

# POSITION PAPER

# ADVOCACY

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**What is advocacy all about? How to do advocacy? If you are asking yourself these questions, this paper is for you. It presents DUFs definition of advocacy – as well as lessons learnt, ideas and tools for working with advocacy.**

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## WHY DO ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is a **systematic** and **strategic** approach to achieve positive, lasting change – that is, a change that will last after the project ends.

As youth organizations we are working to better young people's lives and conditions. If we want to better the lives of marginalized youth, we can provide services or activities for them.

But if we want to improve conditions for young people in the long term, we need to focus on **how decisions around young people's lives are made** – and how we can assure that the youth who are affected by the decisions have a voice.

In short, advocacy is about **persuading** and **influencing those, who have power and responsibility**, to take an interest in your issue and act for change.

Well conducted advocacy may influence the structural causes of inequalities, shift power balances and challenge the discrimination that affect youth – and thereby contribute to more **sustainable, long term changes** and **reach more people and areas** than a single project is capable of.

➤➤ For instance, you may provide education for a small group of out-of-school youth in your project – but after the project ends, the problem of out-of-school youth continues. Instead you could focus on strengthening citizens' skills to build support for and influence people with power in the area of education to make better decisions and ensure education for all children.

## WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

There are various definitions of advocacy. In DUF, we work according to this definition of advocacy:

**“Advocacy is a planned, purposeful effort to advocate for, or enact influence on, a cause with the purpose to create lasting, positive changes in society. Advocacy is a process, where you turn the focus outwards”.**

Put simply, advocacy is a set of **planned, coordinated activities** designed to **persuade someone else** – either decision makers or someone who can influence them.

Advocacy is essentially about changing people's **knowledge, attitudes and behavior**.

Through different activities, organizations may influence those who have power, responsibility and authority to change a given situation. In DUF supported partnerships the focus is on making people with power care for issues that are important to young people and take actions that improve young people's living conditions.

Advocacy is an **externally focused** effort, in which you influence people outside of your own organization.

Advocacy can happen at many levels. Depending on your objectives, you may influence people, who have power to change a given situation – at the **local, national and international level**.

## HOW TO WORK WITH ADVOCACY?

All DUF supported partnerships and project must integrate advocacy as part of their strategy to create change.

In our experience **successful advocacy** builds on a realis-



### Examples of advocacy focus areas

Advocacy efforts can be directed at influencing different **political, economic, social and cultural processes** and **decisions**. Young peoples' conditions, fulfillment of human rights and quality of life, can for instance be improved by change in the following areas:

- **Political processes and decisions:**

- Changes in **laws and policies** that affect young people. This could be achieved by arguing for the creation of a national youth policy or increasing the focus on youth in other policies; e.g. employment or health policies.
- Changes in **practices and implementation of policies and laws** that affect young people. An example could be to suggest creative ideas to encourage youth to register and vote in elections or proposing new methods in health education to the Ministry of Health.
- Increased **space for civil society organizations**. This could be by encouraging that civil society organizations are invited to give input to political processes or arguing for improved legal frameworks for civil society organizations.
- Increased **transparency and accountability** in the political system. Do you know how decisions are made in politics and how you can influence political processes? An example of an action could be to encourage decision makers to engage youth more actively in political processes for instance through dialogue with decision makers and youth parliaments - or to argue for access to government data, for example public budgets and spending.

- **Social and cultural processes and decisions:**

- Changes in **knowledge, attitudes, behavior** of specific groups or people in general. For instance you may create a public campaign against child labor or work closely with parents to influence them to send their children to school.
- Changes in **power relationships and structures** based on cultural norms. You could for instance engage young women and men in dialogue about gender roles, power relationships and structures and work to encourage more young women to participate in decision making processes – or you could take up a public discussion of young peoples' role and influence in society.

- **Economic processes and decisions:**

- Increased influence on political processes around the economy and corporate interests. For instance you could argue for transparency in government budgeting and spending, hold companies accountable to paying taxes or strengthen young workers in making companies live up to labor laws.

