

Influencing Decision Makers



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The purpose of this toolkit is to help readers plan their engagement with government policy makers and legislators, and to conduct effective lobbying meetings.

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The Climate Change Advocacy Toolkits

These toolkits aim to guide and support civil society actors in the South in their efforts to advocate for pro-poor climate policies. They include a mix of:

-  instructions on how to plan and conduct advocacy interventions,
-  a range of case stories on how civil society works to influence climate change policy-making, and
-  references for further reading.

The toolkits are developed and published by *Southern Voices on Climate Change*. Since 2011, this Programme has supported around 20 civil society networks in the global South to advocate for climate policies that benefit poor and vulnerable people. The Programme is implemented by the Climate Capacity Consortium, comprised of four Danish and two international NGOs, with CARE Denmark as lead agency, and IIED as co-publisher of the toolkits. Funding is from DANIDA from the Danish climate finance envelope.

Further information on the Southern Voices networks and the Programme is available at www.southernvoices.net



Introduction

Governments are the primary duty bearers, the ones who make the decisions on energy use, on adaptation programmes, on budget allocations. Influencing the policy makers and decision makers in government is a crucial part of our advocacy work on climate change and we need to do it effectively.

Some of that influence will be through direct engagement, and that approach is explored in this Toolkit, but this should be undertaken alongside other forms of influence – building support from stakeholders outside of government. These other approaches should have been identified in your advocacy planning (see Toolkit No. 2) and are covered in *Toolkit No. 6: Engaging the Public*, *Toolkit No. 7: Engaging the Media*, *Toolkit No. 8: Supporting Local Voices*, and *Toolkit No. 9: Policy Implementation & Finance*.

In planning your advocacy with governments, you need to understand their functional structure and where and how decisions are made. You also you need to understand the political dynamics – where the power actually resides. It is important to remember that the people in government – politicians, civil servants, others – do not have a single viewpoint in relation to your issues. We can have both allies and opponents in the same structure and we need to engage with them strategically.



Who to target?

Working out who to target is the first step to influencing key decision-makers. But this is not as easy as it seems. Different parts of government are involved with different policies and activities at different levels, in different ways and at different stages.

There are typically three main arms of government – the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Some countries will also have a monarch. Their exact roles and the relationships between them vary from country to country.

The head of the **executive** is usually called the president or prime Minister. They might be directly elected by the public, elected by the legislature, appointed by the monarch, or established through military force. The president or prime minister will usually appoint ministers to take responsibility for different areas of government (e.g. finance, education, health, defence, environment, etc.), and each minister will usually have a team of appointed officials in their ministry to help them develop and implement policies and programmes. This includes the national budget, which sets out how resources are to be allocated to policies. In some countries, these ministers will also meet together in a 'cabinet' to determine and coordinate overall government policy.

The **legislature** usually consists of one or two bodies or 'houses'. Their members might be elected by the public, appointed by the monarch or other political elites, or be members through holding some other religious or political office or through hereditary privilege (or any combination of the above). Their function is usually to approve government budgets and make the laws. Some legislatures are able to initiate legislation, others can only approve legislation that is introduced by the executive. Some legislatures have the power to remove the executive if it has lost public support.

The **judiciary** operate at different levels. The highest level is usually called the Supreme Court and is made up of a number of senior judges, headed by the Chief Justice. How the judges and the Chief Justice are appointed will vary from country to country, as will their powers in relation to the executive and legislature. In theory, the judiciary are guardians of the constitution and are responsible for administering and interpreting the law, and holding the Executive to account for its actions. In many countries, however, the judiciary have little real power over the executive.

Although not technically part of government, in some countries the apparatus of the **ruling party** may have a powerful influence over the behaviour of government institutions and individual decision makers within them.

Provincial and local governments are often responsible for implementing national government policies, and in some cases have the authority to develop their own policies and programmes.



Engaging with the executive

Understanding how the executive is structured – which ministry and which departments/sections in that ministry you need to influence – is an essential foundation stone for effective advocacy.

Top down or bottom up?

