

# ADVOCACY TOOLBOX

Develop an ambitious but realistic advocacy strategy in  
eight simple steps

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Zurich, November 2020

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**Note:** This is an adapted version of a chapter written for the 'Pluralism Toolbox' designed in the context of the EU-funded Culture for Peace project (C4P) of HELVETAS Myanmar.

# INTRODUCTION: What is advocacy, and what to expect from this toolbox

This toolbox helps you to develop, adjust and improve an ambitious but realistic advocacy strategy on a specific issue of concern. But wait – what exactly do we mean with ‘advocacy’? If you search the internet, you will find lots of different definitions. A [widely used definition](#) describes advocacy as

“the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal”.

In the context of development cooperation, advocacy may be best defined as “the deliberate process of influencing decisions within political, economic and social systems and institutions with the aim of making policies and processes more just, inclusive and pro-poor” ([Helvetas Advocacy Concept](#)). This also means that advocacy is not just about criticizing governments, but about a deliberate and informed way of influencing decision-making processes, be it towards the state, the private sector or civil society.

Now you may find these definitions still too conceptual and abstract. In this case, the following little story will help you to get the essence of what advocacy is. It comes from [Jonathan Ellis](#), a British advocacy professional and experienced trainer, who has supported Helvetas in our approach to advocacy since 2012 and advises other CSOs around the globe. It goes like this:

“Imagine a little girl at home in her kitchen with her mother. The little girl has a problem: She is hungry. But she knows the solution to her problem: she wants a cookie from her mother’s cookie jar on the top of the shelf. She also knows that her mother has the power to give her one.

At first, she tries the direct approach and says, “Mum, Mum, can I have a cookie?” Her mother says, “No”.

She then says, “You gave a me a cookie yesterday”, so she is using historic precedent – she is a clever girl. Her mother still says, “No”.

She then says, “You gave my little brother a cookie.” Her mother again repeats, “The answer is no.”

She then thinks for a while and runs next door to the lounge where her father is watching television, and says, “Dad, Dad – Mum won’t give me a cookie.”



As simple as this story<sup>1</sup> may be – it contains nearly everything you need to know about advocacy. The little girl has a clear understanding of her **problem** (she is hungry); she knows the **solution** to her problem (eat a cookie); she knows who has the **power** to help her solve the problem (her Mum); and she knows who might help her to **influence** her mother (her Dad). In addition, she is ready to use different **arguments and tactics** – and above all, she is **persistent** and does not give

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<sup>1</sup> As you can imagine, this story gets often criticised for reproducing gender stereotypes (and even other things like promoting unhealthy food (really!)). After several back and forth, I decided to leave it what it is – a simple and very useful metaphor.

up after the first “No”. If you have children, you know very well that they can be really stubborn advocates.

Now in your case, you may not want to advocate for cookies, neither for any other direct benefits to you or your organization. Instead, you may want to convince your city council, the minister of labour or the boss of a company to change certain laws or rules, or to invest a certain amount of money into a specific project. You may want to convince public or private decision makers to do something for a specific group, be it the young or the elderly, people with disabilities, or other marginalized groups. Or – in case you work for an INGO like Helvetas – you might not even want to lead an advocacy campaign, but rather support others who advocate on *their* issues of concern. Whatever it may be – this toolbox helps you to find out how to best do it. It consists of eight distinct sections that build on each other. Each section deals with a specific analytical or planning step which helps you to develop an advocacy strategy that responds to actual circumstances, is embedded in the existing institutional and political framework, and takes into consideration the resources at your disposal.

**Section 1** helps you to better understand and properly define the problem you are dealing with, and to formulate a realistic solution that you are going to propose and advocate for (what is the problem, how can it be solved?). This may sound easy – but it isn’t! This step forms the basis of your advocacy strategy.

**Section 2** is all about analysing and understanding the wider context in which you operate. Who has an interest in your issue? What are relevant policies, laws and regulations in the country, region or municipality you are working in? Who has the power to make the change you want to see? Who might be able and willing to help you, and who might oppose your ideas and plans?

In **Section 3** you identify the different ways and avenues for reaching out to those who can make the change you want to see. The ‘Influence Tree’ will help you to see how you can reach out to decision makers and to be clear about when and in what order you are going to do so.

**Section 4** presents a selection of methods and techniques you can use for reaching out to decision makers. After all, advocacy can take many different forms, from confidential talks behind closed doors to public rallies and media work.

**Section 5** is all about evidence: To be a credible and convincing advocate for your issue of concern, you must be able to proof what you say. However, there are different forms of evidence, and depending on your audience, you may want to present the same evidence in different ways.

**Section 6** deals with getting your advocacy plan right. Using the building blocks established in section 1 to 5, you can now go on to draft your ‘Theory of Change’. What are you going to do first, so that something else happens? And what comes next?

**Section 7** helps you find out to what extent your advocacy has been successful or not. Measuring progress and failure in policy processes can be challenging, but a few simple steps help you to get clarity on where you stand and whether you are still on track.

Finally, **Section 8** shows you to identify and manage advocacy-specific risks.

If you are a newcomer and would like to draft your advocacy strategy from scratch, it is advisable that you follow these eight sections one by one. This will help you to carefully develop your strategy, understand how the different elements build on each other – and avoid coming up with some ‘fantasy advocacy’ that is overambitious and detached from reality.

At a later stage, or if you have already gathered some experience, each section can also be consulted and used on its own, especially if you already have an advocacy strategy that requires punctual reflection and improvement.

# 1 ‘BUT WHY?’: How to know your problem and find a convincing solution

Remember the cookie story? If so, you will certainly remember that the little girl has a very clear understanding of a) what her problem is, and b) how this problem can be solved. Her problem is hunger and eating a cookie (or two) would make the problem go away.

Having a clear idea of what you want to advocate for is an essential precondition for any successful advocacy. Now this may sound obvious, and you may feel very confident in terms of the problem you want to address and of what decision makers would have to do. Yet before you start advocating, you want to be very sure that you are addressing the right thing, and that the solution which you propose is working. Even more, if you advocate together with others, (which is often the case) you need to ensure that everyone shares the same understanding of the problem and supports the same solution. In fact, many campaigns fail because (amongst other things) they address the wrong problem, propose the wrong solution, or because partners and allies start from the implicit assumption that they all share the same understanding of the issue – only to realize halfway that they don’t. And finally, you cannot advocate for five issues at once. Instead, you need to focus in order to gain clarity and make sure others understand what you want.

The following, very simple exercises help you to avoid these pitfalls. In case you are planning your advocacy strategy together with partners, it is advisable to do this exercise – just like all the other, following exercises – together.

## The ‘But Why’ exercise: Get to the root of the problem

Let us assume you are working for a civil society organization that supports poor farming families living in remote areas. The general problem you want to address is that farmers are stuck in extreme poverty and that they cannot make a living from their farming activities. Now this is a very broad problem, so you need to get to the root of the problem to get focus and identify your priority issue. The easiest way to do so is to ask, “But why is this a problem?” – and continue asking until you have a good understanding of the root causes of your problem. Here is how this could work:



**The immediate problem:** Farming families are stuck in extreme poverty and can’t make a living from farming. > **But Why?**

Because their production is very low and they don’t have any surplus to sell on regional markets.

> **Possible response:** Offer agricultural trainings to improve farming practices.

> **But Why?** Why is production so low? Because their access to arable land is severely limited, and they can cultivate only small plots of land far away from their village. > **Possible response:** Improve the road leading to the remote fields.

> **But Why?** Why is land so scarce and scattered? Because a mining company occupied all arable land close to the village without offering compensation. > **Possible response:** Advocate mining company to revert part of the land or pay decent compensation.

