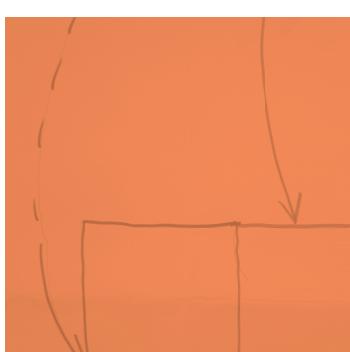


# MAKING RESEARCH EVIDENCE MATTER

A Guide to Policy Advocacy in Transition Countries



OPEN SOCIETY  
FOUNDATIONS

Eóin Young & Lisa Quinn



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## A Guide to Policy Advocacy in Transition Countries

Eóin Young & Lisa Quinn

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As politicians know only too well but social scientists often forget, public policy is made of language.

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*Giandomenico Majone (1989)*

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It is not enough to show how clever you are by showing how obscure everything is.

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*J.L. Austin cited in Phillips (1993)*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have accompanied us in developing this guide and we'd like to thank them for the combination of inspiration, probing, steering, and patiently waiting.

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## **FOREWORD**

Back in the 1980s there was a popular television commercial featuring the slogan “Honda —the car that sells itself.” A dejected salesman loitered about the showroom coming to grips with the fact that his job had been rendered defunct by the ingenuity of the automobiles he was supposed to be selling. The cars were in such demand that people simply came in and bought them, obviating the need for a vendor. Made in jest, of course, the ad could easily be a parody of the world of policy research and advocacy. Our experience shows that it’s not uncommon for policy researchers and activists to employ a “Honda approach” to their work, that is, investing copious amounts of time in policy research and recommendations, only to assume that the ideas will sell themselves to their intended target audiences. Alas, unlike the outcome of the Honda sales experience, as we witness time and time again, policy products constructed without a thoughtful and effective advocacy strategy are normally condemned to a lonely shelf life, if not the dustbin.

*Making Research Evidence Matter: A Guide to Policy Advocacy in Transition Countries* is an instructive guide to bridging policy research with policy change. Its authors are practitioners and trainers who have gained extensive experience in transition countries promoting policy reform over the last decade. They’ve trained thousands of budding and established researchers and advocates on the formulation of evidence-based policy papers and policy advocacy.

This advocacy manual has been long in the making. In 2002, Young and Quinn published *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers: A Guide to Policy Advisers in Central and Eastern Europe*, which has now been reprinted multiple times and translated into 13 languages. That guide supports researchers in transposing their data and findings into compelling policy narratives. With this complementary guide on policy advocacy, researchers and advocates should now be better equipped to mobilize their findings to affect change in policy.

This guide was developed under the auspices of the Open Society Foundations, an organization that has long championed independent thought, critical analysis, and evidenced-based policymaking. Scores of our programs, including our annual policy fellowships, sponsorship of think tanks, and Roma empowerment initiatives have benefited from the materials and trainings developed by Young and Quinn. The thousands of participants at these trainings have come armed with rich experiences, stories of success and failure, and colorful lessons learned in the field. This reservoir of insights has been infused into the narrative of this advocacy manual.

We hope that think tanks, civil society organizations, and independent researchers seeking to get more mileage for their findings will benefit from this manual. We also trust that those who commission evidence-based research such as donors and government entities will make more informed choices on how best to do so because of this guide.

Sincerely,  
Scott Abrams  
Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative  
Open Society Foundations  
Budapest, November 2011



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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

This advocacy guide has been shaped by a decade of experience supporting a broad range of governmental and civil society actors through all stages of policy research and advocacy projects in producing research, evidence, and analysis that informs local and international policymaking processes.<sup>1</sup> Since the publication *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers* in 2002,<sup>2</sup> we have seen a steadily growing demand in transition countries<sup>3</sup> from donors, international organizations, think tanks, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government agencies to develop their capacity to produce and consume evidence-based analysis of policy issues in order to influence decision making. Developing the capacity of individuals and institutions to effectively produce such expert insights needs time, resources, and considerable effort and is still an ongoing project in the transition region. Unfortunately, the focus has to date largely centered on the formulation of policy research and analysis, and considerably less on the communication of such policy insights. As a result, many smart ideas and solutions remain the preserve of expert communities and the academy exactly in those countries where practical insights are desperately needed. This also means that such rational, evidence-based thinking has not become a regular feature of the culture of local policy debates and largely remains the preserve of the international arena.

Our capacity development work focuses on bridging this key communication gap and this guide is the next step: the last manual detailed how to produce effective research-based policy studies, this sister publication turns to their practical use, that is, how to take the key insights learned through research and analysis and feed them into the policymaking process to inform or influence decision making. Put another way, the focus of this manual is on effective policy advocacy that is firmly grounded in evidence and expert analysis.

## 1.1 WHAT NEED ARE WE ADDRESSING IN THIS GUIDE?

From the very beginning of the postcommunist transition, the need to develop a more evidence-based and inclusive decision-making process has been high on the agenda of all actors committed to the establishment of democratic systems of governance. Yet the evidence, more than two decades into this democratization process, is clear: there continues to be both a lack of evidence or research knowledge generated and little appreciation of the importance of evidence in the decision-making process.<sup>4</sup> The relatively low level of domestically produced policy research, the persistence of highly value-driven political debates, and the ongoing struggle to reform public administration systems around a strategic and inclusive policymaking process is further evidence of this unfinished business. While some claim the “transition” is over or fossilized, we still believe that striking the right balance of evidence-based and value-driven debate within any democratic system is a cornerstone to the establishment of a healthy competition of ideas through the decision-making process.<sup>5</sup>

Although the transition countries vary significantly in their level of development and sophistication and the reasons for the low level of demand for research vary accordingly, there are some commonalities: the development of government cultures (rather than just mechanisms) that appreciate the need to devote substantial energy on developing strategic solutions to societal problems is still ongoing. Much of the business of government and public administration is focused on the detail of administering government programs and any larger policy questions tend to fall to the wayside. Therefore, the demand for or use of expertise and policy research remains stubbornly low.<sup>6</sup>

However, when we discuss weak institutions in the region, this also includes the generally low capacity of the NGO sector or the supply side of the policy research equation. Although the capacity gaps on both sides are substantial, it's widely recognized in the literature that there is an urgent need to improve the communication or advocacy of research, in order to make it more accessible, convincing, and usable for policymakers and broader stakeholder groups.<sup>7</sup> We also see that policy practitioners from the NGO and governmental side need a deeper understanding of the challenge of policy advocacy and a shift away from the following three approaches, which are too commonly used yet overwhelmingly fail to yield results:

- The **traditional/academic approach** employs the tools of academic dissemination that are familiar to most researchers. This short one-way engagement usually entails presenting at a conference, publishing the paper in a journal, and/or meeting with a person in the relevant ministry, and rarely brings results.
- The **ad-hoc approach** entails minimal dissemination accompanied by an unplanned and relatively random set of advocacy activities and is driven more by response to the research from any commentator rather than being proactive. No clearly defined advocacy objective or target audience are identified at the beginning, and without this direction or target, it rarely goes very far.
- The **gap fill approach** involves identifying what is needed to reach a certain standard or solve a policy problem and immediately making your advocacy objective the filling of the gap. Then the planning of activities begins. No attempt is made to consider what is actually feasible under the current conditions e.g. a more modest change in the right direction may be possible, rather this approach only sees 100% as success. The common response from decision makers to such an advocacy effort is that it is too idealistic and/or impractical. This approach often leads to frustration and strong cynicism about the policymaking process among those leading the campaign.

This guide tackles these challenges and puts forward a practical approach to planning advocacy campaigns in which the realities of the target policy context are at the heart of the approach.

## **1.2 HOW HAVE WE APPROACHED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS GUIDE?**

Feeding into the recent growing interest in developing advocacy capacity<sup>8</sup>, this guide provides a basis to understand the experience and challenges of successful research-based advocacy in transition contexts, best practice in planning and conducting such advocacy campaigns, and an accessible advocacy planning tool to allow practitioners to apply these insights to their own policy advocacy efforts. Three core principles underpin the development of the manual:

- Context determines the choice of an effective advocacy strategy, and hence there are few universally applicable prescriptions.
- Effective policy advocacy is a two-way process of mediation and negotiation which is messy and normally takes time, persistence, and commitment.
- Policy influence is broad and encompasses capacity building, changing the nature of policy debates and thinking, as well as direct policy impacts.<sup>9</sup>

These principles and the insights developed in the manual are firmly grounded in the learning from four main sources:

- The insights developed from two groundbreaking projects<sup>10</sup> designed to understand effective approaches to bringing research into policymaking in developing and transition contexts. The first is the Global Development Network's Bridging Research and Policy project,<sup>11</sup> built on by the Overseas Development Institute's Research and Policy in Development program.<sup>12</sup> The second is the International Development Research Centre's The Influence of Research on Public Policy project.<sup>13</sup> The 78 case studies developed through these two projects were a valuable resource for this guide.
- Broader literature in the field of bridging policy and research<sup>14</sup> and the field of knowledge utilization.<sup>15</sup>
- Four in-depth case studies where policy research influenced government decision making in transition countries analyzed for this manual.<sup>16</sup>
- Our experience working in policy capacity development in transition contexts over a decade, coupled with our communication-focused analysis of policy advocacy engagement framed in sociolinguistics perspectives.<sup>17</sup>

Through the cases, we seek to give readers a feel for the real world experience, challenges, and effort it normally takes to achieve policy influence. Such an in-depth experiential account of the practice of policy advocacy in transition contexts is sorely lacking in many other guides. The insights and lessons generated from the four cases are based on in-depth interviews conducted with advocates and analysis of relevant documents. In addition, we seek to go beyond manuals that give advice, guidance, and tools, but fail to connect them to the real world, leaving the reader unsure how to apply the advice given. As such, we strive to take each point and develop it using the following approach:

- Introduce the concept or piece of advice.
- Explain it in simple terms.
- Illustrate it in real world cases and draw out lessons.
- Provide questions to prompt practitioners to consider the point in their own advocacy plan (in planning checklists).

The in-depth case studies are by no means exhaustive, but cover a variety of contexts and actors from transition countries: from an international think tank campaign focused on Kosovo (under UN Security Council Resolution 1244),<sup>18</sup> to a local think tank campaign in Macedonia, from an internationally sponsored individual researcher who is also a civil servant in Kazakhstan, to a national office of an international NGO in Mongolia. By examining a number of different sources and why these initiatives worked in contexts that have very different levels of democratic development, we aim to paint a picture of the challenge that is applicable to anyone who might attempt to conduct such advocacy throughout the region.

Nevertheless, we do not see this manual as the definitive guide to policy advocacy; we rather have sought to directly address the recurring issues and capacity gaps for those people who are trying to step into the world of policy research and advocacy or establish themselves once they have done so.

A number of important assumptions frame the work we present here:

- **Research improves decision making**—Although this may not always be the case in a region where many decisions are made without even the most basic data or program evaluation, we are assuming some expert input is better than none.
- **We are focused on policy research, not academic research**—The research we refer to has all been commissioned and produced with the intent to influence decision making; it is not research that is produced in an academic setting and may end up influencing a decision.
- **More liberal democracy is better**—Complex social problems need evidence, inclusion, and strong political representation to be properly addressed.
- **Ours is a “can-do” attitude**—We often work with people who are firmly focused on many complex and often valid reasons for inaction. Although we recognize that certain political regimes present serious obstacles to effective engagement and participation, we subscribe to the view that it is still worth “looking for the cracks,” that is, finding an individual, institution, or community which is interested in making positive change and starting there (within reason, assuming that the strategic risk is not too great for those involved).

## 1.3 WHAT IS COVERED IN THE GUIDE?

Building on the experiential insights of the cases, the guide is centered on a practical tool called the Advocacy Planning Framework or APF developed to support practitioners in planning advocacy campaigns. Founded on an important outcome of the Global Development Network and Overseas Development Institute project,<sup>19</sup> and operating on the principle that context is key, the APF provides you the means to gain in-depth insight into the people and process you are targeting and, in parallel, develop a nuanced and targeted advocacy strategy that has the best chance to engage both the target audiences and process, therefore achieving influence. The need to target your advocacy strategy to fit the specifics

of the decision-making process is central to APF and mapping and planning for that target context are at its heart. Indeed, the APF planning process is one where key decisions and insights in your advocacy strategy deepen and sharpen through the iterations of each element of the tool.

More specifically, the following is an overview of the manual:

- **Chapter 2—The Policy Advocacy Challenge**—The manual opens by defining policy advocacy, explaining the common role of research in the policymaking process and elaborating on the challenges for advocates, and closes by arriving at a point to illustrate the centrality of the two-way approach to effective advocacy.
- **Chapter 3—Overview of the Advocacy Planning Framework**—This chapter provides an overview of the APF tool and the core strategic focus at the heart of planning your advocacy campaign. This is when you will weigh up the obstacles with an assessment of the leverage you have in order to define a feasible advocacy objective in the target policy context. We also provide a short introduction to the four case studies drawn on throughout the manual.
- **Chapter 4—The Way into the Process**—This chapter introduces and provides a detailed explanation of the most important mapping element of the APF. By going through the six elements that make up this pillar of the tool, you should arrive at a point where you have an in-depth picture of the players and playing field and an idea of how you will literally find your way into that process with your advocacy campaign.
- **Chapter 5—Your Messenger**—This chapter provides insight into the choices you need to make about who will be the spokesperson or face(s) of your campaign as well as the support you will need from others. Without support and a credible messenger, advocacy efforts can easily fail at the first hurdle.
- **Chapter 6—Your Message and Activities**—The chapter details the numerous interrelated elements that need to be considered in planning to develop the advocacy messages, activities, and communication tools for your campaign. The focus throughout this planning stage is engaging and moving your chosen audiences to policy action. We also introduce an advocacy communication model to guide this engagement of target audiences from understanding to ownership to action.
- **Chapter 7—Using the APF Tool**—This chapter introduces the complete APF tool in a format ready for photocopying. The final section of the manual provides practical advice on how to organize an advocacy team to effectively use the APF tool.

## 1.4 WHAT IS NOT COVERED IN THE GUIDE?

Simply put, by using this manual, you can build insight into how to develop a policy advocacy strategy and its supporting communication activities and tools to achieve a feasible objective. The manual is focused on the strategic planning level of an advocacy campaign. Usually, this part of the process is not given nearly enough time or focus by advocates and capacity developers, an oversight that is at the core of why many advocacy campaigns fail.

This guide does not cover the many areas that fall outside the focus of strategic planning. First, the skills or knowledge necessary to develop the policy insights that are the foundation of a campaign are beyond the scope of this manual, that is, policy research design, data collection and analysis, and policy writing

in all its forms. Although you choose what communication tools you will need, we don't provide an in-depth focus on the specifics of policy studies, briefs, or policy presentations.

Second, there is little focus on how to plan the implementation of the strategy—that is, who should do what and when—or on budgets and evaluation. We believe that the target audiences for this guide are already adept in this kind of project implementation or action planning and that other manuals adequately cover such project management skills.

Finally, although we make reference to them, we do not focus on the range of skills that are often needed in the advocacy process, for example, presentation, negotiation, coalition building, leadership, and team management. Again, we consider that these skills have been widely covered in many other resources, courses, and training programs.

## 1.5 WHO IS THE TARGET AUDIENCE FOR THIS GUIDE?

This guide primarily targets those who advocate for the adoption of evidence-based proposals generated through a policy research and analysis process. This most obvious target audience are policy research producers and advocates from think tanks/research institutes, NGOs, associations or interest groups, donor organizations, academics, or members of policy teams and advisors in government. Maybe less obvious but an equally important target audience are the users or consumers of policy research, that is, those who commission such research (for example, international organizations or governments) or those who use the results of policy research to support their advocacy positions (for example, NGOs). Indeed, we have recently worked with many NGOs that had previously engaged in mainly value-based advocacy, but are shifting strategy to strengthen their positions with more evidence and policy insights. The manual also targets those who want to learn how to either produce or use policy research, from students to practitioners.

Therefore, we place great emphasis on targeting those from both sides of the supply and demand side of the research axis (which commonly converts into the government and NGO sectors). The idea is to contribute to the further development of intelligent customers and providers of research, and thereby to advance the culture of evidence-based decision making in the transition contexts.<sup>20</sup>

Geographically, we primarily address those involved in producing, commissioning, and using policy research in transition countries of Central and South Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (or former Soviet Union), and Mongolia. Nevertheless, we also hope the advice here may be of relevance to those in developing countries as source literature; many cases and our experience of working in West Africa reveal overlapping challenges in these contexts.

A key aspect of our work is striving to make core knowledge accessible to a wide range of policy actors with varying capacity, from novice to seasoned advocate. So, you don't have to have a background in public policy or political science to be able to access and grasp the concepts and insights in this guide. We aim to bring central policy and advocacy concepts to a broad range of policy actors in a way that removes the obstacles of jargon and disciplines complexity. Our approach in preparing the manual is to “make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler.”<sup>21</sup> A caveat, however: the content should not be misinterpreted as something only for novices—we are just making it more accessible!

## 1.6 HOW CAN THE GUIDE BE USED?

The content of the manual can be used in a number of ways and for a range of purposes:

- **To support advocacy planning**—The APF tool at the heart of this guide is designed to inform and guide the planning process when advocating for proposals developed from a piece of policy research. Chapter 7 includes the whole APF to photocopy for your own use.
- **To support policy training and academic courses**—Our previous guide has become a staple for trainers and lecturers and this one also supports learning in different ways. Indeed, we use it in our own policy advocacy module on developing effective strategies and communication tools for policy advocacy.<sup>22</sup>
- **To support autonomous learning**—You can use the guide as a purely autonomous learning tool to build understanding of the key principles of advocacy and its challenges in a policy environment.
- **To use in combination with our policy writing manual**—The two manuals are designed to complement and build on each other, i.e., the first to guide writing a policy study and this manual to plan how to advocate for the insights of the research in a target policy network.

To allow ease of access for all these purposes, we have highlighted key issues and insights in the text and provided visuals to orient and steer you quickly to seeing and extracting the main points:

- **Key word boxes** on the outer margins of the pages,
- **Planning checklists** in shaded boxes to help you apply the ideas to your own work. The APF tool in Chapter 7 summarizes the essence of the many planning checklists you will find throughout the manual.
- **Case study insights** are in shaded boxes to help distinguish the insights from the main body of the text.

We hope this guidebook encourages you to become involved in policy advocacy or deepen your existing engagement by providing a useful resource to support you in the process of planning your evidence-based advocacy campaigns and achieving the influence quality research and proposals deserve.

## THE ADVOCACY PLANNING FRAMEWORK —AN OVERVIEW

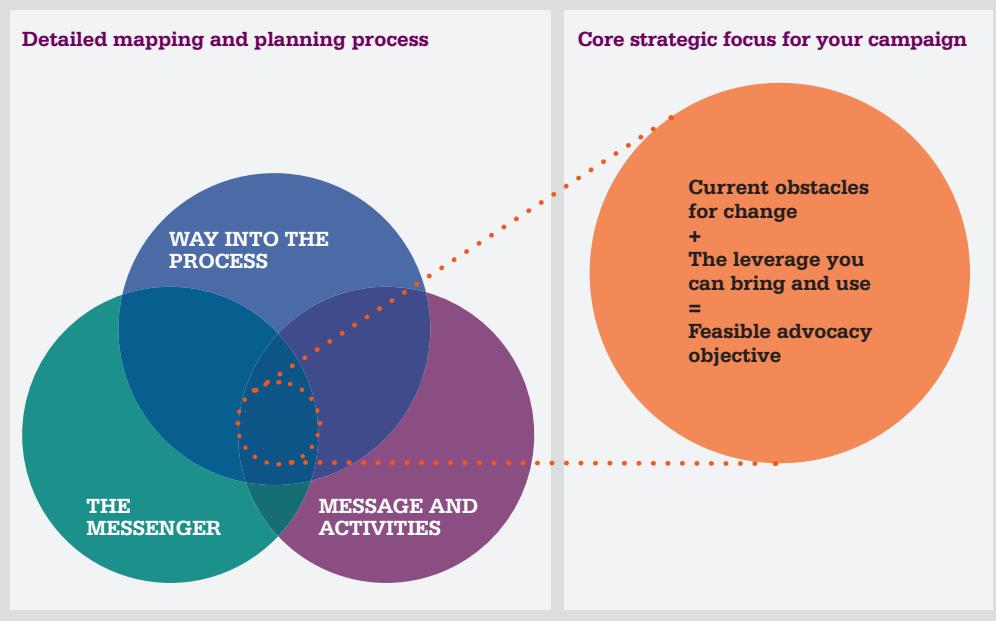
### **Principles that Form the Basis of Effective Policy Advocacy** (Chapter 2)

The following five principles have consistently emerged from the literature and real world advocacy case studies as underpinning effective policy advocacy:

- It is a two-way process of negotiation and mediation towards the transfer of ownership of the findings and proposals developed in the research to key target audiences.
- It is messy and normally takes time, commitment, and persistence.
- The most likely outcome is policy influence, rather than direct impact.
- It involves the “softening up” of specialist expert audiences and also more interest-based coalition-building and bargaining with more political audiences.
- Context is key, as processes are always specific, evolving, and unpredictable.

### **The Advocacy Planning Framework (APF) (Chapter 3)**

The APF is a practical, multidimensional mapping and planning tool for effective advocacy that is built around three main pillars or circles and a strategic core, the overlap in the center. This core overlap represents the target outcome of the planning process: a strategy for realistic policy change.



## Detailed Mapping and Planning Process (Chapter 4, 5, 6)

The three overlapping circles of the APF provide a foundation and direction for an in-depth mapping and planning process by presenting a set of questions that are key to planning any advocacy campaign:

- **The way into the process**—what is the best approach to get your ideas into the target policy debate and who will be your target audience(s)?
- **The messenger**—who should lead or be the face of the campaign and what kind of support do you need from others?
- **Message and activities**—what can you say to the key target audiences that will engage and convince them and how can you best communicate that message to them through carefully chosen advocacy activities and communication tools?

## Core Strategic Focus of Your Campaign (Chapter 3)

By working with the APF to develop answers to the questions in each circle, you will plan a nuanced approach to mediate between what you want to achieve and what is possible in the policymaking process. This should generate the best possible chance to achieve policy influence, that is, locate the core overlapping part of the circles or the core strategic focus of your campaign. In this process, you are continually looking to develop answers to three questions:

- **Current obstacles to change**—what is currently blocking the policymaking process from moving in the direction you want?
- **The leverage you can bring and use**—what can you bring to and use in the process to move it in the direction you wish?
- **A feasible policy objective**—considering the obstacles that exist and the leverage you have, how far do you think you can move the process?

## Way into the Process (Chapter 4)

The top and most important circle in the APF is called the “way into the process.” Through this circle, advocates map out and consider the target decision-making process, people, and thinking in relation to the advocacy effort they are planning. This sets the scene and points you in the right direction by guiding you in planning how to bring what you have learned from research into a target decision-making process. This circle is broken down into six elements:

- **Demand**—What is the level of interest in the researched policy issue in the target policy process?
- **Actors, networks, and power**—Who are the key decision makers and opinion leaders that you need to influence?

- **Decision-making practice**—How does the decision-making process really work?
- **Timing and openings**—What is the best timing/opportunity to start or continue your advocacy effort?
- **Current thinking**—How do the stakeholders understand the target policy issue and the potential solutions?
- **Current positions**—What are the current positions of key actors in relation to any proposed change in policy?

## The Messenger (Chapter 5)

In advocacy, the messenger is often as important as the message. The legitimacy that comes with the support from others and a lead advocate or organization with a solid reputation are key factors in getting doors to open throughout the advocacy process. The planning in this circle involves a frank assessment of the reputation and capacity in choosing the right messenger(s) and supporters:

- **Reputation**—Do you have the resources, credibility, reputation, visibility, and support to be taken seriously by the key players?
- **Skills**—Do you have the range of communication and interpersonal skills required to successfully take on the multiple roles the messenger plays?
- **The face of the campaign**—Who should be the face of the campaign? You or someone else? Can you identify a suitable policy broker to play a specific role?
- **Other support**—What other support do you need for your campaign to be taken seriously?

## Message and Activities (Chapter 6)

This APF circle focuses on making plans for the communication of what you want to say and how: in other words, your “message” and your set of advocacy activities and communication tools. Informed by your planning in the other APF elements, the following five steps will guide you in making plans for constructing your message, deciding on advocacy activities, and managing the advocacy communication process:

- **Audience profile**—Why do your target audiences hold the current positions that they do? Will it be easy to move them from these positions?
- **Shaping messages**—What message would appeal to and convince your target audiences? How can you make your messages striking, memorable, and portable?
- **Activities and communication tools**—How will you get your message to your target audiences (e.g., papers, video, social media)? What kind of events and meetings do you need to allow you to engage your target audiences enough to convince them?

- **Strategic risk**—Will you upset powerful or influential people with the positions you will advocate for? Is there any risk to your sustainability or even safety in the positions you will put forward?
- **Challenges and responses**—What responses or challenges do you expect from the audiences that you will present to? How will you defend or respond to these challenges?

## The APF Tool—Advocacy Planning in a Team (Chapter 7)

To make it easier for you to use the APF as a tool for real planning, we have brought together the key questions from each element in a single, user-friendly document in Chapter 7, ready for photocopying. For example, below is first element from the “way into the process” circle:

KEY QUESTIONS	EXPLANATIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS
<b>1. GAUGE THE LEVEL OF DEMAND</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is your issue already on the government agenda? If not, is there another group of people talking about it or advocating for it?</li> <li>• Does interest and momentum already exist around the issue or do you have to create it?</li> </ul>	<p>It is generally easier to influence policy if there is already some level of demand for your ideas and proposals. The best case is if the government has chosen to act on the problem you are also focusing on. If not, see if there are other researchers, NGOs, government agencies, or stakeholders discussing it. It is better to feed into an ongoing discussion than to have to create one.</p>
<b>NOTES</b>	

## NOTES

- 1 Up to 2011, our training program was supported by and housed in the Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Foundations and from 2012 will come under the work of The International Centre for Policy Advocacy (ICPA), available online: <http://www.policyadvocacy.org>.
- 2 Young and Quinn 2002.
- 3 Transition countries in this manual refer to Central and South Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (or former Soviet Union), and Mongolia. Transition region or countries is used in the manual as a shorthand reference.
- 4 Carden 2009, McGann and Weaver 2000, Stone and Maxwell 2005, Struyk 2006, UNDP 2003.
- 5 Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993.
- 6 Krawchenko 2006, UNDP 2003.
- 7 Carden 2004, 2009, Court and Young 2003, Grochovski and Ben-Gera 2002, McGann and Weaver 2000, Young and Quinn 2005.
- 8 For example: *Manuals*: Data and Pellini (2011), Open Society Foundations (2010), Roebeling and de Vries (2011), Weyrauch, D'Agostino, and Richards (2011) *Blogs and discussion groups*: 1. <http://www.ebpdn.org>/ 2. <http://goranspolicy.com>/ 3. <http://onthinktanks.org>/
- 9 Lindquist 2001.
- 10 For the backbone of the experiences and insights developed through the projects that are the research foundation of this manual: 'Bridging research and policy,' see Global Development Network (2003); 'Research to Policy,' see International Development Research Centre (2004); The field of knowledge/research utilization, see Davies (2004).
- 11 [http://www.gdnet.org/middle.php?primary\\_link\\_id=3&secondary\\_link\\_id=13](http://www.gdnet.org/middle.php?primary_link_id=3&secondary_link_id=13).
- 12 <http://www.odi.org.uk/work/programmes/rapid/default.asp>.
- 13 [http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-26606-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-26606-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html).
- 14 Carden 2004, 2009, Court and Young 2003, Global Development Network 2003, International Development Research Centre 2005a, Overseas Development Institute 2004, Stone and Maxwell 2005, Stone 2009, Struyk and Haddaway 2011.
- 15 Davies 2004, 2005, Neilson 2003, Nutley, Walter, and Davies 2002, Solesbury 2001.
- 16 See section 3.1 for an introduction to the cases.
- 17 Berkenkotter and Huckin 1993, Lave and Wenger 1991, Russell 1997, Swales 1990.
- 18 Hereafter, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244).
- 19 Court and Young 2003, Overseas Development Institute 2004.
- 20 Davies 2004, Solesbury 2001.
- 21 Einstein cited in Kingdon 1984.
- 22 See <http://www.policyadvocacy.org>.

# 2

## THE POLICY ADVOCACY CHALLENGE

We open the manual with an examination of the nature of policy advocacy and how research and expertise feed into decision making in the policymaking process. The main focus of this chapter is on unpacking and building a broad understanding of key concepts, terms and principles towards providing the conceptual foundation on which to present the Advocacy Planning Framework (APF). This chapter draws heavily on the current literature that seeks to investigate and describe the interface between research expertise and policymaking as well as our experience in policy advocacy. Ultimately, we hope that readers get a realistic picture of the challenges of influencing such processes, as the chapter title denotes; however, we also focus on balancing these challenges with identifying opportunities presented by the transitional nature of the target policy contexts and the need to capitalize on them in order to achieve policy influence.

More specifically, this chapter

- defines core advocacy terms,
- looks at the policymaking process and actors involved from an advocacy perspective,
- details the ways in which research knowledge feeds into the policymaking process,
- defines the broad notion of policy influence as the target outcome from the policy advocacy process, and
- ultimately builds the conceptual framework in which the APF can be understood.

## 2.1 DEFINING POLICY ADVOCACY

The most basic meaning of advocacy is to represent, promote, or defend some person(s), interest, or opinion. Such a broad idea encompasses many types of activities such as rights' representation<sup>1</sup> and social marketing<sup>2</sup>, but the focus of this manual is on the approaches adopted by organizations and coalitions in trying to change or preserve specific government programs, that is, approaches focused on influencing decisions of public policy. In order to distinguish this from other types of advocacy activities, it is often referred to as "policy advocacy." This is also the term we use throughout the guide to make this distinction clear.

There are many definitions of policy advocacy available from multiple authors and perspectives.<sup>3</sup> At their core are a number of ideas that continually come up, characterizing policy advocacy as follows:

- **a strategy to affect policy change or action**—an advocacy effort or campaign is a structured and sequenced plan of action with the purpose to start, direct, or prevent a specific policy change.
- **a primary audience of decision makers**—the ultimate target of any advocacy effort is to influence those who hold decision-making power. In some cases, advocates can speak directly to these people in their advocacy efforts; in other cases, they need to put pressure on these people by addressing secondary audiences (for example, their advisors, the media, the public).
- **a deliberate process of persuasive communication**—in all activities and communication tools, advocates are trying to get the target audiences to understand, be convinced, and take ownership of the ideas presented. Ultimately, they should feel the urgency to take action based on the arguments presented.
- **a process that normally requires the building of momentum and support behind the proposed policy idea or recommendation.** Trying to make a change in public policy is usually a relatively slow process as changing attitudes and positions requires ongoing engagement, discussion, argument, and negotiation.
- **conducted by groups of organized citizens**—normally advocacy efforts are carried out by organizations, associations, or coalitions that represent the interests or positions of certain populations, but an individual may, of course, spearhead the effort.

However, taking these basic elements outlined above a little further and emphasizing the specific challenge that we develop in this chapter, our definition is as follows:

**Policy advocacy is the process of negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which influential networks, opinion leaders, and, ultimately, decision makers take ownership of your ideas, evidence, and proposals, and subsequently act upon them.**

In our definition, we place a great emphasis on the idea of the transfer of ownership of core ideas and thinking. In essence, this implies preparing decision makers and opinion leaders for the next policy window or even pushing them to open one in order to take action. If advocates do their job well, decision makers will take the ideas that have been put forward and make changes to the current policy approach in line with that thinking.

Putting the definition another way may be even more striking: your policy advocacy campaign has been successful when politicians present your ideas, analysis, and proposals as their own and do not mention you! For those who come from an academic background, this is often a bitter pill to swallow, but the good news is that it will be no secret where the ideas originated. All those in the policy network close to the decision will know where the idea came from and you will, in fact, be engaged to do further work as your reputation is enhanced. From the practical political position, decision makers have to present policy changes as their own, as they are the ones taking a risk on actually delivering the policy change, have to sell the ideas to build the needed support for their proposal, and ultimately will pay the price if it fails.

Through this focus on mediation, negotiation, and ownership, it could be inferred in our definition that we are only talking about a collaborative working relationship between parties involved in the process and that more confrontational approaches such as whistle-blowing, watchdogging, or strategic litigation would not be covered under such a definition. However, it is our contention that such advocacy approaches are what negotiators call a “high opening position,” and when following such a strong opening of an advocacy process, there is still a long way to go before actual policy change will be delivered to ensure that such victories or exposure of policy failures are not just given lip service by governments. Delivering on such victories still takes a process of building broad ownership of a new system that, for example, does not infringe on the rights of a certain population.

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**Building ownership is at the core of policy advocacy.**

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**You have achieved success when decision makers present your ideas as their own.**

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## 2.2 DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO POLICY ADVOCACY

Many people tend to immediately associate the term advocacy with media campaigning, high profile legal challenges, or the street-based activism of petitions, posters, and demonstrations. This is because these are the most visible actions of actors attempting to make or force policy change. However, this represents only one piece of the puzzle, and in order to further situate the process of policy advocacy and develop and define concepts that are commonly associated with the process, in this section we look at the typical roles different types of organizations (both visible and less so) tend to play in conducting their advocacy.

**Policy advocacy includes other approaches less visible than media campaigning and public activism.**

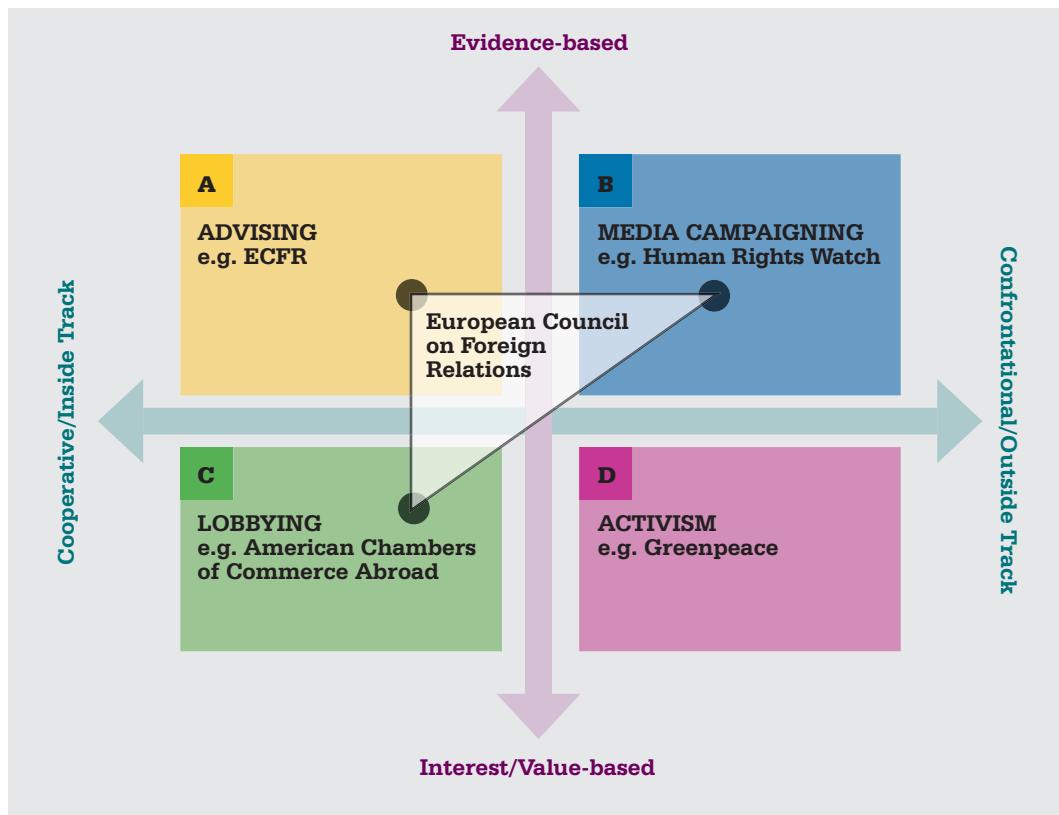
The Overseas Development Institute produced a very useful way of illustrating these differences by mapping the typical advocacy activities of different NGO actors on a graph covering two dimensions of the advocacy process:<sup>4</sup>

1. Whether an organization takes a cooperative to confrontational approach to their advocacy, that is, whether they are “whispering to or shouting at government.”<sup>5</sup>
2. Whether their advocacy messages are more evidence-based or more interest/value-based.