Should you go straight to the top – to the minister responsible – and hope that you can persuade them to instruct their ministry officials to work with you? Or should you start by engaging with the junior officials and with their support work your way up the ladder of responsibility until you get to the minister, who can sign off what has been negotiated with the officials?

The choice you make will depend on your political assessment of the forces acting on the minister and the power that you are seen to wield. If you can get the support of the minister at an early stage, your life will be easier. However, it is often the case that support from the minister is not forthcoming until you have established your case more fully and built support from a range of other stakeholders. Meeting them too early can sometimes undermine your advocacy – it becomes a mere protocol meeting rather than a lobbying meeting, and then it may be harder to get a real lobbying meeting later.

Remember, ministers move on, in a change of government or a ministerial re-shuffle, whereas other ministry staff usually remain in post for longer.

Consultation processes

Sometimes ministries set up consultation processes to get input from civil society in the development of new policies or the review of existing ones. This is a key opportunity to have your voice heard (although sometimes these processes are used to contain and marginalise civil society voices and have no real influence).

The consultation process might involve a round-table discussion or a call for written submissions. Either way, your input has to be carefully planned to ensure your priority concerns are addressed and your arguments are compelling.

NB: Beware of setting advocacy goals or making advocacy demands that are simply about being able to participate in policy consultation processes. This is only a step on the way to being heard and having influence (and can be seen by policy makers and others as being too focused on your own status and not enough about the issue itself). Objectives should always be about actual changes that will impact on climate change and the lives of those affected – if not, there is a danger that you will be co-opted by government and lose credibility with other civil society groups.

Other targets

There may also be other institutions within government that have an interest in or influence over climate change policy implementation and thus worth targeting for advocacy activities. For example, in many countries the auditor general must ensure funds are managed and accounted for in a transparent way, a national statistics office is usually responsible for recording, analysing and providing data to support policy planning and implementation, and commissions or boards may have the responsibility of overseeing particular cross-cutting issues.

And of course we should remember that direct engagement with the executive is only one way of influencing them. Our advocacy strategy (see *Toolkit 2: Advocacy Planning*) should have identified other parallel approaches, including building support from other groups and stakeholders such as trade unions, the business community, faith leaders and the media. If we don't have support from outside, it is unlikely that policy makers will take us seriously.

Don't support advocacy documents written by international networks if they disregard national realities

The case studies below illustrate how *Southern Voices* members have tried to influence governments through direct engagement with relevant ministries.

- In *Ivory Coast*, campaigners worked with the government's national focal point on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Ministry of the Environment (as part of a broader strategy that included coalition work, publishing research findings and building support from other influential stakeholders).
- In *Zimbabwe*, after a lot of public campaigning, CSOs were eventually invited into consultation processes with the government to inform the development of climate change legislation.
- Campaigners in the *Democratic Republic of Congo* used a wide range of different influencing approaches including participating in official government processes and delegations, as well as initiating judicial action against government decisions.



Case Study 1. Promoting Disaster Risk Reduction (DDR) in the Ivory Coast

The involvement of the Youth NGO *Jeunes Volontaires Pour l'Environnement Côte d'Ivoire* (JVE) in debates on how to implement the national strategy for disaster risk management in the Ivory Coast has resulted from work over several years to engage civil society in disaster risk reduction (DRR) policy making in the country. Three years ago, JVE started working on DRR with the Global Network for Disaster Reduction (GNDR). This involved conducting a survey with help from more than 20 civil society organisations to produce a national report. A civil society workshop was held and a national committee established with representation from the National Focal Point, researchers and academics. The report was sent to key stakeholders, namely the National Focal Point on DRR and Environment Minister. This was followed by letters explaining JVE's position on the process and at various international meetings.

NGO involvement in national DRR processes has generally been weak, but JVE members have continued to work with GNDR to produce scientific papers, position papers and advocacy documents. These are shared with all stakeholders involved in DRR in the Ivory Coast through a dedicated database. Key components of the advocacy activities conducted are as follows:

- Ensure documents produced are good quality and include local data to boost arguments. Make sure documents don't include inconsistencies or errors.
- Don't support advocacy documents written with international networks if they disregard national realities.
- Establish partnerships with local and national stakeholders and put transparency at the heart of these relationships.
- Don't ignore the plans or policies of national authorities.
- Don't criticise others without offering alternatives.
- Respect the local customs of communities.
- Don't claim to represent or speak for others without their full approval.

