

Chapter 2

Concept, Theory and Practice of Advocacy

Although this meeting was designed as a planning workshop for a programme to build the capacity of CBOs in advocacy strategies, the context itself was possibly new to many participants. Therefore, the workshop opened with a session in which resource persons established advocacy's conceptual background. The theoretical discussions, theoretical tips coming from different sessions, and theoretical summaries from different presentations are all presented in this chapter.

Definitions

The Advocacy institute (AI) is a global advocacy organisation. AI's working definition of advocacy is as follows.

"Advocacy is the pursuit of influencing outcomes – including policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions – that directly affect people's lives."

In addition, AI also says,

"Advocacy is taking charge of your priorities – what is important to you – by persuading others, or pressuring them, to change their behaviour or rules. What is important is to do it democratically."

David Cohen, Co-Director, Advocacy Institute, (AI)

"I honestly believe that the only way we can change anything is to model right now – today – the family and society we want to see in the future. It's not just about defeating evil. It's about embodying what we want to see."

Makani Themba-Nixon, Programme Executive Director, AI

Considering the diversity of advocacy experiences and perspectives in different contexts, AI recognises that there is no single correct definition or approach to advocacy. Therefore, advocacy practitioners should respect and share the various methodologies that promoters use in their own contexts.

Advocacy is perceived as an effective measure for achieving good governance at all levels. The concept of power decentralisation has identified certain ideal conditions that can be applied as indicators to assess the status of good governance in a society. These conditions explain the parameters – a set of proper norms – that public and private institutions should follow. Ordinary people as citizens of a country deserve the right to review whether or not institutions and individuals are following these norms. Respecting this right is a major emphasis of a rights-based approach to development. If people determine that public and private institutions are not following such parameters they can speak out in a professional manner. In other words, they can begin an advocacy initiative. In this way, good governance, rights-based approaches, and advocacy initiatives are related to one another. The following definitions prepared by different promoters provide additional insights for conceptual clarity in advocacy.

“Public advocacy is a planned and organised set of actions to effectively influence public policies and to have them implemented in a way that would empower the marginalised. In a liberal democratic culture, it uses the instruments of democracy and adopts non-violent and constitutional means.”

This definition indicates that the National Centre for Advocacy Studies (NCAS) has identified a clear linkage between advocacy and a political system. NCAS argues that an advocacy initiative must be in the centre of bridging, resisting, engaging, and strategising. Finally, the initiative must be able to create a force that will promote poor-friendly policies by using the space available within the system.

“Advocacy is the deliberate process of influencing those who make policy decisions.”

(CARE)

CARE also defines the key terminologies used in the definition, as follows.

Advocacy is a deliberate process: it must be clear whom you are trying to influence and what policies you wish to change.

Advocacy is:

- An action with a determined vision of ‘what should be’ based on human rights and a constitutional framework.
- A process of raising the voice of the poor and marginalised to attain a fair and civilised society.
- A process of forwarding logical arguments aimed at influencing the attitude of public position holders to enact and implement laws and public policies so that today’s assumptions can be translated into a future reality.
- A political process, although it remains above party politics and political polarisation based on ideology.
- An action that focuses primarily on public and social policies to have these policies implemented in their true spirit.

- A process that aims to promote social justice and human rights within communities.
- A collective effort to make government institutions accountable and transparent.

Finally, advocacy is a strategy to address, at the policy level, the causes of poverty and discrimination. Advocacy therefore should aim to influence the decisions of policy-makers and stakeholders at all levels through clear and compelling messages.

There are three focus areas of advocacy strategies: (a) creating policies; (b) reforming policies; and (c) ensuring that policies are implemented properly. The assumption is that addressing the policy causes of poverty and discrimination by influencing the decisions of policy makers increases people's livelihood opportunities. Advocacy strategies can make sustainable impacts on large populations.

Diverse Concepts of Advocacy

The various definitions of advocacy clearly tell us that the concept is very flexible and contextual. To date, the concepts and theories generated by different institutions and individuals are generic. Local community contexts can even change the theories. What follows are some generic concepts practised in different contexts.

