What Are Advocacy Networks?

Background Notes

Networks are universal. Whether acknowledged as such or not, most people belong to formal or informal groups—or networks—organized around family life, jobs, religious activities, or recreational interests. People routinely use their personal and professional networks for a variety of reasons—looking for a job, raising funds for a school or community center, campaigning for a politician, or pressing leaders to expand the services available at the local clinic.

Networks are invaluable in policy advocacy because they create structures for organizations and individuals to share ownership of common goals. In the area of reproductive health, a network’s membership usually will include representatives of NGOs, women’s groups, community organizations, and professional associations made up of nurses, midwives, physicians, or lawyers. Local religious and traditional leaders are potential members whose perspective and influence could be invaluable in achieving the network’s objectives.

A network’s advocacy issues will depend upon local political realities and the opportunities for change that exist as well as the specific interests of network members. The possibilities with respect to reproductive health are numerous, ranging from increasing national funding for contraceptive commodities to providing family life education for in-school youth to efforts such as banning girl trafficking or lifting import regulations on contraceptives.

To be successful advocates, networks need to be well organized and operate efficiently. Their founding members have to bring together the resources, time, energy, and talents of many different people and organizations and then skillfully take advantage of opportunities to influence the policy process on behalf of their goals and objectives. When they succeed, networks help create a supportive and self-sustaining environment for reproductive health.

What’s in a Name?

In order to avoid confusion, **Networks** or **Advocacy Networks** will be used throughout the manual.

POLICY partners in different countries use different names for their advocacy groups—some are called networks and others are called coalitions. The structures and procedures ascribed to these groups also vary. For example, in Bolivia, networks are highly structured and ongoing while in Romania coalitions are structured and ongoing and networks are informal and loose. The name chosen by an advocacy group is unimportant. What matters is that the entire membership understands and agrees on the name, the structure, and the operating procedures.
By the end of this unit, participants will be able to
- Define and list the benefits of networking;
- Identify a network of individuals and organizations within their own personal and professional lives; and
- Develop a list of elements needed to form and maintain successful networks.

4 hours and 20 minutes

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- The front page of a local newspaper with the main headline cut out for Activity 6
- Copies of handouts
  1.1.1 Background Notes
  1.1.2 Elements for Forming and Maintaining Networks

Read Introduction to Section I and Background Notes for Unit 1.

Opening Remarks
Time: 30 minutes

- Welcome the participants to the workshop and introduce yourself.
- Review the purpose of the workshop and Section I.
- Facilitate participant introductions.
- Review participant expectations.
- Review the daily agenda and discuss the order and flow of the various units in Section I.

Introduction to Networks
Time: 15 minutes

Introduce Unit 1 by reviewing the objectives and making a brief presentation on networks and the power of networks for advocacy. Key points to include in your overview of networks follow:

- Networks are universal and almost everyone belongs to one or more networks.
- Networks may be personal or professional; formal or informal; temporary or ongoing. They may include family members, school friends, colleagues, members of the same religious institution, etc.
- Members of a network have at least one thing in common with other members of that network.
1. Sometimes networks become the nucleus of a group concerned with taking on or supporting a specific cause or action. Creating or strengthening this type of network—an advocacy network—is the focus of this workshop.

2. Advocacy networks are useful and powerful tools for achieving shared goals.

3. Advocacy networks are effective because they provide a structure that permits organizations and individuals to cooperate, collaborate, and share expertise and resources to influence policy.

4. To be effective advocates, network members must develop skills that enable them to engage in dialogue with decision makers at all levels.

5. Effective networks are well organized, develop a team identity, function according to agreed upon norms and procedures, establish systems and structures for decision making and communication, and use each member’s skills and resources to maximum advantage.

**Transition**

Explain to the participants that advocacy groups around the world call themselves by different names—some are networks, others coalitions, still others alliances. As long as the members of the group agree on its name and structure, the name is unimportant. However, in the training manual, the term “network” or “advocacy network” is used consistently. In the next activity, the participants define “network” for themselves.

**Defining Network**

Time: 30 minutes

1. Write the word “Network” on two sheets of newsprint.
2. Divide the participants into two groups and ask each group to line up single file in front of one of the sheets.
3. Ask each person to write on the newsprint a word or short phrase that she/he associates with the word “network”. Continue until each person has contributed to the list.
4. Ask each group to work with the words listed on its sheet of newsprint and to develop a definition of “network” that everyone in the group agrees with.
5. Share the two groups’ definitions and help the participants reach consensus on one definition. They may choose to accept one of the posted definitions or combine parts of each for a new definition.
6. Write the agreed upon definition on clean newsprint and post in the room.
7. Share the following definition with the group.

