Guidance Note 3

Advocacy

1. Advocacy and its protection value

Practiced by most stakeholders in humanitarian crises, advocacy is a set of activities aimed to promote change to bring policy, practice or law in compliance with international standards. In situations of internal displacement, advocacy is a vital tool to influence decision makers and stakeholders to adopt practices and policies that ensure the protection of internally displaced persons.

Advocacy is a central building block of most comprehensive protection strategies. If strategically combined with other protection activities, such as information dissemination, monitoring or negotiation, it can greatly contribute to transform underlying systems and structures that affect IDPs.

2. Key considerations for an advocacy strategy to improve protection

Most of the work of developing an advocacy strategy takes place before taking public action on the issue. An **effective advocacy strategy**[1] **includes:**

- Determining the objectives of advocacy;
- Identifying the best target groups to address and focal points within these groups; and
- Determining the modalities and the tactics for the advocacy activities.

2.1 Objectives

- Set **realistic** and **clear objectives**. This will require breaking apart a specific protection objective into a set of sub-objectives to be achieved through different and complementary mechanisms. For instance:
  - To define the desired outcome, it is essential to **become thoroughly familiar with the issue of concern,** including legal, policy and other issues related to the protection risks at hand. *Protection monitoring* can be very useful to identify protection trends and patterns, which may inform advocacy activities and contribute to measure the impact of advocacy efforts on the lives of those concerned *(see Part IV.1)*; 📖
  - When facing a particular protection risk, such as lack of access to public services because IDPs lack documentation, one should try to figure out **what is the expected change**. Too often we focus our advocacy efforts on protection concerns without promoting the best solution. A good understanding of the local legal and justice system, including the *traditional justice system* where it exists, is important to advocate for effective solutions to situations of inequality or conflict (*see Part V.10*). 📖
  - **IDPs' real-life experiences** will be central to determine both the nature of the problem and the potential solution(s). **Describing the problem** and asking different members of the communities to come up with possible solutions is a good way to build a larger constituency to support advocacy efforts. Therefore, while continuing to document and discuss the relevant protection concerns, it is important to **involve others in finding creative solutions to the problem**. ▶▶

- **Other variables, such as sex, ethnicity, socio-economic class, or disability** may also influence discrimination, violence or other protection risks experienced by IDPs**.** It is thus necessary to analyze the specific risks and needs of particular individuals or groups and build them into the formulation of the advocacy objectives.
- **Two organizational goals** should always be part of the advocacy strategy:
  - **Increasing community participation:** Reach out to individuals or groups, including IDPs and members of other affected populations, who are not actively advocating for the same objectives but who would have an interest in the issue. Give them an opportunity to work on something they care about *(see Part IV.10)*. 📖
  - **Promoting an inter-agency approach to the advocacy strategy:** Promote the participation of other protection-mandated organizations as well as those in other clusters/sectors who have shared concerns. Civil society groups and national institutions should also be involved to the greatest extent possible.
- Try to reach **agreement about potential areas of compromise and *non-negotiable* issues**. Those involved must be willing to abandon advocacy activities if the only way to achieve part of the plan is to compromise on the non-negotiable issues. Otherwise, if advocacy activities take off without a clear vision of the desired outcomes, there is a risk of achieving undesirable solutions, making existing problems worse, or creating new ones for the IDPs or the other affected population (*see Part II* on team work and negotiations). 📖

2.2 Advocacy targets

- An advocacy strategy for protection should target **stakeholders who have or can have influence on the protection concerns of IDPs or other affected populations with the aim of bringing about a change**. Different target groups can be:
  - **National decision and policy makers**, such as national authorities from the executive, legislative and judicial branches, community leaders, both official and de-facto, non-State actors, rebel and paramilitary groups;
  - **Local actors and institutions that might play a key role in achieving the intended objective,** for example, if the objective is eliminating discrimination in accessing public services, such as health or education, key actors will be doctors, nurses, school masters or teachers;
  - **Individuals or groups who might have an interest in the issue at stake and who would join and strengthen existing advocacy efforts**, such as IDPs and members of other affected communities, local civil-society groups, the business sector and the media. As discussed above, much of the early part of an advocacy strategy involves building community support for the issues at stake; and
  - **The international community**, which may include foreign governments with regional and/or domestic influence (advocacy activities are usually conducted via their embassies in the country, consulates or other offices, such as government development agencies), regional and international courts, relevant human rights bodies and mechanisms, humanitarian organizations, such as the United Nations, and NGOs.
- **Determine who has the power to make the desired decision** and understand how that person **relates to other people in the community's power structure**. If there are various decision-makers, discuss the relationship among them with your partners, as well as your and their history of contact with them. This will help identify who, among advocacy partners, is the best placed to address each interlocutor.
- **Identify particular authorities or institutions that might be closer to your views or objectives.** Governments or authority structures are not homogeneous, and it is helpful to develop a relationship with a broad range of actors who could eventually support the relevant advocacy goals, either by influencing key decision-makers from within their own institutions or by providing useful advice on how to influence change.

