



How to advocate for change

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Speakers

Jake Lloyd, Joanna Watson, Chalwe Nyirenda, Munyaradzi Mataruse

Episode 11: How to advocate for change

Jake Lloyd 00:15

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Hello, I'm Jake Lloyd and welcome to [How to build community](#), a podcast and a radio show brought to you by Tearfund's [Footsteps](#) magazine and Arukah Network. In this episode, we've gathered together a team of experts to talk us through how to do community-led advocacy.

Joanna Watson 0:43

The really powerful advocate often is somebody who just wants to see change. They are fed up with the injustice that they're facing.

Chalwe Nyirenda 0:51

We're really trying to have communities recognise the urgency, the resources they have, and recognising the government as one of the resources.

Munyaradzi Mataruse 1:01

That, I think, is where the beauty of community advocacy is.

Jake Lloyd 1:06

Those were the voices of Joanna Watson from the U.K. She leads a large international advocacy team for Tearfund. Chalwe Nyirenda, who is a Social Accountability Advisor for Tearfund in Zambia, and Munyaradzi Mataruse, who works for the International Fellowship of Zimbabwe with a specific focus on advocacy. Joanna, Chalwe and Munyaradzi have all written about advocacy in a recent edition of *Footsteps* magazine, and they all train people on the subject of advocacy.

So in this episode, you'll hear them tell me what community-led advocacy is, how it can be used to address challenges and boost confidence in your community. Why something called social accountability is key to doing this well, and how you can get started in doing it where you live. But I began by asking my guests to tell me why community-led advocacy excites them.

Munyaradzi Mataruse 2:11

It's when you finally see the fear melt away and people excited to engage in advocacy work without fear. And for me, it's important because of the nature of our context, that we don't have generally a culture of accountability. We struggle with promoting citizen, agency and participation. So when you engage a community, those are some of the challenges that you're faced with from the outset. So, to see them as they journey along and really begin to witness that transformation, that change in mindset and behaviour and that willingness to want to engage, for me, has been some of the most enriching experiences. And it's fair, that rewarding, because what you begin to see is also a genuine responsiveness most of the time from the authorities themselves.

Jake Lloyd 3:10

Chalwe, same question to you, really. Tell me about a time, perhaps a specific story of your work, why you felt the most excited about advocacy?

Chalwe Nyirenda 3:20

Well, I once led a project in a rural community in northern Zambia, and one of the problems they had was a problem of water. But even when we started interacting with them, they really were so timid that they just had the fear of even just going to the government offices. I think after working with them for over a year, supporting them to understand they are rights as citizens, really looking through sometimes even just the budgets that the government had set out, the plans the government had set out with never came to pass. A year later they did engage with the local government and the pride and the big smiles on their faces as they were launching. It was just a water pump, but for them, it really was clear to me that it was more than just a

water pump for them. It was very symbolic of how, in a sense they had gotten their power back or really understood their power.

Chalwe Nyirenda 4:26

And that was very exciting for me because they just seemed like, you know what, they were convinced that they could change the world.

Jake Lloyd 4:33

Brilliant. Joanna, same question to you?

Joanna Watson 4:36

Oh, goodness. There are so many examples I could think of. One would be from a community called Tipa in Bolivia, where climate change means the rains haven't come, when they should have done, and the river supply has just dried up like a vast river that's just dry. And like, like we were saying, the issue was water and I think they went through some training and realised that the church mobilised the community and realised that actually there was a participatory planning process that they could access in Bolivia, which meant they could then challenge the government about provision of water, and they were able to secure a water tank and other means of storing water so that when the drought came again, there was a constant water supply. So there is a sense in which it's partly about when the people just understand that advocacy challenges the root causes, and that really brings long term change. Secondly, it's around the provision of the actual service that's going to bring change in that community. And the third is the one that many touched on, which is just this mindset shift and wow, we've got a voice that didn't even know we had one. We didn't have that, we didn't know how to access things. This kind of building of confidence, I get really excited on all three fronts.