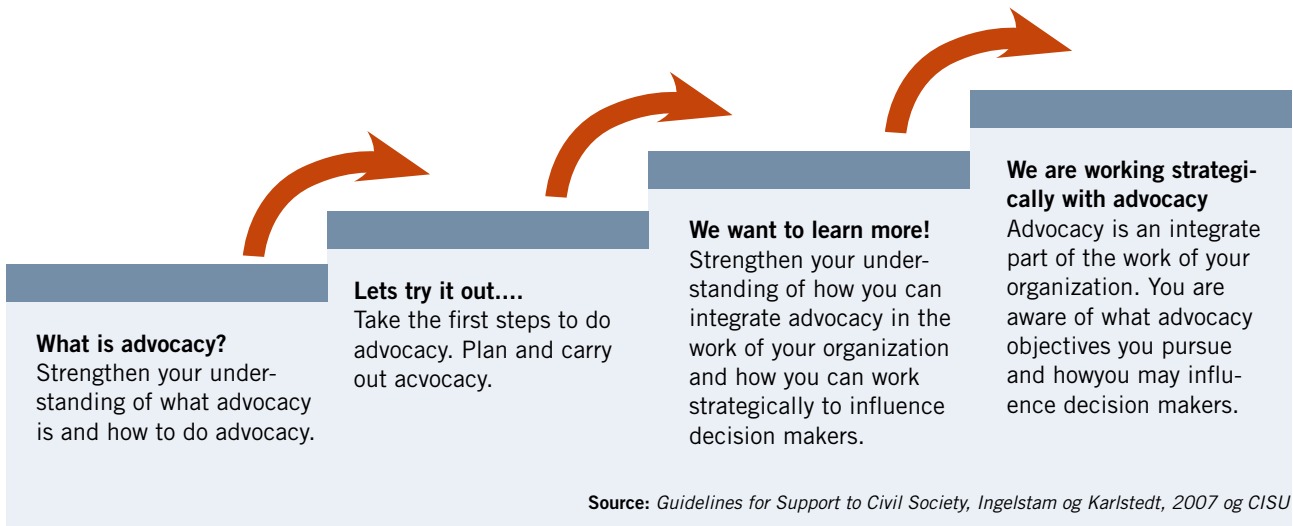
tic assessment of how you may work with advocacy. DUF recommends that you assess the capacity, strengths and weaknesses of your own organizations vis-à-vis the issues you are working with and the context you are working in.

For example, if your organization is inexperienced in advocacy work, we suggest you gradually build understanding and experience on how to conduct advocacy. If your organization depends on volunteer commitment, it is important

➤➤ Put simply, most people do advocacy in their everyday lives when they attempt to change other people's **knowledge, attitudes and behavior**.

- If someone says something you don't agree with and you argue or persuade with them to change their opinion
- If you try to influence or convince someone to do something
- If you find a better way

➤➤ Advocacy often focuses on government decision makers, but you can also advocate for changing attitudes and behavior of other power holders. When you work to influence a company to pay local taxes or an institution to promote young men and women's equal rights, you are also doing advocacy.

