

4

Advocacy Strategies

This chapter presents a simple guideline for outlining advocacy strategies, the second step in the advocacy initiative planning framework. This step includes selection of the issue, selection of the target audience, setting a policy goal, and identification of allies and opponents. The chapter highlights the way in which the 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 from which mountain people are suffering.

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 on selected issues (Figure 4.1).

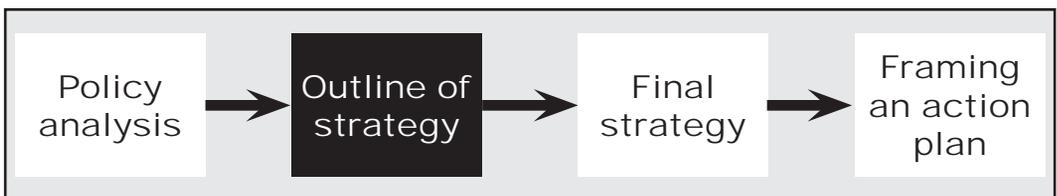


Figure 4.1: Stage two in the horizontal framework

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.
- 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.

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

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 to which a policy issue influences the problem. Therefore you will be able to select those issues which contribute most directly to the problems at hand.

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 could be felt by more than 40,000 labourers in a sustainable manner. But if 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, people could lose hope and give up the struggle if a frank estimation of success is not made. 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 or identified in the community. An analysis of the situation based on the above-mentioned criteria can be presented in matrix form (Table 4.1). The area of labour settlement in Koilapahad is taken as the context for this example. 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 person or group of people who are responsible for bringing about 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 with 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

Table 4.1: 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 depends entirely 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 there is no monitoring mechanism.
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.	There is a 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.

imposed on Community Forest User Groupss in Nepal. People believe that parliamentarians are directly responsible for the formation of rules and regulations. However, the concerned secretariats are the ones primarily 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 majority in parliament.



Learning about different experiences of advocacy by interacting with resource persons at Thane, Mumbai, India

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. In this case, you can consider the personal assistant to be a member of the secondary audience.

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 one issue. Therefore you should focus on those people with the greatest ability to influence your primary audience. Figure 4.2 gives an example of target audiences for the Koilapahad case.

Primary audience

Remember that audiences are always people, not institutions. The primary audience consists of 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.

