

A New Weave of Power, People & Politics

The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation

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To our parents – Margaret and Gordon VeneKlasen and Verginia and George Miller – who taught us the values of community service, accountability, and civic responsibility, exemplified principles of fairness, and opened up their homes with enthusiasm and warmth to our friends and colleagues from around the world. We dedicate this book to you.

Foreword

In November 2001, some forty advocates, educators, and researchers from 18 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas gathered for a workshop in Washington, D.C. to reflect together on our work on advocacy and citizen participation.¹ In particular, we wanted to re-examine how these concepts are being used to achieve the broader goals of equity, social justice, and the global fight against poverty and discrimination. While the conversation was rich, and the grassroots commitments and innovations inspiring, for many of the veteran organisers and popular educators who were present there was a bitter-sweet assessment about the state of our work.

On the one hand, words like citizen participation and advocacy – which are at the heart of our values and concerns – have gained increased prominence over recent years in the mainstream lexicons of governments, donors, and civil society organisations. Groups working on these issues have enjoyed greater attention. New spaces for public involvement are emerging at local, national, and even global levels. On the other hand, as the words themselves gain currency the concepts on which they are based are at risk of losing their credibility and meaning. As they move from the margins to the mainstream, approaches to advocacy and citizen participation become somewhat sterile and technical, failing to take into account underlying realities of power and politics which exclude people from meaningful engagement in the policies and decisions which affect their lives.

At this workshop there was a sense of the need to return to fundamentals. There was a search for a more comprehensive approach that would link policy advocacy with broader

concerns of building critical awareness for action, mobilizing and strengthening coalitions, dealing with conflicts across differences, and embedding participatory practices in broader movements for human rights and social justice.

There also was an awareness of the need for new understandings of how to assess power – especially as the simultaneous moves towards globalization and localization are changing the terrain of power relations. There were debates on how to decide whether and when to engage in new political spaces that the changing terrain is creating, and how to avoid tokenistic forms of participation. In general, there was a renewed recognition of the need to strengthen capacities of civil society groups – as well as of ordinary citizens – to engage in advocacy work as a fundamental right and skill of citizenship.

There also was a sense of urgency. Coming together as we did just a few weeks after September 11 and its ensuing events, we were concerned with how quickly issues of global security, shaped by notions of military might, were supplanting concerns with basic economic needs and human rights, shaped by peoples' participation. We heard stories from a number of countries, including the United States, of how spaces for citizens' voice and dissent were closing, while in other settings changing international forces were potentially creating new openings and alliances. Whatever the circumstances, we felt the very principles which we were discussing of how to use citizen participation and advocacy to insure greater equity, justice, and inclusion were at the heart of how to achieve more long-lasting concepts of peace and security.

Against this somewhat sombre mood, the opportunity at the workshop to review and discuss *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation* offered new energy and positive relief. As we explored, the need to re-inject notions of power, citizenship, and human rights into the increasingly sterile debates on participation and advocacy, this guide provided us some vital concepts and approaches for beginning to do so. As we discussed the changing political terrain and began to envision new strategies for our work, this guide offered valuable tools that could help us build our own capacities for our work.

Of course, many of us who have worked in the arena of popular education and citizen action over the years may have a healthy scepticism of manuals. The American adult educator, Myles Horton at Highlander Centre (a good friend of both of the authors), was always concerned that manuals would become “recipes” or “cookbooks” for social change. Others in the development field warn against what they see as “blueprint” or “off the shelf” approaches. We have all seen our methods become reduced to techniques, devoid of their original meaning and purpose in rote applications in differing contexts.

That is why this book is important. It offers neither a recipe nor a blueprint. Rather it provides a guide for learning, exploration, and adaptation in a number of contexts. Unlike many guides, it is not written on the basis of abstract theory or “drive-by” consultancies. Rather it is based on critical reflection by the authors over decades of experience in their collaborative work in actually doing popular education for democracy, human rights, and social justice in many continents of the globe. It is intended as a living tool to which others may add and contribute based on their own knowledge and experience.