   **Advocacy Networks** are groups of organizations and individuals working together to achieve changes in policy, law, or programs for a particular issue.
**Mapping Individual Networks**

Time: 1 hour

**Individual Work (30 minutes)**

1. Using the example shown below, draw a personal network map on the flipchart to guide the participants in their task.
2. Distribute a 1/4 sheet of newsprint and a marker to each participant.
3. Ask each person to draw a circle in the center of her/his sheet and put her/his initials in the circle.
4. Direct the participants to write the names or initials of people or organizations they know with an association to reproductive health issues in squares and link the squares to the circle.
5. Encourage participants to think broadly, anyone with whom they have contact or know with an interest in reproductive health should be included, such as:
   - People they have met at conferences or workshops,
   - A relative in a government office/clinic whose work is connected with FP/RH,
   - Parents or friends concerned with getting RH information to adolescents,
   - Editors and writers of newsletters and other publications, and
   - RH organizations/people they have contacted through the Internet.

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**Mapping Your Personal Network: An Example**

- **E.K.** Dept. of Population Studies; local university
- **P.F.** Clinic Director
- **S.C.** Local Family Planning Association
- **R.S.** Women’s Rights Network
- **S.C.** Attended ICPD in Cairo
- **A.W.** Parent/Teacher Association
- **J.J.** UNFPA Programme Officer for Adolescents
- **H.C.** YMCA/YWCA

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**Your Initials**
Large Group Discussion: Analysis of Maps (15 minutes)

1. When all the participants have completed their individual maps, ask them to tape them on the wall by slightly overlapping each newsprint with another.
2. With the participants, analyze the maps as follows:
   - Do all of the names on the maps meet the criteria for inclusion (i.e., the mapmaker has contact with the people named and the people have an interest in or linkage with FP/RH)?
   - What is the nature of the contact and/or frequency of the contact (i.e., close, daily contact with a colleague vs. infrequent communication by mail or at conferences)? Is the contact through personal or professional relationships?
   - Which organizations and individuals appear on more than one map? Highlight these names with a colored marker.
   - Which workshop participants appear on other participants’ maps? Highlight these names with a different colored marker.
3. Ask the group if each participant in the room is a member of the other participants’ networks. Explain that the participants are working together in a workshop setting to form or strengthen their network, consequently, each person is part of the others’ networks. Draw lines on the newsprint to link the circles to each other to demonstrate how the participants’ own networks have expanded.

Large Group Discussion: Benefits of Networks (15 minutes)

1. Ask the participants to look at the large wall map and think about the benefits of belonging to this network. Introduce the discussion by naming the most basic benefit of a network—the exchange of information and the use that members make of the information.
2. Write “Benefits of Networks” on a flipchart and ask participants to identify other benefits.
3. Write their answers on the flipchart. Be certain to include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits of Networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Keep you up to date on what is going on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Provide a ready made audience for your ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Provide support for your actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Provide access to varied and multiple resources/skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Pool limited resources for the common goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Achieve things that single organizations or individuals cannot—power of numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Form the nucleus for action and attract other networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Expand the base of support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transition
Remind participants that networks are formed for different reasons, but that they often emerge for the purpose of taking an action. One such action is advocacy. As with any concept, advocacy is understood differently by people in different countries, cultures, societies, and so forth, based upon their experiences. It is important for networks that have decided to commit themselves to RH advocacy to reach a common understanding among their membership of what advocacy means. The next activity is designed to help participants develop and agree on a definition of advocacy for their network.

Defining Advocacy
Time: 35 minutes

Brainstorming  (5 minutes)

1. Write “Advocacy” on a sheet of newsprint.
2. Ask participants to share words that come to mind when they think of advocacy.
3. Write all responses on the newsprint without discussion.

Small Group Work  (30 minutes)

1. Divide participants into four small groups.
2. Ask each group to develop a definition of advocacy by using the words and concepts listed on the newsprint.
3. Direct each group to present its definition and hang it on the wall.
4. When all definitions are posted, ask participants the following:
   • What, if any, common words or themes run throughout the different definitions? (Underline same/similar language and concepts with a colored marker.)
   • Do any of the definitions differ markedly from the others or do they all express similar ideas?
   • What are the most notable differences? Why did that small group feel this way?
   • Does it seem as if everyone has a clear and consistent understanding of advocacy? Does anyone not understand or need clarification?
5. When you feel certain that the participants understand and agree on the meaning of advocacy, write the following definition on newsprint:

   Advocacy is a set of targeted actions directed at decision makers in support of a specific policy issue.

6. Briefly point out the similarities between the workshop definition and those prepared by the groups.
Thinking Ahead
Time: 30 minutes

1. Tape the local newspaper (with the main headline cut out) to the wall or flipchart.
2. Divide participants into small groups.
3. Explain that this activity requires participants to look three years into the future and to imagine that their network has just achieved a major RH advocacy success. Their success is so impressive that it has made national headlines. Ask each group to discuss and agree on the successful advocacy result they would like to see publicized in three years.
4. Once the group members agree, they should write the headline and the first paragraph of the accompanying story.
5. Ask each group to select a representative to present its headline and story to the full group.