Our adaptation of the diagram is included below as Figure 1.

## FIGURE 1.

The advocacy roles of different types of NGOs



Taking the figure one quadrant at a time:

- a. **Advising**—think tanks (for example, the European Council on Foreign Relations) or researchers are commissioned by a client to investigate a certain policy question or problem. This usually entails working with those in authority and producing new empirical research to assist them in making a policy decision. Even when commissioned, there is still an advocacy process of selling the ideas developed through the research to the client, although the hurdles are obviously lower than working from the outside.
- b. **Media campaigning**—many advocacy organizations decide to include a public dimension to their campaign as they feel some type of public or external pressure on decision makers is required to achieve results. This type of approach is commonly used by watchdog organizations that monitor government action, for example, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, or Transparency International.
- c. **Lobbying**—face-to-face meetings with decision makers or influential people are a commonly used approach for many organizations that are defending the interests of a certain group of people, such as business (for example, the American Chambers of Commerce Abroad, professional or community associations, or unions. These types of organizations tend to have ready access to powerful people and focus their efforts on being present and visible during government and public discussions concerning their interests.
- d. **Activism**—petitions, public demonstrations, posters, and leaflet dissemination are common approaches used by organizations that promote a certain value set, such as, for example, environmentalism in the case of Greenpeace, or have a defined constituency and represent or provide a service to a group of people who are not adequately included within government social service provision like the victims of domestic violence or refugees. The main work of the latter groups centers on providing a service to their constituency, but they also have a policy advocacy function.

However, in conducting an actual advocacy campaign, most organizations do not in fact fit neatly into one quadrant on the figure. To illustrate this, we have plotted the common advocacy roles of a think tank we are familiar with: the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). ECFR, as an international think tank, focuses on achieving impact on European foreign policy through direct advocacy efforts in collaboration with its many partners. The type of advocacy approach used by ECFR is mostly inside-track evidence-based supported by publication, discussion, conferences, and lobbying, but the value dimension is also there with what they call “European values” dominating their advocacy messages. ECFR has no problem giving advice to European institutions, governments, and partners willing to listen; nevertheless, ECFR often goes to the public to pressure governments and so media campaigning is a valid option. However, ECFR advocacy efforts do not include street protests or petitioning.<sup>6</sup>

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**An organization usually uses multiple approaches to policy advocacy.**

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**Organizations  
should adopt  
advocacy  
approaches  
that fit their  
capacities.**

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The key lesson to be drawn for advocacy actors from such a mapping exercise is that while it is evident that organizations use multiple approaches to their advocacy efforts, they are centered around the strengths and capacities of the organization itself; for example, think tanks tend to focus on the production of quality research and working on the inside track as they don't normally have the resources or constituency to do big public media campaigns.<sup>7</sup> In addition, going outside a normal advocacy role can also present a strategic risk in some cases, that is, think tanks that publicly criticize partners are unlikely to receive research commissions from them in the near future. Most organizations with an advocacy focus would like to survive beyond a single campaign, and hence—considering the potential effects of a particular advocacy effort in terms of benefits or losses of funding—support, access, and reputation is crucial.<sup>8</sup> Such considerations are often one reason to build coalitions where different types of organizations, such as watchdogs and activist groups, will combine capacities and share the risks of a policy advocacy push. Such longer-term thinking about your role as an advocate is crucial and we will return to this in Chapter 6.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Think of your organization in relation to Figure 1:**

- What type of organization do you work for?**
- What are your strengths as an advocacy organization?**
- What approaches do you normally take to advocacy?**
- How effective has this approach been to date?**
- How could you adjust these approaches to maximize your influence?**

## 2.3 RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS

We opened this chapter with a broad definition of the concept of policy advocacy encompassing many actors and approaches. However, the focus of the guide is specifically centered on advocacy to improve evidence-based decision making, and more specifically research-based evidence. Therefore, in this section we take a deeper look at the process of how research evidence feeds into the decision-making process. The intention is to give an overview of this admittedly messy process and then to consider the nature of advocating a research-based position to achieve a particular result. This provides the foundation for the next chapter where we examine four in-depth cases of research-based policy advocacy and extract key approaches and lessons learned.

### 2.3.1 What Is Evidence-based Decision Making?

While the term is widely used and accepted, we consider it useful to ground our discussion with the following comprehensive definition:

Evidence-based decision making “helps people make well informed decisions about policies, programs, and projects by putting the best available evidence from research at the heart of policy development and implementation. This approach stands in contrast to opinion-based policy, which relies heavily on either the selective use of evidence (for example, on single studies irrespective of quality) or on the untested views of individuals or groups, often inspired by ideological standpoints, prejudices, or speculative conjecture.”<sup>9</sup>

Policy research that feeds into evidence-based decision making usually provides an in-depth expert analysis of an emergent policy problem based on empirical data collected in the target context. Such research can have a wide variety of methodological foci and may include, for example, a broad-scale legal analysis, a pilot study evaluation, or in-depth multidisciplinary case studies. Further, an analysis of the potential solutions available to address the problem is also provided. While there is a strong commitment to academic integrity and evidence, policy research is by no means neutral in its analysis, but rather is shaped by the political context in which it is produced and used to propagate the values of those who produce and commission it.<sup>10</sup>

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**Evidence-based decision making is driven by empirical analysis of policy problems.**

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The types of evidence commonly generated through the process of policy research are multiple and varied, but often include some of the following:

- Impact evidence (reviewing effectiveness).
- Implementation evidence (determining effectiveness of implementation and delivery).
- Descriptive analytical evidence (measuring nature, size, and dynamics of problems, populations, and so on).
- Public attitudes and understanding (via methods such as opinion polls or focus groups).
- Statistical modeling (linear and logarithmic regression methods to make sound predictions).
- Economic evidence (cost-benefit/cost effectiveness of policies).
- Ethical evidence (social justice, redistribution, winners and losers).<sup>11</sup>

Evidence-based decisions bring a focus on solutions rather than just politics and this rebalancing of priorities has been at the heart of governance reform efforts throughout the transition countries for the last 20 years, with varying levels of success in its adoption and implementation.

### 2.3.2 Who Produces and Commissions Policy Research?

Policy research is usually commissioned by a client who is involved or interested in influencing the debate around an upcoming policy decision. The “classic” client is a decision maker who commissions a researcher or research group to conduct a study and find solutions to a policy problem that needs to be addressed. Most think tanks aspire to engage in this classic client-advisor relationship. The following table lists the typical examples of the players commonly involved in such a client-researcher relationship and also shows the types of researchers that different clients can commission.

**TABLE 1.**  
Range of typical clients and policy researchers

CLIENTS	RESEARCHERS
<b>Typical government clients</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry, regional government or municipality</li> <li>• Government officers (for example, deputy ministers) and offices with policy responsibilities (for example, State Secretariat)</li> <li>• Parliamentary working groups</li> <li>• Specialized government agencies</li> </ul>	<b>In government</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy advisors, teams, or units in the executive branch</li> <li>• State research institutes</li> </ul>
<b>Typical clients from outside government</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political parties</li> <li>• International organizations/ donors</li> <li>• Individual NGOs and coalitions</li> <li>• Associations (business, professional, and so on.)</li> </ul>	<b>Outside of government</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think tanks</li> <li>• Individual researchers/ academics</li> <li>• Consulting firms</li> <li>• University centers</li> </ul>

In the transition countries, it has been typical of governments to hire prominent local academics to do this type of research. However, recently there is a shift away from the “usual suspects” to commissioning the types of actors more commonly involved in the production of policy research/analysis.<sup>12</sup> This is a slow process and some actors have been a lot more active in the production and commissioning of policy research, most notably, international organizations. More broadly, the continuing lack of such research in most countries and

governments in the region underscores how little they value the role of policy research in effective decision making. Building further demand for policy research is a major challenge in the establishment of a culture of evidence-based decision making.<sup>13</sup>

Clients commission researchers/analysts to help them develop a position to either lead or influence an upcoming or ongoing policymaking process. This implies far more than simply coming up with an answer to the target policy challenge and usually includes explanations, evidence, rationale, and arguments to support all aspects of a policy position. This is summed up simply: “among the knowledge that they need is not just ‘know how’ (practical experience of what works) but also ‘know what’ (the state of the world), ‘know why’ (causes and explanations), and ‘know who’ (contacts and networks).”<sup>14</sup>

To flesh this out a little more, the client usually wants you to develop extensive answers to these questions in the commonly accepted formats such as a policy study, policy brief(s), or oral presentations. The core elements of any policy argument are centered on a movement from problem to solution to application. Taking this framework, the following table illustrates the key questions that need to be answered in each element.

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Demand for policy research in transition countries is still low.

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Clients need to know more than just the solution—they also need to know the how, why, who, and when.

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**TABLE 2.**  
The elements of a policy argument

ELEMENTS OF A POLICY ARGUMENT	QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED
<b>Problem</b> Providing the rationale for action (core question: why act?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the background to the current problem?</li> <li>• What is causing the current approach to fail?</li> <li>• In what ways is the current policy failing?</li> <li>• What is the impact of this failure?</li> <li>• What is the key evidence to support this interpretation of the problem?</li> </ul>
<b>Solution</b> Providing a choice of and justification for a strategic solution (core questions: what to do? And what not to do?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the strategic options available to solve the current problem?</li> <li>• What is the best option to address the current problem that also fits the contextual challenges?</li> <li>• Why should we choose that option and not choose the others?</li> </ul>
<b>Application</b> Providing a plan to implement the chosen strategy (core question: how to implement?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should be done to implement the chosen strategy?</li> <li>• Who should do it?</li> <li>• When should it be done?</li> </ul>

However, the client normally retains copyright control of the research through the contract signed with the research organization, meaning they can choose whether the research produced will be made public or not. This sometimes means that a client will choose not to publish or publicly use the research if they feel that the response to it from various audiences could pose a strategic risk for them.

### 2.3.3 What Sources Other than Research Influence the Decision Making Process?

Clearly, evidence plays only part of a role in the decision-making process, as it is clear that decision making is informed by many other sources. Research is really “one voice in a noisy room” that must compete directly with easily accessible and influential sources such as newspapers and television.<sup>15</sup>

Although the specific political structures and associated incentives will shape what is influential, a diverse range of sources other than research evidence commonly believed to influence decision-making include the following:

- **Experience and personal views:** The appraisal of a decision maker and his/her close circle of advisors on the basis of their personal views or professional experience will be one of the most influential sources in any decision-making process.
- **A “resources-over-everything” perspective:** The amount of funding available and the capacity of organizations/agencies to deliver will also tend to have a strong bearing on a decision. Maximizing cost-effectiveness or cost-efficiency is the goal in this case to the exclusion of all other analysis.
- **Prevailing political climate:** Governments in power will normally have a clear value-based agenda, for example, neo-liberalism, social democracy, socialism. Policy proposals that clearly fit into advancing the administration’s values will normally have a much better chance of being adopted.
- **Habit and tradition:** Government institutions (parliament, judiciary, ministries) tend to have established practices of doing things in relatively fixed ways. Institutional memory of “how we have always done things around here” will also be influential in any discussions of a policy change.
- **Pressure groups, lobbyists, and opinion leaders:** Strong lobbying by influential individuals or groups can be very influential in terms of how the problem and solutions are discussed and finally, in the actual bargaining for the final decision.
- **Public opinion surveys and focus groups:** Gauging the reactions of the broader public or a specific demographic to policy option choices and even the language and framing of policy issues through surveys or focus groups is common and influential in the final decision for focused politicians.

- **What works:** The urgency of making a decision within a particular parliamentary timetable or budget period using the information available within the allocated budget and institutional framework and which is a suitable compromise for all the players will undoubtedly have a strong influence on the direction chosen.<sup>16</sup>

Even from this relatively short list, it is clear that significant competition exists for the ideas developed through the research or analysis process, and many of the sources commonly seek to challenge the seemingly rational solutions proposed on the basis of the evidence. Further, research evidence is often not prioritized by decision makers because it often tends to “confuse as much as clarify” by questioning the fundamentals.<sup>17</sup> Commentators have recently started to use the term “evidence-influenced” or “evidence-informed” rather than evidence-based decision making, as the latter seems to overplay the role of evidence in such decision-making processes.<sup>18</sup>

**Research evidence competes with many other potential sources of influence.**

### 2.3.4 How Does Research Feed into Policy Debates?

Due to the pressures of time, resources, value priorities, and also based on the events that occur during their time in office, every government will choose to prioritize and work on certain policy issues and devote little or no attention to others. When a government decides to include an issue on their agenda, the urgency to have your analysis ready and join the discussion increases, as these decisions will be completed within a budgetary or parliamentary cycle. When advocates talk about getting the timing right, this refers to the pressure to have the research, analysis, and writing up-to-date and ready to go, if not already part of the policy discussion when the actual decision-making process starts.

Also, the type of discussion around an issue tends to change once it becomes part of the agenda of the government. Discussion and debates about policy issues before they are on a government agenda tend to be more focused on whether the proposals being put forward are useful, innovative, and applicable to the current problem and less focused on the potential redistributive effects of the changes on particular stakeholders. Once the issue gets on the agenda, this balance shifts: stakeholders from all areas who could be affected by the proposed changes become more involved, push to promote their own interests, and so the discussion changes and centers on the winners and losers who will result from the choice of options. We develop more on each stage in the next two points.

**The nature of policy debates change before and after the issue is put on the government agenda.**

- **The “softening up” process: the more problem-focused debate stage**

In governance circles, there are many small groups of experts (for example, academics, researchers from think tanks and research institutes, government advisors) and professionals (for example, civil servants, NGO representatives, journalists, members of parliament) whose job it is to be continually involved in the discussion of how best to solve the policy challenges relating to a particular issue like local government financing, agricultural development, fiscal policy, or minority rights

protection. Within these communities, research and analysis within the policy field is continually introduced, discussed, and debated and this sets the “specialized agenda” for such communities.<sup>19</sup>

As discussed, policy research is generally commissioned by governmental agencies or NGOs seeking to change a current government program that they feel is not working well. The research is mostly conducted by experts from within these specialist communities and/or international consultants with similar backgrounds, both client and researcher sharing the same goal of influencing the specialist agenda. Generally, the researcher’s advocacy goal is to convince the community of the implications of the new research until it becomes the “new conventional wisdom” of the professional community or at least a part of it through the publication of detailed research-driven policy papers, reports, conference presentations, and discussion.<sup>20</sup> Such a process among a naturally skeptical expert audience usually takes time, requires a comprehensive argument with supporting evidence, engagement in discussion and debate, and rarely results in the 100-percent adoption of research findings into the newly held positions of the community.<sup>21</sup> Some believe that fundamental policy shifts can take years of persuasion and multiple layers and sources of evidence before the core shift will take place.<sup>22</sup>

Thus “softening up”<sup>23</sup> implies an approach that is slow and deliberate. Softening up cannot be underestimated, as once the target issue becomes part of a government agenda (or a policy window opens), it is members of this specialist community who will emerge as key players in shaping the discussion towards the final decision. However, this is not to say that the softening up process stops once an issue gets on the agenda. In fact, it will probably continue in earnest but be balanced with a bargaining process.

It may not only be experts who are involved in shaping the conventional wisdom of the field, for members of the broader policy network can and do exert influence. However, under normal circumstances, experts will have a considerable influence in at least shaping the policy options that are on the table.

- **Interest or value-based bargaining: the more outcome-focused debate**

Often overlapping with these specialist or expert communities are many external individuals and organizations with a large stake in the outcomes of particular policy decisions. Examples of people who could be included in this group are government officials, NGO representatives, the media, political parties, and citizens’ groups. Such people continuously work and comment on particular policy issues in multiple fora, but they do not normally get involved in academic or expert discussions or do research on a particular issue. They are the consumers of research and their interests lie more in the potential outcomes of public policy proposals and decision making and its impact on a particular constituency or value set they are defending.

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**The “softening up” process is a slow, deliberate process of persuasion.**

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Such nonexpert communities tend to be much more vocal once a policy issue becomes part of the decision-making agenda of a government as the urgency to represent or defend their positions becomes greater. Through the consultation process, the nature of the debate becomes more a balancing act between the policy proposals on the table and winners and losers of any proposed changes. The practicalities of the decision-making process take over, as a decision will be made within a certain parliamentary cycle. Different sides will seek to build support through coalitions and eventually strike a bargain that is a suitable compromise for the more powerful actors involved.<sup>24</sup>

This movement from academic or expert debate to the bargaining period close to the actual decision is key to understanding how to get involved in any type of policy advocacy initiative, especially one based on research or expert analysis. Unsurprisingly, policy research has a more natural audience in the expert-oriented softening up process and discussion. Once the debate reaches the bargaining phase, the basis for negotiation is normally the choice of policy solutions reflecting the conventional wisdom of the experts.

Introducing new research at this stage of the process would be difficult, unless it was striking enough in its findings to slow down or derail the process. Untangling how such debates develop during the policymaking process gives advocates an important insight into the nature of the challenge of influencing decision making with new research in often heated discussions.

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**Interest or value-based bargaining is a negotiated settlement.**

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### 2.3.5 How Does Research Feed into Decision Making Once Issues Are on the Agenda?

An important aspect of planning to get research into the policy-making process is considering how the debate will develop once the issue gets onto the government agenda. In fact, the findings of policy research itself can be the catalyst for an issue to move from the expert agenda to become part of government's decision-making agenda by showing, for example, that a current government program is underperforming or by suggesting a new solution or application of a new technology to an old problem. New research findings are but one way in which issues can make it onto the government's decision-making agenda. Focusing events (such as natural disasters, economic or security crises) or change in value priorities (for example, following the election of a new party to government) are also major drivers of agenda setting.<sup>25</sup>

Once an administration decides to tackle a policy issue or problem, advocates have to consider how policies will be made and how best to contribute. The policymaking process has variously been described as a rational, logical, and sequenced process (for example, the policy cycle<sup>26</sup>), a gradual process of steady change (for example, incrementalism<sup>27</sup>), a set of interacting and overlapping networks,<sup>28</sup> or even "a chaos of accidents and purposes"<sup>29</sup> (for example, the garbage-can model<sup>30</sup>). This is a highly contested debate spanning

decades in academic policy science circles, and scholars have yet to reach a broad consensus on a model that adequately represents the complexity of policymaking processes from one policy issue to another.

However, our aim in this discussion is not to contribute to the ongoing debate over what model best captures the multifaceted realities of policymaking. Ours is a pragmatic and pedagogical imperative to allow novices without a background in public policy an understandable point of entry into the complex work of policymaking. For this reason, we will focus on the policy cycle, which serves as an accessible way for practitioners to understand a staged and rational decision-making process. This is important, because for better or worse, rational models of policymaking such as the policy cycle have had a strong influence on capacity building and governance reform in transition countries and it is certainly worth recognizing this desire for rationalism in the process. In fact, such a wish for informed, inclusive, and staged decision making represents a significant opportunity for research input to be both significant and influential. Finally, even if the learner reflects on the reality of policymaking in their context and sees that the policy cycle is an inaccurate reflection of this process, it remains a useful entry point to achieve this understanding and more broadly, as a way of talking about policy processes. For these reasons, the policy cycle is the (albeit flawed) model around which we base our consideration of the policymaking process.

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We use an adapted version of the policy cycle to discuss the various stages where research feeds the policymaking process. First, to improve accessibility, we have removed as much of the confusing jargon from the naming of the stages of the cycle to produce a relatively jargon-free policy cycle. Second, we have grouped together stages in the cycle to reflect the nature and development of discussions through the policymaking process. The addition of what we refer to as “the kidneys” in Figure 2 seeks to focus the advocate on what part of the decision-making process to target.

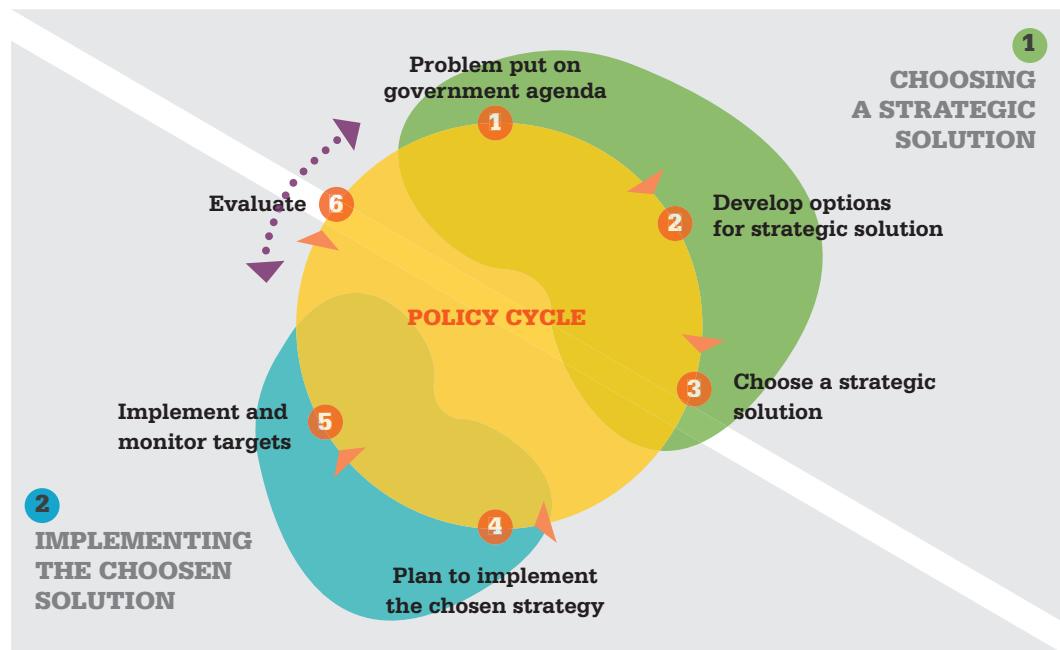
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**The policy cycle  
is a useful point  
of entry to  
considering the  
reality of the  
policy process.**

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## FIGURE 2.

The nature of debates around a policy decision: “the kidneys”



As mentioned previously, a change in value priorities (for example, following the election of a new party to government), focusing events (such as natural disasters, economic or security crises), the emergence of new technologies or solutions, or striking program evaluations or research can be the impetus to set the agenda or start the process. Once a policy problem becomes part of the government agenda, the first type of discussion usually is centered on the choice of a suitable strategic solution to solve the problem (for example, should religious education be confessional or secular?). In such a discussion, participants debate the nature of the problem, the aspirations of society, and the effectiveness and feasibility of the proposed solutions on the table. This first debate continues until a strategic solution is chosen by the government in the wake of this broader debate.

This first stage of the debate is the most opportune time to feed in research evidence. In fact, this debate or the prospect of an upcoming debate of this sort often serves as the impetus to commission research in a certain area or at least further expert analysis. Unsurprisingly, this kind of debate is commonly led and framed by the current conventional wisdom of specialist communities.

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**The first  
“kidney” is  
a discussion  
about the  
choice of  
a suitable  
strategy.**

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Once a strategy has been chosen the process moves onto the second “kidney”—implementing the chosen solution. In this stage, a suitable approach to the implementation of the chosen strategy is designed and implemented. Discussions here focus on how to organize institutions, resources, and policy instruments

(for example, from legislation to incentives to public awareness campaigns) to effectively deliver the chosen strategy (to continue the example from above: if a secular approach is chosen, the discussion would be centered around such issues as how to train teachers, develop textbooks, engage parents in the process, secure funding, and evaluation). This is not just the preserve of the relevant public body tasked with delivering the strategy: independent expertise and research into suitable approaches are very much needed and can make a vital contribution. For example, the Open Society Foundations had a research group in 2006<sup>31</sup> that researched the implementation of local economic development strategies in the Western Balkans. It was felt that the chosen strategies were effective, but the policy design and implementation were failing. There are numerous examples in transition countries of strategy decisions that were taken and either never implemented or very badly or inconsistently delivered.

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**The second “kidney” is a discussion about how to effectively implement the chosen strategy.**

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The final step in the cycle is evaluation. Program evaluation continues to be one of the weakest links in the policymaking process throughout the region, with many NGOs taking on this role in place of public administration. As was the case with other stages, policy research can also feed in here. Indeed, inherently any policy research project evaluates the current approach being taken by an administration and generally this leads to one of two conclusions: that a new/adapted strategy is needed or that the strategy is good but a new/adapted approach to implementation is needed, that is, moving forward or backward in the policy cycle.

What we have described above is a process that may not be recognized by many as a reality in the transition context, but we believe that, slowly but surely, elements of the process are becoming institutionalized practice. In the worst case scenario, an issue is put on the agenda and immediately the discussion of one solution is framed by the need to change the current legislation, that is, move straight to a very limited discussion of policy design, and revised legislation is passed with a minimum of public debate or stakeholder interaction.

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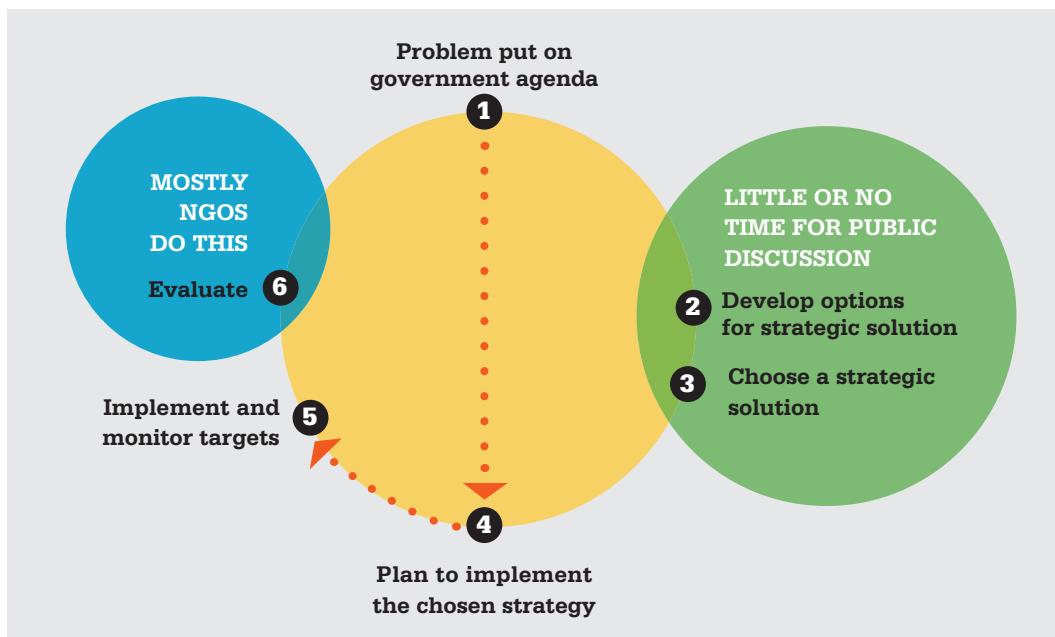
**The policy cycle often does not reflect reality in transition countries.**

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There seems to be a legislative “fixation” in transition contexts: when people consider policy, they automatically think about laws, as if they were the only policy instruments available. In the next step, the revised legislation is passed quickly without much public debate and the implications of the new legislation are then absorbed by the relevant public institutions. They decide what it will mean to them and accordingly change their current practices. The new practices are implemented uncritically in a civil service culture that sees itself as rowing the boat rather than steering it.<sup>32</sup> In this vein, there is little or no evaluation by the public institutions involved and little public discussion of the implications of the change. Broader public debate on the issues remains discretionary and tends to come only if there are reform-oriented politicians in place or there is pressure from the public, media, or an international organization. Figure 3 represents our attempt to capture the dimensions of the worst-case scenario.

**FIGURE 3.**

Worst-case scenario of the policymaking process in transition countries



However, the news is not all negative, as increasingly there is a push (both internal and external) and a realization that such closed processes are highly ineffective and there needs to be a focus on working together to find sustainable solutions. Reform-oriented leaders and the need to respond to international organizations and in-depth accession processes (for example, to the European Union or NATO) within such policy frameworks are leading this change.<sup>33</sup>

The implications of this discussion for the advocate are that it is crucial to have in-depth knowledge of how the policymaking process works for your issue and what stage or discussion in the process you will target, and therefore know exactly how and when to exert pressure at the most suitable key points. We develop this extensively in Chapter 4.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Consider the policy process you are targeting in your own advocacy campaign:**

- Is the initial focus of your advocacy campaign on “softening up” experts and informed practitioners or is it mixed with more interest-based bargaining with broader stakeholder groups?
- Which “kidney” in the decision-making process are you targeting in your research and advocacy? Is your research about the choice of a new strategy or on how to properly implement an already chosen strategy?
- How well does the policy cycle describe the policymaking process you are targeting in your campaign?

### 2.3.6 What Is the Goal of Policy Advocacy?

A common oversimplification of the very messy reality of policy change is that a policy research project is only successful if the recommendations put forward are adopted wholesale and implemented by the government, that is, that it has direct policy impact.<sup>34</sup> Such a view underestimates the role of multiple voices and deliberation in any policymaking process, not to mention the multiple sources of influence on the decision-making process. While some authors claim that such direct impact is more of a possibility in the transition context due to a lack of competition from other experts/research,<sup>35</sup> our experience of working with individual researchers and think tanks in the region is that the influence of policy research comes about much more slowly. This is in line with the “percolation” or enlightenment process<sup>36</sup> where research slowly changes the language, understandings, and options available to policymakers more often than providing the direct basis for policy programming.

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**Policy influence involves capacity building, broadening of policy thinking, and direct impact.**

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Therefore, in this manual, we have adopted the broader notion of policy influence to describe what the goals of an effective policy advocacy campaign should include. We use the framework developed by a leading policy scientist and practitioner<sup>37</sup> to describe policy influence made up of three core elements:

- **Developing policy capacities**

The development and dissemination of a policy research project can help to advance the skills and knowledge of both the researchers and organizations directly involved, but also among the target audiences for such research (for example, advisors, government officials, media). A very important aspect of this type of influence in transition countries may be the building of an understanding of and appreciation for the value of research in decision making.

- **Broadening policy horizons**

Although the recommendations from policy research may never become part of a target government program, they may be successful in introducing, for example, a new perspective or framing of the problem or a new policy alternative that hadn't before been considered. Through the softening up process, this new insight will broaden the nature of the debate and become a pillar in the new conventional wisdom of the specialist community. A researcher at the International Development Research Center put it well when she said that even rejection by a policy community is in fact success in having policy influence—the fact that a justification to reject your recommendations has been developed means that policy learning has occurred.

- **Having policy impact (more commonly called “affecting policy regimes”)**

As described above, this is the process through which a piece of research will be adopted as the basis for changing legislation and government programs. It should be noted that even if this does happen, it is only in rare cases that 100 percent of the recommendations are adopted.

This concept of policy *influence* is a much broader idea than impact and allows us to take a developmental perspective and also see more feasible goals for advocacy initiatives. The adoption of such a broad perspective may also help others involved in the production and commissioning of policy research to see more realistically the effect of their work and not be frustrated by setting the mostly unrealistic goal of direct impact.

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**Broader influence is a more realistic expectation than direct impact.**

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## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Consider your advocacy campaign in terms of its potential policy influence:**

- What kind of capacity will you build?**
- What kind of policy thinking or learning are you trying to achieve?**
- What specific piece of public policy are you attempting to change?**
- What type of policy influence can you realistically expect to achieve through your advocacy campaign?**

## 2.4 THE CHALLENGES FOR ADVOCATES

Given the diversity and complexity of policy communities and processes, it is unsurprising that there are a number of widely recognized challenges for advocates in striving to bring research into action. We have also added two challenges that seem to be particular to transition countries. Together, they are the following:

- The different world views of academics/researchers and policymakers.
- Unethical client expectations for policy-based evidence.
- The role of researcher as advocate.
- The problem of taking credit for policy influence.
- The current domination of power over knowledge in many transition countries.
- The current imbalance of supply and demand for policy research in the transition context.

These issues are continually challenging for fledgling and even established researchers and organizations.

### 2.4.1 Different Worldviews of Researchers and Policymakers

The most basic premise of this guide is that experts and professionals can develop advice in a way that it becomes practically implementable within government programs.<sup>38</sup> This assumes a strong relationship and easy communication between experts/advisors and those supporting and managing such programs, that is, government officials, civil servants, and politicians. However, according to the literature in this area, this relationship is a continual challenge because academics and policymakers tend to see the world in very different ways.<sup>39</sup> A basic overview of the hurdle is as follows:

**TABLE 3.**  
The different worldviews of researchers and policymakers

RESEARCHERS TEND TO:	POLICYMAKERS TEND TO:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continually question the fundamentals of policy approaches and thus are often seen as too radical in their proposals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>have a program management and political view of public policy and are resistant to changes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be impractical or not see enough of the constraints of management and delivery of everyday government and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be driven primarily by budget and capacity restrictions, political will, and election/budgetary cycles</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>talk in academic concepts and jargon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>talk in terms of bureaucracy, budgets, and politics</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be motivated by publication, funding, and donor agendas, recognition and new research commissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>be motivated by doing what works and what fits</li> </ul>

As one source put it, “Often it seems as though the two groups not only come from different cultures, but in fact speak different languages. As a result communication between the two often falters, leaving both frustrated.”<sup>40</sup> The challenge as advocates is to bridge between with two different perceptions: one more theoretical, objective, and universal and the other more practical, political, and context-driven. Realizing the shape of the challenge is an issue that goes to the heart of all aspects of a policy research project from the research design to the policy paper writing and advocacy at all levels. Ultimately, having a chance of influencing a target decision means having to contend with a perception often held by decision makers that policy research is “the opposite of action, rather than the opposite of ignorance.”<sup>41</sup>

This tension between researchers and policymakers assumes a developed culture of research influencing decision making that is often not the case in transition countries, which we discuss further in section 2.4.5. Nevertheless, the core of this challenge is still relevant to anyone coming from outside of government and trying to advocate for change in public policy.

**Researchers often see objective policy choices; policymakers see practical and political ones.**

## 2.4.2 Unethical Client Expectations for Policy-based Evidence

The classic definition of the role of the advisor is to “speak truth to power.” This assumes that what clients want from their advisors, in addition to expertise, is a certain level of independence and skepticism.<sup>42</sup> However, not all clients are this enlightened and sometimes they try to employ analysts to develop a rationale for a previously chosen strategy, as a mentor for a fellowship group recently put it: “policy-based evidence, rather than evidence-based policy.” Taking on such a job will create an ethical problem for the researcher or analyst and could also

**Produce evidence-based policy, not policy-based evidence!**

damage the longer-term reputation of the researcher or his/her organization.<sup>43</sup> It is best to try to avoid such commissions or renegotiate the terms of reference.

### 2.4.3 Researcher as Advocate

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**Policy researchers may be expected to take on multiple roles in the advocacy process.**

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Not all researchers are good at or interested in actually doing advocacy work. For many with a more academic or analytical focus, the research, analysis, and writing process is where their talent and interests lie and venturing from that world is not something they are willing to do.<sup>44</sup> For others, being involved or even leading the advocacy efforts through the softening up and interest bargaining phases is also a key part of their job. However, many policy researchers complain about the multiple roles that they are asked to play, for example, researcher, writer, presenter, lobbyist, facilitator, and media representative. One researcher shared this frustration, memorably saying: "You have to be like Erin Brokovich, no? . . . I said, come on, I'm a researcher."<sup>45</sup>

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**Policy advocacy is usually conducted in teams.**

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For those who are willing and interested in playing a central role in the advocacy efforts, the challenge is to find time to fulfill all roles while continuing to work on other projects. However, the good news is that such policy research and advocacy is usually conducted in teams and in fact, the teams are often selected based on the range of specific research and advocacy skills and knowledge necessary to develop effective research and influence decision making. An example of such a focused policy research/advocacy team was put together by the Centre for European Policy Studies to convince Ukraine to sign a free-trade agreement with the EU.<sup>46</sup> Members of the team were chosen specifically for the following purposes:

- one person to do econometrics
- one person who knew the internal workings of the Ukrainian government
- one person who had specific business sector knowledge and had access to all the World Bank networks
- one person who was an agricultural economist (a key sector) and access to UN networks
- one person who had understanding of and access to the Ukrainian business sector

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These people were selected in addition to the team leader and a number of others, but it shows the thinking that helps in putting together a research/advocacy team.

