

G5

Advocacy Cycle Stage 4

Taking action – Difficult political contexts

Section G5 focuses on how to take action in difficult political contexts. It explains what a difficult political context is, why advocacy is important in such a context, and how advocacy can be prepared for and undertaken in such a context.

To get the most out of this section, it is important that it is not used in isolation. The other parts of the toolkit, and the other stages of the Advocacy Cycle, should have already been worked through.

It is part of Stage 4 of the Advocacy Cycle on taking action.



Facilitator's notes

This section explores a series of questions and answers. A training workshop facilitator must be familiar with this material.

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Tools

This section introduces tools that can help us apply our learning in a practical way. In a training workshop, they can be used as handouts.

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Training exercises

This section outlines interactive training exercises that can be used with groups, in order to deepen understanding of the issues that have been raised and to practise application of the tools that have been introduced. They are ideal for use in a training workshop.

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SECTION G5 Facilitator's notes



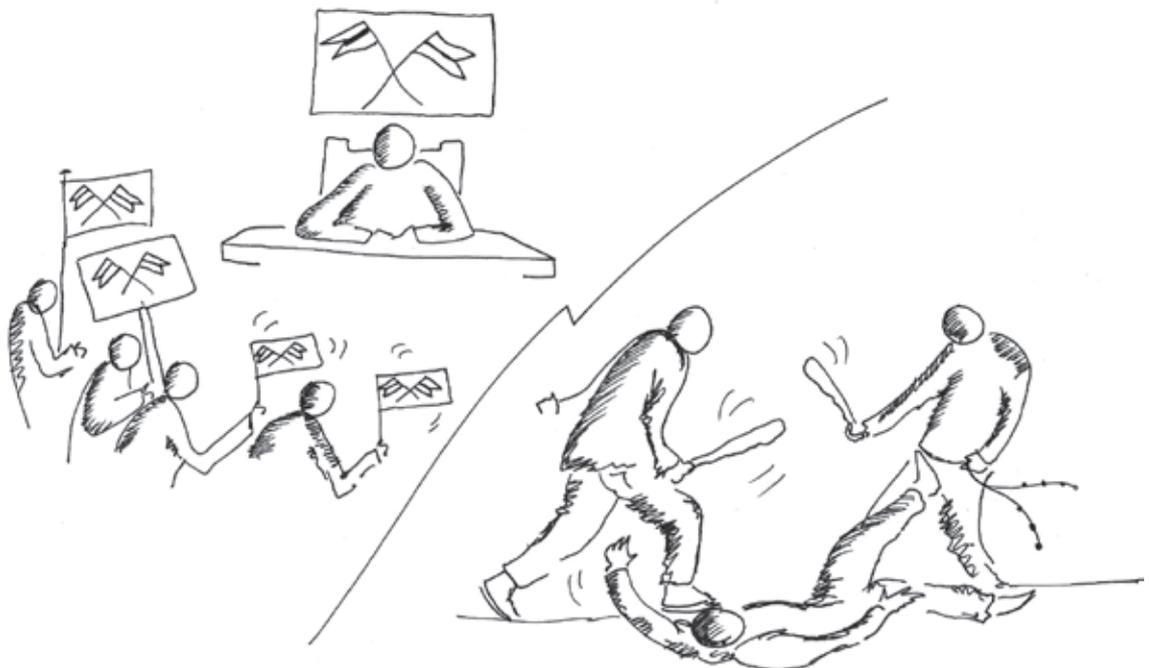
What is a 'difficult political context'?

The phrase 'political context' describes the setting or circumstances in which a government exercises power to govern a nation and administer its affairs, and in which citizens engage with decision-makers.

One example of a political context is democracy. In a democracy, citizens are able to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives and there is civil society space that makes engagement with government possible. Civil society space is a way of describing where the state, the market and the ordinary household interact. It is where dialogue and action take place between a government and its people and is generally regarded as an essential feature of a free society. A 'difficult political context' describes a setting in which a government abuses its power to govern a nation and administer its affairs. Sometimes, these governments claim that they are democratic, but their actions indicate otherwise!

In difficult political contexts, governments may be corrupt and abuse their power, citizens may be prevented from engaging in political activity and advocacy work, and electoral opposition may be treated with hostility. Below are some of the most common examples of difficult political contexts. More than one of these can apply to a country at any one time.

