

NAVIGATING **POWER**

Civil Society
Advice on
Influencing
Change



FOREWORD

This document emerged from the desire of partners in Christian Aid Ireland's Irish Civil Society Partnership for a Better World (ICSP) Programme to learn, from each other and more widely, about useful practices in strategic advocacy. That desire is especially urgent today. Civil society across the world is facing an unprecedented civic space emergency. Laws, policies and practices are shrinking the freedoms of association, assembly and expression that are the foundation of democratic life. Human rights defenders, grassroots organisers and communities are increasingly confronted with restrictions, harassment and even violence. At the very moment when bold civic leadership is most needed – to confront inequality, injustice, conflict, climate breakdown and democratic backsliding – the space to act is being narrowed. The need for adaptable, intentional advocacy, rooted in community voices, has never been greater.

This guide emerges as a practical and timely response. It brings together the lived experience, creativity and resilience of civil society organisations working in some of the most volatile, fragile and restrictive contexts. By documenting approaches that are context-sensitive and adaptive, it provides advocates with tools to not only survive, but to remain effective, intentional and grounded in the communities they serve.

From grassroots to global levels, ICSP partners work on a wide range of context-informed issues related to governance and human rights, gender equality and social inclusion, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and climate action. Their experience has informed the development of this collection of advocacy tactics and approaches that CSOs can employ. It elaborates the contexts, opportunities and challenges that face many social justice advocates, especially in fragile or restrictive environments. But we hope it also speaks to the realities and possibilities facing CSOs well beyond the scope of the ICSP.

The added value of this resource lies in its grounding in lived civil society experience. It gathers strategies that are astute, responsive to shifting dynamics, and proven to help organisations remain effective under pressure. It distils and shares lessons from across contexts – from the grassroots to the global stage – demonstrating how organisations can analyse power, identify opportunities, mitigate risks and build alliances. By capturing these approaches, we aim to equip advocates with practical tools to seize opportunities, mitigate risks, and, above all, ensure that community priorities and perspectives inform policy and decision-making – whether at local, subnational, national or international level.

FOREWORD

We intend this document to be more than a guide. It is an invitation to civil society actors everywhere to reflect, adapt and act with purpose – to create and claim space, to amplify the perspectives of those most often excluded, and to keep pressing for more just, inclusive and sustainable societies.

We are deeply grateful to all of the CSOs who partner with Christian Aid Ireland under ICSP, who agreed to contribute their knowledge and experience. Their insights have greatly enriched this resource, and will allow programme partners – and hopefully CSOs more broadly – to consider advocacy approaches and tactics that peers from different parts of the world find useful.

It is our hope that the approaches and examples within will inform, encourage and inspire civil society actors engaged in social justice advocacy – as they strive to remain adaptable, intentional, and rooted in the communities they represent, creating and finding space to ensure that voices are heard and rights upheld in building more equal and just societies.

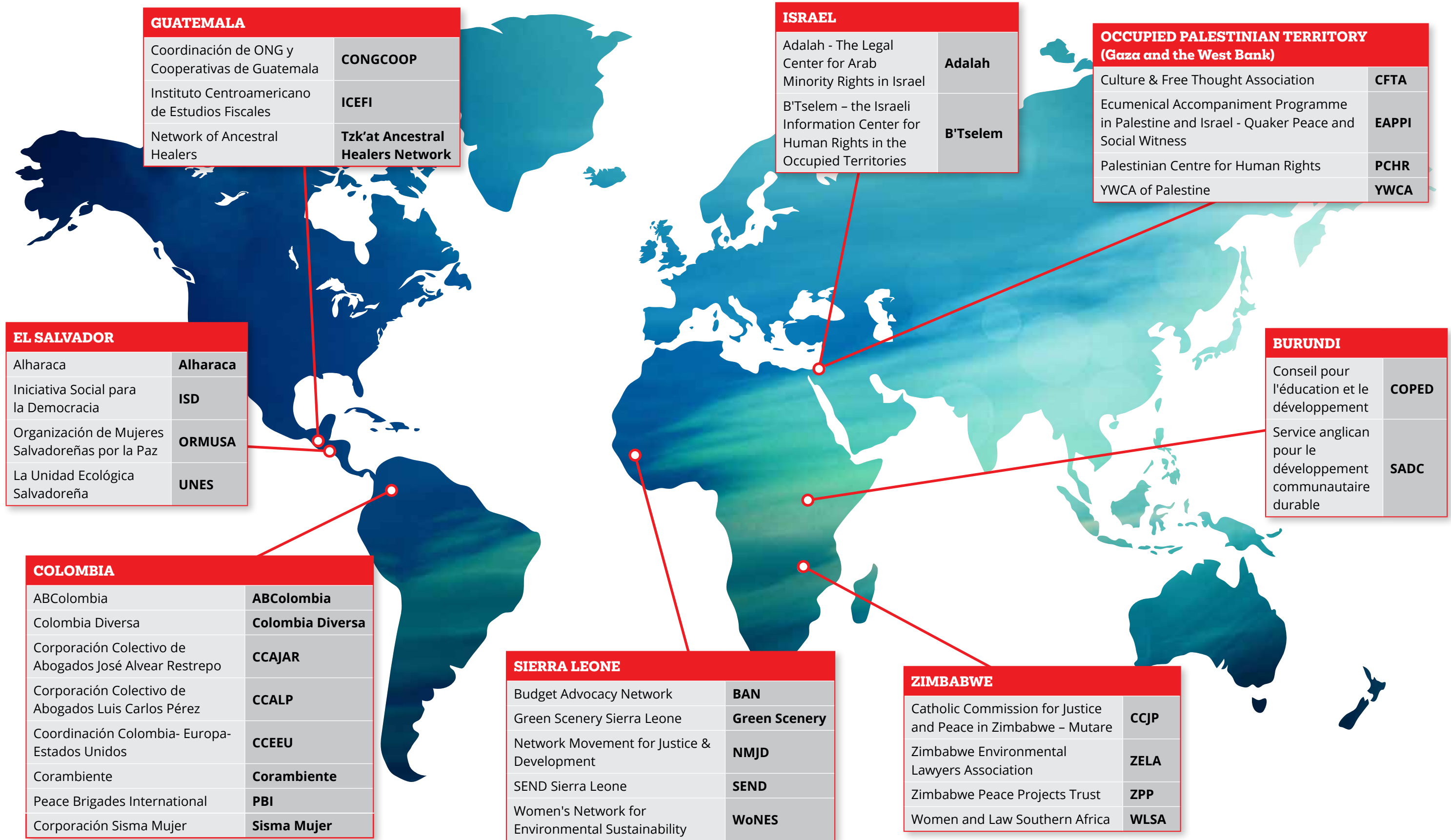
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SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS WHOSE ADVICE INFORMED THIS RESOURCE:



LIST OF ACRONYMS

BAN	Budget Advocacy Network, Sierra Leone
CBO	Community-based organisation
CCALCP	Corporación Colectivo de Abogados Luis Carlos Pérez, Colombia
CCEEU	Coordinación Colombia – Europa – Estados Unidos, Colombia
CONGCOOP	Coordinación de ONG y Cooperativas de Guatemala, Guatemala
Corambiente	Corporación Buen Ambiente, Colombia
CSO	Civil society organisation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
GIPP	Gender, Inclusion, Power and Politics
HRD	Human rights defender
ICEFI	Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Fiscales, El Salvador & Guatemala
ICSP	Ireland's Civil Society Partnership
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
(I)NGO	(International) Non-governmental organisation
IT	Information technology
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, plus
PEA	Political economy analysis
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
ZPP	Zimbabwe Peace Project, Zimbabwe

PURPOSE

At its heart, advocacy means to plead or make a case for, whether that is to try to make something happen, or to try to stop or adapt something that is happening or planned. Doing advocacy involves engaging with people and groups who hold power of some kind (political, governmental, economic, social) to encourage and influence them to support a change that you want to see.

Social justice advocates often want better laws or policies, or to see existing policies be more effectively implemented or more inclusive of marginalised groups. Many want to influence society at a more general level, such as by challenging inequality through public discourse; influencing norms and values, attitudes, and behaviours; supporting marginalised groups' participation in society; and testing or modelling ways to improve society.

There are always obstacles and vested interests to address in bringing about change. This document is intended to support those civil society actors to develop and realise strategies that are right for their context and adaptive to the opportunities and constraints that they may encounter along the way.

We hope it will offer some inspiration and ideas for developing advocacy strategy and adapting to opportunities, obstacles and challenges.

A FEW EXAMPLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY

Encouraging and pressuring decision makers to change laws or policies, their implementation or related budget allocations.

Mobilising people to demand changes in policies or resource allocations, or to stop a damaging initiative.

Raising awareness of and formally reporting abuses of power or human rights.

Finding, opening and leveraging different types of social and decision-making spaces for communities and groups to represent their interests.

Enabling and strategically supporting leaders in civil society – including women (unelected and elected), children and youths, Indigenous Peoples, marginalised ethnic, religious or ethnic groups, and others.

Informing, engaging and potentially challenging traditional and religious leaders as key social influencers, especially at local level, on such matters as gender equality, reproductive rights and Gender-Based Violence.

Monitoring and reporting on effectiveness, efficiency and equality in public services, systems, procedures and procurement.

Addressing gaps in duty-bearer understanding of their human rights or public policy obligations, and their capacities to deliver.

Raising public awareness and understanding on sustainable development, human rights and IHL.

Using the legal system to protect and claim entitlements, and to promote justice and equality, for marginalised groups.

Building coherence, trust and effectiveness in civil society alliances and networks which complement advocacy priorities, and/or protect civil society space.



SECTION 1

A N A L Y S I S

EXPLORE THE IMPORTANCE OF ANALYSIS TO INFORM ADVOCACY

UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

CSO REFLECTIONS ON ANALYSIS FOR INFLUENCING



ANALYSIS

In advocacy work, you are seeking to win support for a particular cause or policy. It is important to get your analysis right to identify the right issue, underlying causes and actions to correct it. It is also critical to identify who can make the changes you want to see happen, and how you can influence them.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

You may have initially identified, with communities affected, a development problem or human rights issue that needs to be rectified. Doing further analysis will help you explore and test your understanding. That may start with looking at how the problem you are trying to address is seen within frameworks such as national law, human rights law, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Is there a legal requirement to address the issue, or a gap there to be managed? Is there a **political or government policy commitment** that you can leverage to bring about change? You might draw on a regional agreement, budget provision, government strategy or municipality plan that would make the advocacy issues and solutions you wish to present policy relevant.

In doing analysis, you will:

- Gather information: facts, data, observations, reports, etc.
- Scrutinise: asking and answering questions, testing ideas, drawing conclusions
- Increase understanding and gain insights to help guide your advocacy strategy (for long-term or overall gain) and approaches that advance it.

ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES: There are many types of analysis you can usefully do, depending on your organisational focus and the issue; and different tools with which to approach them. They include, among others: power, political economy, gender equality and social inclusion, financial, conflict, human rights, environmental, geo-political, and legal.

Some tend to be more formal, structured and resource-heavy pieces of work. Others may involve an ongoing practice of reflection and questioning in an organisation's operations.

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) ANALYSIS

GESI aims to improve your understanding of what is driving gender inequality (including gender-based violence (GBV)) and social exclusion in any given context, and understanding the differentiated impacts of policies and programmes on different people. It focuses on identifying and understanding inequalities and barriers to accessing resources, services, opportunities and power – and the potential opportunities – that women and people of all genders, and other marginalised groups, face in relation to your advocacy issue.

Social exclusion may arise through laws, policies, governance participation, socio-economic status, geographic location, or identity/status discrimination. How these factors play out differs depending on location and context, but the SDGs identify groups often 'left behind' as women, children, people with disabilities, displaced people, and migrants. Indigenous People, older people and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities often face multidimensional discrimination too.

Using GESI analysis helps to:

UNDERSTAND DIFFERENTIAL EXPERIENCES:

Identify how challenges and opportunities around your issue (including attitudes, norms, and behaviours) may be experienced differently by women and various social groups, including some of those furthest behind in society, from an intersectional perspective. It can help inform you how best to engage with these groups in and through your advocacy.

IDENTIFY EXCLUDED GROUPS:

Identify people or groups who are 'invisible' or actively discriminated against in laws, policy, or practice, or through social norms, attitudes, and behaviours. The challenge is to understand the rights or basic services denied to those 'furthest behind' and to make extra efforts to advocate for changes on these things.

ISOLATE KEY ISSUES AND INEQUALITIES:

Isolate key issues and inequalities, and gender equality and social inclusion measures to propose, at the levels of the individual, household, community, and society (including social values, norms, the policy and practice of state- and non-state institutions, and more).

