Networking for Policy Change
An Advocacy Training Manual

The POLICY Project

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Introduction

The follow up [to the ICPD] is in the hands of the people. We have to be careful we don't let governments off the hook.

Sandra Kabir, Founder/President
Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition

Purpose of the Manual

It is through advocacy—a set of targeted actions in support of a specific cause—that a supportive and self-sustaining environment for family planning and reproductive health goals can be created. This training manual was prepared to help representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other formal groups of civil society form and maintain advocacy networks and develop effective family planning/reproductive health (FP/RH) advocacy skills. The manual's tools and approaches can be used to affect FP/RH policy decisions at the international, national, regional, and local levels.

The power of participatory processes to advance family planning and reproductive health goals is reflected in the success of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). At the ICPD, 179 countries reached agreement on a program of action. This striking outcome was the result of a lengthy preparatory process that benefited from NGO collaboration and the participation of diverse groups representing the interests of women, the environment, family health providers, and religious organizations. Numerous official country delegations to the ICPD included NGO representatives who participated in drafting successive versions of the program of action and the ICPD final report.

To assist countries in furthering FP/RH goals and recommendations, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) established the POLICY Project. POLICY's mandate supports the creation of a supportive environment for family planning and reproductive health programs through the promotion of participatory policy processes and population policies that respond to client needs.

To help ensure that governments follow through on the commitments they made in Cairo, the POLICY Project provides technical assistance and training to NGOs and networks to help their representatives act as forceful advocates during the policy formulation and implementation process. By serving as effective agents for change, these representatives can ensure that victories are sustained. They can hold decision makers accountable over time. In this way, they help make certain that appropriate policies, laws, programs, and resource allocations are in place to enable men and women to make substantive choices about the size and well-being of their families.

How the Manual Is Organized

The manual is based on the principle that advocacy strategies and methods can be learned. It is organized around a well-developed model—tested over time and within diverse cultures—for accomplishing advocacy objectives. The components of the model are the same regardless of the advocacy goals—whether for a campaign to secure a national law protecting women's rights, to increase the range of contraceptive methods available, or to secure local funding for a new primary school.

The building blocks of advocacy are the formation of networks, the identification of political opportunities, and the organization of campaigns. The manual includes a section on each of these building blocks, with specific subjects presented in individual units. Each section begins with a general introduction to the topic. Units within each section contain background notes, learning objectives, and handouts. The approximate time required to complete each unit is indicated as are the needed materials and preparation. Within each unit, activities such as role-plays, discussions, and brainstorming are presented to help participants internalize their learning. Each unit concludes with a brief summary and a preview of the next unit.

While the manual can be used in its entirety, it is designed to be used in sections depending on the particular needs of the network. For example, if a group of NGOs has already formed a network and has decided it needs a better understanding of both the policy process and how to become skilled advocates, a workshop could be organized on Sections II and III. To take another example, if NGOs are interested in forming an advocacy network or making their existing network function more effectively, it would be appropriate to organize a workshop on Section I. By focusing only on the introduction to each section and the background notes for each unit, networks can also use the manual as a general reference on advocacy without undertaking any specific training activities.

Training Methodology

This manual is based on the following adult learning principles:

- The learning is self-directed.
- It fills an immediate need and is highly participatory.
- Learning is experiential (i.e., participants and the trainer learn from one another).
- Time is allowed for reflection and corrective feedback.
- A mutually respectful environment is created between trainer and participants.
- A safe atmosphere and comfortable environment are provided.

Training techniques used in this manual include the following:

Presentations - activities conducted by the facilitator or a resource specialist to convey information, theories, or principles;

Case Study Scenarios - written descriptions of real-life situations used for analysis and discussion;

Role-Plays - two or more individuals enacting parts in scenarios as related to a training topic;

Simulations - enactments of real-life situations; and

Small Group Discussions - participants sharing experiences and ideas or solving a problem together.

Role of the Facilitator

It is the responsibility of the facilitator to present each unit's background material and activities as clearly as possible. Skills used to enhance communication include the following:

Nonverbal Communication

- Maintain eye contact with everyone in the group when speaking. Try not to favor certain participants.
- Move around the room without distracting the group. Avoid pacing or addressing the group from a place where you cannot be easily seen.
- React to what people say by nodding, smiling, or engaging in other actions that show you are listening.
- Stand in front of the group, particularly at the beginning of the session. It is important to appear relaxed and at the same time be direct and confident.

Verbal Communication

- Ask open-ended questions that encourage responses. If a participant responds with a simple yes or no, ask "Why do you say that?"
- Ask other participants if they agree with a statement someone makes.
- Be aware of your tone of voice. Speak slowly and clearly.
- Avoid using slang or other "special" language.
- Be sure that participants talk more than you do.
- Let participants answer each others' questions. Say "Does anyone have an answer to that question?"
- Encourage participants to speak and provide them with positive reinforcement.
- Paraphrase statements in your own words. You can check your understanding of what participants are saying and reinforce statements.
- Keep the discussion moving forward and in the direction you want. Watch for disagreements and draw conclusions.
- Reinforce statements by sharing a relevant personal experience. You might say "That reminds me of something that happened last year..."
- Summarize the discussion. Be sure that everyone understands the main points.

Effective facilitation includes the following:

Setting the Learning Climate

- Read each unit and review all materials and activities before each training session so that you are fully comfortable with the content and process.
- Start on time and clearly establish yourself as the facilitator by calling the group together.
- Organize all the materials you need for the session and place them close at hand, stay within the suggested time frames.
- Gain participants' attention and interest by creating comfort between yourself and them.
- Anticipate questions.
- Prepare responses and examples to help move the discussion forward.

Presenting the Objectives

- Provide a link between previous units and the current one.
- Use the background notes that begin each unit to introduce the topic under consideration.
- Inform participants of what they will do during the session to achieve the unit's objectives.

Initiating the Learning Experience

- Introduce, as appropriate, an activity in which participants experience a situation relevant to the objectives of the unit.
- Let participants use the experience as a basis for discussion during the next step.
- If you begin a unit with a presentation, follow it with a more participatory activity.

Reflecting on the Experience

- Guide discussion of the experience.
- Encourage participants to share their reactions to the experience.
- Engage participants in problem-solving discussions.
- See that participants receive feedback on their work from each other and from you.

Discussing Lessons Learned

- Ask participants to identify key points that emerged from the experience and the discussion.
- Help participants draw general conclusions from the experience. Allow time for reflection.

Applying Lessons Learned to Real-life Situations

- Encourage participants to discuss how the information learned in the activity will be helpful in their own work.
- Discuss problems participants might experience in applying or adapting what they have learned to their own or different situations.
- Discuss what participants might do to help overcome difficulties they encounter when applying their new learning.

Providing Closure

- Briefly summarize the activities at the end of each unit.
- Refer to the objective(s) and discuss whether and how they were achieved.
- Discuss what else is needed for better retention or further learning in the subject area.
- Provide linkages between the unit and the rest of the workshop.
- Help participants leave with positive feelings about what they have learned.

Covering All the Details

- Prepare all training materials (resources for research, reference materials, handouts, visual aids, and supplies) and deal with logistics (venue, tea breaks, and audio-visual equipment) in advance.
- Clarify everyone's roles and areas of responsibility if other facilitators are helping to conduct the training. Meet with the co-facilitators daily to monitor the progress of the workshop and to provide each other with feedback.
- Ask participants to evaluate the training both daily and at the end of the workshop.
- Plan follow-up activities and determine additional training needs.