- **Fragile state:** an economically poor country whose government has weak state capacity and weak state legitimacy, meaning its citizens are vulnerable to adverse situations, both manmade and natural, known as 'shocks'
- **Failed state:** a country whose government has lost control of its territory, and is unable to ensure security to its citizens. It lacks legitimate authority to make decisions, cannot provide the basic public services, and is unable to fulfil its responsibilities as a member of the international community
- **Failing state:** a country whose government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over its territory, and fails to provide public services. There is often widespread corruption and criminality, sharp economic decline and a rise in refugees and internally displaced people



- **Conflict-affected state:** a country where repeated cycles of political and civil violence disrupt political processes, including elections and the administration of government
- **Oppressive regime:** a political context in which a government exercises authority and power in an unjust or cruel manner, imposing obligations on citizens and preventing them from engaging with decision-making and political processes
- **Single party dominant regime:** a political context in which a government is characterised by one political party successively winning election victories, without any foreseeable likelihood of future electoral defeat. Other political parties are tolerated and operate without impediment, but have no realistic chance of winning
- **Authoritarian regime:** a political context in which a government conflates its political party with the state, and appoints party officials to senior positions, irrespective of whether or not they have the required abilities and qualities. Other political parties are either banned altogether, or they are allowed but they are too weak or ineffective to seriously challenge power.



Why bother with advocacy in a difficult political context?

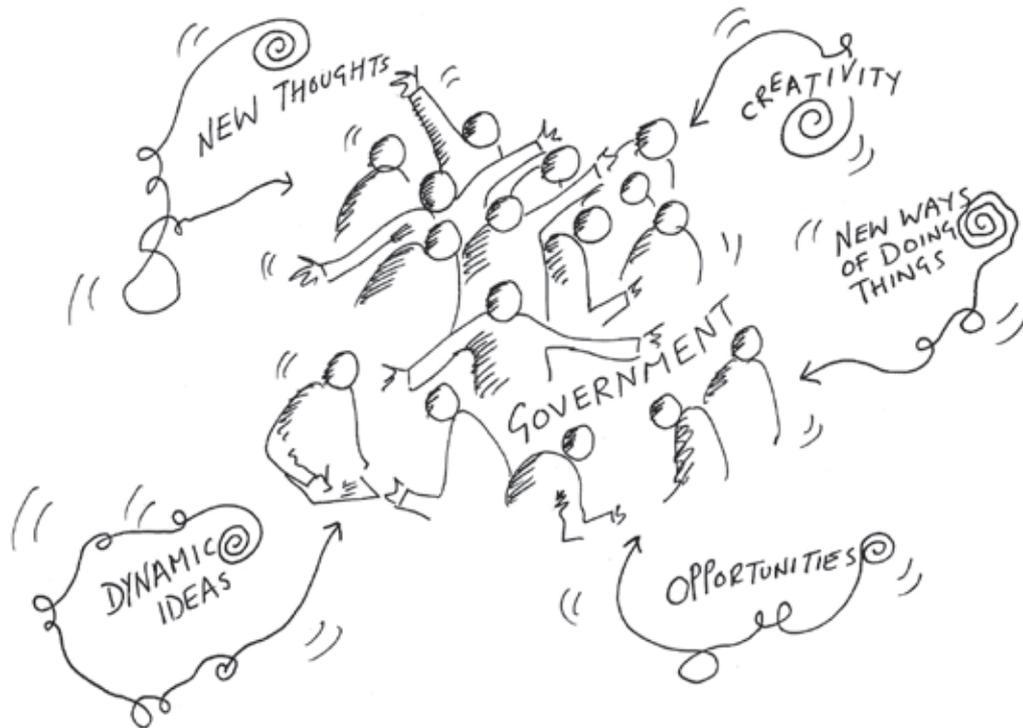
Advocacy is required in a difficult political context for the same reasons that advocacy is required in other contexts: it contributes to poverty alleviation, by addressing the underlying causes of poverty, and is complementary to programmatic work that addresses the effects of poverty. It holds governments to account for provision of and access to basic services, such as health care, education, shelter, water and sanitation. It asks decision-makers to uphold laws, policies and practices that benefit people who are poor, vulnerable and marginalised. It helps people to communicate with decision-makers, empowering them to make suggestions and seek justice. It can be done even when the difficult political context makes it inadvisable to use the word 'advocacy' or the phrase 'seeking justice'.

In many difficult political contexts, citizens live in poverty, churches may be in a minority, and anyone who is perceived to be against the government in any way is potentially at risk of persecution. In these circumstances, advocacy is important because it can:

- Open up civil society space, enabling civil society to engage with government on an ongoing basis
- Encourage changes in the accountability and transparency of government and other public institutions



- Strengthen civil society and empower citizens, so that more communities are aware of their basic entitlements to development, and know who has responsibility for upholding those entitlements and how to go about claiming them
- Build the capacity of governments and open them up to ideas and opportunities.



See also Section F2 on threats, risks, concerns and challenges in advocacy, and Section B2 on political space, and power and politics.



How can we prepare for advocacy in a difficult political context?

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to advocacy in difficult political contexts because each situation is unique. Many of the principles and tools in this toolkit apply in all contexts, regardless of whether they are difficult politically. In addition to a thorough risk analysis (see Section F2), there is some specific preparation we can do to minimise the challenges:

- **Build intentional and strategic relationships ahead of time**

Identify officials at all levels of government who are trustworthy and sympathetic to our advocacy issue. Build intentional and strategic relationships with them, without an agenda and even when nothing is required of them. Meet together, talk, listen, pay attention and develop an interest in them as people, not just as officials, in order to understand what motivates them. This way, when we need to make requests, they will know who we are and will be more likely to listen to us. Be aware, however, that it can be frustrating having to rebuild relationships when elections happen and people leave or change posts.

