Advocating in and on conflict situations:
A quick guide to effective conflict advocacy
Understanding conflict advocacy

What is advocacy?
There are two general definitions of advocacy which are useful and complementary:

- Advocacy is a range of activities an individual or organisation undertakes on behalf of someone, and/or on an issue or issues (common dictionary definition).
- Advocacy is about getting a message across to an individual/group in order to influence a decision (Advocacy in Programmes, CAFOD).

The first definition focuses on the victim/beneficiary/client and the issue/abuse/case the advocate is undertaking on his/her behalf.

The second definition focuses on the resolution/outcome/change aimed for and the adversary/actor/target that the advocate is seeking to influence.

What is conflict advocacy?

‘Conflict advocacy’ is a broad term which refers to advocacy carried out in conflict situations, advocacy on conflict issues, and ‘conflict sensitive’ advocacy:

- **Advocacy in conflict situations** refers to the different approaches adopted for conducting advocacy in different situations, particularly in order to manage the risks involved to the agents/advocates and/or the beneficiaries/clients concerned.
- **Advocacy on conflict issues** refers to the choice of underlying conflict issue to lobby on, and the strategy adopted for achieving the desired change.
- **Conflict sensitive advocacy** refers to the strategies adopted to both minimise the harm/violence which any activity in a conflict setting could inadvertently cause; and equally to maximise the positive/peaceful outcomes which any activity could contribute to.

How to understand conflict?

Thorough and repeated context or conflict analysis is essential in conflict situations. Analysis should aim to precisely determine the key concepts of conflict which will be affected by the situation – whether the conflict is overt or latent and how the situation is evolving.

Establishing Reliable facts about the conflict should be the starting point of conflict analysis. All conflict situations are subject to very rapid change. Secrecy and unpredictability are common tactics in conflicts and give rise to rumour and speculation, which in turn are often manipulated as a further tactic. Addressing rumour by seeking out and providing accurate information is an important element of conflict advocacy strategy and can be an issue which requires dedicated attention. The development of civil society networks to produce and disseminate regular and reliable information has been one method used in conflict situations by CAFOD partners where to combat rumour and prejudice.

Power and stakeholder analyses are especially important but often complex and sensitive to undertake in conflict situations where power may be exerted violently by some actors. Power may be used in different ways, it may be hidden or invisible and threats may not always be obvious. Invisible power (including socio-cultural aspects) is often of equal importance to other forms of power but perhaps the hardest to describe and so easiest to neglect. A deeper understanding of what shapes consciousness, worth and agency in a conflict and how it affects attitudes, behaviours and beliefs is needed to refine several aspects of conflict advocacy strategy such as the goal, beneficiaries, target group and message.

Identifying the underlying or deep-rooted causes or drivers of conflict is perhaps the
Advocating in and on conflict situations
A quick guide to effective conflict advocacy

Broad approaches to gender in conflict situations:

1. The still common ‘gender-blind’ approach which ignores the differential effects of conflict on men and women and the resulting need for women’s protection in conflict situations.

2. The increasingly used UN Security Council Resolution 1325 approach, in which it is axiomatic that women are more vulnerable and marginalised than men and gender analysis is applied across the board with the specific aim of counteracting this tendency for the betterment of women and of society more broadly.

3. The as yet under-represented ‘gender-relational’ approach which starts with the context specific relational gender analysis and aims at better benefit sharing (including protection) generally, on the assumption that this leads to more peaceful outcomes in the long-term.

Women have enormous potential as peace builders. There are many examples where the capacity of women as peace builders has been strengthened through advocacy on both a local and international scale. Making sure that conflict advocacy messages and activities are based on an analysis of the specific contexts is important for impact and also minimising risks to women who are often extremely vulnerable.
Advocating in and on conflict situations?

In programmes:
The programmatic lessons are grouped according to the four elements of understanding conflict described earlier: context, strategy, focus issue, and actors (victim/client, advocate, target actor).