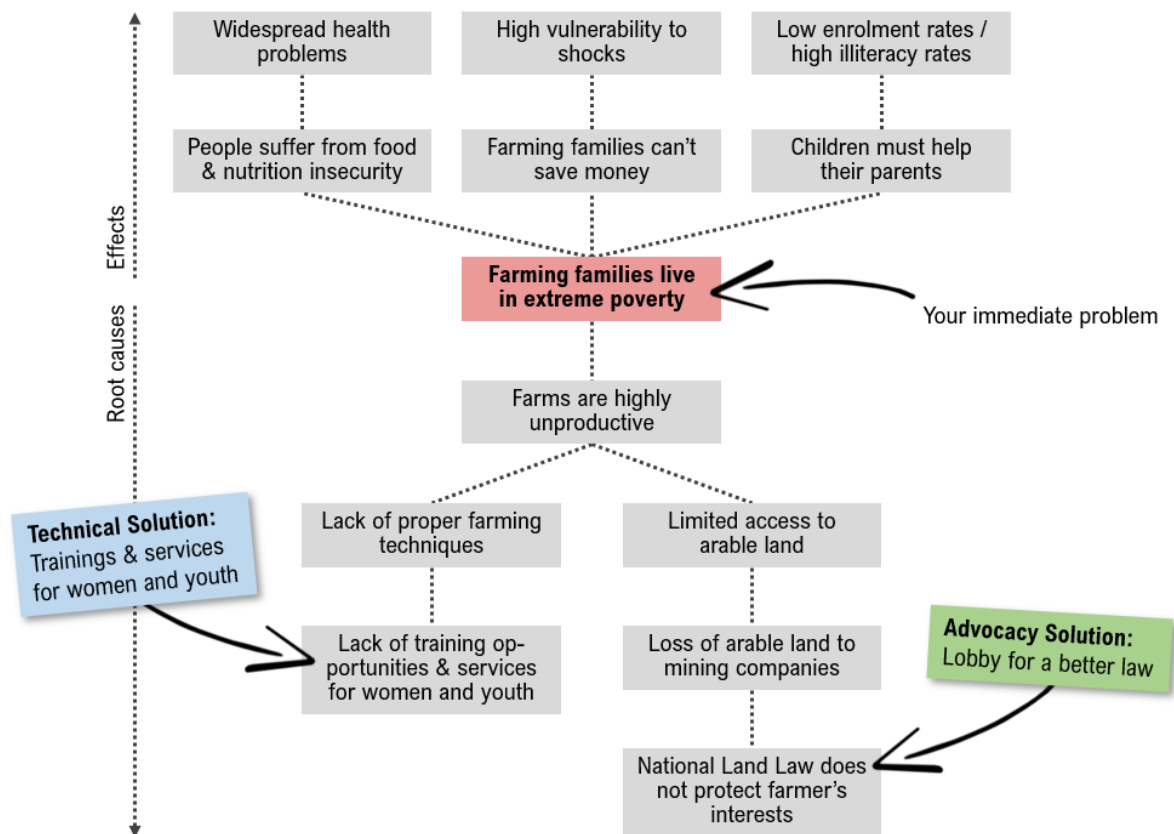
> **But Why?** Why could the company occupy the land without offering compensation? Because the National Land Law does not require private companies to compensate affected villages. > **Possible response:** Advocate the national government to change the law and ensure future compensations to affected communities.

Let's stop here – although you could continue with this exercise for a long time. Some find it disturbing to continuously ask 'But Why?'. It forces you to dig deeper and ask uncomfortable questions. Nonetheless, doing this exercise can be very revealing as it helps you to distinguish two things: First, you can tell symptoms from root causes. Second, you can distinguish problems that require a 'technical' solution (e.g. road construction) from problems that require an advocacy effort.

At the same time, you need to be sure that your immediate problem is properly formulated – it is never wrong to give it a second thought! For instance, if you realise that rural poverty mainly affects female-headed households, you would probably get other responses when asking 'But Why?' – and come to a different conclusion on what needs to be done.

## Problem tree: Find out where advocacy can help (and where not)

Many people find it helpful to visualize their problem analysis with the help of a Problem Tree. To do so, write your immediate problem in the center of a big sheet of paper and start to develop various root causes from there. This will help you to quickly recognize interrelated problems. In a second step, you can add possible effects of your problem, i.e. what happens if the problem does not get solved. Using the above example, a Problem Tree might look like this:



Once you have done this, take your time to discuss with your colleagues and partners which problems might be addressed through advocacy, and which ones rather not. Highlight them by using different colours. Then, try to **identify the single key problem you want to focus on** in your campaign. In case you wonder why you are repeatedly asked to keep it short, simple and focused – there is good reason for it.

## Focus, focus, focus

Many advocates tend to overload and overcomplicate their campaigns. They try to solve all problems at once, thus losing focus and momentum. If you address decision makers with a dazzling array of problems and a long wish list, you are bound to fail: Politicians will pick the issue they feel comfortable with – and ignore the rest. Yet if you confront them with a specific problem and solution, there is no way for them to escape. Defining such a focus can be hard, so you need a few clear-cut selection criteria: Do you stand realistic chances for success? Is there a window of opportunity to address this problem *now*? Can you find enough partners and allies (see section 2)? Do you have the expertise to be credible and convincing? You will certainly find more selection criteria – the crucial thing is that **you know exactly why you choose a certain issue** over another.

Once you have identified your key problem, you should also be able to formulate a concrete solution for how the problem can be solved. This – problem statement and proposed solution – will form the basis of the following steps towards your advocacy strategy, so write it down by using only one sentence each. This could look like this.

**Problem statement:** 60% of all smallholder farmers in our country live in extreme poverty because they lack access to arable land.

**Proposed solution:** Adjust the National Land Law to protect the farmers' right to land, and to ensure proper compensation in the case of enforced land loss.

## The Elevator Pitch: Problem, solution, call to action

Hence, you need to make sure your campaign stays focused, and keep your key message very brief and to the point. Here is how to refine it and to train how to deliver it with maximum impact: Imagine you step into an elevator – and run into the one politician you tried to meet for weeks and months already. How are you going to use the next 30 seconds, until the elevator reaches the next level? As time is very limited, you need to concentrate on three things:

- **Your problem:** What are you talking about?
- **Your proposed solution:** What do you propose?
- **Your call to action:** What should the politician do next?

Conveying these three key points in only 30 seconds can be hard – but it is feasible! Practice your pitch on a friend or colleague and use stopwatch to make sure you can do it in time. Here's an example on the topic used above:

Problem statement

“Good morning Minister, what an honor to meet you. My name is Sam from the Land Rights Movement. Did you know that 60% of all smallholder farmers in our country live in extreme poverty because they lack access to arable land? Adjusting the National Land Law would help to protect the farmers' right to land, and to ensure proper compensation in the case of land lease to private companies. We would be pleased to welcome you at the National Land Roundtable next week!”

Proposed solution

Call to action

Practicing your pitch might feel a bit ridiculous at the beginning – but it is hugely helpful as it allows you to convey your key message within no time and make everyone understand what you are advocating for. Have fun practicing!

## 2 CONTEXT AND POWER ANALYSIS: How to understand your environment

Once you are clear on your problem statement and your proposed solution, you need to orientate yourself: How does the wider political and institutional context for your issue look like? Who is taking important decisions in this respective thematic field? What are relevant laws, rules and practices in relation to your subject? In short: What is happening around you, and how could it be relevant for your advocacy work?

The starting point here is that we often tend to focus on our issue of concern only (e.g. land access for poor farmers) – and forget everything around it. However, a problem never comes on its own, but always has multiple causes (as we have come to realize in section 1) and is embedded in various sets of rules and practices. At the same time, things tend to change – the government issues a new regulation, a private company changes its business practices, people change their minds, or an international trend has an unprecedented influence on a certain debate. To test whether you are a good observer, have a look at [this car commercial!](#)



### Analyse your external environment: How does power work?

Analysing the external political and institutional context can be a lengthy exercise. If you search the internet you will find many excellent tools – most of which can be pretty time consuming. For a start, you might therefore decide to do a first rough analysis, to which you can add more intelligence and insights at a later stage. To do so, follow two basic analytical steps:

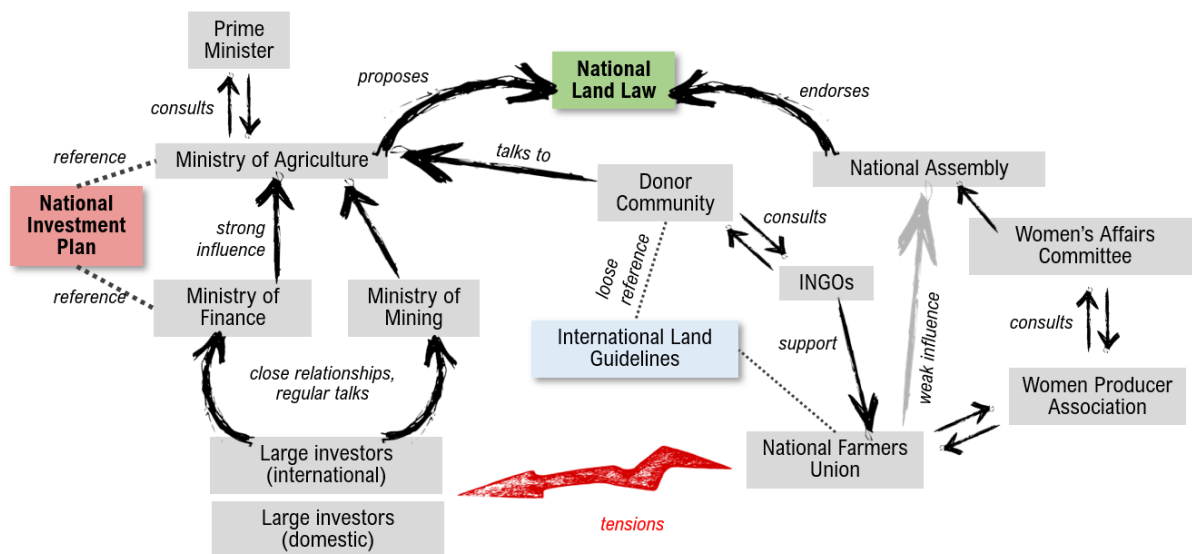
First, **map all actors, organizations, institutions and processes** that you consider relevant in regard to your issue. These can be

- state entities (e.g. ministries, regional governments, municipal authorities);
- private sector (e.g. national and international companies; business associations);
- civil society (e.g. other NGOs, social movements, Unions);
- universities and research institutes;
- specific laws, rules and regulations (e.g. National Land Law; regulation on handing out land concessions; laws specific to the rights of women, indigenous communities, or other marginalised groups);
- and many more.

Don't stop too early and do this exercise with your advocacy partners and allies – doing it together you reveal much more than if you do this on your own.

Second, think about **relations and processes between these actors, organizations and institutions**: How do they relate to each other? Who takes the important decisions? How does power work for your issue of concern?

Now this might sound a bit academic, so here is an example how this could look like (based on the same example used in section 1):



Use different types of arrows and different colours to indicate certain processes and/or the type of relationship between certain institutions – whether it is good or not so good, strong or weak. Be creative and use this rough analysis as a first basis to which you can add information as you learn more on the way. By doing this exercise, you will also realise that you still lack certain knowledge and intelligence, e.g. that you don't know all the laws and regulations governing access to land or regulating land use rights for women and indigenous groups. In that case, take your time to investigate and seek advice from those who know. And in case you want to do this analysis in a more structured and scientific manner, please consult the [Helvetas Political Economy and Power Analysis \(PEPA\) Guide](#).

## Influence and interest matrix: Who stands where?

Once you have a better understanding of the external context, you can start to position relevant actors in relation to your issue of concern. Who stands where regarding your key ask? Who might be willing to support your cause? Who might oppose your plans? Who might simply not care? And most importantly: Who might be ready to engage at all?

The Influence and Interest Matrix helps you to get clarity on this. It helps you to identify your potential partners and allies, but also your opposition. It is a very simple matrix, and you can use it like this (compare the example below):

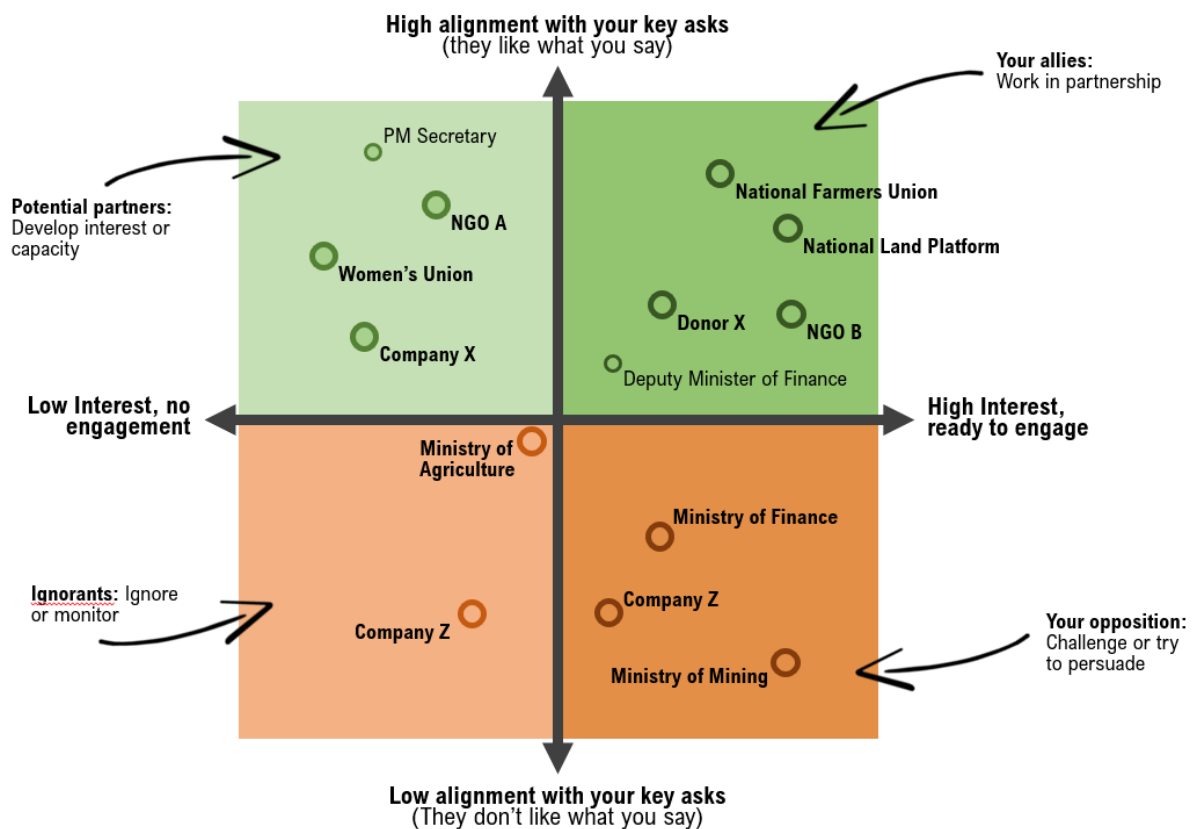
- Take a large piece of paper and draw a simple X-Y matrix.
- The **vertical axis** reflects whether someone likes your key ask and proposal or not, i.e. whether someone agrees with what you say and propose. The higher up on the axis, the more support for your advocacy ask.
- The **horizontal axis** reflects whether someone is likely to engage in a political debate or not, i.e. whether someone has the resources (time, money, people) and the energy and motivation to support or oppose you. The further right on the axis, the more likely it is that they will become active.
- Go now back to your context analysis from before and start to **fill in all actors from your context analysis** into this matrix. Do it one by one – ask yourself whether a particular ministry, NGO or company might like what you say and whether or not they might engage. Do this one by one, until you have positioned all relevant actors on your matrix.



- In a second step, try to go beyond whole organizations like ministries, NGOs or donor agencies by **adding individuals**. After all, here might be someone in the Ministry of Finance who supports your ideas and might help you to convince others.

The result of this exercise will show you:

- **your allies**, who are likely to support your cause and with whom you should cooperate (upper right corner, green);
- **your opponents**, who will oppose your plans and with which you will have to argue (lower right, orange);
- **potential partners**, who support your ideas in principle but do not engage because of certain limitations or because they have other priorities, so you will have to talk to them (upper left, light green). If you manage to convince some of them to support your cause as ‘surprising allies’, it might considerably boost your advocacy work!
- **ignorants**, who don’t really care, and whom you don’t have to bother with a lot (lower left, light orange).



