



# Advocacy Impact Assessment Guidelines

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## Summary

DFID's major advocacy activities focus on influencing agencies and governments to invest in infrastructure. However, it is hard to find concrete evidence of the contributions that advocacy makes towards poverty eradication. Here we provide guidelines for an approach that many NGOs take to assess advocacy impacts. Being clear about the changes you want to effect means that you can develop measurable advocacy objectives. Designing indicators that act as milestones towards the achievement of your objectives provides a basis in your search for evidence. There are different types of advocacy impacts, known as *different dimensions of change*, and we describe some indicators for the following dimensions: changes in policies and their implementation, private sector change, strengthening civil society, aiding democracy and improving the material situation of individuals. Participatory monitoring and evaluation asks the people being affected by a project whether it has made a difference. However, this is often more complex than standard evaluation systems and you need to be clear about the goals of the process and who should be involved. In order to assess impact, you need to know the existing situation prior to advocacy. This can be determined by identifying your target's Awareness, Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviour (AKAB) on your issue, and progress can then be monitored by AKAB re-evaluation. Once you have the information, it needs to be analysed. Lessons can then be learned and evaluation results used to demonstrate that advocacy works.

## WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is a useful word to describe a series of planned interventions that are intended to **bring about change** in response to specific problems. These planned interventions either prevent a problem from occurring or mobilise people to undertake new actions to overcome a problem. Different organisations have different definitions, and some do not use the word at all, but talk about influencing instead. The words don't matter: being clear and realistic about your ambitions does matter.

### **Why is advocacy important to DFID?**

DFID spends around half of its annual budget through multilaterals and has increasingly used its influence to increase multilateral commitment to effective poverty elimination.

Within DFID, the Infrastructure/Urban Division has specific, if not particularly explicit, ambitions to influence others. These focus on persuading bilateral and multilateral agencies and governments to maintain or increase investment in infrastructure hardware and services.

These ambitions to change the way that others do

things are advocacy. Advocacy is not a new activity but a continuation of what DFID has been doing for many years. There have been some advocacy successes, but why are they so hard to find?

## WHY EVIDENCE OF SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY IS HARD TO FIND

Assessing the impact of your influencing or advocacy activities follows the same basic ground rules as project evaluation. You need to be clear about your objectives, explicit about the activities that will realise the objectives, logical about the way in which you gather data and evaluate it, and pragmatic about how much time you spend on the whole exercise. If you're spending more than one tenth of your overall budget on evaluation, then you're probably looking for evidence that doesn't exist.

There is no doubt that **concrete evidence** that a communication, research, or advocacy initiative has *directly* brought about a reduction in poverty, is hard to find. Evaluating effectiveness is more difficult than for straightforward project work (where you can count numbers of latrines built, number of jobs generated, revenues earned, etc.), and this partly explains why in

1999 18% of 32 UK NGOs involved in advocacy work did 'some evaluation'; 28% did 'a little'; and 54% did 'practically none'<sup>i</sup>.

There are a number of reasons why finding evidence of bringing about change is difficult:

- First, the chain of events that needs to unfold before there is impact is a long one. For example, it may be years before research that develops new water harvesting technologies is taken up and brings about greater food security at community level. The impact is unlikely to reveal itself during the life of the research project, and funds are rarely available to continue monitoring of uptake and impact after the project ends;
- Second, it is difficult to attribute advocacy results, (e.g. influencing UN member states to aim to meet 15% of national energy needs with renewable energy sources by the year 2015) *uniquely* to your intervention;
- Third, poverty reduction is rarely brought about by one single *kind* of intervention on its own. It requires a combination of interventions that are mutually supportive (e.g. combining policy reform, with the generation of new knowledge and dissemination of existing knowledge);
- Fourth, outright or absolute 'victory' in advocacy is extremely rare: it is much more likely that you have made some gains and accepted some compromises. Assessing achievements is therefore a subjective exercise that will present different conclusions depending on who is making the judgement.

## LOOKING FOR THE EVIDENCE

Unlike projects, for which lots of evaluation frameworks exist to help you assess impact, advocacy doesn't come with its own set of frameworks. Instead there are a number of approaches that are used by different organisations, with varying success.

