

Let us teach both ourselves and others that politics does not have to be the art of the possible...but that it also can be the *art of the impossible*, that is, the art of making both ourselves and the world better.”

Vaclav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia, 1990

“I have come to the conclusion that politics are too serious a matter to be left to politicians.”

Charles de Gaulle, French Statesman

“Politics is for upliftment . . . not for personal gain”

A group of Garifuna women in Belize¹

In many countries, engaging in advocacy first requires overcoming an aversion to politics (see box below). People who have survived repressive regimes, violent conflict, and other kinds of political instability often fear politics. In older democracies, apathy can be an equally stubborn barrier to getting involved in advocacy. The first part of this chapter helps you

bring to the surface some of the misgivings about what is ‘political’ in order to establish a level of comfort with the subject. This lays the foundation for further learning and action. The exercises in this chapter are also useful for more experienced activists who may think of politics only in terms of formal public decisionmaking such as political parties,

Reflections on Politics from Uganda

Why do many people say NGOs are not part of politics?

People’s perception of politics is generally negative, and development is viewed as an apolitical activity.

- Many people equate politics with being affiliated to a party. So, apolitical is the same as non-partisan. Claiming to be apolitical has been a survival strategy for many NGOs operating under restrictive regimes. The strategy provides women and poor people with a safe working space where they can be critical of the government and demand changes without being perceived automatically as subversive.
- Donors have contributed to NGOs’ avoidance tactics because of their own concerns about a government backlash. The donors make clear to potential grantees that they do not support political activities. But they also use the prevalence of NGOs as indicators of stability and democracy, hence politics!
- Politics is associated with those who govern, whilst the governed are assumed not be involved in politics.

What are some of the key features we want to see in a new politics?

- transparent decisionmaking
- broad-based participation
- equitable distribution of resources
- willingness to negotiate
- openness to change
- power sharing
- productive economy

Ugandan workshop of women activists, 1994

Formal Politics

Refers to legislatures, national assemblies, political parties, governments, international agencies, and public policy and resources.

Informal Politics

Refers to what happens in civil society, families, communities, neighborhoods and organizations.

legislatures, and government. The exercises can help to extend their political thinking to the informal realms of decisionmaking in organizations, communities, and families.

Some Reflections on Politics

This Guide is based on an understanding of politics that bridges formal and informal institutions, processes, values and expressions of political life. *All* social relationships and dynamics are political, from the home to the corridors of government. The perception that politics is only the privilege of those in formal political power serves to reinforce exclusion. It can perpetuate people's sense of powerlessness about their ability to create change.

In many countries, despite important political openings in recent years, formal politics continues to be controlled by a handful of interests. Civil society groups organize to inject diverse voices into the process, but political parties and elites retain most public power and resources. Even the newer parties often forsake some of their broader reform agenda in order to “play the political game.”

Outside the formal realm, decisionmaking reflects similar forms of discrimination and control. For example, inequalities in the family often restrict women's public involvement. In the face of these challenges, some contemporary social movements not only want to partici-

pate in the formal political process—they want to change the very boundaries, practice, and culture of politics.²

Some feminists and gender activists describe their alternative approach to politics as transformative politics. **Transformative politics** refers to political activities within and outside the formal political realm that seek not only to influence public decisions, but to reshape the rules and structures of public decisionmaking to be more inclusive and equitable.

We envision politics as the dynamic and often, unequal process of negotiations and decisionmaking in both the formal and informal spheres that determines access to resources and opportunities. The tendency of politics in many countries has been to concentrate decisionmaking and resources while excluding many voices and interests—such as those of ethnic minorities, women, small businesses, trade unions, and peasants. When disadvantaged groups become engaged in politics and advocacy, they seek public recognition for their problems, as well as a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities to solve those problems. They also often demand that the state legitimize and protect their rights in both the public and private realms.

How to begin the discussion of politics

Before doing the following exercises, start off with a trust-building and personal reflection activity that allows people to say something about themselves and what they care about. See Chapter 7 and the Annex for possible exercises.

A Redefinition of Politics from Ugandan Women

What is politics? It is decisionmaking, and managing and planning the use of resources. The inputs necessary to make politics happen are ideas, skills, technology, money and people.

Where does politics happen? At all levels and in all institutions, including the family, local councils, within the workplace, in churches and in Parliament.

How does politics happen? Politics is a continuous process of negotiation between different interests and interest groups.

What do you need to be political? Skills and knowledge about decisionmaking procedures and a sense of your own power and how to use it.

What do women need in order to participate effectively in politics?

