



# Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit

# Women's Rights Advocacy Toolkit

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Womankind has also produced a **training programme on women's rights advocacy** based on this toolkit, which is available from Womankind's website [www.womankind.org.uk](http://www.womankind.org.uk)

## Acknowledgements

The resources section lists a number of useful toolkits provided by other organisations. In addition to the specific tools which we have referenced from these manuals, they also prompted some of the other ideas used in this document.

## About Womankind Worldwide

Womankind Worldwide is a UK-based charity entirely dedicated to improving women's lives and promoting women's rights across Africa, Asia and Latin America. We work in long term partnerships with 38 organisations in 15 countries and we pride ourselves on our partnership approach. We believe that women are a powerful force for change and we are guided by the women we work with and by what they want to change in their world.

## Womankind Worldwide's partners

With thanks to the following Womankind partners for their contributions to this project and for their ongoing inspirational work to advance women's rights:

**South Africa:** The Women's Legal Centre and Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (TLAC), **Zimbabwe:** the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA) and Women in Politics Support Unit (WiPSU),

**Ghana:** Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), Gender Studies Human Rights Documentation Centre, and International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), **Afghanistan:** the Afghan Women's Network (AWN),

**Peru:** Institute for the Defence of Women's Rights (DEMUS) and Ica Women's Federation (FEPROMU), **Bolivia:** Centre for the Holistic/Full Development of Aymara Women (CDIMA), National Network of Women Working on Media and Communications (Red Ada), **Nepal:** Saathi.

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## ACRONYMS

**AFF** African Feminist Forum  
**APWLD** Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development  
**AWID** Association for Women's Rights in Development  
**AWN** Afghan Women's Network  
**Bpfa** The Beijing Platform for Action 1995  
**CAS** Country Assistance Strategy  
**CAT** Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment 1984  
**CCF** Community Constituency Forum  
**CEDAW** Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979  
**CERD** Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination  
**CMW** International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families  
**CRC** Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989  
**CSO** Civil Society Organisation  
**DAWN** Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era  
**DVA** Domestic Violence Act  
**ECOWAS** Economic Community of West Africa States  
**EU** European Union  
**EWL** European Women's Lobby  
**FEDO** Feminist Dalit Organisation, Nepal  
**FGM/C** Female genital mutilation / cutting  
**FIDA** International Federation of Women Lawyers, Ghana  
**GBA** Gender Budget Auditing  
**GBV** Gender-based Violence  
**GEAR** Gender Equality Architecture Reform campaign  
**GRB** Gender Responsive Budgeting  
**ICCPR** International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966  
**ICESCR** International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966  
**ICPD** International Conference on Population and Development 1994  
**IFIs** International Financial Institutions  
**ILO** International Labour Organisation  
**IMF** International Monetary Fund  
**IPU** Inter-Parliamentary Union  
**KMG** Kembatta Mentti Gezzima, Ethiopia  
**LGBT** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people  
**M&E** Monitoring and Evaluation  
**MDGs** Millennium Development Goals  
**MOWA** Ministry of Women's Affairs  
**MP** Member of Parliament

**NDS** National Development Strategy  
**NGO** Non-Government Organisation  
**PR** Proportional Representation  
**PRS** Poverty Reduction Strategy  
**PRSP** Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper  
**RIPA** Revised Regional Integrated Programme of Action  
**SAARC** The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation  
**SADC** Southern African Development Community  
**SALC** South African Law Commission  
**SAP** Structural Adjustment Programme  
**SAWNET** South Asian Women's Network  
**SIPA SAARC** Integrated Programme of Action  
**SKA** Safai Karmachari Andolan  
**SOA** Sexual Offences Act  
**SRHR** Sexual and reproductive health and rights  
**TCPL** Total consumption poverty line  
**TLAC** Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, South Africa  
**UN** United Nations  
**UNDHR** Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948  
**UNDP** United Nations Development Programme  
**UNFPA** United Nations Population Fund  
**UNGASS** United Nations General Assembly Special Session  
**UNICEF** United Nations Children's Fund  
**UNIFEM** United Nations Fund for Women  
**UN-NGLS** United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service  
**UNSCR UN** Security Council Resolution  
**VAW** Violence against women  
**VAWG** Violence against women and girls  
**WB** World Bank  
**WEDO** Women's Environment and Development Organisation  
**WfC** Women for Change, Zambia  
**WFP** Women on Farms Project  
**WGNRR** Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights  
**WIDE** Women in Development Europe Network  
**WiLDAF** Women in Law and Development in Africa, Ghana  
**WiPSU** Women in Politics Support Unit, Zimbabwe  
**WLC** Women's Legal Centre, South Africa  
**WLSA** Women and Law in South Africa  
**WTO** World Trade Organisation  
**WWW** Women Won't Wait  
**ZANU-PF** Zimbabwe Africa National Union – Patriotic Front  
**ZWLA** Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association