The Concept of Capacity Building

While some people clearly ignore the rights of others, their intentions may not always be bad. Certain traditions and cultural practices may have been ongoing in their particular community for many years, and they do not dare to break these. In such cases, capacity building of privileged groups in modern technological innovation, constitutional changes within the country, and an expected democratic culture could provide sufficient exposure to enable certain changes to be integrated into traditional culture. Many professionals seem reluctant to support this notion of advocacy, however. They argue that capacity building programmes – particularly for privileged groups – have no part in advocacy. This would merely be granting an additional privilege, enabling them to enjoy their life with additional exposure to national and international trends.

While this argument was not seriously discussed during the regional planning workshop, several examples were presented of advocacy programmes working through capacity building. For example, Mr. Binoy Acharya working with UNNATI – Organisation for Development Education in Gujarat, India, sincerely believes in this advocacy concept. He argues, "If you are able to get policy changes in favour of the poor, why it is necessary to term it advocacy? You can use language more acceptable to your opponents. You can call it a capacity building programme".

In 1997 and 1998, when advocacy initiatives were just beginning in Nepal, many foresters working under the government were afraid of the term 'advocacy', and some individuals promoting advocacy initiatives in the forestry sector at that time decided to talk about 'policy feedback' instead of 'advocacy'. Similar examples can be found in

Nepal in relation to women's empowerment programmes in remote areas. Women were not being given enough authority in decision-making processes because many men were not aware of the equal rights of women provisioned in the Local Self Governance Act of Nepal. A programme called 'Participation of Women for their Real Representation' (POWER) implemented by CARE International showed how awareness has changed the situation of women in some mountain areas of Nepal.

Negotiation in Advocacy

Advocacy is a struggle to achieve favourable changes in policy or practices. It is carried out in a systematic way based on a set vision and a mission. Opposing groups or individuals need not agree completely with the demands forwarded by advocacy initiators. The negotiation theory of advocacy holds that both the advocacy initiators and the opposing group should believe there is scope for negotiation on some points. According to this theory, the ultimate aim of an advocacy initiative is to achieve negotiation on certain points. As far as possible, both sides should look for a 'win-win' situation to have an ideal negotiation. Advocacy initiatives based on this theory often remain professional and friendly. All advocates, both leaders and workers, follow a clear discipline set down by the initiators. If either side sees no room for negotiation, they jointly conclude the process and the situation remains the same.

The regional planning workshop reviewed this concept and its practices in the HKH countries. Participants did not unanimously agree. Some participants shared their experiences of failing to achieve favourable results from negotiation processes. Government institutions in particular are often reluctant to develop a 'win-win' negotiation. Uneven behaviour by the opponent group can sometimes limit the scope for negotiation. Other participants argued that CBOs face certain limitations in going beyond the negotiation concept since all registered organisations, both NGOs and CBOs, are committed to remain within the broad framework of their governments.

Confrontational Concept for Advocacy

Another school of thought within advocacy is that since some strata of the population have a comfortable life at the cost of many others, advocacy cannot only be carried out from the 'soft' corner. While advocacy could begin from here, it moves on when there appears to be no possibility of achieving favourable change from mutual dialogue. Advocates believing in this approach argue that people who have been enjoying privileges for a long time do not easily give them up. Such individuals often express their desire to be non-confrontational while their actual intention is not to negotiate about their personal privileges. Therefore, advocacy activists often say that confrontation with privileged groups is unavoidable in real advocacy in favour of poor people, and that this holds true for the mountain poor as well.

This region has several examples of confrontations. During the bonded labour movement in Nepal (1998 to 1999), confrontation was not intended in the beginning, but some confrontations did occur among landlords, government institutions, support

agencies, and bonded labourers themselves. Mr. Vivem Pandit cites several similar examples in his book *Fearless Mind* in relation to advocacy initiatives taking place in the Thane area of Mumbai, India. Similarly, *Dhan Khed* presents other examples of unintended confrontations. Organisations such as Backward Society Education (BASE) in Nepal, Navasarjan in Gujarat India, and Laxmi Ashram in Uttaranchal, India argue that some confrontations are unavoidable in the advocacy process.

