

# ways & means

## An Advocacy Guide for Feminists

Advocacy is a type of engagement designed to bring about change. This primer describes 'Feminist Advocacy' and how gender equality advocates can use it most effectively.

### What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is an umbrella term that describes various strategies – including campaigning, lobbying, research/communication and alliance-building – that are used to influence decision-makers and policies. Advocacy is engagement aimed at **bringing about change**.

"Advocacy must be based on an analysis of what needs to be changed and why... this analysis **must be feminist** because only feminism gives an analysis of patriarchy and how it is linked to the structures and relationships of power between men and women that perpetuate violence, poverty — the crises that confront us."

– Peggy Antrobus, Founder of DAWN, a leading feminist network in the global South

### Is there a 'Feminist' Way to do Advocacy?

Doing advocacy in a feminist way would imply **infusing advocacy strategies with feminist values**. It would seek to advance women's rights and address the effects of policies, laws, corporate behaviour and other processes on the lives of women around the world. Ideally, it would be intimately connected to and grounded in local struggles, and it would establish its legitimacy and take direction from those who are experiencing injustices and inequalities within our communities.

What feminist advocacy looks like in practice, however, remains less certain.

One suggestion is that feminist advocacy seeks to place women's rights into a framework that promotes four core values: the belief in equality; the belief in gender justice in all its different dimensions; the universal sanctity of human rights; and the flexibility to make alliances and realize the fluidity of circumstances and partnerships.<sup>1</sup> Another suggestion is that feminist advocacy, when it is grounded in feminist political analysis, is the daily work of gender equality advocates.

As a starting point, we can conceptualize feminist advocacy as



including **lobbying, campaigning, research, communication and alliance-building activities which seek to advance women's rights and gender equality**. It can build a critical bridge between theory and practice, recognizing that project-level work has limited effect without making changes in the structures which cause poverty and gender inequalities. For example, we can ask questions such as: Why are we providing these services? Is there a gender dimension to the provision of this service? And why are women in a given situation experiencing so much violence? To be effective, feminist advocates should ask the “WHY” questions and connect with power analysis and feminist theory. We are then in a position to connect issues to the policies and institutions that are producing and perpetuating inequalities, thereby engaging in a form of feminist advocacy.

## Weaving Advocacy into our Work

There is a misconception by some that to take up ‘advocacy’ requires an entire shift of focus to lobbying and campaigning activities, away from other valuable work in which we may be engaged on a daily basis. **Advocacy can be effectively combined with other types of service provision and analytical work**, however we should not overlook the strategic significance of incorporating advocacy into our daily work and struggles if we want to bring about meaningful change. We must ask ourselves: What are the costs of NOT weaving advocacy into our daily work?

Some of the most effective and cutting-edge organizations are ones which have a campaigning and advocacy arm.<sup>2</sup> A critical step is incorporating political awareness and consciousness into our work and realizing that advocacy can happen at all levels of engagement and capacity. For example, the rights violations that women are experiencing are connected to the failures of our governments to live up to the international

agreements that they have signed on to and this, in turn, resonates throughout local and national policies. Gender equality and women's rights issues are intimately and pervasively affected by policy decisions taken in local, national and global institutions.

## Navigating Advocacy Spaces and Places

Advocacy can take place within your organization, school, or local community, at your federal government, at a regional inter-governmental body, or in international venues. When initiating an advocacy activity, it is important to **make strategic choices** about where to direct your energies and to look for strategic entry points. In some cases, it is beneficial to participate in established agendas of institutions or decision-makers such as government-sponsored policy consultations, stakeholder meetings with financial institutions, and local council meetings. Effective advocacy in these

“invited spaces” requires clear demands for change by skilled advocates.<sup>3</sup> Advocacy activities in “created spaces”, that is, in spaces opened up by advocates themselves with different and independent agendas, may require more resources but often offers stronger negotiating positions.<sup>4</sup>

Given resource constraints and the urgency of our goals, we should develop **criteria for engagement** that help us determine where we will have the greatest impact in promoting women’s rights and equality and where our efforts can have the desired effects. Where is it that we have the most capacity and resources to effect changes in policy? What risks are associated with engaging in particular spaces? How can we ensure that our agendas are being promoted at the national, regional and international levels? And in what institutions are the relevant decisions being made?