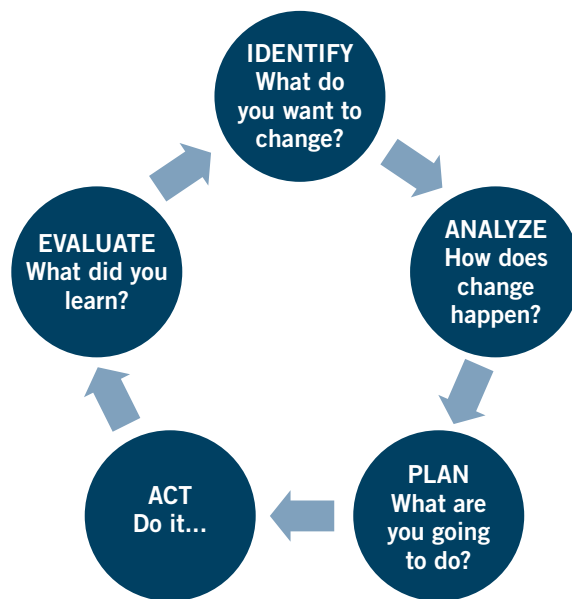


to consider the time and resources available and to what extent you can do long-term, systematic advocacy work. Often DUF supported partnerships start with **building organizational capacity and empowering people to work with advocacy** – before moving on to do advocacy work aimed at **influencing decision makers** to support positive change. The model below shows a **gradual approach to building up the capacity** to understand and do advocacy leading on to strategic advocacy work.

**5 STEPS IN YOUR ADVOCACY WORK**

Advocates all over the world use similar models, when they develop strategies to guide their advocacy work. Below are 5 main steps when working to influence decision makers.

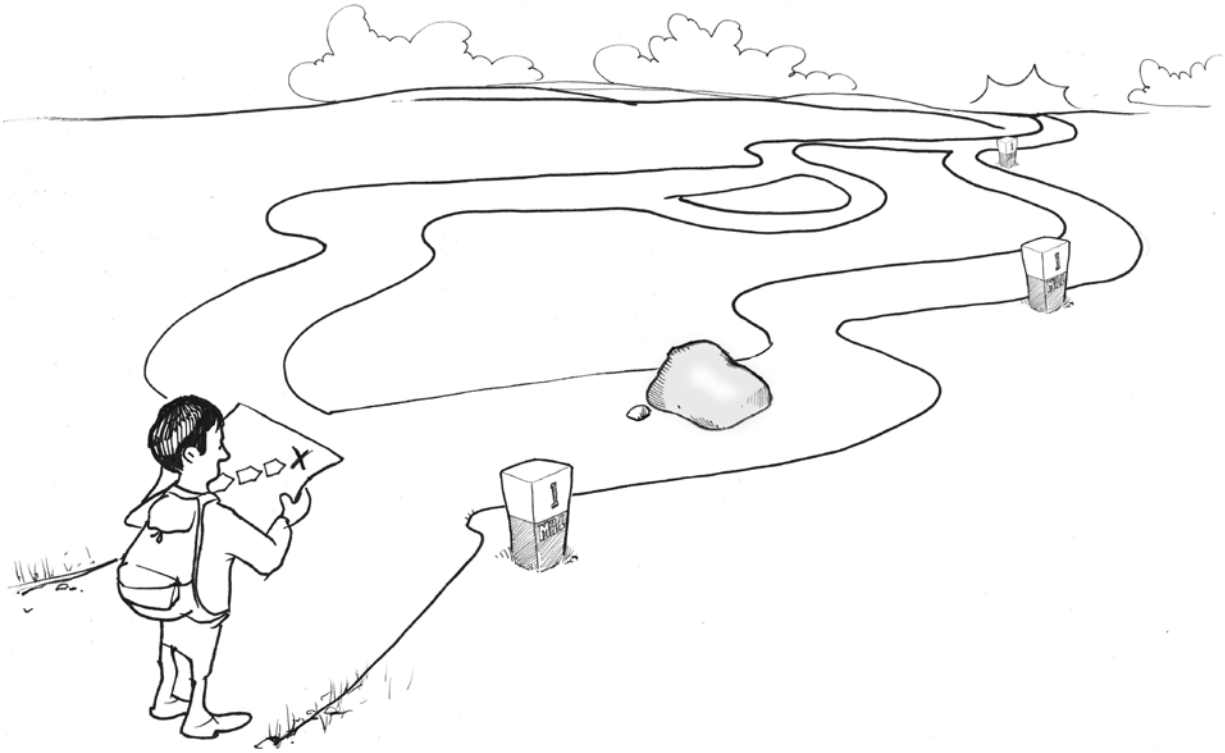
DUF recommends that you spend time on analyzing the problem you want to change, the context and the possibilities for creating change before you decide on your advocacy strategy and methods.



