



A FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL ADVOCACY FOR ACHIEVING SOCIAL PROGRESS

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INTRODUCTION:

Advocacy is an act of giving support to a cause. What a lawyer does in court is that he advocates his client's interest. By persuasion, he tries to convince the judge about his client's point of view. This helps in resolving the conflict between his client and his opponent. This technique of solving a conflict or a problem has come to be known as *advocacy*. It is no longer restricted to lawyers. Any organised attempt to resolve a problem in a non-violent way by negotiation, persuasion, perseverance and by convincing the other party is practising advocacy. When the efforts are directed towards the benefit of the public at large, or a large group of individuals, they could be regarded as *public advocacy*.

Public advocacy generally promotes public good and attempts to bring about social justice. It focuses attention on furthering the well-being of the under-privileged members of the community. Public advocacy efforts, therefore, take up issues relating to women, children, SC/ST, labour, construction workers etc. In fact public advocacy moves hand-in-hand with politics. This does not mean that advocacy is politicking. But it deals with and comes face-to-face with those who wield political and economic power. Advocacy is as much political as democracy. It is a democratic tool to bring about change, be it economic, political or social.

Advocacy efforts may vary in their external manifestation depending on the issue it is focussing on. Advocacy as a democratic tool itself consists of several democratic techniques, strategies and tactics. Advocacy is like a Swiss knife consisting of several gadgets but collectively known as a knife.

David Cohen, the Advocacy Institute in the USA and known as a dean of public interest lobbyists, once said:

"Just as humans seek a dignity that says not by bread alone so we as (social) advocates must work to effect change, not by elections alone, not by mass mobilisation alone, not by lobbying alone, not by information alone, not by coalition alone, not by media alone and not by anything else alone."

Advocacy may take shape with any permutation and combination of the above characteristics and many more. Yet it has a single purposeful result *viz.*, to bring about social change so that the weaker sections of the community get greater access to political power and economic resources of the community.

This social change does not necessarily emerge through a sudden revolution. It may take place as a result of a peaceful and gradual transition.

The course of advocacy efforts on any particular issue would be determined on the basis of strategies used, tactics employed and skills exercised. The effectiveness and the success of advocacy efforts would depend on how efficiently the following techniques and strategies are employed.

1. Identifying and framing the issues
2. Collecting information
3. Mobilising interested people
4. Networking
5. Forming alliances
6. Forming and sustaining coalitions
7. Planning campaigns
8. Involving media
9. Building pressure on the legislature
10. Establishing contact within the systems.

1. IDENTIFYING AND FRAMING THE ISSUES:

Advocacy efforts arise from field situations or an individual case or a policy initiative. A campaign to release bonded labourers for example, arose by the inclusion of a policy to that effect in the 20-point programme during the

Emergency declared in 1975. Under public pressure, the Government passed *The Bonded Labour Systems (Abolition) Act, 1976*. This Act defined the nature of bondage and abolished the bonded labour system in India. *Bandhua Mukti Morchafa* voluntary organisation took the matter to the court for securing the release of the quarry workers working in a state of virtual bondage. The Supreme Court gave directions to the government to release these labourers.

2. COLLECTING INFORMATION:

A lot of work needs to be done after the issue is identified, but before it is properly framed. In fact an issue cannot be framed unless a lot of information is collected. This information would relate to those aspects which will guide the future steps in the campaign. The information to be collected would be regarding the following points:

- 2.1 Laws relating to the issues
- 2.2 Policy on the issues
- 2.3 The persons concerned in implementing the laws/schemes
- 2.4 Sympathisers within the government, of our issue and opponents of our cause
- 2.5 Neutral ground persons who have not made up their minds on this issue
- 2.6 Media coverage and its analysis
- 2.7 Other groups on the same issue
- 2.8 Possibility of forming a coalition with other groups.

The social action organisation must ensure that the issue is understood by the affected people and that they are aware and ready to take initiative in the advocacy efforts. The issue as identified, has to be properly framed before any action could be taken on it. Once the information is collected, it forms the background for framing the issue in a manner that would help to achieve the desired objective.

