Chapter 3
Strategic Planning for Advocacy

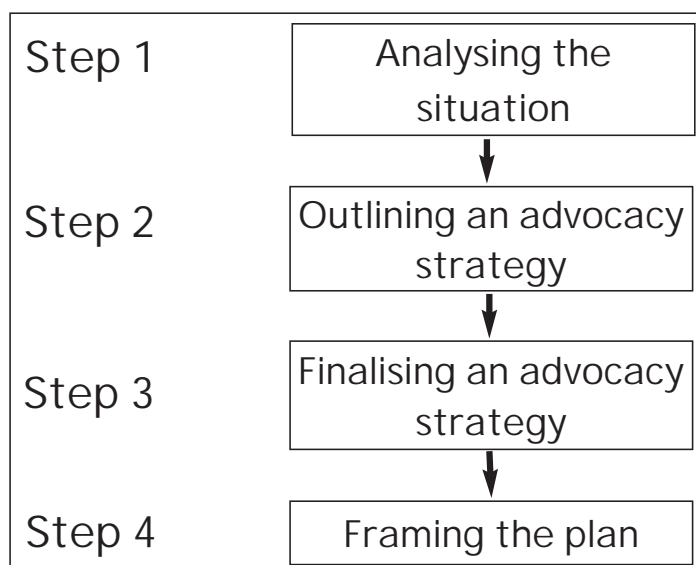Advocacy to change policies and practices is currently called 'people-centred advocacy.' The basic principle is that those people who are directly or indirectly affected by the policies and practices in question are the real advocates. Great intellectual capacity and exposure are not necessary to raise issues that require advocacy. In this chapter, the people who are affected by the issues that are the subject of the advocacy effort are called 'advocates'. Community-based institutions can guide them to present their case in a systematic and professional manner. To take this process forward, a certain amount of analysis is a pre-requisite. The workshop discussions focused on this analysis, which can be carried out through participatory processes. The analysis required for advocacy planning, as discussed in the planning workshop, is presented in this chapter.

Visualisation of a Planning Framework

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what a campaign is, what it does, and why it is focusing on the selected issue. All these elements cannot remain in isolation. Inter-connectivity and sequential flows are very important in planning. One such planning framework can be seen here.

Further steps could be as follows:

- Develop clarity of goals and objectives: the goal and objectives of the overall advocacy campaign, including the bottom line for negotiation, should be clear to all members.

Step 1	Analysing the situation
Step 2	Outlining an advocacy strategy
Step 3	Finalising an advocacy strategy
Step 4	Framing the plan

Planning framework

- Collect the necessary information for analysis: in particular, information about the opponents – what they do, what they don't do, what they like, what they don't like, and so on – is important at this stage.
- Know key actors: all actors may not be visible. The key formal as well as informal actors on behalf of opponents as well as on behalf of advocates should be known.
- Identify the hitting points: advocates should be able to hit those points where the opponents are vulnerable, and so must know their weaknesses.
- Choose the appropriate time: advocates need to choose the most appropriate time for the best results from their actions. For example, some actions might be effective before elections, while others could be effective immediately following elections.
- Identify informal decision makers: decision makers often act based on ideas and information provided by the people around them. These idea banks may be invisible. Therefore, looking for others who can influence the opponents is a good strategy.

There are several sub-steps under each of the above. The sub-steps can be determined based on the local context and gravity of the selected issue. However, the following questions are good reminders for developing an advocacy strategy.

- What do we want? (strategic objectives)
- Who can deliver it? (identify key players)
- What does the audience wants to hear? (message development)
- Who do they want to hear it from? (expert/ leader)
- How can we get them to listen to the poor? (means of delivery)
- What kinds of resources are required? (manpower, financial, knowledge)
- What resources do we have at present? (resources)
- What do we need to develop further? (gaps in resources)
- How do we begin the process? (first effort)
- How do we evaluate whether is working or not? (evaluation)
- How do we modify the strategy if it is not working? (strategic planning)

Analysis of Systems and Structures

All NGOs and CBOs are considered to be effective agents of change. All of these organisations, with different mandates and agendas, work to achieve favourable change. Nevertheless, despite ongoing efforts, the reality is that the desired social change has not yet come about. Many reasons may be given for this lack of success in bringing expected and hoped-for change. The path to achieving change may be different or more difficult than expected. It may be that the system around the communities is corrupt.

The existing social structure and systems require close attention, and must be understood and analysed before interactions can be begun with responsible individuals working within the system. Without proper analysis, advocates can use only the most direct routes to reach to the targeted goal of policy change. In fact, there may be many ways to reach the targeted goal. Proper analysis will reveal all possible alternatives.

Operational Mechanisms for Advocacy

After properly understanding the system, operational mechanisms must also be understood. In particular, systems in mountain regions do not operate as described in the literature. Many invisible practices are in operation, including informal mobilisation of resources, informal routes of communication and interaction, polite requests to politicians and bureaucrats, maintaining connections and connecting policy makers with the poor, applying gentle pressure on policy makers, bargaining about the issue, and so on. Therefore, advocates should carefully analyse all possible practices before starting advocacy on any issue at any level. This analysis can provide clues about using opportunities that arise at different moments. Sometimes unexpected routes and persons can be used to approach policy makers.

The best way to carry out advocacy initiatives is by knowing the system and its operational practices. Advocates can then enter the system through whatever appropriate routes are available for different issues. Working within a system enables advocates to use the available provisions efficiently to promote beneficial policies and activities for the poor. However, systems in mountain societies are not very open. Most systems established under government structures are nearly closed to the deprived strata of the population. Another reality is that government institutions are very powerful, with considerable legal and institutional power at the disposal of their officers and bureaucrats. Therefore, advocates should analyse all these past and present realities properly.