ENHANCE ENGAGEMENT:

Enhance engagement with women and those facing marginalisation in and through your advocacy and support their own priorities and empowerment through their engagement and representation of their concerns and priorities in decision-making processes and forums.

USE EFFECTIVE APPROACHES:

Utilise more effective and sustainable advocacy approaches that are more cognisant of the root causes of inequalities and marginalisation.

TAKE A SAFER APPROACH:

Develop safer and more appropriate advocacy approaches that do not reinforce existing inequalities, marginalisation or exclusion.



ANALYSIS

CONFLICT ANALYSIS

Conflict Analysis, an important input to proposed advocacy in any context, involves appraising the history, profile, actors, trends and dynamics involved in an existing violent conflict or context. It also considers how conflict dynamics could move in a new direction in certain circumstances.

Conflict analysis is strongest when combined with **political economy** and **GESI analysis**. Together, they highlight conflict risks, real power dynamics, and the differentiated impacts on women and marginalised groups - making advocacy safer, more inclusive and strategic.

Even if there is no current conflict, consider what conflict could arise. Might there be a violent response if you, or communities you support, confront powerful individuals or private corporations on 'hot issues' such as extractive industry practices, land rights, public accountability or political participation?

Conflict analysis can help ensure your activities are conflict-sensitive and Do No Harm.

- Being conflict-sensitive means applying the understandings gained to minimise the risk of violent conflict, or worsening it through your advocacy, and to maximise the positive effect you can have on conflict dynamics or peacebuilding.
- The Do No Harm principle suggests that if engaging a power holder will result in threats to safety or life, or worsen the problem, then the risks outweigh the benefits and you need to reconsider your advocacy strategy.

This could involve postponing or cancelling a plan for public protests or peaceful direct action at a moment of real tension, or when a community is at risk of being targeted as a result. In other circumstances, you might need to mobilise public protests to halt acts of violence or to demand accountability.

POWER OR POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS

Identifying issue-relevant power holders and dynamics will help you to identify where to act for the greatest impact.

In addition to those actors relevant to your advocacy, both your allies and potential blockers, it is also important to consider what (or who) can influence them to support the change you are seeking. Some campaigners find it helpful to plot out different actors and factors on a grid, like the one below.

Actor	Type/ source of power	Position on your issue	Motivation	Can be influenced by



ANALYSIS

Stakeholder Mapping

Stakeholder Mapping can also help you to identify the right approach: Some target audiences may be influenced through public dissemination events, street marches and demonstrations, or media coverage. Others you may need to influence through a petition to government, a formal lobbying approach to a minister, informally briefing government officials or ministerial advisers, or other means.

Power and stakeholder mapping can help you understand safety and security concerns around engaging power holders. If they are not just reluctant but hostile, then attempts to engage them may carry threats to safety or life. In that case, you may want to reassess your advocacy intention, strategy, tactics or timing.

Advocacy always happens in a political context, whether that is local, national or international. **Political Economy Analysis** (PEA) aims to bring into clear focus the power and political settlement – sometimes called the ‘elite bargain’ – that has caused a situation to be, and stay, the way it is. This involves analysing:

- The actors and interest groups on your issue, and where power is located, pooled or distributed among them
- Where and how decisions are made, and who is included/excluded from decision making
- What and where spaces are available for bringing about change – formally or otherwise
- The ideas, identities, loyalties, influences and capacities you need to contest or address an issue
- The actors, incentives, processes and resources you need to bring to bear, at what key moments, and over what duration
- The risks, opportunities and potential unintended consequences involved.

If you work through these types of question, and act on your findings to advance your advocacy, you are doing what some writers call thinking and acting politically.

PEA can be light-touch and low-cost – see the model of [Everyday Political Analysis](#) – and it can be combined with Power Analysis, rather than involving a separate exercise.

You could also consider using the [Gender, Inclusion, Power and Politics \(GIPP\) Analysis Toolkit](#), developed by Christian Aid and Social Development Direct, which *integrates traditional political economy analysis with GESI analysis*. This toolkit helps highlight sources and dynamics of power, which stakeholders can influence change, and the key social spaces and networks affecting an issue. Crucially, it examines differentiated effects for different actors, including women and other frequently marginalised groups.

Whether using a straight PEA approach or the integrated GIPP Toolkit, applying political economy analysis to an issue can help you with scenario planning, messaging and asks, identifying potential allies, and pathways to influence the actors with power. It can help you see past constraints, and identify the most realistic advocacy spaces in which to engage for the change you want.

It may turn out that an actor with a title that suggests power does not actually have it, possibly having been marginalised for political or institutional reasons. In contrast, people without a formal role may hold ‘invisible power’ because of their relations with a key power holder or network, or access to resources, an influential ethnic or kinship group, etc. Power analysis, political economy analysis and stakeholder mapping help to bring clarity on pathways to the changes you want to see happen.

Tools to Help Explore Power

There is a range of tools and approaches available to explore power, and those actors with the individual or collective capacities to bring about the changes you want to see. Have a look at the influential [Power Cube](#) resources, for example, to explore spaces of power (closed, invited or created); faces of power (visible, hidden and invisible); and levels of power (local, national, and international or global) as they affect an advocacy issue.





ANALYSIS

TESTING YOUR ANALYSIS

All of us have attitudes and beliefs, and dispositions towards different issues and people, by virtue of being human. We often work with similarly minded people. This means we can be at risk of confirming our own biases (easy, familiar thought pathways), so it is vital to test your analysis with an external actor or critical friend – maybe even a power holder with whom you have good relations – before building an advocacy plan around it.

IDENTIFYING ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

After your combined analyses, you will be better placed to describe a theory of change for your advocacy:

- How you see change happening on your issue, including key actors and factors;
- How, when, with what and whom you plan to act to influence it;
- How and when you will know you are making progress, or need to intensify, adapt or correct course.

You will nearly always need to develop different strategies and approaches to engage diverse power holders at different levels and in different spaces to achieve your aims. Doing that can help build a web of smaller changes that add up to help achieve your intended outcomes.

REVIEW & REFRESH YOUR ANALYSIS

But do not consider your initial analysis to be complete, perfect or fixed. Be prepared to revisit, refresh or even substantially amend your analysis as you consider context shifts – whether that is in stand-up meetings, more formal reflections on your advocacy logs or even coffee-break chats.

Building a culture of being reflective and analytical can help in many ways, such as routinely checking that you are being gender-aware and responsive; or periodically questioning the sociopolitical context to consider shifts in potential advocacy allies, blockers or influencers.

IS THERE POTENTIAL TO INFLUENCE?

When it is 'good enough' to use, but not fixed, your analysis will help guide whether you and your allies have the potential to influence a given situation:

- If you have an open-door opportunity for change, with a broad support constituency and requiring only a catalyst or final push for change, then carry on.
- If you have closed doors, but the possibility to achieve substantive change with concerted effort, then strive to find the right keys and unlock the situation.
- If you face brick walls – with entrenched resistance, few allies, openings that are hard to see for at least incremental change, or with substantive risks – you may need to revisit the intended advocacy.

Thankfully, there is often the chance (even in restrictive environments) to refocus your advocacy from an intended issue that may be closed off at a certain moment. You could choose to operate at a different level than initially planned, focusing on micro or meso level where you feel you can gain more traction, for example. Or you might opt to support community empowerment, progressive narratives in public discourse, and social solidarity and networks, and otherwise protect civil society space.

CSOs' THOUGHTS ON ANALYSIS FOR UNDERSTANDING & INFLUENCE

How do you engage with communities as part of your analysis?

ZPP notes how it facilitates community analysis and diagnoses, so they can collectively agree priorities, local solutions and strategies to progress them. This includes human rights awareness and training, analysis of local government and public policy processes, and identification of openings for people to take forward their issues.

Corambiente also emphasises the importance of local-level analysis, being part and parcel of community empowerment – identifying local issues, power dynamics and blockages, and pathways to power holders. It helps communities build and document an evidence base to put forward to power holders. At national level, Corambiente tracks those issues of interest (agroecology, organic production, inequality patterns, women's empowerment) and related legislation or policy processes – then coordinates and consolidates community inputs on these matters to bring to decision makers in different ways and spaces.

Are there other types of analyses that you find useful?

ICEFI emphasises political, economic, power and geopolitical analysis but also, as a think-tank on public finance issues, financial analysis too. Aiming to leave no one behind, it considers winners and losers, gaps, and opportunities, in its analysis.

BAN brings rigorous economic, financial and legal analysis to bear on public finances, taxation, expenditure and debt issues. It also emphasises the significance of power and stakeholder analysis for “knowing the powers, players and timings” for advocacy engagement. It also underlines the importance of situational analysis and ‘human data’ – including facts and stories.

CCALCP has an emphasis on legal, public policy, economic and environmental analysis. It explores equality and inclusion dimensions, including resource allocation, for marginalised communities, including those affected by environmental damage and ecosystem loss through extractive practices, legal and illegal.

Have you found it useful to undertake different types of analyses?

CONGCOOP highlights the importance of a variety of analyses, including on power, legal and political, budgetary, gender and social inclusion aspects, as well as regional or sub-regional sub-analyses. It places particular emphasis on gender analysis: considering the place of rural women and women in agriculture within budget decision making – and ringfenced gender-positive budget allocations – at national and local levels.

Does conflict influence your approach to analysis?

ZPP emphasises the importance of Conflict Analysis and conflict-sensitive programming to ensure you understand the potential impact of programming. Knowing that, you can strive to Do No Harm, avoid contributing to instability or violence, or putting communities or staff members at risk.

CCEEU analyses the effects of armed conflict on communities in different areas, and the degree of respect for IHL and human rights law. It collects and verifies data on violent incidents; and investigates trends in attacks on communities, activists and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) in different locations. They consolidate community-sourced data and analysis in Memoranda that communities can bring to power holders.

Do you have any suggestions for those undertaking analysis in restrictive environments?

CCALCP points to the need, sometimes – especially in restrictive environments – for CSOs to draw on additional external analysis. This can bring acknowledged technical or academic expertise, extra validation in the eyes of power holders, additional or stronger relationships and networks to use, and new or better spaces within which to advocate.

SECTION 2

PARTICIPATION

ENGAGE COMMUNITIES, EMPOWER RIGHTS HOLDERS

MAINTAINING LEGITIMACY

OPEN UP ADVOCACY SPACES TO COMMUNITIES

INCLUDE MARGINALISED PEOPLE & GROUPS

PITCH YOUR ADVOCACY AT THE RIGHT LEVEL

BE EMPOWERING IN YOUR APPROACH

CSO REFLECTIONS ON ADVOCACY AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

2

PARTICIPATION

All advocacy is local because it must begin and end with a community or group that is impacted by adverse conditions, policies, practices, social values, norms or behaviours.

It is important that the community has real ownership, participation and leadership in relation to an advocacy campaign, because the community often bears the highest risk from unintended consequences or backlash. That 'community' could be geographic or a community of interest, such as small farmers, women affected by GBV, forcibly displaced people, etc.

Community inclusion, meaningful participation and empowerment are underpinned by human rights. Enabling citizens to know their rights, and supporting them to grow their knowledge, skills, analysis and confidence to advocate, is an important part of social justice advocacy.

MAINTAINING LEGITIMACY

The community has the most legitimacy in demanding changes – a legitimacy it shares with CSOs advocating with them.

Organisations advocating with (or for) a community should regularly reflect on their relevance, their participation and leadership on the issue, and the strategies to be pursued. This type of dynamic, participatory process gives an organisation legitimacy and mandate on an issue – and the credibility to engage power holders alongside or on behalf of community members.

'Nothing about us without us' is a motto used through the years by political and human rights activists to convey the idea that no representative should decide on a policy, position or action without the full participation of those affected.

OPEN ADVOCACY SPACES TO COMMUNITIES

It can be difficult to have full community participation in, and leadership of, an advocacy initiative; it takes processes, time and resources, and you may have to rely on delegated leaders. But it is not impossible, with the right intention, commitment and organisational support. Advocacy organisations can enable community leaders to represent themselves – offering training, opening spaces, helping prepare messaging for different audiences – as advocacy opportunities and requirements allow.

More usually, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and others strive to include community participation at key stages through the life cycle of an advocacy initiative (from conception through planning to implementation, monitoring, adaptation, reporting and evaluation). This ensures renewed ownership at key stages in the cycle.

CSOs may offer their own (or third-party) advocacy or technical expertise to complement community voices, but should take care not to always ‘speak for’ communities – and certainly not to further marginalise communities and their leaders in putting forward trained or technically expert speakers on an issue.

INCLUDE PEOPLE & GROUPS FACING MARGINALISATION

ZPP emphasises the importance of active citizens (particularly the often-excluded groupings of women, youths and persons with disabilities) mobilising to engage duty bearers to realise their rights – as well as encouraging and demanding that duty bearers should be responsive to those rightful demands.

