

## F2

## Advocacy Cycle Stage 3

## Planning – Risks, concerns and challenges

Section F2 considers some of the most common threats, risks, concerns and challenges that we might face in our advocacy work, together with suggestions for how to mitigate and overcome them.

This section is included within Stage 3 of the Advocacy Cycle, as it is an integral part of planning and deciding whether or not to advocate. If appropriate, it should be considered in conjunction with Section G5 about advocacy in difficult political contexts.



## 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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- TOOL 36: Advocacy risks mitigation chart 148



## 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 F2 Facilitator's notes



### What are the risks involved in advocacy?

Everything we do involves risks. Whether we are aware of it or not, we constantly seek to avoid, reduce or mitigate risks. For example, we take a risk when we drive a car because we know that accidents happen. However, we can reduce the risk by wearing a seat belt, making sure we are not too tired and driving in the daylight.

It is the same with advocacy. We need to consider the main risks we face as an organisation before we undertake our advocacy work.

Some of the main risks of advocacy include:

#### ■ Risks to reputation

Advocacy work can often be high profile. If an organisation makes any mistakes, these can happen in the public domain, creating potential for damage to the organisation's reputation. For example: if an organisation relies on incorrect information, compromises its message, claims to be speaking for people who have not been consulted, fails to represent them accurately or does not deliver on promises made.

#### ■ Risks to people

When an organisation speaks out in a difficult operating environment and/or on controversial issues, it can be risky for the people involved in the advocacy work, and sometimes for friends and colleagues in other parts of the world. For example: violence, threats of violence, imprisonment and even death threats may be made against those doing the advocacy, their friends and family, and against people in the communities affected by the advocacy issues. There may also be psychological abuse against all those involved, including isolation in the community or in the church.

#### ■ Risks to property

Sometimes, an organisation's advocacy messages may antagonise opponents. In extreme circumstances, this could lead to violence, threats of violence or damage against organisational property and personal property, particularly in countries where law enforcement is weak. For example: forcible closure of buildings, confiscation of paperwork, arson attacks on an office, theft of key documents, stealing livestock, burning crops or polluting a water supply.

#### ■ Risks to relationships

Sometimes new advocacy work can damage existing relationships with our advocacy allies, supporters and decision-makers if they do not agree with the policy position or practice that an organisation has adopted on a particular issue.

## CASE STUDY

**ZIMBABWE**

In Bulawayo, there was a season when water supplies dried up. The rains failed, the dams that supply the city fell into disrepair and the pipes into people's homes leaked. There were no chemicals to purify the water and no water pumps. The city's inhabitants found themselves without a water supply.

The pastors of Churches in Bulawayo (CIB), a Tearfund partner, decided to take action. They hired trucks, drove across the border and bought some water tanks. Upon their return, they met with local authority officials, community leaders and church leaders to identify the communities most in need of water. Then they located nearby boreholes and placed the tanks where everyone could access them.

At the same time, they lobbied the government ministry responsible for water to do something about the severe water shortages, starting with paying for repairs to the dams, on the basis that everyone in Bulawayo had a legal right to access clean water. Their advocacy efforts were publicised in the newspaper and on radio. Unfortunately, the government officials refused to cooperate. CIB conducted a risk assessment, concluded they should continue to advocate and carried on regardless.

**■ Risks to finances**

Advocacy work can sometimes divert resources away from other work, hindering the effectiveness of that work. There may sometimes be a trade-off between undertaking advocacy work and opportunities for funding. Occasionally, advocacy work can lead to the people involved losing their job, livelihood or trade, or an organisation losing its funding. There is also a trend, particularly among donors, towards increasing scrutiny about the amount of finances that organisations invest in advocacy, and the impact that this has on poverty reduction. Consistent monitoring, reviewing and evaluation are vital to ensure that funds are not wasted on initiatives that are ill-advised or badly planned.

**■ Risks to expectations**

Advocacy can be a long-term process and change is unlikely to be rapid. An organisation needs to create and manage realistic expectations among advocacy allies, supporters and people in the communities affected by the advocacy issue, to ensure that anger, frustration and disappointment are avoided.

**■ Risks to legal status**

Most organisations are regulated by laws and registered in such a way that they must not engage in politics. Any advocacy work must remain within the remit of the law, and any political engagement must be linked to the organisation's purpose and status. Otherwise, there is a risk that an organisation's legal status may be damaged or revoked.