“The hand that rocks the cradle  
should also rock the boat<sup>1</sup>”







Womankind Worldwide has prepared this toolkit because we believe that the denial of women's rights and the extent of inequality between women and men is one of the greatest injustices the world faces. We believe that advocacy, alongside programme work, is a vital way to bring about the change that is so desperately needed.

With our toolkit, we hope to convince advocacy organisations that they can (and should) campaign for women's rights and equality, and to support women's organisations and other members of civil society who want to advocate for change.

## DEFINITIONS

**Advocacy** is a set of organised activities designed to influence the policies and actions of others to achieve change.

Advocacy usually refers to attempts to **change policy and practice**. In most of this toolkit we use examples of advocacy directed at governments or other public bodies, but it can also be directed towards communities or corporations.

Advocacy can also be about **changing decision making processes**, for example to make them more democratic and to ensure that marginalised people are able to participate and influence political agendas.

Advocacy may also **empower people**, so that those who are excluded have the confidence and skills to participate effectively in decision making, and to claim their right to do so.

Advocacy must always be about getting a **change in actions**, not just in understanding. Attempts to raise awareness or educate are possible methods to achieve an advocacy goal, but these will need to lead to a change in behaviour to be effective.

In this toolkit, advocacy is defined broadly as covering the full range of possible methods – **from lobbying to activism**. In **section six**, we look in-depth at these methods.

The term **campaign** is usually used to describe a set of advocacy initiatives – an advocacy project will be a campaign. In this toolkit we will use both advocacy and campaigning to mean the same thing.

## 1. WHY ADVOCACY?

If you give a woman a fish she can feed her family for a day, teach her to fish and she can feed her family for a year, but campaign with her for the rights to the river and her family will have fish for generations<sup>2</sup>.

Meeting women's daily needs through service provision is vital, and will in itself provide space for women to fulfil their own potential. However, the provision of services takes place within the constraints imposed by local, national and international rules and regulations, and in the context of social norms and values which ascribe women particular roles. Through advocacy we can challenge these, and address the root causes of the disadvantages women face.

Organisations promoting women's rights are particularly aware of the need to tackle and change the underlying causes of a problem, whether this is women's exclusion from politics, the gender division of labour which ties women to the home, or the social norms which make women believe they are responsible for being raped.

Advocacy can grow from small beginnings. Project work enables women to join together as they try to change things in their own lives. They, in turn, educate and support others to do the same; from a few actions come many more. As this momentum grows, women's voices get heard more widely and bigger changes can result – within communities and throughout society.

Despite the injustices they face, women around the world are standing up to claim their rights and to fight inequality. Alongside these brave steps, organisations should join with others to push for change nationally and internationally. In this way, we help transform the big picture for women, as well as improve their daily lives.

## 2. ADVOCACY WORKS

A compelling reason for doing advocacy is that it works! With hard work, good planning and a bit of luck you can achieve your goal and bring about change.

Throughout this toolkit, there are examples of successful advocacy resulting in changes which make a tangible difference to women's lives. Some advocates target legal reforms, others aim to empower individual women to change their lives, some work in coalition, others alone, some initiate major campaigns using the media, others run small campaigns focused only on lobbying. What they all share is persistence and the

determination to make a difference. Three examples from Womankind partner organisations show the success that advocacy can have.

**Example** The Albanian Centre for Population and Development and the Independent Forum of Albanian Women worked in coalition with others for five years until the Albanian government finally introduced a Gender Quota Law that mandates all political parties to ensure that 30% of their candidates for election are women. The real success came with the national elections in June 2009 when the percentage of women in Parliament leapt from 7% to 16%.