## Choosing an Advocacy Strategy

Various advocacy strategies can be used at different points in advocacy efforts, either alone or in combination with each other. The policies or decisions that you are trying to influence will inform the strategy that you select. For example, if you are advocating for the creation of a new policy that is not yet on the agenda of your local, regional, or national government, your advocacy strategy will be different than if you are seeking changes to, or enforcement of, an existing policy. There are also different types

of struggles to consider. An “**issue-based struggle**” is an advocacy effort designed around one specific issue or policy-change. In contrast, advocacy can address an issue as one step in a longer term struggle for social justice, referred to as a “**struggle-based issue**”.<sup>5</sup> Social change for gender equality is a slow, long-term, political process of transforming power relations. Both “issue-based struggles” and “struggle-based issues” can be planned to contribute to opening opportunities for further action to change power relations and bring about gender equality and women’s human rights.

## Building a Campaign

Campaigns are extremely important to advocacy and require a combination of many different strategies and players in order to be effective. The **most effective campaigns are grounded in existing advocacy efforts and use well thought out strate-**

**gies for specific end goals.** Starting or joining a national or global campaign can be a very strategic and direct way to influence gender inequalities throughout the world, especially if the campaign is directly challenging a specific law or policy.

*In a time when so much ‘gender work’ is geared to technical fixes or service provision, feminist advocacy repoliticizes our demands for social, economic and political transformation.*



Campaigns are most strategic when a particular issue is at the forefront of concern and a strategy is needed in order to make specific gains (for example, the 1993 global campaign “Women’s Rights are Human Rights”<sup>6</sup>). Campaigns can fulfil numerous purposes within broader advocacy goals of policy change. They can, for example, **raise awareness** for mobilization on an issue, **attract media attention** to an issue, **pressure the government** during negotiations, and **ensure that a policy is being implemented** correctly and in a timely manner.

## The Amina Lawal ‘Letter-Writing Campaign’: A Campaign Gone Wrong?

Many people will remember being bombarded by emails pleading with us to ‘sign on’ and support the campaign to stop the stoning of Amina Lawal, a young Nigerian woman who was sentenced to stoning to death for adultery in August 2002. According to the international letter-writing campaign, her life was in ‘imminent’ danger.

What most of us did not realize was that the campaign letter that was being circulated contained inaccurate information and portrayed negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. Ms. Lawal’s case was in fact being skillfully taken care of by a Nigerian women’s rights group, BAOBAB, that is familiar with and sensitive to the local situation and specificities of her case. According to BAOBAB, the letter-writing strategy was not appropriate in this situation because of

the volatility of the local situation and the potential for vigilante-action against Amina and her supporters. The campaign may have aggravated the situation and put Ms. Lawal and her supporters in danger.

### Lessons for advocates to keep in mind:

- Get your facts straight. Do your homework.
- Find out who the local activists/organizations are that support the issue and consult with them.
- Devise your response/advocacy strategy working in partnership with those who are directly involved.

For more information about this case please refer to:  
<http://www.whrnet.org/docs/action-03-05-07.html>  
<http://www.awid.org/fridayfile/msg00130.html>

## To ensure that you make strategic decisions when designing or joining a campaign, ask yourself:

- Why am I joining/creating this campaign? What outcomes am I hoping to achieve?
- Who/what is this campaign supporting?
- Who is supporting the campaign and why?
- Is this campaign supported at different levels and grounded in daily struggles which could be improved by successfully achieving the campaign’s goal?
- Is this campaign harnessing a strategic moment or a particular political venue that is appropriate to the issue?
- Will the campaign raise awareness of people and encourage citizen participation in decision-making?
- Will the campaign contribute to the transformation of power relations?

In building a campaign, it is important to **identify your target audiences**. For example, if you are targeting a broad audience of the general public with your communication and alliance-building strategies, it is important to frame your messages in a way that is meaningful to those without specific knowledge of the issue. This is in contrast to targeting policy-makers who support your endeavour or those who are

opposed to the changes that you are advocating for. **Structure your strategies and messages in ways that will make an impact on your audiences**. Select strategies that respond to the issues at hand and to the goal of bringing about sustainable social transformation. And always remember to **consult like-minded organizations** (especially locally based organizations) about the most appropriate and effective strategy for your campaign.