**■ Risks to timing**

Advocacy work often involves seizing a moment of opportunity to influence decision-makers. There can be a risk if such a moment is missed, perhaps because of lack of awareness or a focus on other issues.



### What are common concerns for Christians involved in advocacy?

If Christians are not convinced that advocacy is biblical, or that it is important for the church, they are unlikely to become involved, even if they are given reasons that are theological and practical. It can be a good idea to anticipate some of these discussion points in advance, and to consider possible responses. See Section B3 for more context.

REASON GIVEN	POSSIBLE RESPONSE
Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:13–14 say that we are to obey the state, not challenge it.	These verses do say that we should obey the state, but only when it does not go against God's law. The assumption here is that those in power are God's servants. However, what happens if those in authority are not governing according to God's laws? Daniel 6:10 gives us an example of a godly man who intentionally disobeyed a state edict that went against God's laws. We cannot just sit back and watch a government abuse its power and role as a servant of God. It is our role, both as citizens and as Christians, to hold governments to account, so that the state fulfils its God-given role in upholding right, punishing those who do wrong and promoting human well-being.
Jesus says to love our enemies, turn the other cheek and that 'it is mine to avenge' (Matthew 5).	We are called to love our enemies. The focus of this teaching is not to seek revenge, but to leave that to God.
Jesus says that the 'poor will always be with you' (Mark 14:7).	He continues by saying 'and you can help them any time you want'. These words are a command rather than an option. The focus of the passage is the anointing with perfume just days before his death and resurrection, showing that the woman had recognised the meaning of what was about to happen.
What really matters is that people are saved, so we need to concentrate on that. Advocacy work does not bring salvation.	Christians are called to seek justice (Micah 6:8), plead the cause of poor people (Proverbs 31:8-9), and stand in the gap for those who are suffering (Ezekiel 22:30).
Jesus did not engage in political activity.	Jesus did not take part in an organised political movement but he challenged the authorities. For example, he spoke assertively regarding the authorities (Luke 13:32), he cleansed the temple (John 2:13–16), and he spoke out against injustice and oppression (Luke 11:42). We need to seek a godly response to issues, which might involve advocacy work.
Politics is a dirty game. You should not mix religion and politics.	It is true that power can corrupt but, by choosing not to be involved in politics, Christians leave it to others to make decisions that affect everyone's lives. We therefore fail to take seriously our responsibility for stewardship. A good example of godly political engagement is Joseph, when he governed Egypt and averted a famine (Genesis 41:41–57). (See Section B3 for more information on advocates in the Bible.)
Christians have become involved in advocacy work in the past and disgraced the church.	The church has been discredited in the past by its involvement with power, but it has been discredited because of the way it was done, not because it was involved in the first place. We need to learn from the past.
There are two kingdoms – the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. We live in one and not the other.	There are two kingdoms. Christians are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20) but we live in the world. We are called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13) and to influence the world. We should not run away from our responsibility.

The problem is that, if the church does not engage in advocacy work, it will be less effective in bringing good news to the poor, because it will have failed in God's calling to hold rulers to

account in fulfilling their purpose, and it will have allowed injustice and poverty to continue unchallenged. *'For evil to prosper, all it takes is for good men to do nothing'* (Edmund Burke).



### How do we mitigate and manage risks and concerns?

If any risk is too high, it is wise to consider alternative options for our advocacy, such as asking an external spokesperson or overseas organisation to advocate on our behalf. However, there may be some situations where the risk is so high that we cannot do any advocacy at all.

It is good practice to ensure that everyone involved is aware of the risk, is still happy to proceed and is aware of what to do to minimise the risk. This will probably involve ensuring that they know who to go to for help. It is worth remembering that, sometimes, there may be a bigger risk in not doing advocacy than in going ahead with it.

#### CASE STUDY

##### GUATEMALA

As with many countries in Central America, Guatemala has seen a rapid growth in violence, both real and threatened. This had repercussions for one Tearfund partner there because an integral part of its community health development programme involved empowering poor and vulnerable rural communities. The partner encouraged the communities to develop a voice as a group, which they had not historically had, in order to claim their entitlements to access affordable health care when they needed it. This gave many people a sense of value and dignity, as the partner opened up opportunities and connections for them to access local authority decision-makers. However, it was also costly.

