Building Advocacy Coalitions for Greater Action and Accountability

Rationale
Advocacy entails a set of coordinated strategic activities that aim to bring about a desired and lasting political change, and is most effective when adapted to the specific context in focus. It helps accord importance to certain critical issues that might not figure in national priorities due to their controversial nature or due to other issues being accorded higher importance by key decision-makers. Building coalitions with advocacy partners is a key strategy to enhance the reach of the advocacy effort; enable greater efficiency and effectiveness by combining resources and skills; leverage the comparative advantage of each member; and reduce duplication. Coalitions can be multi-stakeholder in nature, or reflect the views of a single stakeholder group. The participation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in multi-stakeholder advocacy coalitions enables them to have a voice in decision-making processes alongside “traditional” decision makers such as governments and the donor agencies. From the perspective of the government, coalitions provide an opportunity to engage with a coordinated ‘CSO voice’, rather than dealing with multiple and disparate CSOs.

Getting Started
Building an advocacy coalition is particularly useful when targeting policy changes (including focusing on a new area which needs attention by decision-makers) and/or encouraging a certain level of budget allocation for a specific programme or issue. For example, the multi-stakeholder RMNCH Coalition in India aims at advocating for policies and programmes that will improve RMNCH outcomes. A first step would be to identify the advocacy issue by singling out the problem to be addressed, and to clearly define the desired outcome. This would be followed by the development of a plan (including a realistic timeframe) to achieve the goal, the identification of the skills and resources required, and the continual engagement of partners to guide and implement that plan.

Approaches / Steps

1. Develop broad networks/coalitions of like-minded actors:
   - Identify appropriate partners with complementarities in terms of organizational skills, resources, experience and spheres of influence.

2. Establish principles and effective practices of working:
   - Agree on guiding principles for partnership, including strategic objectives and modalities of collaboration.
   - Implement mechanisms to ensure the smooth functioning of the coalition, such as clarifying roles and resources of each partner, having a budgeted work plan, regular update meetings and appointment of a chair (possibly on a rotation basis).
   - Build trust by facilitating information sharing between partners (building a common website, sending regular e-blasts to members, Twitter feed, etc.), creating immediate “quick-win” opportunities to work together to demonstrate added value of the coalition, ensuring reciprocal transparency, and supporting each other’s initiatives.
   - Recognise the challenges of working in coalition; for instance, disagreements on specific policy solutions, need to reach a broad consensus, and conflicts on branding of the coalition.

3. Research and identification of ‘entry points’ and champions:
   - Early and comprehensive research would inform the entire advocacy process. A balance needs to be struck between advancing the overall agenda on a constant basis, and gearing up action on a specific issue to take advantage of a certain policy window, when political attention might be feasibly secured, during national elections for instance.
   - Identify the relevant players who can influence the decision-making process for the specific issue at hand, e.g., media, parliamentarians, key political constituencies, donors, etc. Work towards creating ownership of the advocacy issues by the identified champions.
   - Identify potential ‘entry points’ for the advocacy initiatives to generate maximum impact, and garner broader interest and support for the particular issue – e.g., in Brazil, advocacy efforts by BemEstar Familiar no Brasil (International Planned Parenthood Federation member) focused on maternal health, which offered an entry point to engage on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues such as abortion.
   - Further research is also needed to understand other current and related advocacy efforts and options for complementarity/leveraging.

4. Manage and deliver communications:
   - Identify the best available vehicles for messaging,
e.g. talking points to be delivered by key influencers in highly visible forums or bilateral meetings; media products [Twitter, web packages, press releases, etc.]; presentations in parliamentarian forums. Understanding what a specific audience needs and expects is critical.

- Delivering the message can fall under three areas – sensitizing the target audience by cultivating interest, asking the target audience to take concrete action towards an end, and following up after the request for action to see if it has been undertaken.

5. Evaluate:

- Evaluate specific campaigns in relation to agreed benchmarks against baseline measures, e.g., increase in awareness or increase in public discussion. Evaluate advocacy efforts on an ongoing basis.
- Promote accountability by developing monitoring and transparency tools and mechanisms (for example, to monitor the actual flow and utilization of budgeted funds), and space for greater dialogue with civil society.
- Evaluate the coalition on other important outcomes, such as strengthened organizational capacity, alliances, or increased base for support.

Role of actors

This summary may be of use to global, national and local civil society organizations and other advocacy agencies, as they seek to prepare and consolidate their advocacy efforts.

Toolkit

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<th>STEP INVOLVED</th>
<th>RESOURCES</th>
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| Approach to advocacy and coalitions | IPPF Handbook on ‘Generating political change: using advocacy to create political commitment’.
| | Save the Children UK (2011): ‘Ready for Action – Campaigning at the Grassroots and in coalitions’.
| Developing advocacy strategies | IPPF Handbooks on ‘Political Analysis and Mapping’ and ‘Advocacy Planning’.

Case Study

Creating a nationally owned advocacy movement in Indonesia

The Maternal and Child Health Movement started in Indonesia in 2010 and is an independent network of several coalition partners such as UNICEF, Indonesian Lactation Centre, Association of Breast-feeding mothers of Indonesia, Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association, White Ribbon Alliance, World Vision, Child Fund, Plan, Save the Children, Mercy Corps, Care and Health Workers Association. The coalition has the support of the Government of Indonesia and works both at the national and provincial/district level. The coalition has been instrumental, for example, in focusing the Government’s attention on the follow-up to the ten recommendations of Commission on Information and Accountability, and preparing and discussing a Country Roadmap towards achieving these; and holding a workshop to discuss Indonesia’s commitment on the UN Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health in coordination with President’s Envoy for MDGs. The coalition has also engaged in policy discussions, such as drafting of Government’s Regulation on Exclusive Breast-feeding (enacted in March 2012); Acceleration Plan of Exclusive Breast-feeding for 2012-14 (launched in September 2012); and the discussion for Integrating Social Services (includes Health) at the village level. Some challenges faced by the coalition include its limited coverage (area and programme wise), and leadership change and staff turnover in its constituent NGO members. The coalition offers useful lessons in terms of mobilizing champion partners who can influence key decisions/policies of the Government, and effectively working together to influence positive change in Indonesia.

Opportunities to engage

Global, regional and national NGO and civil society organizations can benefit from forming coalitions to advocate more effectively on important policy and/or funding issues in RMNCH in the run-up to the MDG 2015 deadlines and thereafter. The formation and activities of such broad-based multi-stakeholder coalitions in India and Indonesia, whether led or supported by the country governments, provide rich examples for other countries to draw lessons from.

Resources

- Paul A. Sabattier. An advocacy coalition framework of policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning therein.
- Save the Children UK (2011). Ready for Action – Campaigning at the grassroots and in coalitions.

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