ZPP facilitates communities’ and groups’ analysis of their collective challenges, possible solutions and avenues of approach towards government offices and other mandated institutions. The organisation helps citizen groups strategise, plan and mobilise to demand the human rights and basic social services due to them (water, education, health, participation, etc.), particularly at local levels.



PARTICIPATION

Enabling rights holders to present their own issues, analysis and solutions is often done at grassroots and municipal/district levels (micro and meso) – but it can work at national and international levels, when community leaders or spokespeople are given the right preparatory support and accompanied properly.



CCEEU notes how it has created and used *safe spaces* for advocacy in Colombia by having government officials, members of the international community (diplomatic corps) and other intermediaries present. This has helped create an enabling environment for dialogue with government, with improved aspects of relationship management, transparency and follow-through or accountability on IHL and human rights matters discussed and agreed.

In Creative Coalitions – A Handbook for Change, Crisis Action argues that it is quite possible to coordinate, support and accompany a powerful advocacy campaign while staying behind the scenes. It notes that “amplifying a series of different voices speaking out from their own experience can carry more weight, be more authentic”.

Advocacy can be pitched at different levels – micro, meso and macro (local, intermediate and national/ international) – or across all three depending on the issue and context. It is generally easier for communities to represent themselves at the lower levels, for reasons of access, expense, self-confidence, etc. Yet it is still possible, and sometimes vital, at macro level.

PITCH YOUR ADVOCACY AT THE RIGHT LEVEL

Analysis and mapping can help you identify the right level, or levels, to work at given your advocacy aims. They may be as specific as securing alterations to local regulations or budget allocations, or as large as demanding an overhaul of a national law or international policy.

Micro Level:

At this grassroots level, you may be championing the rights of individuals, small groups (e.g., people with no access to land in a location) or communities. This could include: supporting community capacities for problem analysis and advocacy engagement, advocating for basic state services, addressing legal issues, or seeking communities' or specific groups' inclusion in a development scheme.

Meso Level:

At this level, social justice CSOs engage with local government accountability and responsiveness to community concerns. Civil society may work with communities and community groups on monitoring resource extraction, municipal budget tracking, social auditing, and community consultation on infrastructure projects or corporate practices for example.

In Guatemala, for instance, **CONGCOOP** has trained Indigenous women in Social Audit Commissions on mobilisation for advocacy and political engagement. This supported them to do budget analysis, present a community-informed budget proposal to the Municipal Commission, and discuss it on local radio for increased profile and public awareness.

(e.g.)

CCALCP in Colombia straddles different levels as it connects injustices and collective analysis from peasant communities to power holders in local and district institutions. It also brings these concerns up to the autonomous Special Jurisdiction for Peace, ministries and high-level government officials. It supports communities to bring their own words to the world of advocacy – helping to prepare community representatives, frame messaging and clarify proposals for decision makers.

(e.g.)

PARTICIPATION

Macro Level:

At this level, CSOs and their networks often engage government institutions or other national bodies, such as the judiciary, semi-state organisations or a National Human Rights Commission. You may also be dealing with businesses, including transnational corporations, in relation to their investments and activities, such as mining.

Civil society and networks are often involved in research and publications, direct advocacy, and might include lobbying government officials and politicians. The range of issues might include: transparency and good governance, equity issues in taxation and public expenditure, social inclusion and protection practices, community dialogue and peacebuilding measures, and security and protection for at-risk communities and groups.

(e.g.)

CSOs in Colombia are working to support the Peace Agreement, including measures to support women and Indigenous People, enhance land rights and access, and ensure the protection of HRDs.

You may find, from your analyses, that you need to work at the international level to progress your work – through United Nations (UN) agencies, human rights mechanisms, the International Financial Institutions or corporate governance processes.

(e.g.)

Social justice and human rights CSOs in the Israel – Occupied Palestinian Territory area have long been working at national and international levels, including in Ireland, at the European Union level and at the UN. This includes advocacy on the just application of IHL and human rights law; tracking violations of IHL and the denial of rights; and demanding accountability, including legal consequences, for violations of IHL and human rights law.

Advocacy Targets at Different Levels
MICRO: Individuals and groups, traditional elders and community leaders, school leaders and teachers, village chiefs, religious leaders, local government officials (elected/staff members), police and army officers or local posts, school parents, health outreach workers and clinics, housing and social welfare officers, families and neighbours, local transport officials, security guards, school communities, community-based organisations (CBOs) and CSOs, corporate actors' local representatives
MESO: Community and interest groups (farmers, fishermen, men, women, youths), town or city officials, district officials, municipalities, mayors, elected officials, school leaders, district education and health committees, police, army and court officials, agricultural extension officers, social workers, hospitals and health centres, neighbouring villages or communities, employers and other corporate actors, CBOs, CSOs and NGOs, local media/social media, survivor and support groups
MACRO: Government institutions and officials, parliament and sub-committees or caucuses, elected officials, ministers and advisers, semi-state companies and utility companies, corporate actors' national or international representatives, CBOs, CSOs, NGOs and INGOs, civil society networks, alliances and coalitions, diplomats, academics, local, national and/or international media, social media, survivor and support groups, political groups, social movements, international campaigns, UN agencies and other international mechanisms (SDGs, human rights, corporate accountability)

Groups are not exclusive to any one level. You may target some of them while working primarily at a different level – and you will often, of course, be working across the levels.

PARTICIPATION

BE EMPOWERING IN YOUR APPROACH

As you consider different advocacy spaces and the merits of engaging with them, it is important to consider who they enable and empower.

You could be invited to discuss an issue with power holders but it may be in a closed space from which important allies are excluded, or one where you sense there is little hope of being meaningfully heard – and decide not to engage. Or you may be able to access a space, but it may be more effective – and empowering – to open that opportunity to community actors, coalition allies or others, if that is possible.



CONGCOOP notes the need to strive for wider and more democratic participation in processes and institutions that hold power, even – or especially – if they are often closed, or aligned with special interests.

Crisis Action notes the simple premise that, for the greatest impact, “the right expertise needs to be applied strategically, where it can maximally contribute to the overall goal”. The task for CSOs is to marry this strategic advice with an empowering approach that keeps communities at the centre.

During development of this learning resource, **CCALCP** wondered ‘who can carry out advocacy?’ It contends that there is a real challenge to sustainable development and social justice CSOs to legitimise communities’ struggles, help empower leaders and find dialogue spaces for them to claim their own rights at micro, meso and macro levels. “Communities can do anything” if you allow them and help create the spaces, **ZPP** echoes.

Corambiente says there is learning to be done on how to bring the voices of community leaders, women and Indigenous People (increasingly being heard at micro level) up to meso and macro levels; and secure action on their concerns and asks.

Capacity Development for Advocacy

- Empowerment may involve supporting capacity development of communities and local CSOs to build the knowledge, skills, understanding and relationships for advocacy, at individual, project, organisational or network levels.
- It could involve helping build relationships and linkages needed to elevate or amplify an issue (e.g., to a regional or international level), through researching suitable allies and helping make introductions. It is important to make sure when engaging in any networks and coalitions – but especially regional or international ones – that you have the capacity to support the extent and quality of coordination required for effective advocacy. Effective coalitions require member CSOs' contribution to them, rather than CSOs being passive members, or takers only.
- After identifying knowledge or practice gaps, capacity development will usually involve structured support to address identified needs (e.g., training), supportive processes and patterns of interaction, or a combination of these.
- From micro to meso and macro levels, you can achieve useful gains by finding, creating or leveraging safe advocacy spaces for dialogue between marginalised communities and those holding power.

CSOs' ADVOCACY ACTIONS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

How do you use advocacy issues identified at micro level to inform advocacy at other levels?

Corambiente accompanies local communities and groups, across election and policy cycles. It supports them to analyse collective issues and gather evidence, maps relevant actors and municipal processes, identifies advocacy moments and spaces, and helps empower them to transform their own life situations. As well as supporting community-level work, Corambiente identifies key themes consistent with communities' and women's local priorities (agroecology, food sovereignty, inequality, environmental and climate action) to work on at national level.

ZPP works close to the ground, supporting the analysis, mobilisation and agency of active citizens pursuing their human rights. At the same time, it seeks to enhance the responsiveness of power holders within local authorities, providers of public services, etc. While the communities it works with are mostly engaged at local level, ZPP identifies some shared issues to bring to a higher level, e.g., government departments and agencies, and the Independent Commissions on Gender, Peace and Reconciliation, and Human Rights.

Advocacy at Macro level

ICEFI is a think-tank and is focused primarily on lobbying at national level in different countries across Central America. It engages with ministers, government advisers, finance ministries, tax authorities, legislative and executive arms of government, and diplomatic missions. In this world, weighty technical analysis (economic, financial, institutional) is needed to work in either formal or informal channels. ICEFI works towards influencing a budget or policy-making process. Its detailed analysis may be highly technical, but they are also framed within a wider discourse of sustainable development, social justice and rights.

How do you approach advocating on issues of particular importance to those facing marginalisation?

With its cross-cutting thematic focus on rural development, agriculture and democratic development, **CONGCOOP** works with rural and peasant actors, Indigenous women, the national Women's Forum, the People's Health Movement, and other stakeholders in Guatemala. It advocates on progress and effective implementation of the 2021 Bill on increasing the representation of women and Indigenous People in politics and society, as well as on generalised discrimination against women and high levels of GBV. It also advocates on land rights, and the protection of social activists and HRDs.



SECTION 3

E N G A G E M E N T

TARGET THE RIGHT POWER HOLDERS IN THE RIGHT WAY

KNOW THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

BUILD POLITICAL CAPITAL ON YOUR ISSUE

SPREADING YOUR MESSAGES THROUGH THE MEDIA

MAXIMISE ACCESS TO INFLUENCE

WORK IN NETWORKS AND COALITIONS

TAILOR YOUR ADVOCACY MESSAGES TO MAXIMISE INFLUENCE

DELIVER YOUR MESSAGES EFFECTIVELY

DIGITAL ADVOCACY CAN BOOST CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

TAILOR YOUR COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH

QUICK TIPS FROM CHRISTIAN AID IRELAND PARTNER DIALOGUE

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After identifying advocacy targets and defining your asks, there are various avenues to choose from, or combine, to approach and influence them. Important things to consider, include:

STEP 1: KNOW THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

“Know the powers, players and timings for your advocacy engagement”
- **BAN**

- To understand entry points for your advocacy, especially around laws or policies, identify and build your knowledge of the relevant policy-making or **decision-making process**: e.g., budget cycle, election, public consultation.
- Analyses of different types can highlight advocacy pathways, opportunities, timing/sequencing matters, resource requirements and risks. Stakeholder mapping can identify the right actors to engage: with a mandate or decision-making responsibility – or with duty bearer obligations, in human rights language.
- Your analysis can help identify the right approach in the right spaces; suitable stages and moments in the decision-making cycle; and the data, evidence and format expected to be able to influence public decisions, policy or practice.
- There may also be private practices and actors you wish to influence, or stop, whether they involve transnational corporations, local companies, investor groups or regional banks. Legal or regulatory requirements may be unclear and you may be calling for increased transparency, the application of due process, informed and meaningful consent for communities affected, or private and public accountability around problem issues.
- You might wish to inform debates and attitudes, influence social norms and behaviours, highlight inequalities, or champion the participation in society of marginalised people. For example, you may want to tackle cultural issues, such as women’s traditional roles, or the frequent invisibility in society of disabled persons.
- Progress in these areas by raising awareness and understanding, shifting social attitudes and behaviours, and increasing the voice of marginalised groups – rather than aiming to influence policy, or influence policy alone.

- There may be informal opportunities to meet power holders in person – at a community or sporting event, at a council meeting or over a cup of coffee even – and make your case. A word in the right ear at the right time can be very influential.
- Promoting change on bigger or more slow-moving issues could involve promoting media coverage, or organising public events, marches or campaigns. Equally, it might involve cultivating community champions, securing endorsements from politicians, traditional leaders or other influential people; or sending your messages out into society through art, dance, music or other cultural expressions.

CCALCP, working in the formal space of lobbying with special legal expertise, describes making progress on fleshing out details of the right to participation of local communities under pressure from extractive industries. It is helping to establish, with the autonomous Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the legitimacy of victim-centred, community-developed demands for justice, redress and reparations for violent actions by state actors. It has helped ensure that the victims' voices are being heard and – once a legal decision is reached (as anticipated) – will follow up on implementation measures.



STEP 2: BUILD POLITICAL CAPITAL ON YOUR ISSUE

Explore the means you have at your disposal to build **political capital** (the ability to build and apply pressure on influential stakeholders to act in the way you would like) around an issue.