Source: Ange David Emmanuel Baiméy, JVE



Case Study 2. Advocacy for a new climate change law in Zimbabwe

Different stakeholders were increasingly implementing climate change activities in Zimbabwe, but ZERO Regional Environment Organisation realised that these activities were occurring without any guiding framework at the local level. Zimbabwe lacked any climate change policy or strategy. ZERO therefore began coordinating efforts to bring civil society organisations (CSOs) together to inform planning and climate change policy making.

CSOs became increasingly active in their planning and advocacy efforts. They held regular meetings to which government officials – especially negotiators – were often invited. The newly formed Climate Change Working Group invited many different CSOs to meetings so that perspectives on gender, agriculture, water, infrastructure, human settlements etc. could be heard.

The Working Group engaged strongly with the media through television and radio programmes and articles in the printed press. Newspaper supplements and billboard posters were prepared. Media interviews and public events such as environment expositions and exhibitions were used to air CSO views.

Soon, CSOs began to be invited to government information sharing meetings. CSOs had documented case studies and commissioned research and this helped inform planning and debates on the need for a climate law. Finally, the government of Zimbabwe agreed to start working on a comprehensive climate change response strategy. There is now a draft Climate Change Strategy for the country.

Key to the success of these civil society advocacy activities in Zimbabwe are the following:

- Make sure that CSO initiatives are known to government.
- CSOs need to be determined. The same messages need repeating again and again.
- CSOs must continue to document climate change issues to inform government processes. Government always needs information to inform policy making, and without evidence it is difficult to influence the process.
- It is important not to confront the government, compete with it or write/talk badly about government in public arenas or the media.

Source: Sheppard Zvigadza, Climate Change Working Group / ZERO, Zimbabwe

Case Study 3. Protecting the rights of forest dependent communities under REDD+ in the Democratic Republic of Congo



Civil society organisations represented by the Climate and REDD+ Working Group (GTCR) are working to influence the REDD+ process to ensure the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples who depend on forests for their livelihoods are recognised, along with the multiple benefits of the Congolese forests which go beyond just carbon sequestration. GTCR is a platform of about 200 organisations, established in 2009.

Advocacy activities include:

- Participation in current REDD+ governance bodies, including a REDD+ National Committee (CN-REDD+). Unfortunately the Committee does not operate effectively so civil society delegates have been unable to exert real influence over the process.
- Joining official Congolese government delegations to international conferences and negotiations on climate change. This has allowed civil society to become more deeply involved in international discussions, but has also meant that once part of the government delegation, civil society delegates were no longer free to take independent positions.
- Thematic Coordination (CT) groups were established as multi-stakeholder platforms to inform national REDD+ strategy development. Increasingly weak civil society participation in CT work, and persistent governance failures in REDD+ structures, led civil society organisations to suspend their participation in the CT in June 2012. CN-REDD+ is preparing to restructure and re-launch these groups, and GTCR has arranged a meeting to discuss the proposed plans and sent a letter requesting information with a view to influencing the process.
- The Forest Investment Programme (FIP) is a component of the Strategic Climate Fund created by the multilateral development banks. It aims to prepare countries for REDD+ finance. DRC is one of eight pilot countries under FIP. GTCR helped prepare DRC's FIP plan, and conducted field consultations to ensure investments take into account local perspectives.
- With funding from the United Nations Environment Programme, GTCR developed the first national social and environmental standards for REDD+ in DRC. There is concern, however, that the next phases under this process, which is now housed under CN-REDD+, will not maintain such strong civil society participation.
- Lodging an administrative appeal against a decree on the REDD+ project approval process signed by the Minister of the Environment, which excludes civil society and communities, and asking the Supreme Court to cancel the decree. This followed several unsuccessful attempts to see the text revised or cancelled.