- **Seize opportunities when they arise**

In advocacy, it is important that we recognise when timing allows for unique opportunities and seize those opportunities. For example, when a disaster happens, it can present a unique opportunity to advocate because governments are often unable to respond in the immediate aftermath, particularly if the government is isolated from the rest of the international community.

CASE STUDY

MYANMAR

One Tearfund partner in Myanmar works with people living with disability, who are one of the most poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups in the country. When Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar, it soon became clear that people living with disability were a low priority in the government response.

However, the partner saw the potential opportunity presented by the disaster. Almost immediately after the cyclone, the partner approached the government and talked with them about the needs of people living with disability who were suffering after the cyclone. This was possible because they had previously developed a relationship with the officials concerned for disability issues, so it was not difficult to knock on their door with this request.

As a result of the talks, the government agreed to work with the partner, with inputs from organisations for people living with disability and others, to develop a national plan of action for people with disabilities who were affected by the cyclone, which the partner then implemented.

They did such a good job of drafting the plan that the government later asked the partner to develop longer-term policy and guidelines concerning the needs of people living with disability in the event of a disaster. The government also funded a nationwide survey of the needs of people living with disability, in order to provide the evidence base for the plan. The cyclone had triggered their advocacy, but the work then went national.

■ Link to existing activities

This is particularly relevant if we are involved in responding to a disaster in a difficult political context, where we may already be active in attending cluster, coordination and donor meetings. At these meetings we can often discuss our advocacy issues in a safe environment, agree our advocacy strategies, identify government contacts and engage in dialogue with instrumental decision-makers involved in the disaster response.

■ Be aware of cultural norms and worldviews

Cultural norms and worldviews vary widely between different difficult political contexts. It can be helpful to be aware of them and to work around them. It is vital to ensure we widen our horizons concerning different cultural norms, rather than ignoring or criticising them. For example, in China, the prevailing worldview is that the government is always correct, so any advocacy needs to be presented to the government in a way that does not undermine this perspective.

CASE STUDY

CHINA

In China, engagement with government is all about relationship. Chinese culture prizes relationships for the long term. Organisations there spent many years building relationships with government officials, through all the layers of government, intentionally investing time and energy and expenditure. One organisation, concerned for people living with HIV, focused on the Health Bureau and the Centre for Disease Control. This was required because the different ministries and departments do not often work together. As they engaged with the government, they led by example, showcasing models of good practice and demonstrating what the outworking of government policy looks like for people living with HIV. They also established trust and respect, so that the officials listened to what they said during meetings.

■ Acknowledge and confront fear

Many people are fearful about advocating in a difficult political context. Many governments thrive on fear, and sometimes fear keeps them in power, so it is important to acknowledge and confront it. Christians are called to be bold and courageous, and to take risks in speaking the truth. This is not always easy, especially in contexts where churches are victimised, but we may need to take risks, despite our fear. It may involve strategic choices, such as being selective about who speaks out in advocacy, working undercover, following the example of peer agencies that have had success in advocacy, or working anonymously in a group if we feel fearful.

CASE STUDY

AFGHANISTAN

One of Tearfund's partners in Afghanistan operates in a very difficult cultural and political environment with ongoing security concerns. They often have to demonstrate enormous courage and overcome significant risk just to be able to operate, let alone speak out in advocacy.

In one particular district, community members worked together to make a plan for their incomplete electric project. Community representatives negotiated with government officials to gain the permission required to connect their area with the city power grid. It was not easy, as the officials were reluctant to engage. However, they persevered and permission was granted, so that the district is now connected to the city power grid.

As a result, a group that previously did not agree with the partner's work in the area had a change of heart after witnessing for themselves what happened through the negotiations with the government. The group approached the partner for assistance in preparing to meet with the government to negotiate a drainage line to their community. Group representatives had to overcome fear to approach the relevant government officials, but their meetings were successful, and they ended up working together on constructing the drainage line.

■ Choose an advocacy issue with wisdom

When we select an advocacy issue, we need to make sure that it is in line with our organisation's main aims. Otherwise, there is a risk that our advocacy work will be disconnected from the rest of our programmes. When we advocate about something that directly links to our organisation's existing work, this gives legitimacy to what we are asking for when we speak with the government officials. It can also help to choose an issue that we know is on the government's agenda, as long as it is about real problems in the affected communities. We may prefer to work on a politically neutral or non-controversial issue, but if this is not possible, we must be aware of the risks.

CASE STUDY

MYANMAR

One of Tearfund's partners in Myanmar focuses on responding to health issues. In recent years, food security has emerged as an important issue within this remit of health.

The partner collaborated with several NGOs interested in their work on food security, and formed a working group, one of whose activities was advocacy for changes in policy and practice relating to food security.