By now you should know who might support your advocacy and might oppose it. In case you didn’t know already, this exercise also helps you to identify the ‘owner’ of the problem, i.e. the group or organisation who is most affected and, thus, would be the most credible advocate (but doesn’t necessarily have the means or capacities to do so). With this, you have made a big step towards your advocacy strategy! As with the exercises before, try to do this matrix repeatedly. As you start advocating, you will inevitably learn new things about others – what they think, how they position themselves, and why. You will also come meet new stakeholders you did not think of before. Use this matrix as a ‘living document’ to which you can add new intelligence, share it with your partners – and reflect any changes you may observe in your wider context.

### 3 INFLUENCE TREE: How to reach your target

Having completed the first two sections of this toolbox, you should by now be clear about your problem statement and your proposed solution; you should have a clear understanding of the political and institutional context relevant for your cause; and you should know the different actors and how they position themselves towards your key ask. With this, you have completed the analytical part and are now ready to start working on your advocacy strategy!

By now, you should also be in a position to answer the question “Who can make the change we want to see?” Or in other words: Who has the power to resolve your problem by initiating the desired solution? Remember the cookie story from the introduction? The little girl knows very well who can help her to solve her problem: It’s her mother who has the power to open the cookie jar, give her a cookie and make her hunger go away. So, the little girl goes directly to the kitchen and asks her mother for a cookie – she takes the direct route. When she eventually fails to convince her mother, she takes another route and asks her father – the indirect route.

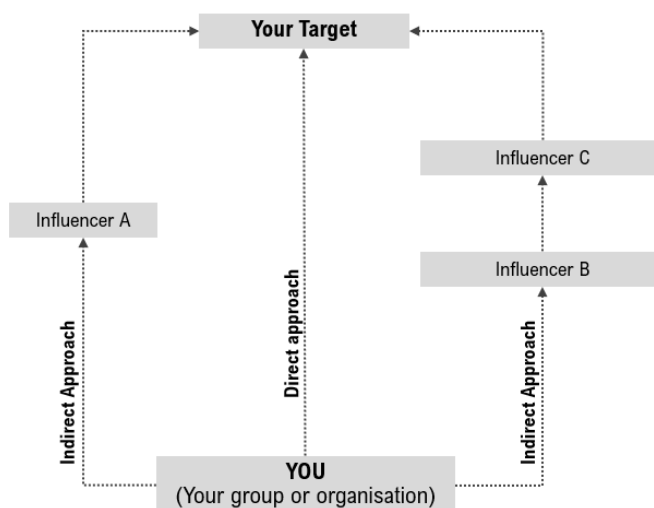
This is exactly what this section is about: It helps you to identify your main target group and start thinking about the various routes you and your partners can take to reach out to your target. After all, if one route doesn’t work, you need to have alternatives. Let’s get started!

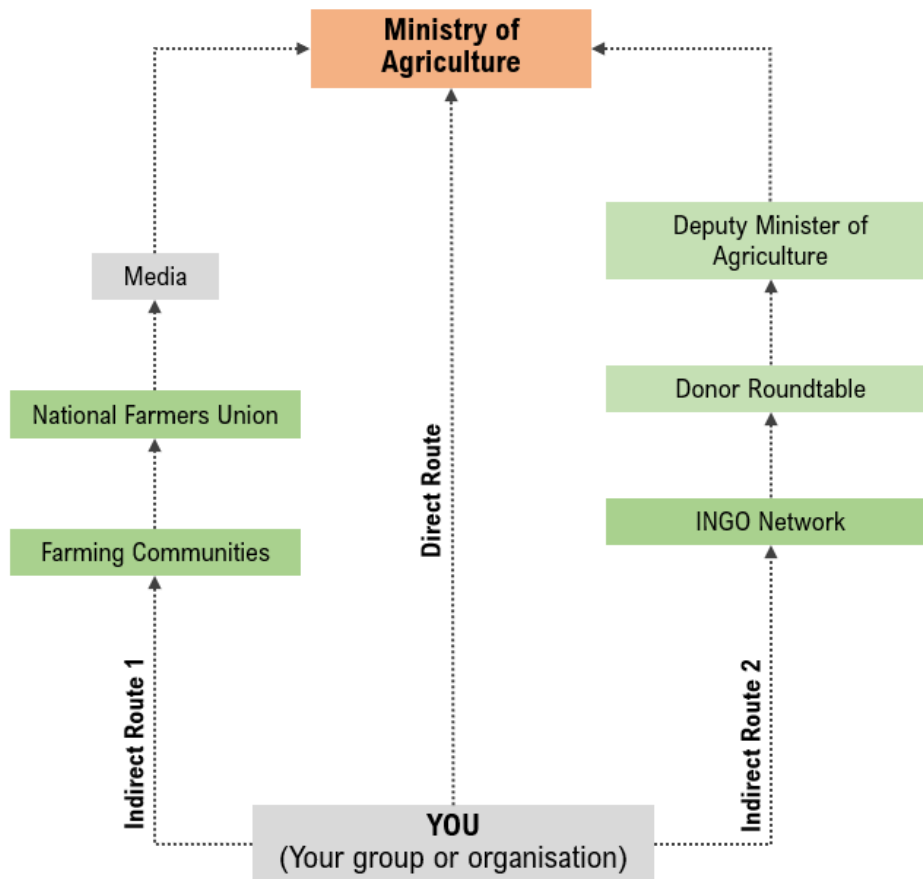
#### Draw your Influence Tree

To do this exercise, take another large sheet of paper and pens of various color. Then follow these steps:

- At the **bottom of the page**, draw yourself, i.e. you and your partners, or your alliance.
- On **top of the page**, draw your main target, whether it’s a ministry, the prime minister, a certain company or anyone else. Just make sure it is the one person or organization that has the power to make the change you want to see.
- Now start thinking about different ways how you could reach out to your target group. As a first choice, you may want to try **the direct approach**. After all, you could just ask the minister for a meeting and explain her/him what s/he should do. Sometimes it works – so you should always give it a try.
- In most cases, however, the direct route does not work. Ministers are usually hard to reach, and even if you can talk to them, they are usually hard to convince. This is why you need to think about **alternative routes**: Who might help you to reach out to your target? Who has better access to the minister, who is a close advisor or friend? And who can influence these advisors or friends, if you cannot? Here you start to think about **influencers**. To do so, go back to your Interest and Influence Matrix (section 2) to see whom you might ask for help.

The figure on the right illustrates the logic of the Influence Tree: Which routes or approaches can you take to reach out to your main target group? And if the direct approach does not work, who can help you? Who are your main influencers, and how can you reach them?





To make things more concrete, let's come back to our previously used example of land rights. From our previous analysis (section 2), we know that the main power to change the National Land Law lies with the Ministry of Agriculture – it has the power to draft legal changes and to propose them to Parliament. Hence, it will be the main target of our advocacy for a better Land Law that protects the interests of farming families (at least in the beginning).

The influence tree above features three distinct routes or approaches: The **direct route** between our group of advocates (our partners and us) and the Ministry – it probably won't work, but let's give it a try! If it doesn't, we can take an **indirect route**: We reach out to the INGO network, who in turn can mobilize the donor community. After all, we know from our analysis (see section 2) that they are supportive to our key asks. They in turn can talk to the Deputy Minister of Agriculture of whom we know that she/he is quite positive about our proposed change. She/he might then try to convince the Minister of Agriculture to initiate a redraft of the Land Law (Indirect Approach 1).

Alternatively, and at the same time, we can engage citizens and mobilize local communities by various means (compare section 4) so that they raise the issue and stir up the National Farmers Union – which in turn then raises broad public awareness about the problem of smallholders through media work. This will increase public pressure on the Ministry, so that they must address the issue and come up with a meaningful draft law.