Jake Lloyd 5:56

I hope this topic can excite you in a similar way, but let's now start at the beginning and find out what community-led advocacy actually is. Chalwe?

Chalwe Nyirenda 6:08

So in my mind, when we talk about community-led advocacy, I take it a step back and ask what advocacy is. And in Tearfund, we basically just define advocacy as the influencing of the decisions, the practices, the policies of decision makers, or they may be called duty bearers, but people in government and the whole aim in trying to influence their decisions is really to address the root causes of poverty, but also seek to support good development. And therefore then when we talk about community-led advocacy, for me, it's really the idea of having communities, ordinary citizens, who are able to then engage in this process so that

the duty bears are able to attend to problems that they are facing in their community.

Jake Lloyd 7:10

Joanna In your article on *Footsteps*, you talk about three different kinds of advocacy. Can you give a quick overview of those?

Joanna Watson 7:21

Yeah, thanks, Jake. And it's really whether advocacy who does the advocacy say whether advocacy is being done on behalf of somebody else or whether it's being done with those effects or whether it's the people themselves who are speaking and doing community? That advocacy is very much about the communities doing speaking the communities affected by the issue of injustice, actually speaking out to challenge that injustice themselves rather than having it done on their behalf or alongside others. And I think for me, in all the years I've been supporting others to do what see is the most sustainable. Because you really see people's confidence rise. You see them becoming aware that they've got rights and how to claim them and working in ways that are appropriate to that contact and actually understanding that they have a voice and they can express their hopes and their desires and come up with solutions that the decision makers will hopefully come on board with and action on their behalf. And just seeing their capabilities grow and then the benefits are really it's really rewarding.

Jake Lloyd 8:33

That's what community-led advocacy is. Where's the best place to start in actually doing it? Here's Munyaradzi.

Munyaradzi Mataruse 8:42

The process really begins with getting the community together and understanding their community. So what are the dynamics? What are the challenges? What are the strengths of that particular community where they do a description of their community? And then once they've been able to describe their community, identify what the actual challenges are.

Jake Lloyd 9:08

And from that, Joanna explained what the next step might be.

Joanna Watson 9:12

I think the next step is probably about identifying which issues or issues need to be advocated, about which things really need to change and can be changed through advocacy and then identifying who has got the power to bring about the change, like what type of decision maker and where they're located, and who's got the relationships with them, if anyone. And if you haven't got the relationship, obviously you've got to stop building them. But if you have got a kind of open door into a particular government department's office through somebody in the community knowing them or having had an interaction with them, then that gives you leverage in.

Jake Lloyd 9:51

The next question I wanted to explore was who are the best people to be advocates in a community? You heard Joanna there mention involving people who have a good relationship with decision makers, but that is far from the only consideration. I asked each guest what qualities are needed to do advocacy. Well, first of all, here's Chalwe.

Chalwe Nyirenda 10:15

They need to be convinced about the need for advocacy. So, sometimes advocacy is risky and there are ways to mitigate those risks. But because it requires patience, you must be convinced of the long term gain that will be derived from doing the advocacy. That is a very important quality, in my view.

Jake Lloyd 10:41

Joanna, I'll come to you next.

Joanna Watson 10:43

I think there's something about being a collaborator and highly relational, because advocacy, whether you're advocating with others or in your home, it's all about relationship with those who are around you, who are affected by the issue you're advocating about. But little say relating well to those in power. You've got the power to change things, please, and to do that collaboratively rather than confrontation me. And I think there's something about persistence. And with that comes almost having vision for change, like being passionate to see change, you know, a really powerful advocate often is somebody who just wants to see change. They are fed up with the injustice that they're facing in their community.

Munyaradzi Mataruse 11:28

So the first word that came to my mind was long suffering, which I think it is. It is true. They really have got to be that. And I think it speaks to what both Joanna and Chalwe have already mentioned. But for me, two

key words commitment and conviction. I think it is important for members of any community that engage in advocacy to be fully committed to the cause and to have a conviction that their cause is a worthy one.