None of the methodologies is perfect, but all have good ideas and it is up to you to decide which one you adopt. When choosing, think about the kind of advocacy work you're involved with (i.e. is it more focused at policy reform than building civil society?); the scale of the work (i.e. don't spend weeks monitoring a campaign that is meant to be short and sharp); the capacity available to you; and the skills needed for the job.

These Advocacy Guidelines describe an approach used by a number of NGOs which capture the 'different dimensions of change' that make up any advocacy intervention.

### **Understanding the key terms**

You can use the same words to evaluate advocacy as you do to evaluate projects, but their definitions may vary. For example:

**Impact.** Concrete changes in the lives of the ultimate beneficiaries, i.e. poor people. Examples of impact are: a reduction in levels of poverty because of increased mobility through improved transport, or better access to health facilities.

You have the *least* control over impact, but since this is the kind of change that *most* people want to see proven, it is worth putting in place both a rigorous system of monitoring and some creative 'paths of attribution' so that you can show some connection between your intervention and a reduction in poverty on the ground<sup>ii</sup>.

**Outcomes.** These are the changes brought about as a result of your activities. For example:

- Media campaign to profile IUDD's reconstruction work in Montserrat results in an editorial in the Daily Splash (read by 3,700 policymakers worldwide) and nine follow-up requests for training materials;
- A workshop to share the results of research into the negative impacts of ICTs for urban women motivates community researchers in two pilot areas to produce gender disaggregated data so that they can profile impact on women;
- The Institute of Agricultural Engineering in Zimbabwe incorporates slow dripfeed irrigation pipes into its curriculum as a result of a training course for engineers;
- Research findings presented at regional workshops highlighting the importance of water transport result in Ministry X and donor Y incorporating water transport as a specific line item in subsequent strategic plans.

**Outputs.** These are the direct results of your activities over which you have most control (e.g. printing of 5,000 EngKaR Progress Reports, hosting a workshop to share research findings, etc.) which lead to outcomes.

Most evaluation reports focus on outputs rather than outcomes and impact. This is because outputs are more visible and happen almost immediately after the intervention (a time when project staff can witness and report on completed activities).

**Inputs.** These are the resources – both people time and actual costs – that are incurred in undertaking the activities (e.g. 40 days of a researcher's time to do a literature search; 24 days of an engineer's time to design and conduct field trials; air fares, subsistence, costs of hiring a conference venue for a seminar to share research findings).

### **The different dimensions of change**

To have any developmental impact through advocacy, you will need to bring about change in a number of related but different areas at the same

time. These are sometimes called the different dimensions of change. It is only when these changes occur in concert with each other, that the benefits in people's lives start to be seen. You need to look for evidence of making progress in each of these different areas.

The clearer you are about your intentions for change, the easier will be your search for evidence. For example, if your **development objective** is more appropriate housing in informal settlements, your **advocacy objectives** might include the following:

- changing building standards to better reflect the reality of what people can afford to build (through research and pilot project);
- strengthening people's knowledge of appropriate building materials and techniques;
- influencing policymakers to communicate and apply the new standards;
- influencing appropriate government and civil society organisations to provide skills training and programmes of technical support to maximise uptake.

As with planning projects, each advocacy objective should be SMART (Simple, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-Bound).

### **Designing Indicators**

Indicators are like milestones that show you in which direction and how far you have travelled, on the journey towards meeting your advocacy objectives. You need to design indicators at the beginning of any intervention, and systematise their collection and analysis in your monitoring and evaluation system.

Things to look for include the process itself, as well as evidence of the actual impact of the intervention. Questions you should be asking about the process of advocacy include:

- Are the techniques being used working well? For example, is the media campaign generating media coverage of the right sort, in the right places?
- Are the policymakers that you seek to engage responding positively?
- Are other organisations 'coming on board' and beginning to join forces with you?
- Are the people being reached those that you want to target?
- Is there evidence that your targets (i.e. those in a position to bring about change) are being reached and are responding?
- Are they taking action? Is the action likely to bring you closer to realising your objectives?
- Are you involving, or collaborating with the right people, organisations or bodies?
- In retrospect, were the targets and channels of communications used to reach them, the most appropriate?

