

Prioritizing Policy Issues: Making the Best Matches

Background Notes

Now that participants have reviewed how policies are formulated, identified current policies and programs, and mapped the decision-making process for reproductive health, they must set realistic goals for the network's advocacy agenda.

The first step in the process is to identify an issue that requires advocacy. Clearly, given the current climate, the network will realize that certain actions are not feasible at the moment. Network members need to know their limitations and focus on

areas where they have the potential for making the greatest impact. If they find, for example, that essential drugs are exempted from tariffs and that family planning products are not on the essential drug list, they may want to concentrate their efforts on changing the essential drug list to include contraceptives.

Policy research will suggest ways in which the network can define problems, link them to solutions, and translate them into simplified images that will influence both the general public and decision makers. Finally, policy solutions must be developed for the issues selected. The solutions will be refined in Section III.

Framing an Issue

When a 14-year old girl who is a good student drops out of school because she is pregnant, it may be a personal misfortune for the girl and her family. When an alliance of women's organizations and educators demonstrates that teen pregnancy threatens the growth of a skilled work force and national economic development goals, teen pregnancy becomes a problem for government and invites a policy response.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, participants will be able to

- Identify and prioritize issues based on established criteria, and
- Determine an issue for advocacy.

TIME

3 hours and 25 minutes

MATERIALS HANDOUTS

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Index cards
- Copies of handouts
 - II.3.1 Background Notes
 - II.3.2 Checklist for Choosing an Issue
- Copies of the reproductive health policy map completed in Unit 2
- List of priority reproductive health issues listed on newsprint in Unit 2

PREPARATION

For Activity 3, write the questions on newsprint and copy the chart on newsprint.

ACTIVITY 1

Introduction

Time: 10 minutes

Introduce Unit 3 by reviewing the objectives and making a brief presentation that includes the following key points:

- Based on the previous assessment of the decision-making process for reproductive health policy formulation and implementation and the identification of current FP/RH issues, not to mention personal and organizational interests, participants are likely to have a wide variety of ideas for their advocacy agenda.
- Some of these ideas, however, will not be feasible at the moment given the realities of the political climate or the availability of resources. It is important to acknowledge these realities and keep the network focused in areas where it can potentially make an impact.
- This unit takes network members through a process of prioritizing FP/RH advocacy issues in accordance with established criteria. The activity is intended to help participants look at several key issues both objectively and analytically so that they can work to reach consensus on their advocacy issue.

ACTIVITY 2

Prioritizing Reproductive Health Issues

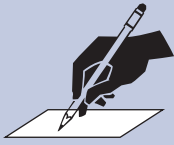
Time: 2 hours

Small Groups (1 hour and 30 minutes)

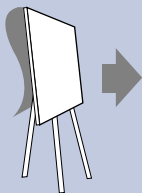
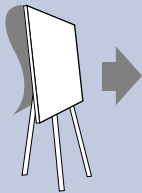
1. Divide participants into three small groups and distribute one index card to each participant.
2. Ask each participant to choose one FP/RH policy issue that she/he thinks the network should consider for advocacy and then write that issue on the index card. Participants should consider the following:
 - List of key FP/RH issues developed in Unit 2
 - Network mission statement prepared in Section I, Unit 4
 - Their personal and professional interests
 - Concerns and priorities of their communities and beneficiaries.
3. Ask the participants to share their cards within their small groups and to reach agreement on **THREE** priority issues.
4. Distribute copies of the “Checklist for Choosing an Issue” (Handout II.3.2). Ask each group to complete one master “checklist” for the group.
5. Review and clarify with participants the criteria listed on the “Checklist.” Ask for suggestions for additional criteria and add any to the list.
6. Explain the instructions for completing the “Checklist.” Each small group should do the following:
 - Write the three priority issues across the top of the chart in the boxes labeled “issue.”
 - Begin with Issue 1 and rank it against each of the 12 criteria listed by writing one of the following terms: **HIGH** (always or almost always meets the criterion); **MEDIUM** (often meets the criterion); or **LOW** (rarely or never meets the criterion).
 - Respond to all of the criteria for Issue 1 before moving to Issue 2. Continue in the same way until all three issues are ranked against the criteria.
 - Discuss the rankings within the small group and choose **ONE** of the issues as the group’s priority FP/RH policy advocacy issue.
 - Select a spokesperson to present the issue and a brief description of the process.