During the course of their advocacy, the partner exposed fraud and corruption on a large scale within the government. This was difficult for those involved because powerful people felt threatened. Social change made them uncomfortable, and they feared their privileges would be challenged and removed. Death threats and threats of violence and organisational closure followed, as the government tried to clamp down and stifle their voice.

As a result, the partner developed a strategic plan of action for mitigating the risks involved. For example, they agreed not to travel after dark, to install security lights at their office premises, to put only certain information into the public domain and nothing that could identify specific individuals, to always obtain receipts for expenditure, etc. They also decided to continue their advocacy, despite the ongoing risks.

The most common risks and concerns associated with doing advocacy work can easily be addressed and overcome if they are anticipated in advance. Below are some examples.

### “ If we speak out, then we may be threatened or ostracised ”

- If there is a potential risk, advocates and those affected by a situation should be aware of the risk before any action is taken.
- Use organisations outside the country if that is a safe option.
- Undertake advocacy with others, as part of a network, alliance or coalition, in order to keep a low profile and diffuse any potential backlash.
- Cultivate strong relationships with trusted people in power, so that they can act as bridges to others or help you if you get into difficulty.
- Show respect to decision-makers and give them clear explanations if they ask for them.

## CASE STUDY

**SENSITIVE LOCATION IN AFRICA**

One Tearfund partner, working in a difficult political context, wanted to work with the local church to implement its project. However, it faced the difficulty that, according to government policy, 'partners' within this context were normally NGOs and the church was not registered. The partner built relationships with the local government officials, and then used those contacts to ask them to allow an exemption to this policy and for them to work temporarily with the church. This was on the basis that, from this working relationship, a community-based organisation would be set up by both, which could then be registered and could continue the work. The local government was persuaded by this argument and allowed the partner to have an exemption to the policy.

**“ We do not know enough about the situation ”**

- Contact other organisations that are working on the same advocacy issue to see what information they have and collate it together with the evidence and research that we have done.
- Join networks, coalitions and alliances that are working on the same advocacy issue. We may find that collectively we have all the information and contacts we need.

**“ Advocacy is confrontational ”**

- This is not always the case. Decision-makers in governments and other authorities are often aware that there is a problem and will welcome suggestions as to how it can be solved.
- Some of the best advocacy work is done collaboratively.
- Take time to build relationships with decision-makers before we need to influence them, and then it will be possible to be persuasive.
- Avoid advocacy activities and tactics that could be seen as condemning or negative, or publicly shaming government officials.

**“ We are too small to make a difference ”**

- A well known quote says: *'If you think you are too small to make a difference, you have never been in bed with a mosquito!'* (Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop)
- Ensure there is sufficient staff time and, if possible, sufficient budget allocated, to ensure that advocacy is not forgotten or deprioritised.
- Ensure our organisation's example is consistent with our advocacy message, as this will hold much more weight and credibility in any advocacy work, because decision-makers will observe integrity rather than double standards.
- Talk to as many other organisations as possible to find out whether they are acting on the issue and whether they know of others who are.
- Use the information and contacts we have to form networks, alliances and coalitions, as there is power in joint advocacy with others.
- Use a variety of advocacy methods and approaches to maximise our impact.

## CASE STUDY

**SRI LANKA**

A former Tearfund partner, Navajeevana, was working with people seeking freedom from drug addiction. They wanted to respond to a major cigarette advertising campaign that was targeting the ports of Galle and Colombo. An international tobacco company was using a yacht as its main promotional strategy as well as distributing branded promotional materials. Schools were invited to take their children on the yacht and Navajeevana felt this promoted a glamorous image of smoking. Navajeevana visited schools and encouraged them to cancel any proposed visits to the yacht in order to benefit and protect the children. Navajeevana decorated a bus to make it look like a yacht and drove it round the local area, performing street drama and mocking the cigarette company's advertising slogans. When the yacht eventually arrived, there was little interest in the advertising campaign. Local people also became more aware of the risks associated with smoking.

