

Cultural  
Rights to  
Promote  
Development  
and Health

**DE  
CI  
DES**



**Strengthening CSO's  
and women's  
capacity to stop  
Domestic Violence**

## **Handout for CSOs on Advocacy and Lobbying**

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**DECIDES CARIBBEAN.** Cultural Rights to foster behavioural changes and women's empowerment against Domestic Violence in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean.



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The hand-out provides an introduction and relevant tips for advocacy and lobbying for CSOs that work in the field of Domestic Violence and Gender Based Violence in Caribbean Countries.

For further information, visit <http://www.interarts.net/en/encurso.php?p=446>

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CBO	Community-based organization
DECIDES	Derechos Culturales Para Impulsar el Desarrollo y la Salud (Cultural Rights to Promote Development and Health)
DV	Domestic Violence
NGO	Non-governmental organization

## 1 What is Advocacy

**“Advocacy is a process to bring about change in the policies, laws and practices of influential individuals, groups and institutions.”**

It is the active support of an idea or cause expressed through strategies and methods that influence the opinions and decisions of people and organisations.

In the social and economic development context the aims of advocacy are to create or change policies, laws, regulations, distribution of resources or other decisions that affect people’s lives and to ensure that such decisions lead to implementation.

As the overall objective of our project is to contribute to reduce domestic violence in our respective countries by promoting societal cultural changes and enhancing the capacity of civil society organizations to counter it, we must remain focussed and find strategic solutions to achieve this goal. This is where the important role of advocacy and lobbying is most needed.

Advocacy is generally directed at policy makers including politicians, government officials and public servants, but also private sector leaders whose decisions impact upon peoples’ lives, as well as those whose opinions and actions influence policy makers, such as journalists and the media, development agencies and large NGOs. Our approach must therefore be multi-faceted.

What is lobby and advocacy? The overarching objective of any lobby and advocacy strategy is to influence decision makers in order to advance and improve conditions for your selected target group. Decision-makers can be politicians and policy-makers as well as other crucial decisive stakeholders, such as international companies, but also church leaders or tribal leaders. Both lobby and advocacy increase the scope of influence to improve policies and achieve structural change in key areas such as health and overall improvement for the targeted group.

### LIMITS

The tools and methods used will highly depend on the context and (cultural) setting you are operating in. In case you have limited political space or access to decision-makers to engage in a constructive dialogue you might be more inclined to organise a demonstration or a petition.



Whereas in some countries or on specific topics more can be achieved through personal dialogue or through close collaboration. It is important you define your own terms of engagement.

Carefully analyse the ways which are likely to generate the highest impact. At the same time, be aware that it will be impossible to realise all your objectives at once. You are not in power yourself, you are not the decision-maker.

It is also important to communicate this clearly to your beneficiaries. Set realistic goals. In the end, it is the decision-maker who decides on your influencing space. However, by playing it smart, you may create more space. An extra limit to lobbying is that it is often necessary to compromise as you try to create a win-win situation (instead of a win-lose). An advantage of lobbying however is that, as you are presenting possible alternatives and solutions, it poses less of a threat to make a decision.

Because the issue of domestic violence is such a pervasive and entrenched problem in our society, our advocacy for reduction in domestic violence has to be an ongoing process aiming at change of attitudes, actions, policies and laws by influencing people and organisations with power, systems and structures at different levels. We must however remain focussed on the goals of the DECIDES Caribbean project and ensure that our advocacy and lobbying efforts are successful at achieving our project goals and objectives during the course of our work together.

Bear in mind that:

- Advocacy is nothing new. Individuals and groups have always tried to influence people in power, in their private lives and as part of their work.
- Advocacy work takes on many shapes. In relation to DV it can include a wide range of strategies
- It is possible to advocate for ourselves or for other people.
- Advocacy is only one approach to undertaking reduction in DV
- Other approaches include community mobilisation, education, public health measures, community support.

Advocacy can make all these methods more effective, by gaining the support of people in power and changing the social environment in which we work.

Almost all NGOs and CBOs already have experience of doing advocacy – even if they do not realise it, or do not use the word ‘advocacy’.



## **2 Introduction**

We can gain a practical understanding of advocacy by sharing experiences of doing advocacy work.

Advocacy can be achieved at different levels: local, national and international. These levels refer to the level where the power or influence lies, rather than where the advocates are working.

### **KEY POINT!!!!**

Advocacy around policies does not only include changing or creating policies – advocacy can also be about putting policies into practice (implementation). In our case, one of our main goals, is to have a harmonized system of reporting and this also has to be pivotal to our approach for advocacy and lobbying.

Also bear in mind that advocacy can involve many specific, short-term activities which together combine to reach a long-term vision of change.



### **3 Different ways of doing advocacy**

- Advocacy can take many different forms – for example, it can be written, spoken, sung or acted.
- It can also vary in the time it takes, from one hour to more than several years.
- We can do advocacy work on our own or with others. Involvement or permission from people affected by the advocacy issue.
- Some of the most powerful advocacy methods are led by the people affected by the problem or issue, or directly involve them.
- It is very important to receive the permission of the people affected by the problem if we use methods that do not directly involve them in the advocacy work. This permission allows us to legitimately advocate for them or represent them (legitimacy or representation). This is only possible if we have a very close relationship with people affected by the problem or issue. Proactive or reactive advocacy.
- Sometimes advocacy work is forced on us – the problem or issue is already there, and we use advocacy to reduce the problem. This is reactive advocacy.
- At other times it is possible to plan for the future, to ‘set the agenda’ and use advocacy to create a positive.





