



## C1 REVEALING WAYS OF TAKING ACTION

# Advocacy - communicating with people in power



## Why use this tool?

Bringing change for communities sometimes involves influencing decision-makers such as local government officials or community leaders. This may be one of the methods your community chooses to use to bring about the changes you want to see.



## Explaining the words we use

**Advocacy** - influencing the decisions, policies and practices of powerful decision-makers in order to bring about change



## A brief description

This tool gives guidance and advice for people who are planning influencing activities. It outlines the purpose of influencing decision-makers, gives guidance on understanding power, and describes three influencing activities: talking directly with decision-makers, mobilising people and working with the media.



## Keys to success

- Be clear about who you want to influence and why.
- Think about the most effective way of influencing them such as through meetings, street marches, or through the media.



## What to do

### Think about who you want to influence and why.

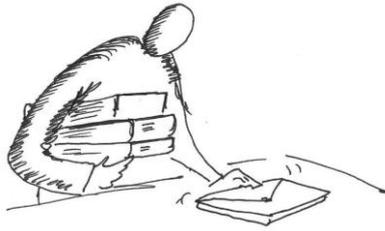
Sometimes, there is no law or policy in place related to the issue you want to influence, and one is needed. Influencing decision-makers could include **asking them for a new law or policy.**



For example: *Three children have drowned in recent months because they fell off a bridge into a fast-flowing river. No law or policy exists on public safety on or around bridges. Advocacy would call on the local government to develop and put into practice a policy that ensured safety along all the district's roads and bridges, including a requirement for railings to be put along the bridges from which people could fall.*

C1 COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE IN POWER

Sometimes, there is a law or policy already in place, but it may be unjust or not work properly, and it needs to be changed. Influencing decision-makers here involves **asking for the law or policy to be amended and revised.**



*For example, a law says that only people from a particular caste or ethnic group are entitled to a certain benefit (such as access to free health care). Advocacy would call for the law to be extended so that people from all ethnic groups benefit.*

Sometimes, there may be a good law or policy in place but it needs to be enforced. Influencing decision-makers would involve **asking for the law or policy to be implemented.** It could also involve trying to gain definite commitments from those who implement the policies, such as projects, funding, personnel and timing.

*For example, a law says that companies should not dispose of dangerous waste in rivers. However, companies violate this law and face no punishment. Advocacy involves asking the national or local government to implement the law so that companies are stopped from doing this.*



Sometimes, there is a good law or policy in place but it is implemented in a way that is unfair or discriminatory. Influencing decision-makers here involves **asking for better implementation.**



*For example, a policy says that the Local Education Authority (LEA) should ensure free schooling for all primary school children. However, the LEA is putting a lot of resources into one district, while others are being ignored. Advocacy would call on the LEA to fulfil its obligations in all districts.*

Sometimes, there is no law or practice in place, and it is simply an issue of changing attitudes. Influencing decision-makers here involves **asking for attitudes, or practices, to be changed.**

*For example, church and community leaders are not allowing women to be on any decision-making committees. Advocacy would be influencing these leaders, showing them that men and women are equal and that women have every right to be on, and contribute to, decision-making committees.*

Awareness-raising
Children & youth
Climate & environment
Conflict & peace-building
Corruption & governance
Disaster risk management
Discrimination & inclusion
Food & livelihoods
Gender & sexual violence
Health & HIV
Influencing decision-makers
Migration & trafficking
Water, sanitation & hygiene

## Understanding power

It is important to understand what 'power' is and who holds it, as we plan our influencing work.

**Power** is the ability to impact the behaviour of people and the circumstances they live in. Power affects who makes decisions, what decisions are made, when they are made, and how. People inherit, take, use and share power in different ways. Power can be used well, for example where it is used to bring about positive change. But it can also be used badly, for example where it is used to control or manipulate people, or where force is used.

Everyone has different types of power. For example, government officials may have formal authority to get things done, businesses may have economic power and churches and communities have power through having information, legitimacy and people! Advocacy is about understanding the power we have, making the most of it, and using it to influence and persuade decision-makers to do what we want them to do, even when they have greater formal power than we do. It is not about trying to take power from others but about ensuring that the power we have is used well.

Influencing decision-makers involves:

- holding them to account for their use of power
- trying to change the way power is used
- challenging the abuse of power
- gaining access to power for those who are excluded
- helping people to see and use the power they have in order to influence decision-makers
- overcoming a sense of powerlessness in situations where people cannot use their power, or where it is not recognised or acknowledged

For influencing activities to be effective, it is necessary to understand who holds the power in your country and context, both **formally (who officially has the power)** and **informally (who actually has the power)**. In planning your influencing work, it is also important to think about who might **join you** in supporting what you are calling for (churches, local NGOs, individuals) and who might **oppose you** (organisations, officials, individuals). How can you work with those who might join you? How can you help those who might oppose you to see your point-of-view?