Because there are so many inter-connected food security issues in Myanmar, they could not decide what to talk with the government about, so they decided to conduct a needs assessment into the extent of food insecurity across the country. This helped them to identify the critical issues and provided the evidence in support of their subsequent advocacy work.

■ Prepare and communicate a clear message

It is essential that we know what we want to say and how we want to say it before we start. Most officials in a difficult political context want us to give our message clearly and concisely, and with due respect and honour, even when we disagree. Sometimes, we need to be creative, using phrases and vocabulary that officials will understand, and linking it to matters that will attract government attention.

■ Understand how government works

It is important to understand how the government makes decisions. It can be complicated, so a detailed working knowledge is not necessary, rather just enough to have an overview. For example, it can be helpful to know:

- How much authority is retained centrally by the government?
- What powers are delegated to decentralised bodies?
- Where does responsibility lie for making laws, policies, regulations, procedures and so on?
- Who is responsible for their implementation?

CASE STUDY

CENTRAL ASIA

In Central Asia, prisoners' passports and other identity documents are taken away when they enter prison. This practice dates from the time of the Soviet Union and, although the region has changed since independence, the law has not changed. Upon release, prisoners need a reference in order to reapply for the documents. Without them, they have little chance of rebuilding their lives. They have no income, no registered address and no means of getting a job. They cannot open a bank account or go to a doctor. They have no rights in the eyes of the law and no way of proving their identity.

One of Tearfund's partners in Central Asia developed relationships with the local authorities, the police and the Ministry of Justice in order to help prisoners leaving prison to obtain a reference, recover their documents and make a new start in life. They had to understand how the system worked, what the law said and how to use it to support their cause. They had to gain the trust and respect of the local authorities because they were responsible for authenticating the prisoners' documents and providing them with new ones. It was not easy to challenge this unjust practice, and the law did not change, but prisoners leaving prison were able to rebuild their lives.



How can we do advocacy in a difficult political context?

There are also some specific actions that we can take to alleviate the challenges that might arise while we are doing advocacy work:

- **Use contextually appropriate terminology**

The word 'advocacy' can be unhelpful in a difficult political context, because it can appear subversive and/or aggressive. It is the same for references to 'human rights', 'justice', 'democracy', 'politics' and other such words that we associate with advocacy. Using contextually appropriate alternative words and phrases is good practice and reduces vulnerabilities that may be caused by miscommunication or misunderstanding of the intention behind the words. See Section A Facilitator's notes for suggestions.

CASE STUDY

EAST AFRICA

In one country in East Africa, a law places restrictions on NGOs funded by foreign donors. One Tearfund partner learned to negotiate a way around the law in order to engage with government about key issues in a diplomatic and collaborative way. In particular, they were careful not to refer to 'advocacy' or any associated terminology, preferring instead to use more contextually appropriate language, such as 'strategic communication'. They also chose to advocate on issues because these were important to their members, but not perceived to be too political or controversial (eg children's rights). This was a huge help to them, not only in finding others to work with, but also in persuading key decision-makers to change their attitudes and practices concerning their advocacy issues.

- **Be collaborative, not confrontational**

It is important to have the right attitude towards government officials. Be collaborative, rather than confrontational. Find common ground with them, rather than focusing on differences. Identify where there are mutual concerns and opportunities to work together. Avoid being confrontational or threatening, by choosing contextually appropriate methods and avoiding marches, slogans, publicity and negative comments. Build trust and confidence, and use positive language. Show respect, honour and integrity.

CASE STUDY

ETHIOPIA

One Tearfund partner, the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church Development Programme, which was passionate about water, sanitation and hygiene issues, joined with other like-minded groups and organisations in a multi-stakeholder forum. Together, they committed to hold the government to account for fulfilling its commitment to provide universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene.

Unfortunately, the government's universal access plan was ambitious and unachievable, which made it difficult to monitor progress. Rather than being confrontational about it, the forum acted in a collaborative and low-key way, by meeting with government ministers, and persuading them on an ongoing basis about the importance of the issue. They also urged the government to review the progress of the universal access plan, in order to avoid complications in the way it would be implemented.

As a result, the government asked key members of the forum to help them redraft the plan and to change the practical outworking of it. Consequently, relationships between the forum and the government are good, and there is ongoing dialogue, as well as joint technical review sessions and annual sector reviews about how to improve water, sanitation and hygiene across the country.

- **Keep praying**

If we are Christians involved in advocacy, it is fundamental that we remember to pray, and to ask God for authority and protection when we advocate in difficult political contexts.

- **Avoid bribery and corruption**

Government relationships can be unpredictable, but bribery should be avoided. Be transparent. We want to achieve long-term incremental changes, rather than short-term gains that have been secured because of bribes.