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**At minimum, researchers need to defend the research during the advocacy debate.**

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For those researchers not so intrigued by advocacy, there is an important dividing line which they need to consider: policy research is not conducted in an ivory tower and the legitimacy of the researcher and his/her organization (not to mention the advocacy campaign itself) is dependent on the foundation of a sound research project. If others outside of the research team become involved or are leading the advocacy efforts, it is rare that they will be able to defend questions on the research from other experts. As a minimum, researchers must

stay involved to the extent that the legitimacy of the research and its findings are not undermined. This may simply involve leading the push among a group of experts who you already know and are comfortable working with, to playing a support/advisory role in all phases of advocacy.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Consider your role and your team in the upcoming advocacy campaign:**

- To what extent are you willing or interested in being involved in the advocacy process beyond conducting research?
- What kinds of capacities and resources can you draw on in putting together an advocacy team?
- Can you get people from your organization or coalition partners who would be willing to be part of the team?

### 2.4.4 Taking and Getting Credit for Policy Influence

When someone is in the business of producing or supporting the production of policy advice (for example, donors), it goes without saying that success in any such project will ultimately be measured in the extent to which they influenced the final decision. For researchers and analysts, this link is proof that their expertise is an essential part of a decision-making process in a certain policy area, and therefore the basis for future commissions and sustainability. Donors want dollars turned into change in ways that support their own goals. Linking their support to partners who achieve such change is the basis for them to prove that they are fulfilling their mission.

However, making clear links from your own input to the final decision or adopted policy is usually a very difficult proposition. First, if decision making is a long-term inclusive process of convincing and bargaining, then many people will have a say in the final outcome and yours will only be one voice in this multistakeholder discussion: for example, the final approach adopted will probably not look very much like the proposals you put forward at the beginning.<sup>47</sup> Second, through the process and over time, people will be motivated to make decisions on the basis of multiple and overlapping inputs and may even forget that it was you who made a certain proposal at the beginning. In addition, for donors, policy processes rarely fit neatly into budgetary cycles and this can create its own problems in reporting results.<sup>48</sup>

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**Linking one input to a multi-sourced final decision is difficult.**

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Of course, there are instances where new ideas or desperately needed solutions are relatively uncontested and the link to the decision made is plain to everyone. Most often, the key is to adopt a broader definition of success, such as policy influence (see section 2.3.7). Broadening this definition to include capacity building and contribution to policy dialogue does not mean lowering the hurdle, but setting a target that is a better reflection of an extremely messy and challenging reality that then allows you to see the influence of your ideas in the broader process. In contrast, only targeting direct policy impact is usually setting yourself up to fail from the start. Setting such an unrealistic goal can and does have serious implications for fostering policy communities throughout the region, since many initiatives are doomed to be considered failures.

Researchers in the region also struggle with the following issue:

- **Keeping your name as the source in a policy discussion**

For policy researchers from an academic background, it is worrying to see people within the policymaking world take on others' ideas all the time and make them their own without mentioning or giving credit to the original source of the idea. In a formal academic setting, this would amount to plagiarism. However, in the policymaking world, this in fact should be the goal and also makes sense in this context.

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**In public, the sources of ideas get lost in most policy debates.**

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As researchers or analysts, the best-case scenario is that a target policy dialogue is dominated by your insights, analysis, and even your language. What's more, if someone is convinced by your position, as in any argument, they will begin to process it, repeat it, and take ownership of the ideas themselves. Finally, for politicians to be convincing and sound legitimate in a policy debate, they must put forward their proposed position as their own. They may at some point find it useful to acknowledge the source of some ideas, especially if it is particularly reputable, but mostly it is their "own" position that will be at the center of the argument.

The silver lining to this apparent cloud is that most specialist policy communities are relatively small, even in the international arena, and if you or your institution comes up with something new, interesting, innovative, and/or brilliant, it will not be forgotten. In fact, this is how policy researchers build their reputations and as a result, the chances of continuing to be included in the discussion and receiving new commissions for analysis or research are increased—even if your name is not all over the newspapers.

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**Opinion leaders will remember where all inputs come from.**

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For example, in a conference in 2008, a representative from the European Council on Foreign Relations reported on how the European Commission's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, had substantively adopted and presented their positions (as outlined in a policy brief) on how Europe should respond to the growing strength and power of Russia. Of course, these ideas were put forward as the European Commission's own position and no mention was made of the European Council on Foreign Relations' paper. The researchers took this as a considerable victory.

## 2.4.5 Power Over Knowledge or Knowledge Over Power?

What we have described above is a policymaking process that, on the one hand, is often resistant to research evidence and, on the other, is completely dependent on it to move forward. This can be seen as one part of what is often described as the ongoing tension between knowledge and power where “emphasising the role of power and authority at the expense of knowledge and expertise in public affairs seems cynical; emphasising the latter at the expense of the former seems naïve.”<sup>49</sup> However, this apparent tension is better considered as interdependence especially if we view such decision-making processes as a continuous discourse.<sup>50</sup> Our descriptions of the process through which a research-based idea actually becomes part of a government program directly supports this logic of a slow, ongoing, multi-voiced dialogue or as we referred to in the introduction, a two-way process of interaction towards a negotiated settlement.

The literature we have drawn from is mostly based on research developed in transition and developing countries and the underlying assumption for these authors is that all countries are in various stages of moving towards inclusive, open, functioning democracies.<sup>51</sup> We also make this assumption in our work, but this does not get away from the fact that there seem to be particularly difficult obstacles to overcome in making the next steps in this direction. One of the current key hurdles relates directly not to the tension, but to the current domination of power over knowledge or, to put it another way, politics over solutions. This tends to result in a public and political dialogue that is based on taking sides and where policy decisions are only portrayed as a win for those in power and a loss for the opposition. For example, both Hungary and Bosnia and Herzegovina have sadly gone down this path in the last decade: there is hardly ever enough facts or evidence available from independent, reputable sources to ground a policy debate and move it towards a focus on the best solution to the current problem; and even if evidence is available, there is a tendency to cherry pick the source for political ends. Moreover, compounding the problem, politicians do not see such practices as an ethical problem, but rather just as a normal part of the game.

This reinforces the absolute necessity in the transition context to promote an evidence-based decision-making culture and further, the need to stay the distance for those involved in producing and advocating for policy research and analysis. However, it is also a clear illustration of a further challenge for advocates: in some cases, it will probably not be enough to try to sell the ideas developed through the research, but you will probably also have to sell the idea and ethics of research evidence in the policymaking process, especially to those who may see it as an unnecessary obstacle for them to retain power. In the short term, the key must be to illustrate that their longer-term political lives are actually dependent on improving the lives of their voters, and without the expertise and evidence to support complicated policy decisions, there is little chance that they will survive. In the longer term, we all hope that such instrumental motivation would not be part of the equation and all actors will see the centrality of this interdependence between knowledge and power.

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**In many transition countries, politics still dominates over solutions.**

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**You not only have to sell the research, but also the idea of why such research is important in decision making.**

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## 2.4.6 Imbalance of Supply and Demand for Policy Research

Another implication from this domination of power over knowledge within the decision-making bodies and public administration is a lack of appreciation for and understanding of the role of policy research in the decision-making process. Post-Soviet public administrations are portrayed as struggling to incorporate the broader, strategic perspectives of public policy within institutions and a decision-making culture dominated by vertical structures in which civil servants do the bidding of their superiors in an *ad-hoc* and clientelistic manner.<sup>52</sup> In many countries, large public administrations often exist as a way to provide jobs to citizens and help ensure the political future of those in power. However, all is not so bleak as many transition countries have sought to place the policy perspective as a central focus of their public administration reform process, usually with support and pressure from transnational networks, international organizations, conventions, and agreements (for example, European Union, World Bank, International Monetary Fund).<sup>53</sup> We can see these institutions gaining even more influence since the financial crisis that began in 2008.

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**At the moment, supply of research outweighs demand.**

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Nevertheless, one outcome of the current stage of the reform process is an imbalance between the supply and demand for policy research. To be more precise at the moment, there tends to be more supply of such research from outside of government than demand from within.<sup>54</sup> With policy reform at the top of the agenda for many international organizations and donors, it is unsurprising that substantial resources have been spent on developing the capacity to deliver such expertise and analysis both in the governmental and NGO sectors. Due to the flexibility of the organizations and their close relationship to donors, NGOs have strongly responded to this call, resulting in a booming number of think tanks in the region through the late 1990s.<sup>55</sup> However, it is clear that the reform of public administration is a much slower process and so there is a mismatch between the suppliers of such policy advice and the body that is their traditional and, in many ways, their ultimate client: the government.

Correcting this imbalance will ultimately be a long, slow process, but there are positive signs that many government bodies are attempting to build-in such processes as Regulatory Impact Assessment<sup>56</sup> and are developing their core policy analysis component in ministries, municipalities, agencies, and policy analysis units, as well as establishing special offices to deal with international accession and integration processes (e.g., EU and NATO). Such capacity development will be at the heart of building increased demand for policy research and it is not only within government structures that such learning needs to happen: The NGO community has a responsibility to become a supplier of quality advice that stakeholders will be unable to ignore.

An additional factor evident from our experience and extensively developed in the literature is the positive influence of the “revolving door” of experts from NGO to government and back again.<sup>57</sup> The classic description of this situation is of a newly elected government inviting an expert from a think tank to join the administration. This means that you have an individual whose entire approach is centered on evidence-based decision making who will advocate in this direction. Usually such experts lose their positions if their party loses power. At this point, they tend to return to their NGOs or think tanks.

Sometimes this imbalance of supply and demand is portrayed as an illustration of why NGOs have so much more capacity and innovation than governments, but such perceptions reduce the complexity and seem to be more borne out of frustration at the slow pace of change rather than a reality informed of the challenges. As one Canadian source tells us: “Policymakers are people, too,”<sup>58</sup> and the target must be a healthy competition of ideas that supports evidence-based decision making where intelligent providers and intelligent consumers interact to support such a process.<sup>59</sup>

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**More and more,  
there is less  
separation  
between  
government  
and NGO  
sectors.**

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## 2.5 THE FOUNDATIONS OF EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY FOR POLICY RESEARCH

Having developed a relatively in-depth description of the nature of policy advocacy, the role of research and expertise, and the challenges of bringing them into the decision-making process in a way that guides the choices and the thinking, it is obvious that the final decision stems from the input of multiple voices from multiple sources through multiple stages. This is true both in the best functioning democracies as well as in most transition countries. Fewer voices and sources, plus the lack of appreciation for policy research and the unpredictability of the process itself, make influencing decision making in transition countries even more of a challenge.

Given these realities, it is unsurprising that an approach to policy advocacy where the researcher publishes and disseminates his or her paper, presents the findings once at a conference, and has a meeting with a government official is unlikely to produce much influence. Such a one-way approach, even if it includes great ideas and analysis, is more likely to be ignored and confuses the totally messy and evolving realities of the policy-making process with the traditional processes of academia.

Based on the challenges detailed in this chapter and insights developed through the investigation of multiple cases of research achieving influence in transition and developing countries,<sup>60</sup> the following are the basic principles that frame and guide an effective approach to policy advocacy:

- It is a two-way process of negotiation and mediation towards the transfer of ownership of the findings and proposals developed in the research to key target audiences.
- It is messy and normally takes time, commitment, and persistence.
- The most likely target is policy influence, rather than impact.
- It involves the “softening up” of specialist expert audiences and also more interest-based coalition building and bargaining with more political audiences.
- Context is key, as processes are always specific, evolving, and unpredictable.

In the next chapter, we provide an overview of how to take these principles and operationalize them in your policy advocacy planning process using the Advocacy Planning Framework tool.

## NOTES

- 1 The protection of the rights of a certain constituency, such as, for example, ensuring that public services such as education are equally accessible for a particular marginalized group or minority.
- 2 Public information campaigns to inform and persuade citizens of government strategies and programs, such as, for example, government-produced advertising warning of the risks of smoking.
- 3 Carden 2009, Court and Young 2003, Data and Pellini 2011, Open Society Foundations 2010, Roebeling and de Vries 2011, Weyrauch, D'Agostino, and Richards 2011.
- 4 Start and Hovland 2004.
- 5 Krastev 2000.
- 6 See: <http://ecfr.eu/content/about/>.
- 7 Start and Hovland 2004.
- 8 International Development Research Centre 2004.
- 9 Davies 2004.
- 10 Davies 2004, 2005, Global Development Network 2003, Jones 2009, Majone 1989.
- 11 Davies 2004.
- 12 Buldioski 2007.
- 13 Peteri 2005, Stone and Maxwell 2005.
- 14 Solesbury 2001.
- 15 International Development Research Centre 2004, Carden 2009.
- 16 Global Development Network 2003, Carden 2009, Davies 2004, 2005, International Development Research Centre 2004, Solesbury 2001.
- 17 Davies 2004.
- 18 Stone 2009, Weiss in Carden 2009.
- 19 Kingdon 1984.
- 20 Start and Hovland 2004, Global Development Network 2003.
- 21 Kingdon 1984.
- 22 DeLeon 1997.
- 23 Kingdon 1984.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Howlett and Ramesh 1995, Anderson 1994.
- 27 Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993.
- 28 Marsh 1998.
- 29 Clay and Schaffer 1984.
- 30 Kingdon 1984.
- 31 Policy research fellowship programs at the Open Society Foundations engage researchers to conduct policy research commissioned by Foundations over a one-year period, and they are supported by training and mentoring to develop their capacities. For this specific fellowship group see: [http://lgi.osi.hu/documents.php?id=3259&m\\_id=177&bid=4](http://lgi.osi.hu/documents.php?id=3259&m_id=177&bid=4).
- 32 Peters 2008.
- 33 Bokros cited in Peteri 2005, Jones et al. 2009.
- 34 Carden 2009, Weyrauch, D'Agostino, and Richards 2011.
- 35 Stone and Maxwell 2005, Carden 2005.
- 36 Cited in International Development Research Centre 2005.
- 37 Lindquist 2001.
- 38 Jones 2009.
- 39 Canadian Institute for Health Information 2004, Carden 2004, 2009, Court and Young 2003, Davies 2004, Glover 2005, International Development Research Centre 2004, Jones 2009, Neilson 2003, Stone and Maxwell 2005.
- 40 Canadian Institute for Health Information 2004.
- 41 Court and Young 2003.
- 42 Mintrom 2004.
- 43 Weimar and Vining 1996.
- 44 Court and Young 2003.
- 45 Carden 2004.
- 46 Available online: <http://www.ceps.be/>.
- 47 Carden 2004.
- 48 Ryan and Garret 2005.
- 49 Solesbury 2001.
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 Global Development Network 2003, International Development Research Centre 2004.
- 52 Krawchenko 2006.
- 53 Weyrauch and Selwood 2007.
- 54 Carden 2009, Peteri 2005, UNDP 2003.
- 55 Carden 2009, McGann and Weaver 2000, UNDP 2003.
- 56 OECD 2009.
- 57 Carden 2009, Global Development Network 2003, Kingdon 1984, McGann and Weaver 2000.
- 58 Canadian Institute for Health Information 2004.
- 59 Davies 2004.
- 60 Global Development Network 2003, International Development Research Centre 2004.

# 3

## THE ADVOCACY PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Chapter 2 outlined that the challenge of having influence in a policymaking process normally involves commitment and persistence through a process of mediation and negotiation, until your ideas and proposals have become accepted by at least a part of the key target audience and, at best, accepted by the powerful majority, thus providing the basis for action. In understanding policy advocacy in this manner, one of the main lessons is that context is everything when it comes to advocacy.<sup>1</sup> What this naturally implies is that advocates need to be very careful in transferring “best practice” advocacy approaches from one context to another. Taking this idea further, we have seen that even within the same national context, one policymaking process will differ significantly from the next depending on the policy issue (for example, from higher education to fiscal policy). Thus, advocates should be wary when transferring advocacy approaches from one policymaking process to another, even within the same national context.

However, this does not mean there is nothing to learn from the advocacy practices of others. The lesson to draw is that in order to conduct effective advocacy, the first essential step involves gaining an in-depth understanding of the context and policy landscape itself, that is, the target policymaking process and people involved. What can be transferred is a common approach to analyzing a target policy context in order to plan an effective advocacy campaign. Or put another way: if context is everything, then questions are the answer. By understanding your own context in an in-depth manner, you will have the critical knowledge necessary to evaluate whether you can employ previously used approaches, and how to adapt these approaches to effectively

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**In advocacy,  
context is  
everything.**

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**If context is  
everything,  
then questions  
are the answer.**

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fit your own advocacy challenges. In sum, you first need to map out your target context and then make plans for your advocacy.

In adopting this approach, the chapter introduces the key mapping and planning tool that is at the heart of this guide: the Advocacy Planning Framework (APF). First, we present a short overview of the rationale, focus, and architecture of the APF, followed by introducing, explaining, and illustrating the central element of the APF that focuses on three key strategic level planning questions called the “core strategic focus of your campaign.” However, before introducing the APF, we provide a brief overview of the four case studies we used in developing the guide and use throughout our discussion of the APF.

### 3.1 THE FOUR CASE STUDIES

The four case studies are real examples of research-based advocacy campaigns that were successful in influencing policy decision making in transition countries. In this chapter and also Chapters 4, 5, and 6, we take the main elements of the APF in turn and build on the case studies to develop and illustrate core concepts and to draw out deeper advocacy lessons and insights. We advise that you take some time to become familiar with the basics of the cases provided in the table below as we will reference them throughout the guide.

#### KAZAKHSTAN

##### **Improving One Stop Shops (2006–2007)**

*Policy fellow<sup>2</sup> and civil servant*

One Stop Shops were introduced by presidential decree in Kazakhstan a few years prior to this research as the solution to corruption and weak public service delivery. There had been much criticism in public and the media of the supposed effectiveness of the One Stop Shops and the minister in charge desperately needed an evaluation of the current problems and suggestions for improving the approach so it could fit with local capacities. The researcher, who at the time was a PhD student and a policy fellow, was on a leave of absence from a government job in the Civil Service Agency. She was able to produce the research that was needed and made a connection to a key advisor in the Ministry of Justice (the agency with the responsibility to manage the implementation of One Stop Shops). They readily accepted her research input and her solutions focused on local capacity development.

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

### Reorganization of local administrative units in Mitrovica (2003–2006)

*Think tank (European Stability Initiative)*

At the beginning of the European Stability Initiative research and advocacy, the town of Mitrovica was the poster child for the problems of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), with two ethnic groups entirely separated from one another by the Ibar river. The challenge of Mitrovica had been extensively discussed in national, regional, and international policy circles and the media but they were stuck on how to solve what they viewed as primarily a policing/security problem. The European Stability Initiative started from a different point and looked at the basic socioeconomic issues in the town. What they found was that the town was living off the crisis, with most people existing on subsidies and stipends from Belgrade, Pristina, and the international community; for example, only 14 percent of cash income for the Serbian population was coming from private business. Once the crisis was over and the stipends dried up, the town would be dead. It was on this basis that they were able to get the Albanian and Serbian sides to accept the division of the town into separate municipalities (to keep the Serbs in the town), but only on the conditions that there was freedom of movement, full property return on both sides, and joint economic planning. This solution was also included in the Ahtisaari Plan, the blueprint for status talks on the independence of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244).

## MACEDONIA

### Introducing and passing a Patients' Bill of Rights (2006–2008)

*Policy fellow<sup>3</sup> and think tank (Studiorum<sup>4</sup>)*

The passing of a Patients' Bill of Rights for Macedonia was one of the commitments made by the country through the EU preaccession process. It was on the country's legislative agenda but not a stated priority for the new administration elected in the summer of 2006. The researcher, who worked for the Studiorum think tank in Skopje, had completed research on a Patients' Bill of Rights early in 2006 through the Open Society Foundations' International Policy Fellowship<sup>5</sup> program. A colleague and friend became the new advisor to the minister of health and was looking for policy suggestions to put forward. The researcher showed the recent research, which the advisor liked and presented to the minister. Soon after, the researcher was asked to become the NGO representative on the ministry's working group that drafted the legislation. She was also a member of the parliamentary working group when the draft bill went through the legislature and the Patients' Bill of Rights was passed in July 2008.

## MONGOLIA

### **Preventing the signing of an ill-considered mining contract between the Mongolian government and an international mining consortium (2006–2007)**

*National and international NGO coalition (Open Society Forum, Mongolia and Revenue Watch Institute)*

The issue of the revenue received by the Mongolian government through mining contracts with international mining companies has been hugely debated for more than a decade in Mongolia. Stories of large-scale corruption, unfairly negotiated contracts, and environmental damage have been at the center of the discussion. All sectors have been involved because the mining sector has the potential to revolutionize the economic future of the country. The debate centered around the discovery of one of the largest copper deposits in the world, the Oyu Tolgoi mine. It was estimated that this one mine alone had the potential to double government revenue, if negotiated and managed properly. The initial negotiation with the mining consortia, completed with the ministerial working group (from the ministries of finance, energy, and mineral resources), was a closed discussion, although many tried to get involved. Once the draft contract was submitted to Parliament, it became public in July 2007, and the Open Society Forum pushed quickly to reveal the shortcomings of the contract by commissioning an expert analysis and making the findings public. This was one key ingredient that led to street protests, and with this push they were able to prevent the quick approval of the agreement by Parliament.

### **3.2 OVERVIEW OF THE ADVOCACY PLANNING FRAMEWORK (APF)**

The Advocacy Planning Framework builds on one of the main outcomes of the work from the Bridging Research and Policy project<sup>6</sup>: the Research and Policy In Development (RAPID) framework.<sup>7</sup> The main focus of the RAPID framework was to describe what is referred to as the “knowledge-policy nexus” in transition and developing countries, that is, the key elements of how research evidence becomes part of a target policymaking process.<sup>8</sup> Our focus was to turn this very useful research outcome into a practical tool for the day-to-day planning of advocacy campaigns. With this focus, we have developed what we simply call the Advocacy Planning Framework or APF, for short.

In the last chapter, we defined successful advocacy as a process through which the main target audiences, including decision makers, need to build ownership of the ideas and proposals put forward, which will then direct them in leading any upcoming decision. If this is the ultimate goal, APF provides the foundation for advocates to map out their target policymaking process and through the mapping answer the key advocacy planning questions necessary to give them the best possible chance of achieving their specified goal.

## FIGURE 4.

### The Advocacy Planning Framework (APF)

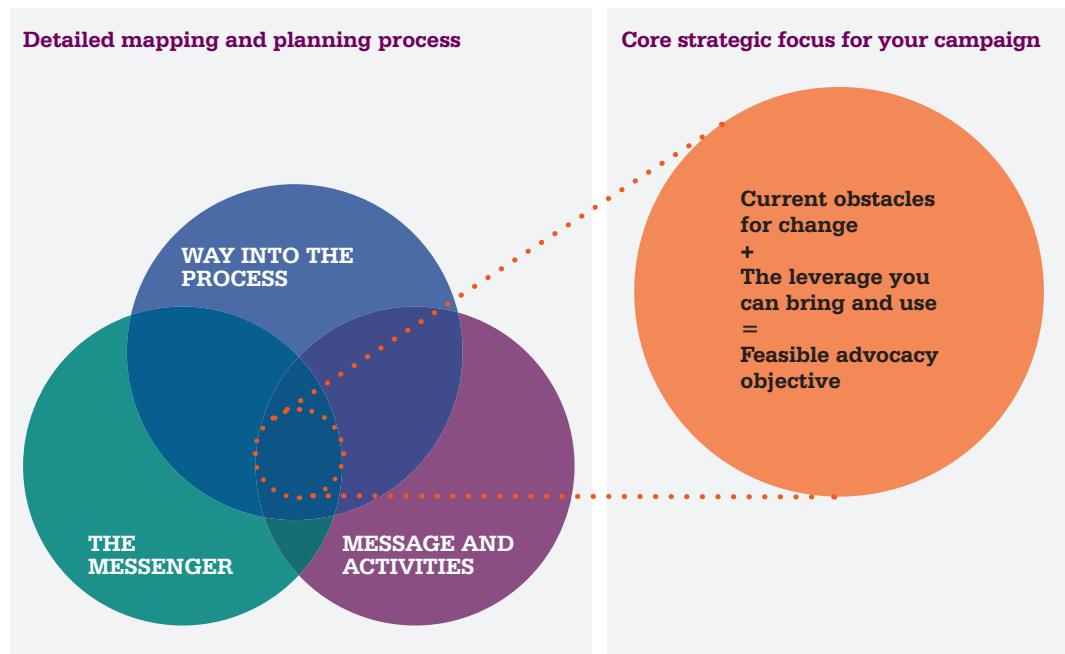


Figure 4 illustrates that APF is a multidimensional mapping and planning tool that is built around three main pillars or circles and a strategic core, that is, the overlap in the center. This core overlap represents the target outcome of the planning process: a strategy for realistic policy change. The three overlapping circles of the APF provide a foundation and direction for an in-depth mapping and planning process by presenting a set of questions that are key to planning any advocacy campaign:

- **Way into the process**—what is the best approach to get your ideas into the target policy debate and who will be your target audience(s)?
- **The messenger**—who should lead or be the face of the campaign and what kind of support do you need from others?
- **Messages and activities**—what can you say to the key target audiences that will engage and convince them and how can you best communicate that message to them through carefully chosen advocacy activities and communication tools?

Hence, the title of each circle indicates the decisions you will have made upon completing the mapping and planning process for that circle. We develop the three circles separately in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. However, it is also important to note that the overlap between the three individual circles is integral to the

architecture of the APF as one circle influences and feeds into the planning for the others. To give just one example: in planning your advocacy messages and activities, you will draw on insights from the mapping completed in the “way into the process” element to ensure that your messages are framed to fit the current debate and are chosen to appeal to or appease those whose positions need to shift in order for the policymaking process to move in your intended direction.

By working with the APF to develop answers to the key interdependent questions in each circle, you can plan a nuanced approach to mediate between what you want to achieve and what is possible in the policymaking process and this should generate the best possible chance to achieve policy influence, that is, to locate the core overlapping part of the circles or the core strategic focus of your campaign. In targeting the strategic core, you are continually looking to develop targeted and nuanced answers to three questions:

- **Current obstacles to change**—what is currently blocking the policymaking process from moving in the direction you want?
- **The leverage you can bring and use**—what can you bring to and use in the process to move it in the direction you wish?
- **A feasible policy objective**—considering the obstacles that exist and the leverage you have, how far do you think you can move the process?

These three interrelated questions of the core element of the APF are fleshed out in the next section.

### 3.3 THE CORE STRATEGIC FOCUS OF YOUR CAMPAIGN

The most common objective in policy advocacy is to change thinking about a particular issue and ultimately government practice or programming in a target area. Some people also conduct advocacy to prevent or block change, but for the sake of clarity and to represent the majority of cases we've experienced, here we focus more on advocating *for* change or reform. Through your advocacy efforts, you are hoping to start, continue, or restart a process of change in government action that, even in the least democratic societies, requires relatively broad consensus building among those who can influence the decision-making process. Ultimately, your voice in the advocacy process is one among many, but if you do a good job, it can serve as the catalyst for advancing the change you are seeking in the broader policymaking process. As such, we would characterize the challenge of policy advocacy as an attempt to move the policymaking process. This perspective is illustrated in Figure 5.

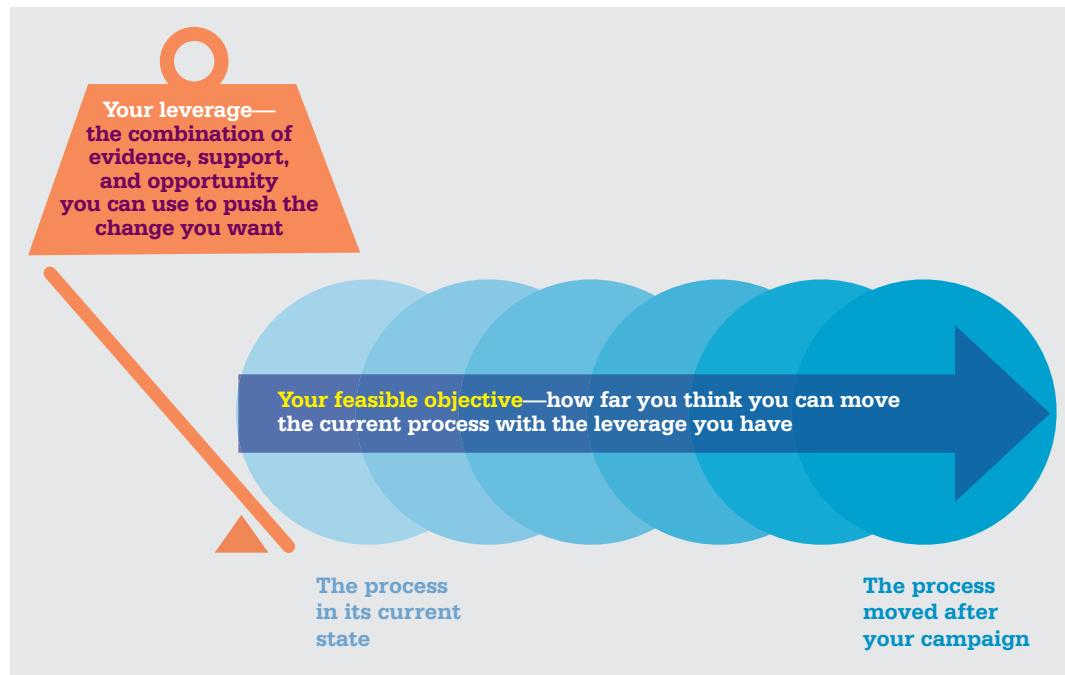
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**The advocacy challenge is ultimately to move the target process.**

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## FIGURE 5.

Moving the policymaking process



The central questions that advocates need to answer through the APF planning process rest around the potential outcome of their advocacy efforts, or in other words, if and how they can move the policymaking process. In answering these questions about how to move the process, there are three main areas you need to focus on: the challenges or obstacles to moving the process in the desired direction; the leverage you can bring and use to push the process in that direction; and how far you can expect the process to move as a result. In considering the relationship between these three elements of the core strategic focus, we tentatively offer the following equation:

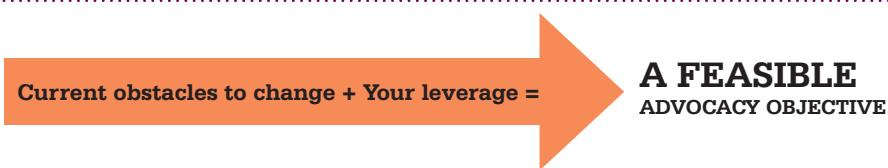
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**The core strategic focus questions ensure that you target realistic policy change.**

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## FIGURE 6.

The relationship between the core strategic focus questions



The crux of strategic advocacy planning involves finding a feasible objective by weighing up the push and pull factors of the obstacles preventing the policymaking process moving forward and balancing that with the leverage you

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**The crux is to find a feasible objective based on the obstacles identified and your leverage.**

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can bring to the process to move it in the desired direction. The result of this combined approach is that you settle on an advocacy objective that is realistic and targeted for the specific policy context. We realize that the equation offered is rather crude, but it has turned out to be a helpful orientation for our trainees in seeing the relationship between the three core strategic elements of the APF. Being able to answer the three strategic questions at the core in a nuanced and clear manner will ensure you have a well-considered and solid strategy.

Careful consideration of these core strategic questions also helps researchers to transition into the role of advocate. Researchers devote considerable time and effort to an in-depth study on a policy issue and often feel that they have generated an “optimal” solution to the problem and cannot see why it would not be quickly adopted and implemented. However, often such solutions are generated in a “laboratory” setting and with limited consideration of the constraints, politics, and complexities that occur in the actual policymaking realities around the issue. The overall strategic focus encompassed in these three questions, especially starting with considering the challenges and obstacles in the policymaking process, helps to temper this often unrealistic ambition and ensures you are grounded in the real policy context and its constraints.

### 3.3.1 Map the Current Obstacles to Change

Before beginning any advocacy initiative, it is essential to understand the obstacles and challenges to moving the process in the direction you intend. The challenges vary but common types include

- a relatively closed decision-making process
- a government that does not share the same values or protect the same interests as you
- a policy issue that is not on the government agenda
- a lack of knowledge or understanding among a certain audience of the problem or potential solutions
- a lack of data to support decision-making or even a complete absence of research in your policy area

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**Mapping the current obstacles allows you to see the potential for policy change.**

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Starting from a focus on the obstacles ahead immediately contextualizes your research results and proposals, thus beginning the shift from researcher to advocate. Knowing these obstacles and challenges helps you to be realistic about what kind of change your advocacy can be expected to bring and focuses your advocacy messages and activities to address such challenges.

In the following case, the significant obstacles identified played a major role in determining how to approach the advocacy campaign and deciding what was achievable in that challenging context. The issues of leverage and advocacy objective are also included in the box as all three are interconnected and the insights from the other two are needed to make sense of the third.

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

### MAPPING THE OBSTACLES/CHALLENGES:

The obstacles in this case seemed insurmountable at the beginning. The European Stability Initiative had previously avoided working in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) since so many international organizations, NGOs, and media had been working, writing, and thinking about the challenges, especially after NATO's intervention in 1999. However, being an organization that was focused on the Balkans, at a certain point it became time to work on the issue.

By 2003, Mitrovica had become the leitmotif of the conflict with the two ethnic populations living separately across the Ibar river and protected from each other by UN troops. It was also the only significant urban population of Serbs left in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244). The problem was seen as a security issue, with the Serbs in the north of the town demanding that a separate administrative unit be established for them. The administrations in Pristina and Belgrade, as well as the international community and the media, were also very focused on the events in the town with the prospect of talks about the "final status" or independence of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) in the background. The process was at a stalemate within the framework of this highly charged security discussion.

### ASSESSING THE LEVERAGE:

Reframing of the problem away from just a security issue to a basic survival issue for the town was pivotal to the success of this advocacy initiative. The European Stability Initiative's approach to researching any situation is to first gather the most basic socioeconomic data; once they collected the data from Mitrovica, both the demographic information and the sources of income in the town showed that the town had no future after the conflict was over and outside subsidies dwindled away. By highlighting this dramatic sustainability problem, immediately local politicians took note and began to talk about ways to solve this local problem—a big turning point in the discussion.

In addition to the research, other elements contributed to making this change:

- The European Stability Initiative had built a strong reputation as a provider of quality research for the region.
- They had been directly contracted by the UN as an evaluation unit in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), allowing them access to the de facto government and all local networks.
- They also had a strong and established network of experts, opinion leaders, academics, and politicians on both sides of the conflict and built strong relationships with the spokespeople on both sides.
- They had strong links to the international community actors, the diplomatic community, and local and international media in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244).
- Their whole team made a huge effort over a year to mediate and push this decision by producing multiple policy papers, holding a number of conferences, and continually meeting all the actors and responding to the challenges as they emerged.
- The fact that the process was stuck for so long around a security discussion was indeed a challenge and an opportunity once ESI reset the agenda and broke the deadlock.

### SETTING A FEASIBLE ADVOCACY OBJECTIVE:

Having defined the problem as a local issue, the solutions they defined were also local: to allow a separate administrative unit to be established in the north of the town for the predominantly Serb population, but only on the conditions that freedom of movement between the two parts of the town was returned, full property rights were to be respected, and local economic development planning would be done together. The European Stability Initiative went through many stages of first getting this problem and an associated solution on the table in public, media, and expert discussions. It then went through a lengthy and difficult convincing and bargaining phase, and in the end the proposals were written into the independence plan for Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)—the Ahtisaari Plan.