Jake Lloyd 11:58

So you've gathered together a group of local people. You've explored your community strengths and challenges. You've figured out what you want to advocate for. You've worked out which decision maker you need to speak to. What do you do now? How do you equip yourself to speak with local decision makers? You're going to hear my guests now talk about social accountability tools. And this term describes the tools a community can use to gather evidence and data and stories about the issues that affect them in such a way that they can hold decision makers, duty bearers, local governments accountable. For example, information about the quality of public services such as water, sanitation and waste collection can be gathered from each household. This information can then be presented to local government representatives as evidence that there are problems with one or more of these services and the government representatives can be held to account because they have a responsibility to provide good services for their citizens. Let's hear about why social accountability tools are important. You'll hear from Munyaradzi in a moment. But first, Chalwe?

Chalwe Nyirenda 13:20

The use of collaborative social accountability tools really helps the process along because when communities are using those tools, they are gathering evidence. So there's a record for the issues they are raising. It's one that cannot be disputed and therefore that provision of evidence also helps them once they go before those government officials.

Munyaradzi Mataruse 13:46

But I think more importantly is also that communities are coming to engage from an informed perspective where they actually have evidence in their hands that they get through using the variety of social accountability tools that they would have been skilled in. So you're having a conversation. We always give this example in communities to say that if three women in a community are the only ones that are going to the local authority on a daily basis, complaining that they're the ones that that water supply is a challenge. They're not getting enough water. They could probably spend 365 days in that community and never get a meaningful response from the local authority. But all of a sudden, if the same women employ a more strategic, social accountability or advocacy tool, and all of a sudden they've honest feedback from 2000 members of their community and now in their hands, they've got evidence in the form of a report, and they are providing this as a tool to engage their local authority or service provider that that service provider is more likely to respond. So that, I think, is where the beauty of community advocacy is, where the community is able to provide evidence based discussions with the solution holders. They are almost always likely to get responses and to actually begin to witness change in terms of delivery of basic social services.

Jake Lloyd 15:13

So once you've gathered information, data or stories about the thing you're advocating for, how do you approach the decision maker? You'll hear from Joanna in a moment. But first, Chalwe.

Chalwe Nyirenda 15:27

For some, the best way to engage with them is to have a chat with them at church before you go to the office. For some, they may want more structure and want an official letter. So that's part of the support that communities usually need to think through who the power holders are and what kind of strategies they can use to get their results.

Joanna Watson 15:52

I was going to say, I think it also depends very much on the context of the country that you're in and how people relate to people in power. Is there a kind of a deference and a very guarded respect? And, you know, does it need a formal letter before you can even approach informally? Does it need to be really clear about a meeting? Like does a meeting have to happen behind closed doors in order to gain access? Or could it be done more publicly? And everybody invited, you know, country by country, if people are listening, they just need to think about their own context and how it would vary. Like what would work for them if what they knew about their nation and what they know about that particular part of that country. How does it work for them and then adapt their methods appropriately?

Jake Lloyd 16:42

And although this process of engaging with government or decision makers can take time, requiring patience and perseverance, Joanna explained how the approach of a community can actually be very welcome on the part of the decision maker.

Joanna Watson 16:58

You do need to have patience and you do need to have perseverance. And some of it is about managing expectations because it can take quite a long time to achieve the change. But if it's done well, then often decision makers are quite great for when the community members come. If it's done in a very collaborative way, they tend to be quite antagonistic towards confrontational stances. But if it's done in a relational, collaborative way, then it can really yield dividends. And if I give an example from Uganda, where there's a particular methodology called Church and Community Transformation Advocacy, which involves the church mobilizing the community to identify the issues that the community is facing and which ones could be addressed through advocacy and identifying what resources they have, and then prioritising their issues and prioritising their resources and using those resources to meet their development needs as a community. And this community in Uganda had said that they needed a health clinic and they needed a school, and in the process of doing a church community transformation, they realised that actually they had resources,