CASE STUDY

CENTRAL ASIA

Advocacy is risky in Central Asia, and potential repercussions include harassment, intimidation, violence, death threats, imprisonment and operational restrictions. When a provincial authority laid claim to a children's play centre, owned by one of Tearfund's partners, the partner found that important land registration paperwork had gone missing. It was suggested that, if they paid bribes, the documents would be returned. The partner refused to pay bribes. Fortunately they had kept official copies. They also knew that the law was on their side. So they gathered sufficient, accurate and reliable evidence in support of their case, and then convened a series of meetings with the provincial governor and other officials in order to enforce their right to retain ownership of the centre and to uphold the law. They were collaborative and respectful and they stood their ground. As a result, the unjust claim for ownership of the centre was dropped.

- **Use indirect routes to access advocacy targets**

Sometimes, it is important to engage with government departments that do not seem the most obvious ones, and with stakeholders that may have access to the right government departments. For example, if we cannot gain access to the officials whom we would like to build a relationship with, then we should approach others. It is wise to find out who influences the advocacy targets, make friends with them and influence them. If necessary, we should use our network of contacts to gain access to specific individuals, such as someone more senior, or junior, to the person we need to influence. (See Section E2 for further information on routes of influence.)

- **Be willing to share good practice**

In a difficult political context, actions can sometimes speak louder than words. We may need to lead by example and gain respect for our programmatic work if we want our advocacy work to be taken seriously. We may also have to invite government officials to visit our projects to see for themselves the scale of the problem and the solutions we have identified.

CASE STUDY

MYANMAR

One Tearfund partner in Myanmar has a vision for people living with disability to live and work as others can. For example, they want to see people with a physical disability live in a barrier-free world, with easy access for wheelchairs into buildings and along pathways.

They realised that they needed to think about how they could communicate this vision to other people, including government at different levels, other organisations, business people, media, community leaders, people with disabilities and their carers. So, they decided to create models, such as wheelchair ramps, to demonstrate how a barrier-free world could be created, and then showed them to government officials and other interested groups. For example, they looked at places where people living with disability cannot go, such as hospitals and schools, and then they built ramps or similar access points into those buildings. They also mobilised communities to pave village roads and pathways, previously muddy and prone to flooding, so that people living with disability could use them.

They used these barrier-free examples to show what is meant by 'barrier-free access', which inspired the government officials and others to imagine how Myanmar could be improved for people living with disability. As a result, the government agreed to provide more funding to replicate barrier-free models elsewhere, and to put a policy in place to achieve barrier-free access for all people living with disability in Myanmar, which the partner worked with the government to draft.

■ Create a vision for change

It is important that we clearly define what we want to see changed. We need to envision how things could be improved for the affected communities and what role the government needs to play to make that happen, and then communicate our vision for change in such a way that the officials think it is their idea! We do this by giving them knowledge about what is already working well, what change would look like and why it is important, and then making suggestions that help them see what they can do to bring it about. We use our imagination to envision them. Sometimes, we may need to create a prototype or a model, so that the government officials can see it and understand what our idea might look like in reality, which makes it easier for them to approve it.

CASE STUDY

CENTRAL ASIA

After the former Soviet Union collapsed, family breakdown led to large numbers of orphans and vulnerable children in Central Asia. One of Tearfund's partners there runs a crisis centre for such children, pending either a return home or a foster family placement. Over many years, the partner developed relationships with the local government to ensure children were placed in suitable foster families. At the time they were doing this, fostering was a new concept in Central Asia and many people questioned what they were doing. But the partner had a clear vision for change, and longed for the day when every child, if unable to live with their natural family, could find a new place in a foster family rather than ending up in residential care. They also knew that their government had signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which gave them reason to believe that there would be backing for a new national law.

The breakthrough came when a local authority social worker put the partner in contact with the national government's ministry responsible for children and families. The partner then formed a network, together with other organisations interested in fostering, which lobbied the ministry until a national law was passed, governing everything to do with fostering. Now they work to implement the law by ensuring that children are always found a suitable home, with formal agreements made between all involved, setting out when and how the child is going to be integrated back home or moved into a foster family. Without their clear vision for change, it might not have been so straightforward.

■ Mark international days that highlight the issue

Sometimes, an opportunity arises around a specific date or event that we can find out about far in advance. For example, the United Nations often facilitates annual days to remember poverty issues and we can use these days to organise events, raise awareness and reinforce our message, both with the government officials we are trying to influence and with affected communities, whose interest in the issue can provoke more attention by the government.

CASE STUDY

SOUTH SUDAN

In South Sudan, the environment has suffered as a result of conflict, as well as soil erosion, desertification, deforestation and droughts. As part of an initiative to raise awareness about these environmental issues, and to encourage communities and the relevant government departments to adopt good environmental policies and practices, one of Tearfund's partners there decided to mark World Environment Day. Ahead of the day, the partner conducted a survey to assess the scale of environmental degradation in the areas of the country where they worked. Using this information, ahead of the day they engaged in discussions with the government departments; mobilised communities, community groups, churches, and other NGOs; notified the media; and sought all the required permissions. It was a celebration of the natural resources in their areas as well as a march with a serious message. Tree seedlings were distributed and planted and rubbish was officially cleaned up and disposed of before keynote speeches were delivered by the county commissioner and other officials, who promised a countrywide environmental sustainability policy, something the partner requested. The partner then followed this up, because the commitments and promises were not automatically followed through.