### 3.3.2 Assess Your Leverage

The second issue that the APF asks you to consider is the question of *leverage*: this is a combination of what you can bring to the target policy debate together with what opportunities you can capitalize on in the process to address the challenges and start the process moving. This assessment asks you to look at your research and its insights in a purposeful manner, figuring out how you will use the findings to catalyze the policy change you are seeking. In tandem, you are also seeking to identify suitable opportunities or policy windows in the policymaking process that you can capitalize on with your research findings. Your leverage as a policy advocate often is a combination of the following:

- surprising or new research evidence or analysis
- a new solution to an old problem
- an open policy window or opportunity you can use to push forward a new idea
- support from influential or powerful individuals or groups

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**Leverage is the combination of what you can bring and use to start moving the process.**

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In the next case study, leverage underpinned many decisions on the approach to advocacy undertaken.

## MONGOLIA

### MAPPING THE OBSTACLES/CHALLENGES:

The issue of the potential revenues from mining projects had been a major public issue in Mongolia for a decade or more. Previous contracts or deals by the government with mining companies had been conducted in a very nontransparent manner and there were many claims of bribery and corruption. In 2006, a new law on mining was passed which sought to open up this process and protect the public interest in such dealings. The Oyu Tolgoi mine was a copper and gold deposit on a completely different scale to any previously discovered in Mongolia and had the potential to double government revenue if managed correctly. This contract and its potential outcome was the focal point of discussion among all sectors in Mongolia.

In spite of the new law on mining, the first stage of the negotiation process with the mining consortium was completed with the ministerial working group behind closed doors. The Open Society Forum asked to see a copy of the draft agreement and also to be invited into the discussion but was never given access. The only access they had was delivering training on such negotiations to those in the government involved in the negotiation process. One of the other big challenges in this process was a time-related issue: the working group brought the agreement to Parliament on the day before a weeklong national holiday, trying to slip it through the legislature unnoticed. Luckily this did not happen, and Open Society Forum had a three-to four-week period to complete an analysis and publish an opinion on the draft agreement.

### ASSESSING THE LEVERAGE:

In this case, the Open Society Forum's leverage was a combination of the following:

- Reacting with an analysis of the mining agreement in a very short four-week window: two recognized experts (an economist and a lawyer) showed that most of the risk was being carried by the state and that many important issues were unclear.
- Publishing this expert analysis in an opinion piece that was easy to access by all: "7 Questions on the Oyu Tolgoi Mining Agreement"<sup>9</sup> pointed out what issues had not been dealt with. Managing to arrange publication for this article was a major contribution.
- Having an established reputation as an independent player in Mongolia and volunteering their experts as advisors to the government.
- Accessing the expertise of the Open Society Foundations' worldwide network and Revenue Watch on extractive industries.
- Accessing the draft of the mining contract going to Parliament thanks to the Open Society Forum's strong ties with many people there.
- Acting as a bridge to broader civil society: once they held a meeting with their network to announce the findings of the analysis, CSOs mobilized, and these findings were an important ingredient that led to street demonstrations protesting the agreement.

### SETTING A FEASIBLE ADVOCACY OBJECTIVE:

From the beginning of the process, the Open Society Forum was worried about the quality of the deal and the risk of repeating past mistakes on such a hugely important development opportunity. Once they saw the draft agreement, their advocacy objective was to prevent the passing of this version and then to have further and broader consultations to come up with a fairer and more developed deal. By drawing on their network in Parliament, they succeeded in achieving this.

### 3.3.3 Set a Feasible Advocacy Objective

Balancing the obstacles and the leverage you can use and bring into the process, you then need to consider to what extent you can expect the process to move based on your advocacy efforts. Setting a feasible advocacy objective can range from starting a discussion to closing a decision:

- raising public awareness
- starting a stakeholder discussion
- changing expert thinking on an issue or option
- putting an issue on the government agenda
- getting draft legislative proposals tabled for discussion in parliament
- having your policy recommendations adopted and implemented

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**Your advocacy objective is the kind of change you are expecting in the process, from starting a discussion to closing a decision.**

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Of course, it is possible that the APF planning process may lead you to conclude that it is not actually feasible at the moment to move the process and that waiting for a more favorable environment is prudent.

It is important to point out that in planning a policy advocacy campaign your objective should be focused on the kind of change you are targeting in the policymaking process, as you can see in the list of examples above, and not on the resulting policy outcome. For example, you may want to improve access to healthcare services for a particular minority group (your planned outcome), but in planning your advocacy initiative, you need to think how far you can move the process towards making this a reality, for example, convincing a political party to commit to this in an upcoming election manifesto. Even if you are at the point where a decision-making body is ready to pass the legislation needed to deliver your target outcome, in planning your advocacy campaign the focus needs to be on getting that legislation passed. Advocacy planning is always firmly focused on process changes and these changes in process, if achieved, will deliver an outcome.

The following table gives more insight into these three interrelated dimensions of strategic advocacy planning in two of our cases. In both cases, a feasible objective was set after a process of weighing the obstacles with the leverage.

## KAZAKHSTAN

### MAPPING THE OBSTACLES/CHALLENGES:

The government's big idea of One Stop Shops was failing and being criticized in public. The Ministry of Justice realized that the implementation of One Stop Shops was not easy within the Kazakh culture of public administration and the assumptions underlying international best practice in this area did not hold to Kazakh realities. One main advisor to the minister was seen as the sole expert in the area of One Stop Shops, and there was little or no policy research available.

The challenge here centered around the legitimacy of both the new research and the researcher herself. The fact that the researcher worked in the government was a good start in a fairly closed system of government. However, the researcher worked in the Civil Service Agency and had little background or reputation in advising on the area of One Stop Shops. Further, this work was done in her other roles as a PhD student in a foreign university and as a research fellow exactly on the issue of One Stop Shops, so getting the research into the decision-making process and getting it taken seriously was a real issue.

### ASSESSING THE LEVERAGE:

In this case the main leverage was a combination of the following:

- Long-term relationships built with One Stop Shop managers and the relevant government officials by arranging trainings and foreign site visits through the Civil Service Agency.
- Research and, in essence, a program evaluation of One Stop Shops done by a civil servant researcher who understood Kazakh realities. The research, using and building on international best practice, concluded with practical suggestions for improvement and a long-term training program established in collaboration with professionals from the University of Edinburgh (where the researcher was studying), which is housed in a local training organization.
- The combination of the researcher being a government insider (civil servant) who brought in-depth knowledge of international best practices and an international network of resource people on One Stop Shops was also appealing.
- Convincing the main advisor to the Ministry of Justice on One Stop Shops that the research and its findings were worth using in the improvement of the One Stop Shop system in Kazakhstan.
- Broad criticism of the One Stop Shop model in the media put a lot more pressure on the Ministry of Justice to find a solution.

### SETTING A FEASIBLE ADVOCACY OBJECTIVE:

Knowing the relatively closed and hierarchical decision-making practices of the Kazakh government, the researcher sought to influence the expert thinking and drive at least some of the solutions by putting a new option on the table for improving the implementation of One Stop Shops in the upcoming decision-making process. Her proposal was a combination of an institutional fix in the short term (a new model for implementing One Stop Shops) combined with a longer-term capacity building approach. The fact that she was working from the inside of government made this considerably easier. She explicitly mentioned that this would not have been easy at all for an outside expert or someone from civil society.

## MACEDONIA

### MAPPING THE OBSTACLES/CHALLENGES:

The election of a new government in the summer of 2006 provided a window of opportunity for this piece of fresh research produced earlier that year. The new minister for health was looking for fresh initiatives to take forward in his new mandate. The research was also timely as Macedonia had already committed to delivering a Patients' Bill of Rights in the EU accession process.

The challenges for this advocacy effort came first from finding a way to get the research into the hands of the minister and convince him it was a priority area. Second, reframing the provision of health services to protect the rights of patients was something that was immediately met with skepticism from the very powerful medical professional community. They were afraid that this would change the legal position of doctors with regard to insurance claims.

### ASSESSING THE LEVERAGE:

In this case the main leverage was a combination of the following:

- The appointment of a close friend and former colleague as an advisor to the minister of health. At the beginning of his appointment, the advisor was looking for new initiatives to put to the minister and immediately liked the idea of a Patients' Bill of Rights.
- A piece of research that had done all the ministry's homework in this area, including a survey of international best practice, regional practice in the area, and a public opinion survey in Macedonia showing support for the idea.
- The appointment of the researcher as NGO representative to the ministerial working group to draft the legislation and also on the parliamentary working groups to follow the parliamentary stages of passing the bill.
- An already established reputation of working with the Ministry of Health in a different health-related area.
- An established name as the one think tank/NGO in Macedonia that was a member of the network that had established the European Charter on Patients' Rights.

### SETTING A FEASIBLE ADVOCACY OBJECTIVE:

Once the door to the minister was open and he was committed, few real obstacles impeded the passage of the bill, which with a lot of effort, eventually did happen in July 2008.

The following questions are designed to help you consider your own project from this strategic perspective:

## **ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST**

*Consider the key strategic questions for your advocacy plans:*

### **MAPPING THE CURRENT OBSTACLES/CHALLENGES**

- What's holding back the process from moving in the direction you wish?
- What obstacles or challenges exist to having your proposals accepted and acted upon?  
For example, in terms of the decision-making process, politics, interests, knowledge, or capacity.

### **ASSESSING YOUR LEVERAGE**

- What have you got that will catalyze movement of the process in the direction you want?
- What combination of new insights, evidence, supporters, and opportunities can you use to move the process?
- Is this combination enough to overcome the obstacles and challenges you identified and enough to achieve your objective(s)?

### **SETTING A FEASIBLE ADVOCACY OBJECTIVE**

- What kind of change can you realistically expect to see in the decision-making process?
- Given the leverage you have got and obstacles outlined, how far can you realistically expect to move the process?

Remember not to get too stuck on these questions at the beginning, as the detailed mapping and planning that follow will provide much more insight into how to nuance or shape your answers at this level.

## NOTES

- 1 Carden 2005, 2009; Nutley, Walter, and Davies 2002.
- 2 See: [http://lgi.osi.hu/documents.php?m\\_id=127](http://lgi.osi.hu/documents.php?m_id=127).
- 3 Available online: <http://www.policy.hu>.
- 4 Center for Regional Policy Research and Cooperation "Studiorum," hereafter Studiorum in the guide.
- 5 Available online: <http://www.policy.hu>.
- 6 Global Development Network 2003.
- 7 Crewe and Young 2002, Overseas Development Institute 2004, Stone 2009.
- 8 These insights were developed based on 50 case studies of research projects in developing and transition countries that were successful in influencing decision making.
- 9 Open Society Forum 2007b.

# 4

## ADVOCACY PLANNING FRAMEWORK (APP)—THE WAY INTO THE PROCESS

For any policy advocate, as the most basic element of trying to be influential, you have to engage the key actors in the target decision-making process. Knowing exactly who to engage, as well as when, where, and how to get involved, can make the difference between success and failure in an advocacy effort.<sup>1</sup> Building on an initial consideration of the core strategic focus questions outlined in Chapter 3, looking to find a way into the process is the next major point when leaving the one-way delivery of research or supply-side approach and beginning to consider the real and rather messy challenges of truly having policy influence.

The top and most important of the circles in the APP is called the “way into the process.” Through this circle, advocates map out and consider the target decision-making process, people, and thinking in relation to the advocacy effort they are planning. This is the major starting point in the detailed part of the APF mapping and planning process as most other advocacy planning decisions will be guided and influenced by the nature of the opportunities and challenges you map out in this circle. It basically sets the scene and points you in the right direction by guiding you in planning how to bring what you have learned from research into a target decision-making process. One recent training participant nicely summarized this challenge: “We need to understand the players and the playing field.”

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**The starting point of detailed planning is to understand the players and the playing field.**

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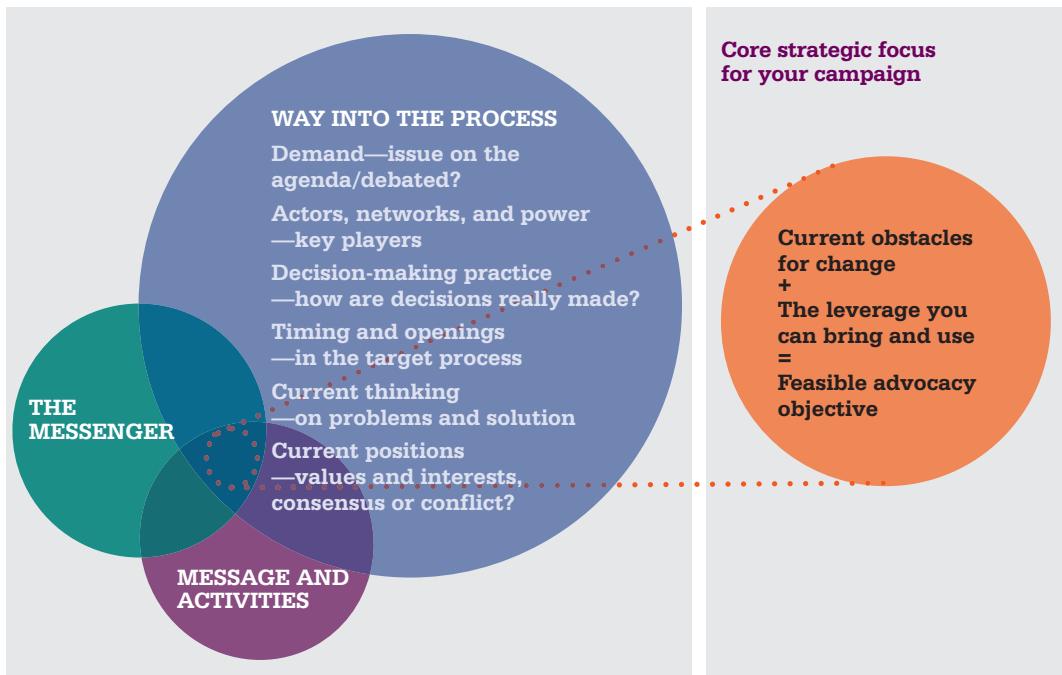
In this chapter, we provide an overview of the way into the process circle and then develop the six key areas of mapping and planning that together constitute the basis for a detailed picture of the policy landscape. In each of these key areas, we illustrate the key questions and advocacy lessons through the four

cases studies (introduced in section 3.1) and close each sub-section with a set of basic planning questions to help in your own planning.

## 4.1 WAY INTO THE PROCESS

**FIGURE 7.**

Way into the process (APF)



In Figure 7, we have broken down this first detailed mapping and planning process into six elements which address the following questions:

- What is the level of interest in the researched policy issue in the target policy process?
- Who are the key decision makers and opinion leaders that you need to influence?
- How does the decision-making process really work?
- What is the best timing/opportunity to start or continue your advocacy effort?
- How do the stakeholders understand the target policy issue and the potential solutions?
- What are the current positions of key actors in relation to any proposed change in policy?

There is considerable overlap in many of the categories presented separately in the APF—for example, demand and openings/timing—but we feel there is value in looking at the advocacy challenge from each of these perspectives as they ask you to consider slightly different elements and lend the required depth and nuance to strategic planning. This process should reveal an in-depth insight into the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead of you, which in turn inform all other aspects of your advocacy plan.

## 4.2 GAUGE THE LEVEL OF DEMAND

Governments will choose to make decisions and take action on certain policy issues (and ignore others) during their time in office, that is, these will be issues on the agenda and a “policy window” will open in these areas.<sup>2</sup> Once an issue is on the agenda, they will invite debate and input through public participation, commissioning and publishing research, establishing various working groups, and promoting their positions through the media and in Parliament. Some type of debate will probably happen in public and through formal procedures and/or in a more quiet, behind-the-scenes manner among experts and interested parties. If you are interested and prepared to advocate on agenda issues at this time, there will naturally be more interest in the positions put forward by any stakeholder. This is the simplest and most obvious idea behind the notion of demand. You will not have to create momentum around the issue; it already exists.

Of course, a policy issue does not necessarily have to be on the government agenda for debate to exist. Groups of experts, public officials, and interested stakeholders continually discuss their professional policy issues, and players such as activists, watchdogs, international organizations, political parties, associations, and unions often start or continue debates on many issues that do not appear on the current government agenda. Nevertheless, from an advocacy perspective, the ultimate reason they initiate and engage in such debates is to get the government to actually respond and act on their concerns.

The fact that a government chooses to act in a particular policy area simply means that more people are likely to be interested in reading, listening, responding to, and engaging with your advocacy efforts. Much of the literature points to the fact that you are much more likely to be successful in influencing policy if some level of demand for it already exists.<sup>3</sup> Further, it is worth noting that “policy influence is not a spontaneous by-product of good quality research”<sup>4</sup> and that supply without some existing demand will not easily lead to policy change. While this insight should not discourage you from developing issues on which there is little debate, it should make you realize that your first feasible advocacy objective is to create the type of discussion that puts pressure to get the issue on the agenda. You should also realize that in this case, your proposed policy change will probably take time and considerable resources and commitment.

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**Determine whether there is a call for change.**

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**Try to feed into an existing policy debate.**

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Some level of demand already existed in all four of our cases analyzed at the point where the advocates started their campaigns. The following three examples illustrate different dimensions of demand:

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

At the beginning of the European Stability Initiative research and advocacy, the town of Mitrovica was the leitmotif for the problems of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), with the two ethnic groups living entirely separately from each other divided by the Ibar river. The challenge of Mitrovica had been extensively discussed in national, regional, and international policy circles and the media and stakeholders were stuck on how to solve what they viewed as a policing/security problem.

## MACEDONIA

The passing of a Patients' Bill of Rights for Macedonia was part of the commitments made by the country through the EU accession process. It was on the legislative agenda but was not really a high priority for the new administration in 2006. The fact that Studiorum was able to show that much of the hard work was already completed through their research from 2006, combined with having access to the new advisor to the minister of health, meant that the issue moved easily onto the agenda of the government. In fact, the EU accession process has created many opportunities for such research to have influence, as the EU/EC often frames its questions in policy-oriented terms and wants to see evidence-based answers in return.<sup>5</sup>

## MONGOLIA

Revenue received by the Mongolian government through mining contracts with international mining companies has been a huge issue for over a decade in Mongolia. Stories of large-scale corruption, unfairly negotiated contacts, and environmental damage have been at the center of the debate. All sectors have been involved in this issue because the mining sector has the potential to revolutionize the economic future of the country. Through this broader discussion, a new mining law was passed in 2006 to regulate the contracting process.

The discovery of one of the largest copper deposits in the world, the Oyu Tolgoi mine, focused this debate on the potentially richest reserve in Mongolia. Despite this pressure, the initial negotiation undertaken with a ministerial working group was a closed discussion, although many tried to get involved. Once the draft contract was submitted to Parliament for approval in July 2007, the Open Society Forum got an advance copy, made it public, and pushed quickly to publish an expert analysis of the draft and to try to stop the signing of what their experts evaluated to be a badly negotiated contract.

In the following sections, we develop the need to understand the type of change that is being discussed as well as the unpredictable nature of demand.

### **4.2.1 Types of Demand— from Routine to Incremental to Radical**

Advocates must be aware of the types of change discussed or called for in any existing discussions on the issue, that is, routine, incremental, or fundamental.<sup>6</sup> Put simply, these types of change can be defined as follows:

- **Routine change**—this normally refers to the change of a day-to-day administrative procedure and governments usually will not call for analysis or research input to make this change; it is more trial and error by officials to find what works for the given situation.
- **Incremental change**—this refers to a change in the overall approach to implementing a current policy or, to use the jargon, a change in policy design. An example might be to contract out the delivery of a social service to a local NGO, rather than continuing to use a local government agency to do so. This may need more expert input, especially where the capacity of local officials is low, which is often the case in many transition countries.
- **Fundamental change**—this refers to a radical change in the strategic direction of a policy, for example, changing the approach on minorities from a multicultural approach to one that is rooted in assimilating such populations. Unsurprisingly, this is an opportune moment to achieve influence with research evidence, as governments who adopt radical changes are putting their political lives at risk and tend to take as much input on that change as possible.<sup>7</sup> Many commentators from transition countries say it is more radical reformers who have presented the real opportunity for research and expertise to influence decision making.<sup>8</sup>

Whether or not you actually agree with the administration on the level of change being discussed or proposed, it is essential to be aware of the discussion and shape your argument accordingly. Policymakers often remark that researchers are too willing to push for fundamental change, when that really is not on the agenda.<sup>9</sup> If fundamental change is not on the government agenda but you think it is needed, you would need to make an extremely compelling case for your recommendations. You may also realize that over time small incremental changes will not fix the underlying problem, and a discussion about a fundamental shift will slowly develop, and hence it is worth staying the course and continuing to push for such a fundamental change.

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**Be aware of the type of change achievable.**

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Two of our cases illustrate how addressing the level of demand can be a step towards influence.

## KAZAKHSTAN

One Stop Shops were introduced by presidential decree in Kazakhstan as the solution to corruption and weak public service delivery. There had been much criticism in public and the media of the effectiveness of One Stop Shops and an assessment of the implementation problems for this model was being called for, together with a proposal that would address the local constraints but improve the delivery of services through One Stop Shops, that is, an incremental change. It was at this level, directly feeding a demand from government, that the researcher put forward her recommendations.

## MACEDONIA

The issue of a Patients' Bill of Rights for Macedonia was indirectly related to the criteria for Macedonia as a candidate country in the EU accession process. Therefore, the government had committed to this level of fundamental rights-based change throughout the medical system, a radical change of sorts, in that these issues had been the subject of legislation in the past but not from a patients' rights perspective. As part of the accession commitments, there was little room for maneuvering and Studiorum did research and made proposals at this level, directly addressing the elements of how to put such a Bill of Rights together to suit the Macedonian context.

### 4.2.2 Challenges and Opportunities for Research Demand in Transition Countries

The specific characteristics of transition contexts impact on the push and pull for research in a number of ways. The fact that governments will only ask for input on decision making from anyone if there is institutional stability and a relatively open decision-making process<sup>10</sup> is of particular relevance. One of the main challenges to institutional stability in transition countries is the over-politicization of the executive branch, which usually results in the sacking of staff, all the way from senior to quite a low level, in a ministry when there is a change of administration.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, commentators and practitioners advise that in order to work with such public agencies in the long term, it is better to target and build relationships with second or third-tier officials, as they will be the ones to survive the cuts and are also the ones who possess the institutional memory that always strongly influences decisions and implementation.<sup>12</sup>

**Work with second- and third-tier government officials, as they will normally survive a political change.**

The literature also reveals that the transition process itself and/or strong economic pressures create conditions for strong research uptake.<sup>13</sup> This can be true when a government has the will and/or is under pressure (for example, from the international community) to actually make radical changes. Unfortunately, many leaders are more committed to patronage than policy change and sign international conventions to appease donors, with little desire to deliver on the policy commitments made in these documents.

Open decision-making processes are also a cornerstone to greater research uptake, and decentralization has provided more opportunities for research to influence policy when decision making, along with competencies and associated budgets, have been devolved from the center.<sup>14</sup> In fact, we take this insight a little further when we advise trainees from transition countries that “you’ve got to ‘look for the cracks’ in the process.” Nonetheless, decision-making processes that include public participation and/or research evidence remain largely at the discretion of the individual(s) in power and this can indeed be at any level of government, central or local.<sup>15</sup> If an individual or representative of a more progressive political movement becomes minister or mayor in a certain agency, region, or municipality, decisions ideally will be made in an open and expertise-informed manner for the duration of his/her administration. This is the kind of “crack” we are looking for. Unfortunately, when this person or party loses power and the next person takes over, the decision-making process often then returns to the much more familiar politically driven and closed process of old.

More inclusive decision-making processes also commonly happen when an issue is hotly contested and the administration is under pressure from the international community, the media, or the public.<sup>16</sup> Again, this is another type of crack for those interested in putting their voice in the debate. After two decades of the transition process, the fact that inclusive policymaking processes remain discretionary rather than institutionalized as a standard would imply that capacity development in this area for all actors (including decision makers) should stay high on the agenda.<sup>17</sup>

Even within more authoritarian societies, opportunities, however unexpected, do arise for research to influence policy.<sup>18</sup> Our case from Kazakhstan<sup>19</sup> clearly shows that more modern technologies such as One Stop Shops are being used to try to solve the basic challenges of government in such a country. Of course, this requires the input of experts with the capacity to investigate and understand the challenges of the local context. Furthermore, with the massive development of extractive industries and accompanying large increases in tax revenue in Kazakhstan and Mongolia, the general public and private industry is expecting more professionalism and delivery from their governments, creating more opportunity and demand for expertise in making decisions. This development, unfortunately, should not be confused with a larger commitment to democracy, but it may act as a catalyst in this direction. Of course, the expertise in our Kazakh case comes from within the government structure and this clearly shows that the lack of openness of the system severely restricts the opportunity to influence such decisions. Moreover, such a situation seems quite common in many transition countries where the power and resources are held tightly in the ministries and it is very difficult for any outsiders, and especially NGOs who may be perceived as enemies of government, to influence decisions.

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**Even in less  
open decision-  
making  
processes, you  
can still find  
“the cracks.”**

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## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Consider your advocacy plan from the perspective of demand:**

- Is your issue on the current government agenda?
- Is there a clearly stated demand for your research or ideas from government, international organizations, or other stakeholders?
- What kind of change do the main players say is needed? Is it something small and procedural or a change in strategy?
- If demand is low or nonexistent, can you still identify a “crack” in the policymaking process to work on?
- Is your advocacy objective still realistic based on the current level of demand or interest in the issue you’ve identified?

### 4.3 MAP THE ACTORS, NETWORKS, AND POWER CENTERS

Another dimension of this mapping process is understanding who is involved, the networks they are part of, and where the power lies in the network.<sup>20</sup> As one commentator put it: “Understanding who makes decisions—and who influences the decision makers—is paramount.”<sup>21</sup> People who have such influence can range from advisors to bureaucrats, journalists, academics, or NGO leaders, from leaders of unions or associations to even family members. Understanding these interactions and the power dynamic will provide you with an even deeper understanding of what we have referred to earlier as the *practice* of decision making.

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**Identify the main players with decision-making power and their networks.**

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At this stage, you are still mostly trying to map and understand how the decision-making process really works by adding another layer for consideration, that is, the players in the playing field. This will help you to make an informed decision on finding your way into the process as a player, who should be the target of your message, and potentially what kind of support you need and from whom. We approach this section by mapping the most formal relationships to the least. This order in no way reflects the level of influence; in fact, it is often the inverse that is the case.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 8 illustrates the grouping of actors and their relationships to the decision makers, and we develop these connections next.

**FIGURE 8.**  
Actors, networks, and power centers



#### 4.3.1 Decision Makers, Advisors, and Institutions inside Government

In a representative democracy, we elect leaders to represent us in making decisions, which we hope are made in the public interest. Such leaders have roles in the legislative arms of our governments as parliamentarians or councilors, and if they are prominent figures in their political parties, they may also be members of the cabinet and have a role as a minister or deputy minister at the national level or mayor at the local level. Further, in any political party, influential opinion leaders in a particular area (such as foreign policy or environmentalism) are often the appointed leaders of commissions or working groups in these areas. The first task in this mapping is identifying those who are in the decision-making roles through all stages of the target decision-making process.

It is then worthwhile to find out about the individuals themselves in these roles, honing in on their past, interests, background, and education, as well as their rise to power. As mentioned above, the position of an individual decision maker can mean the difference between a decision-making process that is open and interested in research evidence and one that is not.<sup>23</sup> Also, finding out whether

a minister has any strong interest or expertise in the assigned role can be a strong indicator as to whether she or he will lead the decision-making process or whether it will be lead more by advisors and advisory bodies such as working groups or research institutes.

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**Find out about the background and interests of decision makers and the circle of advisors.**

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For example, an associate of ours works as a researcher in a think tank with a strong liberal bias in Slovakia. The head of the think tank became a minister in a recent administration. Knowing about his previous work in the think tank tells you much about both his interests and how he might approach decision making as well as the networks he has been a part of in the past.

Knowing the circle of advisors around a decision maker is also crucial: if a decision maker has a limited background in a certain policy area, he or she will often simply follow the word of an advisor or advisory body in making decisions. Higher-level civil servants or bureaucrats may also be very influential in leading decision making, as they are the ones who can advise what works in terms of the management, administration, and capacity of a public institution. It is often said that decision makers set the agenda, but advisors and bureaucrats are the ones who elaborate the alternatives on an agenda issue.<sup>24</sup>

The following cases examined illustrate how in-depth knowledge of decision-making circles was key to success.

## KAZAKHSTAN

In this case, the researcher knew that one advisor to the minister was the opinion leader in the area of One Stop Shops and she targeted him with her research in advocacy efforts.

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

In the Mitrovica case, the European Stability Initiative quickly identified and primarily targeted the main spokespersons for the two sides in this dispute: on the Serbian side, this was a member of Parliament, and on the Albanian side, the person was the first postconflict mayor of Mitrovica and prime minister of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) at the time of the campaign. Without engaging these two, nothing could have happened in this advocacy effort.

## MACEDONIA

As in the Kazakh case, the identification and targeting of an advisor to the minister of health and an almost accidental relationship through academic circles with a future deputy minister were pivotal in making this advocacy effort work.

### **4.3.2 Decision Makers, NGOs, Associations, and Interest Groups**

It is also critical for the advocate to understand “where power lies and the inter-relationships between government and nongovernment actors.”<sup>25</sup> Although the level of engagement of NGOs in decision making in the region is well below what we might consider to be the target of a strong governance model, as time passes, there is an increasing recognition of the value of including NGOs in such decision making. Advice from NGOs to government can range from formal commissions of think tanks and academics, to participation and consultation through working groups and formal hearings, to more *ad hoc* interactions commonly through lobbying, conferences, and publications.

In addition, the lines between government and NGOs are blurring as the “revolving door” syndrome<sup>26</sup> becomes more evident, a situation where NGO figures take up government roles for the duration of an administration and return to their former NGO posts when they are voted out. The Slovak think tank director mentioned earlier is the perfect example. Much more broad-scale involvement of former NGO activists in government has also occurred (for instance, in Georgia and Bulgaria in the last decade).

Two of our cases illustrate long-term and developing partnerships between NGOs and government agencies and the importance of these connections in advocacy efforts:

#### **MACEDONIA**

Studiorum began cooperating with the Ministry of Health in Macedonia on how to safely use contaminated land before this project began. They were then invited to be the NGO representative on the working group for the Patients’ Bill of Rights and were prominent during all stages of the bill’s drafting and passage through the executive and parliamentary stages. The ministry then continued the cooperation with Studiorum on the publicity campaign or social marketing around the Patients’ Bill of Rights following its adoption. Upon the suggestion of Studiorum, the ministry also has formed working groups to look into introducing public-private partnership modalities into the health sector, including dialysis treatment, eye surgery, and health technologies.

#### **MONGOLIA**

Open Society Forum has maintained a position as an independent player in Mongolia and this means that it has made many friends in various political parties. They had little or no access to the Ministry of Finance during the early stages of the negotiation of this agreement. But once it was submitted to Parliament, which at the time was made up of a broad range of representatives from different political parties, they were able to get access to the draft agreement and lobby their parliamentarians to wait and take heed of their analysis. These connections or networks proved very valuable in this advocacy effort.

Hence, looking at the ties between decision makers or government bodies and the NGO sector is also important. Many NGOs, think tanks, and organizations compete with each other to be *the* recognized voice or the “go to” organization on certain issues or representing certain constituencies. There may be more than one organization in such a network or they may actually comprise a more formal coalition or an umbrella organization. Nevertheless, having this access and reputation is a primary goal for many NGOs and understanding the role these connections and networks play in decision making is important.

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**Evaluate the connections between decision makers and NGOs.**

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Associations representing large or powerful constituencies can also be very influential in such decision-making processes. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, associations that represent the interests of war veterans are very powerful and it is difficult for any government to be seen to question the broad range of benefits they have been given. Obviously, business associations and the private sector can also be of significant importance in certain issues, for the economic impact of policy change is always a major consideration, and business interests are often very close to particular political parties and movements.

### **4.3.3 Decision Makers and the Media**

In countries where the media holds a certain level of independence, many media outlets can be an important actor in influencing decision making. As mentioned above, the decision-making process itself is often opened by the influence of public pressure coming from all kinds of media: from the traditional sources of newspapers, TV, and radio and now even more so from social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, or blogs. However, in many countries of the region, substantial numbers of media outlets continue to act more as the public voice of their political and/or corporate masters and are more focused on announcing and defending government positions that have already been made, rather than acting as the checks and balances to such positions. Social media can be especially important in circumstances where there is an attempt to control the broader public discourse or harsh repression on calls for change.

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**Consider the role of both traditional and social media.**

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Hence, understanding the level of independence and role of various media outlets is very important in knowing where the power lies, as the reputation and political future of politicians often rests in the hands of the discussions that are brought to the public through the media. Media outlets or particular commentators will often have a particular interest in certain issues or political stances and can be very influential in policy decision making as they hold a lot of leverage. Knowing these potential players is vital to understanding the potential dynamic of a decision. The Mitrovica case illustrates the potential importance of the media in advocacy efforts and how getting it right really matters.

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

The European Stability Initiative worked tirelessly through the process on a broad range of media in Albanian and Serbian languages and also had a lot of interaction with the international media outlets covering the development of the situation in Mitrovica. For example, once the European Stability Initiative had convinced the Kosovar political leadership to accept an administrative division of the town, it was essential that Albanian-speaking media understood why this decision was taken and that it would not be painted as a sell-out to international pressure.

### 4.3.4 Informal Networks

Informal connections or relationships cannot and should not be discounted.<sup>27</sup> As one commentator remarked, “Relationships are critical. Regardless of the formal or bureaucratic systems in which they operate, the personal and professional links among individual researchers and decision makers are decisive in affecting policy influence.”<sup>28</sup> For example, a trainee from Tajikistan mapped out the circle of influence around the president and found that the people with the most influence were members of his family. The Macedonian example is also a good illustration of the importance of personal and informal relationships.

**Don't overlook  
or reduce the  
importance  
of informal  
or personal  
connections.**

## MACEDONIA

The key path to influence in this case was through a newly appointed advisor to the Ministry of Health. He happened to be a colleague and friend of the researcher's, and although he had graduated in medical sciences, he had not worked in the area of healthcare for quite a while. He came to the researcher and her think tank to get some new ideas to present to the minister.

Also, within the framework of an academic conference, the researcher had been trying to promote a more academic publication from Studiorum called the Journal for European Issues, “EuroDialogue.”<sup>29</sup> After her presentation of the journal, one of the conference attendees expressed interest in publishing an article in this journal. This person turned out to be the future deputy minister of health and this informal academic connection turned out to be useful in the advocacy effort. In truth, this is more an example of luck and the benefits of being well-connected than planning, but often this kind of good fortune is also an ingredient of policy influence.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Consider the important actors and networks in your advocacy plan:**

- Who are the main stakeholders in the target policy issue?
- Who are the actual decision makers on your issue? Where does the real power lie?
- Who are decision makers connected to in government and in the NGO sector?
- Are there informal or personal relationships that matter?
- Who should be the main target audiences for your advocacy?

### 4.4 UNDERSTAND THE DECISION-MAKING PRACTICE

Here, we focus on how the decision-making process actually happens. The how and who are obviously two sides of one coin, but we feel they are worth looking at individually.

We've emphasized that a starting point for effective advocacy is having a good understanding of the policy landscape, that is, the target decision-making process. However, there is often a great difference between the formally stated decision-making process and the reality of how the decision is really made. For example, the formal statement of a policy process for an environmental policy may be that an initiative starts in an environmental ministry where they have an internal working group of officials, advisors, and invited stakeholders who then submit draft legislation to the Parliament, which opens a public debate and starts a working group of their own. After the requisite time for public discussion and input from other experts, the initiative is then brought up in the Parliament for discussion and a vote. The reality of this decision might be that it is actually a negotiated settlement between the government, business interests, and an environmental coalition of local NGOs backed by international organizations and donors. This is where the deal is done and where the real decision is made.