“ **Advocacy can raise unrealistic expectations about how fast change can come** ”

- Ensure that the community participates in identifying the problems, proposing solutions and assessing what chance they have of influencing change.
- Establish a realistic advocacy strategy that takes account of the resources available, the skills of the community, the accessibility of the targets and the likelihood of change.
- Make sure that everyone has realistic expectations from the outset.
- Ensure that our advocacy work is integrated into other existing development work.

“ **Advocacy might lead to compromise for the people involved and even for the organisation itself** ”

- Promote participatory processes to ensure that advocacy messages are developed by a group of people.
- Ensure that prayer underpins all actions, and there is clear understanding of any biblical mandate for action.
- Ensure that those affected by a situation represent themselves.
- Ensure that different people have contact with decision-makers so that all contacts and influence are not focused on one person.
- Have a clear internal system of accountability.

For more suggestions, see **TOOL 35: Advocacy risk analysis** and **TOOL 36: Advocacy risks mitigation chart**.

See also **Section G5** on doing advocacy in difficult political contexts.

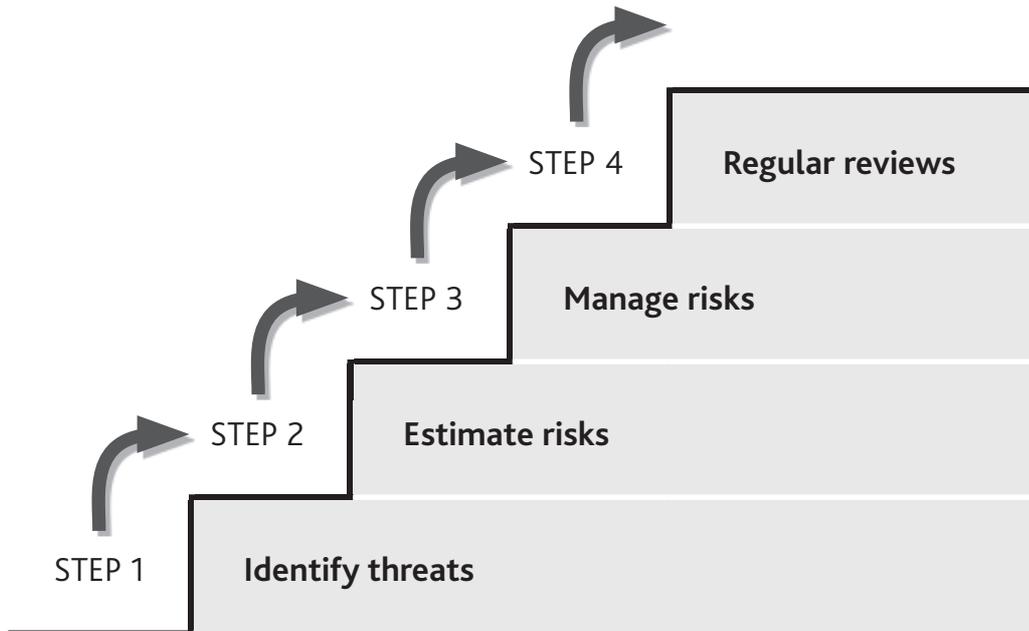


## TOOL 35

## Advocacy risk analysis

An advocacy risk analysis is a tool that allows us to examine the risks that we or our organisations might face when we do advocacy. It forms the basis for risk management and crisis prevention, and is based on a structured approach to thinking through threats, which is followed by an evaluation of the likelihood that those events will occur, and the creation of a contingency plan to mitigate and manage them.

There are several steps to take in a risk analysis:



### STEP 1 Identify threats

The first step is to identify potential threats, making sure that none of them is overlooked. This can be done by:

- Working through a checklist, such as the one below, and noting the applicable threats
- Deliberately trying to spot areas of vulnerability within an advocacy plan, for example in relation to specific relationships, systems, structures, etc
- Consulting with different people who might have different perspectives about the likely impact of particular threats.