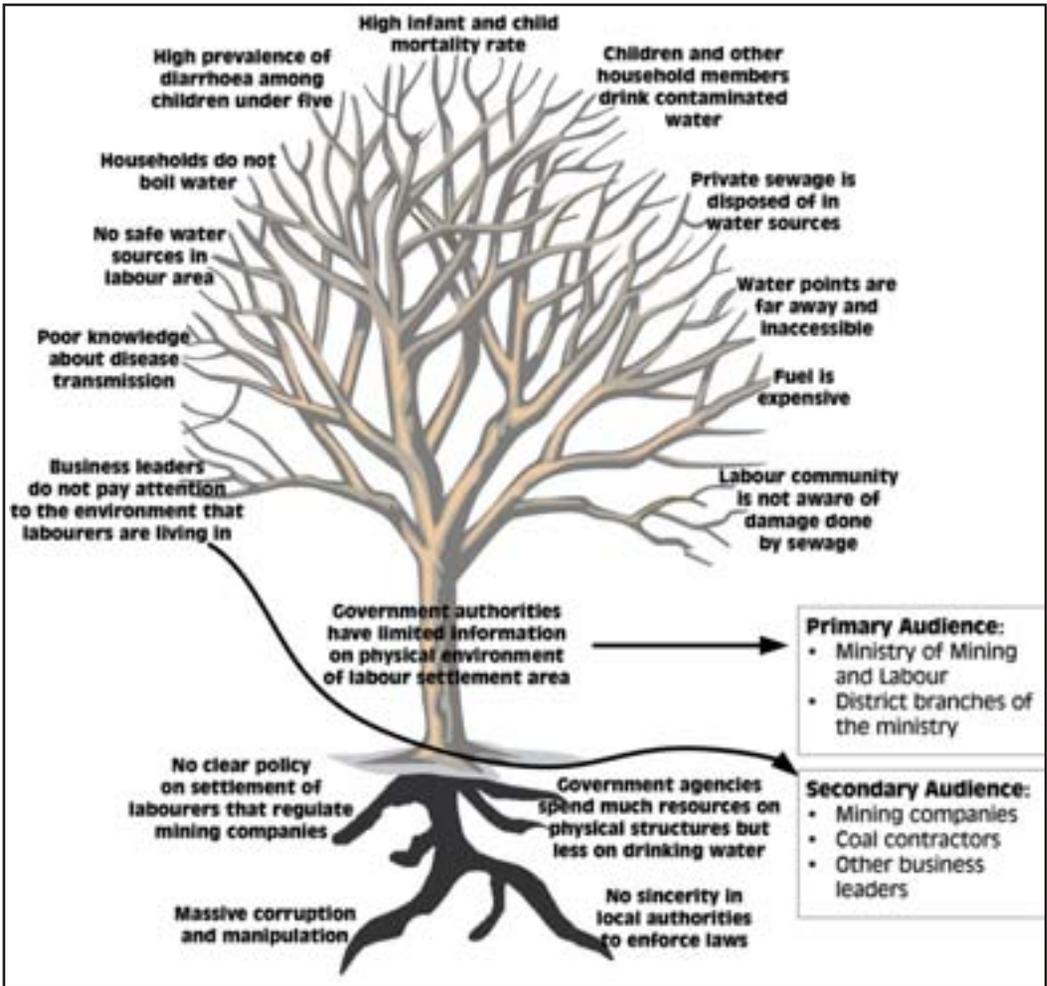


Figure 4.2: An example of target audiences in the Koilapahad case

Selection of Policy Goal

Selecting goals at different levels before starting any intervention is a way of doing things systematically. 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

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 4.3.

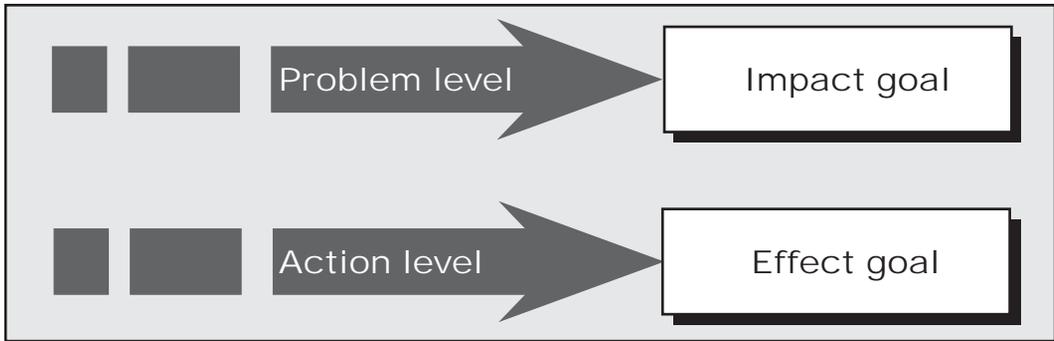


Figure 4.3: Examples of different goals

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:

“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 it is presented in Chapter 2 in connection with the effort to set goals at different levels. For a clear understanding, the matrix shown in Figure 4.4 can be used. You can prepare this kind of matrix in your own context for a real-life advocacy planning effort.