Source: *REDD+ safeguards: more than just good intentions? Case studies from the ACCRA Caucus* written in June 2013 by the ACCRA Caucus on Forests and Climate Change



Engaging with parliament

The power of parliaments and their responsiveness to the views of citizens can vary widely from country to country. However, in most countries they still represent an established channel by which civil society can have its voice heard.

We can engage with parliament at three levels:

- Individual members (MPs, deputies, senators, representatives, etc.)
- Parliamentary committees addressing specific issues and policies
- The whole parliament sitting in plenary

Members

Individual members of parliament can be influenced in their constituency or in the capital. They may be allies, opponents or neutrals.

- If allies, they can be good spokespeople or champions for your cause – tabling motions in parliament, questioning and lobbying ministers and talking to the media.
- If opponents, then you either persuade them to change their viewpoint or you ignore them, hoping that their view becomes more marginalised.
- Neutrals can be persuaded to become allies, but your opponents will also be trying to persuade them to adopt their point of view.

Parliamentary committees

It is usually through parliamentary committees that specific policies are monitored, overseen and debated in depth, because members of parliament generally do not have the time to look deeply into the implications of every single policy in a country.

Parliamentary committees, however, often have few resources available for research and monitoring. If a relevant committee exists in your country with a stake in climate change related policy, they may be interested in network activities relating to the monitoring and evaluation of climate change related policy implementation because this will help them to perform their own function of providing parliament with reliable information on the impact of policies.

Parliament in plenary

Although the detail may be worked on in committee, parliament as a whole has to approve the draft laws and policies put before it. These can lead to some high profile debates (plenary sessions tend to get more media attention than committee discussions).

Individual members of parliament may be allies, opponents or neutral. They can be influenced in their constituency or the capital

Case Study 4. Creating a civil society-parliament liaison unit in Lebanon



Engagement between civil society and parliament is poor in Lebanon. In the hope of improving how civil society organisations can influence the legislative process, IndyACT designed and established a civil society-parliament liaison unit. Amongst other activities, the unit facilitates communication between CSOs and Lebanese MPs through the CSO liaison officer and produces a monthly newsletter sharing the legislative demands of Lebanese CSOs. It works to ensure MPs are open to stakeholder engagement and to make stakeholder participation the accepted norm for policy development. It helps CSOs implement their campaigns and builds CSO advocacy capacity through workshops. The unit also helps create a consolidated civil society network that can support common causes for the benefit of a more democratic, fair and just society. Key to success is working as a unit rather than seeking the personal support of any individual, and seeking a common framework for understanding rather than looking for legal representation on specific issues.

Source: Patricia R. Sfeir, IndyACT



Effective lobbying

‘Lobbying is the art of educating and persuading your key audiences through direct, one-on-one contact. Lobbying is an ‘inside’ persuasion tool that must be combined with ‘outside’ pressure-making tools. Lobby visits, whether informal or formal, provide the opportunity to build relationships, listen and collect information, educate and provide information, and persuade. To be as effective as possible, practice and preparation are the key’.¹

Effective lobbying involves three stages:

1. **Preparation:** What do you want to get from the meeting? What does your target want from the meeting? What will be your main arguments? How will you answer difficult questions?
2. The **meeting** itself: After the initial building of rapport and establishing your credentials, the main part of the meeting should be dialogue – an exchange of views. People don’t change their viewpoint when passively listening – only when they are actively exploring the issue and the alternatives. Therefore in this part of the meeting you and your colleagues should be speaking for less than half of the time (in small chunks), allowing your target to talk for other half. By the end of the meeting, something must be agreed, even if it is just a mechanism for continuing the dialogue.
3. **Following up** from the meeting: Debrief among yourselves, write up notes, write to target thanking them for the meeting and confirming what was agreed, then plan your next steps.

Remember that lobbying is only one way of exerting influence as part of your overall advocacy strategy, and in most cases lobbying happens after and/or alongside other forms of influencing. Getting the target to agree to the meeting may have been as a result of previous advocacy efforts, and ensuring any agreements reached will be implemented will also require advocacy.



