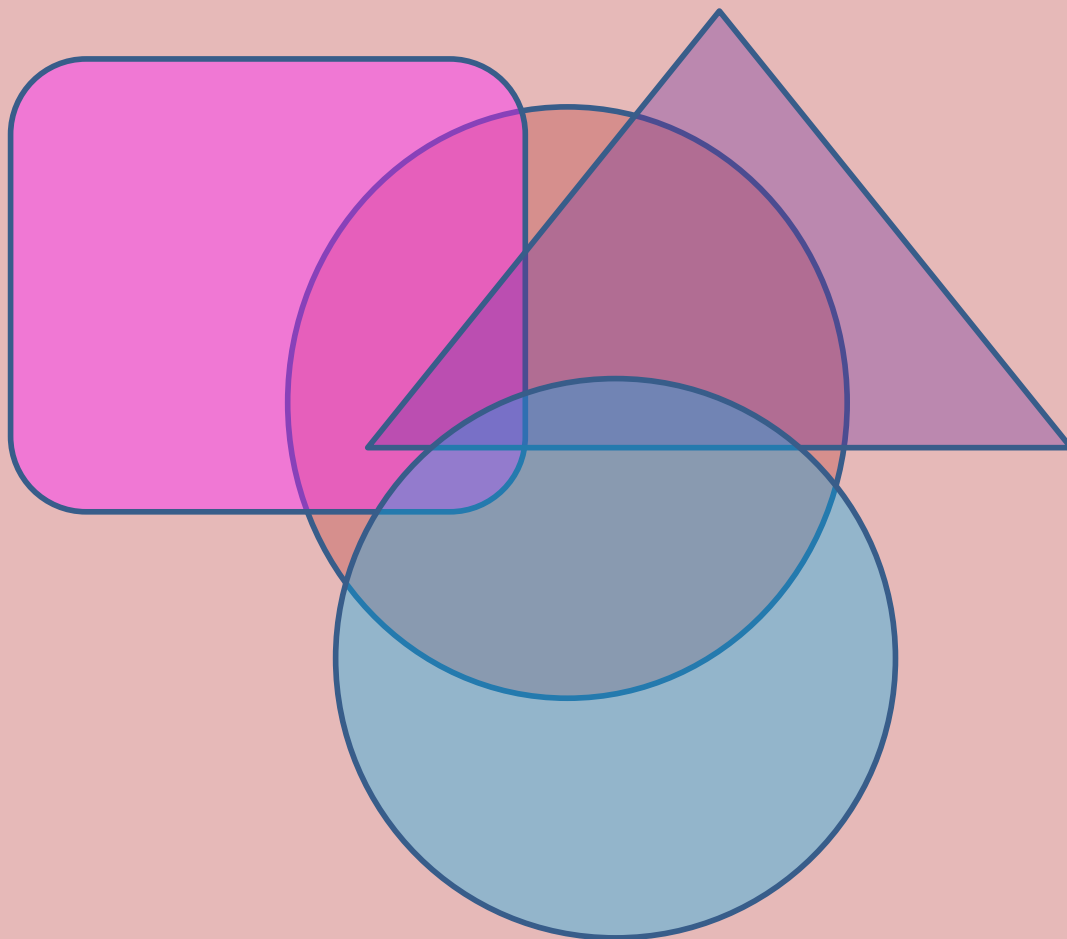


ADVOCACY

All it takes to bring about change

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ADVOCACY: All it takes to bring about change

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About the Author

The author of this paper, Joseph Rahall is a renowned activist. He is well known for his human rights and environmental activism. Rahall has a strong background in journalism and served in his earlier life as a high school science teacher.

Since 2000 Rahall took up the responsibility of reconstructing Green Scenery from its original voluntary group Project Green Scenery after it was impacted by the Civil War. Green Scenery was then formally registered with a constituted board and he has since been the Executive Director.

He has managed the organisation through good times and tough times. His ability to manage small funds to create big impacts has resonated well with development partners, building for himself and Green Scenery an outstanding reputation.

Rahall is a fire brand advocate with tremendous skills and disposition. His skills and abilities to pursue issues of national interests, placing value on Sierra Leonean citizens is ranked very high and has commanded admiration in and out of Sierra Leone.