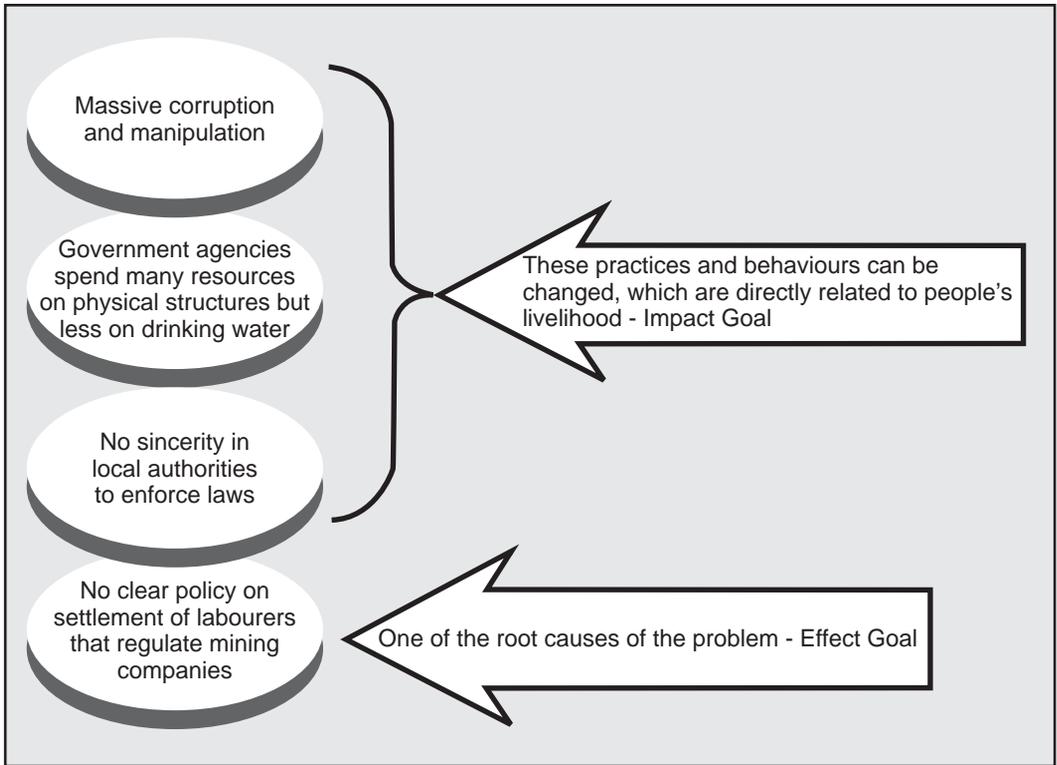


Figure 4.4: Examples of goals in labour settlement Koilapahad issue

Based on the above facts, you can outline an advocacy strategy for Koilapahad as 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, Table 4.2 might help you to create similar matrixes to plan your strategies.

Table 4.2: An example of tabulating different audiences	
Policy issue	Lack of labour settlement management policy for coal mining labourers in Koilapahad
Primary audience	Minister 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.
Effect goal	By the end of 2004, infant mortality rate of 20,000 labourer families living in Koilapahad decreasing by 30% from baseline status.
Impact goal	By the end of 2007, State Ministry of Labour and Housing passing labour settlement area management act and enacting it in the Koilapahad labour settlement area.

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 individuals are the people whom we can call 'allies' in advocacy.

Identification of allies: Advocacy for policy change is not possible through a single individual or the effort of one organisation. 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 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:

- Possibility of sharing resources, experience, credibility and visibility
- Increasing the 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 a coalition already, you can join with it 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 a 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 the conditions of resource sharing during advocacy acceptable?

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. For a big 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 power diagram shown in Figure 4.5 plays a vital role.