- This might start with raising awareness and understanding of an issue. You may then be able to build some kind of pressure (from media or influential people such as religious or traditional leaders, academics, cross-community groupings) for a power holder to support a suggested change.
- Exerting influence could involve creating a network of power holders to consider your evidence, arguments and proposals – in the context of other arguments, positions and trade-offs that you believe they hold or have been lobbied on.

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- In another context, you might secure endorsement from an influential actor that encourages others to feel safe supporting a proposition. With luck and effort, you might secure a government or ministerial commitment to a course of action, or a budget allocation.
- Make it as easy as possible for a power holder to support you, in a timeframe that matters, so consider what it is that will move them. This might include convincing facts, emotional stories, grassroots pressure, media demands, sizeable public marches of support or the availability of political cover to allow them to support your issue.
- It may help to publish and present a research paper or opinion poll to policy makers, bring forward a civil society coalition campaign, or encourage constituents to petition selected politicians. Or you may wish to be discreet, brief foreign embassy officials and urge them to exert influence.



Putting into Practice: How do you Build Political Capital on your Advocacy Issues?

Corambiente notes the importance of community participation throughout the advocacy cycle, including community representatives or delegates leading (or being engaged in) the implementation process. As mentioned, this is important as a matter of rights, and makes for more powerful advocacy.

CCALCP highlights the importance of bringing in third-parties (for their knowledge, expertise and credibility to power holders) at certain times – such as on technical issues.

CCALCP and **ZPP** identify the importance of pre-engagement, or early-stage engagement, with key stakeholders for varied reasons: informing, intelligence-gathering, testing an issue framing or positioning, or potential allyship.

STEP 3: SPREAD YOUR MESSAGES THROUGH THE MEDIA

An important option in many advocacy contexts is to select and work with media, to contribute to public discourse and build political capital. Sometimes this may mean cultivating good relations with influential and trusted journalists, opinion writers or analysts, and seeking to influence what they put out on your theme in print media, radio or television.

Deciding to work with traditional media, or social media, to build political pressure depends on the nature of your issue and messaging, who you want to reach, and how you hope the message will be received and used. You will also rely, of course, on having the resources and ability to work effectively in your chosen media spaces.

Think about the requirements and perceptions of the medium and the channel. Will a power holder you are targeting be swayed by an editorial you can place in a respected newspaper? Or by a widespread social media campaign that captures broad public attention and demands that power holders tune in?

Putting into Practice: How have you Used Media to Progress your Advocacy?

BAN notes the significance of engaging with (informed and progressive) media in helping to shape a public discourse or advocacy agenda. This can help in having your issues and potential solutions surfaced publicly, to incrementally build public understanding and pressure – rather than having an issue linked just to you, as a sole or isolated civil society actor, in the eyes of power holders.

On some sensitive advocacy issues, **ZPP** notes, it has had to partner with other local organisations, build media interest, rally the public to “ask tough questions”, or advocate for peace and justice issues – or combine several different approaches.



You may *have to* build political capital by working through the media, or through public mobilisation and engagement of politicians, to help create windows of opportunity. There is a feeling of extra possibility, for example, in advocating towards a politician who has felt substantial constituent and media pressure to act on an issue.

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Putting into Practice: How have you Engaged with Power Holders on your Messaging?

ZPP points to success it had in working with two elected local councillors, in different wards and from different parties, who worked as champions of community-led advocacy. They promoted the community-identified priorities themselves, and opened space at council meetings and beyond for community asks to get a hearing.

CCEEU highlights the value of its coordination and information-sharing across communities and geographic areas where it works. You can play an important role in validation and systematisation of different communities' or working groups' data, to bring together advocacy-ready information to share with responsible bodies. In CCEEU's case, this means monitoring and evidencing trends, dynamics and causes of problems. In one instance, its trend analysis uncovered the 'unintended consequence' of an armed forces policy that resulted in additional civilian deaths, which allowed it to tackle the problem with the authorities.

STEP 4: MAXIMISE ACCESS TO INFLUENCE

Consider how to **secure most or best access** to get your messages and asks across to key identified decision makers. Many mature democracies offer pathways through which power holders (especially government office holders and ministry officials) can be accessed, at least to some degree, e.g., through public consultation processes for development of laws and policies, parliamentary committee systems, or election hustings.

There may not be the same access points or systems in less democratically mature or more restricted systems. Even so, political leaders or parties, small networks of public officials, and certain 'thought leaders' (such as journalists and academics) still sometimes look out for increased understanding of problem issues, potential solutions, new social thinking and policy ideas – within permissible limits.

Access to public officials may be available through informal or semi-formal contacts, even without formal channels or systems; or through government actors tasked with regulating civil society, or certain sectors of the economy. Access to those with greater power will be more limited (as it is everywhere), but can occasionally be open to advocates through government events, conferences and workshops, political party rallies, overlapping social circles, or professional networks.

Putting into Practice: What Opportunities have you Used to Enhance Access to Influence?



ICEFI, which works across Central America, aims to influence government, international donor and business actors on tax, debt and public spending decisions for transparency and the public good. It analyses the institutional, sociopolitical contexts and human freedoms of different countries in the region. It works hard to identify and seeks to influence “islands of legitimacy” within different administrations, and to establish and maintain networks of interested actors across sectoral interest areas and political affiliations.

ZPP emphasises taking advantage of (relevant or vital) opportunities that arise for incremental gains. There are some regular, set-piece events that can open (or close) spaces, such as the agreement of national or municipal budgets, followed by the roll-out of agreed measures. Election cycles can also open advocacy space depending on the context and, especially, thematic and advocacy issues. Election proximity may also close other advocacy windows – such as decentralisation in Zimbabwe.

Putting into Practice: Have Issues of Trust and Safety Shaped how you Access Influencers?



BAN is very involved with macro-level advocacy on tax and public finance transparency, effectiveness, accountability, and responsiveness to the needs and rights of vulnerable people. Through establishing its expertise and trust in its credibility over time, and working different channels of influence, it has helped inform and enhance legislation and public policy on debt management.

CCEEU emphasises the importance of community ownership, and its practice of enabling identified spokespeople to bring collective analysis before power holders and third-party witnesses. This happens, for example, in the safe space of Colombia’s National Guarantee Roundtables. In this way, the third parties present can help assure safety; take note of officials’ commitments, along with targets and timings; and monitor progress on commitments.

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Publishing a report, or even launching it in the presence of power holders, is never the endpoint for advocates. Rather, such a publication is just the start, a basis for seeking meetings, attending coffee mornings, doing briefings, addressing seminars, answering questions, defending data, clarifying analysis and seeking decision points with power holders. And these are just some potential steps in the difficult and constantly evolving process of policy advocacy.



Putting into Practice: How do you Balance Working towards Big Milestones and Keeping a Focus on Smaller Changes?

CCALCP highlights the importance of working for and building on incremental changes. It has initially managed to secure a favourable hearing on community-developed, victim-centred asks for restorative justice and reparation measures with the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. When that body delivers a ruling, which is anticipated, communities and CCALCP will need to follow up diligently on the implementation of measures recommended to different actors – at least some of whom will oppose them. While underscoring the value of securing legal changes, court rulings or policy commitments to leverage change, CCALCP notes how critical it is to follow up on implementation to ensure it brings required improvements in the lives of marginalised groups.

Corambiente underlines the significance of being open to taking, and building on, the incremental gains you can achieve – while still retaining your critical thinking, and keeping a rights and justice focus. This means that you keep thinking about duty bearer obligations (varying with their roles and mandate) and probably choose not to accept short-term solutions, partial measures or token offerings from a state actor, corporation or armed group that would undermine the realisation of rights in the longer term, or for a particular cohort.

STEP 5: WORK IN NETWORKS AND COALITIONS

The benefits of coalitions are so great that working in them is considered by many to be a principle of advocacy. Operating well, they can help reach different and wider audiences, build political capital through increased numbers, and maximise the use of resources. They can also increase unity of purpose and reduce mixed messages, build motivation and solidarity, reduce risk for individual organisations and people, and have a multiplier effect for all related advocacy.

You do not always need huge groups to have an effective alliance or coalition. With sufficient 'opt in' to working collaboratively, a few key organisations or individuals can contribute very effectively to generating awareness and public or political demands for the changes you want to see.

It is useful for these networks to look beyond familiar CSO voices. This might include journalists and social media influencers. You could try to involve policy makers in government ministries or agencies (although it is important to clarify with them that you do not work for government). Or you might consider including academics, UN agency actors, or international donor or diplomatic delegates.

There may be circumstances where you judge that it is prudent not to join a particular coalition, because of a lack of focus, its position on one of your core issues, domination by an organisation or personality, or known antagonism to government, governance and accountability issues.

Generally, though, it is considered that if you want to go far with your advocacy, it is helpful to journey with others. You may find that you can help tackle an issue, or issues, that had led you to consider steering away from a coalition.



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CSO Reflections on Working in Networks and Coalitions

Maintain Relationships - BAN notes how establishing and maintaining relationships and networks is important. Allies in politics or public administration can share important information, informally and ahead of time, on planned policy processes, timing and openings. They can also offer insights on your advocacy issues (the degree of power holders' sensitivity, helpful or unhelpful framing, potential advocacy spaces, timing, tone, etc.) or even help co-design or co-present policy-relevant research and analysis. BAN describes having an ally within a state system (with whom it has fostered a relationship of trust over time) inviting important stakeholders into a loose and informal network with it to discuss and progress issues of mutual interest.

Harmonise Approaches - CCEEU suggests the merit of bringing together different CSOs, alliances and coalitions – working on peace, justice, sustainable development and rights – to harmonise agendas, generate more spaces and voice, and offer mutual support. An organisation may have to publicly retreat on one 'red line' issue in a particular circumstance or moment, it notes, but can still support other coalition issues and protect civic space broadly.

Consider Existing Alliances - CONGCOOP in Guatemala notes how it works with and through established alliances at local and national levels: developing shared analyses, creating concrete and collaborative proposals, and building broader backing from different geographic territories, and deeper representation and support for collective advocacy asks. Ongoing power and gender equality analysis is essential, according to CONGCOOP, which says it tries to take advantage of relationships, networks, spaces and allyship that can be built (slowly and painstakingly) across municipalities, ministries, autonomous commissions and thematic/sectoral caucuses.

“Your network is your currency: look after it, nurture it, and make it grow” – **Crisis Action**

Put the Issue First - BAN emphasises the importance of working within and across unified alliances and coalitions. This can offer different pathways to accessing available officials (among other advantages). Be ready to put the issue first, seeking engagement and influence on it, rather than feeling you or your organisation must have your say, or must 'go public'.

Identify Shared Needs - CCEEU also highlights the importance of bringing together different (complementary) alliances and campaigns – such as peace, sustainable development, human rights – to identify and protect shared requirements, such as an enabling environment for civil society, autonomous and respectful spaces for dialogue, and safety for communities, social leaders and other advocates including HRDs.

STEP 6: CREATE AND TAILOR YOUR ADVOCACY MESSAGES TO MAXIMISE INFLUENCE

Think about your **message content and message delivery** mechanisms. To progress your advocacy, you will need public messaging that: describes the problem you are trying to address, the evidence you are bringing, the solutions you propose, how they will make life better, and who can do what to bring about this change. Be sure to be participatory and inclusive of multiple stakeholders in developing your messages and putting them across, to avoid stepping away from community priorities.

Develop **targeted messages** for key advocacy targets, explaining why they should care to support the change you want. The framing of your purpose, evidence and asks will need to be pitched specifically to appeal to that stakeholder, and what is in it for them.



Is your advocacy ask something they will wish to support, for personal, political or ideological reasons? Will their support be consistent with their worldview, or statements they have made before? Can you frame an ask such that supporting it will make power holders feel good about themselves, or look good to peers, constituents or the wider public?

Much of your pitch to a particular audience will depend on your analysis of their power, interest and position, as well as the specific call to action you are making of them.

Targeted approaches: Bear in mind that people with power (who are often busy on political, economic and social fronts) may have little time to devote to your advocacy issue, even if you can reach them. For many targets, it will be much more effective to provide a one-page summary highlighting the issue, key facts (punchy, easily digestible and memorable) and a human impact story, rather than a long, detailed research report.

Or you may assess that a certain key power holder will be swayed by data and logic – and that you need more quantitative evidence: facts and figures, suitably analysed and checked, accessibly and attractively presented. You might, for example, use incident reports and trend data to brief a responsible minister on evidenced human rights abuses, but a human-centred story focused on the impact on individuals for public mobilisation on the same issue. Civil society actors in Sierra Leone emphasise the importance of using official facts and figures (e.g., government or UN) in your research and analysis, where available, thereby making them more defensible in engagements with power holders.