»» When you and your organization want to improve your work with advocacy it is key to build on your existing capacities and link your advocacy work to your organizational mission, strategy and values.

DUF recommends that you share learnings about your advocacy work in the organization – to continually review your approach and ensure that new volunteers are on board.

If you don't have the relevant advocacy experience in your organization, you are encouraged to include advocacy capacity building with an external resource person, follow up meetings and internal learning seminars in your project application to DUF.



The choice of **strategy** and **method** depends on...

- **Your objectives** – What do you want to change?
- **Context, situation and timing**
- The **time, resources** and the **experience** available in your organization
- The **position** and **relations** of your organization to those who have power in the political landscape and the broader public
- The **possibilities** and the **space** your organization has to influence decision makers
- How you will deal with potential **risks** and **challenges**

When you decide on your advocacy strategy, think about how you can best contribute to change at a given time. It is also good to consider how different advocacy approaches may work in synergy at a particular moment and over a longer period of time.

### EXAMPLES OF ADVOCACY

There are many approaches to doing advocacy – and many possible tools and activities. At an overall level, you may consider to use an outsider or an insider approach – or a combination of both.

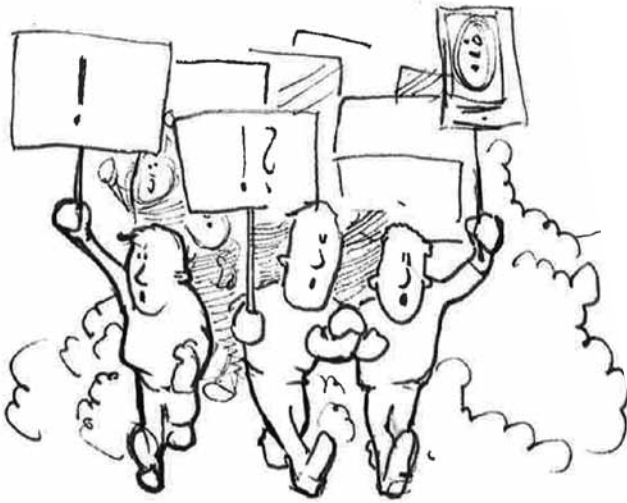
»» DUF recommends that you base your advocacy work on analyses of how change takes place in your particular context and in relation to your issue. Talk to DUFs consultants about **how to do an advocacy strategy** for inspiration on tools and ideas for developing an advocacy strategy.

»» Remember to get a clear mandate and support from the leadership level in your organization, when conducting advocacy work. You are representatives of your organization and need to ensure that there is clear support for the cause and the advocacy strategy.

### »» Example from DUF partnerships

Often DUF supported partnerships starts out by doing activities to empower children and youth. As part of this process, children and youth may participate in influencing decision makers or raise public awareness on an issue.

More experienced partnerships may work towards achieving political influence and change of policies or practices. Often experienced partnerships base their advocacy work on their knowledge and experience of working with a particular group of youth or a specific issue.



An **outsider approach** will often aim to raise awareness of a cause among many people and engage citizens and organizations through **public campaigning** – in order to **make citizens act themselves** or **pressure authorities to take action on the cause**.

Public campaigning often make use of petitions, social media campaigns, marches and letters to decision-makers. Often the focus is on problems, but it is recommended also to be clear about the change you want and suggest solutions.

Often this is an effective strategy to engage citizens and members – and you will often be seen as active and untainted by compromise. However, depending on your tactics and your message you may run the risk of alienating the decision makers you intend to influence.

An **insider approach** will often work through persuasion of decision makers behind closed doors. The focus is on entering into **dialogue with decision makers, influencing a particular agenda** and **finding solutions together**.

Many political decisions are influenced through *quiet diplomacy* and by developing a trusting relationship with decision makers.

Often this is an effective strategy for influencing legislation and policies. It may also entail a risk of decision makers attempting to delay change or convert you into their field of interest.