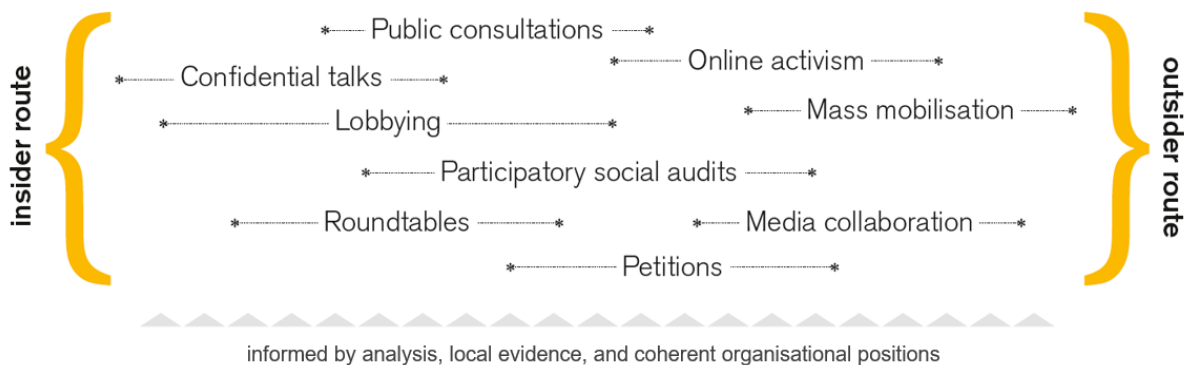
When doing this exercise, it is essential that you build on your previous analysis. Use your Context Analysis and your Interest and Influence Matrix from section 2 to draft your influence tree. Ask yourself where your partners and allies might come in to help, and how they might influence important actors you have no access to. After all, advocacy is all about building strong alliances and networks!

## 4 METHODS: How to find the right tone of voice

When hearing the word ‘advocacy’, many people tend to think of street protests, public ‘naming and shaming’ campaigns and the like. Yet advocacy is so much more than this! Remember the introductory section? It defines advocacy as a “deliberate process of influencing decisions”. Thinking of the cookie story, you will also remember that the little girl does not just shout at her mother but instead tries different ways and arguments to persuade and convince her. And this is exactly what advocacy is all about: You need to be creative by trying different ways and approaches to reach out to your target groups and convince them of your cause. There are plenty of things you can do – this section introduces you to the wide range of advocacy methods, helps you choose the right ones, picks out a few to look at in more detail, and helps you to strategically build them into your advocacy strategy.

### Insider vs. outsider route

In general, advocacy methods can be differentiated by the ‘insider’ and the ‘outsider route’. On the one hand, the **insider route** includes those methods that are not geared towards a broad audience and are not intended to mobilize a large number of people for building public pressure. Instead, they seek to convince decision makers and other key stakeholders by virtue solid evidence presented face-to-face meetings and behind closed doors. Advocacy methods like confidential talks, lobbying in parliament or smaller roundtables fall into this category. On the other hand, the **outsider route** describes those methods that seek to build broad awareness to raise public pressure on decision makers. This can include online petitions, collaboration with mass media, or even public protests and rallies.



The above figure contains a few examples only to illustrate that there is a whole range of methods between the insider and the outsider route – it’s not just black or white. As a matter of fact, many advocacy campaigns start along the insider route: They first try the direct approach by proposing **bilateral talks** with policy makers, with the idea to convince them by virtue of solid evidence and strong facts and figures. They may then follow up with a **roundtable**, involving a few more stakeholders, to discuss possible solutions and eventually come to an agreement. In such a case, there is no need for the outsider route.

Very often, however, the insider route is not enough: If a regional governor repeatedly refuses to meet with you and your partners, if a roundtable ends without agreement, or if policy makers reject or ignore a public consultation process, you might want to use other methods. This can include **citizen engagement** through **public gatherings or consultations**, an **online campaign**, filing **petitions**, **media reports** or even **public protests**. The aim of any method along the ‘outsider

route' is to increase the number of people knowing and talking about your cause, so that public pressure on decision makers rises – and eventually forces them to address the issue.

This does by no means imply that the outsider route is always confrontational and provocative. Instead, many **non-confrontational ways** can be used to inform people, raise public awareness and build people's confidence to speak out and spread the word by themselves. Cultural activities like community exhibitions or participatory filming can be a great way to enter the outsider route without risking too much exposure from the very beginning. For more information on Helvetas' approach to Conflict Sensitive Program Management, see [here](#).

## Choose the right methods

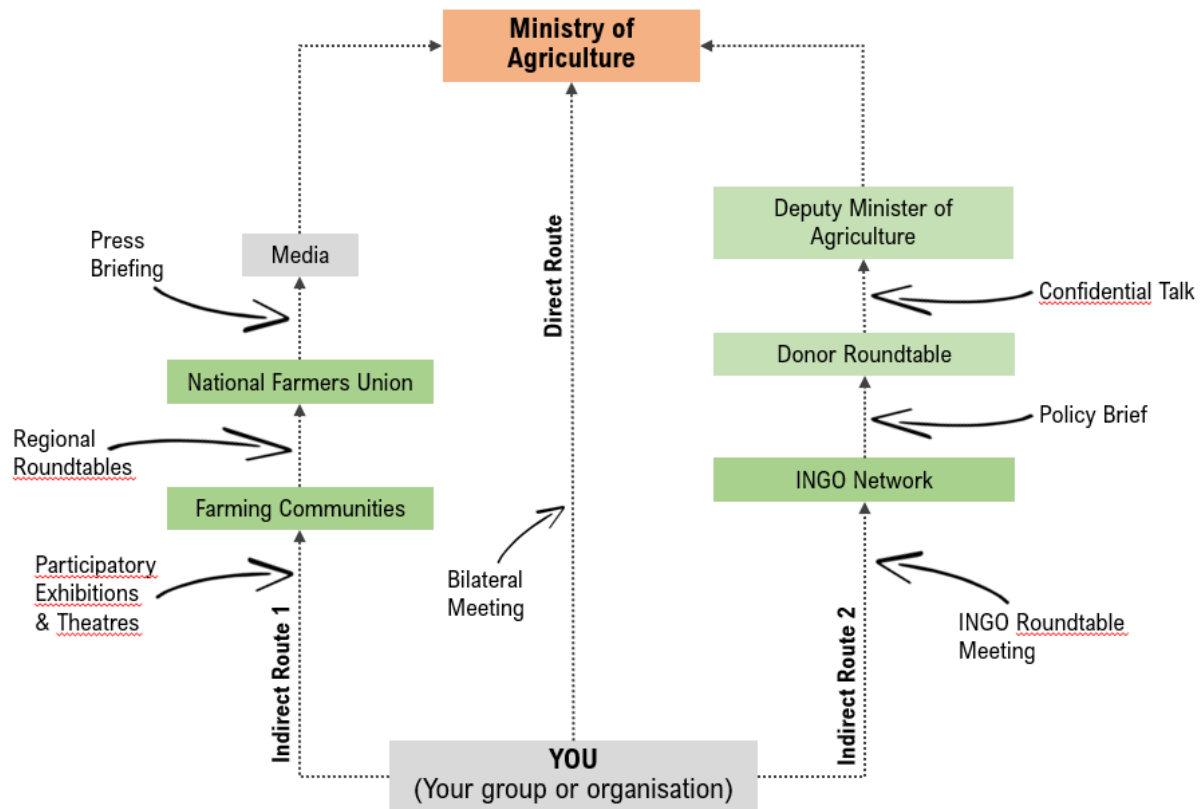
Obviously, it is up to you and to your partners and allies which advocacy methods you want to use. However, there are a few criteria you need to consider when developing your strategy:

- **Your organization's desired positioning:** If you want to position yourself as a trusted advisor to the government, you will certainly choose the insider route. If you cherish your independence and want to be seen as a critical observer, you might choose the outsider route.
- **Your partners and allies:** Make sure that your partners and allies agree with the chosen strategy – you don't want to define their agenda and run them into trouble. In fact, if you work with an INGO like Helvetas, it will rather be your partners who lead the advocacy campaign, so make sure they feel comfortable with the chosen paths and methods.
- **Your preferred tone of voice:** If you want to be seen as a trustworthy, reliable counterpart which is open for constructive dialogue, you may rather start along the insider route. If you don't care and think it's time to stir things a bit – choose the outsider route.
- **Your understanding of the external context:** In some contexts, it is not advisable to speak out loud about sensitive issues, so you better do not organize large public gatherings.
- **Your knowledge about your target:** While some decision makers are easy to contact and open for bilateral meetings with civil society, others just never listen. In such a case, you will need to go public to build up pressure.
- **Your resources, skills and capacities:** Choosing the outsider route can be costly, as organizing meetings and printing material has its price. At the same time, facilitating a roundtable or a public consultation requires certain skills, so make sure you are ready for it. But remember: If you don't have the necessary skills or resources, maybe one of your partners does.
- **Your success:** Sometimes the direct route works perfectly, so there is no need to use the outsider route.