The guide gives “a new weave” to a number of important issues, and in so doing makes a significant contribution to the growing international literature on citizen participation and advocacy.

First, while it offers concrete strategies and tools for citizen participation and advocacy, it locates them in the broader debates on the meanings of citizenship and democracy. At a time when many political institutions around the world are facing a crisis of legitimacy, as models of democracy and representation are re-examined, this approach challenges us to continue to construct new forms of citizenship, based on popular knowledge and respect for differences, in diverse contexts.

Second, at a time when there is increased talk of concepts such as a “rights-based approach” to development, “participation” and “good governance,” this manual illustrates how better to understand what these concepts might mean in practice, based on peoples’ own knowledge and experiences, as well as by showing how in real life they must be integrated with one another.

Third, the guide grows specifically out of the authors’ particular concerns and experiences in the areas of gender and women’s political participation. On the basis of this work, it speaks strongly to concerns for issues of inclusion, respect for differences and identities, and the need to address underlying attitudes and values – concerns which often get short-shrift in the focus on organizing campaigns, winning issues and changing policies.

A New Weave has been needed for a long time. Some thirty years ago, following her experiences in attempting to promote the concept of citizen participation in the American War on Poverty, Sherry Arnstein wrote, “the idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spin-

ach: No one is against it in principle because it is good for you.” However, she went on, “when the have-nots define participation as the redistribution of power, the American consensus on the fundamental principle explodes into many shades of *outright radical, ethnic, ideological, and political opposition*.”² This no doubt is a conundrum that many activists have experienced, and speaks as well to a number of current crises around the world. Often work on citizen participation and advocacy becomes stymied in the face of such confrontations. However, *A New Weave* insists that rather than ignoring power and conflict, citizen participation and advocacy work must *begin* with learning how to address these realities if real change is to occur.

For those us who have seen this action guide actually being woven and re-woven over the years – including many of us at the Washington workshop – its release is in itself a cause for celebration. Like many good popular educators and activists, the authors have been so busy doing the work on the ground, and so willing personally to share their experiences with others, that getting the time to document and extend their learning more broadly has always been difficult. And throughout, they have steadfastly refused pressures to give quick fixes and simple answers to complex issues. That in itself is the greatest strength of *A New Weave* – it grows not only from the head but from the heart, not only from intellectual and methodological curiosity but from long-term

personal commitment and engagement with the struggles of others in both south and north. It may have taken a long time and a lot of effort to weave, but will be a stronger and more enduring resource as a result. Thanks.

John Gaventa
Institute of Development Studies
March 8, 2002

NOTES

¹ ‘Making Change Happen: Advocacy and Citizen Participation’, co-sponsored by the Asia Foundation, ActionAid, and the Participation Group at the Institute of Development Studies, November 28 – 30, 2001.

² Sherry Arnstein, ‘The Journal of the American Institute of Planners,’ Vol 35, No 4, July 1969. Quoted further in this Guide, page 30.

Introduction

Who is the Action Guide for?

This Action Guide is designed for people and organizations grappling with issues of power, politics, and exclusion. It goes beyond the first generation of advocacy manuals to delve more deeply into questions of citizenship, constituency-building, social change, gender, and accountability. The Guide is designed for:

- **non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots groups** interested in a rights-based approach to advocacy that combines policy influence activities with strategies to strengthen citizen participation, awareness, and organization;
- **donor institutions** interested in supporting comprehensive advocacy programs that focus on overcoming exclusion and subordination, as well as on building more democratic forms of public decisionmaking;
- **development agencies** interested in engaging their own service delivery structures and beneficiaries in the pursuit of development solutions through the political process;
- **trainers, activists, organizers, and researchers** interested in building bridges between civil society, government, business, and other influential people and institutions to promote more accountable political processes and responsive development policies.

What Is the Guide's Approach to Advocacy?

The Guide's approach to advocacy is geared to improving the lives and participation of marginalized people and forging broad alliances for reform across society. We define this as *citizen-centered advocacy*, sometimes referred to as transformative, people-centered, participatory, or social justice advocacy.