3. MOBILISING INTERESTED PEOPLE:

For any advocacy effort to be effective, it is essential that as many of the people interested and affected by the issue come together. This can help in

projecting the importance of the concern for the issue. It is expected that the interested people can be mobilised by any one of the following methods:

- 3.1 Appeals, letters
- 3.2 Exhibitions, posters, leaflets, handbills
- 3.3 Speeches
- 3.4 Meetings
- 3.5 Signature campaigns
- 3.6 Dramas, rallies, demonstrations
- 3.7 Street plays
- 3.8 Conferences, workshops, symposia
- 3.9 Competitions
- 3.10 Exposure through the various media

4. NETWORKING:

It is very important to establish links with groups and organisations having similar interests. Such groups may interact with one another primarily on matters of common interest. For example, a network like *Voluntary Action Network of India (VANI)* deliberates on common concerns of voluntary organisations, like distribution of foreign contribution, Regulation Act and payment of contribution to the Charity Commissioner.

The networks could be formed around specific issues, e.g. network established around the issue of housing rights, construction labour, child labour etc. What is expected to be achieved through such networks is to strengthen the links, share the experiences, widen the information base, pool the expertise and understand the issue from all angles. Establishing links within the network and among the networks, though time-consuming, is yet very essential in strengthening the efforts at advocacy.

5. FORMING ALLIANCES:

After knowing the people who are interested in the issue, it is very useful to form alliances and close associations with some of them. The groups may not always have common priorities, but so long as they have interest in the issue, they are potential allies. Greater the alliance, greater the impact it would have on decision-makers, be it bureaucracy, legislature, judiciary or the media. The

different allies increase the strength of the group as a whole and therefore increase the impact of the issue.

In a campaign against child labour for example, all the social action groups working for the betterment of the street children as well as the trade unions are allies. It may appear strange how a trade union can be an ally in a campaign against child labour. But they could pressurise and dissuade the employer from employing children. Working children are strong adversaries of the adult workers, one may in fact come across such unlikely allies.

6. FORMING AND SUSTAINING COALITIONS:

Coalitions in the context of advocacy are alliances of organisations working together for a common concern. These organisations may belong to different sectors, they may ordinarily carry out different activities or may also nurture opposing ideologies. What is peculiar to the coalitions is that they form associations of different groups and organisations that are driven by a common concern. Ordinarily these groups have different on-going activities and priorities and they have come together under an umbrella.

It is observed that forming coalitions is not a difficult task, but what is difficult is sustaining a coalition and monitoring their progress.

Depending on the cause of the concern, a coalition should function for a short duration or over a long stretch of time. In order to maintain good relations among members of the coalition and also effectively pursue the cause it is necessary to fulfil the following conditions:

- 6.1 The goals and objectives of the coalitions are clearly stated
- 6.2 The tasks and responsibilities among the groups are clearly defined
- 6.3 Perfect and open communication and dialogue is maintained among the groups
- 6.4 Collective leadership should emerge from the coalition

Coalitions provide support and strengthen the movement. They help to look at the problem/issue from different angles and pool experience and expertise of different groups.

7. PLANNING CAMPAIGNS:

Every advocacy campaign, to be optimally effective, has to be properly planned. This planning would include the following:

- 7.1 Collecting all relevant information relating to the campaign including legal information, policy statement, scientific information and similar activities.
- 7.2 Identifying the key players including
 - i. those who make decisions
 - ii. those who oppose the action
 - iii, those who are proponents of the issues
 - iv. those who have no opinion on the issue.
- 7.3 Analysing one's own and opponent's strengths and weaknesses. Analysing how such strengths and weaknesses would provide opportunities for further action
- 7.4 Searching for the proper tool and where it could be used and when. For example, in a campaign against mass hysterectomy of mentally retarded girls in the remand homes in Pune, campaign planning covered the following activities.
 - a. Information collection on the following points:
 - i. similar past incidents
 - ii. legal basis for these actions
 - iii, possible legal arguments against such actions
 - iv. what action is preferred by the parents of such girls
 - v. Preparation of the argument on moral, legal, and ethical grounds
 - vi. conditions of mental asylums
 - b. Identifying the main actor on the basis of the following:
 - i. Immediate responsibility of the social welfare directorate
 - ii. State Chief Minister as a legal guardian
 - iii. Operating doctors
 - iv. Parents of retarded girls
 - v. Other concerned social workers
 - vi. Psychiatrists and surgeons for their expert opinion