He is highly learned and has command of many subject areas due to his curiosity to learn. He is an expert in Environmental Security and Peace, a Fellow in Transitional Justice, with vast knowledge in Transitional Politics, Human Rights, Mediation and Peacebuilding.

Rahall is also a researcher and has conducted many research alone and in partnership with renowned researchers or have provided many field and technical support to national and international researchers.

In his first degree, Rahall studied agriculture from Njala University College. He has done stints in the University of Cape Town, South Africa and UN Mandated University for Peace, Costa Rica from where he attained post graduate certificates, diploma and a Master's degree respectively.

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The Reason for this Paper

When I started my amateur advocacy in 1989, the onset of Project Green Scenery, now Green Scenery, little did I realise that I will perfect it and later document something about it. But this is truly not the reason for this paper although it may have an invincible invocation.

I have witnessed and been a part of groups that would take up issues for advocacy. Many a times when they engage in the process, the groups burn out because of the time spent on advocating on the matter. True to say, often, time is of the essence and not on the side of the groups pursuing their issues because the issues are tied to projects with very limited time frames and should that time elapses with no response from the target or targets of the advocacy, the issue is thrown away and the advocating group is worried of failure in the action. This experience has led many organizations away from advocacy to deal with softer issues of interventions.

The reason for this paper is therefore to provide insights for beginners and other practitioners how to chart the uncharted waters of advocacy. The paper intends to have guide posts on how to navigate the tough challenges of advocacy. It presents to the practitioner reasons why not to quit even when you think you are involved in an impossible mission of bringing about change. Why it is necessary to review your strategy instead of quitting because we know too well that if you run away from the battle field you will have to face the battle another day.

Advocacy requires strong inner will to take challenges to bring about change, which change often are blocked by heavy weights in politics, business, religion, the judiciary, diplomacy, etc. Often these set of people are small in number, but powerful in wealth, influence and power. So if one decides to take on advocacy on an issue, policy or otherwise, one should have at the back of the mind that a long haul is a possibility. Ones ability to sustain the the advocacy in spite of funding restrictions/limitations remains to be part of the advocates strategy.

The advocates strong purpose is that the change envisaged is meant for the greater good and that should be the focus and not distractions that will be placed in the way to deviate from the advocacy strategy.

What I have described in the pages of this paper is a personal experience of my advocacy work in over 20 years. This paper will be reviewed as more experience are encountered in my work.

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What is advocacy?

Dictionary (wordweb): Active support of an idea or cause etc.; especially the act of pleading or arguing for something.

(Merriam Webster): The act or process of supporting a cause or proposal; the act or process of advocating something.

Working definition (JR): This is an act of supporting a cause that may lead to an outcome. This support may arise from evidence of a study or strong theoretical inference or even practical situation.

It is the act of lending voice to the suffering silence of the voiceless. Bringing problems to the attention of powerful and influential people capable of changing a situation affecting people, e.g. suffering experienced by vulnerable groups.

Many times the question comes up as to whether there are differences between Advocacy and Lobbying. Most often the words may be used inter-changeably. Of course there is a thin line between the two. The difference actually lies in the approach even though the desired result is seeking a change in the interest of people who may be affected by some governance, structural, or process regime. There are those who view that one is the subset of the other. I have heard claims that lobbying is a subset of advocacy. As a practitioner, I have often used the two approaches in combination because I believe they are effective when combined.

Whatever is ones disposition towards the two intervention methods, they are both good approaches to bring about change.

Why advocacy

Advocacy is involved when a problem or problems affecting a person, a group of persons is/are raised either by themselves or on behalf of them with the intention of resolving the problem. We advocate because we want to let those who can change the problematic circumstance/s know of the problem. Often in advocacy the advocates would make suggestions to bring about a favourable condition. They could also become part of seeking the solution through inclusive processes and approaches.

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Engaging in advocacy can be mundane particularly for first timers or for CSOs wishing to start work. Taking the task can be challenging if the first timer lacks basic knowledge in advocacy or the steps that are required to accomplish an advocacy action. To help a first timer or deepen the understanding of an amateur this writer presented advocacy in a schematic diagram in an attempt to simplify the process.

This paper intends to explain the schematic diagram on the previous page. The steps presented in the complex pictorial format starts with the first step (1) of hearing of the issue, or the problem under monitoring, or the problem is discovered as an outcome of a research.