(e.g.)

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Usually, you will have, and need, more qualitative data too: stories or images conveying experiences, perspectives, insights and emotions that may help move the decision maker, power holder or duty bearer.

The ideal is to gather and present both quantitative and qualitative data, cross-checking to ensure that different sources of evidence and analysis are credible and support each other. Still, either source of evidence is better than none, so long as it is transparent, credible and reliable.

Two key tests of data credibility are whether it is representative of the issue or population you are addressing, and has legitimacy in terms of how it was sourced and is used. Be aware that your advocacy messages may be made public (deliberately or otherwise), and make sure you can stand over the truth and accuracy of your messaging.



Putting into Practice: How have you Tailored your Messages for your Intended Audience?

Corambiente underlines the value of writing up and presenting copies of “evidential summaries” of community issues, analysis, solutions and advocacy asks of power holders. It is useful to retain these types of records for reflection on the effectiveness of varied approaches towards different power holders.

BAN, in Sierra Leone, notes the importance of bringing rigorous quantitative analysis and data – but also qualitative situational analysis and human stories – to formal public finance discourse and processes. “Get your facts correct, your analysis robust and credible” - **BAN**



Putting into Practice: How do you Retain a Focus on Community Perspectives when Tailoring your Messaging?

ZPP highlights the intersection of its own ‘hotspot mapping’ on the denial of human rights with facilitated community mapping of challenges and problems (with a particular focus on women, youths and persons with disabilities) shaping the issues, remedies and entry points for change at micro and meso levels.

CCALCP emphasises clear factual analysis, with technical rigour, given its legal specialisation; and the use of academic links and public policy expertise. Within that, it aims to respect and include community diagnosis on issues, violation of rights and possible solutions, and encourage advocacy audiences to validate the shared community view.

STEP 7: DELIVER YOUR MESSAGES EFFECTIVELY

Think about suitable message delivery mechanisms for your advocacy, in the context that prevails and given the approaches, spaces and media available to you.

Your message may be more effectively delivered in private or public, by community members directly affected. In another situation, it may be expressed more successfully by a civil society delegation, or a recognised subject expert, whether internal or external to your advocacy campaign.

Beyond direct lobbying of politicians, public officials or corporate actors, and engagement with consultations or other policy processes, there is a wide range of tactics that advocates can use – including, but not limited to:

- Commissioning research, disseminating it to those with power and holding discussions with them on its importance
- Supporting community engagement with power holders
- Publishing media editorials and letters, or taking part in radio interviews and phone-ins
- Organising public rallies or peaceful direct actions
- Mobilising and training cohorts of change-makers among women, youths, children, community leaders or specific population cohorts: farmers, fishermen, displaced or landless people
- Engaging with celebrities and social influencers, and using social media to raise broad awareness.

As well as considering the right channel for communication and influence, consider who will lead on delivery of the message: a person or group directly affected, you as a trained advocate, or a third-party with expertise or authority recognised by power holders.

Think too about what you need to bring to support an advocacy pitch: a detailed research document, an evidence dossier, a campaign pamphlet, a video testimony, or simply a one-page summary for a busy political leader. Be prepared for anticipated opposition, having your responses ready to opponents' likely lines of argument.

“Put time into consolidating, simplifying, and framing your advocacy message and asks” - **BAN**

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STEP 8: DIGITAL ADVOCACY CAN BOOST CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Digital advocacy (using technology such as emails, social media and 'virtual events' to build support for a cause or campaign) is increasingly important to CSOs in a world of rapid local and global communications, and where many potential supporters spend hours on-screen.

Using digital advocacy tools can increase the reach of your messaging, and at great speed; enable you to build and retain supporters; collect key data; and build public visibility and a virtual network, readily available to target with action alerts.



The key things are to create an engaging and shareable message to attract attention; make getting involved quick and easy for existing and potential supporters; and use the most effective digital platform(s) for your content type and messaging.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Think through the pros and cons of different media and platforms. If you opt to use social media, will your messages reach the audiences you intend and land with them in the way you hope? Consider the potential downsides (self-exposure, distrust, perceptions of bias, political or public annoyance) and whether the advantages outweigh them.

Reflect on whether you have the communications resources needed to *engage responsively* and in a sustained way with audiences, which is a key promise and demand of social media.

There can be wide and quick reach through social media, with relatively low input, but there is also a danger of backlash – with recent academic research on advocacy in more restrictive and closed environments suggesting that social media advocacy campaigns are a high-reward, high-risk option. Think about the potential for online or physical targeting of social media advocates (especially prominent ones, public faces of a campaign, and women) – and have a response in mind.



CONGCOOP notes a civil society excitement around social media use if and where there is a relative shortage of spaces in society for civic society engagement. Social media, it says, offer the opportunity of greater access to more and different population groups than were reachable before – and give an important push on advocacy messaging, beyond sending the advocacy document to power holders.

There are also other considerations to bear in mind with digital advocacy, such as understanding and practice on the need for human dignity and accountable messaging, informed consent to use information or images, good practice on data privacy, and the lifespan of data and its potential uses in the future.

STEP 9: TAILOR YOUR COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH

Are there ways you can access a different space to deliver your message, such as through a community forum, grassroots petition or leaders' delegation? Might that be preferable to having your own communications action, or a civil society coalition one, towards which a social media audience may be indifferent or even hostile? Tailor your communication approach to what is appropriate for your audience and your objective, while taking account of community and marginalised groups.

Putting into Practice: Can you Share an Example of Tailoring the Tone of your Communications Approach?



ICEFI makes the case that maintaining a professional tone and calm approach (cordial, dispassionate, non-confrontational) is important to formal policy advocacy, and remains important when holding to account, or even critiquing poor performance of, a duty bearer. (However, the tone of advocacy communications may be stronger, or more strident, in public advocacy – especially if calling out egregious acts by a public or corporate power holder.)

CCEEU notes the importance of adapting the message and tone to the advocacy audience, so that it is supportive of allies, addresses obstacles and holds to account if needed – while maintaining a coherent discourse. Your framing will refer to an audience's areas of power or responsibility, their interests and position on your issue, and your asks of them.

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Putting into Practice: What Types of Opportunities can Support your Communications?

BAN emphasises the importance of listening to and exploring any common ground with power holders in your advocacy engagements, not just speaking at them – and being open to the idea of an acceptable compromise.

ICEFI highlights the value of having planned advocacy actions, underpinned by your purpose and evidence, but also being open to – and scanning for – “opportunities emerging” in either policy or public spaces, where you can do a quick analysis and response, rooted in your prior, well established core messaging.

You may need a ‘technical expert’ or other third-party to be involved in an advocacy event, but make space in a meeting (or certainly over a campaign) to platform, validate and amplify representative voices of empowered communities or sub-groups directly affected.

“We create safe spaces for dialogue between the national government and civil society, with the international community acting as a guarantor to ensure guarantees for the defence of human rights...”
– **CCEEU**

Depending on the scope, depth and duration of your relationship with communities and rights holders, you will need to take an informed decision on whether to facilitate advocacy led by them, undertake advocacy with them or advocate for them. It is quite likely that you will combine these in different spaces.

Normally there should be the chance to build in advocacy by or advocacy with partner communities at some point. This could be through delegations from affected groups bringing collectively-agreed evidence to bear, with the authenticity and representativeness, inclusion, and empowerment that entails.

Consider Marginalised Groups

The facilitation, mobilisation and engagement of marginalised communities or excluded groups is central to an advocacy approach which seeks empowerment above and beyond the issue at hand. This may involve supporting mobilisation of different cohorts affected by

an issue (women, youths, farmers, landless people), facilitating analysis and messaging, and accompanying their engagement with advocacy audiences – local, national or international.

Colombia Diversa, for example, supports very marginalised LGBTQI+ people to engage directly with religious leaders in ‘improbable discourses’ to explore the potential for a more inclusive approach by religious leaders to the rights, hopes and aspirations of LGBTQI+ people.

Public advocacy can also be a useful complement to efforts at direct or indirect influencing of politics, policies or practice. It helps CSO policy advocacy to be able to point to a wider campaign and public support, underlining the authenticity, representativeness and relevance of their asks.

For some CSOs, individual issues are important but the participatory and empowering processes by which communities emancipate and transform themselves is the real gold. At other times, especially if lobbying access to policy-making space and sources of power are restricted, advocacy messaging may be best delivered, or may have to be delivered, through high level technical engagement or public campaigns.

“Communities can do anything, if you enable and support them and help create the spaces... That is important, for ownership and to avoid dependency – but also for reasons of representativeness, relevance and defensibility of the positions taken in advocacy engagement” – **ZPP**

Putting into Practice: What are your Reflections on the Complementarity of Public Advocacy?



Green Scenery cites the example of how women leaders’ public advocacy at a parliamentary session and media work through powerful testimony videos were very influential in moving obstacles and securing gains on land rights and access in Sierra Leone.

BAN emphasises the importance of progressing an advocacy issue by seeking engagement and influence yourself, through communities or a sector group – whatever works – rather than feeling the need to ‘go public’ or be controversial if that is not required.

CSO TIPS FOR ADVOCACY ENGAGEMENT

1	STAY ROOTED IN COMMUNITIES
Make sure that your advocacy work is rooted in communities, and reflective of their rights, interests and priorities. This is not just for greater effectiveness but also to adhere as well as possible to the PANEL principles of being participatory, accountable, non-discriminatory and inclusive, empowering, and operating legally.	
2	ESTABLISH EVIDENCE, ANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE
Ensure you have the strongest, most accurate and defensible evidence, analysis and narrative that you can. In lobbying, maintain a professional tone as you bring evidence and solutions forward to whatever advocacy audience you engage with. Directly affected communities and groups may use stronger emotion and language, especially at 'street level' but even when lobbying. Yet they should still aim to be respectful, constructive and solutions-oriented (notwithstanding the import of their issue and strength of their passions) because that is where influence often lies.	
3	PITCH YOUR ADVOCACY AT THE RIGHT LEVEL
Frame and pitch your advocacy at the right level: micro, meso or macro, or a suitable combination. Decide what is important to pursue, and why and how, then map out the approaches, tools, allies, spaces, openings, etc. needed. Some advocacy aims may be possible to address at the community level; others need to be brought up to municipal/district level. More complex or contested issues may require advocacy at national or regional/international levels. Assess what you are able to pursue, given the issue requirements and openings, and the capacities, resources and influence that you and allies can bring to bear.	
4	OPEN ADVOCACY SPACES TO RIGHTS HOLDERS
Create, open and leverage (or leave) different advocacy spaces for greatest advocacy effectiveness. Work at leveraging spaces or opening spaces that are safe and meaningful for communities, rights holders or excluded groups for whom you are seeking entry. Try to amplify their voice and power rather than taking the time and space available.	
5	DIALOGUE EARLY (AGAIN) WITH POWER HOLDERS
Consider 'advance dialogue' or information-sharing with power holders. This could be before the start of an advocacy programme: helping to inform, shape or frame it, source allies, or even secure formal/tacit acceptance. Equally, it could be after gathering evidence and analysis, framing the advocacy message and asks, to test how it might land before formally approaching advocacy targets.	

6	WORK IN ALLIANCES, NETWORKS AND COALITIONS
Work in networks, alliances and coalitions for greater effectiveness. Help establish them, or their coherence, if they are not available or operating effectively at the outset. Seek out allies within government, public administration, politics, local leaders, corporations, donors, civil society networks, social movements and communities of interest. There is rarely a society or system so closed that there is nobody willing to at least listen to an important issue.	
7	TAKE COMMITMENTS, FOCUS ON IMPLEMENTATION
Seek to realise what legal, policy and regulatory gains (or even verbal commitments) you can, but do not be lulled into thinking your advocacy job is done. Ensuring clarity, sufficient resources, equity and consistency in the implementation of laws, rulings or policy decisions is often what delivers substantive change in the lives and choices of people you are working with.	
8	USE, POSITION AND SAVE ‘EVIDENTIAL SUMMARIES’
Help create powerful collective analyses, narratives and asks, captured in what different CSO dialogue partners have called written memoranda or evidential summaries. Use them during your advocacy. Complement these with advocacy framed for, or pitched towards, the interests and positions of key power holders, but without straying from the advocacy purpose.	
9	WORK ON ATTITUDES AND VALUES AS WELL AS POLICY
Shape the discourse: sometimes, because of the highly-sensitive nature of an issue or impending events, it is not possible or advisable to pursue lobbying pathways. However, it may still be possible and useful to stage public-facing advocacy actions, whether directly through marches, protests, sit-ins, letter-writing, etc. or indirectly, through engagement with traditional or social media.	
10	IMPLEMENT, TRACK, REFLECT AND ADAPT
Monitor and reflect on your advocacy work, so you are constantly aware of opportunities or needs to adapt in a strategic, planned direction and manner – rather than being forced into sudden shifts.	