- c. Analysis of strengths .and weaknesses
 - i. of the coalition
 - ii. of the State
 - iii. of the situation that would embarrass the State
 - iv. of the tools and when to use them
- d. The media
- e. How to use legal action to stop the scheduled operations
- f. To hold workshops and seminars,
- g. To organise a rally or *dharna*

These strategies for action are decided, revised and modified several times, as the situation is assessed from time to time. This coalition proved to be effective and well-knit. All the partners of the coalition were driven by human rights concern for the girls and feared the possible excesses by the State. They had excellent rapport among themselves and they shared duties and tasks between them. They used every weapon to communicate information about the group and the development and progress of the -activities of the group. On enquiry, they gave credit to the periodic meetings, communications, collective leadership, sharing of responsibilities and duties and in-depth planning of the strategies.

8. INVOLVING MEDIA:

Media, whether print or electronic, play a very crucial role in the advocacy action. In fact, media advocacy can be a separate topic for consideration. Media, a very effective tool, can give wide exposure to the cause and can influence a large number of people including the main or the influential actors. Advocacy, in fact, is influencing the influential and other people involved in the cause. If the cause is newsworthy and the media also have the policy of focussing on that cause, the task before the social activists is very easy. If the media is unaware of the impact of the issue, an activist has to convince them of the importance and the news worthiness of the cause. This can be done by creating sympathy for the cause among media personnel or by appealing to the feelings of compassion among them. The media can be used to give exposure to the cause as news items, by way of advertisements, articles, debates, editorials or as a story. Apart from

how it appears in the media, when and where it appears also has an impact on the public as well as on the policymakers.

In the USA, one of the organisations uses print media very effectively by giving a one-page advertisement in an international newspaper like the New York Times. They believe that such advertisements catch the eye of those who matter in decision-making. This group has influenced decisionmakers across the country on topics ranging from AIDS, extinction of sea turtles, commercial whaling, nuclear testing, ozone crisis, abortion issues etc. Exposure in the media forces the decision-makers to take a stand and give reasons for it.

9. BUILDING PRESSURE ON THE LEGISLATURE:

It is in the legislature that the governmental policy gets formulated and the laws get enforced by fresh measures or by amending or repealing existing laws.

In a democracy, the legislators are the representatives of the people. They are expected to give effect to the desires and aspirations of the people whom they represent. It is therefore essential that the legislators know what people want and what they do not want.

The legislators need to be informed on different issues based on factual statistical data. This would help the legislators to take a reasoned stand in formulating policies.

The legislators can be informed by inviting them to the organisations, or their workshops or seminars. They may be presented with a memorandum or met with by a group of persons. A flood of letters may also be sent to them. These are among the different tactics that could be used to influence and educate the legislators in creating support for particular causes.

10. ESTABLISHING FRIENDLY CONTACTS WITHIN THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM:

It is not sufficient to approach the media or the legislators or bureaucrats only when you are taking a confrontationist stance. It is also important that a good rapport and relationship be established with the decision-makers or others influencing decisionmaking. Establishing friendly and credible relationships

with these power centres is essential for influencing them as well as for receiving information from them.

RELEVANCE OF PUBLIC ADVOCACY:

In a democratic society it is the responsibility of the people to be vigilant of their own rights. They must exert sufficient pressure on the legislature, so that they are compelled to take action in a manner that is most desirable for the people, especially the poor and the politically weak. People must exhibit their strength by joining hands on common issues and compelling the bureaucracy also to implement the laws and the schemes that are introduced for their benefit.

Both the legislature and the bureaucracy are the most powerful institutions in the governance of the country. It is therefore very important that they be persuaded, forced, pressurised or influenced to carry out their functions in a most effective and efficient way.