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## Has it worked? How will I know?

To measure your success, clearly **outline the goals of your advocacy strategy in advance** and then **measure your outcomes against whether your goals were achieved**.

Critical questions to ask when designing advocacy efforts are:

- What is the focus of my advocacy strategy?
- Who are my target audiences and what do I want to achieve through them?
- What is the impact that I am hoping for through these strategies?
- What are the actual policy change and decision-making structures that I want to change/influence?

Incorporating these questions into the initial design of your advocacy efforts will not only allow careful consideration of *what* exactly you are trying to achieve, but will allow you to assess *how* you will achieve your goals. In this way, you can **measure your successes by the IMPACT that your advocacy strategies have had** and you can **learn from your experiences**.

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## Using 'Feminist Advocacy' as an Engine for Change

Feminist advocacy, as described here, encompasses a wide range of strategies which consolidate and focus the fight for gender equality and human rights into an action

framework which is inclusive and accessible. It bridges the gaps between theory and practice, and between the local and the global, to devise strategies for influencing behaviours and decision-making structures in ways that are meaningful and relevant to the issue, and the communities with which we are working.



Feminist advocacy can be used on the ground and in local struggles. **Feminist advocacy provides a framework to challenge local effects of the implementation of national policies and decisions.** For instance, if a community is fighting against the privatization of water and associated cost-recovery programs, feminist advocacy enables communities to bring in political analysis and a gendered lens when planning their responses, as well as providing the tools to identify strategic entry points and target audiences.

## The Rape Crisis Centre of Cape Town

The Rape Crisis Centre of Cape Town was created in 1976 to provide counselling, public education and awareness-raising for survivors of sexual assault and the broader community. It has been transformed over the years from a predominantly service-oriented organization into one that has built diverse advocacy strategies into its daily functioning. Along with its partners, it has been instrumental in policy creation, change, education and awareness about gender-based violence in South Africa.

The Rape Crisis Centre realized there were major stumbling blocks that interfered with their effective service provision. These stumbling blocks could themselves be characterized as women's rights violations or as impediments to women's recovery and subsequent participation in society. They therefore established an advocacy branch, which worked in cooperation with the other branches within the organization, to establish which issues would become the focus of their advocacy efforts.

They have used numerous successful advocacy strategies, targeting different audiences and entry points for diverse outcomes and impacts. The following are some examples:

- A review of international and national policy documents related to violence against women and detailed analysis of South African legislation which impacts on violence against women. They have made submissions to Parliament relevant to changing legislation, participated in developing National Policy Guidelines for health, justice, police, correctional services and welfare in the treatment of sexual assault survivors, as well as contributing to a National Legal Manual on Violence Against Women.
- Identification of relevant non-governmental organizations and individuals for the purpose of securing support in advocating for victims of sexual offences, as well as developing close and mutually beneficial working relationships with key stakeholders such as the Department of Justice, the Ministry of Safety and Security, the Department of Health, and the Department of Social Development.
- Lobbying for change in legal and medical procedures that give better services to women complainants, writing letters to the press highlighting the extent of violence against women and balancing biased reporting, and giving radio, TV and press interviews on issues relating to sexual violence.

*Please visit their website at: <http://www.rapecrisis.org.za/> for more information about advocacy strategies and successes.*

Feminist advocacy can be used to link regional struggles with international struggles. **It provides a concrete plan of action for activists from different regions to consolidate their efforts.** It also allows for multisectoral approaches to issues such as trade liberalization, food security, peace-building, and violence against women and migration. Through advocacy initiatives, advocates from different regions can consolidate their efforts and resources.

## The Maquila Solidarity Network's "No Sweat

The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) focuses on the promotion of fair labour practices in the garment industry in maquiladora factories and export processing zones in the global South. MSN was born in 1995 out of the consolidation of two separate networks and has had numerous successes in their advocacy efforts over the last few years. They employ a wide range of advocacy tactics, ranging from local concerns to international lobbying.

By focusing on very specific goals with their innovative "No Sweat Campaign", MSN was able to achieve changes with both local and global impacts.