Also, it is worth considering **cooperating** with other civil society organizations and actors, when meaningful and effective.

## »» Example from practice

In Uganda, young people are creating their own youth clubs. They secure finances for their club activities through income generating activities such as small businesses. Through peer-to-peer education, the youth clubs empower youth to discuss and speak up. Straight Talk Foundation is cooperating with the Danish organization Ungdomsringen and both organizations have gained new insights on how much young people are able to achieve. Previously Straight Talk Foundation focused on youth as a target group, but now youth are more involved in designing activities and setting up clubs.

The partnership has learnt a lot about its approach to advocate for youth clubs during the project. It has worked well to talk to the head teachers first as this made it easier to gain good work relations in the school with other teachers later on. Also, the partnership found that it was a good idea to do a meeting to orient all teachers about the straight talk club operations in the new school where young people are to set up a club. Often youth were eager to setup clubs, but the partnership found that it didn't work well when the first contact with the school was through a student. In such cases, the head teachers would feel bypassed and would not be welcome to the club concept

### »» Example from practice

In 2012, the Baptist Youth of Denmark (BBU) and the Association of Baptist Youth in Rwanda (AEBR-Youth) arranged a national conference in Rwanda with a focus on young peoples' participation in the development processes in Rwanda.

Leading up to the conference, young people were encouraged to participate in society through regional leadership trainings and creative competitions in Baptist churches on the theme: 'Young peoples' rights and roles in the development processes in Rwanda'. Youth shared experiences and expressed their views on young peoples' engagement in the Rwandan society through songs, poems, theatre and storytelling. For many youth, it is a new experience to speak up for themselves and take an active part in dialogue about society.

Based on the youths' experiences and expressions, a booklet on the aspirations of the youth was published.

The Minister of Youth was invited for the national conference and the final national creative competition with the participation of government actors, NGO's and churches. This attracted national media coverage by television and radio and raised attention to young peoples' rights.

During the conference the youth did the final creative competition, delivered the booklet and proposed suggestions to the Minister of Youth. The Minister in turn expressed that he was impressed with the contributions of the AEBR youth and that he wanted to involve them in the further process of supporting young people.

BBU and AEBR Youth made an effort to invite local authorities for the regional as well as national events – as speakers and participants. In that way, local authorities got a chance to speak to the youth and experienced firsthand that youth had valuable contributions. This made a positive impact on how youth were perceived by authorities – and it reinforced the view among authorities of the value of the work of the church in society.

Also, the event had positive effects inside the church as the seniors in the church gained more understanding of that youth can make a positive difference. There is now increased support for the youth work within the church and the youth are seen as a big resource for the church and the community.

AEBR-Youth used these achievements as a platform to apply for and achieve formal recognition as an association with the National Youth Council under the Ministry of Youth.

### LEGITIMACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Government authorities and other stakeholders may challenge the **legitimacy** and **accountability** of advocacy done by civil society organizations.

**Legitimacy** is an important aspect in advocacy. You are going to ask decision makers and other stakeholders to engage with you in discussions on how to bring about change and hold them accountable for their actions – you need to consider: **Who are you and why should they listen to you?**

Remember to analyze your own legitimacy base before starting your advocacy work. Ask yourself:

- **“What is the cause of your organization?”** Often civil society organizations base their engagement with an issue on the basis of their beliefs or values – or on evidence that there is a need to take action on an issue.
- **“Who do you represent?”** Who are you speaking up for and how do you involve the people, you represent?

»» What works in a Danish context doesn't always work in a different country. It is important to know the local context and the local systems in order to decide on how you may seek influence most effectively. While examples from Denmark or elsewhere can be inspiring, it is also useful to base your advocacy on local traditions and locally recognized forms of advocacy.

»» Advocacy is about **defending rights** or **exposing problems** – but it is equally important to **propose a realistic solution**. When trying to persuade others, do your best to understand their needs and interest and show that you have needs and interests in common. It is about building understanding and consensus for an idea, not to impose it on others.