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**It's crucial to know how decisions are really made.**

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This is why we choose to focus on decision-making "practice" rather than process, as the emphasis is rather different.<sup>30</sup> This focus on practice may be especially important in transition countries, as even the formal processes often tend to happen at the discretion of the individual or institution leading the process or because of external pressure (as mentioned in the section above).

The following case studies illustrate that knowing the reality of the decision-making process was an important factor:

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

In the Mitrovica case, the European Stability Initiative ran and mediated an entire informal and parallel process to get the two sides to discuss and respond to their research and proposals, and also facilitated the inclusion of the international community, local political parties, governments, and the media.

A good example of their understanding of the real practice of decision making is illustrated in how they dealt with advisors and opinion leaders in Belgrade on the Mitrovica issue. During the initial meeting of both sides from Mitrovica in Wilton Park, the Kosovar (UNSCR 1244) prime minister committed to the administrative division of the town as well as freedom of movement, the full return of property, and joint economic development of the town. Knowing there were opinion leaders in Belgrade who could possibly force local Serb leaders to back down on these commitments, the European Stability Initiative went to Belgrade to try to convince them not to. While they did not convince them to buy into the whole idea, it was enough to convince them to not block the process at a certain time. This was very important in moving the process forward.

## MONGOLIA

The history of contracts between Mongolian government officials and mining companies has been one marred by allegations of large-scale corruption. The law on mining in 2006 was an attempt to formalize and make more transparent and inclusive these negotiation processes. So, once the negotiation began in 2006 about the Oyu Tolgi mine (one of the largest copper deposits in the world), there was a great worry from those outside the executive of how well these new procedures would actually work.

The initial negotiations happened between the companies and a ministerial working group, but did not allow any outside participation in the group. The Open Society Forum tried to get access to the debate but was only allowed to offer training to the group, and never got to see the draft agreement. It was only when the agreement was submitted to Parliament that it became available to the Forum and only at that point because the government was made up of a broad coalition of political parties, some of which had worked closely with the Open Society Forum in the past.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Consider the reality of the decision-making process for your advocacy plan:**

- What are the formally stated stages of decision making on your issue?
- Are there more informal decision-making structures and networks that will influence or lead the decision in your area?
- Who is involved in these more informal discussions?
- How does this balance of formal and informal decision making feed into your advocacy plan?

## 4.5 GET THE TIMING RIGHT

**Plan to have your research and analysis ready for when a decision is being made.**

One piece of advice that seems to come from all commentators is that timing is crucial in advocacy.<sup>31</sup> Simply put: in order to have the best chance of influencing a policy decision, you must try to have your research or analysis ready to feed into the target discussion at the time when decisions are going to be made on the issue, that is, when policy windows are open.<sup>32</sup> Having a deep understanding of the people and processes around a particular policymaking process will effectively guide you in understanding when such windows may open and also when is the best time to make your move. Two of our policy advocacy cases are illustrative of getting the timing right.

### KAZAKHSTAN

One Stop Shops were introduced by presidential decree in Kazakhstan a few years prior to the research as the solution to corruption and weak public service delivery. Following much public and media criticism of the implementation of One Stop Shops, the researcher knew that the government agency with the task of making the One Stop Shop model work had really not done the required research or evaluation and had little capacity to do so. There was clear demand from the Ministry of Justice to get this input and they immediately took the research on board.

### MONGOLIA

The Open Society Forum and Revenue Watch had been trying and failing to get information on and access to the draft agreement between the mining consortium and the government while it was being negotiated in a ministerial working group for nearly a year. Once it came to a parliamentary discussion, it was suddenly available and they acted immediately to prevent the signing of what they judged to be a contract not in the best public interest. We often experience that such discretionary processes mean there may be a very short time given for stakeholders, especially NGO actors, to respond to drafts of policy proposals or legislation.

### 4.5.1 Predict When Policy Windows Will Open

One of the greatest challenges for analysts and researchers and their organizations is to be ready with their evidence and analysis when a policy issue comes onto the decision-making agenda. In most instances, policy research can take anywhere from two or three months to two years to complete. In all four case studies, the organizations had been working on their issues for over a year before they were ready and the policy window was open. In addition, conducting such research takes time and resources, and in order to fund these initiatives you need to show some return, which in the case of policy research or analysis means influence of some kind. So, in planning your advocacy work, you need to try to predict what will come on the agenda and when and make plans accordingly.<sup>33</sup>

Making such predictions is notoriously difficult as policymaking and political processes are dynamic and volatile<sup>34</sup> and it often turns out that there is as much luck as strategy in getting this right. Nevertheless, experience has shown that there are ways to look at an upcoming process to guide your prediction of what may occur. As previously raised in Chapter 2, there are a number of recognized ways to influence agenda-setting:

- New research evidence setting the agenda
- New technologies and trends and their transfer to address policy problems
- Changes of leadership or political parties in government
- Focusing events such as emergencies, security or economic crises, or natural disasters<sup>35</sup>

Exploring these four categories helps to unpack ideas of how to facilitate the prediction process:

- **New research evidence setting the agenda**

This can be the easiest situation for policy researchers since, in essence, the research they are doing leads to a decision to act on the part of the government. In such cases, the research normally brings out something that is unexpected, surprising or unignorable—what we call a “striking fact”—that does not fit into the commonly held understanding of the problem or the current solution. A common scenario is that the research shows that the current government policy is not performing to the expected level or that the assumptions that led to the decision to take the current policy approach have changed, for example, in terms of demography or economic development.<sup>36</sup>

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**“Striking facts” from your research can help open a policy window.**

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Two of our cases nicely illustrate situations where research and analysis lead the agenda:

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

In this case, the European Stability Initiative started their research by looking at the most basic socioeconomic questions: What are the populations of both ethnic groups and how do they live? They found that the population levels of both Serbs and Albanians in Mitrovica were falling, which completely contradicted what political leaders on both sides were saying. Further, they found that the town of Mitrovica was essentially living off the crisis, with subsidies going to a majority of the population from all sides. Once the crisis was over, there would be no economic future for the town. These findings were something that local politicians could not ignore. The research's economic sustainability dimension opened a new line in the discussion, which previously had focused solely on the security and territory component. Ultimately, this lead to a decision that took the economic element into account.

## MONGOLIA

The Mongolian government was set to sign an agreement on the Oyu Tolgoi mine with an international mining consortium in July 2007. The Open Society Forum introduced their economic and legal analysis of the agreement and showed that the monetary returns had not been well evaluated or elaborated and that many of the legal positions were not clear. Through these revelations, the Open Society Forum successfully mobilized a significant public and NGO response that was instrumental in getting the government to reconsider its position and continue the negotiation process instead of signing the agreement.

The cases illustrate examples of when research results can lead the agenda, but there is still an element of prediction involved. In terms of helping on agenda prediction, it is also advisable to try as much as possible to stay informed on the research agendas of other relevant organizations.

Another aspect of research leading the agenda that may be particularly relevant to the transition context is the fact that even the most striking research evidence may not be listened to or taken seriously by government.<sup>37</sup> Hence, the standing and credibility of an organization producing research is important for predicting agenda issues. This element of the perceived legitimacy of those producing research or analysis will be developed in detail later in Chapter 5, The Messenger.

- **New technology, trends, and transfer**

There is a continuous discussion of how to innovate to employ new technologies and approaches to find better and more efficient solutions to policy challenges. The example of how information technologies and the internet have been harnessed to network citizens, provide information, and even deliver public services in the last two decades is the most il-

lustrative example of such innovation. The development and availability of new technologies often provide the impetus for governments to act to solve public policy problems, thereby putting them on the agenda.<sup>38</sup>

Sometimes called “policy spillovers”<sup>39</sup> or transfers, the development of new technologies or new approaches to solving policy problems often become international trends that then lead policy discussions in many countries. This is certainly true of transition countries where neighbors quickly transfer successful or “trendy” policy solutions from country to country. A recent example is the introduction of a flat income tax and simplification of the tax return process to try to reduce the informal economy and increase government revenue.

However, the transfer of policy solutions may not always be a purely rational or internal political decision and is often led by a mixture of pressure and incentive from international organizations.<sup>40</sup> Throughout the 1990s, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund offered huge monetary support to transition and developing countries on the condition of deep structural reforms led by the thinking of what is called the “Washington consensus,” that is, a market-based reform of public services. The EU accession process has also pushed broad reforms incentivized by the promise of investment and membership.

In two of our cases, agendas were led by the introduction of such new technologies.

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**Stay informed  
on new  
trends and  
technologies  
used in other  
countries as  
they can lead  
the agenda-  
setting process.**

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## KAZAKHSTAN

The One Stop Shop model has been a popular approach throughout the region to try to reduce the obstacles to citizens accessing public services and, as in this case, improving the quality and efficiency of public services and reducing corruption. This model of public service delivery is one of the implementation models that came from the new public management (NPM) approach that seeks to bring the professionalism and responsiveness of the market to public service delivery.<sup>41</sup> Such an approach would also be positively received as a step in the reform process by international donors and banks.

## MACEDONIA

The passing of a Patients’ Bill of Rights was indirectly related to the criteria for Macedonia as a candidate country in the EU accession process.

You should also be aware that trends only have a limited shelf life and these windows may close as quickly as they open. In summary, you have got to be aware of the end as well as the beginning of such trends in the policy world.

- **Change of leadership or political parties in government**

This most predictable way for agendas to be reset is through a change of the political party in power.<sup>42</sup> The basic competition of values between parties through the electoral process normally means that parties identify policy issues, approaches, and solutions they will prioritize and which will be different from other parties. Also, when a new party is elected to government there tends to be more openness to new ideas as well as a change in the source of ideas and advice.<sup>43</sup> Such a change in agenda priorities can also result from a change of leadership within the governing political party or a change in the balance of power in a coalition government.

Given the realities of politics, it is unsurprising that research advice that fits the value framework of a new leadership is a lot more likely to be influential than advice that does not.<sup>44</sup> This is certainly something to consider in making your plans for policy advocacy campaigns. One of our cases illustrates a new agenda development following a change of government.

## MACEDONIA

Studiorum finished the research on a Patients' Bill of Rights in the beginning of 2006 and decided that with an upcoming election in the summer, it was better to wait for the outcome of the election than begin advocacy work at that time. Following the election, a colleague and friend became advisor to the minister of health and he was interested in best advising the minister with ideas for ongoing healthcare reforms. The researcher put forward the research on a Patients' Bill of Rights, which would not only fulfill EU accession criteria but also fit into the new government's political agenda. Not surprisingly, the minister put this on the agenda more or less immediately and the researcher was invited to participate in the ministerial working group as the NGO representative in November 2006.

The experience from this case does not mean that you should not engage in any advocacy until a political party that shares your values is in power. In fact, this kind of value opposition is the key to strong democratic debate. Moreover, research can give a decision maker the confidence to act or not to act.<sup>45</sup> You may, for example, introduce research that creates enough doubt or discussion to prevent a decision going ahead. Nevertheless, advocates should be clear about what is a feasible objective under such conditions: feeding or supporting an opposition position, for example, or softening up expert communities to bring your perspective into their discussion. Of course, waiting is also always an option.

However, election cycles and possible changes in administration are not the only thing to consider. Planning and budgetary cycles mean decisions

will be made according to set deadlines and will determine when policy windows open and close.<sup>46</sup> Being aware of the executive planning of your policy issue can also help in timing your advocacy interventions.

- **Focusing events such as emergencies, security or economic crises, or natural disasters**

For obvious reasons, these situations are the most difficult to predict as they tend to occur without warning. The global financial crisis of October 2008 is a good example of how the sudden failure of the international banking system quickly brought onto the agenda decisions on the ways to save key banking institutions in national and international arenas, and in the medium to longer term a discussion to rethink state regulation of the banking system. Under these conditions, all other items on the government agenda are put on hold and all opinions get a decent airing, especially those with workable and practical solutions attached.

Such focusing events mean that researchers and analysts have a chance to react to but not plan for these events. A quick response is required, as suggested in one of the “Ten Commandments for economists”: “Dare to be quick and dirty. Partial analysis is better than none.”<sup>47</sup> In essence, the advice is to work with what you have to get your voice in the discussion within that short span of time before some action has to be taken. An organization like International Crisis Group<sup>48</sup> is a good illustration of this kind of tension between continually monitoring potential conflict situations and the need to respond quickly once something happens with the information and tools available. Put simply, when a crisis erupts, it is time to act, not commission a two-year research project. However, we would sound a note of caution: avoid becoming the “instant expert” on issues you are unprepared to respond to! This will probably damage your reputation in the long run more than any short term media attention would bring.

Two of the case studies are examples of where a focusing event led to a response from the researchers and analysts involved. In both cases, they had been monitoring and studying the situations for some time and were prepared to respond.

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If the timing is not right, developing opposing positions or waiting are often the best options.

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To respond in a crisis, “partial analysis is better than none.”<sup>49</sup>

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## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

In March 2004, violence erupted across the bridge over the Ibar river in Mitrovica between rioting groups of Serbs and Albanians, with UN peacekeepers in between. This received a lot of international press attention and everyone in the international sphere began to take the issue much more seriously. This, in turn, opened the space for the European Stability Initiative to act, since the think tank had just introduced its proposal (in February 2004) for a separate Serb municipality in the North of Mitrovica coupled with commitments to freedom of movement, property return, and joint economic planning.

## MONGOLIA

This was not a crisis or emergency per se, but a situation where researchers had to react in a similar fashion. A ministerial working group from the Mongolian government was in closed negotiation with an international mining consortium on the Oyu Tolgoi mine up to July 2007. They submitted the agreement to Parliament on the eve of the opening of the biggest national festival in the country. During this week-long festival (Naadam) period, most people are on holiday. The Open Society Forum suspected that the Ministry of Finance was trying to push the agreement through Parliament when very few people would notice.

The Open Society Forum and Revenue Watch had been trying to gain access to the negotiation process and had even conducted training for those involved during 2006. But at no time did they get access to the draft agreement. Once the agreement was submitted to Parliament, it became public and the Open Society Forum worked intensively with the experts from Revenue Watch to produce a legal and economic analysis of the draft before the end of July. They released an analysis that seriously questioned the economic return predictions presented by the Ministry of Finance as well as the soundness of the legal agreement. This was presented to the press and NGOs, which immediately put pressure on parliamentarians not to agree to this version of the contract, succeeding in holding up the process.

It is evident from the commentary and cases that getting the timing right is a balance of being able to predict openings and closings of policy windows and being ready to respond to windows that open in a predicted manner or quite suddenly.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

### **Consider the timing and openings for your advocacy plan:**

- When is the best time to make your move or start your campaign?
- Is there a specific event or process that you can target? For example, a conference, a public or expert debate, a working group?
- Can your research drive the process? Can you show very striking insights or facts and/or offer a much-needed solution?
- Can you draw on momentum around a popular or trendy international new technology or approach that is relevant for solving the problem?
- Can you predict an opening that will emerge through some form of change? For example, an election or a change in political leadership?

## 4.6 UNDERSTAND CURRENT THINKING IN THE POLICY NETWORK

When targeting experts in a policy community with a new piece of analysis, advocates strive to persuade them to buy into their interpretation of the problem, their assessment of the options available, and ultimately their recommendations, so that their thinking and proposals become part of the new conventional wisdom on the issue. This speaks to an idea of a commonly shared current interpretation of any policy issue, which is also commonly called the “dominant discourse” or “policy narrative.”<sup>50</sup> Such a narrative or story often includes a framing of the problem, an interpretation of the effectiveness of the current approach, a bank of evidence to support these interpretations, and an elaboration of the possible solutions available. Very importantly, there is also a commonly shared language or jargon around the issue. Of course, there may be competing interpretations of all aspects of the problem; nevertheless, there is usually a significant overlap in the current opinion on the policy challenge itself. Having a good understanding of all aspects of the current narrative or thinking on a policy issue is a crucial foundation for constructing an advocacy message that effectively engages target audiences and is considered a relevant contribution to the policy debate around the issue.

Two more specific points about policy narratives are worth raising:

- **Policy narratives of the past inform current thinking.**

Understanding past policy narratives is also important, especially knowing the kind of information or evidence on which previous decisions have been based.<sup>51</sup> In our experience of transition contexts, this may be particularly important as many decisions have been made with low-quality and/or very limited empirical data sets. In fact, decisions are often lead by a combination of the current interpretation of international best practice by leading experts in the capital city and the often-limited data available in the central statistics office. This presents both an opportunity as well as the obvious challenge, as any in-depth policy research that is informed by primary data from the national context has an advantage; however, in a culture that is unused to producing or using policy research, you may have to sell the idea of the research itself as a worthwhile contribution to more effective decision-making, in addition to the new evidence it generates. These realities often result in narratives that are value-heavy and evidence-light and may continue to be strongly defended as the main experts have presented and defended these stories for a considerable time.

- **Shaping your proposals to fit with how the issue is framed ensures your ideas are perceived as relevant.**

The way problems are framed is a particularly important aspect of current thinking which impacts greatly on how you frame your own contribution to the debate. For example, a discussion on the lack of delivery of social services to a minority population in the minority language can be framed

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You need to understand how stakeholders discuss the target issue and potential solutions.

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Due to limited research, current thinking on an issue may be value-heavy and evidence-light.

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by various actors as an issue of human rights, public service delivery, or even national security, if some actors view the minority as a threat. Mapping and understanding the various lines, arguments, and evidence in the problem framing and broader thinking about the topic is essential for the development of an advocacy campaign that is immediately seen as relevant and targeted. If you fail to address the issue without at least reference to how it is framed, your contribution can and will be readily perceived as out of touch and irrelevant, no matter how strong your research and evidence may be. One of the cases analyzed is a very good illustration of how reframing the policy narrative can be a powerful strategy in moving the process.

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

Reframing the problem, thereby changing the policy narrative, made a big difference in the Mitrovica case. Until the European Stability Initiative's research, Mitrovica was discussed as a security and policing issue and the process was stuck around this sensitive and politicized discussion. No one was considering the economic future or sustainability of the town and the European Stability Initiative's reframing of the problem away from a security issue of national and international significance to the simple question of how the town would survive after the crisis brought a change in the focus of the narrative which was immediately engaging for all sides and also brought all the local actors on board. This reframing also provided the basis of a fruitful and constructive debate between the two sides that previously did not move from very entrenched positions.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

### Map out the current thinking or policy narrative for your advocacy plan:

- How do the various stakeholders define the problem?
- How do key players frame the discussion? For example, as an issue of human rights, public service delivery, or national security?
- What language do key players use in discussing the issue? What are key terms or concepts that are commonly used in the discussion?
- What solutions do different actors talk about?
- Which solutions do different actors consider feasible or acceptable?
- How have actors arrived at the current thinking on the issue? What from the past has informed this thinking?
- How will you frame your contribution to fit in with or change the nature of the discussion?

## 4.7 MAP THE CURRENT POSITIONS OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

In contrast to the broad shared thinking or narrative on an issue, this is an attempt to map the specific opinions and positions of the various actors involved. This mapping will also help you see where your own position might fit in and how you may need to focus your messages to shift key players' positions. In some issues, there may be broad consensus for change, but there is rarely a consensus on how to make this change. In any policy change, there are winners and losers and different actors will defend the interests of certain constituencies in a policy debate, for example, war veterans, unions, teachers, private sector, or pensioners. In addition, there are usually ideological differences between the actors involved who seek to promote certain values, for example, nationalism, liberalism, protectionism, freedom of speech, or open society. In open systems, this leads to a healthy competition of ideas that is the foundation of the democratic system. In summary, mapping the actors' positions is critical to planning an advocacy campaign with an aim to move the debate.<sup>52</sup>

The feasibility of your advocacy objective is also influenced by the level of consensus or conflict around an issue as this is often a predictor of how easily the process will move.<sup>53</sup> Through the transition process, there has been a remarkably consensual liberal democracy and neo-liberal market-oriented reform agenda; in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, whether by choice or under pressure from international organizations, these reforms have gone ahead without a huge amount of dissent.<sup>54</sup> This is especially true where new technologies or approaches are introduced and policymakers are more ready to admit that they do not understand these areas and hence look for advice.<sup>55</sup> Our cases on a Patients' Bill of Rights in Macedonia and One Stop Shops in Kazakhstan are good examples of this type of consensual change.

When conflict between actors does exist, you need to know the various positions being taken and understand why these groups are holding onto these positions. By trying to understand the incentives of the actors, you can work out how firmly entrenched they are in these positions and also if there is a chance to move them. You can also see where your argument would fit in the current debate and who might benefit from using it. On this basis, you need to consider whether it is in your interest to take that side, and more generally how to manage the strategic risk of entering the debate on either side (see section 6.5). Mapping helps you to see who are your natural allies in the debate and also may lead to reconsidering how you might present your argument. This is particularly relevant for organizations or networks that want to remain independent in such discussions.

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**Be aware of the interests and values different actors are defending and promoting.**

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**Gauge the level of consensus or conflict on the target issue.**

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The Mitrovica case is a good example of how to target entrenched positions.

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

Prior to the European Stability Initiative's research and advocacy effort, the Serbian side demanded a separate municipality in the north of Mitrovica to protect them and their interests from what would be a large Albanian majority in a municipality comprising the whole town. At that time the Serbs were protected in the northern area by UN peacekeepers. There was little movement between the north and the Albanian-dominated southern area; many Albanian properties in the north were already sold and settled by Serbs.

On the Albanian side, they saw the demand for a separate administrative unit as an attempt to annex territory by Serbs wanting to keep a direct link to Belgrade even after the planned independence of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244). The loss of property was also an issue on both sides.

When the European Stability Initiative's research convinced both sides that the town had no economic future beyond the crisis unless the two sides worked together, a new discussion began. Their proposal was to give the Serbs a separate municipality so that their interests would be well represented and that they would stay in the town, along with the hospital and university on the north side. However, it was proposed in return they must agree to freedom of movement between the north and south, the full return of property to Albanians in the north, and joint economic planning for the town. This allowed both sides to see the need from a local perspective of trying to find a solution to their problem that provided for a sustainable and equitable future. The proposal was agreed.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

### Map the current positions of stakeholders for your advocacy plan:

- Is there broad consensus among the main players on this issue or is there conflict between various parties?
- What interests are various actors defending?
- What values are various actors promoting?
- Which players will more easily be convinced by your argument?
- How easily will the debate move or be settled?
- How entrenched are actors in their current position?
- How movable is their position and to what extent does their position need to move in order for you to move the process?
- Given the level of consensus or conflict you've identified, how achievable do you think your advocacy objective is?

## NOTES

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- 2 Kingdon 1984.
- 3 Court and Young 2003, International Development Research Centre 2004, Ryan and Garret 2005.
- 4 International Development Research Centre 2004.
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- 6 Lindquist 2001.
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- 10 Carden 2005, 2009, Court and Young 2003.
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- 22 Carden 2005.
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- 24 Kingdon 1984.
- 25 Lindquist 2001.
- 26 Global Development Network 2003, International Development Research Centre 2004, Kingdon 1984, McGann and Weaver 2000.
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- 31 International Development Research Centre 2004, Ryan and Garrett 2005, Glover 2005, Porter and Prysor-Jones 2007.
- 32 Kingdon 1984, Sutton 1999.
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- 34 Global Development Network 2003.
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- 36 Lindquist 2001, Glover 2005.
- 37 Carden 2005.
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- 41 Peters 2008.
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- 52 Glover 2005.
- 53 Court and Young 2003.
- 54 Global Development Network 2003.
- 55 Carden 2009.



# 5

## ADVOCACY PLANNING FRAMEWORK (APF) —YOUR MESSENGER

Having decided on your way into the process and identified your target audience(s), the planning now turns to who should take on the role of the “face” of the advocacy campaign. In advocacy, the messenger is often as important as the message and the choice of the right face or messenger can seriously impact your chances of achieving influence. This circle of the APF denotes a clear departure from a one-way perspective of the messenger simply “delivering” the message. Here, the messenger has to commit to an often lengthy and complex process of engaging, persuading, and negotiating with target audiences through many waves of communication towards the ultimate goal of having them adopt your proposals and act upon them. Hence, the decision about who will take on the different challenges and roles of messenger should not be taken lightly.

Although “messenger” or “face” may imply an individual, given the responsibility involved in the messenger role, it is not necessarily one person who will be the spokesperson for all waves of the advocacy campaign. In fact, a more common scenario is that a team from the lead organization or coalition is involved, with different people playing different messenger roles based on the best match of needs with capacity, skills, and resources.

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**In advocacy,  
the messenger  
is often as  
important as  
the message.**

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Hence, the core question is whether it should be your organization or another that leads in the spokesperson role. Do you have the resources, credibility, reputation, visibility, and support to be taken seriously by the key players? Do the target audiences know and trust you? Are they willing to listen to you? You should also ask whether you have what it takes in terms of the range of communication and interpersonal skills required to successfully take on the

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**The messenger  
can be an  
individual, an  
organization, or  
a coalition.**

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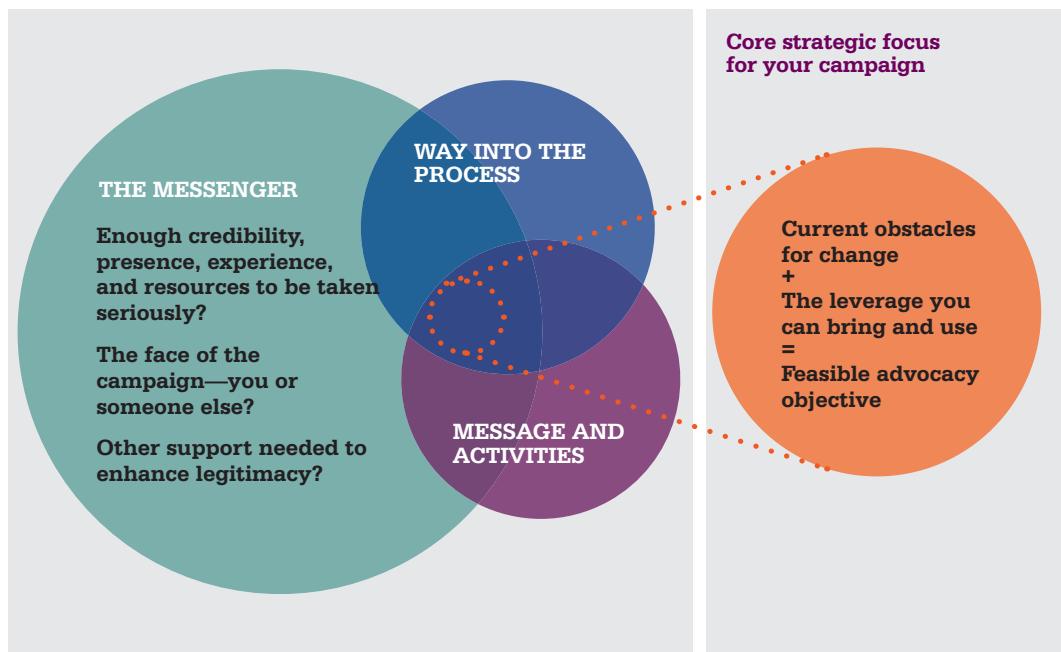
role of messenger. If not, you will need to find a messenger from outside, either to lead the entire advocacy process or play a specific role. Beyond the considerations of messenger, building a base of support is absolutely necessary: as one commentator put it, “You must find friends somewhere in the process.”<sup>1</sup> The legitimacy that comes with the support from others and a lead advocate or organization with a solid reputation are key factors in getting doors to open throughout the advocacy process.<sup>2</sup>

Taking on this perspective and building on the insights developed in planning the “way into the process” circle, you need to consider the following issues in making plans for this element of your advocacy planning:

- Who should be the face of the campaign? Do you have what it takes to be the messenger or should you chose someone else?
- What other support do you need for your campaign to be taken seriously?

**FIGURE 9.**  
**The messenger (APF)**

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## 5.1 THE FACE OF THE CAMPAIGN

When we say the “face” of the campaign, this refers to the spokesperson that becomes recognized by all players as the one who is leading (at least) the public side of the advocacy campaign. Although it often happens that a particular advocacy initiative is closely linked with an individual, the messenger does not necessarily refer to an individual. Instead, it is commonly an organization or a coalition that takes the lead with a team of people who actually engage in the defined range of advocacy activities.

With this in mind, the task of choosing the face(s) of the campaign involves a frank and thorough assessment of your organization on two levels:

- Reputation and standing in the policy network
- Possession of range of skills needed for messenger role

In general, it is nearly impossible to find an individual who possesses the full range of research, analysis, communication, and social skills needed for all stages of policy research and advocacy communication. Hence, in a more basic way, you also need to consider whether your organization has the right mix of people with the right mix of credentials, skills, and style to lead the campaign, and how you can possibly divide advocacy communication activities across their roles to match your organization’s messaging capacity. For example, if there is a media dimension to your advocacy campaign, then the person(s) with these skills could be designated to handle this communication. Finally, this self-evaluation will not only help you identify your strengths, and thereby the parts or functions of messenger roles you are “right” to play, but also reveal your needs and capacity and resource gaps, indicating the roles to be filled by other messenger(s).

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**Do a frank evaluation to assess if you are the “right” messenger.**

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### 5.1.1 Assess Your Reputation

The first level of assessment involves evaluating the standing, presence, and legitimacy of your organization as a player in your target decision-making process, and is centered around answering the following question:

Do you have the established track record, visibility, and reputation as a provider of quality analysis and advice in this policy area to open doors and be taken seriously?

A number of factors should be considered in answering this question, focused on evaluating to what extent you have built a good reputation in the policy network through previous and ongoing engagement in the target policy debate. The recognized characteristics of a strong messenger are a combination of the following credentials:

- Known as an opinion leader, an expert or innovator whose opinion is valued in this area.
- Has an established track record as a reputable provider of research, analysis, advice, and commentary in the target policy area.
- Known to represent an important constituency in these debates.
- Known to have strong connections and visibility in the network.
- Has access to key players on the policy issue in focus.
- Has the trust of decision makers and/or opinion leaders in this policy area.
- Is seen as an honest broker and not overtly political.
- Has the trust of, sensitivity for, and connection to affected stakeholders.
- Has approval and support from opinion leaders, stakeholders, and/or even decision makers for your findings and/or recommendations.
- Known as an individual or organization that has the capacity and willingness to engage in the advocacy process and can make it happen.<sup>3</sup>

Taking this range of factors into account, this is a question of evaluating yourself in the context of the broader policy network by looking back at your policy experience and considering if the key decision makers and opinion leaders in the process already know who you are and see you as a player of merit in the debate. Of course, they do not have to agree with you or like your point of view, but they do have to see you as someone who can potentially change the course of events in the debate and decision-making process, that is, they will have to respond or engage with you in the process and they cannot afford to ignore what you say. It may not be necessary for you to tick all the boxes and possess all the factors, but identifying those that are crucial for the particular advocacy campaign and how you weigh up against them is valuable information. It goes without saying that gaining the trust of decision makers and stakeholders as a reputable provider does not happen overnight, but rather is the result of long-term engagement with these actors in this area and careful cultivation of relationships.<sup>4</sup>

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**The messenger  
is usually well  
established  
in the policy  
network, but  
in rare cases,  
a fresh face  
may be more  
suitable.**

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While the above considerations of past experience, reputation, and connections are vital in considering who should be the face of the campaign, there is one instance when a newcomer may make a more suitable messenger: when you bring an innovative solution to a policy debate that is at a stalemate around a seemingly intractable problem. Under those circumstances, the new face with the new solution will often be welcomed as a breath of fresh air for an old problem.

## 5.1.2 Assess Your Communication and Social Skills

Advocacy at its most basic is about interacting with people; therefore, cultivating relationships with key target audiences is a crucial dimension to advocacy communication. In addition to, and overlapping with a strong presence and reputation in the policy network outlined above, the face or spokesperson for the campaign should have a range of broader skills and style, including

- strong social/interpersonal skills,
- impressive oral and written communication skills,
- effective negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy skills, and
- good networking and leadership skills.

However, researchers often do not possess the wide range of skills needed to do this kind of work.<sup>5</sup> A common response by some practitioners is to assign the messenger role to the person in an organization responsible for communications or public relations.<sup>6</sup> In fact, often the whole advocacy process is somehow seen as the communications person's job. This assumption is a major fallacy, given the multifaceted role that the messenger plays and broad spectrum of knowledge, skills, and reputation required. Advocacy is a team effort, which, of course, will include the communications person, but they are rarely able to see through a policy change without a team behind them.

In all our cases the organizations weighed the issue of messenger choice carefully, and in two cases they decided to take on the role of messengers themselves: both organizations are well-established and well-known players in their contexts on the issue in question, and therefore had the legitimacy to do this. They also had the internal advocacy experience, capacity, and skills in their team to plan and conduct the range of advocacy activities.

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**The messenger needs strong communication and interpersonal skills together with a good reputation in the policy network.**

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### KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

In the Mitrovica case, the European Stability Initiative acted as the sole messenger; in fact, their whole team put a huge amount of effort into managing and facilitating the discussion. They are a well-established think tank with a solid reputation internationally for strong policy research and advocacy in the Balkans. Through this earlier work, they had developed a strong presence and network in the international community (that has commissioned and funded much of their research), and among national governments and civil society in the region. They also stressed the strength of having a team working on this advocacy effort and how important it was to divide the roles according to the audiences and languages. One member of the team speaks Serbian and he was the main contact person on the Serbian side, while another speaks Albanian and she was the face of the campaign on that side of the effort. They also had a lot of interaction with the media (local and international), international organizations, the diplomatic corps and opinion leaders in the region. With such a large number of audiences to manage, a team of messengers was key.

## MONGOLIA

In this instance, the Open Society Forum is a long-established NGO and is seen as an independent, apolitical player in Mongolia: this means that it has friends and connections in many political and NGO circles. Therefore, they had little problem deciding to be the local face of this campaign. However, they have little experience or capacity in the legal or economic details of such mining contracts. It was at this point they decided to engage their international partner, Revenue Watch, to give them the legitimacy they needed. In fact, even the mining consortium admitted to them that they were the only local player to provide a detailed analysis and response to the draft agreement. This obviously carried a lot of weight with local NGOs and parliamentarians.

Two further lessons can be drawn from the cases:

- **Divide messenger roles strategically among team members based on their capacities and the specific requirements of the campaign.**

In addition to having the legitimacy and broad skill set outlined in this section, the European Stability Initiative team was also in a position to act as the face of the campaign as their individual team members had the specific skills and characteristics needed for this particular advocacy effort. In this sensitive issue, communicating in local languages with target audiences in different countries was paramount to being listened to and trusted. Hence, it is worth considering that when dealing with an issue of a sensitive nature, factors such as language, ethnicity, location, or affiliation may be especially important when deciding on a spokesperson for your campaign. However, an organization acting as sole messenger in such circumstances does entail significant commitment of resources, especially in terms of time and manpower.

- **You may need to draw on additional partners to play the messenger role for specific purposes.**

The Open Society Forum is well established in the Mongolian policy network on this issue and possesses advocacy and communication capacity and experience, and so they could have been the sole face of the advocacy campaign. However, they realized where their weaknesses were in terms of legal and economic analytical expertise of mining contracts and, as a result, strategically drew on an external partner, Revenue Watch, to fill this expertise gap. Thus, teaming up the local face with an international partner for key advocacy activities, such as an editorial opinion placed in the national newspapers, served to strengthen and reinforce the case, making it more difficult for the government to ignore their message of the need to stop the signing of the mining contract.