■ Use contacts outside the country

If advocacy is risky, sometimes it can be appropriate to ask our contacts outside the country to speak out on our behalf. For example, they may be able to put pressure on donor governments to impose sanctions and increase demands on recipient governments. In the country we live in, we might want to invite foreigners to attend government meetings with us if their presence will assist our advocacy. However, there can be risks associated with passing information to people outside the country because it can get into the public forum, particularly through the internet.

■ Non-violent resistance (or civil resistance)

Occasionally, it might be appropriate to advocate for social or political change using civil resistance and non-violent methods such as symbolic protests, picketing, civil disobedience, economic or political non-cooperation and prayer vigils. This applies particularly if we do not want either to accept oppression passively, or invoke an armed struggle to fight it. However, it is usually risky, and there are only a few contexts where it works, so it needs thorough and careful consideration (see Section F2 on doing a risk analysis).

CASE STUDY

ZIMBABWE

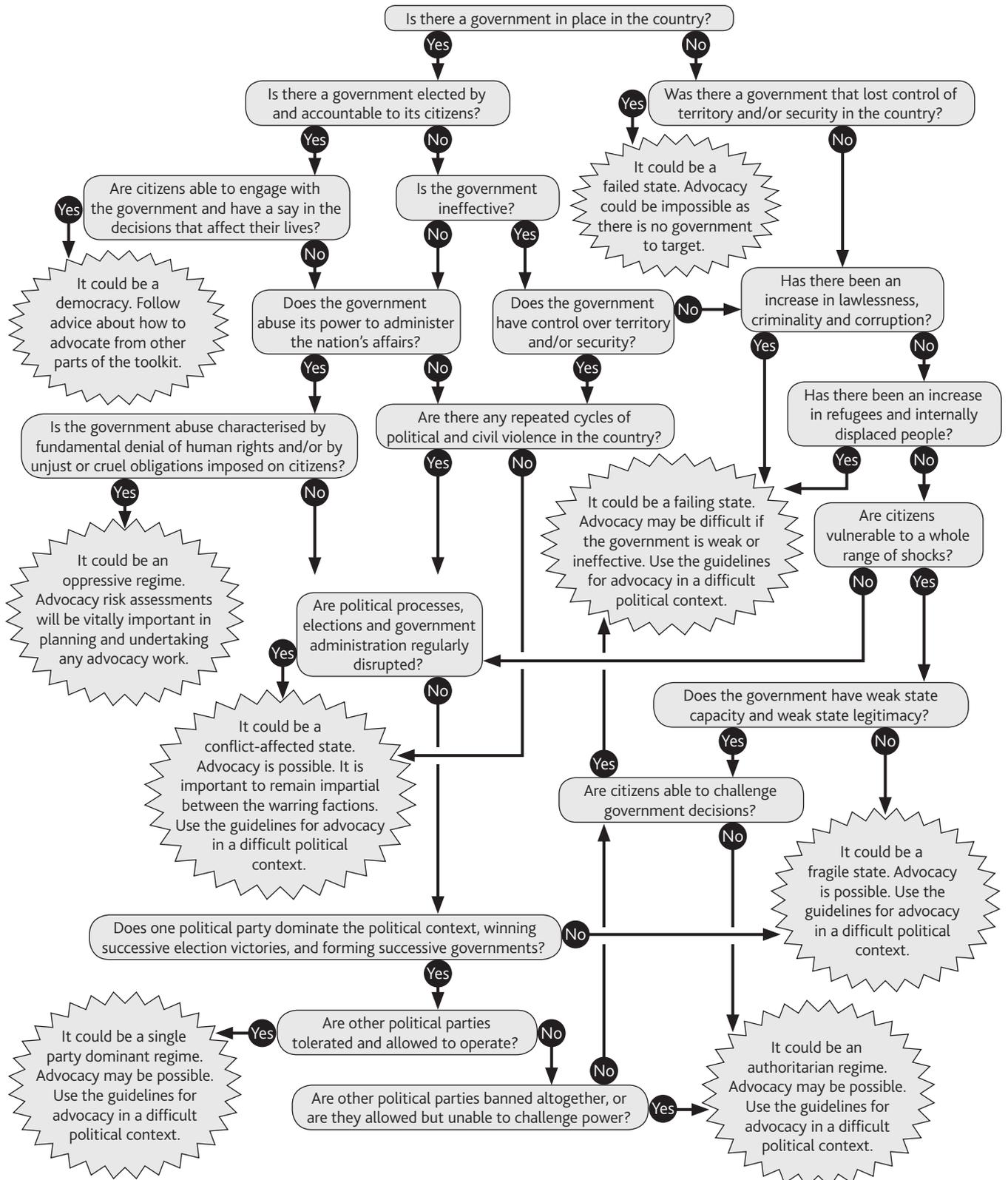
The crisis in Zimbabwe has been well documented. Despite the risks involved in advocacy, Tearfund partner Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) spoke out repeatedly about the government's oppression of fundamental human rights. They hosted prayer rallies on church premises as mass awareness-raising events about government clearance operations, even though the secret police infiltrated them. They facilitated a 'religious' street march to make their case, which was peaceful until the government sent in the army to break it up. They mobilised people to whistle, clap their hands, stamp their feet, hoot horns, hit pots and make a noise, every lunch time for a week, to draw attention to the situation. They launched a campaign called *Save Zimbabwe*, which the government tried to close down, until there was an outcry from the international community. This prompted the Southern Africa Development Community to initiate dialogue with the government, which eventually led to elections and a government of national unity, following which ZCA continued to advocate, with an emphasis on non-violent actions.