1. We want to know if any change has taken place since the launch and popularization of the National Land Policy, if so why and if not, why not. The policy is a very broad subject, therefore we can for instance choose to investigate what changes have reflected on women's land rights in the context of the policy. A research question can be developed and a study carried out. The result if negative, now becomes an issue for advocacy. If for instance the research finding shows that four years since the launch of the NLP, women are still denied the rights to access, own and control land otherwise their tenure rights are still denied, this problem becomes an advocacy issue.

What is involved in advocacy?

Because advocacy is about changing a situation or bringing about a positive outcome it is often directed at persons that can bring about the outcome. It can be directed at these persons for a systemic change¹ or a structural change² or even just for a change in practice or way-of-life. It can be for the development or review of a legal framework that will ensure the outcome (see no. 13).

Not all advocacy leads to the desired success and the success rates can differ among practitioners.

Whatever the case, there is a level of success even where advocates would think there is a failure. That success is bringing up the vexing issue/s from the darkness to light and drawing attention to those targeted by the advocates. The issue/s now become/s open and public. This turns out to be the first level of success; being bold to bring the hush-hush out in public for engagement.

Many groups are notable of ending their advocacy at this level when the issues are exposed. But a true advocate goes beyond that. A delve into structural, policy, legal framework that should have a lasting solution is always the goal of a true advocate. The group Green Scenery has grappled for long on issues of large land acquisition for agric-business. They have confronted the excesses of SOCFIN in Sierra Leone for nine years and still counting, extensively working on the National Land Policy and with the Voluntary Guidelines, laws etc. to bring about positive change that will be of greater benefit to Sierra Leoneans.

When planning an advocacy the advocates should be ready for the long haul or of course the short haul. Green Scenery for example has been advocating for land rights for over eight years. No matter the time involved in achieving an advocacy outcome, there are steps to watch and apply as the advocacy proceeds. These steps have been carefully laid out in a schematic diagram for better understanding of how to approach advocacy in a professional manner.

The advocate is on the right track if - from the planning of the strategy to the implementation of the plan - the following procedures, processes or steps are considered and followed.

2. The advocacy problem is identified and well defined. Often this emerges from step one: research outcomes, monitoring results, citizens' demand etc. A well-defined advocacy problem is crucial to be successful. A poor understanding of the advocacy problem may lead to confusion at a later point in the implementation of the advocacy strategy leading to poor or undesired outcomes.

¹ Customary practice can be systemic and so is the customary land law. Therefore, people and institutions dealing with customary practice will be primary targets to effect change.

² Structural change could be politic or economic. In the case of customary land for example, the Constitution justifies customary practices. The same constitution, protects against arbitrary conversion of property belonging to another person. To bring about a structural change would require a review of the constitution and developing laws. It would mean that the advocate would primarily target the law makers, ministries, departments and agencies associated with constitutional matters.

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During planning, questions would arise as to who are likely interested (benefit from) or are affected by the problem (victims) warranting the advocacy. A well defined advocacy problem is bound to present indicators of stakeholders that would likely be targets for the functional action of advocacy. Answering the questions would require a stakeholder mapping and analysis. There are various tools that can be used for this exercise, my preferential tools can be found in: Handbook for Participatory Research, Planning and Evaluation (SAS² Dialogue) by Jacques M. Chevalier and Daniel J. Buckles (2019).

Stakeholder Identification

3. There are a number of methodologies in module 4 of the SAS² but of preferential use is the “stakeholder rainbow”, which categorise stakeholders into low, moderate and high influence, as well as little affected, moderately affected and highly affected. The question now is: Why is it necessary to undertake the stakeholder analysis?

Stakeholder Analysis

4. The answers invariably are: 1) Planners would want to understand stakeholders who are likely to be in favour of the action, those who are likely to oppose it and those who may be indifferent to the action. The stakeholder analysis will identify who should be the target of the advocacy intervention or strategy. It is important to know those who are indifferent to the problem because targeting that group may yield the dividend of getting some more stakeholders in favour of the action.

2) Planners would surely want to do a power analysis alongside the “stakeholder rainbow” to understand the levels of power or sphere of influence of each of the stakeholders.

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Power Analysis

5. Power can be in the form of wealth, it can be in the form of authority, in the form of force or in the form of access to information and means of communication. One latent power often overlooked is the power of numbers. Numbers here mean population.