Context:
There are as many different experiences of ‘conflict advocacy’ as there are contexts and moreover conflict situations change rapidly. It is therefore imperative that conflict analysis is updated on a very regular basis. The practice of conflict analysis is not a strait jacket and should be viewed more as a continuous and wide-ranging discussion accompanying other activities. Likewise advocacy response needs to be correspondingly adaptable and nimble as opportunities for influence may arise suddenly and judgements on the risks involved have to rely on the existing bank of knowledge.

Strategy:
A clear advocacy strategy is essential as it will articulate good conflict analysis and a vision for positive peace. Broad and long-term overall aims need to be broken down into realistic milestones.

Conflict sensitivity processes need adequate resourcing at the start of a programme because they are complementary to context analysis and bring focus issues and risks together in a clear set of mitigating actions.

Conflict advocacy can contribute to change at different levels from local to national, to regional to international. As such the level of advocacy needs to be appropriate to the nature of the conflict. For example advocacy work in and on the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) requires advocacy action that is linked at all levels because the complex web of relations and interests that fuels the conflict exists from the top down to the grass roots.

The potential for local level advocacy to contribute to local level conflict resolution, reconciliation and prevention of broader escalation of conflict should not be undervalued. Similarly middle-level advocacy has in many situations been crucial for the implementation of national level agreements and polices. These levels of advocacy sometimes not valued as highly as national or international advocacy and thus neglected however advocacy at these levels are critical post peace agreement in helping to maintain and support the peace and ensure ‘spoilers’ are not permitted to influence the situation negatively. It is important to recognise that overall advocacy effectiveness is weakened when ‘top down’ advocacy is not joined up with ‘bottom up’ advocacy but instead runs parallel to it.

Focus issue(s):
Priority focus issues for advocacy should be determined by the conflict analysis.

It is also often effective to combine conflict advocacy with programme delivery as not only do vulnerable populations receive material benefits, advocacy activities gain credibility and legitimacy from work which improves the lives of people living in poverty in conflict affected places.

Actors:
The many stakeholders in conflict situations all require thorough understanding and careful engagement.

Some advocacy actions will be uncomfortable, such as identifying and seeking to reduce the influence of ‘spoilers’ or reaching out to understand actors with opposing views or violent tactics (including the military or armed groups). Engaging with government or other actors such as local elites who hold economic power and political influence is often challenging too. However bridges can be built with these groups if they are included in training and workshops alongside community members or other stakeholders or encouraged to join in dialogue taking place in neutral spaces. This strategy has been used in programmes in Nigeria and Kenya to good effect.

It is useful to identify allies, and where possible and with extreme care, to engage with a range of actors across the conflict spectrum. Such initiatives increase the number of voices heard on a particular conflict related issue or range of
issues and create a better environment for dialogue and reconciliation.

The choice of advocacy partners is also a critical factor in conflict advocacy success; while partners and their leaders will take a firm stand on a given conflict, they will have impact if they attract respect from all parties at the appropriate level as well as the international stage if this level is identified in the advocacy strategy.

**Indicators of successful conflict Advocacy:**
Articulating advocacy changes can be difficult. The following indicators are broad and should be specified further, along with appropriate milestones, in actual programme design.

### Indicators for advocacy to promote peace:
- Communities/participants become actors
- Political institutions for handling grievances that fuel conflict are created or reformed
- People increasingly resist violence and provocations to violence
- People’s security improves
- Change is sustained and proportional (i.e. national level violence is reduced at national level). This is the key to which level of action to focus on.

### Indicators for advocacy to reduce harm:
- Fewer divisions between conflicting groups
- Less danger for participants in advocacy/peace activities
- Reduced structural/overt violence
- Human/material resources are more directed to productive peace activities
- Less cynicism around ‘peace’ and stigmatisation of those involved in promoting it
- Local people have been empowered (not preached to, or avoided)

**In institutions:**

**Ways of working:**
‘Conflict advocacy’ is a hybrid approach which draws on different disciplines and terminologies often used by different departments within a non-governmental organisation. These departments need to work together to be most effective.