### Achievements through Action:

- Supported students' lobbying efforts which resulted in the University of Toronto becoming the first Canadian university to adopt a code of conduct for the manufacture of products bearing the "U. of T." name. The code ensures that manufacturers meet basic labour standards, including prohibitions on child labour, forced labour, and discrimination, and rights to safe working conditions, freedom of association, and collective bargaining. The code also requires companies to disclose the names and locations of factories producing their goods, and to open them up to independent inspection.
- With partners in the South (Thailand, Mexico, etc.), MSN has successfully leveraged codes of conduct to improve labour practices in maquiladora factories.
- Through educational workshops and the distribution of campaign materials, MSN raised awareness of sweatshop abuses in Canada and internationally.
- Through corporate campaigns, MSN has mobilized public pressure on retailers and apparel companies to clean-up sweatshop practices.

For further information, visit

<http://www.maquilasolidarity.org/campaigns/nosweat/>

The Association for Women's Rights in Development is an international membership organization connecting, informing and mobilizing people and organizations committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights. A dynamic network of women and men, AWID members are researchers, academics, students, educators, activists, business people, policy-makers, development practitioners, funders and others, half of whom are located in the global South and Eastern Europe.

AWID's goal is to cause policy, institutional and individual change that will improve the lives of women and girls everywhere. Since 1982, AWID has been doing this by facilitating on-going debates on fundamental and provocative issues as well as by building the individual and organizational capacities of those working for women's empowerment.

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## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Described by Gita Sen at the DAWN Feminist Advocacy Institute in Bangalore, India. September, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Leipold, Gerd. "Campaigning: a Fashion or the Best Way to Change the Global Agenda?" in *Debating Development*. (United Kingdom: Oxfam GB) 2001. p.234.

<sup>3</sup> C.Clark, "Making Change Happen: Advocacy and Citizen Participation" (Action Aid, Institute for Development Studies – Participation Group, and Just Associates) p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, at 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> See Centre for Women's Global Leadership.

<sup>7</sup> Msimang, Sisonke. Personal Interview. November 2003.

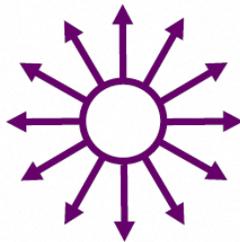
# Advocacy Strategies: Some ‘Tried and True’ Lessons

## Research and Analysis

It is imperative to have solid, up-to-date factual information driving your advocacy strategies. This is the foundation of any well-informed and critical analysis. It allows valid and thorough assessment of existing policies and decision-making processes, as well as revealing the context in which these have come about. Research and analysis inform the advocacy strategies which we should choose as our way forward, revealing where, and what mechanisms would be the most beneficial focal points.

## Lobbying

Engaging directly with key players within the policy and decision-making arena can be essential for moving forward in advocacy efforts. Lobbying activities are extremely focused and usually involve having direct conversations, putting pressure on, and participating in consultations with politicians and bureaucrats. These activities can take place in different places and with very diverse role-players, depending on the policy and decision-making process that is the focus. In choosing your entry point, consider the phases of the policy-making process (from agenda-setting to enactment, implementation, enforcement and monitoring) and whether or not a policy change will contribute to the type of change you want to bring



about. The policy process may vary depending on what type of issues you are dealing with (local, national or international context), and not every problem has a policy solution.<sup>7</sup>

## Alliance Building

Perhaps the most integral part of any successful advocacy effort is the consolidation of efforts between like-minded movements, organizations, and individuals. The more people involved in strategic advocacy efforts, the louder and more unstoppable are the demands for change and reform. Inclusive and diverse representation is vital for success and diverse voices of those most affected should be included in meetings, strategy sessions, public statements, etc.

## Communication

Effective tools are essential to get the key messages and issues into the spotlight. Some of the different tactics available for successful communication are: public demonstrations, eye-catching banners and memorable slogans, informative flyers and posters, succinct briefings for policy makers, ‘urgent action’ letter-writing announcements, captivating interviews in the media, and various means of creative expression such as street theatre and poetry. Choose the strategies most likely to have an impact on your target audiences.



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L'Association des droits de la femme et le développement  
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