

Analyzing the situation

Advocacy begins with identification of an issue or problem that the organization agrees to support in order to promote a policy change. The situation analysis forms the foundation for any programme or advocacy plan. It provides the analysis of the problem that you are trying to address, and looks at the ways in which it can be solved.¹ By creating a solid evidence base, the situation analysis provides a starting point for setting advocacy priorities and a baseline against which to measure progress.²

There are other several ways to perform a quick analysis of the situation. For instance, you could perform a review of available situation analysis and monitoring of trends to determine the advocacy issue. Engage active think tanks, activists, and stakeholders to get an assortment of ideas, that can help define the problem and solutions that can be addressed by advocacy.

Generating evidence

CSOs, VOPEs and stakeholders can utilize evidence strategically when advocating with policy-makers to make greater use of evaluation evidence in policy-making. For effective advocacy, evidence may include all information that is collected through a systematic credible process. Top end evidence may include a policy evaluation, empirical research and expert knowledge³ that can stand up to scrutiny. Evidence can be a potential tool in advocacy and can also be an approach in itself, i.e. through creating debate, opening policy space, building national capacity and using the research to gain adherence and overcome opposition.

Gathering evidence supports many of the stages of the advocacy process. It is required to identify the problem, select the advocacy issue and develop goals, and also to craft messages, expand support, and monitor and evaluate progress in advocacy.⁴ A reputation for thorough research and credible evidence is important in providing legitimacy – so that decision-makers take what you have to say seriously. Such evidence can make a difference to policy-making in the following ways⁵:

- Achieve recognition of an evaluation policy issue;
- Inform the design and choice of evaluation policy;
- Forecast the future to know whether an evaluation policy measure will be successful not just in the short-run but also in the long-run; and
- Monitor policy implementation and evaluate policy impact.

¹ Adapted from Gosling L., Cohen D. (2007). *Participant's Manual: Advocacy Matters – Helping children change their world*, International Save the Children Alliance.

² UNICEF. (2010). *Advocacy Toolkit: A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives*. Available at http://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/Advocacy_Toolkit.pdf

³ Adapted from Overseas Development Institute. (2005). *Evidence-Based Policy-making: What is it? How does it work? What relevance for developing countries?*

⁴ Gosling L., Cohen D., (2007). *Participant's Manual: Advocacy Matters – Helping children change their world*, International Save the Children Alliance.

⁵ UNICEF in partnership with the World Bank, IDEAS, DevInfo, MICS. (2008). *Bridging the gap: The role of monitoring and evaluation in evidence-based policy-making*.

Checklist for evidence from evaluation or research to influence policy⁶

- Evaluation/research must be rigorous and of high quality (check with peer group/professional institutions where relevant).
- Findings and conclusions of the evaluation/research must be agreed by key stakeholders (e.g. where evaluation is carried out with different partners).
- The evidence could challenge current assumptions, offering a new perspective, or it could improve or confirm current assumptions.
- Implications for action should be clear and well promoted.
- The evidence should be relevant to its policy audience and timely.
- The evidence may involve the subjects of the research/evaluation speaking for themselves.
- The research/evaluation process should interact with decision-makers.

Remember evidence is never enough on its own to influence policy-making. It must be complemented by sound political analysis and by building networks and partnerships.⁷ It is important to acknowledge that at each stage of the policy cycle, a number of different factors will affect policy. This occurs both at an individual level – for example, a policy-maker’s own experience, expertise and judgment – and at an institutional level, for example in terms of institutional capacity. There are also a number of constraints, which will limit the extent to which evidence can affect policy – for example, the pressure to process information quickly. Policy-making is neither objective nor neutral; it is an inherently political process.⁸

KEEP IN MIND
Evidence on its own does not persuade policymakers. It is what you do with it that matters.

Choosing advocacy priorities

Choosing an advocacy priority becomes particularly critical especially for coalitions such as VOPEs that involve several partners. There may be several advocacy interests and agendas within a VOPE, but advocacy should be undertaken for one issue at a time. The advocacy priority you start with can build momentum for the next chosen issue. For instance, an initial advocacy priority for a VOPE can be to create monitoring and evaluation units in all government departments. Such advocacy efforts can later provide momentum to advocate for an equity and gender sensitive national evaluation policy.

⁶ Laws, S. (2003). *Research for Development: A practical guide*. Save the Children. Sage.

⁷ Gosling L., Cohen D. (2007). *Participant’s Manual: Advocacy Matters – Helping children change their world*, International Save the Children Alliance.

⁸ Overseas Development Institute. (2005). *Evidence-Based Policy-making: What is it? How does it work? What relevance for developing countries?*