- a change in the culture of politics to make it more accessible and inclusive
- self-confidence, information, and skills for political influence
- political consciousness to be able to understand issues and solutions with a political mind
- an understanding of power and an ability to identify sources and ways of using power
- resources—human, material, financial
- accountability to constituencies they claim to represent
- negotiating skills
- a vision of a better future

Ugandan workshop of women activists and parliamentarians, 1994

Purpose

To demystify politics and develop a broad definition that envisions politics as a process of negotiation and decisionmaking occurring in all aspects of life.

Process

(Time: 1 hour)

This exercise has two parts. In the first part, a plenary brainstorming exercise is used in which participants call out words that they associate with the word “politics”. In the second part, participants form small groups to analyze four illustrations. The questions for the analysis can be handed out or written on a piece of flipchart paper for everyone to read.

1. The facilitator describes the purpose and process of the exercise.
2. Brainstorming: The facilitator asks the following questions and jots down participants’ responses on a flipchart. At this stage the facilitator does not introduce any new information.
 - What words would you use to describe politics?
 - What do these words tell us about how we think about politics?
3. Small Group Work: Divide participants into small groups and distribute a copy of the illustrations to each group. Ask the groups:
 - What do they see in each illustration?
 - How does the picture relate to politics?
 - In each picture, who are the key people that might be involved in decisionmaking?
 - What does it tell us about who has more power and who has less power in politics and decisionmaking?
4. Plenary: Ask participants to share their reflections from the small groups. To avoid repetition, after the first group has presented, ask the other groups only to add any new thoughts not covered by previous groups.
5. Conclusions and input: Summarize the main points from the presentations. You might want to highlight that power expresses itself in all kinds of decisionmaking in our lives. For this reason, politics can be seen as a negotiation process between people with different interests and perspectives in all areas of life.

Facilitator’s Tips

Common Responses to the First Question:

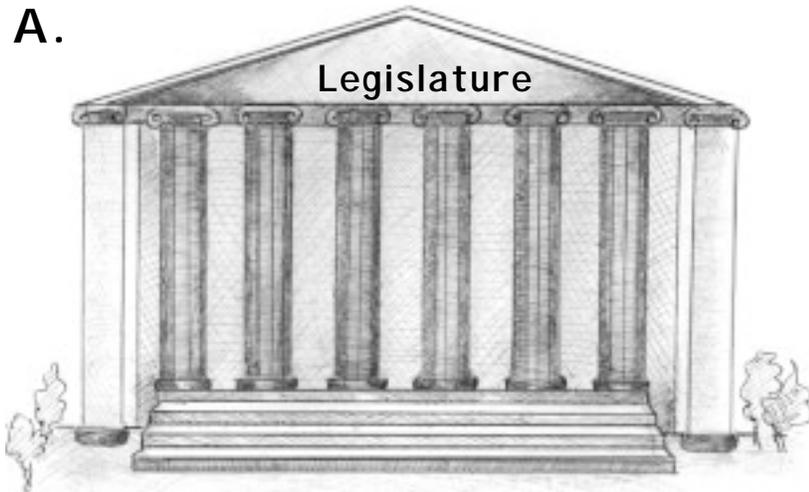
corruption, lies, abuse, repression, control, dictatorship, censorship, rules, power, fear, prejudice, thugs, etc. *Note:* The words usually have negative associations.

Common Responses to the Second Question:

- We judge politics from the perspective of the players in formal politics.
- Our image of politics is negative.
- Politics is too difficult to comprehend.
- Politics is about the power of control, abuse, and money. Since we have no money and no power, it’s useless to think about politics.

From workshops in Africa and the former Soviet Union

A.



B.



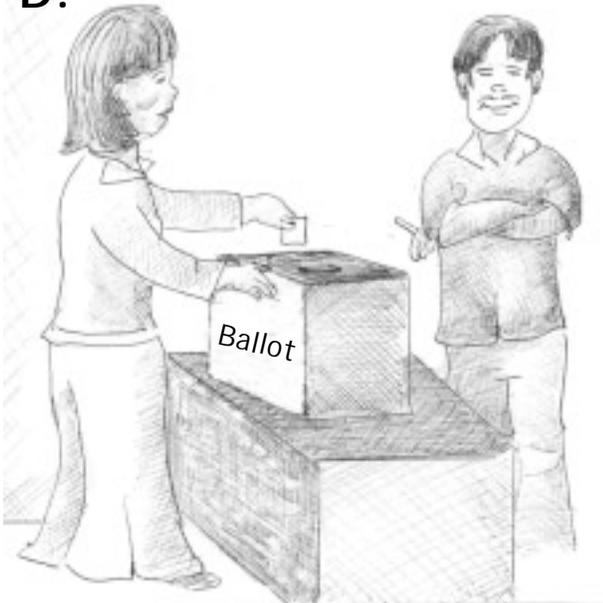
C.