SECTION 4

E N V I R O N M E N T

ADVOCACY WORK IN RESTRICTED ENVIRONMENTS

IDENTIFY RESTRICTIONS THAT CSOs ENCOUNTER

ADAPT ADVOCACY APPROACHES IN RESTRICTED ENVIRONMENTS

CONSIDER NEW SPACES, PROCESSES & ALLIES

MIX & MATCH STRATEGIES TO EVOLVING CONTEXT

CONSIDER STRATEGIES & APPROACHES IN AUTOCRATIC SPACES

WHAT CSOs SAY ABOUT SECURITY ACCESS FOR ADVOCACY

4

ENVIRONMENT

Year after year it seems, restrictions are growing on CSOs engaged in advocacy – including on specific themes, and in states that were known as champions of human rights and freedoms.

IDENTIFY RESTRICTIONS THAT CSOs ENCOUNTER

Among the measures that some states commonly use, and combine, are:

- onerous and costly regulations
- legislative curbs
- misuse of anti-terrorism laws
- online and offline harassment and smears
- travel bans
- limitations on foreign funding contributions, or their use
- prohibition on public gatherings beyond a certain (small) size
- intimidation and harassment
- violence and detention
- ‘lawfare’ – the use of legal systems and institutions to deter, damage or delegitimise civil society

Other actors, such as paramilitary groups, corporations or their agents, criminal gangs, and traffickers in people or drugs, are more likely to use harassment, intimidation or violence.

ADAPT ADVOCACY APPROACHES IN RESTRICTED ENVIRONMENTS

Advocates are faced with slender opportunity, constant uncertainty and potential threat when they go about [Lobbying the Autocrat](#). However, they can, with difficulty, carve out lobbying niches even in restrictive policy spaces. And they can, sometimes, organise public advocacy even on sensitive issues from women’s rights to election reform, and environmental protection to land rights.

Within boundaries set by an authoritarian administration and tested creatively by civil society. CSOs can and do find ways to advocate in restricted environments. They may focus on aspects of an issue that are less sensitive and where they can make progress – ‘pushing on open doors’, operate in a low-key way or use alternative entry points (e.g., informal influencing where there are no formal channels) or find amenable spaces to approach more friendly targets – such as government events, public or community festivals, or kinship networks.

MIX & MATCH STRATEGIES TO EVOLVING CONTEXT

Sometimes you may need to lie low, switching to advocacy on a less contested topic, to a mode of operation primarily concerned with community and staff safety, or even an organisational survival agenda.

However, you and allies may decide that you must confront especially egregious restrictions, such as through online campaigning or creative cultural resistance through arts, street theatre or music. Sometimes, CSOs need to call out for mass, peaceful public mobilisation (even despite bans), or challenge restrictions legally – whether through local, national, regional or international courts.

Even autocratic states may offer limited, uneven or favoured access to decision making at times. For instance, they may feel a need to buttress support in a period of (relative) political pressure, to create an appearance of civil society consultation, get trustworthy technical information or grassroots social analysis, or to gain ideas on alternative policy framing or potential solutions to recognised problems – at no cost. In these situations, you’ll need to decide how to get involved in a way that is most effective but avoids being taken advantage of or manipulated.

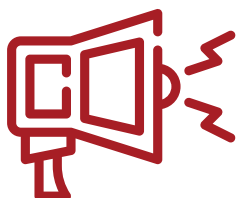
Lobbying the Autocrat suggests that targeting bureaucracies (e.g., establishing and maintaining informal networks with policy makers in autocratic states) may be a more effective approach for advocates than seeking to mobilise or influence the public. Even so, it suggests, social media and other (limited) public-facing strategies may be more attractive to CSOs because of the low cost and relative ease of entry to this space, and potential speed of access to power holders – even with the potentially high risk and cost of backlash.

“Advocates are pushed into a precarious dance... [requiring] just the right amount of acquiescence and assertiveness, private persuasion and public pressure, and the flexibility to change quickly to suit different situations. An adaptive lobbyist survives and may even thrive in such conditions, while others often face dire consequences.”

Lobbying the Autocrat: The Dynamics of Policy Advocacy in Nondemocracies

4 ENVIRONMENT

CONSIDER STRATEGIES & APPROACHES IN AUTOCRATIC SPACES



Some advocacy strategies and approaches to consider (with due care) in autocratic spaces

- Modelling change through pilot projects, documenting field evidence and building networks of influence (even if fragile)
- Developing expert knowledge that is valuable to and otherwise unavailable to government and other power holders
- Securing unlikely allies – such as government units and corporations on corruption, who may also be interested in good governance, transparency and social accountability more widely
- Finding openings among political factions or rising political stars, or on themes favoured by the administration during different sociopolitical phases or power shifts
- Securing access to power holders through professional bodies, kinship networks or geographic links
- Finding some partial advocacy access through regulatory mechanisms and those in charge of them: administratively and/or politically
- Working through traditional elders or faith group leaders, who may have some ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ leverage on power holders
- Linking to advocates or lobby governments in the Global North to bring pressure to change on a target government (or corporation)
- Leveraging opportunities such as governance or corruption scandals.

CONSIDER NEW SPACES, PROCESSES & ALLIES

Where in-country sources of influence are hard to find, CSOs may engage with UN agencies or diplomats to influence a relatively closed government or use a regional or international mechanism to apply pressure. This could involve using the UN Human Rights Council, other treaty bodies, the Universal Period Review process of appraising states' human rights records, or the easier-to-access [UN Special Procedures on Human Rights](#). The latter cover a range of themes and geographic locations, and circulate regular calls for inputs that are accessible to CSOs – without process requirements and time demands that are too onerous.

Outside the UN system, CSOs find recourse to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights or the African Commission on Human and People's Rights very powerful at times. Representation at, and findings by, these bodies can reinforce national demands on adherence to internationally accepted standards and offer points of leverage for in-country advocates.

Strength and safety in numbers: It is especially important for CSOs operating in restrictive environments to build their network of allies (within and across sectors and spaces, with donors, UN agencies and sometimes within administrations) to mitigate and share risk, and for reasons of effectiveness.



Depending on a particular advocacy issue and how sensitive it is, you may be able to (or have to) reach out carefully to 'unlikely allies' – such as people from political or public service circles, or their family members; corporate representatives; faith-based or other influencers; associational networks such as Chambers of Commerce, lawyers and investors; or diaspora organisations.

WHAT CSOs SAY ABOUT SECURING ACCESS FOR ADVOCACY

Do you have any tips for engaging in advocacy with governments and power holders in restricted environments?

CCEEU notes the importance of being “a critical friend”. It aims to give government and other power holders credit where it is due, and hold them accountable when necessary. It aims to be positive and solutions-oriented, always offering advice on constructive ways forward.

ICEFI suggests the possibility of “finding islands of opportunity and legitimacy” within most administrations, even in restrictive environments. It is vital, it says, to identify actors, opportunities and moments to gain access to them in safe spaces, which is helped by operating in alliances and coalitions. Finding a ‘framing’ of the issue and proposed solution that speaks to a power holder’s interests will also assist your advocacy.

BAN suggests a range of potential strategies including: bringing expert evidence, trying to access targeted government officials, presenting government with solutions, building media understanding and coverage of issues, understanding and seeking to address capacity constraints among power holders, and working within and across coalitions to build traction.

What advice would you have around the role of communities in such advocacy?

Corambiente emphasises bringing communities and coalitions (e.g., social and environmental movements) together to maximise their “power with each other”. It also focuses on opening safe spaces for communities to engage on their own issues, and pushing not just for policies or commitments, but also for implementation.

CCALCP highlights the value of communities having real participation, a chance to be heard and having their rights recognised. It emphasises how vital it is to remain connected with them, and enable/support them to bring their own analysis and issues forward to the highest level of power holder necessary.

Can technology play a role in advocacy in restricted environments?

ZPP emphasises the significance of using information technology (IT) for awareness raising in more restricted environments, and for convening people virtually for analysis, planning and actions. Recognising the risk to activists of potential surveillance or data capture, ZPP considers the communication and mobilising power of IT and social media to offer greater potential in restrictive environments – for the moment.

“State entities are not homogenous... sometimes you can support progressive elements within government, which are listening but may be weak... you can try to support allies to address obstacles in different organs of state... frame your messages to address different responsible areas of power... maintain a coherent discourse – engaging where possible, defending where you need, consolidating when you can...” – **CCEEU**

“Build understanding and space to operate by engaging with duty bearers from the outset – before any formal engagement... This can help with framing the work, not having it misunderstood and avoiding ‘nasty surprises’ upon later engagement” – **ZPP**

SECTION 5

R I S K

DEALING WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF RISK.

IDENTIFY & ANALYSE THE RISK

IDENTIFY COHORTS AT PARTICULAR RISK

MANAGE THE RISK TO COMMUNITIES

PAY ATTENTION TO ACTIVISTS AND HRDS

CONSIDER RISKS OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES

MINIMISE RISK TO YOUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

CONSIDER RISKS TO YOUR ADVOCACY AND ORGANISATION

WHAT CSOs SAY ON MANAGING RISK

5

RISK

Assessing risks to different actors and allies in your advocacy initiative should be part of your analysis and planning – bearing in mind that the community often bears the most serious risk of unintended consequences, notwithstanding the risks that may face advocacy staff and volunteers.

Daring to act is inherent to the work of social justice and human rights CSOs, but the aim of risk management is to increase the chances and scope of positive achievements while reducing the odds and magnitude of negative outcomes.

IDENTIFY & ANALYSE THE RISK

Risk management requires you to identify, assess the likelihood and potential impact, and then reduce, mitigate and manage your risks, bearing in mind your risk appetite and communities you are working with, as well as the urgency and severity of the problem you want to address.

Considerations for Understanding Risk

- **Types of Risk:** Think about risk types, such as contextual risks (political, economic), programme risks (failing to achieve results, contributing to harm in partner communities, etc.), and organisational risks (addressing compliance, governance, property, security, IT, organisational reputation, etc.).
- **Analyse by Category:** Analyse risk in different risk categories. These include, for example, physical safety, legal matters, bureaucratic compliance, financial and reputational issues.
- **Don't Forget:** Your risk assessment should also consider IT and data security threats, psychological well-being, and risk of trauma among participant groups, staff members and volunteers. Think especially about the people to whom the greatest risks may apply. This could be at grassroots level, where less control or accountability may apply to army or police forces, paramilitary actors or corporate security guards.

IDENTIFY COHORTS AT PARTICULAR RISK

CONGCOOP notes the need to address individual and collective risks, which emerge and present differently at different levels but can sometimes be most acute and urgent at grassroots level – especially to facilitators of gender-related work and women’s representatives.



Risk may adhere to particular people associated with activism, such as groups and people (especially identified leaders) organising for equality, justice and human rights. Specific risks apply to communities and activists mobilising against major public, private or collaborative infrastructure projects, public or privatised land grabs, or the extraction or destruction of natural resources.

Threats may centre on marginalised groups (women, youths, displaced people, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic or religious minorities) because, at a wider level, impunity often applies to discrimination against them. Women in activism, public life and social media (whether community leaders, entrepreneurs, public figures or politicians) often experience heightened abuse, intimidation and threat of violence, both online and in-person.

It is important to identify ways to reduce, manage and mitigate the broad risks identified, but also to drill down and tackle risks (whether clear from the outset or which emerge over time) that apply to planned strategies or approaches, or to particularly at-risk individuals or cohorts.

Sometimes, working to increase duty bearers’ awareness and understanding of their human rights obligations, and their willingness and capacities to be responsive, may represent more effective (and lower risk) advocacy than ‘calling them out’ publicly on failures they may not fully understand, or about which they can do little.



RISK

MANAGE THE RISK TO COMMUNITIES

Pay particular attention to the potential risks to affected communities, and their chosen or elected representatives. Explore with communities the pros and cons (and ultimate merit) of engaging on an issue at hand, with a particular audience, at a specific time or within a given time and scenario.

Make sure you are clear on their risk appetite, and yours, and plan the different means by which you can manage or mitigate risks, within or outside the communities as required.

Community-based responses to identifying and managing risk (rising threat levels, strangers in the community, triggers to action, etc.) will work in some circumstances. In others, you may have to move leaders, or planned activities, outside a community for a time; pause initiatives; or, in extreme situations, halt your advocacy altogether.

Some important ways to manage risk include raising awareness and understanding among staff, volunteers and communities; building a culture of risk analysis, protection and risk minimisation; networking for mutual support and security; and putting in place wellbeing and self- or peer care approaches for those who may need them.