If all people are vigilant and alert about their rights and responsibilities there would be little work left for the social advocates. However, in a country where the majority of the people are illiterate and unaware of their own rights and entitlements, the social activists have to step in to make these weaker sections of the community aware of their rights.

They need to be encouraged to take initiative in leading their own lives as competent members of the community.

The advocacy action would vary with the sector and the issue that is being worked upon. The strategies used at one time and in one place may not prove to be correct and appropriate at another time and place. But documentation of advocacy efforts no doubt would guide others who are following or are keen to follow the path of advocacy with the intention of bringing about the desired change—social, economic and political.

TOWARDS ADVOCACY: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE:

In India, the Government does not function in a mysterious Kafkaesque castle that shelters the legislature, the bureaucracies and the judiciary; still the ways of the government remain mysterious to the people at large. The very character of a democratic polity is increasingly getting polluted and threatened by an unethically ruthless electoral arithmetic in which people at the grass-roots

level are condemned to exist as *faceless votebanks*. Despite the number of good social legislations, the administrative machinery has not been responsive enough to implement many of such legislations.

ADVOCACY: A MODE OF SOCIAL ACTION:

It has been the common experience of the grassroots organisations that the policy-making and implementing systems are often mystified and are not adequately accountable to the people. It is in this context that advocacy as a mode of social action acquires a significant role in making the systems and powers more responsive and accountable to the people. As Prof. Sadanand Varde succinctly puts it "The large masses of people, outside the organised sector and the political process, whose voice does not reach the citadels of power and policy-making bodies and who are at the mercy of lower level bureaucracy, both revenue and police, need public advocacy." In spite of occasional aberrations within the Indian democracy, there is still a creative socio-political space for building up public argument through mass mobilisation, media, public interest litigations and legislative advocacy. Non-party social and political initiatives by social action groups many a time form the basis of public advocacy that would bring the issues of equity, sustainable development, gender justice, social justice and human rights into the central stage of public policy priorities.

Advocacy is a mode of social action to influence those who hold governmental, political and economic power so that public policies would be formulated and implemented in ways that would empower the underprivileged classes and strengthen the lives of those with/conventional political power and economic resources. It has been defined by David Cohen (1994) as "a tool, based on organised efforts and actions that uses the instruments of democracy to strengthen democratic processes; such tools include election related work, lobbying, mass mobilisation, forms of civil disobedience, negotiations and bargaining, and court actions."

ADVOCACY IN INDIA:

Advocacy as a practice is not nascent in India. The tradition of influencing public policy, for eradicating social evils, goes back to nineteenth century social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The legacy of BalGangadharTilak,

Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar gives significant insight into the indigenous and effective advocacy methods practised during the pre-independence period. Here it would be interesting to note the influence of Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent methods Martin Luther King, whose legacy still prevails in the social justice movements in the U.S.A. As David Cohen (1994) pointed out, "The legacy of Gandhiji and Luther King is not just non-violence but non-violence to achieve social justice and with that a fundamental re-ordering of power relationships within the society."

In India, there have been advocacy efforts on issues related to environmental degradation, rights of the *dalits* and tribals, women's rights and civil rights, nuclear installations, land alienation of tribals, child labour, unorganised working sector, drug and forest policies and many other issues. While voluntary organisations and activist groups have been active in social, developmental and political interventions at micro levels, efforts by such organisations or groups to influence the formulation or implementation of public policies remained by and large fragmented or isolated in the larger context of the country. Even in such contexts, some of the successful advocacy campaigns like the Silent Valley Movement in Kerala and Amniocentesis Campaign in Maharashtra point to the greater possibilities of organised efforts. Advocacy efforts by the social action groups played a crucial role in the making of government policies such as the abolition of Bonded Labour Act (1976) and the Primary Health Care Policy (1977). It is true that many a times initiatives of grass-roots organisations to intervene at a mjero level for influencing the public policies were not sustained and systematic enough to bring out the desired results. This was also because of the lack of adequate knowledge and skills to deal with various systems that determine the making and unmaking of the public policies. At ex ; time when grass-roots reality of the country is increasingly being affected by economic liberalisation and ^ajustmeSt'^ policies there is a growing realisation among the social action groups about the necessity of empowering the people to influence the public policies for ensuring socio-economic, environmental and distributive justice to all.