## **Looking for different dimensions of change**

The Institute for Development Research distinguishes between different types of advocacy impact:

### **POLICY CHANGE**

The policy outcome is the degree to which policy objectives are achieved, (i.e. specific changes in the policies, practices, programmes or behaviour of major institutions that affect the public, such as government, international financial bodies and corporations). You might want to bring about change in public policy (this could be either generating or modifying an existing policy on paper – for example prioritising infrastructure within the Poverty Reduction Strategies), or influence policy implementation (i.e. how that policy is actually implemented on the ground and brings benefit to poor people's lives).

Oxfam's Policy Department outlines a series of stages in bringing about policy reform and ultimately benefits to people's lives for which you could develop a series of indicators:

- Heightened awareness about an issue
- Contributions to debate
- Changed opinions
- Changed policy
- Policy change is implemented
- Positive change in people's lives

In reality, the process of policy creation is not this simple<sup>iii</sup> and some useful models of the more chaotic processes involved are evolving.

Table 1  
Dimension of Change: Policy change indicators

Indicators of progress (outcomes)	Indicators of change (impact)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased dialogue on an issue at policy level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive change in people's lives as a result of the policy/legislative change</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raised profile of issue</li> <li>• Changed opinion of target, or key influentials</li> <li>• Changed rhetoric (in public/private)</li> <li>• Change in written publications about the issue</li> <li>• Changes in clauses of legislation/policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changed policy (e.g. shown in agreed texts)</li> <li>• Change in legislation</li> <li>• Budgets and expenditure shown change</li> <li>• Policy-legislation change implemented</li> </ul>

## Monitoring policy implementation

Even if a policy is changed or a new policy is developed, policies are enacted but not implemented because there is a lack of capacity within government departments or some vested interests that prevent it. This makes the monitoring of actual policy implementation extremely important.

Budget monitoring provides a quantitative approach to impact assessment. It recognises that policy change is not always implemented, and so does not always achieve real change in people's lives. Analysing public expenditure allows us to investigate the detailed steps in the implementation process. These include:

- whether the budget is allocated;
- whether the budget leaves the Ministry of Finance and is received by the relevant Ministry which will be involved in implementation. (It should never be assumed that allocations directly translate into expenditure);
- whether the resources are received by the relevant local government agencies;
- whether this translates into resources available to service users and citizens.

## PRIVATE SECTOR CHANGE

The private sector outcome is the degree to which specific changes in policies, practices, programmes or behaviour relating to the private sector come about. For example, policies that facilitate the positive role of private sector infrastructure investment in the south, and better ways of working between governments and the private sector.

## CIVIL SOCIETY CHANGE

On its own, policy change doesn't guarantee a positive impact on people's lives. A longer term vision is one where civil society is capable of not only advocating for policy change on their own terms, but holding governments to account by monitoring and enforcing the implementation of policies. Civil society strengthening is therefore seen as an integral part of any advocacy agenda. You need to break down the different groups that exist within any society and set targets for what you want to achieve with each of them. It's useful to think here about partner NGOs and civil society organisations as one group, the general public as a second and the media as a third.

Table 2  
Dimension of Change: Change indicators for a stronger civil society

Dimension of change	Possible output indicators	Indicators of progress (outcomes)	Indicators of change (impact)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening civil society by working with:</li> <li>• NGOs</li> <li>• Movements/networks</li> <li>• Community Based Organisations</li> <li>• Popular organisations</li> <li>• Partner organisations (including southern researchers and their institutions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No. of people trained on specific issues</li> <li>• No. of joint activities on specific issues</li> <li>• Staff exchanges</li> <li>• Joint campaigns/advocacy initiatives</li> <li>• Visits and discussions etc.</li> <li>• Meeting of a campaign network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in individual members' skills, capacity, knowledge and effectiveness</li> <li>• Change in individual civil groups' capacity, organisational skills, effectiveness</li> <li>• Greater synergy of aims/activities in networks/movements</li> <li>• Change in collaboration, trust or unity of civil society groups</li> <li>• Demonstrated ways organisation has taken forward training objectives</li> <li>• Improve performance as a result of support (e.g. through joint campaign work, staff exchange etc.)</li> <li>• Partner has translated objectives into practice</li> <li>• Organisation carrying out campaigns with little outside support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased effectiveness of civil society work</li> <li>• Civil groups active in influencing decision makers in ways that will benefit poor people</li> <li>• Effective advocacy work</li> <li>• Declaratory impact: changes in oral rhetoric in private or in public</li> <li>• Changes in policy</li> <li>• Improved lives dependent on policy change</li> </ul>

## The media

Although the media form part of civil society, and are often not actual targets so much as messengers for your information, they are key players in the effectiveness of any communications plan. You need to show how you are engaging different parts of the media, and how effectively they understand and communicate your messages. Break down the different kinds of media partners you need to target and answer the following questions concerning the effectiveness of your targeting.