Potential types of threats include:

- **REPUTATIONAL** Loss of credibility, lack of legitimacy, compromising of messages, reliance on incorrect information, etc
- **PEOPLE** Illness, intimidation, harassment, violence, imprisonment, death, etc
- **PROPERTY** Forcible closure of buildings, confiscation of paperwork, arson attacks, theft of key documents, etc
- **POLITICAL** Changes in regimes, key decision-makers leaving office, public opinion, government policy, foreign influence, etc

TOOL 35 continues on next page

- **OPERATIONAL** External disruption to plans, loss of access to finances, failure to secure access to decision-makers, revocation of legal status, etc
- **PROCEDURAL** Lack of accountability, poor governance, inability to seize timely opportunities, etc
- **PROJECT** Cost over-runs, jobs taking too long, diversion of focus because of an emergency, etc
- **FINANCIAL** Fraud, bribery, diversion of funds, loss of jobs or livelihoods, etc
- **TECHNICAL** Inability to accommodate advances in technology, technical failure, etc
- **NATURAL** Threats from weather, natural disaster, accident, disease, etc

#### STEP 2 **Estimate risks**

The second step is to work out the likelihood of each threat being realised and to assess its impact. One approach to this is to estimate the probability of the event occurring, and to work out how much it would cost to set things right if it occurs, in terms of both finances and relationships. This provides estimated values for each risk.

An alternative approach is to consider both the likely impact of the risk and the likelihood of the risk occurring, grading them separately on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very low and 5 is very high. Multiply the numbers together and the higher the score, the higher the estimated risk.

#### STEP 3 **Manage risks**

The third step is to work out ways of managing the risks while acknowledging that some will remain high despite your best efforts. This needs to be as cost-effective as possible, in light of their estimated value. Sometimes, it may be better to accept the risk than to use excessive resources to eliminate it. This should be done with wisdom, prayer and discernment.

Risks can be managed in a number of ways:

- **BY USING EXISTING RESOURCES** Improvements in existing methods and systems, changes in responsibilities, improvements to accountability and internal controls, etc.
- **BY CONTINGENCY PLANNING** This involves deciding to accept a risk, but choosing to develop a plan to minimise its effects if it happens. The plan allows for immediate action in the event of the risk occurring and a crisis management situation.
- **BY INVESTING IN NEW RESOURCES** This involves deciding whether to bring in additional resources to counter the risk, or even insuring against the risk.

#### STEP 4 **Regular reviews**

The fourth step is to carry out regular reviews. This might involve formal reviews of the risk analysis, perhaps each time there are changes in circumstances. It might also involve adapting plans, allocating additional budget or alerting external contacts.



## TOOL 36

## Advocacy risks mitigation chart

It is wise to plan for all possible risks and consider ways of reducing them ahead of time. Below is a chart that can be used as a tool for contingency planning to mitigate advocacy risks. It has been partially completed with some sample suggestions.

Potential risks	Ways of reducing risks	Risk manager
Damaged organisational reputation because of reliance on incorrect information or a lack of evidence in support of advocacy messages	<p>Verify and triangulate information (use at least three sources) before using it in discussions with decision-makers</p> <p>Ensure all information has been sourced and accredited correctly</p> <p>Ensure sufficient factually accurate evidence has been gathered before developing advocacy messages</p>	Specify person with responsibility
Lack of legitimacy because of speaking on behalf of a group who have not been consulted	<p>Consult with the group on whose behalf you are speaking</p> <p>Establish clear lines of accountability</p> <p>Clarify the process for deciding who will be stakeholders in the advocacy process</p>	Specify person with responsibility
Disillusionment in the affected communities because of the length of time taken to achieve change	<p>Be clear about what you will do and when, and what is likely to be achievable and by when</p> <p>Manage expectations from the outset of the advocacy work</p> <p>Provide people with clear information during the process to reduce disillusionment</p>	Specify person with responsibility
Threats of violence, or actual violence, towards those who are advocating	<p>Build relationships with those in power who could help you in difficult situations</p> <p>Work in networks and alliances to give strength in numbers</p> <p>Work with allies outside the context who are not under the same threat</p> <p>Treat your opponents with respect so as not to cause them to be violent</p>	Specify person with responsibility
Political change and instability, which could damage the impact and effectiveness of the advocacy	<p>Be collaborative and avoid confrontation</p> <p>Undertake contingency planning</p> <p>Ensure advocacy actions are accountable and transferable across different political scenarios</p> <p>Empower affected communities to advocate</p>	Specify person with responsibility
A failure by Christians to engage with advocacy as an approach to the problem identified	<p>Encourage engagement with materials outlining the biblical basis for advocacy</p> <p>Work with established Christian leaders as much as possible</p> <p>Demonstrate by example that advocacy works</p> <p>Share examples of what other Christian organisations have done in advocacy</p>	Specify person with responsibility

## SECTION F2 Training exercises



### EXERCISE 41 Identifying and reducing risks in advocacy

**Aim** To understand how to identify advocacy risks and how to plan ways to reduce them

**TYPE** Group exercise

**TIPS** The first stage is light-hearted, only works in a group and could be used as an energiser. The second stage is more serious, works best in small groups but could be used by individuals for personal reflection.