## Build the methods into your strategy

Since you now know about different advocacy methods, you can start building them into your strategy. To do so, go back to your Influence Tree (section 3), and follow these steps:

- Look at each approach or route you have foreseen in your Influence Tree and think about which method might work best to reach a certain actor / stakeholder.
- You might foresee different methods along a certain route, depending on whom you try to reach.
- Write down your methods along the respective arrows.



As a last step, think about **timing**: Will you use all routes at the same time, or will you try one after the other? This is a delicate but important aspect. Many decision makers react negatively if they realize that an issue is already in the media before confidential talks have even started. And some mind if there is too much pressure from different sides, while others don't. Again – the better you know your target, the better you can decide what to do when.

Finally, be prepared for failure and don't give up if a certain route does not work as expected. After all, advocacy includes a lot of 'trial and error' and requires creativity along the way.

## 5 OPPOSITION AND EVIDENCE: How to use and convince your opponents

One of the main reasons why certain advocacy campaigns fail is that they do not care enough about their opposition. You now may wonder ‘Why should I think about my opponents at all? Isn’t it enough if I care for my own campaign?’ And it’s only natural and fully understandable if you focus on your preferred messages and those facts and figures that convince yourself. But in the end, you don’t advocate to yourself and don’t need to convince those who are already with you. Hopefully, you and your partners are already convinced by what you say and do. Instead, you need to convince others, show them why your cause is right and eventually let them make the change you want to see. As an advocate, you should therefore really care about opposition, try to understand their specific perceptions, their fears and concerns. This will help you to understand why they oppose your plans – and to figure out how to best change their mind.

So, this section is all about understanding and convincing your opposition. The first tool helps you to systematically analyze your opponent’s concerns, while the second part looks at different types of evidence and how to use them towards different audiences and target groups.

### The Opposition Matrix

This is another very simple tool – but a very powerful one. You should use it repeatedly as your advocacy unfolds, as you will hear many new concerns and criticism brought up against your key asks. Here is how to do it:

- Take a sheet of paper and draw three columns and a few lines.
- Go back to have a look at your Stakeholder Mapping (section 2) and your Influence Tree (section 3) to see who is likely to oppose your plans and whom you will have to convince of your proposed solution as you go along.
- To begin with, select one particular opponent (e.g. a minister or an organization) and try to figure out what s/he might say against your ideas and proposals. What different arguments might they raise to oppose you, what fears and concerns might they have?
- Write these concerns one by one and below each other in the **first column** of your sheet.
- Once you have done this, think about how you can counter each critique. What can you say in favor of your campaign? How can you best answer to these concerns? Write down each response in the **second column**.

Against your ideas	In favour of your ideas	Supporting Evidence
Concern 1	Supporting Argument 1	Evidence 1
Concern 2	Supporting Argument 3	Evidence 2
Concern 3	Supporting Argument 3	Evidence 3
...	...	...

For certain concerns, you may have several good and convincing counterarguments, while for others you may struggle to reply in a convincing manner. These are the ones you need to focus on! Discuss in your team, with your partners and allies to find good arguments to support your advocacy work. In addition, try to find out which concerns feature highest in your opponents' minds. What scares them most, what are their primary concerns? Focus on these and be sure you can really address and counter them.

Finally, make sure you can prove what you say. Referring to hearsay only and citing questionable sources will make you vulnerable and damage your credibility. Do you have solid and reliable evidence to prove what you say? Can you back up each of your supporting arguments with proven facts and figures? Most of your opponents won't be convinced by kind words alone, but will want to see a proof for what you say. So, in the **third column**, write down what evidence you have.

Going back to the **land rights example** used in the previous sections, major opposition may arise from the Finance and Mining Ministries, but also from certain people within the Ministry of Agriculture as well as from private companies who profit from large land transfers and have no interest to strengthen local people's voice and rights. Hence, a first Opposition Matrix for the case may look like this:

Against New Land Law	In favour of New Land Law	Supporting Evidence
The existing law sufficiently protects smallholders' land rights	There are no safeguards in the existing law	Comparative legal analysis
Farmers receive compensation, they are greedy	Compensation is either not paid or insufficient	Investigative media report (TV documentary)
The mining industry is key for the country's future	Only rich people profit, while rural poverty remains	Economic analysis
...	...	...

Doing this exercise helps you to quickly identify whether a) you have a good understanding of your opposition and their ways of thinking; b) you can counter their most important critique; and c) you can really prove what you say.

Repeat this exercise as your advocacy evolves. When talking to different people you will hear new arguments and critique you have never thought of before. Include it into your Opposition Matrix, complete the list and make the evidence check. This way, you always have an up-to-date list with your key arguments which you can also share with your partners and allies.

## Different types of evidence...

When doing the opposition matrix and the evidence check you might realize that you do not have convincing and reliable evidence to support each of your arguments. In such a case, you will have to invest a bit to find the evidence you need. There are many different forms of 'evidence', such as:

- A scientific report with facts and figures about your subject.
- A legal study that analyses a certain law or regulation you want to change.
- First-hand accounts of concerned people



- A documentary or investigative media report
- Anecdotal evidence proving that certain things do happen (e.g. photos, short films)

You can certainly think of more than this and will know examples from other campaigns. Think about other campaigns that you liked – what evidence did they present, and how?

## ...and how to use them

Sometimes you must first generate the evidence you need because it does not yet exist. In such a case, you might want to contract a study or analysis, or reach out to the media so they investigate and report on a certain issue. Sometimes, however, evidence is already there and all you need to do is to present it in a way so that people listen. But not everyone listens to the same messages! Some people are more receptive to dry facts and figures, to thorough and detailed analyses. Others want to hear surprising stories and first-hand accounts, real quotes from real people who recount their experiences and share their point of view. So, depending on your main audience, you may want to repack your evidence and present it in different ways and formats. The table below gives you a few ideas on which forms of evidence resonate best with different audiences (Oxfam 2016; [www.nature.com/articles/s41599-018-0176-7](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-018-0176-7)).

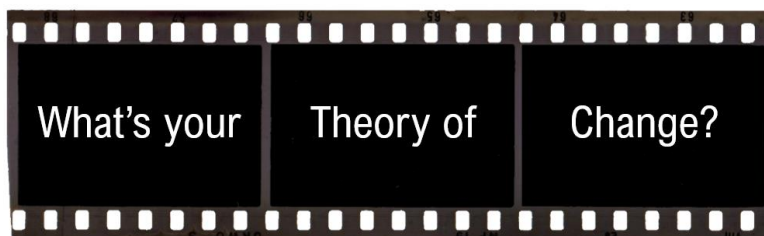
Audience	Evidence they might respond to best
Elected policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big ideas</li> <li>• Compelling stories</li> <li>• Positive visions</li> </ul>
Civil servants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective and rigorous</li> <li>• Credible methodology</li> <li>• Data and technical details</li> </ul>
Corporate executives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company-specific findings</li> <li>• Credible methodology</li> </ul>
Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-focused</li> <li>• Generated with their participation</li> </ul>
Activists and the broad public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human face to the story</li> <li>• Simple facts easy to remember</li> </ul>
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controversial, new</li> <li>• Human face to the story</li> <li>• Simple facts with numbers</li> </ul>

Obviously, policy makers like ministers or members of parliament listen and respond to other evidence than civil servants, activists or the media. This means that if you have a well-researched analytical paper, you might have to process it into different formats: A two-page policy brief for politicians (because they have not time to read more than this); a full-fledged report for civil servants (because they want all the details), and a catchy story with some 'killer facts' for the media (because that sells).

(Oxfam 2016)

## 6 ‘SO THAT’: How to build your Theory of Change

If you have followed this toolbox until now, you now should have a pretty clear understanding of the problem you are dealing with and of the solution you are going to propose; you know who has the power to make the change you want to see; you know your natural partners and allies as well as your potential



opposition; you have a plan for reaching out to your main targets; and you have pondered on opposition and how you are going to use evidence to overcome it. The only thing that is missing now is – action! The best advocacy plan is utterly useless if never put into action. Obviously, you could go on for days and months improving your advocacy plan, adding more intelligence, doing more research, scrutinizing your opponents. This is known as the ‘paralysis of analysis’ – to remain inactive just because you think you don’t know enough to give it a go.