Large Group Discussion (30 minutes)

1. When the small groups have finished, ask each spokesperson to present his/her group’s results as well as the highlights of the process the group followed for its assessment and selection. Encourage the spokespersons to focus on how the process helped the group analyze and select the priority issue. Spokespersons should **NOT** present the individual rankings for the each of three issues.
2. List each group’s priority issue, a total of **THREE**, on newsprint.



ACTIVITY 3



Note to Facilitator: Ideally, at the end of this activity, you will have three distinct issues for the network to consider for advocacy action. If, however, the issues turn out to be the same or similar, you should ask participants to combine similar issues and select another priority issue(s) to ensure some variety in the three final choices.

Matching Issues and Opportunities

Time: 1 hour and 15 minutes

Small Groups (30 minutes)

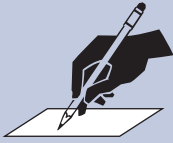
1. Refer to the three priority issues and ask participants to self-select the issue they would like to address. Organize a working group for each issue.
2. Write the following questions on newsprint and ask the groups to answer the questions:

- *What data are available to support the issue?*
- *What is the desired policy outcome for the issue over the short and long term?*

3. Ask the groups to write their responses on the newsprint chart you have prepared and select a presenter.

	<i>Group 1: Issue</i>	<i>Group 2: Issue</i>	<i>Group 3: Issue</i>
<i>Available Data</i>			
<i>Policy Outcome</i>			

4. Ask each presenter to report his/her group's responses.
5. Ask the other participants for comments or additions to each of the presentations.



Large Group Discussion (45 minutes)

Note to Facilitator: The discussion should provide an opportunity for participants, first, to pull together all the information they have discerned and developed and, second, decide on ONE concrete reproductive health policy issue for the network’s first advocacy campaign. During the discussion, encourage participants to use good communication and decision making skills, (e.g., make sure that everyone who wants to speak is heard from and encourage participants not to give in to reach agreement but rather to express differences of opinion.)

1. Facilitate a general discussion of the issues and information on the chart by using the following questions:
 - How do the availability of support data and other trends influence the group’s thinking about the issues?
 - How achievable are the desired policy outcomes? How do the prospects for success affect participants’ thinking about priority issues?
 - What overlap exists between the group’s issues and the “current issues” identified in Unit 2?
 - If there is little or no “current” interest in any of the issues, what are the implications for the network in taking on that issue for policy advocacy?
 - Which policies/regulations/laws directly or indirectly affect the issue? Can they be changed?
 - Given all of the analysis and discussion carried out by the network, what one issue should the group select?
2. Conclude the discussion by agreeing on ONE reproductive health policy issue (e.g., high incidence of teenage pregnancy) for the network advocacy campaign.

Selecting a realistic policy issue for advocacy requires an understanding of the policymaking process in general and, specifically, the decision-making process for reproductive health. It also requires an assessment of where the opportunities are for influencing the process and a sound analysis of priority issues by network members. **Distribute handouts for Unit 3.**

Participants conclude this section with a reproductive health policy advocacy issue that was chosen based on sound analysis of the policy environment, agreement with the network’s mission, and a process for setting priorities. Now the network is ready to begin to design and implement its advocacy campaign. Section III of the manual leads the network through each step of an advocacy strategy.

SUMMARY

MOVING AHEAD

Prioritizing Policy Issues: Making the Best Matches

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Framing an Issue

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Policy research will suggest ways in which the network can define problems, link them to solutions, and translate them into simplified images that will influence both the general public and decision makers alike. Finally, policy solutions must be developed for the issues selected. The solutions will be refined in Section III.

Checklist for Choosing an Issue*

A good policy advocacy issue is one that matches most of these criteria. Rank your three priority issues against the criteria (HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW).

Issue 1:	Issue 2:	Issue 3:	CRITERIA Will the issue.....
			1. Be widely felt (by many people)?
			2. Have broad support?
			3. Be supported by sound data?
			4. Be easily understood?
			5. Result in real improvement in people's lives?
			6. Be achievable?
			7. Help build alliances with other groups?
			8. Have a clear timeframe?
			9. Build grassroots leadership?
			10. Strengthen NGO linkages?
			11. Be consistent with the network's values and mission?
			12. Respond to the community's expressed needs?

High– Always or almost always meets the criterion.

Medium– Often meets the criterion.

Low– Rarely or never meets the criterion.

*Adapted from the Midwest Academy. 1996. *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*. Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press.