**Example** In 2009, swift advocacy action by the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) and Afghan Women's Education Centre (AWEC), together with two female parliamentarians, prevented a change in the law which would effectively have legalised child marriage.

**Example** One Ethiopian campaign by Kembatta Mentti Gezzima (KMG) was an amazing success (**see case study, section two**). Prior to KMG's intervention, 97% of villagers said they would have complied with tradition and circumcised their daughters. After the campaign, the figure fell dramatically to 5%. The campaign successfully challenged long held values so that uncircumcised girls were no longer 'despised' in their villages, and encouraged the community to ensure the law against female genital mutilation and cutting was enforced. Importantly, these changes in attitude were reflected in practice, and no circumcision rituals were reported.<sup>3</sup>

Coalitions and international alliances have also achieved changes on the international stage. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 was a ground-breaking development which provided hope and opportunities to advocates around the world. The newly created UN Women is the product of years of advocacy by women's groups globally. (See **section eight** on international processes).

### 3. FEMINIST ADVOCACY

Women's rights or gender advocacy is, at its simplest, advocacy to promote women's rights and gender equality.

**Gender equality** is the situation where women and men are recognised as equal and are treated equally with the same status, power, resources, responsibilities and opportunities for fulfilling their potential.

**Women's rights** are basic rights and freedoms that all women and girls are entitled to as human beings. The concept builds on the notion of human rights which are shared by all women, men, girls and boys, and which are enshrined in international agreements and law. The central concept of rights is that every individual is entitled to them equally, whatever their status in society. The notion of women's rights started to be used because of the traditional bias against the exercise of women's and girls' rights in favour of men and boys.<sup>4</sup> It was seen that, in the context of a society where women and men had unequal power, women's rights needed to be specifically recognised and fought for.

Many women and men advocating for gender equality and women's rights define themselves as feminist. There is no single definition of feminism as it is a political movement and therefore any definition becomes part of a political dialogue. Feminism is broadly about an increase in women's power relative to men's. It analyses each individual issue or problem in the context of a set of power relationships between women and men.

'Advocacy must be based on an analysis of what needs to be changed and why... this analysis must be feminist because only feminism gives an analysis of patriarchy and how it is linked to the structures and relationships of power between men and women that perpetuate violence, poverty — the crises that confront us.' Peggy Antrobus, Founder of DAWN, a leading feminist network in the global South<sup>5</sup>

Feminist advocacy explicitly aims to challenge unequal power relations between men and women and end the unequal distribution of power and resources that excludes women and other marginalised groups. This requires bringing about changes in:<sup>6</sup>

- Who gets what – the distribution and control of resources
- Who does what – the division of labour
- Who decides what – decision-making power
- Who sets the agenda – the power to determine whose issues/priorities come to the table for discussion.

Changes are needed to both the ideologies that justify and sustain gender inequality (the beliefs, attitudes and practices) and the institutions that reproduce unequal power between women and men – the family, community, state, market, education, health, law etc.<sup>7</sup>

A better understanding of power will challenge you to think more carefully about what change you want to achieve through your advocacy and what methods to use. The next section will explore this in more detail.

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1 African Proverb

2 Adapted by Jessica Woodroffe from a traditional saying.

3 Haile Gabriel Dagne, "Ethiopia: Social Dynamics of Abandonment of Harmful Practices – Experiences in Four Locations", Special Series on Social Norms and Harmful Practices, Innocenti Working Paper No. 2009-07. Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2009.

4 See Fran P. Hosken, 'Towards a Definition of Women's Rights' in *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 2. (May, 1981), pp. 1–10

5 Quoted in AWID - Association for Women's Rights in Development, "An Advocacy Guide for Feminists", *Young Women and Leadership Series*, 2003.