TOOL 46

Difficult political contexts flowchart

This tool is designed to help identify what kind of political context might be present in a country, by highlighting some of the potential challenges for citizens wanting to engage with their governments.





TOOL 47

Difficult political contexts assessment criteria

This tool enables advocates to rank a government's performance against criteria that should be displayed by a functioning government. The results can be used to shape the development of an advocacy strategy in a difficult political context by highlighting areas where caution is needed because of governmental shortcomings.

Each question needs to be ranked 1–5 on the following basis:

1. No, not at all
2. To a limited extent
3. Some activity but plenty of room for improvement
4. Yes, but with some limitations in capacities and resources
5. Yes, with satisfactory, sustainable and effective measures in place

	Questions	Rank
Capability	Does the government regularly review laws, policies and procedures?	
	Does the government have designated ministries and/or people with delegated responsibilities and authority to support the development, implementation and upholding of laws, policies and procedures?	
	Does the government have enough skill and ability to govern the nation's affairs?	
	Does the government have enough money from appropriate budgets to implement and uphold laws, policies and procedures?	
Inclusivity	Does the government uphold and respect human rights for all people?	
	Are government laws, policies and procedures responsive to the needs of all citizens, particularly targeting vulnerable people (eg children, elderly people and people living with disability)?	
	Is the government responsive to the specific needs and capacities of women, and does it encourage their participation in decision-making and planning processes?	
	Do vulnerable people actively participate in government decision-making and planning processes?	
Accountability	Is the government accountable to its citizens for the laws, policies and procedures it creates?	
	Does the government set targets and regularly monitor and report on progress towards achieving its targets?	
	Does the government involve civil society and local communities in forming laws, policies and procedures?	
	Do citizens have the means to register complaints and seek a corresponding response from the government for failure to meet obligations and commitments created by laws, policies and procedures?	
Transparency	Does the government regularly collect, review and map information to inform action planning and policy development?	
	Does the government provide access to regularly updated, easily understood information on laws, policies and procedures?	
Coherence	Does the government coordinate its work among different government ministries and departments?	
	Does the government support collaborative actions among different state and non-state stakeholders?	



TOOL 48

Difficult political contexts preparation and action checklist

This tool draws on practical suggestions and lessons learned by Tearfund staff and partners. It is a checklist only, so some suggestions will work better than others in different difficult political contexts.

Preparing for advocacy in a difficult political context

- ✓ Are you building intentional and strategic relationships with appropriate government officials, ahead of time, without any pre-conceived agenda?
- ✓ What potential advocacy opportunities do you need to recognise and seize, if timing allows? Is it possible to link advocacy into your existing activities?
- ✓ Are you aware of the cultural norms and worldviews that are common in your context? If so, what are they, and how will they impact your ability to do advocacy?
- ✓ To what extent are you fearful about advocacy? How will you acknowledge, confront and mitigate your fear?
- ✓ Have you been wise and selective in your choice of advocacy issue? Does it align with your organisation's vision? Do you have legitimacy to speak about it? Is it of interest to the government? How controversial is it?
- ✓ Do you know what you want to say and how you want to say it? Are you going to be able to communicate it clearly and concisely?
- ✓ Do you understand how the government makes decisions and how to influence the decision-making process?

Doing advocacy in a difficult political context

- ✓ Have you decided what words and phrases are the most contextually appropriate for describing 'advocacy' and other related words, and are you using them?
- ✓ Are you being collaborative, rather than confrontational, and finding common ground, rather than differences, in your advocacy work?
- ✓ Are you being transparent and doing everything possible to avoid bribery?
- ✓ Have you used all possible routes and contacts, both direct and indirect, in order to access your advocacy targets?
- ✓ Is there widespread respect for your programmatic work on the issue, so as to give credibility to your advocacy work? Are you willing and able to invite government officials to see for themselves the extent of the problem?
- ✓ Are you clear about what you want to see changed and are you communicating it in such a way that the government officials think it is their idea?
- ✓ Are you marking international days that highlight the advocacy issue?
- ✓ If you are a faith-based organisation, are you praying?
- ✓ Is it appropriate to ask your contacts outside the country to speak out on your behalf?
- ✓ Is it appropriate to seek change using civil resistance and non-violent actions?