Why are planners interested in a power analysis? Before attempting to answer, it is important to understand that these analyses should not be serial events in the planning, they should be done holistically, by that, the outcomes become vivid and not confusing.

5b. A power analysis is bound to provide the advocacy strategy planner with an insight into number results. It can give the planner an idea of all those stakeholders who will resist and hence attempt to block any desired change. These elements are referred to as "the blockers". While there are the blockers, the analysis will equally shed light on the influencers, those who will be in favour of the advocacy campaign and are ready to effect the change or will influence those who can effect the desired change.

5c. Experience would lead the advocate to undertake a stakeholders interest analysis in the given advocacy strategy. This analysis shows of what interest the outcome of the advocacy intervention would be to stakeholder with certain levels of power. Such an interest would be the reason for a stakeholder to block or resist the advocacy. For instance, if a stakeholder with a high level of power (wealth, authority, etc.) has a low interest in the outcome of the advocacy intervention, there are very high chances that this stakeholder would push for a failure of the advocacy or may find ways to block the advocacy. If on the other hand a stakeholder with high level of power has high interest in the outcome of the advocacy intervention, this stakeholder will surely be in favour of the desired change sort by the advocate.

6. Designing the Advocacy Strategy.

The next step in the journey after clearly understanding who the stakeholders are, is designing the advocacy strategy. The strategy can be simple or complex depending on the stakeholders to be targeted and the nature of the problem under advocacy. It is however essential to keep even the most complex strategy clear and easily understood. This way it becomes less cumbersome to implement.

7. Concept Note

A short concept note should form the essentials of a good advocacy strategy. A concept gives you a quick road map of your strategy. It should present the following features:

- A short background to the issue or the problem
- A short problem statement
- The goal
- The objective/s of the advocacy action
- The intended outcome
- The advocacy activities to be undertaken

Put together, the concept note should be no longer than 4 pages. Once the concept note is generated, the strategy would now lay out orchestrated activities as presented in the concept.

Features of an Advocacy Strategy

- ❖ Well defined goal
- ❖ Well defined objectives
- ❖ A simple and well stated outcome (the change you wish to see)
- ❖ Optional to have outcome indicator/s
- ❖ An implementation plan

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8. Implementing Advocacy Plan

The implementation plan requires number of points of note

The message/s

The target/s

Aligning targets with appropriate message/s

Timing; appropriateness of timing must not be overlooked

Location of the advocacy must be taken into consideration

Partnerships/coalitions/networks

Media engagement

In a given advocacy action depending on its nature, more than one message can be designed for different targeted stakeholders. For instance, a message meant for traditional leaders may not be very appropriate for parliamentarians. Therefore, messages could be tailored to fit the target, such approach often yield quick gains. This does not mean however that generic messages cannot be developed in what could be referred to as one-cap-fit-all. The most important factor that should be kept in focus is the outcome. Therefore, no matter the number of messages and the target, bottom line is that they should generate the desired outcome. But the message/s should be clear, simple and understandable. A complex and windy message gets the target stakeholder confused and disinterested in your advocacy action.

In advocacy, the choice of targets is very important and prioritizing them is of ought most importance. How they are chosen depends on your stakeholder and power analysis. Often there are three categories; those who sympathise with the cause, those who are in doubt/on the fence and those in total opposition. Your best bet would be to tackle the first two. Because it is necessary to increase the number of sympathisers to the cause to bring about the desired change, it is always advisable to tackle stakeholders on the fence that way the number of sympathizers to the advocacy cause increases thereby improving the chances of success.

Timing of advocacy can be crucial. It is important because the advocacy is timed at a time to get the attention of the person/s who could be instrumental in bringing about change. Advocacy can be sprung at certain events national or international, for instance world food day can be targeted for food security or large scale land acquisition for agri-business. International Human Rights Day can be used to launch an advocacy on state of human rights defenders in your country. The visit of a world renown personality; a President, a UN personality, an European commissioner etc. could serve as basis of advocacy to draw attention of the visitor to the issues under advocacy.

Like timing, location for advocacy is also important, for instant an international team visiting a country's capital will have the capital to be the location of the advocacy. A conference of District Council Persons in Makeni would have Makeni as a location for advocacy on e.g. women's land rights in communities.

The adage; the more, the merrier can be applied in this context. There are times when the voice of a single organisation /individual advocating on an issue may take time to achieve the desired goal, but the goal may be reached when that organisation/individual acts in a group such as a network or a coalition. Therefore, it is always advisable to consider acting in a group of like minded organisations/individuals on an advocacy issue.