6 Aruna Rao & David Kelleher, 'Unravelling Institutionalised Gender Inequality', *Gender at Work*, 2002

7 Srilatha Battiwala, 'Women's Empowerment in South Asia – Concepts and Practices', *FAO/ASPBAE*, 1992

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

In this toolkit we will:

- Help you understand how power affects your advocacy
- Guide you through the process of planning your advocacy campaign
- Give you ideas on how best to carry out your advocacy
- Suggest how to relate to national and international processes in your advocacy
- Provide you with suggestions of more resources

**Important: You don't need to read this toolkit from start to finish – use the bits that are useful to you.**

**This toolkit is intended both for advocacy organisations that want to work more on women's rights or gender equality, and for women's organisations that want to do more advocacy.**

**Good planning is not a tick-box exercise that you should complete and then file away. Very few organisations would do all the elements suggested in this toolkit in full. Decide which bits of the advocacy planning process you most need to focus on (section three will help with this). If you don't have many resources then do less....and do it better.**

**There are no right answers. This toolkit aims to share experiences, suggest ways forward, and provoke debate. It is vital that you use your own experiences, instincts and, in particular, your knowledge of your own national or local context to shape the advocacy work you wish to do.**

## SECTION 2. UNDERSTANDING POWER

- WHAT POWER IS AND HOW IT IS EXERCISED
- HOW AN UNDERSTANDING OF POWER SHOULD INFLUENCE YOUR ADVOCACY GOALS AND METHODS

## SECTION 3. INTRODUCTION TO PLANNING

- REASONS TO PLAN
- THE PLANNING CYCLE

## SECTION 4. WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM
- THE EXTERNAL CONTEXT
- IDENTIFYING AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

## SECTION 5. YOUR ROLE IN MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

- KNOWING YOUR RESOURCES
- DEFINING YOUR STRATEGY
- ACTION PLANNING

Now you have finished your strategy and planning, Section 6 will consider the methods that you will use

## SECTION 6. ADVOCACY METHODS

- HOW TO CARRY OUT YOUR DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES

Section 7 and 8 examine the context in which we work and how this will impact on your advocacy

## SECTION 7. NATIONAL PROCESSES

- AN OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICY MAKING PROCESSES
- DIFFERENT WAYS OF ENGAGING WITH THEM

## SECTION 8. INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

- WHY INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS MAY BE RELEVANT TO YOUR ADVOCACY
- HOW TO USE INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS, PROCESSES AND DATA TO FRAME YOUR ADVOCACY WORK
- AN OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICY MAKING PROCESSES
- HOW TO INFLUENCE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Section 9 signposts helpful resources which you may wish to consult for further learning or information as you make your way through the toolkit.

## Using the icons

Throughout the toolkit icons are used to help you navigate your way.



### Women's Rights icon

Most of the toolkit is relevant whatever you are campaigning on. However, campaigning on women's rights can present its own challenges. We have therefore included specific ideas relevant to this work; both where you see this icon and throughout the text.



### Tools icon

Some basic tools which many organisations use have been included in the toolkit in case they are useful for you. We have also provided links to websites which may be of use.



### Tips and Caution icon

Alongside the basic ideas are tips and caution – some of these may seem complicated – only use them if they are helpful to you.



### Reality check icon

These are questions designed to help you pause and reflect on your advocacy planning process and the effectiveness of your strategy.



### Strategic choice icon

These are questions designed to help you make strategic choices about where to focus your advocacy efforts.

### Example

### Example icon

Examples are included from [Womankind partners and many others](#) and will look like this

There is also an imaginary case study running through sections four to six (in [red](#)) intended to illustrate the key points being made.



**This section will cover:**

- What power is and how it is exercised
- How an understanding of power should influence your advocacy goals and methods





# 1. DIFFERENT KINDS OF POWER

## 1.1 HOW IS POWER EXERCISED?

**Power** can be understood both as something negative to do with exercising control over others and maintaining the status quo, and as something positive linked to people's capacity and agency to drive social change.

### **Some power is formal**

Power is most commonly associated with the state and formal political institutions. Laws and legal processes create a formal system for the exercise of this power.

Most advocacy by CSOs is directed at this formal or visible type of power. Advocacy is seen as a way to use existing power structures to persuade those with power to make changes to legislation, policies or the allocation of resources. Tools such as lobbying, media work and public campaigning are used to influence the actions of those in government.

### **Some power is hidden**

Un-elected and un-accountable groups and institutions can also be powerful, such as big corporations. These groups have hidden or informal power to influence the formal decision-making processes and can determine what gets discussed, who sits around the table, and even what is decided. This often results in the concerns of less powerful groups being excluded. Increasingly CSO advocacy has targeted those who try to influence decision makers, such as corporate lobby groups.

More fundamentally, some advocacy is aimed at exposing these hidden processes and opening up decision making processes so that those who have been excluded can have a voice.