## **4 Levels of advocacy**

Advocacy work can target people with influence at all levels – from a local midwife, to the United Nations. Although there are multiple levels of advocacy work, for the sake of simplicity we can identify three key ‘levels’ of advocacy:

- ◆ Local (village, district, city, etc.)
- ◆ National (the whole country)
- ◆ International (more than one country)

Regional level: The CARICOM Secretariat can have influence over regional Ministers of Health and Gender

In reality the problem or issue may have a combination of local, national and international causes, so the level of your advocacy work will depend on:

- The scale of the problem or issue (it may have a purely local cause)
- Where you can have the greatest impact on the problem or issue (a hotel may be part of a national chain, but it may be more realistic to persuade the local hotel manager first and then work with the manager to advocate at the national level afterwards)
- The resources of your organisation (i.e., different levels of advocacy take different amounts of staff time, skills and funds)
- Your organisation’s networks and relationships (for example, one of your trustees may know the owner of the national hotel chain)
- The mission of your organisation (for example, your activities may be purely within one district). Working together in coalitions can be a strength at every level, but becomes particularly important as you move from local to national to international level and face greater bureaucracy and power.



## **5 Be systematic**

The benefits of planning advocacy work in a systematic way by asking the following kinds of questions:

What are the advantages of planning our work?

Do the same advantages also apply to planning advocacy work?

What could be the effects of not planning our advocacy work?

## 6 Advocacy framework

We know the issue we want to address and a key component has already been covered, which is the research, which will inform our advocacy and lobbying efforts. This is very important and we must use it wisely and strategically to influence and inform our targets and allies, as well as to:

- ◆ To provide evidence for our position or those of others
- ◆ To disprove statements by people who oppose us
- ◆ To change perceptions of a problem
- ◆ To disprove myths, rumours and false assumptions
- ◆ To explain why previous strategies have not worked

It is also important to involve people who are directly affected by the issue or problem at this stage. They will have an in-depth understanding of the problem and its effects, and will have ideas about how it can be solved. For example, participatory drama (involving a discussion with the audience) or a cause-and-effect flowchart can be used to analyse issues and identify solutions with those affected.

It is important to consider carefully the effects of any suggested solutions – some proposed solutions can cause more problems than they solve!

We have specific objectives for our advocacy and research to back up our approach, so we now need to do the following:

- ◆ Identify and map your targets
- ◆ Be clear and realistic about our resources
- ◆ Create an action plan and
- ◆ Implement

### **IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP IN MIND THE FOLLOWING**

- Most organisations have limited resources available for undertaking advocacy work. Therefore it is important to focus advocacy efforts on the individuals, groups or institutions that have the greatest capacity to take action and to introduce the desired changes.



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- At a national or international level these people are usually those with the power to make policy or programme decisions. At a local level there are often charismatic people who have power and influence at an informal level – for example, peer leaders, respected older people, traditional healers – as well as those who have formal influential roles.
- Now we have developed clear aims and objectives, it is much easier to identify our advocacy targets.
- Understanding the decision-making system is an important part of advocacy at all levels. Once the decision-making process is clear, it is possible that the most obvious target is not accessible and it is necessary to work through others to reach them. For example, it may be better to work with ‘those who can influence those with influence’ and who have sympathetic views, rather than targeting the decision-maker directly. These people can be called indirect targets, rather than direct targets.
- Identifying our targets will help us to plan strategically, and will also help us to choose the most appropriate methods or activities, including indirect targets

## 7 Effective Representation

Effective representation refers in this case, to involving people directly affected by the advocacy issue or problem. Advocacy can be carried out by the people affected by an issue or problem, by other people representing them, or by both groups together.

Advocacy is often more powerful if those affected by the problem or issue are involved with or lead the process. If we advocate by representing others, we need to ensure that we represent their opinions and interests fairly. This means having a very close relationship with those affected by the problem or issue, a deep understanding of the issue, and permission from those affected by the problem or issue to advocate on their behalf. Having permission or the 'right' to advocate for other people is known as 'legitimacy'. It is also important to ensure that advocacy work is supported by the mission or aims of our organisation, by senior managers, and by any external funders.

Why it is important to involve those directly affected by the advocacy issue, from early in the planning process

- They will have expert knowledge of the issue or problem
- They can suggest workable solutions based on direct experience of the problem
- They can view a problem from a different perspective
- They are often highly motivated, because they are directly affected by the issue
- Those affected will gain more skills and confidence

Problems caused by lack of legitimacy involving those affected by the problem or issue late, superficially ('tokenism') or not at all can result in:

- identifying irrelevant issues
- suggesting solutions which do not solve the problem, or make the problem worse
- public disagreement
- loss of credibility for the organisations and individuals involved in advocacy
- disempowerment of those affected, so they are less in control of their own situations.



## **DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION GATHERING SKILLS**

This will be critical to developing the Harmonized System of Reporting. We should therefore ensure that the follow-up workshops provide the much needed additional guidance and outputs to strengthen our case for that system.

Documentation and information-gathering skills are vital for nearly all kinds of advocacy work. Documentation and information-gathering are needed to help us develop our ideas and as well as to support our opinions so that they will be taken seriously by those in influence.

## 8 How to choose effective advocacy methods

There are no simple rules for choosing the best advocacy methods.

Your choice will depend on many factors:

- a) the target person/group/institution;
- b) the advocacy issue;
- c) your advocacy objective;
- d) the evidence to support your objective;
- e) the skills and resources of your coalition; and
- f) timing – for example, external political events, when a law is still in draft form, immediately before a budgeting process, time of year, stage of advocacy process. Below is an example of the strengths and weaknesses of some methods for a particular advocacy objective and targets. Remember, that every cause is different.

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