The media should be an essential part of any advocacy strategy. The media's role of disseminating information can help make the advocacy message/s reach the appropriate stakeholders. The media can even go beyond its traditional role of disseminating the information by carrying out its own investigation and publishing its findings along with its potion (editorial) on the advocacy issue. A strong media campaign on the issue could result in achieving an advocacy goal. It is therefore important to make media part of the advocacy strategy.

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9. Assessing the Outcome

Assessing the outcome of the advocacy plan. What outcomes have been achieved upon implementing the advocacy action over the dedicated period, targeting all the stakeholders using the appropriate messaging, timing and location while galvanizing the media on the issues, the advocate should then assess the outcome of the strategy.

The advocate should plan a reflection moment to assess the extent to which success was achieved. Whether or not the set expected outcome/s was/were achieved. It is best to further explore whether the outcome indicators as developed are actualized and are indeed related to the outcome/s.

10. Reflection

During reflection on the outcome of the advocacy action the result may take the following form:

- a) Success: in which the desired outcome is achieved such as a policy or legislation is passed, wrong practices have been stopped and new ways of practices are adopted.
- b) Partial success: achieved such as the acknowledgement of the problem by those who should create change, but no policy, legislation passed or no action applied to deal with the problem,
- c) No success; for instance no acknowledgement, or policy passed, or no action.

11. Re-planning Advocacy

In the event that the advocacy is partially successful or not successful. The advocating team may wish, if so desired to review the advocacy plan with the aim of strengthening it and re-engaging in another round of advocacy action. This means therefore that the implementation should start as if it just started considering the necessary adjustments, inclusions and or eliminations of the original plan, which did not perform well. It is also advisable that a fresh round of stakeholder analysis is carried as it could be possible that the advocacy messages may have been targeting the wrong stakeholders as a result of wrong stakeholder analysis.

12. Successful Advocacy

In the event that the strategy was a success. Meaning that the desirable outcome of the plan was successful. It would mean that the advocate has triggered set change/s for instance: that policy will change, that institutional structures will be restructured or impacted, that people are bound to change their behavior, that systems or procedures will be altered to deliver more efficiently etc.

While this is an achievement enough, some advocates would stop when the sense of success has set in. Yet a good advocate should not be complacent because it will be necessary to start monitoring if in fact the changes achieved are being implemented or are being applied. For that reason a monitoring schedule should be put in place.

Depending on the availability of resources, some groups -and it is advisable to do so- would accompany the process and progress until the implementation of the desired change. It is further necessary to interrogate the effect of that outcome. Measuring the effect and maybe later the impact. It is quite in place measure the impact as this would indicate the latitude and the depth of the new measure in place. It will also give a sense of the need for further adjustments for better delivery.

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Some Notes

No advocacy action seen as partial success or none success must be seen as a failure. Much of the ideas and materials put together unleashes potentials in advocates to be able to deepen their resolve for a better outcome. While it may not have had the desired external impact, it may have a strong internal impact on the organization to learn for success cases.

Because advocacy is largely about passing on information for a given problem, various forms of information are packaged in different formats. The dissemination of the information is highly educative and may raise the knowledge level or the awareness level of not only the target stakeholder but non-stakeholders as well on the issues. This may trigger interest in such stakeholders as to carry out individual investigations.

2. Your knowledge of the issues must be very strong. Where knowledge is weak, it is good to improve it through research and other forms of information or data gathering on the issues to be advocated.
 3. Your ability to undertake a good stakeholder analysis is vital. This must be done with all seriousness, may be even more than ones.
- It is also advisable to carry out risk assessment of your advocacy action. This will help you to plan for some form of mitigation.
 - It is paramount to identify allies and build bridges with them and establishing some form of a network on the issue/s.
6. Linking the issues with local and international laws.
 7. Good also to link the issues to public interests where possible also to security issues.
 8. A good knowledge in raising funds to sustain the advocacy.
 9. A good mix of media forms needs to be adopted and applied.

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Further reading

- FERN, (2006). Provoking change: a tool kit for African NGOs
- Jacques M. Chevalier and Daniel J. Buckles (2019). Handbook for Participatory Action Research, Planning and Evaluation: SAS² Dialogue.
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