ZPP notes the need for a twin approach to managing the sometimes considerable risks to communities or their leaders during advocacy:

- On the one hand, accompanying communities on non-confrontational approaches to persuasion, influencing and dialogue, building on relationships and trust;
- And on the other hand, supporting careful risk assessment and planning for communities dealing with “hot issues”, supporting activists when needed, or taking them to a place of temporary safety in more extreme situations.

CONGCOOP spells out different means (a mix of strategic, relational and tactical) to mitigate and manage conflict-related risk in the context of long-running civil strife and related high levels of social violence.



They include:

- Presenting a vision of societal change in advocacy, rather than a list of issues and demands
- Engaging, informing and consulting with different stakeholders throughout an initiative or campaign
- Working to re-set and improve relations with different power holders when promising context changes occur (through elections, peace deals, cessation of violence, etc.)
- Helping to build different actors' awareness and understanding, capacities and relations
- Tactical matters such as changing meeting locations, times and arrangements to reduce the risk of CSOs and community or activist group leaders being targeted.

PAY ATTENTION TO ACTIVISTS AND HRDS

Human rights defenders including frontline social justice activists on issues like gender inequalities and GBV, social exclusion, land rights, natural resource management and problems with extractive industries, may face an elevated level of risk. It is important that your risk analysis and planning consider this and reduces or mitigates the risks they face.

What would negative scenarios and unintended consequences look like in relation to your advocacy? Factor the mitigation or management of these into your planning and implementation.



RISK

CONSIDER RISKS OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Certain advocacy approaches and tactics carry more risk than others in any given circumstance, so consider the pros and cons of different approaches, tactics and tools. Strive for the best dynamic balance between likely effectiveness and risk mitigation.

Public mobilisation or protest may carry additional safety risks. Insider lobbying may risk distancing from your community of interest or the appearance of being co-opted. Champions you have cultivated may be institutionally or politically sidelined, or shift allegiance on an issue. Seeding or popularising a discourse in the media may pay dividends or invite a backlash.

The risk level and types will depend on your advocacy issue and its sensitivity. That may be inherent to the issue or specific to a given time – such as ahead of a general or local elections; during a high-profile mission to a country by International Financial Institutions, UN human rights mechanisms or other bodies; or ahead of an international investment decision on a major but contested infrastructure project.

Some issues may be considered red-line issues ('do not cross') at all times; others will depend on the context, power and interest dynamics, as well as timing. Being non-partisan politically and seeking allies across the political spectrum is important, however challenging it may be, so that you do not align yourself – and are not perceived to have aligned yourself – with any one political party or shade of ideological opinion.

Having good contextual knowledge, familiarity with the context and experiential awareness of how to operate can mitigate some risk. Be careful, though, as habitual exposure to dangers (among frontline programme staff, for example) can desensitise them to rising levels of risk, or changing sources of risk, and lead to complacency.

In some contexts, larger NGOs and CSOs have provided a protective presence to communities, community-based organisations and individuals engaged in social justice advocacy or protecting human rights, or who are at risk because of the contexts in which they live. Through the encouragement and support of their partners, for example:



- Peace Brigades International has accompanied HRDs under threat in Colombia
- Ecumenical accompaniers stood in solidarity with rights holders in the occupied West Bank in Palestine
- And in Guatemala, a network of feminist, Indigenous women supported Indigenous Peoples and other communities under threat of forcible displacement.

MINIMISE RISK TO STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

No advocacy is entirely risk-free for your organisation and its reputation. Neither is there a risk-free environment for organisational leaders involved in advocacy or staff members mobilising communities on a fractious issue at local level.

Good practice will involve analysing, planning and implementing measures to prevent or reduce danger from known sources; to plan and prepare for rapid and appropriate protection responses when dangers arise; to address wellbeing, and primary or secondary trauma where it arises; and to reflect on and evolve your risk management measures based on experience.

RISK



Things to consider at operational level include:

- duty of care aspects for staff and communities
- codes of conduct for staff safety and security
- resources and training needed for psychosocial support
- digital security from online surveillance, attacks or harassment
- standby insurance, moving, medical or psychosocial arrangements that need to be lined up for staff or community advocates in unavoidably high-risk situations (including HRDs).

For staff members, volunteers and community activists alike, the nature of some advocacy work gives rise to the risk of secondary or vicarious trauma, and potential burnout, with risks to the people involved and operational sustainability alike.

This is particularly the case with ‘frontline work’ on contentious issues such as land and natural resource rights, extractive practices, women’s rights, violence against women, conflict mediation and peacebuilding, and human trafficking. Good practice suggests building awareness, prevention and response measures into programmes, and ensuring adequate resource levels for their proper functioning.

Ongoing consideration and management of risk by your organisation, along with preparedness and planning for different eventualities and scenarios, is a key tool. Keeping risk awareness and management on the agenda within your advocacy alliances and wider partnerships is also vital.

CONSIDER RISKS TO YOUR ADVOCACY AND ORGANISATION

Ask yourself if a tactic intended to reach one objective might undermine the achievement of another objective. Ideally, the tactics you use to achieve separate advocacy objectives will reinforce each other, contributing within an effective theory of change.

If you are thinking of a large public mobilisation, plan how you will respond to any potential disruption, arrest, imprisonment or injuries – and any public, legal or financial liabilities that may be laid at your door as an organisation, alliance or coalition. Consider whether a public mobilisation may cut off any possibility of formal or informal lobbying, or cause an opportunity for policy influence to be cancelled. Keep the pros and cons of different tactics in constant, dynamic discussion.

Other means of reducing and managing risk for staff members, volunteers, communities and activists include having (and implementing) safety and security protocols, securing IT and data management systems, and having preparedness and response measures in place.

Depending on the sensitivity of issues you are working on, it may be important to have an organisational crisis action plan in place and ready to implement – or even better, rehearsed ahead of any need to implement it.

WHAT CSOs SAY ON MANAGING RISK

How do you best prepare to deal with advocacy risk in your organisation?

"You have to understand the socio-political context, the possibilities and constraints... bring your evidence and analysis... be cordial and professional, not confrontational in your approach... keep your autonomy... have good risk assessment and mitigation in place... and also show some backbone" – **ICEFI**

"Be as objective, strongly factual, and professional as possible - being aware of red-lines issues and contextual trigger factors... and engaging in dialogue, not 'ranting' at power holders" – **BAN**

"When needed, we can mobilise a big number of people in support of our advocacy: communities, women's leaders and so on... at local level and up to attending parliament with their banners. But very good facts and analysis – making sure our advocacy is defensible – is vital... Facts are key: try not to be too emotional, and just stick to the facts" – **Green Scenery**

Can you share examples of your approach to protection?

"There are big security risks involved and we support protection and self-protection measures for communities and for the team... We emphasise a collective presence and leaders' role in representing their communities within advocacy spaces – backed by Community Diagnosis and agreed asks... to try to mitigate risks at the level of individuals... – **Corambiente**

"We identify activists and Human Rights Defenders facing risk and bring them to the attention of the National Protection System, so we are passing risk elements and accountability onto the state... We also work on legitimising, and establishing state support and funding for, community protection measures – such as the Indigenous Guard" – **CCEEU**

Do you have any tips for when risks may evolve or be more acute than anticipated?

“Knowledge of the law and experience of human rights work helps, but there is always potential that things escalate so you need different voices to bring forward issues – to shield staff and communities a bit. You need to work with sensitivity, through a combination of approaches, to partner with others on some issues; and sometimes to rally support from local leaders and the public” – **ZPP**

“Make sure to address individual and collective risks, which emerge and present differently at different levels, but can sometimes be most acute and urgent at grassroots level – especially to facilitators of gender-related work and women’s representatives” – **CONGCOOP**

“Make sure the risks are worthwhile, in helping to strengthen communities... give legitimacy to their concerns and collective proposals... securing rulings and precedents that support peasants’ rights... and help position their challenges at a different level” – **CCALCP**



SECTION 6

A D A P T A T I O N

ADAPTATION FOR EFFECTIVENESS

REFLECT ON PRACTICE

REFLECT ON BLOCKAGES & CHALLENGES

WHAT DO CSOs HAVE TO SAY ON ADAPTATION?

ADAPTATION IN CRISIS

SELECTED CSOs' REFLECTIONS ON ADAPTATION

6

ADAPTATION

CSOs are in a perpetual state of change, adapting to community requirements, donor demands, context and programme learning, as well as changes in government policy, economic and environmental factors, and sociopolitical shifts.

An organisational disposition to change, and an openness to adaptation (informed by flexible ways of thinking, working, interacting, learning and achieving) is essential for CSOs involved in advocacy, as they seek to maximise opportunities – and circumvent constraints – in any given context.

By being open to potential change, reflective and nimble as an organisation, you are much more likely to spot shifting context and power dynamics relevant to the issue you are advocating on, and emergent opportunities.

REFLECT ON PRACTICE

You cannot think of all potential changes, positive or negative, but preparedness for change and routine reflection on context and effectiveness build a culture of flexibility and responsiveness that can help you adapt. Some important questions to help you reflect include:

- What is happening (or appears to be emerging), and why?
- What does it mean, for who you are (as an organisation or alliance) and what you are trying to change?
- What next? What could your response be? Is there an opportunity here on your issue?

Advocacy initiatives or campaigns need to have data to consider their effectiveness and to allow practitioners to adapt their approaches as opportune or necessary. It is important, therefore, to record your advocacy actions (who, what, when, why, where, how) and reflect, even briefly, on the outcome of each engagement – whether that is positive, negative or null. This will help ongoing adaptation and learning, and can inform a periodic review of progress towards your advocacy objectives. Keeping such a log will enable insight on what is working and what is not, avoid duplication of efforts or the repetition of ineffective or counterproductive approaches. It can also help to see the small, incremental wins along the way to your larger goal.

REFLECT ON BLOCKAGES & CHALLENGES

If you find that your usual ways of enabling, mobilising and advocating are not working, ask yourself:

- Are you targeting the right people?
- Are the vested interests too strong? Are there policies or commitments that you can appeal to?
- Are there aspects of an issue where you can focus to make more progress?
- Do you require action from many and/or dispersed players?
- Can you sequence or focus your advocacy differently?
- Is your coalition not wide, deep, unified or credible enough to amount to a persuasive constituency for political action?

Organisational reflection on questions like this can help you decide if you need to adapt strategically: in a designed and planned way, with an eye on seizing opportunities, minimising disruption and maximising effective use of resources. Planned reflection and strategic adaptation is better than having to undergo more short-term or reactive adaptation as circumstances force you into crisis decisions.

And remember: the process of reflecting and strategising never really stops: you keep gathering information and intelligence around the issue you want to resolve, adapt your theory of change and approaches, and give yourself the best chance of achieving your purpose as the context evolves.



ADAPTATION

WHAT DO CSOs HAVE TO SAY ON ADAPTATION?

In the course of developing this resource, CSOs shared their reflections on adaptation. As noted by Green Scenery, “For every advocacy activity, you need a reflection: what went well, and worked; what did not work so well. And then also an annual reflection: did your strategy work? How do you need to change it, or ‘step it up’?”

Further reflections from CSOs include:

“Sometimes be judicious and patient, and do not stir up a hot issue” – **BAN**

“Know your issues and the context well, and how advocacy can be affected by ‘matters arising’” – **ZPP**

“Look at different things – actors, effectiveness, risks, opportunities, etc. – in different ways at different times...” – **Corambiente**

“It is constant adjustment and calibration, listening attentively, validating community concerns, and seeking ways forward...” – **CCALCP**

“Ongoing flexible and adaptive programming is important: discussing potential changes in period partner or funding meetings, for example...” – **ICEFI**

ADAPTATION IN CRISIS

Generally, when you have identified a need to change your advocacy initiative, you are probably best to consider modifying it through what is termed the Hierarchy of Change: trying changes to activities first, then approaches, then your strategies and objectives – and if necessary, though more rarely, your goals.

- Sometimes, however, there can be a sudden and serious shift in the advocacy context, or in the wider governance, sociopolitical or conflict environment. This might cause you to end all advocacy and reflect. Alternatively, you might move to a 'Plan B' scenario (involving different advocacy objectives and approaches) that you considered in your scenario development or organisational crisis planning.
- A crisis can potentially cause you to escalate your advocacy, either quietly or vocally – from a local or municipal level to national level, or from national to regional or international levels – and it is best to have potential approaches in mind for different scenarios.
- There are also occasions when more hard-hitting advocacy is required. Strong public expressions and demands for accountability can be warranted, for example, when a government is acting illegally, when decisions are being made around going to war or supporting one, or to protest violent extremism or the harming of civilians, according to A Handbook for Change, published by Crisis Action.