Awareness-raising

Children &amp; youth

Climate &amp; environment

Conflict &amp; peace-building

Corruption &amp; governance

Disaster risk management

Discrimination &amp; inclusion

Food &amp; livelihoods

Gender &amp; sexual violence

Health &amp; HIV

Influencing decision-makers

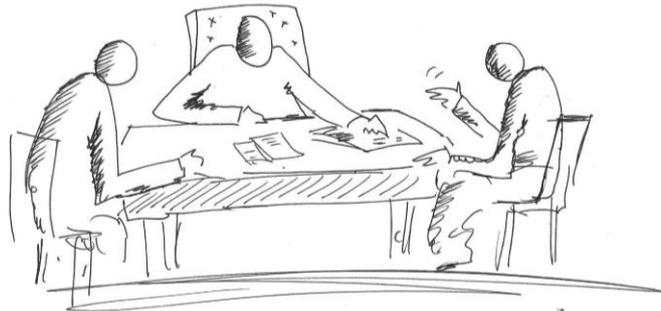
Migration &amp; trafficking

Water, sanitation &amp; hygiene

## WAYS OF INFLUENCING PEOPLE WITH POWER

### Speaking directly with decision-makers

Sometimes, it is helpful to have direct contact or conversations with decision-makers. The aim is to influence the people who have power to bring about the changes we are seeking, for example, local government officials, business leaders or village elders.



This could involve writing letters, making phone calls or arranging a visit or meeting. There is often a much greater chance of change if we are able to build relationships with decision-makers over time, rather than just having one-off contact. We need to prepare well for conversations with decision-makers whom we want to influence. See **Tool C1 - Making the most of meetings with decision-makers.**

### Mobilising people

Mobilising people involves enabling them to take part in actions that increase pressure on decision-makers to bring about the changes we are seeking. The aim is to show that people are concerned and want to see change on the issue. Mobilising people will look different in different cultures and contexts. What works in one country, such as a street march, may not work in another place, where an orderly public meeting might be more appropriate. In some countries, mobilising people publicly is not possible at all. Mobilising people could include:



- street marches and demonstrations – where a group of people gather or walk to a symbolic place to make a protest to decision-makers. Often people carry signs or banners with a message on them
- petitions – where people sign a sheet of paper or write a message on a postcard or in a letter to decision-makers
- public meetings – where people are brought together for a debate and decision-makers are open to public questioning
- prayer vigils – where a group of people gather to show how important something is to them, through a public church activity

Mobilising needs careful planning. See **Tool C1 – Mobilising people** for more information.

## Working with the media

### What is the media?

The media includes traditional media platforms and magazines, and electronic and online media such as email and the internet. It is a powerful force that can build awareness and shape public opinion and influence decision-makers and their decisions, leading to changes in laws, policies and practices. Using the media to spread your message can greatly expand the number of people that are aware of the situation.



Activities could include:

- writing a press release about a situation, activity or event
- talking on the radio or television
- writing a letter to the editor of a local or national newspaper or magazine
- phoning in to a radio talk show
- inviting a journalist to see the issue or situation that you are working on
- placing film footage on social networking sites
- providing journalists with background information on the issue

When working through the media, it is important to have a clear message (called a 'media message') to communicate. See **Tool C1 - Working with the media** for advice on written and spoken media messages.



## Finding out more

For more information on influencing decision-makers, and for many more tools and Bible studies, please see:

- Tearfund (2015) *Advocacy toolkit*  
[http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/roots/advocacy\\_toolkit/](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/roots/advocacy_toolkit/)
- Tearfund (2006) A PILLARS Guide: *seeking justice for all*,  
[http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/pillars/seeking\\_justice\\_for\\_all/](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/pillars/seeking_justice_for_all/)
- Tearfund's TILZ pages on advocacy: <http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/themes/advocacy/>

### Related tools:

- B – Advocacy work (Bible study) [*B: Influencing decision-makers-1*]
- B – Being an advocate (Bible study) [*B: Influencing decision-makers-2*]
- C1 – Ways of taking action [*C1: Awareness-raising-1*]
- C1 – Mobilising people [*C1: Influencing decision-makers-2*]
- C1 – Working with the media [*C1: Influencing decision-makers-3*]
- C1 – Making the most of meetings with decision-makers [*C1: Influencing decision-makers-4*]