they had land that was community land. They had labour people who were willing to do the hard graft and they had the sort of the resources to be able to make bricks and to be able to make tiles and roofing for them, for the school and for the clinic. But what they didn't have was the money to pay for health care professionals or teachers and the salaries that go with it. And so when they were doing the whole process of identifying what they could contribute to meet their needs as a community, they also said, well, actually, we can offer these things. Maybe we could go to the local authority and ask for their support, financial support, to get the teachers and the salaries that are needed to then have our school or the pharmacists and the doctors to be able to have a health care clinic. And actually, when they then approached the local authority officials in order to say, this is what we can contribute, this is what we've identified, we need over the course of a number of conversations and a number of letters, they actually found that those decision makers were really pleased. They were like, 'We've done our job for us. You've actually helped us to know what you need and we would be delighted to give you the teachers the funds for their salaries'. And so they end up with a school and they ended up with a health clinic. But there was a real sense of ownership within the community that they had done it. That was a kind of a sense of pride if we asked for this and we got it, and subsequently, when things began to fall into disrepair, there was a sense of, 'we own this', and we will repair it and we will invest in it.

Jake Lloyd 19:49

Finally, so far in this episode, we've been talking about advocacy in terms of a group of local people working together to claim their rights. But when we talk about rights, they're often spoke about alongside responsibilities. And so I asked Chalwe, do these two things, rights and responsibilities go hand in hand in advocacy as well?

Chalwe Nyirenda 19:49

It's a very important point that communities also recognise their responsibilities because we are really trying to have communities recognise the urgency, recognise the resources they have, the responsibility they have for their own development. And they are really recognising the government as one of the resources that they have and therefore they still have their responsibility. If it's paying local taxes, if it's throwing trash in the proper places, they are still required to hold on to that responsibility and hold their fellow citizens to account when they do not do what they need to do. And that also even helps with the duty bearers, because they recognise that the citizens are not only making demands, but they are also making sure that they fulfil their responsibilities as citizens. And a typical example would be around taxes or fees that they have to pay.

Jake Lloyd 21:14

Joanna, does that reflect your experience or your viewpoint as well?

Joanna Watson 21:19

I'd say yes. I mean, I think the challenge comes where you have people in power who are incredibly self-interested or only concerned about that political party or who just don't want to listen.

Jake Lloyd 21:34

What's your advice to people who find themselves in that situation, dealing with a person that doesn't want to listen?

Joanna Watson 21:40

Yeah, try and find an alternative. I think. Is there somebody else who's got power who who is engaged or come in a coalition? One of the things that's incredibly powerful in advocacy is working alongside other people who care as passionately about the issue that you're wanting to see changed. And that applies whether it's a community-led level or any other level. And actually, sometimes if you come in coalition and there are lots of you who feel the same way, it can be a very powerful way of speaking. Doesn't always work, but it can have a big impact.

Jake Lloyd 22:30

That was Joanna Watson from the UK, Munyaradzi Mataruse from Zimbabwe and Chalwe Nyirenda from Zambia. All experts in community-led advocacy all sharing their expertise with us.

But that's almost it for this episode before we go. Don't forget you can catch up on previous episodes of [How to build community](#) on our SoundCloud page or in your podcast player. Just search 'How to build community'. You can help support this show by making a small monthly donation on our Patreon page, that's [patreon/arukahnetwork](#). You can learn more about Arukah Network at the website [arukahnetwork.org](#). You can download every edition of Tearfund's *Footsteps* magazine at Learn, [tearfund.learn.orgjake@arukahnetwork.org](mailto:jake@arukahnetwork.org)

And finally, if you have feedback on the show or suggestions for future interviewees, then you can reach me via jake@arukahnetwork.org

But that's it for this episode. Until next time.

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