### Effective News Media Partnerships

- Have the news media that reach audiences you are trying to influence, increased their coverage of infrastructure issues?
- Is there an ongoing, regular communication mechanism with the key decision makers in those news organisations?

- Are the news organisations receiving the information and ideas that they most require? How is this being done systematically?
- Are the news organisations receiving development information and ideas in forms that make it easy for them to comprehend and use?
- Have priority development issues been a prominent focus of the major news media industry?

The series of questions developed for the news media can easily be applied for features coverage in the mainstream commercial and public-owned mass media e.g. broadcast TV and radio, national and regional, daily and weekly newspapers. You could also identify 'specialist press' such as development journals, professional magazines etc.

Table 3  
Dimension of Change: Indicators for general public change

Dimension of change	Possible output indicators	Indicators of progress (outcomes)	Indicators of change (impact)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff time (person days)</li> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• Consultants/trainers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public meetings/talks (no. held? What quality? Who came? Key figures attended? etc.)</li> <li>• Press Conferences held (number? With what attendance? Quality?)</li> <li>• Television (Air time given? Quality? Coverage of the issues? Time of broadcast? Probable audience etc.)</li> <li>• Internet: No. of hits to web page? Email conferences? Probable audience?</li> <li>• Research materials produced: what type of materials, what quality? Who were they used by? Etc. etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replies and other communication from public</li> <li>• Number of people who write for more information</li> <li>• Unsolicited responses from the public (no. of letters to newspapers from general public)</li> <li>• Numbers of people who come to meetings</li> <li>• Invitations to speak at different fora</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of people who have taken action (taken part in demonstrations, written to their MP, signed petitions etc.)</li> <li>• Changed attitudes on the issue</li> <li>• Changed behaviour</li> </ul>

## DEMOCRACY CHANGE

The democratic outcome is the extent to which the work has opened up new channels for civil society organisations to be involved in decisions in the future. For example:

- Creating mechanisms for the participation of marginalised rural communities in policy decisions

about where the transport budget should be spent in their province;

- Increasing the legitimacy of civil society organisations in water privatisation processes;
- Improving the attitudes and behaviours of government officials and elites towards NGOs and grassroots groups working on household energy issues;

- Increasing the accountability and transparency of public institutions.

## INDIVIDUAL CHANGE

The individual outcome is the improved material situation of individuals, such as concrete living conditions and opportunities for health, education and work. This outcome also includes expanded attitudes and beliefs and raised awareness of the individual as a protagonist and citizen with rights and responsibilities

Table 4

Dimension of change: Indicators for enlarging democratic space (i.e. the space in which civil society groups can effectively operate in society)

Indicators of progress (outcomes)	Indicators of change (impact)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater freedom of expression</li> <li>• Greater acceptance/recognition of civil groups</li> <li>• Existence of fora for civil groups to input into a wider range of decisions</li> <li>• Increased legitimacy of civil society groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased participation of civil society groups in influencing decisions</li> <li>• Change in accountability and transparency of public institutions</li> </ul>

Table 5

Dimension of change: Indicators to support people-centred policy making

Indicators of progress (outcomes)	Indicators of change (impact)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater awareness of individual rights and the power systems that withhold rights</li> <li>• Change in local people's skills, capacity and knowledge to mobilise and advocate on their own behalf.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved access to basic rights such as health, housing, water and food</li> </ul>

## PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION (PM and E)<sup>iv</sup>

Conventional evaluation systems do not answer the question 'Has the project made a difference?' from the perspective of those being affected by the project. Participatory evaluation allows others, with a different perspective on the answer, to be involved in the process.