»» Example from practice

The Association for Rwandan Medicine Students, MEDSAR, has worked together with the International Medical Cooperation Committee, IMCC, to strengthen peer-to-peer methods in sexual and reproductive health education. During several projects, the partnership has reached out to thousands of secondary school students and teachers - and has changed mindsets and teaching styles.

MEDSAR and IMCC started out by targeting only students with peer to peer education to create an open and free dialogue. However, the partnership realised that in order to achieve sustainability and increase the outreach of their actions, they needed to get the teachers on board. The teachers are the ones who stay at the schools and will continue working with the pupils. Therefore the partnership also started dialogue with head masters and teachers and are also developing teaching material and methodologies for teachers.

The results and the gathered experience of the peer-to-peer education has strengthened MEDSARs recognition as a relevant actor in the field of SRH education. National and local government actors, church authorities and the university are aware that MEDSAR is doing valuable work.

MEDSAR has gradually built capacity for improved dialogue with stakeholders and decision makers – both at the local and national level. Together with IMCC, MEDSAR has been doing advocacy trainings and refresher trainings, an advocacy white book has been created and an advocacy task force has been established. The capacity building on advocacy has increased MEDSARs focus on involvement and dialogue with the Ministry of Youth, local government authorities and other health partners on SRH education.

Based on the organizations experience and ongoing dialogue with the Ministry of Health, MEDSAR has been invited to participate in government development of the curriculum and teaching methods for sexual health education. That way, the good experiences can reach many more secondary school students and teachers

- “Do you know what you are talking about”? Often the advocacy will be stronger if you base your message on evidence or expressed concerns among the people you are advocating for. For instance medicine students and doctors work with health issues on a daily basis and youth social workers know of the conditions of marginalized youth.

It is equally important to be able to explain to whom your advocacy work is **accountable**. Be prepared to answer questions about how your organization is governed, how decisions are made and how you involve beneficiaries and members. If you claim to be representing others, there are some basic questions to ask yourself: “Have they asked you or approved of that you advocate for them? Have they given input to your position and your work? Are they happy with your strategy”?

»» Advocacy requires a call to action. It is not just awareness raising – you are asking people to **do something**. In an information campaign you increase people’s knowledge and ask them to change behavior. When you influence policy processes, you aim to change a policy and ask people to join your cause.

**WHAT ROLE ARE YOU PLAYING?**

When planning and doing advocacy, there is sometimes a lot of focus on **what** method, framework or tool is used and not enough on how the **process** is done.

Remember to consider who shall be involved and how you may encourage people to question, analyze, learn and use the lessons learned in your forward advocacy efforts.

You can do advocacy **for** and **with** a group of people – and you can also **strengthen people in advocating their own cause** with authorities.

In some cases, where civil society space is restricted it may be safer for organizations to speak on behalf of a group of people than for the people to do their own advocacy. Civil society organizations may also have greater and faster influence with powerful actors.

»» DUF recommends that you involve the children and young people you are working with in the advocacy efforts in a way that strengthens their self-esteem, support their own expression and allow them to gain concrete experience of how to influence their own living conditions.

### → DUF encourages the following advocacy practices

Encourage **participation** – Involve different people in planning and carrying out advocacy. Each participant will bring different skills, experiences, contacts, resources and ideas. When you encourage participation of the children and youth you are advocating for, they gain a sense of ownership and an experience of being able to influence their own life.

Ensure **legitimacy** and **representation** – In order to be legitimate you need to earn the trust of the people and communities, you represent. Listen to them, develop your strategy with them, respect their opinions and experiences and take action together.

Be **accountable** – Discuss the progress and challenges of your advocacy work openly with the people you are advocating for and with.

Act **peacefully** – Violence does not produce sustainable, long-term solutions. Peaceful, constructive advocacy will earn you trust and respect of both supporters and opponents.

When you do advocacy on behalf of a group of people, it is a good idea to consult the group on the solutions that you put forward and the strategy you pursue. Do the people agree with you?