2.3 Key approaches to advocacy for protection purposes

a.   *Formal versus informal advocacy*

- *Informal advocacy activities* take place all the time in humanitarian crises in the form of **talks** and **discussions** among key stakeholders. Even though it might not be formally acknowledged, humanitarian workers, particularly those with a protection mandate, members of the affected populations and local authorities spend most of their time advocating with their respective interlocutors. Each discussion, even at the most informal level, can have an impact on other stakeholders. Given the political sensitivity of IDP protection advocacy work, the potential effect of all positions and activities undertaken, even at the informal level, must be carefully considered at all times.

- *Formal advocacy activities*, which can be carried out through **position statements, analytical documents or letters to the authorities, humanitarian organizations and community leaders**, help ensure accuracy in the wording of advocacy messages, thereby countering rumours; they can also have a multiplying effect, since they can be widely disseminated among other stakeholders.

b.   *Soft versus hard advocacy*

- *"Soft" advocacy activities*, such as **awareness-raising, training activities and quiet diplomacy**, are usually the preferred option *to persuade* stakeholders to introduce change or expand the use of good practices for the protection of IDPs. It can also be useful *to mobilize* other individuals or groups in support of advocacy efforts for a specific cause. Such activities are usually preferred in long-term advocacy strategies and for situations that require social change. When there are serious protection risks, the sole use of soft advocacy activities is insufficient.

- *"Hard" advocacy,* consisting of stronger persuasion methods such as **public reports, press releases, personal testimonies and denunciation letters, even if confidential,** should be used when a stronger approach is required. It can be effective in *denouncing* corruption, discrimination or harmful treatment of IDPs and the other affected populations.

  The use of hard advocacy should be determined on a case-by-case basis. It could disrupt dialogue with key stakeholders, prompt a denial of humanitarian access to vital areas, or heighten the risks to the affected populations or humanitarian staff. The decision should thus be carefully weighed against the urgency and seriousness of the protection concerns. If it is determined that hard advocacy should be used, do so in a timely manner, before the situation becomes too grave or the damage done is irreparable.

c.   *Quiet versus public interventions*

- *Quiet advocacy*, such as **quiet diplomacy for the transfer of land to displaced persons, or confidential letters denouncing discrimination against individuals**, can allow authorities and other relevant stakeholders to take corrective action and "save face"; they can also help maintain frank but discreet communication with both sides in a conflict. Humanitarian actors must preserve impartiality and neutrality to ensure continued dialogue, access and open channels of cooperation.[2] At times, this may prevent them from making public statements on protection concerns. Perceived silence from the humanitarian community may discourage local advocacy groups from undertaking their own advocacy efforts, as they might feel isolated and therefore at greater risk.[3] At the same time, the perception that specific humanitarian actors might not be raising protection concerns with the relevant stakeholder risks undermining the trust of the local population, who may cease to regard humanitarian actors as impartial.

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[2] Proponents of this view hold that a protection advocacy role is more the function of the media and human rights NGOs, such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch. See discussion in: *Protect or Neglect? Toward a More Effective United Nations Approach to the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, an evaluation by Simon Bagshaw and Diane Paul, The Brookings Institution-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement and the United Nations, OCHA-IDD, November 2004, p. 40.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 42.

- **Public advocacy**, if used carefully, can be effective in improving the protection of IDPs. It includes a wide range of **"soft" public advocacy activities** that can enhance protection for IDPs, **such as public-awareness campaigns on human rights and sensitization of communities to IDP returns**. They can be instrumental in raising the profile of communities at risk of displacement or human rights violations, promoting awareness of the consequences of displacement and the rights of IDPs, and encouraging the involvement of civil society, and the commitment of the international community to address such issues.

2.4 Key considerations for the implementation of an advocacy strategy[4]

In selecting the right approach to deliver advocacy messages, it is important to refer to and apply attitudes and skills presented in Part II of this Handbook. In addition, we should:

- **Watch for potential risks to persons of concern and humanitarian staff**. Because internal displacement usually unfolds in the midst of tension, violence and volatility, it is important to assess the potential consequences of the different approaches. In the case of individual advocacy initiatives, it is vital to ensure victim safety, maintain confidentiality and respect the wishes of the victim regarding advocacy action on his/her behalf. It is essential to elicit feedback from persons of concern about the proposed advocacy actions.
- **Calculate the timing to intervene in light of the expected impact.** Reversing a finalized decision is always far more challenging and unlikely to happen in the short term. Try to launch advocacy campaigns to influence the decision-makers before a final decision has been made.
- **Identify agencies or groups in other communities or countries that have undertaken a similar advocacy strategy**. A large number of operational partners and civil-society groups can provide valuable information about their experiences to strengthen the advocacy strategy. Some of them might also be instrumental in influencing the government response.
- **Build community support in the early part of the strategy.** Plan to concentrate efforts on direct contact with individuals and small groups at the beginning of the strategy to inform and reinforce the overall advocacy campaign from the outset. This will also leave time for more substantive activities during the later stages of the strategy.
- **Do not assume that the other interlocutors are knowledgeable about the issues.** Be aware that the target audience will probably not have the same in-depth understanding of the issue at hand as the humanitarian actors. Given that, formulate advocacy tools, documents and messages that enable the target audience to understand the protection issue at hand. If necessary, develop an information plan about the problem or concern that will explain the desired outcome, address possible objections to change, and identify potential sources of support (*see Part IV.6*). 📖
- **Understand what each interlocutor can or cannot do for the relevant issues** you pursue through advocacy. Avoid overwhelming your target interlocutors with requests that are beyond their control or area of influence. Mobilize them to take concrete actions and maintain motivation and commitment.
- **Formulate effective advocacy messages.** Such messages have two parts: an appeal on the merits ("this issue is important because…") and an appeal to self-interest ("… if you allow access to this group…tension in this area will decrease and you will be able to focus more on developmental projects").
- **Involve the media as appropriate.** It is often useful to manage a flexible approach with the media, gradually increasing its involvement, as the team decides to go more public on the issue. This will help to keep control of public focus on the specific issue, thereby managing potential risks. Contact well-known reporters or editors whom the organization or partners think might be objectively interested in the issue, and keep them up-to-date on basic developments so that they can step in at the key moments. ▸▸

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[4] Many of these points have been adapted from *Women's Human Rights Step by Step*, Women Law and Development International and Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project, 1997.

- **Always follow up on advocacy meetings.** Send a letter to the relevant interlocutor summarizing the key advocacy messages transmitted during the meeting and any decisions taken. Debrief your organization/cluster/working group immediately after advocacy meetings and be transparent about this with your interlocutors. Depending on confidentiality requirements and the sensitivity of the protection concerns at hand, debriefings can be public or remain confidential.
- **Review the advocacy strategy during implementation and adjust it as necessary.** In doing so, review the initial objectives of the advocacy strategy and check their practicality and validity against the present situation. Seek feedback from relevant stakeholders, including affected communities, partner agencies, the media, and public and national authorities, as appropriate (*see Part III.3*). 📖

3. Challenges in advocating for the protection of IDPs

Internal displacement situations often present difficulties for advocacy, particularly when there are protection issues at stake.

- **Security concerns** have an increasingly important impact on protection advocacy strategies. At the international level, concern for the security of staff members on the ground can affect the ability of organizations to raise protection concerns publicly. This presents a potential dilemma, since the failure to address human rights issues can, in turn, undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian programmes.
- Advocacy activities targeting influential States are often crucial for increasing diplomatic pressure on concerned governments to address protection issues. Potentially influential countries might share, in principle, a common position with the humanitarian community, yet **strong commercial or geo-political ties** with the concerned State can make it difficult for them to intervene when required.
- For some actors, it can be extremely challenging to balance **broad interventions**, such as a political role in conflict-resolution in a given country or between different States, **with single advocacy actions**, such as publicly intervening or advocating in relation to an individual human rights situation. It may be a strategic decision in some situations to use soft and low-key advocacy so as not to disrupt wider efforts to resolve the conflict.
- **When advocacy fails:** when advocacy "does not produce the desired outcome,"[5] the international community might be faced with difficult decisions, such as whether to continue maintaining a presence in the country or to tie continued humanitarian assistance to real improvement in the protection of IDPs *(see Parts IV.2 and IV.7)*. 📖

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📖 Resources

- *Guide to International Human Rights Mechanisms for Internally Displaced Persons and their Advocates*, Fisher, D., The Brookings Institution-University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement, June 2006.
- *Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups: A Manual for Practitioners,* United Nations, New York, 2006.
- *Proactive Presence: Field Strategies for Civilian Protection*, Mahoney, L., Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Geneva, 2006.
- *Protect or Neglect? Toward a More Effective United Nations Approach to the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, an evaluation by Simon Bagshaw and Diane Paul, The Brookings Institution-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement and the United Nations, OCHA-IDD, November 2004.
- *Protection: An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies,* Slim, H., and Bonwick, A., ALNAP, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2005.
- *Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, Policy Paper Series, No. 2, OCHA/IASC, United Nations, New York, 2000.

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[5]   *Protect or Neglect*, op. cit., p. 56.