## 5.2 CHOOSE SOMEONE ELSE AS MESSENGER?

Your assessment may lead you to the conclusion that your organization will not act as the spokesperson for the entire campaign, or only for specific roles or communication activities. In considering who might be the right spokesperson to lead the effort, this may be very obvious from the start if you already have a supporter or member of your coalition who has the strong reputation, network, experience, and willingness to take on this role. In fact, you may not have to look at all; potential messengers may come to you and offer or even suggest that they front the campaign. For example, many international organizations that commission policy research also have established transnational networks of NGOs, academics, civil servants, and opinion leaders, and part of the commission might be to feed the results into and through these networks where the spokespeople or messengers are plentiful.<sup>7</sup>

However, it is important to sound a note of caution: just because an individual or organization expresses willingness to take on the messenger role does not automatically mean they are indeed the “right” messenger. This decision entails more than selecting your friend or ally or identifying the most vocal or well-known person or organization in the network: as outlined above, the messenger needs to be well-connected, trusted, and influential in making policy change happen as well as possessing the required communication and interpersonal skills. Therefore, you should conduct a similar assessment of the credentials and skills that you conducted for your own organization to ensure you are choosing a messenger with the right profile.

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**Choose the messenger(s) strategically and not just because they are your friend or ally.**

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### 5.2.1 Identify Policy Brokers or Champions

A popular discussion in the literature recently has centered on the role of people who are referred to as policy entrepreneurs, brokers, or champions.<sup>8</sup> Such individuals are said to be “people who are willing to invest their resources in pushing their pet proposals or problems, are responsible not only for prompting important people to pay attention, but also for coupling both problems and solutions to politics.”<sup>9</sup> Their advocacy role can entail a number of things: from taking the ideas forward, translating and spreading them, to networking and going all the way in selling the ideas to decision makers.<sup>10</sup> They serve as key messengers in clinching the deal to make proposals generated from policy research influential.

When looking for such champions, you are usually seeking high-level individuals who are easily able to reach decision makers, opinion leaders, and managers. A good example of high-level individuals playing the role of champion comes from a Canadian-supported research project in the developing world where a small group of MPs brought the ideas from the research to parliamentary debate.<sup>11</sup> Such individuals or groups are said to act in an entrepreneurial manner in that they recognize a piece of analysis that advances their own values and agenda and use the resources at their disposal to move the process. Through this initiative, their reputation is also further enhanced.

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**A policy broker  
is a person  
willing and  
able to take on  
the advocacy  
messenger role.**

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When it comes to brokers or messengers, you are commonly looking for someone who already has the access and reputation in that they are well-established and have a strong network to draw on, and depending on the role you would like the messenger to play, they commonly need to have some or all of the communication and interpersonal skills outlined above. The further qualities you are looking for in a policy broker are

- knowledge and interest in the substance of your policy issue and
- a willingness to commit time to the role they are being asked to play.

In addition to skills, commitment, and reputation, the person also has to be the right fit for your campaign, coalition, or organization. They will be the person who is representing your position to decision makers and opinion leaders, so you must try to make sure that they are both willing and able to deliver the intended message and also represent your position in the manner that you wish. You must also try to ensure that their own interests do not dominate the goals of the advocacy effort. Working closely with the broker throughout their engagement is crucial: this is not a one-off process of handing your work over to them and disengaging from the advocacy communication process. Finally, you should also consider the strategic risks of having this person represent the campaign or your organization: in some instances, the short-term gain for the campaign may not outweigh the potential longer-term damage to your reputation of being associated with the “wrong” person.

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**A potential  
policy broker  
needs to be  
the right fit for  
your campaign.**

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Hence, the question of choice of you or someone else such as a policy broker as messenger is not usually an either-or scenario. Nevertheless, these reflections give a strong guide as to the kinds of people or organizations that can act on your behalf, whether in specific roles or as the sole face of your campaigns. Choosing a messenger will always bring some sort of compromise, but you need to keep all of these considerations in mind before moving ahead in deciding who to engage as the face of your advocacy and for what role.

Two of our cases used a broker as the messenger for strategic reasons; the Kazakh case due to legitimacy reasons, and the Macedonian case to enable access because this advisor was close to the minister.

## KAZAKHSTAN

In this case, the researcher had an established reputation in the Civil Service Agency as a manager of international capacity building in the Civil Service Agency. For the rather closed system in Kazakhstan, the fact that the advice was coming from a government insider was important. Nevertheless, she was not well-known in the Ministry of Justice in this area, so when she approached them to work together on One Stop Shops she found out that the Ministry had checked out her background with the Civil Service Agency.

But the international dimension of the researchers experience was also very important in making the advocacy happen. The fact that she was a PhD student at Edinburgh University and also a policy fellow on an Open Society Foundations fellowship program<sup>12</sup> was key in building her credibility and the credibility of the research in this area of new technology for the target audiences. As she put it in the interview, “they really liked talking to the international part of me.”

Nevertheless, being a relatively young individual researcher without extensive experience in this field, she also realized that she did not have the connections to the decision makers. Hence, she found a broker: there was one advisor to the minister who was the opinion leader in the area of One Stop Shops and she targeted him in her advocacy efforts. The advisor was convinced and presented the ideas and evidence to the minister as his own, and the minister then took them on board.

## MACEDONIA

Studiorum had worked over the years to build a good reputation in the area of public health in Macedonia. They had previously worked on projects with the Ministry of Health and had also joined an international public health network that drafted the EU Charter of Patients’ Rights. These were strong starting points in this advocacy effort.

But, as in the Kazakh case, it was the identification and targeting of an advisor in the Ministry of Health that was key to making this advocacy effort work. In fact, this advisor was a colleague and friend of the researcher from Studiorum and was considering new healthcare reform ideas to present to a newly appointed minister. He then played the role of broker in this case by presenting the ideas from the research as his own to the minister and succeeded in getting the researcher on the working group to draft the legislation in the ministry.

It is also worth noting that the researcher would have been reluctant to present the research in the traditional manner, that is, at a conference to ministers and other experts, as she doubted her ability to handle the pressure of such an event. The advisor in the role of broker, communicator, and then networker really was pivotal in making the advocacy happen.

Two important lessons can be drawn from these cases:

- **It is advantageous to find policy brokers within or closely connected to the government sector.**

Policy brokers are often NGO people or consultants outside the government circle, but the two cases above highlight that such champions can also be found in government, often in an advisory role. In the Kazakh case, the researcher successfully and strategically identified the right broker, a ministerial advisor who was the opinion leader in One Stop Shops, and therefore she knew he would be receptive to the research and proposals she was putting forward on this issue and bring them directly into the right decision-making circle. In such a closed system, the researcher also realized that her proposals would only be acceptable if she found a supporter and champion within government. In the Macedonian case, the new advisor was actively seeking fresh ideas to bring to his minister, again demonstrating how willingness and openness are indispensable as factors in selecting the right person to act as broker. Due to the researcher's long-standing professional and personal relationship with the advisor, the process of winning over the advisor as supporter for her proposals was relatively easy. This insider and direct pathway to power facilitates a straightforward advocacy communication process that can occur in a relatively short period of time.

- **Brokers are generally not knights in shining armor coming to save the day, but play a vital role in a specific stage of the campaign.**

Both examples illustrate that brokers tend to play more specific roles of making a specific connection or selling an idea to a particular audience rather than taking over and becoming the face of a whole campaign. The Macedonian example is a good illustration of different messengers used for different waves of an advocacy campaign, that is, the role of the broker was to complete the softening up process of selling the idea of a Patients' Bill of Rights to the minister. Once the minister committed to the idea, Studiorum, as the organization that conducted the research, took over as messenger and was engaged on the working group to negotiate the details and see through the implementation of the legislation. This example also leads to the question of whether individuals with such a broad skill set really exist<sup>13</sup> to act as messenger or broker for all facets of a campaign.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

### Consider the face of your campaign:

- Will your organization be the face of your campaign?
- Do you have the reputation and visibility in the decision-making circle to be considered a credible voice and taken seriously on your issue?
- Do you have the range of social and communication skills required for effective communication and negotiation of policy proposals?
- Or should someone else take the lead in the campaign? Should this be an individual or an organization or a coalition?
- Can you identify suitable candidates with the right profile to act as the face of your campaign?
- Should you divide roles and have others represent the campaign in certain capacities? For example, for different waves of communication? For different target audiences?
- Can you identify a policy champion/broker in the network (from NGO or government sector) who can play a key messenger role?
- Are there other specific criteria related to your context or issue relevant for the selection of the messenger? For example, ethnicity or language?

### 5.3 MOBILIZE OTHER SUPPORT

Beyond your own team of messengers or brokers, having the broader support of others, whether in a formal coalition or a more informal network of supporters, is also a major factor in effective advocacy.<sup>14</sup> Being able to show that influential individuals, organizations, associations of stakeholders, or even advisors and other policymakers are on your side is pivotal to building the legitimacy of the position you are putting forward. In fact, experience shows that the most successful networks supporting policy advocacy initiatives normally include a wide range of actors, including researchers, decision makers, NGOs, and affected stakeholders.<sup>15</sup> You really do need friends in the process, but this does not just mean teaming up with those already close to you: it's about building strategic alliances.

Building such purposeful networks means engaging all actors as early as possible and keeping them on board through the process, which also means that coordination and communication are critical.<sup>16</sup> In fact, building this support is often the first step in many advocacy campaigns, as the approval and support of a broad consensus of people can make the difference between a decision maker listening to and engaging with your ideas or just ignoring them. Hence, building on your analysis of people, networks, and power in the “way into the

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The support of a wide range of stakeholders will make your case more compelling for decision makers.

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**Building a network is not just about numbers; it's about building strategic alliances.**

process” circle of the APF, you should strategically consider who you need and can get as supporters and how to build broader support in the network. It is worth repeating that personal and informal relationships are often very important in this kind of work.

You should also think beyond just the level of support that coalition partners can bring, but also the resources and capacities that you don’t have and could use in your advocacy effort. For example: analytical capacity, funding, previous advocacy experience, access to other networks, constituencies, research, data, media, and international organizations or policymakers. As already mentioned, targeting your selection of other support on the basis of identified resource or capacity gaps and on the basis of the skills and experience that complement yours is more focused and prudent than just aligning yourself with friends in the network.

Building and drawing on support networks was a fundamental part of the advocacy success in all our cases studied and two examples follow below.

## MACEDONIA

Two examples from this case:

1. For a number of years before the campaign, Studiorum was a member of an international NGO network that had drafted the EU Charter of Patients’ Rights. This was a strong starting point for the government to recognize them as the “go to” organization in this area.
2. During the parliamentary stage of the debate on the Patients’ Bill of Rights, the government considered passing the bill without discussing the fiscal implications of some of the rights contained in the legislation, such as the right to a second medical opinion. So Studiorum and other NGOs, through a parliamentary MP group, were able to pressure the government to allow time for a public debate and input on the necessary financial commitments to make the principles in the bill a reality.

## MONGOLIA

In this instance, as a long-established independent NGO in Mongolia, the Open Society Forum has friends in many political and NGO circles. They actually received a first copy of the draft contract from MPs with whom they have a long-established working relationship. The ministerial working group that began the negotiations had kept it secret in their discussions prior to the parliamentary round.

Having very good connections with the NGO community, the Open Society Forum only needed to act as facilitator and bring partners together at a media event. Once they presented their negative analysis of the draft agreement, a broad NGO coalition immediately reacted. In fact, large street demonstrations and lobbying of Parliament occurred almost immediately.

A further point arises from the Mongolian case about support from others for advocacy campaigns:

- **Building support networks is usually a long-term project and not just tied to one advocacy campaign.**

In many advocacy plans, coalition building is listed as the first stage of the project. However, even if you have a new idea to put to potential partners, you will not cold call them; you will go to the people you know and they can then put you in contact with others who might be interested. In addition, if you focus and work in one policy area for any length of time in a country or region, you will become part of the network of people and organizations that are also involved in that issue. So, of course, it is best to have these networks established and be able to leverage them at short notice.

Policy windows don't always open in a predictable manner or with advance notice; hence, being in a position to respond quickly when an opportunity arises can make a significant difference to your chances of achieving influence. The Mongolian case is a good illustration of immediately mobilizing already-existing support, showing the benefits of investing time in networking on an ongoing basis as a priority, and not just tied to one single advocacy campaign. The long-term investment in building a network and maintaining their independent reputation also allowed the Open Society Forum access to the draft mining contract, which was pivotal in providing an opportunity to respond before it was too late.

**Having  
established  
support  
networks  
allows for quick  
responses when  
an opportunity  
or crisis arises.**

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

### Consider the support of others you need for your advocacy campaign:

- What type and level of support from others do you need to achieve your objectives?
- Can you draw on your already existing network for the campaign or do you need to recruit new members?
- Who are the key people you need to get behind your position? Are they already part of your network or can other supporters help to convince them?
- Who are the easier people to convince? And the more difficult?
- Who will come on board only after you have secured support of others on your team?
- Are there people you can target to fill skill and resource gaps in your campaign?

## NOTES

- 1 International Development Research Centre 2003.
- 2 Porter and Prysor-Jones 1997, Court and Young 2003, Nutley, Walter, and Davies 2002, Struyk and Haddaway 2011.
- 3 Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002, Court and Young 2002, 2003, Glover 2005; Nutley, Walter, and Davies 2002, Porter and Prysor-Jones 1997.
- 4 Ryan and Garret 2005.
- 5 Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002, Nutley, Walter, and Davies 2002, Porter and Prysor-Jones 1997.
- 6 Struyk 2006.
- 7 Weyrauch and Selwood 2007.
- 8 Gladwell 2000, Glover 2005, Kingdon 1984, Nutley, Walter, and Davies 2002, Overseas Development Institute 2009, Stone and Maxwell 2005, Sutton 1999.
- 9 Kingdon 1984.
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- 11 International Development Research Centre 2004.
- 12 Available online: [http://lgi.osi.hu/documents.php?m\\_id=127](http://lgi.osi.hu/documents.php?m_id=127).
- 13 Weiss 1978 (cited in Glover 2005).
- 14 Court and Young 2005, Ryan and Garrett 2005.
- 15 International Development Research Centre 2003.
- 16 Carden 2004, Court and Young 2005, International Development Research Centre 2003, 2004.

# 6

## ADVOCACY PLANNING FRAMEWORK (APF)—YOUR MESSAGE AND ACTIVITIES

Having found a way into the process and identified the key audiences you need to target in your advocacy efforts and made at least an initial decision on your messenger(s), we now come to making plans for the communication of what you want to say: in other words, your “message” and your set of advocacy activities and communication tools. Following an in-depth process of research and analysis, researchers often find it difficult to know where to start in retelling the story and extracting the essence of what they have found. They often try to tell the whole story and are caught up in small details or methodological challenges that are very interesting to them but are often confusing to any nonresearcher.

In planning your advocacy messages, the focus should not be on what you want to say about the research, but on how to draw on the research to get your target audiences to understand, engage, and be convinced of your findings and proposals. As a first hurdle, you simply want to avoid being ignored or misunderstood. Too often good ideas do not even merit a response because no communication planning is done. As we often remind trainees, we are trying to change public policy, not fill library shelves, and although it is often less valued, focusing on the communication aspect of a policy project time and time again proves to be just as important as doing a thorough analysis.

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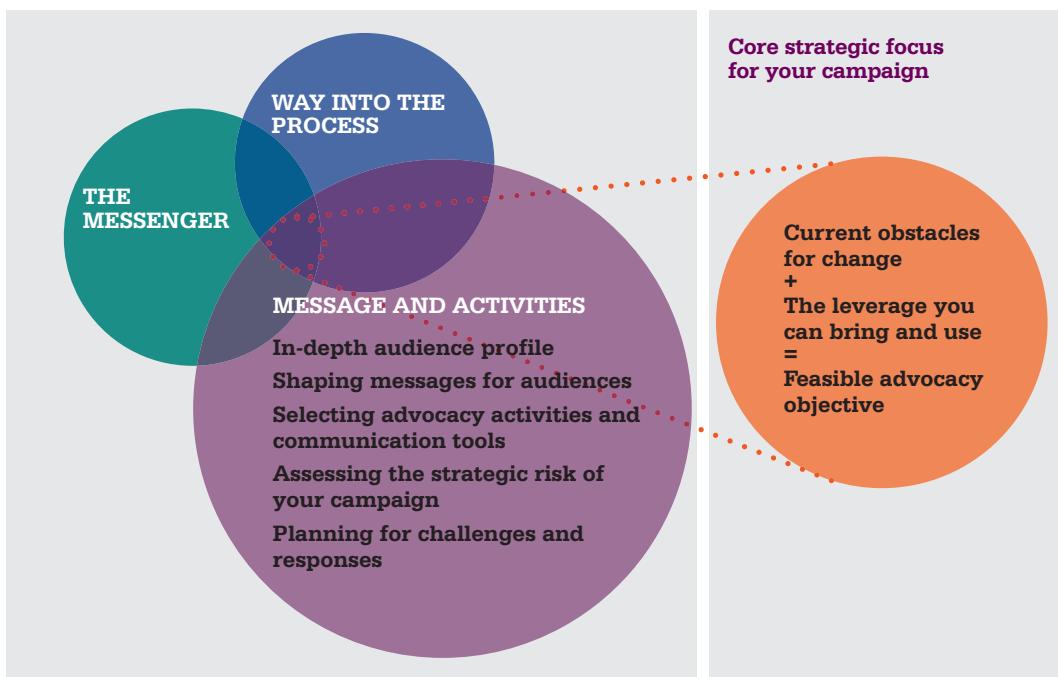
**The message is not focused on what you want to report, but on how to engage your target audience.**

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**Advocacy activities must provide enough opportunity for target audiences to engage, discuss, and ultimately take ownership of your ideas.**

Once you have an idea of how to focus your message, you then have to decide how you are going to deliver the message so that it is engaging and convincing. Maybe even more importantly, you also have to design for enough interaction with the target audiences to allow them to engage, understand, negotiate, and ultimately take ownership of your ideas. That is, you need to design a targeted set of advocacy activities and communication tools. Drawing on the mapping and planning you completed in the “way into the process” circle, you will have identified an opportunity or timeline to start or continue your advocacy campaign and a specific audience(s) that you are targeting. Now, in designing your messages and activities, you are planning to take advantage of the chosen opportunity and steer the policy debate in the direction that serves your objectives. The overlapping nature of the planning is represented in Figure 10.

**FIGURE 10.**  
Message and activities (APF)



Informed by your planning in the other APF elements and taking the third circle, you need to go through the following five steps in making plans for constructing your message, deciding on advocacy activities, and managing the advocacy communication process:

- Developing an in-depth audience profile
- Shaping the message for the audience
- Selecting advocacy activities and communication tools

- Assessing the strategic risk of the campaign
- Planning for challenges and responses

In order to focus the planning in this circle, you need to understand your staged objectives in moving the audience from understanding to ownership and this section begins by outlining our advocacy communication model that will guide you through the planning for the five steps in this circle.

## **6.1 TARGETING OWNERSHIP AND ACTION THROUGH DIALOGUE—AN ADVOCACY COMMUNICATION MODEL**

The connotation of the word “message” is quite unidirectional, in that it is something you send to someone else and then wait for his or her reply. If we take the literal meaning of the word for advocacy planning, you might see your primary job as the preparation of this first message, after which you wait for the reply. This approach is nicely summed up as: “Research it, write it, and they will find it.”<sup>1</sup>

However, experience has shown that effective advocacy is a two-way process of mediation and negotiation that normally takes considerable time and effort.<sup>2</sup> In adopting this approach, you immediately move away from ideas of advocacy as “presenting your findings” or one-way transfer, but rather see the development of your message as a process of planning to start a dialogue.<sup>3</sup> Of course, you cannot predict all the responses to your initial message nor be sure how the process will move, but with an in-depth knowledge of the players and the playing field, you can make a pretty good estimate of how it is likely to go. Also, seeing your advocacy campaign as the start of a dialogue will mean that you are immediately considering responses and also see the need to stay involved in steering the developing discussion. This further reinforces the centrality of designing your messages, communication activities, and tools with a strong focus on engaging and persuading specific target audiences.

Of course, staying in the dialogue is not enough; you must have a clear purpose for your involvement in these discussions and a clear intent to influence the decision-making process in a certain direction. We stress again that the advocacy challenge is a process of leading and steering opinion leaders and decision makers to make your words, ideas, evidence, and proposals their own and act on them. This process naturally includes and often starts with presenting your ideas, but the heart of the communication process is more about mediation and negotiation, and ultimately transferring ownership of your ideas.

Ownership is the end result of a successful advocacy process and in planning your messages, range of advocacy activities, and communication tools, you need a set of initial targets to get there. We have developed the policy advocacy

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**Develop your message and activities to start a dialogue, not just one-way delivery.**

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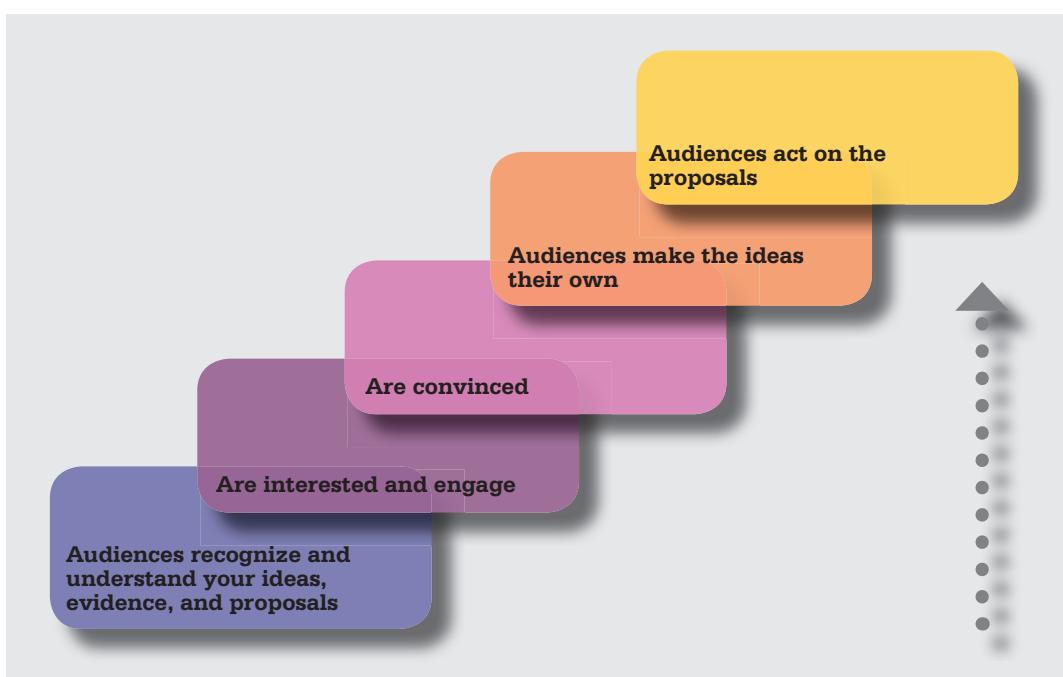
**Ownership is the target of advocacy communication: once target audiences present your ideas as their own, they are ready to act upon them.**

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communication model in Figure 11 to illustrate the challenges or stages prior to the goal of audience ownership and subsequent action. Starting at the bottom box and moving up, these are the stages that any audience needs to move through to finally take ownership of policy proposals. Hence, it is crucial that you keep this movement and these stages in mind throughout the design of your messages, activities, and communication tools, so that they are designed purposefully to facilitate this movement. It is important to stress that the staged targets in the model are how you want your audiences to respond to your messages and activities.

## FIGURE 11.

**Advocacy communication model: Targeting ownership and action through dialogue**



Constructing effective messages is an artful balance of attention grabbing, incentives, and threats, appealing to the audience's concerns and values, supported by just the right evidence to bring the intended target audience over to your side. As the multiple stages of the communication model imply, you also usually need to be willing to invest time, effort, and resources; be persistent in reacting to the responses you elicit; and manage and steer the process with your activities and communication tools to reach the goal of target audience ownership and action.<sup>4</sup> With this advocacy communication model in mind, we outline the five main steps in mapping and planning for the message and activities circle of the APF.

## 6.2 DEVELOP AN IN-DEPTH AUDIENCE PROFILE

If advocacy is a dialogue with the goal of convincing a particular target audience to adopt your proposed ideas as their own, then having an in-depth knowledge or profile of these audiences is a key starting point.<sup>5</sup> This insight is a core guide to how you focus your messages and choose suitable activities and communication tools, as well as informing you on what to avoid.

In looking for the right way into the process in the first APF circle, you mapped the players and the playing field in the target process, including current thinking and positions, and the levels of consensus and conflict in the debate. Building on that analysis, this mapping and planning now involves going much deeper to try to better understand your particular target audiences and get behind the reasons or incentive structures that have led to their current positions. Such an analysis of the incentive structures that guides their opinions and positions is an extremely useful starting point in thinking about how you can design messages and proposals that will easily resonate with them. You also need to try to go beyond statements of simple interests and values to the more emotional or “personal” elements of their hopes and fears around the issue.

Some may say that this is just stakeholder analysis, true to an extent. However, in our experience, the tools of stakeholder analysis tend to stay at the level outlined in the “way into the process” circle of the APF. The depth of analysis we propose in this step is a much more qualitative elaboration of trying to understand the history and evolution that has lead to the current positions of your identified target audience. Having conducted in-depth research or analysis in a target policy issue, you more than likely already have this knowledge. Nevertheless, it is not normally the type of in-depth insight that is put down in a policy paper or report. So, it is useful at this point to elaborate these audience profiles more fully with your advocacy team to serve as a guide to making more informed and better decisions on messages, activities, and tools targeted at your specific audiences.

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**Go beyond  
current  
positions  
and interests  
of target  
audiences to  
understand  
their incentives,  
hopes, and  
fears.**

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One of our cases illustrates how the researchers elaborated such an in-depth audience profile:

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

In the Mitrovica case, the researchers developed a very in-depth profile of the minority Serbian population on the north side of town and what lead to their entrenched positions at the beginning of the advocacy effort. The incentive structure and the hopes, fears, and memories of the local population were at the center of their advocacy effort:

### INCENTIVE STRUCTURE

In the years preceding and following NATO intervention in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) in 1999, many Serbs had left the region and moved to the territory of undisputed Serbia. By 2002, northern Mitrovica was the only remaining urban population of Serbs in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) that had a hospital and a university, that is, a population of professional and urban elites. The government in Belgrade was, of course, interested in keeping this population in the town and was paying a subsidy to public workers who stayed there. Their salaries, including this subsidy, were two to three times more than what public servants such as doctors or teachers were being paid in the rest of Serbia. Also, the size of the public sector was greater on the Serbian side of town than it was when the whole town had been administered as a single undivided unit. The subsidy from Belgrade was also supplemented by a subsidy from Pristina, which also wanted to be seen as supporting minority populations.

Furthermore, the town had one industry, the Trepca mine, during state socialism. The mine was run down in the 1990s and destroyed in the 1999 conflict but in order to save the economic foundations of the town, the UN through the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was paying former workers a stipend. Basically, the Serbian population of Mitrovica was living off subsidies: the European Stability Initiative research found out that only 14 percent of the income of the Serbian population was coming from private business. Moreover, the European Stability Initiative found out that many of the better-paid professionals in Mitrovica were hedging their bets and buying flats in Belgrade if the whole thing fell apart.

Recognizing the strong monetary element of the incentive structure in the dispute, the European Stability Initiative started with the striking and very basic economic facts summed up in the phrase that the town was “living off the crisis” and would be the “biggest slum in Kosovo if it went away,” so “what are we fighting for?” It is unsurprising that a message focused on the lack of a sustainable future was something that resonated with both sides.

### HOPES, FEARS, AND MEMORIES

To tap into this side of the story for both communities in Mitrovica, the European Stability Initiative made a documentary film called *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.<sup>6</sup> In it they tried to bring people back to the memories of the town during socialist times and contrast them with the ethnically divided town. The film reminded the viewers of how Mitrovica was a very integrated town under the old system: it was the town in Yugoslavia in which the highest percentage of Serbs spoke Albanian. They worked side by side in the Trepca mine and had a famous football team made up of players from both ethnicities. To make this relevant to the present day, they talked to two former teammates, one Serbian and one Albanian, who remained friends but could not visit each other because of the conflict. They contrasted this with the impressions of children and other adults in the divided town. By focusing on the history of Mitrovica and the damage to the social fabric of the town due to conflict, the European Stability Initiative sought to steer the emotions surrounding the debate away from the strong and fearful nationalist narratives that lead the conflict towards a more hopeful local narrative.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

### Develop an in-depth profile of your target audiences:

- What is the current position of different key stakeholders on the policy issue? And how strongly entrenched are they in their current position?
- What is their incentive or interest in holding these positions? Try to elaborate the story behind these positions: what is the history behind their position and how has it evolved to the present day?
- Is there some element of personal or emotional attachment to the position they hold? How do they discuss their hopes and fears in this regard?

### 6.3 SHAPE THE MESSAGE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

In presenting policy research to any audience, there is a tendency for those from a research or academic background to place too much emphasis on the research process itself and the details of the experiment. Audiences interested in public policy problems tend to be of mixed backgrounds, and normally have limited interest in or capacity to absorb the details of your research; what really interests them is the implications of your findings for the current policy challenges and discussion. The message derived from your research project should be an argument about the current policy challenge and potential solutions based on the outcomes and findings of the research.<sup>7</sup>

Having developed an in-depth profile of your target audiences, you now come to thinking about how you can shape your advocacy message to appeal to your target audiences.<sup>8</sup> Returning to the policy advocacy communication model for a moment, in this step you are planning to ensure you have the best chance of achieving the first three stages, that is, to get audiences to understand, engage with, and at least begin to be convinced by your arguments.

Following a long process of research and analysis, you will have generated a large amount of evidence, stories, cases, reflections, and findings. When beginning to think about communicating what you have found in the research, you have to choose what to emphasize over all the other things you found, that is, what is going to be the “takeaway message” of the research. This is the intended message you want your target audiences to receive consistently through all communication tools in longer and shorter formats.

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The takeaway message should be consistent through all communication tools.

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Unsurprisingly, your advocacy objectives will guide the choice of what to emphasize in this takeaway message. Knowing the target audiences, the incentive structures, and the hopes and fears that inform their current positions,

you want to build an argument to get these audiences to begin questioning or building on their current thinking and come on board with your ideas and arguments. You are aiming to convince them to think in a different way, an important stepping stone to their ownership of a new conventional wisdom on the policy issue as, ultimately, they will provide you with the leverage you need to move the process in the desired direction.

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**The message will only be the “tip of the iceberg” from all your research findings.**

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The process of choosing what to emphasize in your advocacy message is captured in the idea that you only should plan to present the “tip of the iceberg” from all the data and evidence you generated through your research. Remembering that your message is the beginning of a dialogue on the topic, you will undoubtedly get to present the rest of the “iceberg” since the audiences involved in such discussions are naturally skeptical and will need much more detail and have many questions beyond the content communicated in your initial advocacy messages in order to shift their position.

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**Messages should contain a balance of carrots (incentives) and sticks (threats).**

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In practical terms, shaping messages for specific audiences refers to the development of messages that connect and engage your chosen target audiences. Based on your research findings, this involves developing an argument which clearly illustrates “how seen from their perspective, it makes sense to change.”<sup>9</sup> The argument will logically seek to compare and contrast current interpretations of the evidence with your own. It is also often said that we must provide a balance of carrots (or incentives: how they can benefit from the proposed change) and sticks (or threats: what will happen without this change) in attempting to move audiences out of their current positions. The Macedonian case illustrates one approach to connect the message to target audiences.

## MACEDONIA

The main messages from Studiorum to the Ministry of Health on the Patients’ Bill of Rights issue are a good illustration of how, seen from the ministry’s perspective, they needed to make this change:

- You already need to do this as part of the EU accession process.
- We’ve already done the homework you would need to do, that is, completed the research of international and regional best practice and conducted an opinion survey of Macedonian citizens.
- We are offering you the expertise on a partnership basis to complete this in a way that is not the normal “cut and paste” approach, but an approach that is sensitive to the Macedonian situation and fulfills EU requirements.

It has a good balance of incentives and threats and offers the ministry both the credibility of the international research and local polling.

When we discuss the process of choosing what to emphasize in training workshops, participants often question the ethics of “manipulating” or “spinning” the message to appeal to target audiences. The response to this question is that obviously if you want to preserve your name as a reputable provider of research, the messages you produce should not go outside of the boundaries of a truthful representation of what was found in the research. Also, if you were to decide to untruthfully represent the findings just to appeal to a particular target audience, you will undoubtedly be found out in the questioning and discussion that will follow in any advocacy process. Some literature is critical of this process of the simplification or reduction of policy messages, as they say it removes the complexity of policy challenges.<sup>10</sup> What these commentators seem to forget is that these messages represent only the beginning of a long discussion focusing exactly on that complexity before any influence on policy decisions normally happens.

In shaping messages that connect to the thinking of target audiences, these multiple overlapping dimensions need to be considered:

- Make sure your message is policy-relevant.
- Make sure your message presents practical and usable solutions.
- Communicate simply to make your messages accessible.
- Make your messages memorable and portable.

### **6.3.1 Make Sure Your Message Is Policy-relevant**

There is a basic need to make a clear link between the focus of your message and the currently discussed policy problem and the current policy approach of the government, that is, to make the message policy-relevant. In fact, relevance can go beyond these two elements to where you may also need to address other issues such as the decision-making process, current thinking and positions, stakeholders, timing, resources, or capacity to really show how the research is properly situated in the current policy challenge and landscape.<sup>11</sup>

This challenge is summed up very nicely in the following quote:

“New knowledge is thus poured into a mould of prior understandings, which may not correspond to the researcher’s conceptions of a study.”<sup>12</sup>

The first line emphasizes the need to connect the research and findings to what is already known and to use the advocacy communication model to help target audiences to recognize, understand, and engage with your ideas and proposals. The second line points out that often research starts with assumptions or questions very different from those being asked in the current discussion of an issue. It is the job of the advocate to find a way to make strong connections across the research and policy narrative boundaries. The Macedonian case analyzed illustrates the need to cross this boundary:

## MACEDONIA

The Macedonian case shows a common challenge for researchers in bridging from the framing or agenda of an international organization to a national context. The introduction of a patients' bill of rights was indirectly set as an accession precondition and on this basis, the researcher did a study on the state of patients' rights in the Western Balkans, with a special focus on her own country, Macedonia.

At the beginning of the campaign there was a strong need to frame and relate the proposal or approach in the current health legislation, that is, that most of the issues covered in a patients' bill of rights were already covered under different pieces of legislation, but this current proposal brought these issues together from the rights perspective of the end user. There was also a need to show that this added some rights or privileges for patients and to deliver on these would cost extra money. In addition, the advocate had to allay the fears of the medical societies representing doctors that this bill did not hugely change the relationship between doctor and patient with regard to negligence and insurance claims, but rather that it actually provides additional legal protection for doctors, as the healthcare institution in which they are providing healthcare services is put in the forefront of responsibility for negligence and insurance claims. Hence, the job of reframing and building relevance was a significant task at the beginning of this advocacy campaign.

### 6.3.2 Make Sure Your Message Presents Practical and Usable Solutions

In applied research the second issue for establishing a solid foundation for your advocacy messages is the need to present practical, feasible, and actionable proposals or solutions: the recommendations must be obviously usable for target policymakers<sup>13</sup> or “must have operational relevance.”<sup>14</sup>

We have encountered too many instances of policy research that is immediately dismissed by target audiences saying, “that's very interesting but I don't know what to do with it.” As mentioned earlier, academics focus on describing society and its challenges and this is what they do well: they identify what needs to change, but tend to make vague suggestions about how this change should happen. In these instances, they have failed to overcome the famous “So what?” hurdle. Another common failure in this regard comes from NGOs when they present policy proposals that basically represent their “wish-list” of what they would like to see changed based solely on the values they are committed to.

In both cases, the proposals often do not take enough account of the constraints of actually making a policy or political decision happen, not to mention the budgetary and capacity challenges of delivering on these proposals. Policymakers have reported in trainings that they can very easily judge a policy proposal by first looking at the recommendations and seeing if they reflect knowledge of the daily business of government in the target area.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, they rarely read further if these challenges and realities have not been taken into account.

So, if your policy recommendations are not firmly grounded in the challenges and constraints of the real world, then the foundation for your messages is very shaky. The Kazakh case is an example of clearly tying policy proposals with the constraints and failures the researcher identified in implementing the One Stop Shop model in her country.