Questions to ask yourself before designing/embarking on PM and E:

- **Do you, as a research manager, really want to make the M and E for which you are responsible more participatory?** (PM and E is usually more complicated, involves more people holding different views and may involve more compromises and take longer. Ask what the people you envisage as participants will get out of the process and what their incentive for getting involved will be? If there is no incentive, consider paying for the time they are involved. Be clear about how this approach will benefit you over conventional M and E)
- **Who should be involved, and what will everyone's contribution be?** Who are the key informants and what is the unique perspective that they will be able to contribute?
- **What are the collective goals of the M and E process?** Everyone needs to have an incentive for their participation, as well as clear roles and responsibilities in data collection and analysis.
- What is it that the stakeholders want to monitor or evaluate?
- What do the stakeholders need to learn, and why?
- **How will the participants find what they need to learn?** Agree on methods, responsibilities and timing for collecting information, as well as identifying skills gaps and strengthening capacities through training and support.
- How will participants make sense of, and use the information?

## INFORMATION COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

You will need to establish the **baseline** situation before advocacy activities begin. This can be done through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, sampling techniques etc.

What you find out will depend on what you're trying to do. AKAB is a useful communications planning tool to identify your targets' Awareness, Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviour regarding your issue. You would need to go back to the same group after a period of time to assess how far they have 'moved' and how much of this movement is in response to your advocacy intervention. Useful questions to ask include:

- Recall of advocacy information
- Response to the information (attitude and actions)
- Motivations of those who did respond
- Multipliers (onward effects through others)
- Follow-up responses received by the institution doing the advocacy

A monitoring system needs to be designed at the

beginning of the intervention, which outlines how information about advocacy *process* and *progress* will be collected and analysed. Existing systems of reporting (e.g. annual reviews, quarterly reports, external evaluations) should be *utilised and modified* in the first instance to collect additional advocacy information because people are busy and reluctant to do any more reporting than they already have to.

Once you have the information, it needs to be analysed. Lessons learned need to be fed back to those managing and carrying out the advocacy work, as well as to others who stand to benefit from the work. Communicating evaluation conclusions stimulates interest in further work; heartens those involved; impresses those being influenced; and forges new alliances.

## AND SOME MORE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Different stakeholders will have different views on what success is, depending on where they are within the impact chain.
- If you cannot prove impact, be satisfied with a critically informed assessment of change;
- Include subjective criteria, (i.e. what successes people feel have taken place but cannot substantiate with evidence). Anecdotal information, for example a woman saying that she feels more confident repairing irrigation sprinklers, is valuable.
- Break down your advocacy intervention into manageable components;
- Be practical, yet flexible. The external environment in which your advocacy takes place will be changing all the time, and even the most rigorous evaluation system will not have the power of prophesy. Review the system regularly and informally, as well as the kinds of information that you're collecting, to keep pace with this external change.
- Monitor changes in your strategy itself (as well as in the external environment) so that in hindsight you can explain results when the clarity of 'the now' has disappeared. When we talk about collecting 'lessons for others to learn from', it is these mid-term shifts in emphasis and change in direction that are most insightful.
- Collaborative advocacy means that individual contributions cannot be separated from the success of the whole effort. For example, was it the electronic campaign, or the conference, or the nurturing of a government advisor that made government X adopt a livelihoods approach to urban planning? Most people would argue that it shouldn't be necessary to do so, but there is pressure to show unique contributions to advocacy successes. The use of proxy indicators and inference to show unique contributions can be

used when pressed.

- Share evaluation results with a wide range of people to show the disbelievers that advocacy can work; to motivate those who have been involved; to raise funds for a continuation of the work; and to create the space within your organisation to mainstream the successful approaches etc.

## References

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- 1 *A Bigger Bank for your Buck? UK NGOs and the evaluation of advocacy*, Dr Alan Hudson, 2000 [www.alanhudson.plus.com/bang.htm](http://www.alanhudson.plus.com/bang.htm)
- 2 see 'CIMRC What is a Success Story?' guidance sheets on Infrastructure Connect
- 3 Global Development Network discussions <http://www.gdnet.org/subpages/RAPNet/Background.html>
- 4 Irene Guijt, IIED ibid