Working for change in conflict situations is a long, slow and intensive process that requires special investment in staff. CAFOD has found that care to support and accompany Programme Managers and other staff working in complex environments has been distinctive and appreciated by its partners. The accompaniment method can be especially fruitful in conflict contexts where building relationships of trust is so crucial.

In some cases partner exchanges can be positive in bringing about desired change. However such visits need careful preparations and dedicated follow up to be fully productive.

Above all else, the quality of local leadership has the strongest impact in effecting change. Time and again the case studies bear witness to charismatic civil society leadership which has drawn respect from diverse warring parties. An ability to recognise, support and nurture leaders and leadership qualities can be extremely fruitful.

Where there are appropriate skills and qualities NGO staff can play a useful intermediary or mediating role between different actors or parties in a conflict. Mediation skills differ from advocacy skills and so training in these skills may be useful for staff and partners in some conflict situations.

**Maximising influence:**
Change often takes place through influencing key actors in effective ways. There are a range of tools that can help analyse which actors to influence and at what level: Stakeholder Influence Mapping, IIED (2005)\(^v\) is one, another is described in CDA’s ‘Confronting War’ that focuses on the interconnections between the approaches used and the levels targeted in advocacy. CDA’s research highlights the importance of transferring impacts to different people and at different levels. Translating
Methods for managing risk:

- **Non-confrontational methods should reduce risk** by not inciting violent reactions. Persuasive methods include dissemination of information, collaboration, and personal contact. **Non-violent methods** are the preferred strategy of conflict/peace advocates as a more effective means to break cycles of violence and avoid risk.

- **Seek allies**, there is safety in numbers. Creation of **advocacy networks and CSO coalitions** opens up more opportunities to influence power, and reduces the risk of individual exposure to reprisals or political manipulation.

- **Check out the facts** carefully and present a balanced view of a situation. This means understanding the views of aggressors as well as victims and not taking sides. It is an important principle in sensitive contexts such as Eastern DRC where stereotypes and prejudices are deep rooted.

- **Avoidance is rarely the most useful strategy.** However the best strategy may sometimes be keeping quiet, or simply showing human sympathy to the victims of violence, whoever they are. This was the response of Maralal Diocese after a vicious attack on policemen by Samburu and Turkana tribesmen in northern Kenya. **Timeliness** is important and may require swift, proactive action based on sound judgement which takes risk into account.

- **Develop appropriate protection strategies** that support peace campaigners and human rights defenders and include such elements as international visibility, campaigns and urgent actions if partner organisations or staff are at risk.

- **Responding to felt needs or shared interests** can often unite communities who are politically divided. Livelihoods programming integrated with conflict sensitive advocacy is often an effective approach as shown in Maralal Diocese, Kenya.

- **Conflict sensitivity** exercises include a comprehensive assessment of risk and actions to mitigate it.
The following highlights some desirable institutional characteristics of those involved in ‘conflict advocacy’:

**Characteristics of ethical advocacy:**

- Honest (not over ambition)
- Life giving
- Reliable
- Respects diversity
- Models non-violent behaviour
- Built on justice
- Values local ownership

**Characteristics of mature advocacy partnerships:**

- **Insiders** – those vulnerable to the changing dynamics of conflict, they have a depth of knowledge. However insiders can sometimes gate-keep relationships.
- **Outsiders** – those who choose to become involved in the conflict, have a breadth of knowledge. Outsiders also may have the capacity to protect advocates.
- Joint planning, evaluation and monitoring are important so as to reflect complementary perspectives.
- Take time to establish a relationship of trust – recognising points of convergence and divergence and complementarity of skills etc.

**Conclusion:**

The experience of CAFOD and its partners in conflict advocacy is rich and varied and has further potential. To maximise the potential of conflict advocacy to contribute to change, NGOs need to broaden their conceptual frames of reference (e.g. by using peace building concepts more widely), practice conflict advocacy more systematically and allow the approach to feature more prominently and properly in programme design, and take care to manage risk on an ongoing basis.