## KAZAKHSTAN

In designing for an improvement of the One Stop Shop model in Kazakhstan, the researcher first knew that the Ministry of Justice (the agency responsible for implementing One Stop Shops) had not conducted any in-depth evaluation of their actual performance—very much needed after broad public and media criticism of the model. Knowing this fact meant that the research immediately fed into an administrative and decision-making gap.

The research found that One Stop Shops were being used more as post offices, not service centers, that is, they were helping citizens to fill in forms that would then be delivered to the relevant agency, rather than processing some of them on site and delivering services, as they should do. Also, as government agencies covered in the One Stop Shop were also continuing to offer direct contact to citizens, the other finding was that One Stop Shops were used as an alternative point of contact with citizens rather than as the one stop or single point of contact.

For the researcher, one of the main reasons that these government agencies continued to offer services direct to the public was the wish on the part of civil servants to keep their access to sources of corrupt payments; it was also obvious that there was little understanding of the whole concept of One Stop Shops. This is why the researcher chose to outline these challenges in the recommendations and message and then put forward a proposal focusing on a more suitable One Stop Shop model and a broad capacity development program with a long-term view.

### 6.3.3 Communicate Simply to Make Your Messages Accessible

The added value of policy research is to feed expert analysis and insight into the policymaking process. However, when researchers come to communicate their findings, they often forget that not all audiences share their expertise. In fact, both experts and policymakers come from a wide mix of backgrounds and expertise. As a prominent policy scholar states:

“It’s ok to think like an economist but don’t write like one. Emphasise the decision at hand, the underlying problem, and the options to solve it. Minimise methodology, jargon and equations.”<sup>16</sup>

A direct, nontechnical language and style is unbelievably important: researchers who make their messages accessible to nonexpert audiences have a much better chance of having influence.<sup>17</sup>

**“It’s ok to think like an economist, but don’t write like one.”**

**Keep your message simple at first; the detail and complexity will come later.**

As well as simplifying the language and concepts for broader audiences, keep your message simple at first<sup>18</sup> in order to overcome the first advocacy communication hurdles in getting audiences to recognize, understand, and engage with your ideas. If you provide target audiences with a simpler way to get into your ideas, they will undoubtedly ask you a lot more questions at that point and the complexity will then emerge. As already mentioned, the process of presenting the “tip of the iceberg” also allows access to the important findings before the complexity follows. For many audiences to be convinced of your position, they undoubtedly need this complexity, but there are the lower hurdles of understanding and engaging to overcome before you get there and you should be aware of this in your message design. The following example illustrates such an approach:

## MONGOLIA

This is a very good example of how to make a potentially very complicated analysis accessible to the public. Once the Open Society Forum got a copy of the draft mining agreement they turned it over for analysis by two experts from Revenue Watch. One expert did a legal analysis of the agreement comparing it to best practice with such extractive industry contracts from the government side. The other expert did an analysis of the numbers being used to support this agreement and also a number of scenario predictions on potential returns from this contract in terms of government revenue. Both analyses were extremely technical and complicated, but they both showed that very basic questions had not been adequately asked or answered in the negotiation. The Open Society Forum released an opinion piece in the daily press that began with these unanswered questions.

The Op-ed was titled: “The Ivanhoe Mining Contract: Seven Questions.”<sup>19</sup> It opened by stating, “Here are some questions the [parliament] should ask,” and then presented questions such as the following:

- “Is it fair, does Mongolia get value?”
- “Is this agreement workable and enforceable?”

Under each of the questions, the Open Society Forum showed clearly that these very basic issues had not been adequately addressed or clarified in the negotiations to date. This most definitely fed into the fears of the public: the fear that Mongolia would not get its fair share of this massive copper mine and also the fear that unanswered questions give too much room for discretion and corruption. Following the publication of this op-ed and the presentation to NGOs, there were large street protests about the agreement that the parliament could not ignore.

In developing such simple (but not necessarily simplified!) messages, experience has also shown the need to tell stories so that advocates can “contextualise the theoretical” and also the evidence you have found.<sup>20</sup> The development of “analytical stories” to easily illustrate something technical or complicated will also help your messages be more memorable and portable, as we develop next.

### **6.3.4 Make Your Messages Memorable and Portable**

You not only want to allow audiences access to your messages, you want them to engage with your ideas, and maybe even more importantly, remember them and be able to retell the messages to others once they have been exposed to them. So, your messages need to be memorable and portable.

When it comes to making your messages memorable, this entails trying to find things that catch the attention of your target audiences, thereby getting them to engage further and ask questions about your ideas. There are a number of well-recognized techniques intended to serve these purposes, but a dominant theme through these techniques is to emphasize what you found that was surprising, unexpected, new, interesting, or different from current thinking on the policy issue. The reason to try and make your messages memorable is so that audiences will remember them and tell them to others in their circle. You not only have to make them memorable for the individual, they also have to be easily retellable or what we call “portable.” This idea of easily portable or spreadable messages fits into Gladwell’s (2000) viral concept of how good ideas spread: first from the source, but then from those who have been “infected” to those they interact with, and so on.

Advocates use many techniques for this purpose and we now look in more detail at five that are commonly used to make messages more memorable and portable:

- Sticky titles that are memorable
- Striking facts that are unexpected and draw attention
- Analytical stories to humanize your analysis
- Giving the target audience the language to use
- Pictures and graphical/visual presentation of data

Taking the techniques one by one:

- **Sticky titles that are memorable**

By “sticky” we simply mean very memorable.<sup>21</sup> You are trying to come up with titles that immediately resonate with the target audiences, and hence are easily memorable and portable. Sticky titles can also begin the process of communicating your overall message or at least piquing the interest of the target audience to further engage with your advocacy proposals. A good example is the title of the European Stability Initiative’s paper on the business vibrancy of the Central Anatolian region of Turkey: “Islamic Calvinists.” The purpose of the paper was to try to undermine a reductive and ill-informed narrative in Western Europe about Turkey within discussions on its potential membership of the EU. The title itself is such a strange collocation of words that virtually anybody who reads or hears about the paper remembers the title. In fact, it was not something that was invented by the European Stability

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**Your messages  
not only need to  
be memorable,  
but also  
portable.**

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Initiative, but what people from the region call themselves, that is, they are Muslims, but with a Protestant work-ethic.

- **Striking facts that are unexpected and draw attention**

A strong theme in making advocacy messages memorable is to focus on things that you found which were unexpected or striking.<sup>22</sup> This refers to how you select and highlight the facts, quantitative or qualitative, that you found in your research and which are of such significance or are so surprising that decision makers cannot ignore them. For example, in a recent study in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a policy fellow found that the rate of nonimplementation of constitutional court decisions was 9 percent; this is in direct contrast to the publicly released figure of just 3 percent.<sup>23</sup> This is a figure and fact that policymakers and citizens alike could not ignore.

- **Analytical stories to humanize your analysis**

The next technique essential to making complicated or technical findings more accessible, memorable, and portable is to build the message around the story of the people involved or affected by the public policy in question and support it with your analysis or evidence.<sup>24</sup> Remember that policy is made by people and for people, and stories around people affected by a particular policy can be a good reminder of this for decision makers. Humanizing data is, therefore, an important technique for researchers to develop in their advocacy efforts. A good example of this approach is the European Stability Initiative paper mentioned above, entitled “Islamic Calvinists.” The paper centered on the story of the development of the largest furniture business in the Central Anatolian region and the government and private sector players involved. It did not center on the data on the development of the region, but on the very memorable story of the development of this very successful business—of course, supported by the data.

Our case from Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) has further lessons on this aspect of analytical stories.

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

The European Stability Initiative researcher talked in the interview about trying always to talk in parables, that is, stories that teach the audiences a lesson about the lived experience of the policy problem or solutions.

They also had what they called the “Ahtisaari test.” Martti Ahtisaari, UN special envoy at the Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) status process negotiations, was tasked with developing a plan aimed at resolving the talks on the independence of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244). The Ahtisaari test was simply a test of how portable a message was when framed in analytical story mode, that is, whether Ahtisaari went on to tell the story of the European Stability Initiative research to others.

- **Give the target audience the language to use**

Often it is not enough to come up with stories or striking facts, you also need your target audiences to start using new language or adopting your language or metaphors. Again, you need to focus on the kind of language that might appeal to the target audiences and also consider a language that is memorable and portable. This technique can be especially useful and important if the issue is new for policymakers, and when you are trying to reframe the discussion and/or introduce a new dimension to the debate.

Two of our cases illustrate examples of this transfer of language:

### **KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)**

When the European Stability Initiative presented its initial assessment of the economic future of Mitrovica to Serbian and Albanian leaders and showed that the town was living off the subsidies from the crisis and had no economic future once the crisis was over, they summed up the situation with the phrase, “the light is flickering and about to go out.”

When the prime minister of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) held a press conference to announce his general support for the European Stability Initiative plan for Mitrovica, he used exactly this phrase.

### **MACEDONIA**

The Studiorum researcher reported on work in the area of “patient safety,” an area in which she had been working with the Ministry of Health for some time. She mentioned that in her presentations to the medical community some medical professionals did not really have a clear understanding of what patient safety meant. For the first few presentations she did not explain the concept in detail but continued to use the phrase over and over with some specific examples until the term started to be more widely used in the medical community. It was at this point that medical professionals really started to get interested in what was behind the concept and how they could use it or benefit from its incorporation into the system. This is another interesting starting point in what we have called the “softening up” process.

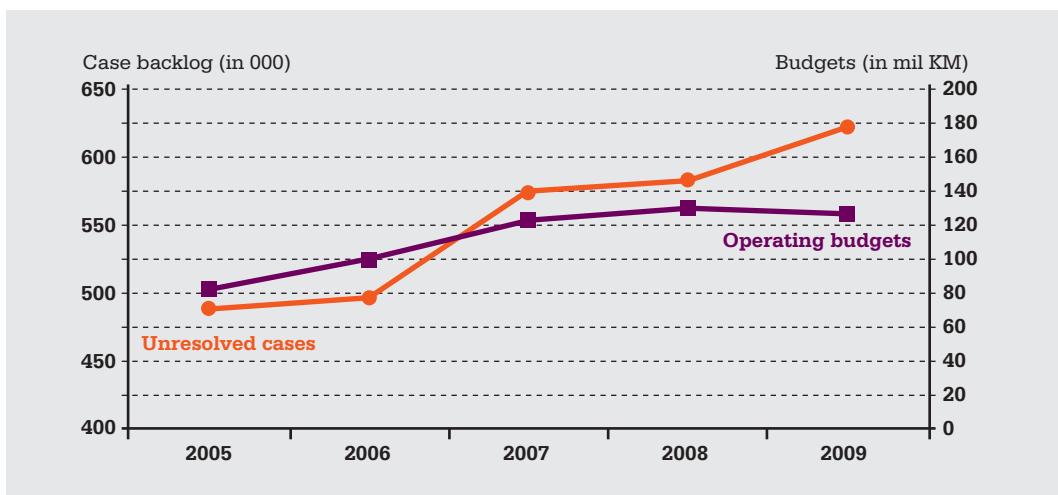
- **Pictures and graphical/visual presentation of data to emphasize the key data**

As we read or hear presentations, we never grow out of our childish habit of looking at the pictures. They are the things that grab our attention and we remember and talk about them. Presenting the key findings of research as a graph or in another visual form draws the attention of the reader to that particular piece of data and also means that the reader does not have to search the text to find it.<sup>25</sup> Unsurprisingly, striking facts, if they are quantitative, are often presented graphically. For example, in

a recent paper from a policy fellowship program<sup>26</sup> on the performance of courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina,<sup>27</sup> the fellows found that the court system was the most expensive and slowest in Europe! The fellows presented the data to support this claim in Figure 12.

## FIGURE 12.

Graphical presentation of key data—“More money does bring better performance”



The figure essentially shows that while budgets increased significantly over a five-year period, this had no impact on the case backlog that, in fact, continued to increase. This one graph forms a pretty devastating picture and completely undermines the standard efficiency argument that the case backlog would come down if more money was made available.

Pictures of the people or places studied in the research obviously humanize the policy discussion, especially if you accompany them with the stories of the person or place shown in the picture, thereby making them memorable. While a picture or graph may be worth a thousand words, you should definitely accompany them with some explanation/story to ensure you get the intended point across and reinforce your message. Try not to fall at the “but it’s obvious” hurdle by assuming that what is obvious to you is also obvious to your audience.

## **ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST**

*Reflect on the messages that you are planning to emphasize for each target audience:*

### **APPEALING TO THE AUDIENCE**

- Why do you think that your message is engaging and convincing for this target audience?
- To what extent and how have you addressed their current positions, thinking, or values in the message?
- Do you have a balance of incentives and/or threats in the message?

### **CONSIDERING POLICY RELEVANCE AND PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION**

- Is your message directly addressing the thinking, issues, and challenges that are currently being discussed by your target stakeholder group?
- Have you really taken into account the realities (especially challenges and constraints) when developing your policy proposal and recommendations?
- Will your main target audiences (especially government officials) consider your recommendations as practically implementable or obviously usable?

### **MAKING THE MESSAGE ACCESSIBLE**

- Have you used concepts and language that the audience can easily recognize and understand?
- Do you need to reduce the complexity of any part of your message for certain audiences?
- Have you supported the message with evidence and cases that also are recognizable and credible for this audience?

### **MAKING THE MESSAGE MEMORABLE AND PORTABLE**

- Can you support your message with a striking or surprising fact or insight?
- Can you support your message with an analytical story, that is, a story of a person or case that illustrates the issue and potential solutions in an accessible way?
- Can you present your striking fact or analytical story in a graphical or pictorial way?
- If presenting your message in a written format or developing a policy presentation, is the title sticky/memorable?

## 6.4 SELECT ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS

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**Plan for multiple activities over time to move your target audiences to the point of ownership, ready to act upon your ideas.**

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Having developed your messages, you need to plan how to practically achieve your advocacy objectives in order to mediate and negotiate the discussion to the point where your target audiences own the research ideas and are ready to act on them. This will be achieved through the purposeful development of a range of advocacy activities and a set of communication tools. For policy researchers, this is normally a combination of releasing papers or articles and opportunities to present and discuss them with stakeholders, potential coalition partners, and decision makers through, for example, individual briefings and lobbying, organizing meetings and conferences, making presentations, and media events.

For the sake of clarity, we divide the discussion and take on the selection of advocacy activities first and then consider the choice of supporting communication tools.

### 6.4.1 Choose the Advocacy Activities That Fit the Role, Process, and Objectives

At this stage in the planning process, a number of factors will guide your choice of advocacy activities. The usual role of any advocacy organization will provide the broader limits of possible choices of activities. For example, think tanks should not really be planning demonstrations, but of course they can choose to go into a coalition with an activist organization willing to do so, if they feel such public action or pressure is required. When it comes to advocating for the results of policy research or expert analysis, the natural networks of actors who usually engage in this type of discussion tend to be on the inside track, and that is where policy advocacy usually starts, with activities such as presentations and briefings with experts and decision makers. If advocates feel that they are not getting a positive response to the proposals on the inside track, they may then go to the media to put on some pressure. Of course, this can differ from context to context: a recent trainee from Bulgaria claimed that if an issue is not in the media, then politicians feel that the issue is *de facto* not on the agenda and are uninterested in advocacy efforts. In such a context, some type of media presence would be required as an opening advocacy activity.

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**Researcher advocates often try presenting their ideas on the inside track, before moving to the outside.**

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As this example illustrates, the specifics of the “way into the process” identified in the first circle of the APF will further guide you in the planning, that is, the target audiences and their current positions, the time available to try to change their position, and how far you think their positions can be changed or, in other words, what you think is a feasible objective. Furthermore, you obviously need to plan these activities in relation to getting the timing right—for example, you might already have an idea when a policy window will open and possibly also close. In sum, you are looking for what will work to convince your target audiences in the time and openings available to have the best chance of achieving your target advocacy objective.

Experience has clearly shown that the more participatory and collaborative the advocacy process, the more effective it will be.<sup>28</sup> This is hardly a surprise when we consider that the goal is to provide enough opportunities for target audiences to understand, engage, ask questions, process and digest, be convinced, further clarify, take input from others, bargain with players and stakeholders, and then own and act on your ideas. The management and steering of this negotiation and dialogue is at the heart of this activity selection step of the planning process.

Table 3 details the combination of advocacy activities that were used in each of the cases presented here.

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**Design a set of activities to shift target audiences' positions during the available time window.**

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**TABLE 3.**  
*Advocacy activities conducted in four cases*

	CASE 1: KAZAKHSTAN <sup>29</sup>	CASE 2: KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)	CASE 3: MACEDONIA	CASE 4: MONGOLIA
Publication and release of documents, webpages, other formats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy study<sup>30</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy study<sup>31</sup></li> <li>• Policy briefs</li> <li>• Documentary video</li> <li>• Webpage</li> <li>• Picture stories on stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy study<sup>32</sup></li> <li>• Policy brief</li> <li>• Policy-oriented journal article</li> <li>• Webpage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy report<sup>33</sup></li> <li>• Opinion-editorial articles in newspapers</li> <li>• Webpage</li> <li>• Answers to working group questions</li> </ul>
Interaction with target audiences		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizing three conferences in Wilton Park, Brussels, and Vienna</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lobbying with ministry advisors and other officials</li> <li>• Conference presentations</li> <li>• Participation in working groups in the executive and parliaments</li> <li>• Presentation to the medical community</li> <li>• Conference presentations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lobbying with parliamentarians</li> <li>• Presentation to working groups</li> <li>• Organizing press conference and presentation to NGOs</li> <li>• Offering Revenue Watch experts as advisors to government</li> </ul>
Previous activities that set up the advocacy effort		<p>Training with officials on One Stop Shop model</p>	<p>Background research on the Trepesa mine<sup>34</sup></p>	<p>Joining the Active Citizenship Network (ACN) and other international networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TV programs on mining in Mongolia</li> <li>• Providing trainings to government officials on negotiating extraction contracts</li> </ul>

**ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES**

A number of lessons also can be drawn from these cases:

- **Multiple activities and persistence over a significant period are usually needed to allow for the interaction necessary to reach your goals.**

In planning your advocacy campaign, you need to combine the release of papers or publications with the multiple opportunities to discuss and push for the ideas in them. You also need to stay involved in the discussion and be persistent in order to reach your advocacy objectives.<sup>35</sup> All four cases show the commitment of an individual or a full team over a cycle of two to four years. This may not entail full-time commitment over this period, but it certainly involves significant time and resources. Another reason to stay involved over a longer period is to make sure that the reporting of your research stays true to its original message: research can be co-opted and distorted for political ends.<sup>36</sup>

- **A significant driver of advocacy activity choice will be the obstacles you need to overcome.**

In addition to providing enough interaction to reach your goals, specification of the obstacles you need to overcome will drive the planning and selection of activities. For example, if the current government in power opposes your value framework, it may be an idea to engage the media and opposition figures to build pressure. Alternatively, you may choose to be more quiet about it and focus instead on building the support of experts and opinion leaders with the aim to soften them up to your ideas for the time when the government changes. The Kazakh case provides a good example of how an obstacle may drive the activity choice.

**Capacity building to fill identified gaps can be an important advocacy activity.**

## KAZAKHSTAN

In advocacy processes in the region, one of the major obstacles is often that important target audiences have little knowledge or capacity in the issue you want to address. This is a regular occurrence in areas of new technology and this was the case with One Stop Shops in Kazakhstan. To address this gap a capacity-building approach that offered trainings and study tours was used to soften up target audiences to the ideas and best practice in One Stop Shops. Such long-term capacity-building approaches to advocacy are, in fact, quite common.<sup>37</sup>

Ultimately, the purposeful planning of your activities in line with your advocacy objectives and yet balanced with overcoming obstacles will ensure that the range of activities and tools you select have the best chance of achieving the specific targets in your advocacy campaign.

- Initially plan activities for the short to medium term or first wave of advocacy, and then make further plans in response to the developing debate.

When it comes to discussion and negotiation, it is difficult to predict how exactly the process or dialogue will develop and unfold. You are trying to plan for the opening or first wave of the advocacy campaign, that is, for the short to medium term, and then you will see what kind of response you get. At this point, you need to return to the APF or the decisions you made through the planning process and be ready and willing to adapt to the situation as it unfolds. In any case, you must be willing to stay involved if you are looking for influence.

- Advocacy should start as early as possible, even during the research process.

Few researchers realize that effective advocacy begins before the research ends; experience has shown that involving policymakers as early as possible in the research process can increase the chance of policy influence or research being used.<sup>38</sup> Getting feedback from the earliest stages of defining the research questions through to data analysis and draft recommendations can be extremely useful for the research process, especially in keeping research and analysis practical and relevant. In addition, it also has an advocacy-oriented dimension of bringing the decision maker into the research ideas, building the political legitimacy of the project, and ultimately building ownership.

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**“Case testing”  
your initial  
findings on  
decision makers  
can help build  
ownership of  
ideas.**

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In this vein, we often emphasize to policy researchers that the advocacy opportunities presented when conducting research interviews with decision makers and other key stakeholders should not be overlooked in building awareness of the research in the broader stakeholder group. It is beneficial to tell them when and how the research will be available and even ask them if it is possible to get a follow-up interview or meeting or just feedback by email, thereby engaging them throughout the process rather than just as a follow-up to the research conducted.

Through these measures, you are starting a dialogue and beginning to think about fostering their ownership of your ideas. As one trainee from an Estonian think tank commented: your policy recommendations should not come as a surprise to the target audience. Her approach is not just to inform decision makers of finished policy advice, but to use the research and analysis process to engage them and negotiate feasible and implementable recommendations that are developed jointly with the researcher. One of the cases illustrates a further useful approach to the early engagement of policymakers:

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

Once the European Stability Initiative had completed the research process, they prepared a PowerPoint presentation of their initial analysis of the evidence collected and the implications they drew from it. At this point in the process, they went to decision makers, briefed them on the initial findings, and asked questions such as, “Are we right?” “Is there something that we have missed?”

This kind of “case testing” approach communicates openness to decision makers and the importance of stakeholder input, which means that researchers end up not only getting very useful feedback but also, in fact, already beginning the advocacy discussion. Indeed, experience has shown that communication of research results prior to publication allows for early uptake and usage of the findings.<sup>39</sup>

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

### Consider the most suitable set of activities for your advocacy campaign:

- What do you think you can achieve in the first or next wave of the advocacy process?
- What are the biggest obstacles that you need to overcome? And whom do you need to focus on to overcome these obstacles?
- How much information sharing, dialogue, or negotiation is needed to win these audiences over?
- What combination of activities will you need to engage in to achieve your aim?
- Are the activities you’ve planned consistent with the broader advocacy role of your organization?
- From a longer-term perspective, how long do you expect to be engaged in this advocacy campaign?

### 6.4.2 Choose Communication Tools to Support Advocacy Activities

Having chosen your target audiences, messages, and set of advocacy activities, you next need to choose the set of advocacy communication tools you will use to deliver these messages and support the chosen activities. This issue is often referred to as selecting “formats” and “packaging” of messages by

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**Choose communication tools that support your activities and suit your audiences.**

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commentators in the literature. However, as you are no doubt aware if you have developed such tools, producing effective advocacy tools involves a lot more in comparison to a simple process like packaging a parcel!

As with all aspects of the message and activities development process, your target audiences will guide the choice of communication tools. You need to select types of communication tools that are

- recognizable,
- commonly used,
- designed to give the level and type information that suits the capacity and expectations of target audiences, and
- easily accessible to target audiences.<sup>40</sup>

If you do choose the right tools for your audiences, you will have a better chance of engaging them and also of building the credibility of your messages and advocacy campaign.<sup>41</sup> It is important to avoid the classic mistake of sending your 120-page technical policy paper to the nonexpert decision maker, who not only does not have time to read it, but actually does not have the capacity to engage with the evidence or arguments. Such an approach will usually mean that the decision maker will probably not read the report and those sending it are highly unlikely to get a response, apart from the negative impression they have made.

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**Don't send long technical papers to decision makers who won't and can't read them.**

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In choosing communication tools, you need to consider three main types of audiences:

- **Experts**—those who have a deep technical knowledge and background in the target policy area. These are commonly advisors, bureaucrats, and people from international organizations, research institutes, think tanks, and universities. In order to convince this audience, they need to see the full argument, including literature, evidence, proposals, predictions, and research (methodology and analysis). Having said that, it is also important to note that such groups are still much more heterogeneous in background and experience than those from a single academic discipline and this needs to be considered in making your communication accessible.
- **Informed nonexperts**—practitioners who work in the target policy area and are users rather than producers of policy research. They are often decision makers, journalists, NGO employees, or civil servants. These people can normally be convinced by seeing the significant outcomes of research and do not need all the in-depth academic and research detail. If possible, these people will consult experts to confirm if their reading of a policy proposal is correct. This is usually a much more heterogeneous group than the expert group in terms of educational background and experience.

- **The general public**—unless they have a stake in the issue or it is a matter of broad public concern, the general public are not normally interested in policy research. Of course, if a policy proposal will divide them into winners or losers or feeds into their hopes and fears, they can easily be made interested. Such an advocacy effort would have to target the specific relevant sector of the general public to get them to buy into the ideas. What is needed in this case is the simplest and clearest presentation of the evidence in such an argument.

Exploring these three types of audiences or publics, Table 4 presents an overview of the common types of communication tools used to deliver advocacy messages.

**TABLE 4.**

**Types of advocacy communication tools targeting specific audiences**

TARGET AUDIENCES			
TYPE OF COMMUNICATION TOOL	Experts	Informed non-experts	The general public
	<b>Written</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy studies</li> <li>• Research papers</li> <li>• Working papers</li> <li>• Policy reports</li> <li>• Policy-oriented journal articles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy briefs, memos, and fact sheets.</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Policy reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Op-ed articles in newspapers</li> <li>• Letters to newspapers</li> <li>• Ads, banners, posters, t-shirts, stickers</li> </ul>
	<b>Oral</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conference presentations</li> <li>• Less formal presentations at one-to-one meetings or lobbying</li> <li>• Presentations to working groups and public hearings</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radio and TV programs</li> <li>• Public meetings and hearings</li> <li>• Speeches to the public</li> </ul>
	<b>Audio visual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentary videos</li> <li>• Advocacy-based advertising</li> </ul>	
	<b>Information &amp; Communication Technology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated advocacy websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-mail campaigns</li> <li>• Dedicated advocacy websites or pages</li> <li>• Social Networking sites: Facebook, Twitter</li> <li>• SMS/text campaigns</li> </ul>
COMMUNICATION TOOLS EACH AUDIENCE IS EXPOSED TO			

A number of lessons can be drawn from this table:

- **Communication tools sometimes have more than one audience.**

In some cases, communication tools primarily engage or target one group, for example, long technical papers for experts. However, there are many communication tools that overlap for different audience groups as, for example, with most of the advocacy based on information and communication technology. Oral presentations for experts and informed nonexperts are also together, as conferences and meetings in which such presentations are made normally include a mix of these two audiences. In the design of such shared or overlapping tools, this normally means an attempt to bridge between both audiences in what you include and how you explain things, but with a definite tendency to make sure to not exclude the group with less expertise.

- **It is important not to confuse exposure to communication tools with targeting.**

In Table 4, the columns include the common types of communication tools used to target each group, that is, the primary means to engage and convince them of the advocacy messages. In contrast, the arrows on the top of the table are there to indicate which communication tools each audience is exposed to. The tools included only under informed nonexperts and the public does not mean that experts do not read or see them; it is just that they are not primarily targeting expert audiences and would not include nearly enough detail to convince such an audience. The arrows above the table face in one direction, as this is not normally true in the other direction. For example, the public will not normally have easy access to policy studies or briefs, nor would they read them if they did. The lesson for the advocate is that if you want to engage particular audiences, you must develop communication tools that target and fully engage them in the debate. For example, it is not usually enough to outline your position only in an opinion editorial article if you need to get experts to buy into your proposals.

Table 5 details the specific combination of communication tools developed for each of our cases.

**TABLE 5.**  
Advocacy communication tools used in cases

COMMUNICATION TOOLS	CASE 1: KAZAKHSTAN	CASE 2: KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)	CASE 3: MACEDONIA	CASE 4: MONGOLIA
	<b>Written</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy study</li> <li>• Policy studies</li> <li>• Policy briefs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy study</li> <li>• Policy brief</li> <li>• Policy-oriented journal article</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy report</li> <li>• Opinion-editorial articles in newspapers</li> </ul>
	<b>Oral</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conference presentations</li> <li>• Less formal presentations at one-to-one meetings or lobbying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conference presentations</li> <li>• Less formal presentations at one-to-one meetings, briefings, or lobbying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentations to working groups and the medical community</li> <li>• Press conference</li> <li>• Presentation to working groups</li> </ul>
	<b>Audio visual</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentary video</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TV programs</li> </ul>
	<b>Information &amp; Communication Technology</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated advocacy webpage</li> <li>• E-mail newsletter</li> <li>• Picture stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated advocacy webpage</li> </ul>

The comparison of cases leads to two further lessons:

- **Developing communication tools for broader audiences requires more effort and resources.**

The table shows that multiple tools were used and needed in each case, but as the cases moved towards including broader public audiences, more tools were needed. For example, the Kosovar (UNSCR 1244) and Mongolian cases required more communication tools as they had a broader public dimension. Managing these types of campaigns can take a lot more time and effort as you have multiple levels of the discussion or dialogue to engage in. Also, it often becomes more expensive as more manpower, communication tools, publications, and so on are required. For example, in the Kosovar (UNSCR 1244) case, the European Stability Initiative made a very professional documentary on the situation in the town and this cost them approximately EUR 20,000.

- Different communication tools may be needed through the different stages of the advocacy process.

The European Stability Initiative case, which played out over a four-year period and in which they wrote multiple policy briefs as the discussion developed is a good illustration of the type of commitment and persistence that is needed through each wave of the advocacy process. The ability to respond in this manner also illustrates the advantage of having the “iceberg” of research evidence available behind the “tip” that was presented in initial stages of the debate. To a certain extent, the same is true for the Mongolian case.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Consider the most suitable communication types and tools for the message of your advocacy campaign:**

- What do you think you can achieve in the first or next wave of the advocacy process?
- What types of audiences will you engage with through these activities? Expert, informed nonexperts, and/or the general public?
- What types of communication tools do you need to support the advocacy activities you planned in the last stage?
- Are the communication tools suitable and accessible for each type of target audience?
- Do you have adequate resources (such as manpower, money) to develop and use the full range of communication tools you have in mind?

## 6.5 ASSESS THE STRATEGIC RISK OF THE CAMPAIGN

At this closing stage, you should have a solid idea of your way into the process, messenger, main target audiences, messages, activities, and communication tools you will use. You have looked to open, continue, feed into, or steer a discussion, and thought about how to develop it in the short to medium term, but one thing that you still need to consider is how particular audiences will respond to your advocacy campaign. A crucial first step in thinking of potential responses is to consider the strategic risks of your planned campaign.

All advocacy interventions have some type of strategic risk: there are risks that opponents might react very negatively to your evidence and proposals, which could then have an adverse effect on the future reputation and sustainability of the organization or could even be a threat to your safety or freedom under more authoritarian regimes. For example, if you are a think tank dependent

for most of your work on commissions from a government or international organization, they may not appreciate it if you publicly criticize them. This should not necessarily deter you from publishing critical positions, but you need to think of the potential consequences of doing so, and consider whether the risk is worth it. Of course, if you are playing the role of whistle-blower or watchdog in your advocacy efforts and are planning to hold actors accountable for their actions, the future of your organization depends on such strong, clear, evidence-based disclosure and there is no question in this case. However, for most other organizations, considering these risks is a very important step in the advocacy planning process, and the assessment in this step should be a culmination of weighing up the factors that emerge throughout your mapping and planning in all elements of the Advocacy Planning Framework.

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**Consider the longer-term risks of going public with the positions you are putting forward.**

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The Mongolian case gives an illustration of the risks that might be considered.

## MONGOLIA

The Open Society Forum is a long-established NGO in Mongolia with an independent reputation. They have a strong NGO and governmental network. Being publicly critical of the draft contract agreed by a ministerial working group and the mining consortium could potentially have been damaging to their relationship with the government. However, in this case, having been a constant commentator on transparency, especially on the mining sector, and knowing that the stakes for the country were so high in terms of the potential monetary return or loss on the agreement, it was an easy decision to go ahead and criticize the agreement. In fact, if they hadn't, their reputation in the NGO network may have been tarnished.

In addition to criticism, there are also potential risks of producing positions or evidence that seem to support people, organizations, or political positions that you really do not wish to be associated with. Considering policy decision making as a "world of highly contested and contestable evidence,"<sup>42</sup> you need to be very clear in drawing the lines between research and policy proposals and crucially those who support or oppose them. In the highly politicized environments of the region, there is always a danger that your research or analysis can be adopted or co-opted by other players with whom you do not wish to be affiliated. If you wish to remain an independent player, you will need to go back and continue to make clear where the line is between proposals and political support. Unwanted and unwarranted political affiliations are difficult to change after the fact and can damage the reputation of a researcher as an independent provider of research.

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**If you want remain an independent player, stick to the issues and divide this from political support or opposition.**

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In terms of practical planning, you should reflect on the potential strategic risks of your planned advocacy campaign and consider the potential consequences and affiliations that may emerge. This may lead you to reconsider anything from the overall advocacy objective to the timing, the support needed, evidence or message focus.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

**Reflect on the extent of risk your planned advocacy campaign poses to you, your organization, and/or your partners:**

- Is there any risk that the positions you are putting forward might damage the long-term reputation or relationships that your institution values?
- Could some parts of your advocacy messages be skewed or used for political gain by some actors?
- Are these risks worth taking or do you need to adjust some parts of the message or choice of activities and tools?
- On a broader level, consider if the risks identified mean you should adjust the advocacy objective, timing of your campaign, choice of coalition partners, or messenger?

## 6.6 PLAN FOR CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

In addition to the issue of strategic risk, you should also predict the challenges and responses you will get from partners and opponents on your proposals and ideas when honing or finally shaping your activities and messages.

In designing an advocacy message based on research and analysis, there are basic challenges that you need to be ready to address from the start. There is a tendency at the beginning of advocacy discussions based on research to try to quickly undermine or delegitimize the project and quickly consign it to the dustbin. These challenges usually come from questions about the credibility, relevance,<sup>43</sup> and utility<sup>44</sup> of the research,<sup>45</sup> so you will need to design your messages and communication tools to have a shelf life beyond what is vividly referred to as the “policy primordial soup.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the aim is to get your audiences past the question of whether it is worth engaging with your research project.

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Predicting responses prepares you to defend your position in the debate.

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As such, there are a number of considerations based on the potential responses of target audiences that may push you to sharpen, shape, focus, support, or polish your messages and campaign plan. Taking both points of challenges and potential responses, this section focuses on the following:

- Defend the credibility of research, analysis, and evidence
- Take into account irrational responses
- Get ready to manage the predicted responses

### **6.6.1 Defend the Credibility of the Research**

With more academic or expert audiences, the focus of the first challenge is often on the relevance, objectivity and comprehensiveness of the research methods employed and evidence generated.<sup>47</sup> This credibility challenge goes beyond the person or provider of the research and addresses whether this particular piece of research presents a “rigorous and substantiated analysis,”<sup>48</sup> and whether the results derived from it are reliable and valid.

Research needs to be seen as high quality, that is, both accurate and objective with methods appropriate to the target question and context.<sup>49</sup> For example, one of the more usual challenges is related to transfer issues: policy research is usually done by focusing in an in-depth manner on particular cases of a policy problem, such as in a few municipalities or towns or schools. However, it often seeks to make recommendations at levels beyond the focus of the particular cases studied, often on national-level policy. The question or challenge then arises as to how researchers can make this jump from findings developed at the local level to national-level policy. You should carefully consider how representative are the cases for your argument. Are they cases of best practice (that all can learn from), an average case (in terms of, for example, demographics or capacity, which then says something about all other cases), or a worst-case scenario (where an improvement in any direction would probably help all other cases)?