Transition
The headlines and success stories envisioned by the participants are entirely realistic and achievable for advocacy networks if those networks are organized, strategic, efficient, representative, and committed to participation and collaboration. But these characteristics are not automatically present when organizations decide to form a network. Network members must consciously address a wide variety of needs and concerns if the network is to function effectively and efficiently. The next activity is designed to involve participants in identifying the different elements needed to create and maintain a network.
Practical Considerations for Successful Networks

Time: 1 hour

1. Divide the participants into four groups.
2. Ask the participants to think about the various advocacy visions they have developed and identify the organizational characteristics and elements that would be necessary for their network to achieve its vision.
3. Assign two groups the task of identifying the practical considerations of forming a network, i.e., what is necessary for a network to form?
4. Assign the other two groups the task of identifying the practical considerations of maintaining a network, i.e., what is necessary for a network to continue its work?
5. Ask each group to list its characteristics/elements on newsprint.

Note to Facilitator: If the groups need help getting started, ask a few of the following questions.

Forming Networks

• How do you define a network?
• What is the purpose of a network?
• What is the mission of the network?
• Which organizations or individuals share this mission?
• How many organizations would you invite to help form the network?
• How would you invite them?
• What agenda would you set for the initial meeting?
• What result do you want from the first meeting?
• How many agreed to join?
• What type of commitment are they willing to make?
• What comes next?

Maintaining Networks

• What is the mission of the network?
• How large is the membership?
• What are the skills and resources of the group? Where are the gaps?
• How will you attract members with needed skills/resources?
• How will decisions be made?
• How will all members stay informed?
• How will consensus be reached?
• How will you maintain a balance of power?
• How will conflicts be managed/resolved?
• How will members develop a plan of action?
• How will activities be coordinated?
• How will tasks be assigned?
• How will network activities be documented?
• How will you monitor and evaluate activities?
• How will you reduce or avoid burnout?
6. Ask one of the two groups working on “Forming Networks” to present its list to the entire group. Ask the second group to share any new items from its list but not to repeat items. Add the new elements to the first list.

**Note to Facilitator:** Refer to the questions listed above to generate additions to the list.

7. Ask one of the two groups working on “Maintaining Networks” to present its list to the entire group. Ask the second group to share any new items from its list but not to repeat items. Add the new elements to the first list.

**Note to Facilitator:** Refer to the questions listed above to generate additions to the list.

8. At a minimum, the two lists should include the elements shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements Needed to Form a Network</th>
<th>Elements Needed to Maintain a Network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Clear purpose</td>
<td>• Clear norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Committed members</td>
<td>• Loose organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mission statement</td>
<td>• Communication system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shared vision</td>
<td>• Shared leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wide participation by all members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Check to make sure that all of the participants understand the elements listed and why they are important for forming and maintaining networks.

Networks are universal. Everyone belongs to networks even if only for the exchange of information. Certain networks such as “Advocacy Networks” have an additional purpose—to work together to achieve changes in policies, laws, or programs with respect to a particular issue. Advocacy networks are powerful tools for achieving policy change. However, many elements need to come together to make networking successful. **Distribute handouts for Unit 1.**

Now that participants are familiar with the concept of networks and their potential for achieving advocacy goals, the next unit will focus on building communication skills. Effective communication is a central component of successful networking efforts.
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Elements for Forming and Maintaining Networks

A. Formation Stage

- Establish a clear purpose or mission.
- Involve individuals and organizations that share the mission.
- Build a commitment to participatory process and collaboration.

B. Maintenance/Growth Stage

Organization

- Define clear, specialized roles.
- Establish a loose or fluid organizational structure. Vertical, hierarchical structures do not build strong networks.
- Compile a skills inventory, including the skills/expertise of individual members and institutional resources (fax, Internet, meeting space, etc.).
- Prepare to fill expertise gaps by recruiting new members.
- Establish a communication system (i.e., telephone tree).
- Create a member database (name, address, organization mission, type and focus of organization, etc.).

Leadership

- Share leadership functions (i.e., rotating coordinating committee).
- Set realistic goals and objectives.
- Divide into subgroups/task forces to take on specific tasks according to expertise.
- Spread responsibilities across all members to reduce workload and avoid burnout.
- Promote participatory planning and decision making.
- Foster trust and collaboration among members.
- Keep members motivated by acknowledging their contributions.

Meetings/Documentation

- Meet only when necessary.
- Set specific agenda and circulate it ahead of time. Follow the agenda and keep meetings brief. Finish meeting on time. Rotate meeting facilitation role.
- Keep attendance list and record meeting minutes for dissemination after meeting.
- Use members’ facilitation skills to help the network reach consensus and resolve conflict.
- Discuss difficult issues openly during meetings.
- Maintain a network notebook to document network activities, decisions, etc.