SECTION G5 Training exercises



EXERCISE 51 Identifying a difficult political context

Aim To understand what makes a context politically difficult, and the impact this has on advocacy work

TYPE Group exercise. Please note that it is essential for a facilitator to prepare in advance for this exercise.

TIPS Both versions are intended to be a light-hearted way of addressing a serious topic. The exercise works best with people who have a good understanding of the political context in which they are working. It is essential that the facilitator has worked out in advance how to answer the questions in the flowchart in **TOOL 46** before trying to use it in this exercise.

METHODS Information-sharing, small group work, presentation, plenary discussion, ranking line

MATERIALS Sets of articles prepared in advance

HANDOUT **TOOL 46: Difficult political contexts flowchart**

ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Ahead of the exercise, using the internet if possible, or other information sources, do some searches to find media articles, opinion pieces, blog posts and similar material about the country in which the participants are based. Try to get as wide a variety and balance as possible.
- Print off a complete set of all the information sources. Copy enough complete sets for one per small group, depending on numbers.
- Work through the flowchart in **TOOL 46** and make sure that you know how you would answer the questions, using the Facilitator's notes to help identify the type(s) of political context(s) in which the workshop is taking place.

STEPS (VERSION 1) This works well when participants are from the same or similar political contexts:

1. Split the participants into groups of six to eight people.
2. Give each group an identical set of information, and ask them to read it through. As they do so, they should highlight any information that might be relevant to identifying the political context in which they are based.
3. Ask each group to identify some of the characteristics of the political context they are operating in. (For example, freedom of speech is limited, there is lawlessness, one political party dominates national politics, and so on.)
4. Hand out **TOOL 46: Difficult political contexts flowchart** and work through the flowchart, answering the questions together, to identify what type of political context participants are working in. Steer the conversation if there is disagreement, based on your preparation, using the Facilitator's notes to help.
5. Discuss how this type of political context might affect potential advocacy work.

STEPS (VERSION 2)

This works particularly well when participants are from different political contexts. If in some cases there is only one person per context, adapt so that each person does Steps 1–2 individually

1. Ask participants to work in pairs and give out **TOOL 46: Difficult political contexts flowchart** to each pair.
2. Invite participants to work through the **TOOL 46: Difficult political contexts flowchart** in their pairs, as discreetly as possible, based on their own understanding and experience of their context. They should not share their answers with the other pairs.
3. Encourage everyone to stand up. Create an imaginary ranking line along the length of the room. Assign one end of the room as democracy and the other end as the most difficult type of political context.
4. Ask each pair to place themselves where they think their government is on the line, based on their findings from the flowchart.
5. While they are standing, ask everyone to discuss why they selected where they are standing, and the implications for advocacy work in their context.



EXERCISE 52 Adapting advocacy plans in a difficult political context

Aim To understand how to adapt plans for advocacy in a difficult political context

TYPE Best suited to a group setting

TIPS This exercise works well if Exercise 51 has already been done and/or if it is clear why the political context is difficult. It is best done when looking at a specific advocacy strategy that is already developed, or is in the process of being developed, rather than considering an advocacy strategy in the abstract.

METHODS Brainstorm, small group work, plenary discussion

HANDOUT **TOOL 47: Difficult political contexts assessment criteria**

- STEPS**
1. Brainstorm ideas about why the participants' political context is considered difficult.
 2. Split the participants into groups of four to six people. Hand out a copy of **TOOL 47: Difficult political contexts assessment criteria** to each group.
 3. Ask each group to rank and assess the criteria in **TOOL 47: Difficult political contexts assessment criteria**, adding up the score for their context.
 4. Draw everyone together in plenary, and discuss their assessments, comparing scores if it is helpful. Ask how the results might influence the development of an advocacy strategy.



EXERCISE 53 Preparing for and doing advocacy in a difficult political context

Aim To identify ways of preparing and undertaking advocacy that work in a difficult political context

TYPE Best suited to a group setting

TIPS It is preferable, although not essential, if Exercises 51 and 52 have been completed beforehand

METHODS Small group work, plenary discussion

MATERIAL Large pieces of paper (such as flipchart paper)

HANDOUT **TOOL 48: Difficult political contexts preparation and action checklist**

- STEPS
1. Split the participants into two groups. Hand out a copy of **TOOL 48: Difficult political contexts preparation and action checklist** to each group.
 2. Ask the first group to brainstorm or work through the first set of questions relating to preparation, in **TOOL 48: Difficult political contexts preparation and action checklist**, deciding which ones apply to their context and to what extent. Ask the second group to do the same in relation to the second set of questions on action. Both groups need to record their answers on flipchart sheets.
 3. Ask each group to swap their flipchart sheets, and discuss and add to the other group's work.
 4. Draw everyone together in plenary, and discuss their answers to the questions and how these will shape the way they plan and undertake advocacy in their context.