### **Some power is invisible**

The least well understood way in which power operates is when it is invisible. Values, beliefs and attitudes, and cultural norms and practices, all reinforce the status quo and can cause people to accept their powerlessness and even blame themselves for it, or fail to see that their situation could be different.

For example, despite being against the law, the practice of dowry (the payment in cash or/and kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family) is still widespread in parts of South Asia. Laws (in the formal arena of power) prohibiting the practice have not brought about the change required in practice. Laws are not enforced both because

powerful groups with 'hidden' power do not see it as an important issue or in their interests to enforce the law, and because strong social norms mean most women themselves may accept the practice.

An analysis of different forms of power – formal, hidden and invisible – suggests that unless women themselves are able to critically analyse their situation, are aware of their rights, and can mobilise collectively to claim them, changes in laws or budgets will not necessarily lead to changes in women's lives. For advocacy to have a truly lasting and transformative effect it needs to go hand in hand with interventions designed to:

- **Transform decision making processes** by exposing the influence of un-elected powerful groups and open up decision making processes to make them more democratic, transparent and inclusive, for example, of women's groups and others representing marginalised women
- **Strengthen the power of excluded groups** so that they can claim a place at the decision-making table and influence the agenda, for example through community organising
- **Empower marginalised people**, for example through consciousness-raising and rights awareness, so that women and men are able to critically question norms and practices, recognise their own self-worth and their power, and envisage alternatives.

## 1.2 WHERE IS POWER EXERCISED?

Power is often understood as occurring in the 'public' arena. But a key part of gender analysis is recognising that power relationships occur not just in political fora or the work place, but also within the household and between individuals who are a 'family'.

Three different levels of power interact in women's lives<sup>8</sup>:

- The **public** realm of power – workplace, politics, legal system
- The **private** realm of power – relationships within the family, including within marriage and sexual relationships
- The **intimate** realm of power – self-confidence, self-esteem, self-image

The rules of the public realm of power are designed by and for men, so changing the rules in the public arena is vital, but it is not enough. Even if women are formally entitled to equal opportunities in the

workplace or political life, their lack of 'intimate' power, caused by low levels of confidence, may act as a barrier to claiming these entitlements. Similarly, women may not use the legal redress available to them if cultural values lead them to believe they are to blame for violations against them. Advocacy which aims to promote women's equality through, for example, equal pay or representation in parliament, will ultimately fail if it does not also address women's lack of power in private and intimate spheres which prevents them from seizing opportunities.

### **Barriers to women's access to their rights<sup>9</sup>**

Take the example of rape – while the laws of the land may have been reformed to give women access to justice, there are many cultural barriers she must cross to reach it. Firstly, the victim's own belief systems must be transformed to recognise that this is a crime of violence, and not something to be hidden for fear of being shamed or shunned by her family or community. Then, her family must support, rather than hinder her, in filing a complaint with the police and making the matter more public. The attitudes of the police must be changed to avoid further harassment or shaming of the victim, or to prevent their aligning themselves with the rapist, if he is from a more powerful group, and refusing to take up the case. She and her family need the support of the larger community, whose traditional taboos against making such matters public need to be altered. Then, she must have the resources – in terms of time, money, etc. – to seek legal assistance. And finally, legal services or courts must not only be available, but provide appropriate services to the victim – such as closed hearings and sensitive judges.

## **2. IMPLICATIONS OF A POWER ANALYSIS FOR YOUR ADVOCACY**

Recognising power relations and the need to challenge them will influence your advocacy goals, the types of interventions you prioritise, and the methods you use. It will also highlight the importance of careful risk analysis and management to improve the safety and security of women's rights advocates. The lessons below will help you to:

- Consider your own power and how you use it in relation to those you work with
- Ensure your methods do not perpetuate or legitimise unequal power
- Assess whether your aims are the right ones

## 2.1 HOW YOU USE YOUR POWER

Taking a feminist approach to advocacy means being reflective about how you use your own power, including questioning your legitimacy and who you are accountable to. When deciding on your advocacy methods and approaches, consider the following questions:

### **Is your advocacy:**

- rooted in an analysis of power relations?
- grounded in women's experiences and the struggles of women's movements?
- carried out in partnership with women and women's organisations?
- people-centred – empowering women and girls to advocate on their own behalf for their rights and interests?
- respectful of diversity and difference among women?
- committed to solidarity and building alliances among social change groups and activists (for example, collaborating with advocates of human rights, LGBTI rights, economic justice, the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, progressive men)?
- accountable, transparent, and inclusive?
- committed to crediting women's contributions in achieving change?