Be careful not to dominate or drive the process as you often have the money, the knowledge and the status – and acknowledge when there is a difference of opinion.

It is also important to consider the role and division of responsibilities between the organizations in the partnership. Often the partner organization will be conducting advocacy in their own country and context – and the Danish organization may support the work through exchange of experiences, support in capacity building efforts and activities and network.

It may be beneficial to do advocacy both at the international level and at the local or national level in the country of

the partner organization in order to reach decision makers, whose decisions impact internationally. In this regard, the Danish organization can play a more active part in conducting advocacy.

### ADVOCACY CAN BE DIFFICULT

When you do advocacy you may run into challenges and frustration along the way. You may encounter people, who are hesitant towards your ideas as well as people who are actively working against your ideas.

Consider and assess the potential **challenges** of doing advocacy – when you plan your advocacy, when you do advocacy and when learning from the experience.



*You can do a stakeholder and power analysis to explore who will support you – and who may oppose your cause or hold you back.*

### → Roles of an advocate

It is important to consider your own role and relationship to the people you are advocating for or with. Be sensitive to the needs and desires of the people, so that you together decide on a role and a relationship that suits the situation and the group of people.

**Represent** – Speak on behalf of the people

**Accompany** – Speak with the people

**Empower** – Enable people to speak for themselves

**Mediate** – Facilitate communication between people

**Model** – Demonstrate behavior to people or authorities/decision makers

**Network** – Build coalitions

*Inspired by DCA (2010)*

➤➤ It is recommended to do a context analysis, an organizational assessment and a risk assessment in the partnership with a focus on what is realistic and possible for the partner organization to do in a given context. Depending on your risk assessment, you can decide on how to manage challenges and risks.



»» In some countries, governments and other authorities are hostile towards civil society organizations that engage in ‘advocacy’. In such contexts, it is recommended to use a constructive dialogue approach rather than confrontation – and to describe your work in terms such as: stakeholder engagement, dialogue with stakeholders, relationship building, influencing. Campaigning language can be problematic as it often draws on military metaphors (targets, allies, opponents, tactics). Using alternative language and metaphors can help smooth discussions on influencing strategies.

Likewise, in some countries, civil society organizations funded by foreign donors may be seen as driven by ‘foreign interests’ and may provide governments with ammunition to discredit an advocacy issue or an organization. A strategy may be to ensure that you can account for your legitimacy to speak up for a specific cause.

If you are working in a **politically difficult context**, you should also consider potential **risks** of doing advocacy. When you challenge those in power, your organization may risk its reputation, its relationships and financing sources – and there may be legal and physical risks to staff, volunteers and target groups.

If your advocacy approach is based on building relationships and engaging in constructive dialogue and persuasion with stakeholders and decision makers, it will entail less risk than confrontational advocacy approaches. DUF encourages a constructive, dialogical approach to advocacy.

It is important to remember that the partner organization is the expert on the social and political situation in its own context. Often the partner organization will be conducting most of the advocacy work – and will also be the most vulnerable organization in the partnership in case of advocacy in fragile and politically challenging contexts.

### LEARNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF ADVOCACY

During your advocacy work, there are often changes to the context, the power relationships and the people you are trying to influence.

It is a good idea to monitor what happens along the way, consider the effectiveness of your strategy and adjust if needed.

As part of your project, you are required to report back to DUF to what extent you have contributed to change. Often it is difficult to determine whether others acted differently because of you – and they may not openly attribute their changed mindsets or actions to your advocacy work.

DUF recommends that you consider how you may measure the success and the quality of your work.

Rather than focusing on measuring decision makers changed opinions, it may be more meaningful for you to focus on setting goals and evaluating changes in these areas:

#### The changed capacity and lessons learned in the organization in regards to advocacy

- What new capacity is now present in the organization? What has been the outcome of the new knowledge and capacity in relation to the advocacy work of the organization?
- What have you done to anchor the capacity and the lessons learned in your organization?