This section helps you to translate your analysis into an action plan, or in other words: to draft your Theory of Change. How is your story of change going to evolve? What will be the sequence of action and reaction that will ultimately lead to the change you want to see? Having a well-structured Theory of Change does not only help you to be clear on what to do when and why. It also helps you to convince others to support your cause, because you have a compelling story to tell.

### The ‘so that’-chain

**So that** – these two words will help you to build your Theory of Change. To do so, follow a few simple steps:

- Go back to your Influence Tree (section 3) to see which direct and indirect routes you want to take, and what advocacy methods (section 4) you want to use.
- Start with the first thing you will do to get things going.
- Think about why you are doing it, and what you want to achieve with it: We do A **so that** B happens.
- You then continue with this **so that**-chain: B happens so that C can happen, and so on.
- In a **first round**, focus on the big steps. This may look like this:

We do some research **so that** we can present it at a press conference **so that** we get broad media coverage **so that** the government must respond **so that** the ministry initiates a legal reform **so that** parliament endorses a better law **so that** people’s rights are better protected.

- In a **second round**, add the smaller, incremental steps that are needed to make the big steps happen. This is not so attractive, but absolutely crucial to stay realistic. So, your Theory of Change may look like this:

We draft Terms of Reference **so that** we can hire a researcher **so that** we can do some research **so that** we have first results after three months **so that** we can prepare a policy and media brief **so that** we can present it at a press conference **so that** we can follow up with focused media work **so that** we get broad media coverage **so that** the government must respond **so that** we are invited for a roundtable with policy makers **so that... so that... so that...**

## Planning your advocacy step by step

Your Theory of Change is like a movie screenplay – it contains the whole story and tells you and others how the various scenes follow each other. But like with a film, you also need to know **who does what when**. After all, you and your organization are probably not the only ones to advocate but ideally act together with partners and allies – or you even ‘only’ facilitate and support the advocacy work led by other actors.

In a **next step**, you therefore enrich your Theory of Change with additional information. This can be a very revealing exercise when done in a group with partners from various organizations. Once you have jointly elaborated your Theory of Change, think about who would be best placed to do what, and start to assign roles and responsibilities. For instance, you may have a lot of experience in mobilizing people and organizing community theatres, while your partners know how to work with national media. Use your comparative strengths to make the best out of your plan! Here’s a great way **how to do this exercise in a group**:

- Ask everyone to write their / their organization’s name on a few sticky notes and put them on the Theory of Change where they feel most skilled or comfortable to contribute. Like this, you will quickly see for which steps you have sufficient support and where you need to find someone to do the job.

Step	Who	When	
1	Prepare Research TORs; hire researcher	...	Mar-Apr
2	Conduct research	...	May-Jul
3	Invite for roundtable	...	Jun-Jul
4	Prepare media and policy brief	...	End of Jul
5	Faciliate roundtable	...	42 Aug
6	Follow-up with national media	...	Aug-Sep
7	...	...	...

**Gap:** Who is going to facilitate the roundtable?

Obviously, you will also have to consider the resources and time needed for each step and come up with a first budget estimate for what you are going to do. However, when adding such planning details, always bear in my mind that you are probably going to change your plan once you start advocating. As soon as you get going, you will realize that some things don’t work as expected – so be prepared for setbacks and changes! This will be easier if you consider your Theory of Change a living document, rather than a strict 5-year plan. Hence, and if possible, foresee some organisational and budgetary leeway in your planning.

## 7 M&E FOR ADVOCACY: How to know when you succeed (or fail)

You have now elaborated your advocacy strategy and are ready to start advocating on your issue of concern. Great – let's go! But... how will you know if your strategy works? How can you be sure that you are on the right track and things are happening as you would like them to?

As mentioned in the previous sections of this toolbox, it is essential that you build in regular checks and moments for reflection. Discuss with your team, your partners and allies whether your advocacy work is on track, and what you want to adjust in order to stay focused and effective. The problem, however, is to figure out whether you are doing the right thing and whether your advocacy is really leading towards the change you want to see. Obviously, you don't want to wait until the new law you are advocating for gets passed and implemented, as this might take years. So, focusing on your final change objective alone will make you frustrated. Even more, you might miss many of the small but important changes that are happening on the way towards your desired change.

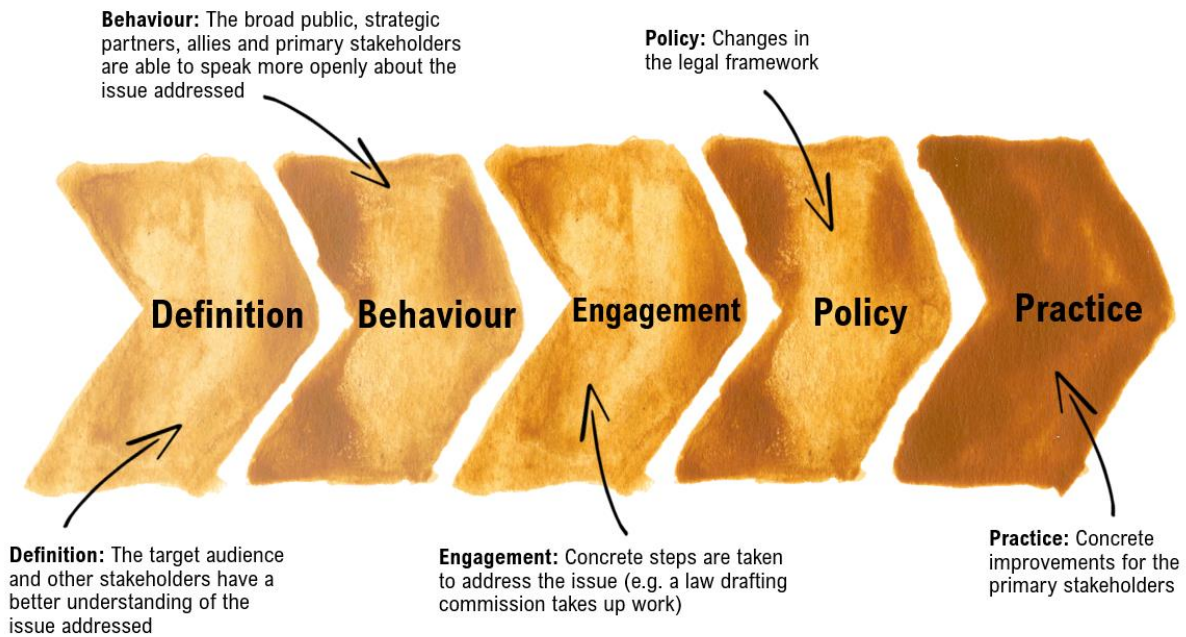
To avoid this, and to keep your motivation as an advocate high, there is a simple model which helps you to better understand change processes – and to see where your advocacy currently stands, and whether it is successful or not.