One way to reflect on how you use your own power is by considering whether your advocacy is 'with', 'by', or 'for' the people affected.

### **Advocacy *by* the people**

Advocacy can be led and undertaken by the women who are directly affected. They have the most direct and holistic understanding of the problem and have the most legitimate voice. Outsiders, including development NGOs, can have a role in supporting these affected communities to be their own advocates. However they must be careful not to control the process or use their knowledge as power. Leadership, agenda-setting and decision making should stay in the community.

### **Advocacy *for* the people**

People and organisations not directly affected by the issue, including staff and supporters of NGOs in the global North, can do advocacy and campaigning on behalf of those who are affected. This may have advantages where the advocates have more influence on or access to targets. It may also be necessary if human rights abuses mean that it is dangerous for those affected to undertake advocacy themselves.

This kind of advocacy will have more legitimacy the more that affected women are genuinely consulted on aims and objectives and advocacy methods. Any differences of opinion should be openly discussed.

However, it will not directly empower the women affected and so will ultimately have less impact on underlying power relations.

### **Advocacy with the people**

Increasingly alliances are being made between affected communities and external advocacy organisations. This kind of collaboration between those with legitimacy and first-hand experience and those with access to power can be beneficial. However it is easy for the latter group to dominate and a real alliance will require joint decision making rather than more tokenistic participation by affected women in front-line activities organised by NGOs.



**TIP** Over the last twenty years many donor governments and international institutions have responded to criticism by creating spaces where a small number of groups are invited to participate, for example by being on a delegation to a UN conference. This kind of access to powerful decision makers can seem very appealing but the agenda is usually already set and civil society participants often have little power to control the outcome. Participation in these spaces can divert precious advocacy resources which could be used for something else, and the access may come at the price of forgoing criticism of the decision maker.



**WOMEN'S RIGHTS** Remember that when you are challenging power there are risks involved, including the risk of violence. Risks are particularly pronounced for women's rights advocates because of the challenges our advocacy poses to accepted gender roles and norms, and to established power hierarchies. It is important to take steps during the process of planning your advocacy to mitigate this risk and ensure your safety and that of fellow activists (see **section 5, 2.4**) for more detail).

## **2.2 WHAT YOU ARE AIMING TO CHANGE**

An understanding of power will shape not only the advocacy methods and approaches you adopt, but also the goals and objectives you decide to focus on. Challenging unequal gender power relations requires tackling the root causes of inequality, not only the symptoms. A useful distinction has been made between women's "practical" and "strategic" interests, also sometimes referred to as the distinction between women's condition and their position.

## Strategic interests and practical needs

Practical gender interests are the immediate needs of women such as access to food, water, shelter, and child care.

Strategic gender interests are the longer-term changes needed to transform women's status in society and end the existing unequal relationships between women and men. These could include women having more control over when and whether to have children, greater voice and influence in political decision making, or a more equal distribution of unpaid care work between women and men.

Advocating for changes which meet women's practical needs is important but may only address the symptoms of women's inequality with men (such as women's lack of access to resources). Achieving women's strategic interests gets to the heart of the problem and can empower women and move towards an end to gender inequality.

For most feminists, the ultimate goal is not only to win women the same privileges and power as men, but to change the nature of the world we live in. For example, advocacy on women's political participation should aim not only to achieve equal representation for women within formal political institutions, but to change the culture and practice of political institutions so that power is more equally shared and decision-making is more democratic, participatory, transparent, inclusive and accountable. Achieving these changes will require a long-term approach, with lots of stepping stones along the way!

The case study on the next page about changing attitudes towards female genital mutilation illustrates how an understanding of power can shape the planning and design of advocacy projects.