Policy briefs

Lobbying can be supported by producing policy briefs – short documents that clearly explain the issue and what you are calling for, including the evidence in support of your call.

Whilst government officials and politicians have the power to influence climate change policy and its implementation, they may not be familiar with the specifics of your advocacy issues. They are also usually very busy and do not have time to read long documents. Preparing a fact sheet, presentation or briefing paper can help explain your advocacy position using convincing arguments, supported by key facts, testimonies and case studies.

Policy makers are often more interested in the political ramifications of proposed changes than purely factual arguments, so the first step to writing a policy brief is to know your reader. How much do they know about the topic? How open will they be to the message? And importantly, what will they see in your message that has value for them?

A policy brief is a short document that summarises an advocacy position. It is important to keep it brief so it should not exceed two pages. It should be relatively easy to understand for a non-specialist audience, authoritative, unbiased, and based on evidence-based arguments. Factual accuracy is essential in policy briefs otherwise you lose all credibility and the decision maker won’t turn to you again. It should contain a strong, clear, simple message.

Try to ensure it is not too long, too general, too cluttered or suffers from ‘information-overload’. Avoid jargon, acronyms, bad language and verbose prose. Write out every acronym and abbreviation. Keep paragraphs and sentences short and break up text with sub-headings. Try to write more like you talk. A little repetition can help reinforce the key messages.

To make it visually appealing consider using boxes for case studies or back stories, photos, illustrations, cartoons, bullet points, sub-headings, quotes, bullet point lists, tables and figures. Good graphics can also aid understanding but be sure to use captions to explain their content. A good briefing paper should contain the following elements:

1. *Advocacy for Social Justice: A global action and reflection guide*, edited by David Cohen et al., Kumarian Press 2001.

1. Executive summary of no more than 90 words. This should grab the reader's attention from the first sentence. Present your conclusions right at the start. Mentioning costs, a key statistic or a particularly gripping finding will help with this. Make it clear why the subject is relevant and timely and outline the main issues. A good executive summary should distil the essence of the brief, provide an overview for busy readers and entice them to go further.
2. Background and context for the problem. This introduction answers the questions 'why does something need to change?' If the brief is based on research, this section needs to explain the research objectives, findings and conclusions.
3. Personal stories related to the problem and real examples of what works and why. Pictures can help 'make it real'.
4. Concrete recommendations / solutions to the problem. These should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. Explain what needs to be done to address the problem and who needs to do it.
5. Requested action that the legislator should take to address the problem.
6. Contact information (names, organisational affiliations, phone numbers and email addresses).

Key ingredients of effective policy briefs ²		
Evidence	Persuasive argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clear purpose ● Cohesive argument ● Quality of evidence ● Transparency of evidence underpinning policy recommendations (e.g. a single study, a synthesis of available evidence)
	Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Messenger (individual or organisations) has credibility in the eyes of policy-maker
Policy content	Audience context specificity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Addresses specific context (e.g. national or sub-national) ● Addresses target audience needs (e.g. social versus economic policy)
	Actionable recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information linked to specific policy processes ● Clear and feasible recommendations on policy steps to be taken
Engagement	Presentation of evidence-informed opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Presentation of author's own views about policy implications of research findings ● But clear identification of argument components that are opinion-based
	Clear language / writing style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Easily understood by educated non-specialist
	Appearance / design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visually engaging ● Presentation of information through charts, graphs, photos

Research by the Overseas Development Institute in 2008 showed how poor scientific understanding amongst policy makers was the most important reason for weak policy uptake. This is a key challenge for climate change advocacy where the issue is difficult to understand and the concepts of risk and uncertainty can be hard to explain. Often we do not know what climate change impacts to expect, where they will strike, and how they will affect people in particular areas. This can discourage officials from taking action. Learning how to explain climate change and make it relevant and urgent is therefore an important part of good lobbying.

2. Source: Overseas Development Institute Background Note, 2008, *Policy Briefs as a communication tool for development research*, by Nicola Jones and Cora Walsh.