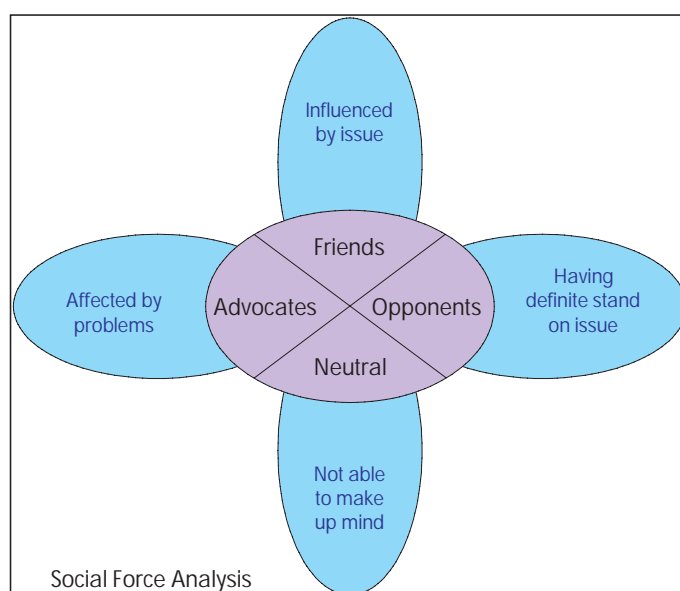
Reviewing the examples, confrontation can be categorised into different levels: (a) extreme level of confrontation; (b) minor confrontation; and (c) minimum confrontation – designed simply to attract the opponents’ attention. Therefore, determining to what level of confrontation CBOs should go is another important subject to consider during the advocacy process.

Selected Advocacy Tools

Historically, public advocacy initiatives have used many tools to mobilise public support and influence policy makers. Common tools include the mass media, the judiciary, lobbying, raising questions in parliament, coalitions with like-minded groups, door-to-door awareness campaigns, mass mobilisation for demonstrations, and civil disobedience. These tools all involve specific processes, conditions of use, and priority in selection. Advocacy initiators must be familiar with these various requirements (Pandit 2001). Advocacy is a struggle for social justice that is not easily attainable. Society contains a diverse range of vested interests. When an advocacy initiative speaks out against certain vested interests, it faces possible attacks from the opposition through different channels. Therefore, advocacy initiatives demand conventional as well as innovative tools and skills. This report assumes that these conventional tools are commonly available in already published literature. In addition to these conventional tools. There are some pioneering tools tested in the South Asian countries, as follows below.

Social Force Analysis

For every issue, social force can be grouped into three categories: supporting, opposing, and neutral. Supporting and opposing forces generally remain the same but most people remain neutral. Ideally, having an issue settled requires that the neutral force be converted into a supporting force. However, this is a time-consuming process, and the neutral force sometimes joins with the opposition. This depends upon the issue and the activities taken up as advocacy initiatives. Therefore,



the movement of social force should be monitored, whether it is tending towards the supportive or the opposing side. This can be done through seminars, public hearings, and informal discussions with different categories of people.

Budget Analysis

The conceptual evolution of budget analysis began in Gujarat, India in 1985 and since then the concept has become popular all over the country. People in many other Indian states are now interested in analysing the government's budget to assist concerned people in raising their voice to direct the budgetary mechanism towards benefiting the poor. On one hand, activists must realise that the two main elements in a democratic society that empower people are 1) information related to finance, and 2) information related to the laws of the country. Detailed information about these two important elements that show the trend of budget allocation over a period of four to five years gives the power of argument to the poor if their interests and needs have been consistently neglected.

Moreover, it must be recognised that the government is the biggest donor in all countries, if the volume of the annual expenditure of the government is analysed properly. Often people and development workers in the mountain areas do not realise this. Budget analysis provides the real picture and proves that the government is the biggest development player in every country. Since government revenues are largely raised from the population, the people have a clear right to influence government spending.

For example, in India, 92% of expenditure comes from internal revenue. In other words, 92% of the total money that the Government of India spends annually is collected from the citizens of India itself. Only 8% of the total budget comes from outside as grants and loans. This is a good indicator for the national economy. The fact that the Indian people are the major contributors to the government's budget clearly gives them the right to know how and where this money is being spent. Careful analysis of the union budget will make this clear.

Media Survey

While the media clearly plays a vital role in advocacy, it is also true that advocates must be selective about using the media. Therefore, an advocacy group or advocacy initiators should monitor media highlights regularly to make sure that their issue or issues are being treated properly. For this purpose, advocates can categorise selected issues under different themes and conduct regular media surveys. For example, an institution can conduct a regular survey of six leading newspapers on health issues. The advocates will then know how many newspapers are highlighting health issues and what priority these issues are being accorded. The data from such a survey can be analysed and shared with a wider audience. NCAS conducts this kind of survey regularly and periodically publishes the results for the benefit of advocacy initiators throughout India.