**METHODS** Small group work, brainstorming, reflection, plenary feedback and discussion

**MATERIAL** Large pieces of paper (such as flipchart paper), pens

**HANDOUTS** **TOOL 35: Advocacy risk analysis**  
**TOOL 36: Advocacy risks mitigation chart**

- STEPS (STAGE 1)**
1. Get everyone to stand in a circle with their right hands out to the side, palm flat and facing up, and their left hands out to the side, fist clenched and thumbs sticking up.
  2. On the count of three, everyone has to try to grab the thumb of the person on their right, whilst avoiding their thumb being grabbed by the person on their left. They must not move beforehand.
  3. Ask people to share their experiences in plenary, and use this to link into the importance of identifying and reducing risks in advocacy.

- STEPS (STAGE 2)**
1. Divide everyone into small groups of three or four and give each group an advocacy case study, preferably one that they have already considered.
  2. Using **TOOL 35: Advocacy risk analysis**, ask each group to brainstorm the main threats that might apply to their advocacy case study, and ask them to estimate the risks involved.
  3. Give each group a piece of flipchart paper and pens.
  4. Ask each group to draw a table on their paper, divided into three columns.
  5. Label each column at the top: the first should say, 'Potential risks'; the second, 'Ways of reducing risk'; and the third column, 'Owner'. Use **TOOL 36: Advocacy risks mitigation chart** to help.
  6. Each group needs to transfer the risks they have identified into the first column. They then need to discuss and agree together the approaches that they think should be applied to reduce each risk. They also need to allocate an owner to take responsibility for each approach suggested. Use **TOOL 36: Advocacy risks mitigation chart** as a sample to help.
  7. Ask each group to feed back in plenary and facilitate a discussion to draw out the key learning points.



## EXERCISE 42 Overcoming common concerns with advocacy work

**Aim** To explore ways to overcome the most common concerns with advocacy work

**TYPE** These exercises work well with a large group that can be sub-divided

**METHODS** Work in pairs, small groups, role play, plenary discussion

**MATERIAL** Sticky notes or blank cards

**STEPS (VERSION 1)**

1. In advance, write the most common concerns people have on separate blank cards.
2. Split the group into pairs.

3. Give each pair one or two cards.

4. Invite them to discuss how these concerns could be addressed and overcome.

5. Encourage feedback to the plenary for discussion.

**STEPS (VERSION 2)**

1. In advance, write the most common concerns people have on separate blank cards.
2. Divide participants into small groups.

3. Give each group an advocacy case study, preferably one that they are familiar with. Also, give each group one or two sticky notes or blank cards.

4. Invite participants to prepare a short drama based on the case studies, illustrating how the concerns on the sticky notes or cards might be overcome.

5. Encourage comments from the observers in plenary and draw out key learning points in discussion.



## EXERCISE 43 Addressing challenges facing Christians in advocacy

**Aim** To understand and address the challenges facing Christians in advocacy work. This exercise emphasises the importance of church involvement in advocacy work in the specific contexts and experiences of participants and shows how it is part of integral mission.

**TYPE** Group exercise

**METHODS** Small groups, presentations, case studies, plenary discussion

**STEPS**

1. Invite two or three participants to share their experiences of church involvement, or lack of involvement, in advocacy work.

2. Discuss some of the challenges that the churches faced, what they did well and what they might have done differently if similar challenges arose again.

3. Split participants into small groups and ask them to answer the following questions and then to present their answers to the plenary:

- What might be appropriate issues for the church to advocate about?

- What internal issues might the church need to address in order to become involved in advocacy work?

- What are the likely consequences if the church does not engage in advocacy work?

4. If appropriate, have a time of prayer, during which participants can ask God for wisdom in their work in their own churches, communities and organisations.