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8. VeneKlasen, L. and Valerie Miller, A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation, 2007

9 Extract from Batiwala, S. 2008. Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements, Association of Women's Rights in Development: 15-16



In Ethiopia, whilst attitudes towards Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) are changing, it remains a widespread practice throughout the country. Kembatta Mentti Gezzima (KMG) an Ethiopian indigenous woman focused NGO, and INGO Womankind Worldwide, implemented an advocacy project in the Kembatta/Tembaro Zone from 2000. The project illustrates many of the factors to consider in **advocacy planning**.

FGM/C is a violation of human rights under international and Ethiopian law. The current constitution and criminal code acknowledge the grave injuries and suffering caused to women and children by harmful traditional practices. Yet despite the law the majority of women have undergone some form of FGM/C. The laws are not enough, and just force the practice underground. By **understanding the current policy position**, KMG recognised that what needed changing was not the law, but its enforcement. Moreover, they understood the **social context** enough to know that law enforcement would not be successful without a change in the prevailing community attitudes which continued to support FGM/C.

The **aim** of the campaign was to reduce the number of circumcision rituals taking place. The **objectives** were to empower girls to make choices about FGM/C, change attitudes among the community so that members would speak out against the practice, and get the law enforced by the police and judiciary.

The campaign was based on an **understanding of power in the community**. Girls' own power had to be increased, while the hidden power of social norms perpetuating the practice had to be challenged.

The strategy was to create a wave of opposition to the practice. Four groups (below) were engaged in awareness-raising and sensitisation, with the aim of encouraging them to change their own practice as well as to put pressure on other groups to change theirs.

### Targets:

- Girls and young women - empowered to resist FGM/C
- Parents - not to practice FGM/C on their daughters
- Community leaders - to speak out against, rather than for, the practice
- Law makers and enforcers - to implement the law

A combination of **methods** was used. Firstly, direct awareness raising and empowerment of girls was central to the strategy. Secondly, all members of the community - parents, community leaders and law enforcers – were brought together to reflect on the adverse implications of the practice and to identify their own proposals for change. This process was used to create peer and community pressure to influence parents, leaders and law enforcers. Finally, community leaders were targeted to put pressure on law enforcers.

The role of **influencers** in this strategy was central, with each target group also being seen as an influencer of other target groups. Many of the participants were elders, religious leaders, leaders of the edir (traditional community organisations) and government officials (predominantly male) who had been identified as the drivers of change. After five years of work by KMG, nearly all the edirs declared that FGM/C should be abandoned and drew up a list of

## Case Study – Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Ethiopia

sanctions. The threat of expulsion from the edir for those who failed to comply proved an effective incentive for others to act.

Uncircumcised girls were especially effective at influencing peers, parents, and communities. Girls were also more able to resist pressure from their parents both because community pressure was increasingly behind them, and because their parents knew the activity was illegal. Different **methods reinforced one another**. The law was an important component, providing legitimacy to those opposing the practice. High profile cases of police arresting violators of the law were also useful deterrents.

The project demonstrated how important it is to understand **what motivates your targets**. Communities were not initially interested in the concept of human rights and wanted to see practical change. KMG worked to meet women's practical needs through the provision of services, so gaining their trust, before raising issues around rights. Birth attendants also explained why FGM/C would have adverse practical implications for women giving birth. However, it was also found that introducing a human rights context provided communities with alternative perspectives and transformed the discussion. It also encouraged genuine reflection on **gender roles** and generated interesting and important discussion within the community about other traditional practices which harm women and children.

A key element of success was found to be the **framing** of the message through the involvement of Dr Bogalech (Boge) Gebre from KMG who was brought up in Kembatta and was circumcised herself as a young woman.

Her passion and enthusiasm convinced many community members to view FGM/C as a violation of human rights.

The campaign was based on a good understanding of the **local power structures** and awareness-raising activities were built on existing community structures. They used a tool called Community Conversations where discussions brought together a wide range of people, including different social groups, religious and community leaders, and local government officials. The result was a mass of people prepared to speak against the practice. They, in turn, created public pressure which helped more families to abandon the FGM/C convention, and put pressure on law enforcers. **Activities** included community events and rallies, public weddings for uncircumcised girls, and public declarations. Working with local communities on these activities required relatively few resources, but a lot of time and commitment from KMG.

**Involving targets** in finding solutions and developing policy proposals was an interesting tactic. This meant that sub-district and district government officials who had been involved in the Community Conversation processes were obliged, but also more willing, to take action to enforce the consensus decisions which emerged.