ADVOCACY METHODS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

The isolated *murmurs of dissent* may be amplified and channelised by using appropriate advocacy methods and this would enable the organisations and the activist groups to influence the policy-makers more effectively. For this, it is imperative to develop advocacy methods and models within the context of the Indian situation. It is also necessary to understand the possibilities as well as limitations of using advocacy as a tool for social change in India. There is much to learn from the experience of the activist groups that made use of the organised advocacy methods. Some of the successful social advocates (Vivek Pandit-Advocacy Workshop, Nirmal, October 6,7 1993) rightly pointed out the need to evolve an integrative approach that would make use of various advocacy components (like legislative advocacy, media advocacy, judicial devices, dealing with the bureaucracy, framing the issue, coalitions and grass-roots mobilisation) simultaneously and optimally according to the context and nature of the issue. In many of the relatively effective advocacy efforts, mass mobilisation, improvised methods of non-violent protest and persuasion, public interest litigation, legislative advocacy, lobbying the bureaucrats and media advocacy were strategically and simultaneously used to build up an effective public argument. In some of the ongoing campaigns like Save Narmada Movement, grass-roots mobilisation was combined with other advocacy, strategies and activating global pressure through international advocacy groups and development lobbies (Srinivasan 1992).

Advocacy is a means and not an end in itself. In India, advocacy without mobilisation may prove to be more of a vanity. Grass-roots mobilisation and advocacy efforts should be complementary. An effective advocacy model may also help to bridge the gap between micro-level social activism and macro-level policy interventions. In the Indian context one should also think of an advocacy model that would enable us to deal with the system at different levels such as Central, State, District and Taluka.

Since the political culture prevailing in different states of India varies considerably, the strategies of advocacy also may change accordingly from one state to another. A proper advocacy model may be able to address the long-term

goals in the larger context of the country and short-term goals within the given space and time. The credibility and the socio-political legitimacy of advocacy efforts in the Indian context would largely depend on the consistency and the compatibility of the means and the ends.

As it has been pointed in one of the earlier studies (Srinivasan, 1992), the public advocacy movement in India seems to be more concerned about the fundamental power relations and processes in the society than its American counterparts (especially anti-smoking campaign, pro-choice campaigns and the like); whether this difference in advocacy priorities is "a function of economic well-being of a society or the degree of anarchy in civil society is worth considering." In a parliamentary democracy like India, the avenues for lobbying through the legislative committees is rather limited as most of the legislations are initiated by the cabinet (executive) itself, which usually commands the support of the majority party in the parliament. In the absence of strong party whips, it is relatively less difficult to persuade the senators or the congressmen in the USA. There is a wide spectrum of ideological shades that are associated with the party politics in India and lobbying the parliamentarians, who are generally bound to follow party whips, may not be as effective as in the USA but the proper use of "Question Hour" in the parliament and legislative assemblies through legislative lobbying is one of the advocacy strategies. In the Indian context, grass-roots support and constituency is the most important factor that determines the credibility of the lobbyists rather than his/her professional background or expertise. It seems that activists with adequate level of expertise and mass support were proven better lobbyists in India than any professional experts.

MAJOR CHALLENGES:

The major challenge for public advocacy in India would be that of safeguarding and extending the political space for effectively advocating the cause of the marginalised sections. It is equally important to resist the agenda setting mechanisms of multinational corporations and the vested interests operating through various kinds of fundamentalism.

Access to information is a prerequisite for any advocacy initiative and a sustained campaign for repealing the Official Secrets Act is an indispensable step towards a more effective Indian advocacy. Another danger of an increasingly "professionalised advocacy" is the dilution or the marginalisation of real issues in the labyrinth of strategies, tactics and skills. A potential threat to the credibility of the advocacy practitioner is the alienation from mass-based movements that could happen when activists get more interested in lobbying and the powers related with it and eventually get themselves co-opted in the power structure or get lost in the maze of vested interest politics.

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