Mutual Sharing

Advocacy is never a single activity for a community. Advocacy moves along a spiralling continuum, shifting from one issue to another. For example, the bonded labour issue in Nepal has already shifted to the issue of settling the recently freed bonded labourers. Therefore, updates are needed about what is taking place on which issue and where. Such updates enrich professional skills and provide encouragement. The main purpose of the update is mutual sharing and learning.



Sharing experiences and ideas

In South Asia, NCAS publishes updates about advocacy initiatives taking place all over India. Sometimes the updates also highlight tips for success and reasons for failure. These tips are very important for advocacy initiators of any area. However, access to this kind of information is very limited in mountain areas. This is one reason why a mountain-specific advocacy centre is a demand raised in different parts of the HKH.

Some Techniques for Advocacy

Tools and techniques are interrelated, and sometimes overlap. 'Tools' are broader and more neutral methods for advocacy than 'techniques'. Advocates select an appropriate tool in a particular context. 'Techniques' are the skills of using selected tools appropriately according to the particular situation and context. Some advocacy techniques shared during the planning workshop and other interactions are documented below.

Working with Political Parties

Political parties provide access to decision makers. In a democratic country, a political party will declare its manifesto before each election. Skilful advocates have their issues included in party manifestos. If major political parties include the issue in their manifesto in a positive manner, the advocacy campaign is more likely to succeed when the party takes control. However, advocates should not act as party workers of one political party. Rather, they must be able to interact with all major political parties, and have their advocacy agendas included in their manifestos. After the election, the issue that was included in the party manifesto becomes a major entry point for undertaking dialogue with the politicians of that particular party.

Political parties can be used after elections as well. Advocates can lobby parliamentarians to convince them about their issues. If the parliamentarians are convinced, they can raise the issue in the parliament or in local-level legislative assemblies. When many members of the legislature speak out in law-making forums, executives find it difficult to resist the pressure exerted on behalf of the poor. However, to maintain a neutral position and convince politicians of more than one party is a challenging task for advocates.

A relevant example can be found in the case of a company from Finland becoming involved with the forestry sector in Nepal. Without any consultation with local people, the Government of Nepal decided to lease a large forest area to a company based in Finland. Working through the Federation of Community Forestry User Groups of Nepal (FECOFUN), the collective voice of the forest users was raised and succeeded in having this decision changed. This case is known as the 'Finland Case' in the history of advocacy in Nepal. FECOFUN convinced several legislators from different political parties to raise the issue in parliament. This was one of many examples of high-level advocacy carried out by FECOFUN that was shared during the planning workshop.

International Coalitions

International forums are good places in which to build public opinion in favour of certain advocacy issues. As far as possible, advocates – particularly initiators – should try to participate in international forums to highlight their issues. Examples of such fora could be regional networks, professional organisations working at the international level, and international workshops such as this one. If someone is participating in these forums on behalf of the government, it presents an even better opportunity to create moral pressure. Decision makers find it difficult to resist opinions presented at international fora. However, such presentations must be very polite, systematic, professional and must work according to protocol.



Planning strategies

For example, an NGO representative from the Chittagong Hill Tracts shared the experience of advocacy work to promote the rights of indigenous people. When discussing this during a workshop organised in Meghalaya, India, in September 2003, workshop participants could do nothing but speak in favour of the issue. This event boosted the morale of the advocates, who had been working very hard

and for a long period of time in the Hill Tracts. A similar experience of working to reverse a government decision to take 40% of the revenue from community forestry in Nepal was also shared at the workshop. The forum gave sympathy and encouragement to those who are taking up this issue as an ongoing advocacy initiative.

Attention to Opponent's Agenda

Sometimes the opponent group is also looking for an easy outcome. In those cases, encouraging opponents to forward their agenda first maintains their dignity. Many experienced professionals suggest agreeing to the opponent's agenda first and forwarding the advocacy agenda later. Such give and take can be useful. If they agree to your agenda, you can then agree to some aspects of theirs. Advocacy also involves the process of building smooth relations with responsible stakeholders. Both sides need the opportunity to understand each other and the limitations of the situation. If advocates agree to their opponent's agenda, moral pressure is then created for the opponents to agree to something as well. This could be better than nothing. At the same time, advocates must be careful about tactics that opponents use to twist and dilute the agendas of the people.