Assessment of the Existing System

Advocacy is often a peaceful struggle to have policy changed in favour of people whose basic human rights are denied. Both the advocates and their opponents hold certain types of power from different sources, and understanding these power relationships is vital for the success of social advocates. Advocates should use whatever type of power they feel they exercise more strongly than their opponents. For example, social advocates may be more powerful in intellectual power, cultural power, and the power gained from knowledge and information. Community-based organisations amass more power from their inner democratic motives than can bureaucrats. In general, advocacy groups should develop a strong bargaining power guided by democratic values, even when they are working within systems that seem to be closed.

Policy makers are supposed to make policy in the public interest, but most deprived people feel this is not happening. Another comment of the poor is that policy-makers protect the interests of the powerful, and that therefore policies exist on paper but are not carried out in practice. These arguments may be partly true or party false, based on different contexts and the individuals responsible. However, the main point is that advocates must have reliable facts and figures to determine the validity of these comments. Such information comes from impartial analysis of any given situation. Preparing a list of demands based on individual opinions is a good advocacy process. 'SWOT' analysis, looking at Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of both advocates and opponents, is an important tool for obtaining many details.

Assessing Political Dynamics

Advocacy is a political process, since politicians are responsible for making policy and enforcing policy implementation. While bureaucrats are not in principle actual decision-makers on policy-related issues, during the workshop many participants argued that in practice bureaucracy is quick to manipulate politicians to safeguard their vested interests. However, bureaucrats are supposed to work as professional experts carrying out good policies made by politicians according to the interests of the people, and some workshop participants contended that providing expertise is not manipulation at all. They said that in fact politicians are often reluctant to listen to the experts. This is another area of debate. Again the question of what is at stake in any decision-making process must be examined.

The reality in mountain areas is that bureaucrats cannot maintain their stand in favour of the poor. Even when they know the situation, they cannot speak out against a different opinion prevailing in the apex political body. Therefore the expert advice they give may tend to make the interests of the politicians more compatible with the ongoing trends of society. From this perspective, paying attention to political dynamics is more important for advocacy than attending to the bureaucratic process. Advocates must analyse the political dynamics carefully before beginning any advocacy initiative. For example, if the ruling party follows a liberal political ideology, this could be an appropriate time to undertake advocacy to achieve the land rights of landless farmers. If the top political body is more interested in industrialising the country, it could be the right time to raise issues related to labour rights.

Status of Social Justice and Human Rights

Advocacy is not a simply a permutation and combination of skills and strategies. Nor is it a substitute for grassroots action to achieve benefits for the public. It is rather a process of protecting the basic human rights of individuals or groups whose rights are being denied by other powerful people or groups. It is not only a matter of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Basic human rights start from the home and the family. A mother may be denying her daughter's basic human rights. Advocacy may then be necessary even within the family to protect the daughter's rights as a human being.

Inequality between son and daughter

Therefore, advocates at all levels should analyse the status of human rights, the factor that determines how social justice is maintained in a society. Social justice and human rights are related concepts and overlap in many areas. Sometimes human rights are well protected but social justice is not maintained. In these cases, the status of social justice has to be separately analysed. For example, if the system is highly corrupt, maintaining social justice is very difficult. In this situation, the root cause of social injustice could be corruption. If the root causes of corruption are analysed, there may be several. Advocacy must be able to dig out the root causes of the visible issues. Advocates can see different issues visible on the surface level but may find many other invisible roots.

The Importance of Public Opinion

Policy makers are good at surveying public opinion. They are more capable of getting information and determining overall opinion than people may think. Advocates should not underestimate their capability. Another reality is that in a modern democracy it is always valuable to attract the opinion of the majority in favour of your advocacy initiative. A great factor in the success of any advocacy initiative is, therefore, to create public opinion in favour of the issue the advocates are advancing. So where does public opinion come from? What do other people living far from the group that is suffering feel about the issue? Are they sympathetic towards those who are suffering? These are important questions that advocates must answer. For example, indigenous people living in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts are raising issues related to their rights over the natural resources of the Hill Tracts. This is most relevant from their perspective, but the attitudes of other people living elsewhere are also important.

Public opinion includes more than merely the opinion of the general public. The opinions of senior bureaucrats, independent judges, planners, economists, journalists, visual media workers, trade unionists, and members of other professional fora are also crucial. If the bonded labour movement of Nepal (1998–1999) is analysed, the advocates succeeded in creating positive public opinion. The best methods for mobilising opinion in favour of any given issue will emerge from analysing what public opinion already is. Determining how to create public opinion is a good idea before undertaking an advocacy campaign. The public media can often play an important role in influencing public opinion. The movement of public opinion should also be monitored during the course of the advocacy initiative. If public opinion cannot be influenced the way the advocate wants, the goal of the campaign may have less chance of success.

Strengths, Limitations, Opportunities, Threats (SLOT) as a Planning Tool

A SLOT analysis of both opponents and advocates is important for advocacy initiatives. Discovering limitations is very important. Achieving 100 % success is rarely possible in a struggle. An acceptable mid-point must be found. Therefore, all advocates should be clear about the bottom line of the struggle. For example, if an advocacy group decides

to start a hunger strike to the death, the group must be clear before beginning that they are ready to accept the worst condition – that their members could die. Otherwise, the question of how long to continue the hunger strike will arise. If there is no response within five, seven, or more days, what will happen? A possible approach could be to quietly stop the hunger strike, but what would then be the effect on the overall advocacy mission? These are the types of matters that must be carefully analysed.