. State-made policies are seen as forms of law, rules, regulations, and directives in standard printed form. Some other policies are made by the communities themselves on an understanding based on tradition, culture, religious beliefs and ongoing social norms. Some of these remain in written form but the majority of these forms of policies remain in unwritten form. Therefore, when we talk about 'policies in advocacy', we should not consider only those policies enacted by the state machinery. Community-made and unwritten norms are also equally important for human beings living in a community.

Policy advocacy can be defined as an action for changing policies. The root of the action is the voice from the people. The people who play leading roles in policy advocacy are those who know the present situation best and see benefits

after getting changes in such policies. The voice makers prepare logical actions supported by facts and figures of the present scenario and a vision for the future. The general trend in society is that not all individual citizens can pay attention to policy advocacy. Some people are very busy in their own business. However, there are some people in all communities who are constantly paying attention to policies and analyse the cost and benefits of existing policies. These people keep on raising their voices for part and partial change of such policies, be they government-made or community-made policies.

Broadly, there are three basic objectives of policy advocacy. These are: (a) formulating a new policy if there is a policy vacuum; (b) amendment of an existing policy; and (c) enforcement of existing good policy. People-centred advocacy is also done for the same objectives. There is a significant overlap between people-centred and policy advocacy. However, the scale of the advocacy and the gravity of the issues are different.

## **Features of policy advocacy**

Advocates at different levels carry out policy advocacy. This lies between people-centred advocacy and political advocacy. Issues start from the bottom as people-centred advocacy. In people-centred advocacy, issues related to policy enforcement and behavioural changes get resolved on the ground because there are already good policies in the country. If there are problems in policies for some issues, policy advocacy is required at the upper levels for changing such policies. If policy formulation or change is not possible within the existing system, then the issue becomes the agenda for political advocacy for a radical change in the political system itself. In this way, policy advocacy is the link between people-centred advocacy and political advocacy.

In people-centred advocacy, all affected people should be aware and take part. In political advocacy, all citizens should be mobilised (both those heavily affected and partly affected). The people's movement of Nepal in April 2006 is a recent example. Neither of these conditions applies to policy advocacy. Some advocates and social workers, who remain far from the people affected, can also carry out continuous policy advocacy. For example, some environmentalists can advocate for policy change in the utilisation of natural resources. If policy change takes place, its benefits go to many other people who may not know about the advocacy.

How to analyse the prevailing policy environment is described in Chapter 3 as the first step of the advocacy planning framework.

**Connection with livelihoods:** There is a saying that the, “poor are not poor by virtue but they are made poor”. In some situations it is possible that some local elite members and leaders might have made other people poor with the help of certain laws and regulations. From this perspective, policies can be the root causes of poverty and deprivation. Poverty alleviation without focusing on its root cause becomes a treatment for the symptoms. This is one of the factors that weakens poverty alleviation programmes in different countries. Changes in policies which were made to protect the vested interests of certain groups indirectly help to reduce poverty.

**Use of information technology:** A group leading policy advocacy can use information technology (IT) for exchanging news and views among the advocates. The media plays a vital role in educating people about the issue and expected changes in policies. Cross-border alliances and networking are made possible by IT tools and techniques because there is no need for the frequent physical presence of the advocates for policy advocacy. Petitions, public consciousness, and pressure from long distance communication (through email and web sites) are all effective means of carrying out present day advocacy efforts.

## **Political Advocacy**

There are many struggles going on in the world including big political changes in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the countries of the former Soviet Union. Many mountain areas, including those in Nepal, North East India, Bhutan, Bangladesh (the Chittagong Hill Tracts), Myanmar, and so on are facing conflict, sometimes armed and violent. When there is a discussion about advocacy initiatives, social activists like to get in touch with these bigger issues and ongoing conflicts. Sometimes, a big debate takes place to determine whether or not these political issues can be addressed by advocacy efforts. If advocacy is deemed to be effective in addressing these issues of conflict, the debate is what kind of advocacy should be carried out and how such advocacy efforts are different from other advocacy efforts which address policy and behavioural change. Therefore, it is essential to make a demarcation between different types of advocacy.

Political advocacy is the process of making logical arguments against the existing political system by mobilising the like-minded population of the country. For example, a popular peoples’ movement under the leadership of Gandhi in India was also political advocacy because Gandhi and his followers wanted to overthrow the ruling British and establish a people’s democracy in India. In the beginning, this argument was not legitimate under the rules and regulations adapted by the British rulers, but later the movement gained legitimacy from the majority of the Indian citizens. In this sense, all democratic movements are also part of advocacy,

but they are completely different to the people-centric advocacy normally carried out for policy and behavioural change within the broader political framework.