Facilitator's Tips

Throughout the Guide we provide a series of drawings to help promote discussions. However, since images do not always translate easily across cultures, we encourage you to find drawings or photos that best reflect your own setting.

D.



E.



F.



Advocacy is not just about getting to the table with a new set of interests, it's about changing the size and configuration of the table to accommodate a whole new set of actors. Effective advocacy challenges imbalances of power and changes thinking.

What Is Advocacy?

The rapid growth of advocacy training in the last decade has generated a wide variety of definitions, approaches and strategies. Diverse advocacy approaches are not just different ways of reaching a similar end. They embody different values, political views and goals, and thus seek different ends. The distinctions have important implications for excluded groups such as women, indigenous communities, and ethnic minorities. Advocacy initiatives concerned with empowerment, citizenship, and participation appear different from those that focus only on policy reform.

Some definitions of advocacy refer to policy change or the technical aspects of advocacy while others explicitly refer to power. Some focus on *who* does advocacy and *who* is meant to benefit from advocacy. We discuss these differences in more detail later on in this chapter.

"We're not certain whether we have a translation for 'advocacy' or whether we should just use the word 'advocacy' in English. Part of the confusion has to do with the way the concept was imported from the outside as if it were a new technology—as if we didn't already know advocacy. Latin America's history is full of examples of people facing power. How can we think that advocacy is new?"

Peruvian activist, 2001

Facilitator's Note

For a training or planning effort, it is helpful to begin with participants' definitions in order to learn more about their political views and questions. If participants are unfamiliar with advocacy, you may need to take a step back. Before doing the following exercise, you can describe examples of advocacy or ask them to read a few brief case examples, and then discuss some of the distinguishing features. (See Chapter 15 for examples.)

Purpose

To explore how different definitions of advocacy reflect different values, aspirations, and political views.

Process

(Time: 1–1 ½ hours)

1. Divide participants into small groups and give each a copy of the drawings on the next page. There are two sets of drawings showing different ways of doing advocacy. Provide the following instructions in a handout or write on flipchart paper.

Discussion Steps and Questions

- Describe what is happening in each box.
 - Compare the roles and actions of the organizers and the citizens in each scenario. Describe the power relationships in each. Who has more and who has less control over the process?
 - In which case will the citizens gain more knowledge and skills? Which will be more empowering to the citizens? In which case will the organizer gain more knowledge and skills?
 - What are the primary differences between the two kinds of advocacy in the drawing?
 - What would you guess to be the final impact in each case?
2. After each group has discussed the questions, ask them to share their analysis with each other in plenary.
 3. Conclusion and input: Provide only a short summary wrap-up because participants will develop their own definitions of advocacy in the next exercise.

1



Parliament



“Experts” bring people’s issues (the water problem) to policymakers

2



People organize to bring their own issues to policymakers

Purpose

Advocacy involves activities directed at different audiences, goals, and strategies. Developing a common definition can improve communication in the advocacy planning process. The purpose of this exercise is to deepen people's thinking about what advocacy is, and to reach a common definition to guide the planning.

Process

(Time: 1–2 hours)

1. Divide participants into small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions. Their thoughts should be noted on flipchart paper to share with the group in plenary.
 - What is advocacy?
 - Name three outcomes of effective advocacy.
 - What kinds of activities does advocacy involve?
2. In the plenary, ask participants to identify three to five similarities among the groups' responses to the first question and three to five differences. Write the similarities and differences on two different sheets of newsprint and discuss.
3. Ask participants to debate and agree on the four or five most important outcomes and activities and circle these.
4. If you have extra time, discuss the definitions on the next page. Highlight the key characteristics of the different definitions.
5. Conclude with a brief reflection about whether and how the discussion changed participants' understanding of advocacy.

Examples for Facilitators

Here are some advocacy definitions from the Asia-Pacific Advocacy Training of Trainers, co-hosted by GWIP and the Center for Legislative Development in 1997. One definition focused on outcomes.

"Advocacy is strategic action that influences decision making (for and against) in order to improve the social, economic, political environment toward the improvement of the community."