Another common challenge is the nature of the evidence collected. The first important task is to present evidence that is relevant to the policy problem being discussed, for example, long-term quantitative analysis of recognized indicators for macroeconomic policy. The second is the simple argumentative challenge, that is, whether you have the right type or amount of evidence included or generated to support the claims you are making.<sup>50</sup>

Arguably, a focus on these issues should have been built into the research design stage of the project, rather than only emerging at the later advocacy planning stage. Nevertheless, even if this has been done, it is a different thing to design your research in the safe confines of your own team than to have to defend it in public. Hence, the focus of this planning phase is to develop sound, understandable arguments in preparation for these challenges, so that the research and your messages survive these first hurdles. This preparation should not lead in constructing your messages, but some elements certainly can support or frame it. More importantly, it must be available to draw upon by advocates when this type of challenge arises.

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**Consider in advance how your research and evidence could be challenged.**

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### **6.6.2 Take into Account Emotional Responses**

The points so far have addressed what might be called rational responses to policy discussions, but of course, it is also equally important to consider the more emotional and personal responses. We cannot overstate two points here: the importance of informal and personal relationships in making advocacy happen, and the importance of taking account of how your audiences will respond to your proposals based on what you know of their personalities and affiliations.<sup>51</sup>

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**People and  
their emotions  
matter in  
managing  
responses to  
messages.**

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At a recent small policy conference, the discussion was dominated by the personal animosity between two of the lead attendees, one the head of a think tank who regularly takes the government to court when they do not deliver on freedom of information requests in the required time, the other the head of the government agency with the responsibility to deliver on such requests. This was a discussion where rational input or evidence seemed not to matter at all and personal challenges ruled, even though the session opened with a presentation of new research on the area. In this case, the official took the continual flow of strategic litigation and public criticism as a personal threat, rather than as the basis to improve on the delivery of the policy. This is not to say that such whistle-blowing tactics do not work, but they certainly do not make a strong basis for collaborative interaction and this is something that advocates will have to deal with even after a court decision delivers a victory.

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**Avoid making  
personal  
attacks on  
any potential  
audiences.**

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Predicting with any certainty the level of emotional response is difficult, but in order not to add fuel to the personal response fire, the European Stability Initiative researchers have a simple rule of thumb: “Don’t ever make *ad hominem* attacks.” Simply put, avoid attacking the people involved or their personal style or approach: this will undoubtedly bring the kind of negative response and detrimental effects on discussions that policy researchers are not normally interested in provoking. However, this is easier said than done in an environment where few people are able to differentiate a professional challenge from a personal attack. The advice we give then is to avoid unintentionally making things worse by adding personal attacks into the argument.

### **6.6.3 Get Ready to Manage Predicted Responses**

Finally, it is not enough to just make predictions about how certain actors will respond; you also need to prepare and potentially adjust your messages and/or be ready to take on the challenges you anticipate. As researchers and analysts, you have the advantage of having the iceberg of evidence available to you to draw on in making these plans.

The European Stability Initiative case is a good illustration of how one advocate used their evidence and produced a separate communication tool to head off a response and challenge they predicted. The example also shows that much effort is entailed in managing this aspect of your advocacy work.

## KOSOVO (UNSCR 1244)

Following their first conference with all the players involved, the European Stability Initiative managed to get the Albanian side to agree to the establishment of a separate Serb municipality in the north of Mitrovica. This came from the European Stability Initiative presenting their research evidence that the town of Mitrovica was living off the crisis and the town would die without its subsidies and stipends. The establishment of the separate municipality came with the conditions that there would be freedom of movement between the northern and southern parts, full return of property, and joint economic planning for the whole town.

However, the European Stability Initiative feared that the government in Belgrade would not like this compromise solution and would push the local Serbian leaders to stay firm to their original plan which would completely separate the town and that this local municipality would stay true to Belgrade as its capital and not recognize the independent Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) they feared was coming. In order to support the decision of the local leaders and respond to this potential threat from Belgrade, the European Stability Initiative produced a policy brief entitled “Mitrovica: People or Territory?”<sup>52</sup> in which these fears were detailed and the advantages of the agreed local solution were emphasized.

In addition to making a prediction about peoples’ responses, it is advisable to case test messages with people from outside the research team and organizations involved before going public with your messages. Obviously, it would be useful to case test your messages with the same profile of audiences you are targeting, that is, experts, informed nonexperts, or the general public, to see whether or not you are getting the responses you predict. Distancing yourself from the research can be a difficult process, so getting feedback in a controlled way is easier to handle when the stakes are low; this feedback should really contribute to sharpening and adapting your messages.

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CHECKLIST

Reflect on the plans you have made for your advocacy messages, communication tools, and supporting activities, and consider the potential responses by the target audiences:

- What responses do you anticipate getting to your ideas and proposals from the target audiences?
- What will be the likely challenges from an expert audience on the methods that you have employed or the evidence that you have gathered? For example, in terms of the claims you make based on the cases studied or sample size or data available?
- Is there any way you can tone down or reshape elements of your message so that a challenge is seen as professional or on the issue, rather than personal?
- How are you going to address the challenges that you predict will come from these target audiences?

## NOTES

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# 7

## USING THE ADVOCACY PLANNING FRAMEWORK TOOL

This chapter turns to a more practical level by merging the essential foundations and elements of advocacy planning from Chapters 3–6 into one comprehensive tool, designed to be user-friendly. The APF tool outlined in the first section of this chapter compiles the core planning questions from the checklists found throughout this guide into one easily accessible resource, which is designed to facilitate the process of advocacy planning with your team in a systematic manner. The second section of the chapter then offers practical guidelines and advice on how to use the tool effectively and efficiently in the process of planning an advocacy campaign with your team.

### 7.1 THE APF TOOL

The APF tool is framed around the four elements of the Advocacy Planning Framework:

- core strategic focus of your campaign
- way into the process
- the messenger
- message and activities

The tool for each APF element consists of two columns: the left contains the key questions to be answered in your advocacy planning process for that element; the column on the right provides explanations and illustrations to give you deeper understanding of the focus of the questions, thereby aiding your thinking and planning. The questions are intended to be clear and straightforward and the explanations as illustrative as possible in line with our intention to develop an advocacy-planning tool that can stand on its own and be used by practitioners with relative ease. Hence, we hope there is very little learning needed to understand and use the tool.

## PLANNING YOUR ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN WITH APF

### CORE STRATEGIC FOCUS OF YOUR CAMPAIGN

*Try not to get stuck on these questions the first time you discuss them or think them over. The detailed mapping process that follows will help you to go much deeper into answering these questions. But keep them in mind and come back to them throughout the process.*

#### KEY QUESTIONS

#### EXPLANATIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

### 1. MAP THE CURRENT OBSTACLES /CHALLENGES

- What's stopping the policymaking process from moving in the direction you wish?
- What obstacles or challenges exist to having your proposals accepted and acted upon?

Understanding the obstacles to the change you are proposing or trying to prevent will inform all aspects of the campaign from setting a feasible objective to developing your messages, activities and communication tools. Obstacles in the process can be varied and include strong opponents, value conflicts, lack of support, or the lack of access to the policymaking process.

Overall, try to identify what combination of these various elements is blocking the process and see if there is a core tipping point that would change this.

#### NOTES

### 2. ASSESS YOUR LEVERAGE

- What can you bring to the policymaking process to address identified obstacles and create the momentum to push the process in the direction you want?
- What combination of new striking insights or evidence, supporters, and opportunities can you use to move the process?

The key is to identify what you have got to catalyze the change you want. This could be one piece or a combination of new evidence, analysis, or research data; a new problem definition; or solutions/policy options; support from opinion leaders, stakeholders, or experts; credibility; money; votes; and/or an open policy window or opportunity in the decision-making process.

#### NOTES

### 3. SET A FEASIBLE ADVOCACY OBJECTIVE

- What is a feasible objective for your advocacy initiative that you think is realistic to achieve?
- Given the leverage you've got and obstacles outlined, how far can you realistically expect to move the process?

Setting feasible objectives will give you a realistic chance of making or preventing change. Examples of objectives are

- to stop or start a particular policy initiative by the government,
- to have your recommendations accepted by the government,
- to change the nature of a public debate around a certain issue,
- to get an issue on the agenda of the government.

Try to avoid just writing down a wish list; being realistic will show you that influence is possible. Also remember that the objective is not the policy outcome you want (for example, decentralized education funding) but the process change you are targeting (for example, getting this option on the agenda of the ministerial working group).

#### NOTES

## DETAILED MAPPING AND PLANNING

### WAY INTO THE PROCESS

*Map the various dimensions of the target decision-making process listed below to try to find the most suitable and effective way of bringing your advocacy messages and campaign into that process.*

#### KEY QUESTIONS

#### EXPLANATIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

### 1. GAUGE THE LEVEL OF DEMAND

- Is your issue already on the government agenda? If not, is there another group of people talking about it or advocating for it?
- Does interest and momentum already exist around the issue or do you have to create it?

It is generally easier to influence policy if there is already some level of demand for your ideas and proposals. The best case is if the government has chosen to act on the problem you are also focusing on. If not, see if there are other researchers, NGOs, government agencies, or stakeholders discussing it. It is better to feed into an ongoing discussion than to have to create one.

#### NOTES

### 2. MAP THE ACTORS, NETWORKS, AND POWER CENTERS

- Who are the main stakeholders in the target policy issue?
- Who are the key decision makers and opinion leaders you need to influence?
- Where does the real power lie? Who actually makes the decision? And who influences that person(s)?
- How are key actors connected in the network?

Understanding who the key players are and how they are connected is pivotal. You are looking for the real decision makers and the circles of people around them, that is, the centers of influence or power in the network. Map out the sectors and their connections, such as government agencies, NGOs, media, and academics. Informal or personal connections can be just as important as the more formal.

#### NOTES

### 3. UNDERSTAND THE DECISION-MAKING PRACTICE

- How are decisions really made in practice for your policy issue?
- Where does decision making really happen? Does influence exist in formal or informal processes?

Decisions are often made through a process of formal and informal fora. There can be public discussions, hearings, and consultancy, ministerial and parliamentary working groups and debates, but maybe the real deal is struck in one informal meeting. Knowing where and how real influence happens is essential.

#### NOTES

#### 4. GET THE TIMING RIGHT

- When is the best time to make your move in launching your advocacy campaign?
- Can you identify an opening/window of opportunity to take advantage of? How long will this opportunity last?
- Will you be ready with your research and analysis to take advantage of the identified opening?

Being ready and getting your proposals and analysis into the decision-making process at the right time is vital to having influence. Looking at the people and decision-making practice, you should try to predict the best opportunity or window to make your move. Policy windows often open around elections, with new administrations or leadership, when new solutions emerge or around focusing events, for example, a financial crisis.

#### NOTES

#### 5. UNDERSTAND CURRENT THINKING IN THE NETWORK

- How do key stakeholders think about and discuss your issue and the potential solutions (policy narrative)?
- How do main stakeholders see or frame the policy issue?

To make your proposals and analysis relevant to stakeholders, you have to be able to connect and contrast your thinking to their ongoing debates on the issue. Before you can do that, you have to understand how they discuss, define, and support their current understandings of the policy problem and potential solutions. Their framing of the problem is very important. For example, in the delivery of social services in minority languages, do they talk about it as an issue of efficiency, human rights, or a threat to national security.

#### NOTES

#### 6. MAP THE CURRENT POSITIONS OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- What is the current position of the key actors on your issue?
- To what extent is there broad consensus or conflict among key players on the issue?

This entails a detailed mapping of where different actors stand on the issue in the debate and understanding the reasons they do, that is, the interests and values informing their position. Remember that even if people are on the same side of the debate, they may be there for very different reasons. This insight will help you really get to an understanding of the nature of the challenge you face in trying to shift key stakeholders' positions. Actors in conflictual policy debates tend to be harder to move.

#### NOTES

Before moving on to the next section on the messenger, go back to the core strategic focus questions and reconsider your notes in light of your discussion in completing your detailed planning on the “way into the process.”

## DETAILED MAPPING AND PLANNING



### THE MESSENGER

*Finding the face for the campaign and assessing the support from others needed. In advocacy, the messenger is often as important (if not more) than the message.*

#### KEY QUESTIONS

#### EXPLANATIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

##### 1. CHOOSE THE FACE OF YOUR CAMPAIGN

- Will you or your organization be the face or spokesperson for your campaign? Do you have the right balance of reputation, credibility, visibility, support, and skills to play this role?
- Or should someone else take the lead in the campaign? Or maybe you just need someone else to play a specific role at a particular time in the campaign?

Having the right person or organization that is credible is key to opening doors, getting the right meetings, and being taken seriously. The messenger does not have to be one person—it can be an organization or coalition.

Often you need the support or approval of a high visibility individual to make a campaign happen. For example, close advisors to ministers or MPs or prominent NGO figures often take on this role.

These people could lead the campaign or play a more specific role, such as providing a bridge to a particular objective or getting past an identified obstacle. These people are often referred to as policy brokers or champions.

#### NOTES

##### 2. MOBILIZE OTHER SUPPORT

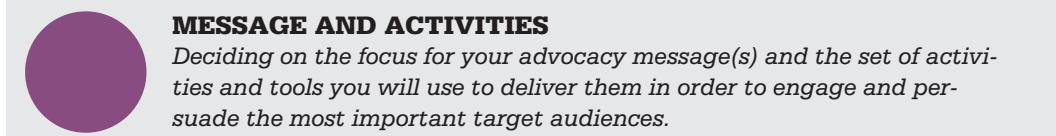
- What type and level of support from others do you need to achieve your objectives? Who are the key people to try to get on your side?

You have to find friends in the process, and hence you need to get the support of others to strengthen your credibility and position. These people can range across the sectors from government to NGOs, stakeholders, and media. You may also need practical support like money, resources, or capacity, so try to match support to the needs and gaps identified, and not just because they are your friends or allies.

#### NOTES

Before moving on to the next section on the message, go back to the core strategic focus questions and reconsider your notes in light of your discussion in completing your detailed planning on the “messenger.”

## DETAILED MAPPING AND PLANNING



### MESSAGE AND ACTIVITIES

*Deciding on the focus for your advocacy message(s) and the set of activities and tools you will use to deliver them in order to engage and persuade the most important target audiences.*

#### KEY QUESTIONS

#### EXPLANATIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

##### 1. DEVELOP AN IN-DEPTH AUDIENCE PROFILE

- Who are the specific audiences you are targeting in the first or next wave of your advocacy campaign?
- How far do the chosen audiences have to move to get on board with your ideas and proposals?
- What interests are they protecting in their current position? Is there also some type of emotional or personal attachment they have to their position?

In the “way into the process,” you identified the main stakeholders. Now you must choose the specific people or groups you will engage in your campaign. These audiences may include pivotal decision makers and opinion leaders or, maybe initially, others whose support you need as a stepping-stone before you directly engage decision makers.

You next need to be clear about the current positions of the target audience(s) and the distance they would need to move to agree with your proposals. Reflect on the feasibility of your objective at this point.

You should try to get behind the positions held by your chosen target audiences. Often there is a monetary element to the protection of a certain position and/or there may also be a historical, national, regional, or ethnic attachment to it. This will help you to really focus and sharpen your messages.

#### NOTES

## 2. SHAPE THE MESSAGE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

- What message(s) will you send to your chosen audience(s) to get them to question their own position and engage with your proposals?
- Is the message accessible and relevant to the current discussion and focusing on practical solutions?
- How will you present the message so that it is memorable and portable, that is, that audiences can easily retell it to others?

Start from the target audience perspective and think how you can engage and convince them, that is, how, seen from their perspective, does it make sense to adopt your thinking. Use their language and support the message with striking or unexpected findings.

Audiences will often write off suggestions and proposals that are unfeasible or do not obviously feed into the debate they are having on the policy issue. Making the message difficult to comprehend is also a barrier.

Thinking of what audiences will easily remember and be able to retell from your messages is important. Planning titles, stories, and graphics that stick is important.

### NOTES

## 3. SELECT ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNICATION TOOLS

- What are you trying to achieve in the next wave of your campaign?
- What combination of activities will you need to provide enough engagement and interaction with your target audiences to reach your goal?
- What combination of communication tools do you need to develop to support your chosen activities?

Think about breaking down your objective into short- to medium-term steps or waves. Maybe as a starting point, for example, you want to engage key opinion leaders to build support. This is a step towards your overall objective.

Reaching your goal may only require publication and a meeting, but often a combination of publications, ICTs, conference presentations, meetings, lobbying, and media are needed. Through the set of activities, you are also building a foundation to the next step of your campaign.

Make sure you choose the right tools to reach the right audiences, that is, for experts, informed nonexperts, or the public. Based on the activities you choose and the audiences, you will need some combination of communication tools such as policy papers, presentations, videos, internet pages, or media articles.

### NOTES

#### 4. ASSESS THE STRATEGIC RISK OF THE CAMPAIGN

- What is the strategic risk for you or your organization in proceeding with your advocacy campaign?

Advocacy means taking a stance and often involves being publicly critical of powerful people. You should think through the risks to you and your organization in conducting your campaign. These risks can involve sustainability questions and, in some instances, even personal safety issues.

#### NOTES

#### 5. PLAN FOR CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

- Are you ready to defend the credibility of the research?
- How can you prepare to defend the ideas and proposals you're putting forward?

The first response to research-based advocacy is often a challenge on the basis of methods used, sample size, case selection, type of evidence, and so on. In essence, you need to be able to defend the claims you make based on the data collected and evidence generated. Also prepare to defend the relevance and practical utility of the research.

Think of the first four or five audiences you will present to: how are they likely to respond to your message? Think about case testing the content and focus of your message before going public. In any case, you can expect to be challenged on your proposals and it's only natural that some people won't like them.

#### NOTES

One last time, go back to the core strategic focus questions and reconsider your notes in light of your discussion in completing your detailed planning on the “message and activities.”

## 7.2 ADVICE ON THE PROCESS OF USING THE APF TOOL

The advice contained in this section is based on two assumptions: getting the most out of planning using the APF tool is a complex process which comprises layers of strategic and detailed mapping and planning; this planning process is not usually completed in isolation by one person. Hence, this section provides more practical advice on the process of effectively using the APF in a team and is structured along the three envisaged stages in the process:

- Preparing to use the tool
- Working your way through the complete tool
- Steps that come after completion of the planning using the APF tool.
- To support the effective long-term use of the tool by your organization, the final part of the section contains a checklist for review after using the APF tool, so that you and your team can adapt and use the tool better in the future.

### 7.2.1 Preparing to Use the APF Tool

We offer two points of advice to set up the process of using the APF tool: one on making sure the whole team understands the APF tool before starting, and the second on the role of a facilitator in the team planning process.

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**Set up the process of using the APF tool before starting.**

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- **Make sure all involved understand the tool, core concepts, and the process you will be going through.**

It is time well spent to introduce the team to the APF tool, its overall architecture, and the focus and function of the four elements, as well as making sure all members of the team have the same understanding of the term “policy advocacy.” When using the APF, it will really help if at least one person on the team has read this manual in advance: while the APF questions are straightforward and can be used independently, the concepts behind them and perspectives put forward are not as easily understandable and will need to be discussed. This may be especially important if your team is comprised of a group of stakeholders on the issue in question coming from different perspectives and backgrounds. Finally, it is helpful to negotiate and harmonize expectations of your staged planning process in working through the APF tool.

- **One person should play the role of facilitator, especially if working in a larger group.**

It is prudent to designate one member of the team as facilitator, as this person will play an important role in keeping the planning focused and navigating the team through the different elements, as well as ensuring you get the most out of planning sessions. The many dimensions to the

APF tool and its iterative nature means you have to structure the process well in order to get the most out of it. Unsurprisingly, to do this job well, it is best that the facilitator has a deep understanding of the APF. The facilitator will also play an important role in collating information and summing up the results of the planning. Thus, having a facilitator can really make a difference in terms of quality of the outcome and efficiency of the mapping and planning process itself.

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**Having at least one person who knows the APF inside-out is essential.**

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## 7.2.2 Working Through the APF Tool

When it comes to doing the actual planning work, we offer the following six points of advice on different aspects of managing the process and team:

- **There is a recommended sequence to using the APF tool and iteration is essential to its effective use.**

To get the most out of the APF planning process, we propose the following “sequence” of working through the elements in four steps:

**Step 1** is an initial consideration of the core strategic focus questions.

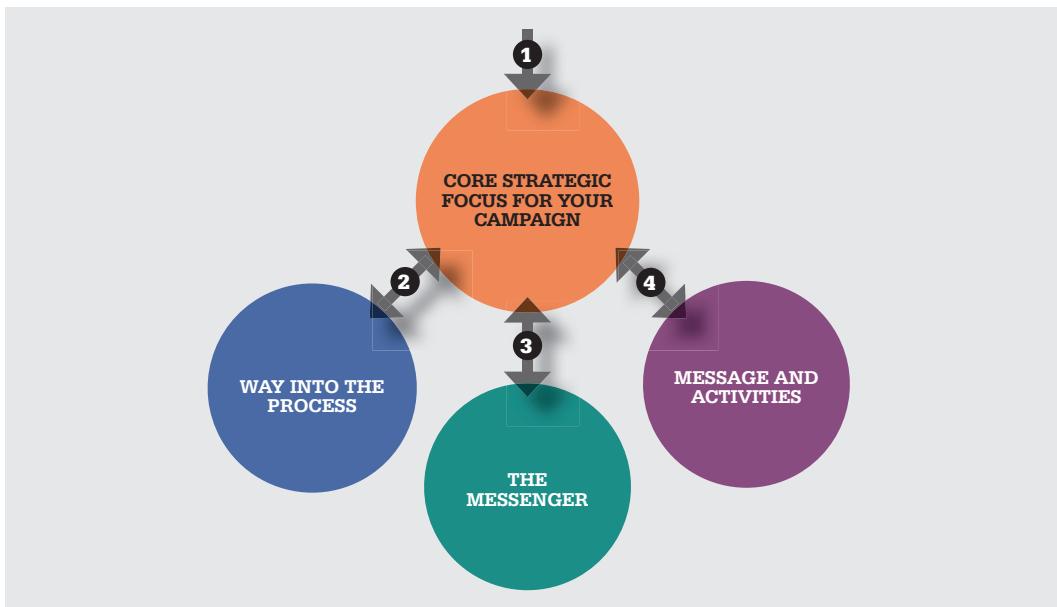
**Step 2** is detailed mapping and planning for the “way into the process” circle followed by a revisit to the “core strategic focus” questions in light of new insights gained.

**Step 3** is a move into detailed mapping and planning for “the messenger” circle, followed by a revisit to the “core strategic focus” questions in light of new insights gained.

**Step 4** is detailed mapping and planning for the “message and activities” circle, followed by a final revisit and consolidation of decisions regarding the “core strategic focus” questions.

The four steps are represented in Figure 13.

**FIGURE 13.**  
Steps in using the APF tool



As you can see, the proposed sequence includes multiple considerations of the core strategic focus questions throughout the planning process. The main purpose of this is to ensure, as you deepen your understanding of the opportunities and challenges through each stage of the planning process, that you continue to reflect on, adapt, and nuance your advocacy objective to make it more feasible and realistic. The process opens with an initial focus on this core strategic focus but it is important not to get stuck on these questions at the start, as there will be multiple opportunities to return to them throughout the planning process.

One of the basic tenets of this manual is that in advocacy, context is everything: hence, it is by design that we've put the "way into the process" at the top of the APF and it is the next element of the APF tool to tackle. Earlier in Chapter 4, we discussed that this circle is the most important circle of the APF and the element where the most extensive mapping is conducted. The questions contained in this element of the tool are designed to ensure you move beyond considering your advocacy efforts solely from your own (research and interests) perspective, but rather are firmly grounded in the realities of the policymaking context you seek to influence. After this first stage, then go back to the strategic questions for a second time.

We then move onto "the messenger" and "message and activities" circles with a revisit to the core strategic focus questions after each one. Although we have represented it in a linear fashion above, the reality of the process should entail a much more looping and iterative experience.

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The APF tool helps you to make in-depth plans through multiple iterations.

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What this means in practice is that the decisions made in each circle are relevant for and impact on decisions made for the other elements, which ensures you design a coherent and comprehensive advocacy strategy.

- **Involve the team members who will play different roles in conducting the advocacy campaign.**

Deciding who to involve in the process of working through the APF tool is crucial. Our overall advice is that the main people internal and (where possible) external to your organization should be involved in the planning process. To ensure that everyone is on the same wavelength, those in the team playing different advocacy roles should be included where possible, for example, the messenger(s), researchers, key coalition partners, other partners such as donors, as well as key staff of the organization itself. Only including people from your organization is limiting, and it is even more limiting to include only those who conducted the research. The experience of those engaged in advocacy planning shows that the process benefits greatly from the input of a range of perspectives in bringing fresh insights, depth of analysis, and moving the thinking outside the organization and research box and into the real policy context. In terms of numbers, between three and nine people is the common size of teams engaged in the APF planning process, with three being the minimum number to really negotiate and ensure no one person dominates.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, responsibility for advocacy planning (and even conducting advocacy activities) is often placed solely on the communications/public relations person in an organization. We hope you can see from this guide what a major fallacy that assumption is: advocacy is a team effort that will, of course, include the communications person, but they are rarely in a position to achieve policy change on their own. In fact, there is a strong argument that in the planning process, the communications person should play a very interesting role<sup>1</sup> that may at first seem counterintuitive from an internal organizational perspective. Rather than working to assist other team members in developing advocacy messages and activities, the communications person should defend the interests, positions, and needs of target audiences who will oppose your ideas. We feel this is sage advice in ensuring planning is focused not only on presenting or defending the research, but rather is immediately grounded in targeting a specific policy change from a stakeholder perspective.

A final very important reason for involving all advocacy team members in the planning process is to build a shared understanding and ownership among all team members of the content, focus, main argument, and main findings contained in the “takeaway messages.” A commonly used method of doing this is to incorporate into the planning process drafting and redrafting of messages through the development of advocacy communication tools, such as policy briefs. Members of the advocacy

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**Advocacy planning is a team effort and not the sole responsibility of the communications/public relations person.**

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**The planning process gets the whole team on message.**

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team do not need to have insight into all research details (researchers can be referred to for this), but they do need to be clear on the purpose and core of the message before the first wave of the advocacy campaign begins. This consistency and clarity will help avoid potential damage to the campaign and your organization's reputation if different members of the team and messengers are saying different things and sending conflicting messages to target audiences.

- **If possible, work together to complete all elements of the APF tool with the whole team.**

It may seem intuitive to divide up the task of planning and mapping among team members by the APF elements for the sake of efficiency. However, given the interrelated and iterative nature of elements of the APF, the best-case scenario is for the whole team to complete the entire planning process contained in the tool. In that way, you are maximizing the opportunities for deepening the analysis and ensuring that decisions made in one circle of the APF feed into other elements. Factoring in how time-consuming and potentially unwieldy the process can be if many people are involved, we propose the following pragmatic process and division: all members of the team complete initial mapping of the core strategic focus questions and “way into the process” circle as a group. Thereafter, the mapping and planning for “the messenger” and “message and activities” may be divided out among groups if necessary.

- **The APF tool can be used in combination with other advocacy planning tools.**

There are many other useful tools which combine well with the APF planning process; these commonly seek to get advocates to look at the planning process from one dimension of the obstacles that they face, for example, stakeholder analysis, influence analysis, force field analysis.<sup>2</sup> These are all useful approaches to looking deeper into the advocacy challenge and situating it; however, what is often missing is how to take the results of these analyses and put them back into broader strategic planning. Therefore, these tools can easily be used to complement and feed into the APF planning process; for example, any stakeholder analysis process would inform many parts of the mapping in the “way into the process” circle.

- **Consolidate the mapping to ensure you get the outcome you need from each element of the APF tool.**

The mapping and planning process is an iterative process of building on layers of insight in order to make more nuanced decisions as you move through your planning process. It is the combined and cohesive decisions and details from each element of the APF that together will comprise your advocacy plan. Hence, a crucial aspect of using the APF tool is pulling together the analysis and mapping to give you the detailed decisions you have reached in each element.

To facilitate this process of consolidating decisions made for each element, we recommend putting things down on paper and recording the decisions made for each element as you go along, that is, use a range of materials and tools such as flip charts, post-its, matrices, and visuals. Remembering that decisions from one element feed into another, this will be a work in progress and decisions made will change and be refined as you go through the process of adding layers and nuance. This thoroughness also ensures you anticipate and consider factors before they surprise (or even wrong-foot) you during actual implementation of your advocacy campaign.

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**Record the decisions made at each stage.**

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- **Give adequate time to working through all elements of the APF.**

It is a common and understandable question to ask how much time you should give to working through the APF tool, but there is no easy answer. Looking at the qualitative nature and scope of the questions in the tool, it should not come as a surprise that completing this mapping process will take significant time and effort and you should be thorough in working through all its elements. However, time spent on the upfront planning stage can help avoid a lot of easily avoidable problems and pitfalls once you are in the implementation stage, ultimately requiring even more time! The main advice is to be comprehensive and thorough in working through all elements in a systematic manner and reflect after the planning process whether the time allocated was realistic. Giving time and attention to all aspects and revisiting the three core strategic focus questions after completing the mapping for each circle is crucial to effective planning and may help you see crucial openings, challenges, factors, and dimensions you might otherwise miss.

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**Time spent in the planning process will save time in the implementation.**

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### 7.2.3 What Comes Next After Completing the APF Tool?

The decisions you have made in working through the APF tool will point you in one of two directions as a next step: move forward or step back. Taking each in turn:

- **Move forward to elaborate a detailed action plan, if you can complete the APF process.**

If you have been able to complete all levels of planning in the APF tool and come up with firm plans for your first or next wave of advocacy, this indicates that you are in a position to move forward towards operationalizing your advocacy strategy. The word “framework” from the APF is important in indicating the stage of development of your advocacy strategy and what you still have to do before starting your advocacy campaign. You have a framework and the basis of your overall strategy and you have chosen your way into the process, messengers and support, target audiences, messages, and set of activities and communication tools. What you are missing is an action plan detailing

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**APF gives you a focused strategy, but not a detailed action plan.**

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who will do what and when, how everything will be prepared and paid for, and how and when you will evaluate your achievements as you go through the process. Many resources exist on developing such detailed action plans for policy advocacy.<sup>3</sup>

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**After completing the APF, decide whether to develop an action plan or do more planning and analysis.**

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- **Step back into the research, analysis, or planning process if the APF process highlights key gaps or needs.**

Going through the planning process using the APF tool can also identify gaps in multiple areas, that is, data gaps, incomplete analysis, resource or capacity gaps, need for more insight into policymaking practices and players involved, or need for more consultation with partners to negotiate roles in the implementation of the advocacy campaign. Hence, the APF helps to tell you what you don't know as well as what you do know! As a result, you may decide to try to fill these identified gaps before moving on to an action plan.

The final two pieces of advice are centered on reflection and review.

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**Reflect on and update your strategy after each wave of advocacy.**

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- **Revisit your original advocacy strategy after each wave of your advocacy campaign.**

Given that you are initiating and steering a process of ongoing dialogue and negotiation, it is only natural that you will need to review your strategy and plan as you implement the strategy to see where and how adaptations or tweaking are needed to keep your advocacy efforts on track. After the first wave of engaging in advocacy, communicating messages and engaging key audiences through targeted activities and receiving their response, you will learn many new things, such as, for example, more about the policymaking process from the actual experience of discussing and arguing your ideas and proposals with key players as well as the level of comprehensibility of the messages you've developed so far. Revisiting how you made your decisions and their effectiveness as you implement your advocacy may provide useful insights for the next wave of your campaign. Your advocacy strategy is not fixed in stone and the APF is not just designed for advance planning and decision making, but also for the crucial dimensions of revisiting and adapting.

- **Reflect on your use of the APF tool.**

To help in future advocacy planning work, we recommend taking time to reflect on your experience using the APF tool. The following checklist is designed to evaluate different aspects of your experience to determine what worked well and what could be improved to make the planning process more effective and efficient next time round.

## APF REFLECTION CHECKLIST

**Think about the APF planning process you just completed:**

- Was the APF tool useful in your advocacy planning process? In what way?
- Did using the APF yield the results in terms of decisions and detail in forming an effective basis for your advocacy strategy?
- Was the timing right for doing the mapping and planning process? Was it too early or too late?
- Which aspects of planning using the APF tool were most challenging and which were most productive?
- What would you do differently next time (in terms of set up, people involved, using the tool, time allocated, facilitation)?

## NOTES

- 1 Struyk 2006.
- 2 These and many other tools are listed in Start and Hovland 2004.
- 3 For example, Amnesty International 1997, International HIV/AIDS Alliance 2002, Sprechmann and Pelton 2001, USAID 2002.

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## **INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLICY ADVOCACY**

The International Centre for Policy Advocacy (ICPA) aims to strengthen the role of evidence-informed decision making primarily in democracies in transition by supporting producers and users of policy research to effectively plan and communicate their advocacy proposals.

The range of capacity development support offered by the network of ICPA specialists recognises that communication designed to achieve policy influence is demanding, and requires significant skill and commitment. ICPA also responds to the fact that researchers and advocates we work with need different types of support throughout the stages of researching, planning and implementing evidence-driven policy advocacy initiatives. The ICPA team provides a combination of skill-focused training modules, hands-on process consultancy with individuals and organisations in their research and advocacy work, and sets of widely available practical resources and tools for independent use. ICPA conducts applied research into regional advocacy practices and decision making processes and shares insights from case studies and capacity development initiatives through its Meta Brief series.

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**"MAKING RESEARCH EVIDENCE MATTER: A GUIDE TO POLICY ADVOCACY IN TRANSITION COUNTRIES"** is a practical resource for those interested in designing and conducting effective evidence-informed advocacy campaigns in environments where the demand for applied research is low and policy discussions are often centered around taking sides rather than finding the best solutions. This policy advocacy guide is a sister publication to the well-received manual "Writing Effective Public Policy Papers" (2002) by the same authors, and addresses the broader issue of how to effectively use the research and policy papers produced to have the best chance of influencing a target decision-making process.

Collecting the insights from extensive case research and literature on effective approaches to policy advocacy in transition and developing countries, this in-depth guide presents and explains the nuts and bolts of the process of designing policy advocacy campaigns to achieve policy results. The guide also draws out lessons from real world cases of successful policy advocacy campaigns from the region. The authors offer a practical and comprehensive tool, the Advocacy Planning Framework to support this planning process. The tool has been developed and sharpened over a five-year period with the input of trainees and practitioners in policy advocacy workshops conducted by the International Centre for Policy Advocacy training team.

This guide primarily targets producers and users of policy research evidence from government advisers to think tank professionals to NGO advocates interested in using evidence more in their advocacy campaigns. It is a good starting place for the novice advocate as well as for more seasoned advocates to reflect on experiences and practices to date. Readers don't need a degree in public policy to start using this guide; the authors have attempted to make it as accessible and user friendly as possible, as the challenge of feeding evidence and policy proposals into decision making processes is far too important to be exclusive.

#### **Testimonials for "Making Research Evidence Matter: A Guide to Policy Advocacy in Transition Countries":**

*"The shared expertise and comparative framework of the International Centre for Policy Advocacy means that it is perfectly placed to offer insight into the policy process generally and sharpen the impact of policy papers in particular. I'm convinced that this book is set to become an essential part of the advocates' toolkit."*

**Professor Andrew Russell**, Chair of Politics, University of Manchester, UK

*"This book fills a major gap in policy development training and education in many parts of the world. Building on the success of their previous book on writing policy papers, Young and Quinn here address the next essential step — advocating for solutions and options that can improve public policies and consequently make a positive difference to both governance and the quality of life for citizens."*

**Dr. Leslie A. Pal**, Chancellor's Professor Public Policy and Administration, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

#### **Testimonials for "Writing Effective Public Policy Papers" (2002) from training participants:**

*"It has to be sent to every ministry and policy-oriented institution."*

*"Extremely good. I already recommended and shared it with a few colleagues and friends."*

*"It's a comprehensive guidebook that can serve as a roadmap for policy writers."*



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