If you experience such an *advocacy crisis level*, it may well represent an organisational crisis too – in terms of safety/security risks, reputational damage, or even an organisation's or staff members' ability to survive.

Do not ignore signs of a crisis, slowly emerging or acute, in the hope that it will blow over, or not affect you or your organisation. Instead, consider convening emergency meetings with your management team, community and other partners, and advocacy coalition allies. It is better to be prepared and not need to act than to be unprepared in the case of urgent need.



ADAPTATION

Moving into Crisis Mode

Consider the tipping point between normality, or relative normality (where CSOs feel they can sense and manage risk), and crisis – where ‘business as usual’ approaches are no longer considered appropriate or sufficient by important people in the organisation, such as the management team or the board.

Switching to crisis mode is hard and studies show that organisations are often slow to realise, or accept, that they are operating in new conditions – even if there is a latent risk of crisis when advocating within a restrictive environment. Values and organisational culture play an important role and it is crucial to have some advance understanding of your organisation’s culture and priorities.

Some researchers who have looked at the overlap between risk management and organisational planning (particularly in the context of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic) suggest [‘managing the switch’](#) to make it easier when it needs to happen. In a five-step process, aimed at building preparedness and capabilities to smooth organisations’ transitions into (and out of) crises, they recommend:

- i. **Value expertise:** Listening to and valuing expert advice on triggers and thresholds
- ii. **Listen intently to outsiders:** Paying attention to voices outside the organisation (NGO networks or thinktanks, for example) and ‘weak signals’ that might cumulatively signal an impending crisis
- iii. **Encourage dissenting voices:** Inviting and really listening to ‘bottom-up’ voices within the organisation
- iv. **Position the ‘devil’s advocate’:** Hear competing viewpoints, and scenario planning (to counterbalance knee-jerk recourse to ‘the way things are done’) within your culture
- v. **Build capability to switch gradually:** Develop processes, trigger points and initial steps to calibrate and manage the switch from normal to crisis mode.

Taken together, these five elements aim to reduce the risk that organisations react too late to impending danger, and rather develop a disposition to listen out for danger and calibrate a response to crisis – especially in contexts where the odds of a crisis occurring are relatively high.

“Have your ‘parachute’ ready, if you are working on a highly sensitive issue – whether that means having emergency resources or a helpline available, having a temporary flight plan in place, international support options, or whatever is suited to the person or group at risk, their context and mobility” – **ICEFI**

During a crisis, keep key stakeholders in the loop and ensure appropriate decisions are taken; approaches, messaging and communications agreed; and risk or crisis management measures urgently put in place.

A shift to crisis advocacy mode, or organisational crisis mode, may be short-term or more long-lasting but you will certainly need another period of reflection and planning (including but not just on your advocacy) afterwards.

And remember that for social justice advocacy organisations, your priority may have to shift for a time from the focus you had earlier planned to issues common to emergency contexts, such as: protection, prevention and response relating to GBV; humanitarian access; gender equality and empowerment of women; and the need for protection of civilians or accountability for human rights abuses.

CSOs' REFLECTIONS ON ADAPTATION

Has adaptation been part of your advocacy work?

CONGCOOP highlights the need to be determined, adaptive and flexible; to work collaboratively – seeking allies and small windows of opportunity; and to bring community voices to the fore. Noting the importance of seeking and recognising small changes that can accumulate, it highlights incremental gains achieved in women's understanding of their rights, collective analysis and decision making, communities' and groups' abilities to formulate and put forward advocacy demands, and their enhanced sense of empowerment (as individuals and communities) over time.

BAN underlines that unforeseen issues can arise that need to be addressed, which can have knock-on effects on planned advocacy initiatives, timelines, resourcing, partnerships, etc. This calls for an organisation's own preparedness to adapt, but also for light-touch partnership dialogue and change processes to facilitate the adaptation.

How do you engage with communities and other stakeholders for and during adaptation?

BAN emphasises bringing people along (communities and other stakeholders) through informing them of progress, or blockages, which helps manage expectations about the – generally slow – pace of change. It also encourages “fluid and constant communications” with communities on implementation – “about advances and challenges, slow procedures and delayed timings” – to keep them meaningfully informed and on-board.

CCEEU also speaks of bringing people along, both in communities and with allies and coalitions. It notes the importance of monitoring civil society space, attacks, and attempts at restriction or closure. Similarly, it highlights the need for shared reflections – across sectors and themes – to identify common requirements, agendas and spaces for advocacy practice and change.

CCALCP underlines the necessity of tracking communities' institutional capacities, to identify where they may need support with analysis, identifying powerful actors and advocacy spaces, developing leadership, and bringing issues forward to claim their rights.

How do you take a pragmatic approach to advocacy and adaptation?

It is vital to remember that interrogating and reflecting on the “process successes and failures” at any level, and the lessons learned, is not wasted time but valuable advocacy time, says Corambiente.

CCEEU highlights the value of being realistic about ambitions in particular timeframes on complex, multi-layered issues, so that you do not set yourself up for results failure but can achieve and consolidate gains over time.

CCALCP underlines the importance of following up on advocacy actions – reports shared, meetings held, petitions sent, commitments secured – because that ongoing commitment and energy, more than advocacy events, is what really changes people’s lives.

FINAL TIPS

PLAN STRATEGICALLY:	Advocacy is slow and complex, and there will be obstacles and setbacks as well as gains, along the way. Plan strategically so that results will build on each other in increments, towards your goal.
TAKE STOCK:	Take your wins where you can, at different levels and in different spaces; celebrate them, and build on them as you go. But setbacks can also offer learnings that help you build towards progressive social change in the long run.
KEEP REFLECTING:	The process of reflecting and strategising never stops: you keep gathering information and intelligence around the issue you want to resolve, adapt your theory of change and approaches, and give yourself the best chance of achieving your purpose – at the level required – as the situation evolves.
BE PATIENT:	It is very rare to secure meaningful change quickly, so you need to be committed and tenacious over sustained periods. A particular strategy or approach may not work this time with a particular target audience but, refined – combining with other approaches and tactics; or with a wider, deeper group of allies – it may bring success in your next initiative.
BE OPEN TO ADAPTING:	Social justice advocacy is not straightforward, easy or linear. It does not happen neatly, as planned, step by step, without setbacks. You will often have to try and then adapt your approaches; and sometimes your objectives too.

RESPOND TO CHALLENGES:	In very challenging circumstances, you may have to pause your advocacy for a time or halt it altogether. In extreme situations, you may have to switch focus to survival as an organisation, with or without crisis-level advocacy that may be quite different from your earlier plans.
EXPECT RESISTANCE:	Whether you are in a restrictive advocacy environment or not, you will find resistance to some approaches, but find you can make progress with others – generating awareness, understanding, then maybe acceptance and positive actions.
SEEK OPPORTUNITIES:	If you are in a restrictive environment, there are still strategies and approaches you can use. CSOs have encountered restrictive systems, had to manage risk, and found ways to create opportunities and spaces to effect positive change.
TAKE A LONG-TERM VIEW:	Remember that you are not yet done with your advocacy even if you achieve a legal, policy or behaviour change you have been seeking. There will be more to do on consolidation of the gains made and fair implementation for all, especially those groups particularly affected by the issue and those normally marginalised in society.
KEEP BUILDING:	If you have success, that is something to build on – with your current community or another, on your current issue or another.
LEARN, AND LEARN AGAIN:	If you fail, and learn from it, you will have more experience and information with which to adapt your strategy, find a new way forward, or focus on a different objective that contributes to your purpose and goals.



ANNEX 1

C H E C K L I S T

A CHECKLIST FOR ADVOCACY

1	Community defined issue, local ownership and meaningful participation
Do you have a locally-identified problem, along with local ownership and participation for the advocacy you are thinking of doing?	
2	Robust and persuasive evidence – quantitative and qualitative
Do you have evidence of the problem (data of different kinds) that is robust and persuasive to support your issue, messaging and asks?	
3	Solid analysis for understanding and to guide paths to influence
Have you done the necessary analysis (at least on power, gender equality and social inclusion, and on conflict; and other matters as relevant), so that you understand: i. The decision-making process involved, and potential obstacles to your aims ii. The actors with power, their interests and influences iii. Your core advocacy messaging – and your asks of different power holders iv. What 'political capital' you can bring to bear to influence the issue.	
4	Clarity on problem policies or decision making, social norms or behaviours
Are you clear on processes and power holders (in government, corporations, municipalities, etc.) who have some responsibility or influence on your issue? Consider how they view it.	

CHECKLIST

5	Plausible approaches to address power – formal and informal, visible and invisible, etc.
Are decisions on your advocacy issue taken in the arena of formal power: laws, government decisions, policies, budgets, policies, regulations or elections? Or will the issue be decided more by hidden power, such as closed-door negotiations between powerful actors? Does it relate more to social values, norms and behaviours that you can influence?	
6	Realistic chances of progress – adapting aims as needed
Do you have a realistic possibility of change on your issue (with the evidence, resources, allies and campaign energy you can summon) in the timeframe required? Maybe you will need to adapt your aims.	
7	Understanding of how the advocacy asks will help solve a social problem
Are you clear on the contribution of your intended advocacy achievement to a meaningful development, social justice or human rights goal?	
8	Advocacy strategy and theory of change are clear
Do you have a clear rationale for your advocacy strategy, captured in a brief advocacy theory of change? This will likely involve a coherent balance of: community mobilisation, formal or informal lobbying, cultivation and support of champions, network and coalition building, media relations, public awareness and mobilisation actions, social movement building, litigation, direct action (sit-ins, occupations), or art or cultural actions.	
9	Analysis, intentions and requirements brought together in an Advocacy Action Plan
Have you developed an Action Plan – identifying the issues and proposed solutions, stakeholders, objectives, key targets (audiences), approaches/openings to reach them, intended actions and timings, messages, timeline, resources, and progress markers? You will need to track your advocacy actions and approaches, and reflect on successes and failures, to gauge progress and the need for adaptation.	

10	Evidenced asks framed to reach different power holders in relevant ways
Are you offering evidence, a narrative and solutions which address real community demands? Make sure they are positioned or 'framed' to encourage positive responses from key power holders.	
11	Advocacy initiatives promise to address/transform gender equality and social inclusion
Will your advocacy help transform gender relations, by supporting gender equality processes and actors, helping to shift social norms or tackle unequal power structures?	
12	Empowerment of and accountability to communities is built in
Are you inclusive and rights-based in your advocacy? This involves meaningful community participation, inclusion and non-discrimination, empowerment, and accountability in how you conceive, plan, implement, review, make adaptations and report on advocacy.	
13	Interventions conceived and shaped to 'Reach the Furthest Behind'
Will your efforts help Leave No One Behind and, where possible, Reach the Furthest Behind First in relation to sustainable human development and the realisation of rights?	
14	Working in (effective) alliances, networks or coalitions
Are you identifying alliances, building networks and coalitions? Working properly, they can contribute to effectiveness, help reduce risk, and build civil society space and strength for the longer term – sustaining the enabling environment for advocacy.	
15	Balanced ambition, pragmatism and principles for gains you can build on
Are you staying true to your purpose, objectives and evidence, but open to dialogue, negotiation and compromise (within reason and principles) to achieve a 'good enough' outcome on a given issue that you can celebrate and build on?	

ANNEX 2

R E A D I N G L I S T

A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation

Applied political economy analysis for human rights programs and campaigns: A guide for practitioners (second edition) | Pact

Cards Against Backlash - Countering Backlash - a toolkit of strategies for surviving and countering Gender Backlash that draw on real-life tactics

Civic network analysis (CNA): A guide for strategy and action in restrictive contexts | Pact

Easy Steps to Change Management in your Non-Profit – an easy, accessible blog on profits preparing for and managing change, and reinforcing a culture that is open to it

Everyday Political Analysis – questions and prompts to support rapid political analysis

Gender Inclusion Power and Politics (GIPP) Analysis Toolkit

Lobbying the Autocrat: The Dynamics of Policy Advocacy in Nondemocracies – including a theoretical framework for understanding how civil society can effectively lobby inside more authoritarian countries: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12414985>

Making Political Analysis Useful – Adjusting and Scaling - Briefing Paper 12-FINAL.docx – including how political analysis can be tailored for different levels, and advice for CSOs on starting small and being pragmatic

NGOs and Risk: Managing uncertainty in national – international partnerships

Politically-Smart Advocacy manual: a guide to effective civil society advocacy for sustainable development, PACT (2018)

Thinking and Working Politically: Lessons from Diverse and Inclusive Applied Political Economy Analysis | Published in RTI Press

Understanding political economy analysis and thinking and working politically - GOV.UK

'We Rise' Toolkit (JASS): - social movement building reimagined, including lessons and voices around strategic choices, tools and resource materials



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