#### The actual advocacy activities that have been carried out and the immediate outcomes.

- Have you conducted meetings with decision makers? How many? How was your message received by decision makers? Did they comment on it or make any commitments? Have you followed up? Have there been concrete actions after your meetings? What has happened?

#### The longer term indications of impact

- Are there new tendencies or indications that something is changing? Have you for instance noticed that there is more attention to your issue in the media or among the people you work to influence?

It is recommended to focus on learning from your advocacy work – and sharing lessons learnt in your organization. When you document the experiences, think about how you may use the experiences for future advocacy work.

You may for instance do case studies, Most Significant Change Stories and do team self-review processes, so that you share the learning in your organization.

Please confer with the toolkit paper on **Learning, monitoring and evaluation**.

### TOOLS RECOMMENDED BY DUF

There are a wide range of tools to support you in creating effective advocacy strategies. The relevance of the tools depends on how experienced you are in doing advocacy, where you are in the process and what approach you are taking to advocacy.

We have chosen simple and efficient tools, that are easy to understand and use – and we encourage you to tailor and develop the tools according to your needs.

#### Understanding advocacy

When you have done your problem analysis, **the Change Triangle** is a powerful tool to visualize and start a dialogue about your change objectives – and the interplay of your children and youth activities, organizational capacity development and advocacy in your project.

Advocacy is essentially about changing people's **knowledge, attitudes** and **behavior**. Use the tool **Know, Feel, Do** to get a basic understanding of what advocacy is about and develop objectives for your advocacy.

#### When designing an advocacy strategy

When designing an advocacy strategy, there is a wide range of tools that may be useful to you. If you are less experienced in working with advocacy, we recommend you talk to one of DUFs consultants on **how to do an advocacy strategy** to help you plan a strategy workshop and decide on relevant tools.

#### When planning meetings with stakeholders and decision makers

Advocacy is essentially about changing people's **knowledge, attitudes** and **behavior**. You can use the tool **Know, Feel, Do** to analyze and reflect on the changes you are aiming towards. We recommend you tailor your message

according to the stakeholder or person you are aiming to influence. Prepare for meetings with stakeholders and decision makers by going through the tool on **Dialogue with decision makers**.

### FURTHER INSPIRATION...

#### Meet up with DUFs consultants

DUF can provide inspiration on how to design capacity building workshops and strategy processes, supply tools and give advice on your advocacy strategies.

**Consider to make use of local consultants** to build capacity in the partnership and in the partner organization

### RECOMMENDED TOOL KITS

- INTRAC: Trainings, Tools and Praxis Papers
- The Right To Influence - Tematisk Forum (2009). Case stories based on the work of Danish NGOs and partners
- Critical Webs of Power and Change – Action Aid (2005) Beautiful Trouble : Creative approaches to working with advocacy
- Manual til Advocacy (in Danish). Fagligt Fokus 2014
- The ABC's of Advocacy – Dan Church Aid (2010). Based on the Advocacy Expert Series Module and focused on influencing political processes.
- Advocacy Expert Series Module 1-5 - PACT Cambodia / Dan Church Aid (2004)
- Tearfund Advocacy Toolkit (2002). Especially relevant for faith-based organizations.

➤➤ This paper presents DUFs definition of advocacy – as well as ideas and tools for doing advocacy.

Our most important advice is to tailor your advocacy approach to your own organizational setup, the work of your organization and the context you are working in. That is why the paper doesn't give prescriptions or specific answers to how you should conduct advocacy. Instead we encourage you to think through themes, that we have found to be important to DUF supported partnerships.

We have included the tools used in DUFs learning activities – and we refer you on to other toolkits that we find inspiring. In doing so, we hope to stimulate your own thinking and ideas on how the methods and tools we present may be useful in your own work to create positive change.

There are many other ideas, approaches and tools that are used by young people in civil society organizations that are not included in this paper. Please share your own experiences, ideas and stories with us in order to make the toolbox more practically relevant for others. There are no deadlines and new pages and tools can be added at any time.