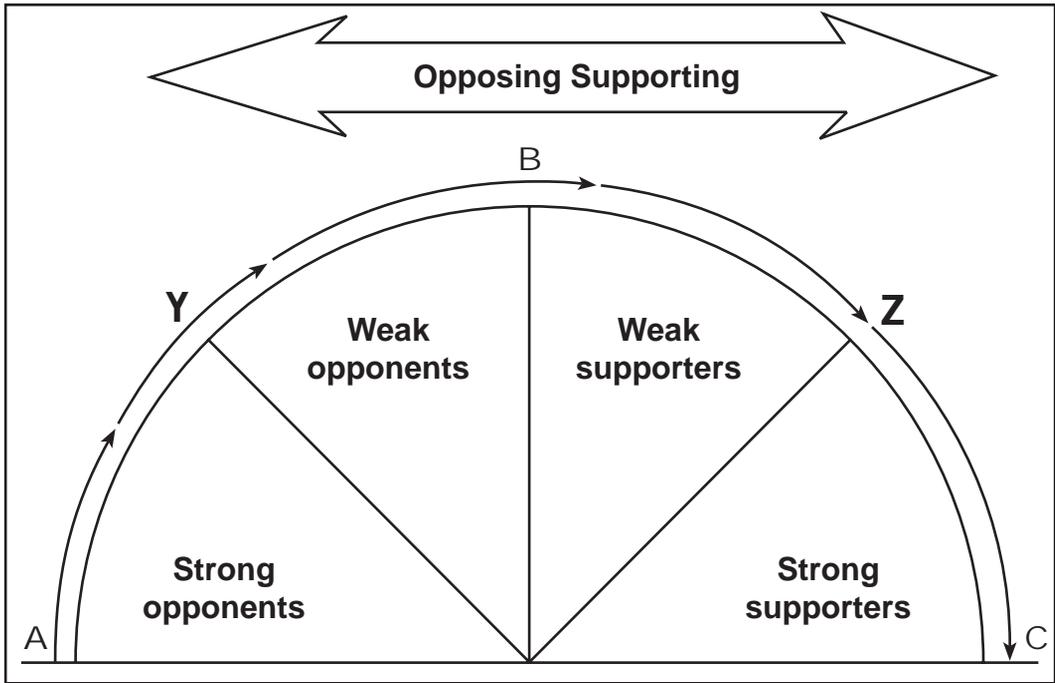


Figure 4.5: Social force analysis

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.

While identifying and treating opponents, please consider the following points:

- In advocacy no opponent should be treated as the ‘enemy’. They are simply people who have different opinions about an issue.
- Social advocates should not label individuals as ‘opponents’ based only on assumption or without consultation. You need to talk to them individually and get their agreement to keep and treat them as opponents. For example, if you label a weak supporter as an opponent, the person will be a strong opponent.

- You need to pay full attention to your opponent in terms of their capacity building. Some people may be opposing you because they do not know or understand the issue, and the expected results of advocacy, properly.
- Be advised that advocacy cannot be successful if the majority of the population is not in favour of the idea that you are advocating for.

Networking

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 concept and development is illustrated through the example of India. The experiences of associations across voluntary organisations were not very encouraging, although several long-standing associational ventures were in existence in India even before independence such as the Association of Sarva Seva Farm, Bharat Sevak Samaj, and the Indian Cooperative Union. The Indian Adult Education Association, and the All India Women’s Conference 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 society¹³.

These 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 Networks

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 a formal or 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

¹³ This paragraph was written by Mr. Anil Kumar Singh, Voluntary Action Network India (VANI). Mr. Singh worked in this network as Executive Secretary for more than 15 years. He presented this paper based on his experiences with networks of civil society organisations in India during the Regional Meeting of the Working Group on 5-7 July 2004 held in Kathmandu.

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 have been made to come together and federate.

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 and 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.

Purpose of Networking

At the basic level, the purpose of networking 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.

The second purpose is solidarity across parties, the sharing of good ideas, and support during a crisis. These are 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 of networking is to influence others – the public at large, the political parties, the media, the corporate sector and so on. 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 a 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 increasing diminishing of 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 can be the most efficient and flexible mechanism for sharing information, experience and ideas among 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.

Categories of Networks

Development professionals have categorised networks differently. While looking at networks from an advocacy perspective, the following two types of networks are very important.

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, and women. These networks can be divided further into two categories – structured networks and loose networks. Structured networks are very effective in information collection and dissemination, lobbying and advocacy, and articulating and developing alternative viewpoints; whereas loose networks mainly mobilise people for campaigns and movements. In practice, however, the two types of networks tend to be antagonistic. They are critical of each other, despite realising each other's strength. Most of the structured networks receive funds from governments and international agencies and have a good infrastructure, whereas loose networks mobilise funds from the public and their member organisations.

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. Voluntary Action Network India (VANI) is perhaps the only such broad-based national network in India although it does not claim to be so. 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. 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 of Networks

The experience of existing networks shows that many face dilemmas or challenges that must be addressed collectively for their continued effectiveness. Some of the 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 a 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 individuals and institutions are equally important.

Information versus action: Information has 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 take little 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. 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.

Existing issues versus 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, issues that have already become important issues for the sector and integrated into the functioning of a 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 to deal with 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: In some networks leaders tend to be static because of their personality, acceptability, and linkages – or perhaps there is no space for others. Sometimes no leadership change takes place unless a person dies or vanishes from the scene. 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 brings 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: Members generally do not have a problem showing solidarity with an affected person or institution in a crisis situation. But if in a crisis a network decides to carry out programmatic action in support of the person or institution affected, 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.

Summary Sheet for 'Advocacy Strategies'

Concepts	Some of the questions dealt with in this chapter
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?