Another focused on action and process. *"Advocacy is about bringing positive changes to all levels of society through the identification of issues, taking of a position, mobilization of resources, organization of structures and mechanisms, and implementation of strategies."*

The third group focused on both outcomes and on process. *"Advocacy is a continuous process which leads to positive change in attitudes, behavior, and relationships within the family, workplace, and community, and state and society i.e. all social institutions."*

Some groups use the word 'for' rather than 'with' when referring to the relationship between the organizers and the communities that will benefit from advocacy. One group defined advocacy as *"to advocate on behalf of the voiceless."* Another group said that advocacy was *"working with the voiceless, organizing people to speak for themselves."*

There is no pure form of advocacy. Most advocacy strategies include aspects of several of the following definitions. At the same time, different definitions reflect different assumptions about how politics and power operate, and how change happens. We discuss this in more detail in the next two chapters. For now, we list some of the influential advocacy definitions. We conclude with the definition of advocacy that informs this Guide.

Public interest advocacy: This is typically large-scale campaign-style advocacy often involving professional lobbyists, media experts, pollsters and fundraisers. These actors mobilize resources and influence in pursuit of policy reforms on social and political issues with the goal of serving the broad public interest.

Policy advocacy: Policy advocacy initiatives focus exclusively on the policy agenda and a specific policy goal. These advocates usually assume that policy change will produce real change on the ground.

Social justice advocacy: A number of organizations worldwide describe their advocacy this way. Strategies involve political and policy influence around issues that directly affect people's lives, especially the lives of the poor and marginalized. Oxfam and the Advocacy Institute (USA) describe it like this: "*Advocacy consists of organized efforts and actions based on the reality of 'what is.' These organized actions seek to highlight critical issues that have been ignored and submerged, to influence public attitudes and to enact and implement laws and public policies so that visions of 'what should be' in a just, decent society become a reality.*" They stress the need "*to embrace power relationships and people's participation . . .*"³

People-centered advocacy: (See the definition on the next page.) These strategies aim to empower poor people to advocate for their rights and interests themselves. This approach challenges the notion that policy is the terrain of "experts." For ActionAid (UK), people-centered advocacy "*supports and enables people to better negotiate on their own behalf, for basic needs and basic rights.*"⁴

Participatory Advocacy: Participatory advocacy extends the boundaries of public decisionmaking by engaging civil society groups in policy debates. It is founded on the belief that democratic governance is the task of citizens as well as governments. This type of advocacy aims to expand public space and citizenship. (Also see the discussion on deliberative democracy in the next chapter.)

Feminist Advocacy: Feminist advocacy refers to strategies, skills, and tools used to influence decisionmaking processes in the public and social arenas in order to eliminate inequalities between women and men. It often challenges other forms of oppression and exclusion. Feminist advocacy seeks to achieve respect for diversity and difference, and to contribute to cultural, social, and political change for women's full and active citizenship.⁵

The Action Guide's Working Definition of Advocacy

Citizen-centered advocacy shares many of the principles of the previous definitions. Like them, ours is explicitly value-based and emphasizes changing unequal relationships of power. We are concerned with how imbalances are perpetuated by social relationships and values in both the public and private arenas. We also share the aspiration of other approaches for equity, justice, and rights.

The approach of this Guide emphasizes how advocacy planning and action can promote more inclusive decisionmaking and citizenship.

The Guide's Definition of Advocacy

Citizen-centered advocacy is an organized political process that involves the coordinated efforts of people to change policies, practices, ideas, and values that perpetuate inequality, intolerance, and exclusion. It strengthens citizens' capacity as decisionmakers and builds more accountable and equitable institutions of power.

We think that the process of articulating priorities, interests, and rights through planning advocacy is as important as the act of claiming them through political organizing.

People-centered Advocacy

John Samuel, the Executive Director of the National Centre of Advocacy Studies in India, defines people-centered advocacy as follows:

"To be effective and efficient, people-centered advocacy needs to:

- **Empower those who have less conventional economic, social, or political power**, using grassroots organizing and mobilization as a means of awareness and assertion of the rights and social responsibilities of citizens.
- **Resist unequal power relations (like patriarchy) at every level:** from personal to public, and from family to governance. The challenge for public advocacy groups is to accomplish this using our meager financial, institutional, and human resources. To effectively influence government or corporate power structures, public advocacy can draw on five major sources that cost nothing:
 - The power of people or citizens
 - The power of direct grassroots experience or linkages
 - The power of information and knowledge
 - The power of constitutional guarantees
 - The power of moral convictions
- **Bridge micro-level activism and macro-level policy initiatives.** Public advocacy initiatives that are practiced only at the macro-level run the risk that a set of urban elites, equipped with information and skills, will take over the voice of the marginalized. Public advocacy groups must make sure they are continually sensitive to the grassroots situation and organically bridge the gap between citizens and policy change.