Further information and resources

The Tearfund Advocacy Toolkit *Practical Action in Advocacy* by Graham Gordon (2002) has general (non-climate change specific) guidance and tools for stakeholder mapping and analysis (tools 17-19), mapping power relations (exercise 19), research and analysis (tools 6-12), writing policies (tool 26), and lobbying and negotiating (tools 28-30). www.tearfund.org The second edition *Advocacy Toolkit* by Joanna Watson was published in 2014: <http://tilz.tearfund.org/~media/files/tilz/publications/roots/english/advocacy%20toolkit/second%20edition/tearfundadvocacytoolkit.pdf>

The Community Toolbox has comprehensive guidance on writing letters to elected officials, seeking enforcement of existing laws or policies, lobbying decision makers, establishing lines of communication with the opposition's traditional allies, developing and maintaining ongoing relationships with legislators and their aides, general rules for organizing legislative advocacy and seeking a negotiator, mediator, or fact-finder. See: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action>

ODI has a 2008 background note called *Policy briefs as a communication tool for development research* by Nicola Jones and Cora Walsh. See: www.odi.org/publications/425-policy-briefs-communication-tool-development-research

These two websites provide additional guidance on writing a good policy briefing: www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Tools_and_Training/Documents/how-to-write-a-policy-brief.pdf and <http://melindaklewis.com/2009/09/30/what-makes-a-good-policy-brief/>

The Green Alliance briefing *Climate Science Explained* provides a good example of a short three-page briefing on climate science aimed primarily at politicians: www.green-alliance.org.uk/uploadedFiles/Publications/reports/ClimateScienceBriefing_July11_sgl.pdf

The Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance provides some good examples of policy briefings in its advocacy resources section: www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/advocacy-capacity/resources/

Sian Lewis at the International Institute for Environment and Development compiled (in 2011) a helpful guide called *Working with policymakers: Opportunities for engagement & how to write a policy briefing*. See: www.iied.org

Monitoring Government Policies: a Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations in Africa by CAFOD, Christian Aid and Trocaire contains a unit on how to identify the key government policy stakeholders, and who to influence to try and change future policy direction.

DanChurchAid's 2010 publication *The ABCs of Advocacy* (in English and Arabic – see www.danchurchaid.org) explores how to build strong relationships with government officials and persuade them to implement proposed solutions. The section on lobbying provides guidance on the following questions: What is the legislative process? Where do we start lobbying (the entry points)? What else do we need to know about the legislative process? How do we analyse legislators? How can we prepare convincing arguments for legislators? How can we create opportunities to meet with legislators?

Guidelines on lobby and advocacy by ICCO, June 2010, provides information on what lobbying and advocacy entails and what can be achieved by it. It gives step by step guidance on developing lobbying and advocacy strategies to influence decision makers. www.icco-international.com/int/

The following manuals are available for purchase:

Advocacy for Social Justice: A global action and reflection guide, edited by David Cohen *et al.*, Kumarian Press 2001. This excellent and comprehensive advocacy manual has a good section on lobbying, as well as a number of interesting case studies.

A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation by Lisa VeneKlasen with Valerie Miller (2007) is a highly regarded and comprehensive manual for advocacy with a section on lobbying and negotiating in the corridors of power. Practical Action Publishing (2nd edition). ISBN 978-185339-644-1.

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Toolkits in this series

Toolkit 1: Start Here! Introducing Advocacy and the Climate Change Advocacy Toolkits

Toolkit 2: Planning Advocacy

Toolkit 3: Framing the Debate: Messages and Communication

Toolkit 4: Strengthening Advocacy Networks

Toolkit 5: Influencing Decision Makers

Toolkit 6: Engaging the Public

Toolkit 7: Engaging the Media

Toolkit 8: Supporting Local Voices

Toolkit 9: Policy Implementation & Finance

Have your say

Readers are invited to provide feedback on the Advocacy Toolkits and experiences of their use at the Southern Voices discussion forum: <http://forum.southernvoices.net/categories/toolkit>



**Strengthening southern voices in
advocating climate policies that
benefit poor and vulnerable people**



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For further information visit www.southernvoices.net