The basic objective of political advocacy is to get a revised political system as per the interest of the majority population of the country. Political advocacy believes in systemic change in government formulation processes and in the management of public affairs rather than changing operational policies. For example, most political advocacy is directed towards constitutional change. If the constitution is changed, all the other operational laws are also changed afterwards automatically and with little effort. For example, since 1993 the Maoist movement in Nepal has been opposing the constitutional framework. Those people who believe in the Maoist movement are not able to follow the provisions envisioned by the constitution of the kingdom of Nepal 1990. This group mainly wants to make a new constitution and political system. There are several other groups in Nepal who also want to bring some changes to the existing constitution, although not drastic changes. Who is right and who is wrong is another dimension of the debate, but all of them are engaged in political advocacy.

### *Features of political advocacy*

Primarily, politicians are the main actors for political advocacy. In a system where there is already a party political system, they can better mobilise mass support through their multi-tier structures. But in a society with no political parties, mobilising mass support for effective political advocacy is far more difficult. For example, there was drastic political change in Nepal in 1990 as a result of a long process of political advocacy carried out by democrats since 1960. It took a long time to mobilise people to reinstall democracy because there was an autocratic government system without the existence of political parties between 1960 and 1990.

Political and people-centred advocacy are both articulations of the people for change. The difference lies in the gravity and scope of the change. The issues actually start from people-centred advocacy, get the attention of the masses, and end with political advocacy. Some of the related areas are described in the following.

**Macro and micro linkages:** Political advocacy generally starts from the macro level politicians and roots down to the grassroots. If the politicians are not able to deepen their idea of political reformation and take it down to the people, they generally fail and advocacy cannot be converted into an appealing movement. When the idea of reformation from the macro level goes down to the grassroots, it becomes a part of people-centred advocacy. The People's Movement of Nepal

(April 2006) is a recent example. Politicians working at the macro level had been advocating for two years (2004 and 2005) to return sovereignty to the people, which had been taken over by the king. However, it took more than two years to take the issue down to the people. Finally, the people were able to take their sovereignty back from the king by a popular people's movement (taking place from 6 to 19 April 2006).

**Connection with livelihoods:** At present, social and political leaders working at the micro level are made, trusted, and credited by the people. Otherwise no one, except some intellectuals, can be a leader of a society. Such leaders, if they are true, conceived the idea for change by observing and experiencing the suffering of the people at the grassroots. Today's suffering may be converted into an agenda for political change after say ten years. The main point is that the agenda of political advocacy must be well connected with people's lives. The people-centred advocacy of today can be converted into bigger political advocacy tomorrow.

**Comparative outlook:** The explosion of communication and transportation networks has brought members of the world community closer to each other. Now a small child can compare the social, political, and economic context of one country to that in many other countries of the world with the help of such networks. When there was no opportunity to compare one reality with others, the system in a particular country was generally acceptable to the people. Most agendas for political advocacy are derived from comparative knowledge and the experiences of people at different levels. For example, a Pakistani child may wonder about the possibility of having an open democracy in Pakistan, as in India. Similarly, a Nepali child can wonder if it is necessary for the king to be an active actor in politics. Finally, such thinking can be converted into political advocacy with the help of committed leaders and supporters.

**Global arrangements:** In the 21st century, no one is enjoying rights and following duties in isolation. There are many influences from the global community and various undertakings. There are also some instruments in use at the global level, which act as the ideal which should be worked towards. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international treaties and conventions are typical examples. If some of the conditions, positions, and rights guaranteed by international tools are not applied to a particular community or country, people feel depressed and want to find out the causes of this lack, which is directly or indirectly connected with political systems. An advocacy process can be started to change policies. When there are a number of unfavourable policies, then all issues come together as a political advocacy for systemic change. This situation becomes the starting point of political advocacy.

## Summary Sheet for ‘Selection of Issues’

Concepts	Some of the questions dealt with in this chapter
Issues for advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the issues for advocacy?</li> <li>• Where are the issues for building the foundations of the advocacy effort?</li> <li>• What is the difference between problems and issues?</li> <li>• How are problems and issues related?</li> </ul>
Nature of issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are all issues of a similar nature and gravity?</li> <li>• What are the factors to consider while selecting issues?</li> <li>• How many issues can be selected for advocacy?</li> <li>• How should the issues be prioritised?</li> </ul>
Types of advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we categorise advocacy?</li> <li>• How do we determine the level of advocacy?</li> <li>• How do we relate advocacy with the problem tree?</li> <li>• On which category should civil society organisations focus?</li> </ul>
People-centred advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the features of this category of advocacy?</li> <li>• What level of issues does this category deal with?</li> <li>• Who are the key stakeholders for this advocacy?</li> <li>• What are the focus areas for this type of advocacy?</li> </ul>
Policy advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the differences between people-centred and policy advocacy?</li> <li>• How do you determine the policy issue?</li> <li>• Who are the actors for this type of advocacy?</li> <li>• What are the expected outcomes of this advocacy?</li> </ul>
Political advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do we need political advocacy?</li> <li>• Who are the key actors for this type of advocacy?</li> <li>• How do you relate this advocacy with policy changes?</li> <li>• What are the differences between policy change and system change?</li> <li>• How do you differentiate between system change, policy change, and behavioural change?</li> </ul>