Grassroots organizing and mobilization lends credibility, legitimacy, and crucial bargaining power to public advocacy. In the Indian context, grassroots support and constituency are the most important factors that determine the credibility of the lobbyist—not his or her professional background or expertise. Activists with an adequate level of expertise and mass support have proven to be better lobbyists than professional experts. Grassroots mobilization and advocacy must work together if we are to achieve real progress at the macro-level."

Citizen-centered approaches have four consistent features:

1. The advocacy planning process engages marginalized people in analyzing, strategizing, and making decisions to improve their lives and claim their rights as citizens;
2. A political hook links citizen organizing and education to specific changes in social, economic, and political decisionmaking and policy;
3. A continuous analysis and negotiation of power relationships helps ensure actions are consistent with a long-term vision of equitable change;
4. The pursuit of alliances and bridges among diverse sectors and groups builds common ground, strength, and legitimacy for change.

Citizen-based advocacy strategies vary widely and may target decisionmaking at global, regional, national or local levels. Strategies combine:

- using the media to shape public opinion,
- lobbying decisionmakers,
- educating the public,
- organizing constituency groups,
- developing leadership among citizens,
- raising political awareness,
- conducting research,
- building coalitions, and other activities.

Advocacy relies on a variety of leaders, activists and organizations with different skills and talents, as well as committed citizens who are willing to take some risk to change their lives. When held together by a set of common principles and commitments, they learn to respect their distinct roles and responsibilities and

Advocacy's Political/Policy Hooks Focus on

Who decides: legislators, heads of state, appointed officials, policy-makers, judges, ministers, boards of advisors, managing directors, administrators, etc.

What is decided: laws, policies, priorities, regulations, services, programs, institutions, budgets, statements, party platforms, appointments, etc.

How decisions are made: accessibility of citizens to information and the decisionmaking process, extent of consultation with and direct say of citizens; accountability and responsiveness of decisionmakers to citizens and other stakeholders, etc.

How decisions are enforced, implemented, and evaluated: ensuring accountability so that decisions are put into action, laws enforced equitably, etc.

develop accountable structures of decisionmaking within their organizations.

The Guide's approach is grounded in the notion that citizens have a right to be involved in decisions affecting their lives. Advocacy success is measured by changes in:

- citizen engagement and organization,
- the political agenda and level of public accountability,
- the participation of excluded voices and interests in decisionmaking processes, and
- values, consciousness, and behavior shaping social roles and responsibilities.

What Do We Mean by Rights-Based Advocacy?

Rights-based advocacy builds on the legitimacy of economic, social, cultural and political rights gained through UN conventions and

procedures. It works both to implement these rights and expand them to respond to new forms of discrimination and indignity.

Rights are a basic ethical foundation for citizen-centered advocacy. They anchor our work in universal aspirations for freedom and fairness and in certain principles:

- People have a right to have a voice in the decisions shaping the quality of their lives;
- Basic economic and social resources and protections—from health care to freedom from violence in the home—are not special privileges. Rather, they are basic rights.

Political and economic structures that systematically exclude social groups from resources and decisions are important targets of rights-based advocacy efforts.

When rights are enshrined in laws and international conventions—such as freedom of speech, of association, and other political and civil rights—they provide a legal framework for action. In such cases, advocacy is about compliance, enforcement, and equal protection.

When rights are not enshrined in law—as is the case with most economic, social and cultural rights related to housing, healthcare, wages, or the environment—then advocacy focuses on legislation and policy change. As advocates identify new areas of potential rights, they work to gain acceptance for them. Rights are part of an evolving framework that gives meaning to people’s aspirations and dreams of human dignity. See pages 39-41 for more discussion of rights.

NOTES

¹ From *Citizens and Governance: Civil Society in the New Millennium*, A Report prepared by the Commonwealth Foundation in partnership with Civicus, 1999, London.

² Alvarez, Sonia E., Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar, eds. *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

³ Advocacy Institute and Oxfam America, *Advocacy Learning Initiative* (draft version), 1999.

⁴ Chapmen, Jennifer and Amboka Wameyo, *Monitoring and Evaluation Advocacy: A Scoping Study*, ActionAid, London, 2001.

⁵ Definition developed by participants during the *Course on Feminist Advocacy*, held in Brazil in March 2001 as part of the project, “Strengthening Advocacy Skills of Latin American NGOs that work on Reproductive and Sexual Rights,” organized by AGENDE (Brazil), Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristan (Peru), and Equidad de Genero (Mexico), 2001.