We understand advocacy as a political process that involves the coordinated efforts of people in changing existing practices, ideas, and distributions of power and resources that exclude women and other disadvantaged groups. From this perspective, advocacy deals with specific aspects of policymaking, as well as the values and behavior that perpetuate exclusion and subordination. Thus, advocacy is both about changing specific decisions affecting people's lives and changing the way decisionmaking happens into a more inclusive and democratic process.

Inevitably, advocacy will involve tensions. This book does not have a technical formula for influencing governments or other structures of power. Instead, it aims to help activists analyze, plan, and manage strategies with a clear understanding of potential risks. Advocacy strategies will vary widely in response to particular circumstances, issues, opportunities, and constraints.

The Guide is like a quilt-making kit. Rather than preset designs, it contains a rich selection of patterns, pieces, and fabrics. From this colorful mix, the user can stitch together an advocacy strategy to fit particular contexts, needs, and visions.

Key Features of the Guide's Approach to Advocacy

- Focuses on building the capacity of marginalized groups to express their voices and use their vote to make change.
- Ties issue-based strategies to accountability and strengthening citizenship.
- Applies rights-based approach to policy change and concrete problem-solving.
- Is grounded in an analysis of the dynamics of power and exclusion, using gender frameworks and other tools.
- Promotes strategies aimed at both influencing specific policy decisions and making the culture and practice of decisionmaking more democratic.
- Extends advocacy to many arenas of political and policy influence. It does not presume that the locus of decisionmaking is solely the legislative process.
- Helps organizations combine development and service provision activities with political organizing and policy influence.
- Seeks to balance the tensions between the need to acknowledge difference and diversity and the need to build collective solutions, agendas, and alliances.
- Forges connections between global, national, and local advocacy efforts.
- Draws attention to the unique risks and opportunities for doing advocacy in different contexts and political moments.
- Incorporates a long-term vision of change with commitment to social justice and equity.
- Combines constituency- and organization-building with leadership development, awareness building, policy research, and political analysis.

Conceptual and Experiential Sources for the Action Guide

The Guide draws on the training, research, and organizing experiences of the authors and many colleagues over the last 30 years. These collective experiences were gathered in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Europe, the former Soviet Union, and North America. They range from participatory research and community development, to neighborhood organizing and legal rights education, to large-scale campaign advocacy. The frameworks, tools, and ideas were initially drawn together for a draft Guide in 1997 for a series of “training of trainers” workshops conducted in Africa, Asia, and Latin America by the Global Women in Politics Program of The Asia Foundation, with Women in Law and Development in Africa, Zimbabwe, Center for Legislative Development, Philippines, and Cenzontle, Nicaragua. For nearly four years prior to its final revision,

the Guide was used and adapted by groups around the world.

Building on the work of countless activists, practitioners and theorists, the Guide's primary sources of inspiration have included:

Citizen action organizing

Based on the Saul Alinsky community organizing model, the citizen action approach has been shaped by the Midwest Academy, a US training institute for neighborhood and labor organizing. It has been further adapted by groups in the Philippines doing grassroots organizing. Citizen action advocacy generally relies on an organizer to mobilize a community around common concerns. Through that process, community members develop their leadership capacity and make decisionmakers more accountable to poor and other disadvantaged people.

Popular adult education

Inspired originally by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, this approach critiques traditional education in which learners are treated as passive recipients of knowledge. In contrast, popular education uses an adult's experience as the core of the learning process. It validates and expands each person's knowledge, thus empowering him or her to take action. It promotes critical consciousness which enables people to understand how their situations are molded by systemic inequalities and helps to motivate collective action for change.

Gender analysis, theory, and practice

These perspectives help to understand the visible and invisible natures of discrimination and subordination. They focus on ways to transform unequal power relations between men and women in the social, economic, and political arenas, and in both public and private realms.

Participatory development techniques

These techniques have offered insights particularly on community-centered initiatives for development, including participatory appraisal, evaluation, research, and project design.