### The 5-step model of policy change

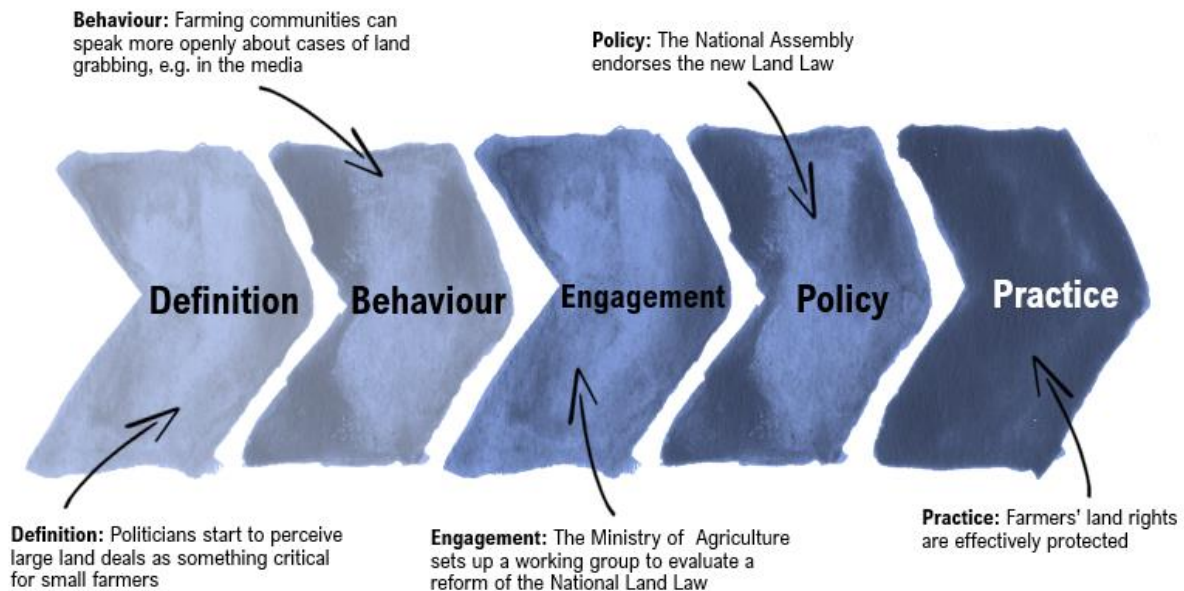
Whether you are advocating for a new law, for more funding to a particular community or social group, or for better quality in basic education – the change process you have to go through is nearly always the same. In principle, policy change (and change in general) is usually non-linear. It always starts long before a concrete policy gets endorsed and implemented, and it usually happens step by step. As an advocate, you want to understand these different steps to see where you are and what comes next.

A simple but helpful model divides the policy change process into **five distinct steps or shifts**:

1. **Shift in definition** – People start to see things differently: your target audience and others have a better understanding of the issue addressed.
2. **Shift in behaviour** – People start to behave differently; the broad public, partners, allies and primary stakeholders are able and ready to speak more openly about the issue.
3. **Shift in engagement** – People start to engage: Concrete steps are taken to address the issue.
4. **Shift in policy** – A policy, law, regulation or practice gets changed.
5. **Shift in practice** – Things start to change in real: The new policy, law, regulation or practice results in concrete improvements for people's daily life.



It takes some practice to apply this model to your own cause so that you can differentiate the different steps in the change process you are advocating for. But once you manage to do so, having this model in mind will help you a lot to better understand where your advocacy stands and what you have already achieved – although the final objective might still seem far away.



To apply this in practice, take your Theory of Change (Section 6) and discuss where and when your advocacy work might make (or contribute to) one of these shifts along the way. Referring to the land rights example, the following could be **relevant questions to ask**:

1. **What needs to happen so that politicians start acknowledging that large land deals can be problematic for smallholders?** And if this happens – how do we know? Possible indicators could be media reports, or recordings of parliamentary debates.
2. **What needs to happen so that farming communities dare to speak openly about critical land deals and demand their rights?** And if this happens – how do we know? Possible indicators could be first-hand accounts of concerned communities, or media reports.
3. **What needs to happen so that the Ministry starts reviewing the Land Law?** And if this happens – how do we know? Possible indicators could be official statements from the Ministry, or an official invitation to a roundtable with concerned parties.
4. **What needs to happen so that a new, better Land Law gets endorsed by parliament?** And if this happens – how do we know? Possible indicators could be ... well, that's rather easy to find out!
5. **What needs to happen so that the new Land Law helps to improve the everyday life of small farmers and effectively protects their land rights?** And if this happens – how do we know? Possible indicators could be first legal cases in which local farmers successfully protect their land rights.

Try to **formulate at least one example for each of these five shifts for your own advocacy** and define specific indicators so you can prove that the shift has actually happened. You can even try to define these shifts for each advocacy route in your Influence Tree – this will help you to check whether the chosen path makes sense and how it leads to the change you want to see.

Being able to define these five shifts for your specific change process will make your life as an advocate much easier, and the whole advocacy process more rewarding. You will be able to identify even small steps and celebrate them as an interim success – because you know that you are on track and heading towards the big change you want to see.

With this, you are getting close to a full-fledged advocacy strategy with defined action points, roles and responsibilities, resources, a timeline, and indicators of success. However, as things may not always happen the way you want them to, there is one thing left to do...

## 8 RISKS: How to expect the unexpected

Sometimes, advocacy can be very easy and straightforward – you get the space and the opportunities to raise your voice and talk, decision makers listen to you, and everything goes well. Very often, however, advocacy is arduous, and you are repeatedly confronted with problems, obstacles and setbacks. Whether it's going well or not depends largely on the issue you are advocating for, your target group, your partners and allies, as well as on the wider political, social and cultural context you are in (compare section 2). If you are raising a very sensitive issue politicians don't want to talk about, you are very likely to run into problems. If you are addressing corruption and nepotism among state authorities, trouble's ahead for sure. At the same time, open or hidden social, ethnic or religious conflicts can undermine your efforts to build coalitions and may even put you and your partners at risk. And finally, some governments see civil society generally as a threat rather than a development partner, so that openly addressing human rights issues may cause serious repercussions. As an advocate you therefore want to know the risks you might be facing, so that you can avoid or mitigate them to the extent possible.



### Identify advocacy-specific risks

Avoiding uncomfortable discussions and hoping for the best never pays off. Instead, try to address potential advocacy risks as early and as open and transparent as possible. Ideally, schedule a separate meeting with your partners and allies for a joint brainstorming on the types of risks you may encounter on the way. Write them down to make things as explicit as possible, and make sure everyone has a say. The following structure may help you to start a discussion:

<b>Risks for your organization</b>	Exclusion from certain spaces or events; non-renewal of your operational permit as CSO; loss of members or supporters; office raids and confiscation of material and information
<b>Risks for your team</b>	Pressure and threats against staff members and their families (especially if they belong to an ethnic, religious or other minority); non-extension of work permits; arrests
<b>Risks for partners and allies</b>	Pressure and threats against organizations and groups as well as against individuals and their families; ban of organizations; arrests
<b>Risks for communities and citizens</b>	Economic and political discrimination; pressure and threats against groups, individuals and their families; arbitrary arrests
<b>Risks for the project</b>	Bureaucratic harassment by public authorities; restricted access to certain villages; forced shut down of project activities or offices

This list is certainly not conclusive, so you may identify more and other risks in your discussion. The important thing is that you do this together with your partners and allies, because they might see things differently than you do. Once you have established such a list and have a rough idea how likely and severe these risks might be, go on to discuss how these risks can be avoided or mitigated.

## Avoid or mitigate advocacy-specific risks

There are many ways to avoid and/or mitigate some of the risks related to advocacy. The first question you must ask yourself is whether you can avoid a certain risk or not. For instance, you might realise that openly addressing a certain land rights case bears unpredictable risks for the concerned community, so you postpone your campaign plans or seek other ways to raise public attention. However, if you and your partners agree that the risks are justifiable in principle, you need to discuss how to manage them. There are many ways for mitigating such risks – here are some first ideas:

<b>Act through networks, build coalitions</b>	Don't act on your own. Instead, seek partners and allies so that you can build a network or platform to advocate together and thus spread responsibility, public exposure and risks.
<b>Always be open and transparent</b>	Openness can help to dispel doubts and misconceptions. Openly inform your partners and allies, and maintain a regular exchange with public authorities, e.g. through letters, meetings, or organized field visits.
<b>Involve project partners</b>	Inform and involve your funding partners when your project comes under pressure.
<b>Identify actors of change</b>	Identify and connect with committed individuals within government and administration. Even when a certain Ministry might dislike your ideas, some public servants might support you (see section 2).
<b>Call for public responsibility</b>	Approach different departments of the government as well as parliamentarians to assume their responsibility towards their constituency.

Again, you will certainly find more ways to mitigate 'your' risks. Ideally, you consolidate them in a separate contingency plan which you can integrate in your advocacy strategy. This way, you together with your team and your partners are always able to adjust your advocacy strategy if certain risks become too high. The important thing is that you don't do this only once (e.g. when you start a new project), but instead regularly review and reassess the identified risks, their likelihood and potential impact and the measures taken.

However, as depressing as a list like this might appear at first sight – don't let yourself be disenchanted! Knowing these risks and how to manage them is a first big step towards your successful advocacy campaign.

Good luck – and don't forget: Advocacy Works!