Women's rights as human rights

These strategies seek to expand women's rights and often use law as an organizing tool to enable women to gain the confidence and skills necessary to seek public solutions to

personal and social problems. Advocacy uses and attempts to reform the international human rights system so that it serves women and other marginalized groups better.

Theoretical discussions about power, agency, and democracy

We have drawn from the work of scholars concerned with the problems of poverty, participation, and subordination who have examined how excluded groups can better engage in public life. Among these scholars are John Gaventa, Sonia Alvarez, John Samuel, Tom Carothers, Srilatha Batliwala, Steven Lukes, Maxine Molyneux, Malena de Montis, Amartya Sen, Virginia Vargas, Chantal Mouffe, and Jonathan Fox.

Approaches to conflict and negotiation

The work of Adam Curle, Larry Susskind, Susan Carpenter, John Paul Lederach, Guy and Heidi Burgess, and Deborah Kolb have provided us with holistic approaches to conflict that address power imbalances and intractable social problems. They weave together strategies of consciousness-raising, education, and organizing as the foundation for negotiating and dealing with social conflict.

Navigating the Action Guide

This book covers many topics. There is a variety of exercises, tools, resources, tips, and stories. In some cases, we present several

"Frequently, despite improved policies and laws, public institutions and society continue to operate with the values and behavior that lead to the exclusion of large numbers of people from resources and options to solve common problems. Building democracy takes more than changing policy, it takes changing the political system itself. It demands an intensive, holistic process of political change that requires developing individual consciousness about how the political system contributes both to community and social problems and to problem-solving. It involves skills in analysis, planning, negotiation, and communication, as well as strong civil society organizations with alternative, flexible models of leadership and decisionmaking."

Global Women in Politics Advocacy Initiative, The Asia Foundation, 1999

exercises or frameworks designed for similar purposes so that you can select which best meet your particular circumstances. You may find some sections slightly repetitive. Since we realize people will photocopy particular pages, we chose to repeat some of the major themes for clarity.

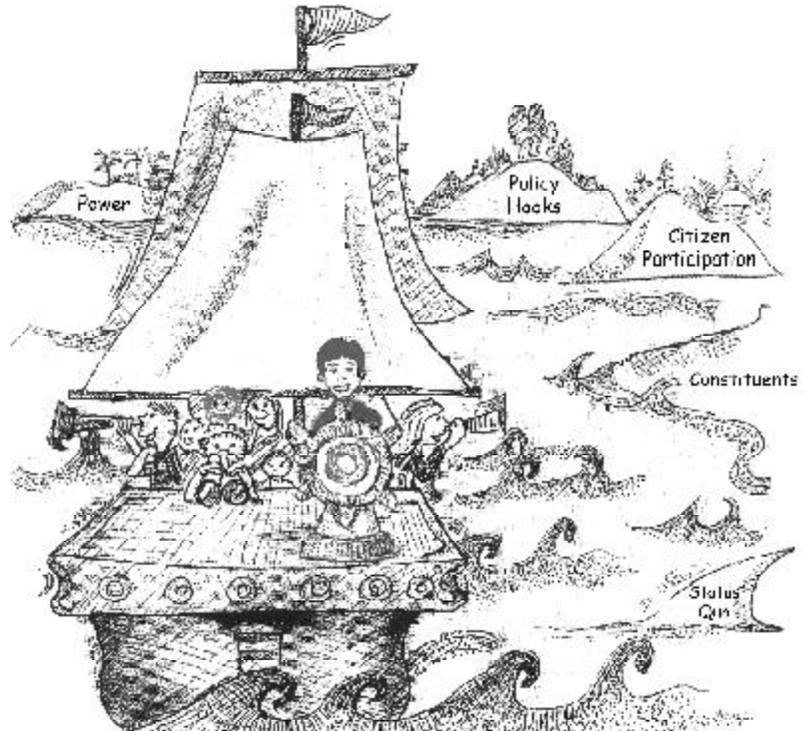
Most activists and trainers have very little time for lengthy reading. It is hard to know where to begin and where to look in the limited time available unless you have a specific training or planning need. To make the book more manageable, on the next page we provide a detailed description of each chapter. We also offer a special training and capacity-building Annex at the end of the Guide that provides workshop and planning ideas for different users and needs. This section is intended to help planners and trainers take full advantage of the book efficiently. The Guide is structured in three parts:

Part 1: Understanding Politics

Effective citizen politics requires conceptual clarity. Advocacy is not a value-neutral technology. Certain concepts define our vision of social and political change. They also help us to interpret reality and make strategic choices. Concepts such as power, gender, equity, and participation shape our methodology and strategies, while concepts such as democracy and citizenship direct our vision. That is why we begin the manual with an exploration of concepts, assumptions, and values.

Part 2: Planning Advocacy

Good planning provides the basis for effective citizen advocacy work. Most users will find this section immediately relevant to their needs. It includes planning tools and helps to



guide processes. Participatory planning builds constituencies for change while educating and empowering individual citizens.

Part 3: Doing Advocacy

The last section provides ideas and stories about doing advocacy. There are fewer exercises in this section. Instead, there are tips and examples to inspire activists to be both creative and careful when designing actions that fit their unique context.

Your Advice on Using the Guide

Above all, we would like to hear your feedback and stories about how you have used and adapted the Guide, what you have found useful, and what has not been useful to you. We encourage you to send us your training workshop designs, materials, and advocacy experiences to inform our own understanding and practice and to help us refine the Guide for future editions. Enjoy the book.

Navigating the Action Guide: Tips for Users

Part One: Understanding Politics

Core Concepts, Assumptions, and Values

This first part of the Guide focuses on the basic conceptual building blocks for advocacy planning and action.

Chapter 1: Politics and Advocacy

Being political takes more than understanding how the “system” operates. For disadvantaged communities, political participation demands a new way of thinking in order to understand and challenge unequal relationships of power as they are perpetuated by culture, social norms, politics, and decisionmaking. This chapter introduces some basic concepts and definitions, including “what is politics?” and “what is advocacy?” as well as some exercises for understanding and getting involved in political change.

Chapter 2: Democracy and Citizenship

Our understanding and vision of democracy and citizenship help us define the kind of political system for which we are striving, as well as the roles, rights, and responsibilities of all the people and institutions involved. This chapter examines different perspectives on these concepts which inform our approach to advocacy. It also offers exercises to guide discussions on democracy and citizenship.

Chapter 3: Power and Empowerment

Power is probably the most decisive ingredient in politics, advocacy, and citizenship. When advocates challenge the social order, their understanding of power dynamics is crucial for success and for survival. This chapter explores different concepts and tools for demystifying and sharpening our analysis of power and for understanding citizen empowerment.

Chapter 4: Constructing Empowering Strategies

Advocacy is a process of building citizenship and political education. If advocacy strategies are meant to engage and empower citizens, then people’s participation in the choices and construction of strategies is the first step in fighting exclusion and developing power, critical consciousness, and political skills. This chapter offers concepts and tools to equip citizens, leaders, and organizations to better promote inclusive politics and empowered citizens. It concludes with the framework that defines this Guide’s approach to advocacy.

Part Two: Planning Advocacy

Tools, Process, and Politics for Citizenship and Action

Planning for advocacy is vital for effective strategies and impact. But planning, if done in a participatory manner, can also be a political education, organizing, and consciousness-raising activity. Part Two of the Action Guide covers the tools, steps, and processes of advocacy planning that build citizen empowerment.

Chapter 5: The Basics of Planning for Citizen-Centered Advocacy

Advocacy planning involves certain basics, including the development of an overall strategy (long-term), a campaign (medium-term), and tactics, actions, or activities (short-term) as well as a way to monitor and measure the success of your efforts. However, participatory approaches to advocacy planning are more than a set of tools and steps for improving impact. They are constituency-building

Navigating the Action Guide: Tips for Users

and citizen education strategies that attempt to put equity and inclusion into practice.

Chapter 6: Planning Moment #1—Looking Inward

Engaging in advocacy is a strategic choice that will have a major impact on an organization. This chapter aims to help you gain a clearer sense of who you are and where you stand before you attempt to change the world around you.

Chapter 7: Planning Moment #2—Understanding the Big Picture

Every context has its own distinct characteristics that lead to ever-changing political opportunities and challenges. Contextual mapping involves identifying how a political system is organized and how different forces, people, organizations, and ideas shape the political space. This chapter offers tools to better understand the “big picture” in which your advocacy takes place.

Chapter 8: Planning Moment #3—Identifying and Defining Problems

Citizen-centered advocacy is about seeking solutions to problems in the political and policy arena. The starting point is a clear understanding of a problem that is widely and deeply felt by a large community or constituency. This chapter offers tips on how to make sure you have a clearly defined problem as well as how-tos for participatory problem definition with constituency groups. These approaches can be adapted both for groups that have already chosen their issue and groups that are beginning the process of defining their issue.

Chapter 9: Planning Moment #4—Analyzing Problems and Selecting Priority Issues

Effective advocacy requires breaking down a large problem into separate issues in order to identify the policy connections and determine which issues are most compelling for further action. This chapter offers a number of tools and exercises to prioritize and select issues.

Chapter 10: Planning Moment #5—Mapping Advocacy Strategies

Problems and issues have many causes and many possible solutions. Advocacy strategies need to be multidimensional to get at the systemic causes of an issue. It is unlikely that a single organization can carry out a complete strategy addressing all of the causes. Limited resources mean a group must choose which aspect to tackle. This chapter presents a series of tools that help to construct and compare strategies.

Chapter 11: Planning Moment #6—Finding Policy Hooks and Political Angles

Policy hooks connect the solution of your issue to the formal political and policymaking arena. To identify a policy hook, you need information about policies, laws, budgets, and the institutions and procedures that determine their content. There are basics about different political systems and ways that policy is developed and decided that help to guide the identification of entry points for influence. This chapter offers an overview of various policymaking arenas to help guide you in determining the policy hook for your advocacy.

Chapter 12: Planning Moment #7—Forces, Friends, and Foes

Advocacy targets specific decisionmakers and institutions, which generates both friends and enemies. It is important to know who they are and what their power is relative to your solution. This chapter contains various tools for identifying, classifying, and weighing who is at the table and who is under it.

Part Three: Doing Advocacy

While Part Two concentrates on the planning of advocacy, Part Three looks at ways of doing advocacy. The planning and doing are part of a cyclical process in which planning informs action and this action, in turn, informs further planning. The cycle builds a deeper understanding of politics and an improved ability to influence policy. This part of the Guide contains fewer exercises and more stories and tips to inspire activists to be creative in their own contexts.

Chapter 13: Messages and Media—Educating and Persuading

A vital piece of advocacy is a compelling message tailored and disseminated specifically for a defined audience. This chapter covers a variety of approaches for reaching, educating, and persuading audiences by using the mass media and alternative media.

Chapter 14: Outreach and Mobilization

While advocacy should build citizen participation, success also depends on the power that organized numbers of people can wield in the political arena. In this chapter we look at how outreach and mobilization serve to achieve both a policy objective and build citizen power.

Chapter 15: Maneuvering on the Inside—Lobbying and Negotiating

This chapter is about getting to the decisionmaking table and advancing your issue once you get there. Engaging directly in discussions to persuade and convince decisionmakers is an important part of successful advocacy and provides useful lessons about politics and power for citizens.

Chapter 16: Advocacy Leadership

Advocacy requires strong leaders and groups who understand power, people, and process. Advocacy leaders face a perpetual juggling act of promoting collaboration and encouraging new leadership on the one hand, while giving direction and vision on the other. These require different skills and styles. This chapter focuses on the aspects of leadership that facilitate broader participation and organizational collaboration.

Chapter 17: Alliances and Coalitions

Coalitions and alliances can greatly enhance social justice advocacy by bringing together the strength and resources of diverse groups to create a more powerful force for change. But they are difficult to form and sustain. This chapter focuses on their dynamics and ways to strengthen them. We examine how to improve communication, decisionmaking, conflict management, and political accountability.