

**A HANDBOOK
FOR NGOS ON ADVOCACY &
LOBBYING SKILLS TO PROMOTE
ELECTORAL REFORMS**

TRANSITION MONITORING GROUP

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PREFACE

A cardinal objective of the Transition Monitoring Group as a civil society coalition is to help strengthen the capacity of its member organizations to achieve the mandates of their organizations and that of the coalition.

It is in furtherance of this goal that the workshop on promoting advocacy skills and lobbying on electoral reforms was organized for NGOs/ CBOs from 36 organizations within the TMG coalition in 12 states of the federation

The workshop was designed to train the 36 NGOs, mobilized from two states in each of the six geo political zones in Nigeria for the purpose of promoting electoral reforms and ultimately to achieve credible elections in 2007.

Thus, this handbook is a compilation of papers presented at the training workshop and provides insightful coverage on the followings:

- a. Concept of advocacy and lobbying
- b. planning for advocacy and lobbying
- c. understanding the decision making process in the national, state assemblies, in the party, the executive, the constituency
- d. the role of the media in advocacy
- e. identifying advocacy issues
- f. building alliances for advocacy
- g. strategic planning

It is our hope that this handbook would be a useful resource material for civil society organizations across the country and that civil society practitioners would learn some tips on how to improve their strategies in advocating for electoral reforms towards the 2007 elections and beyond. We also hope they would be encouraged to develop action plans that would favour women's participation in the democratic process.

Mabel Ade
National Coordinator
Transition Monitoring Group
October 14th 2006

Developing Advocacy and Lobbying Skills to Promote Electoral Reforms

What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is a process through which individuals or organizations engage with decision-makers to influence public policy decisions or legislation on specific issues. Advocacy may be targeted at people in the legislative, judicial or executive branches of government who have the power to influence or make the policy decisions sought to be affected.

David Cohen, Co-Director of the Advocacy Institute, defines “Advocacy” thus:

“It consists of organized efforts and actions that use the instruments of democracy to establish & implement laws & policies that will create a just & equitable society. These instruments include elections, mass mobilization, civil action (including civil disobedience), lobbying, negotiations, bargaining & court action.”

Advocacy may be conducted at local, national, or international levels. It may be conducted at all three levels. Advocacy may be conducted through many different types of activities, including:

- Lobbying
- Mobilizing people at the grassroots
- Strategic litigation
- Using the media to raise public awareness or build visibility for the issue.
- Protests or demonstrations, etc

Advocacy may be confrontational (adversarial) or diplomatic (negotiated). **Adversarial advocacy** engages in activities that express opposition, protest and dissent, while **Negotiated advocacy** engages with decision-makers and aims at achieving the desired objective through consensus-building.

An advocacy campaign may utilize both adversarial & negotiated advocacy, or may use the approaches one after the other. In such a situation, adversarial advocacy may be used to pave the way for negotiated advocacy as the campaign gains momentum and shifts focus from identifying the problems and causes to finding agreeable solutions.

Planning and Implementing Advocacy

Every advocacy campaign needs to be carefully planned and implemented, regardless of the issue involved, the scope of the advocacy, the shape or form which the advocacy may take.

Advocacy Strategy Planning

- Why is it necessary to plan your advocacy strategy?
- What does the advocacy strategy planning process entail?

The advocacy strategy planning process is an effort to design actions that will shape or guide your advocacy campaign. It helps you to determine in the first place whether advocacy is the appropriate approach for effecting a desired change. If so, during this process, you will then identify the main components and tools of the advocacy programme.

Effective advocacy requires you to:

- Clearly define your goals and obtainable objectives (what do you want to change?)
- Identify potential supporters and opponents (who can effect or prevent the change?)
- Develop persuasive messages (what will convince them to make the change?)
- Mobilize people and resources for action (what do you do to persuade them?)

The process of framing these questions & finding answers to them is the development an advocacy strategy. The process will also enable you to assess the context of a planned advocacy campaign, including the external and internal environments.

The External Environment

The external environment might include:

- The political climate in which the advocacy is to be conducted
- The public policy that the advocacy is aimed at
- The key players who can make the required change or prevent it from taking place
- The message to be communicated to the key players
- The messenger who will communicate this message
- How the message should be communicated.

The Internal Environment

The internal environment will:

- Assess the resources and capacity of your organization to conduct the advocacy campaign
- Identify the internal challenges which your organization faces
- Outline the proper sequence for launching the various components of the advocacy campaign
- Design an evaluation process through which your organization can determine whether your campaign is working.

Public Policy Goals

In every advocacy campaign, it is important to clearly define the problems and the desired policy objectives. Once the problems and the possible solutions are clearly identified, consideration should also be given to the potential risks of the advocacy campaign. An advocacy campaign might result in losses, which put the organization in worse position than it was before it started the campaign. Since advocates cannot always control the course of debates, there is always a risk of a bad outcome. The possibility of a bad outcome may outweigh the likelihood of getting the result which the organization seeks. Your organization should carefully and honestly evaluate any such risk before embarking on the campaign.

The Political Climate

Any effective advocacy campaign should first assess whether or not the political environment in which it will be conducted is receptive to the organization and the issue it is canvassing. This assessment will help guide the decisions to be made during the strategic planning. For instance, decisions about how the issues should be framed, the institutions and decision makers to be targeted, the message and messengers to be used, and the coalition to be assembled will be informed by the assessment of the political environment.

The Key Players

It is imperative that your organization identifies the institutions of government or individuals in government who are in a position to secure or frustrate the desired outcome. Sometimes, it may be necessary to pursue policy change in more than one forum. In every case, the organization must carefully examine all possible forums available to achieve the policy change being sought.

Once the appropriate institutions are identified, the organization then needs to identify the key personnel in each institution who can influence the outcome sought. This may be a key legislator, a minister, or the President. The challenge is to identify the key personnel in the decision making process - those who will support and those who will oppose the position of your organization. It is also essential to the strategic planning effort for your organization to identify interests and organizations outside the government that may be allies and those that are likely to oppose the advocacy effort. This mapping of support and opposition, within and outside the government, will enable the advocacy campaign to rally support and neutralize opposition.

The Power Analysis

For the mapping to be effective, you should also attempt to conduct a “Power Analysis”. The Power Analysis tools offer simple, graphic and descriptive strategic analyses.

A power analysis enables you to look at the field of play, analyze the power structure and how the key players interact with each other. The development of the Power Analysis should always be done by the entire advocacy team. This will help to strengthen the team by allowing members to collectively identify where they agree and disagree and arrive at a consensus.

The International Freedom of Expression (IFEX) suggests that there are three questions to ask in a Power Analysis. These are:

- Who has the power to make the change?
- Who has the power to influence those who can make the change?
- Who do you have the power to influence?

To carry out this task you can use a number of tools, namely:

- The Key Actors List
- The Key Actors Table
- The Key Actors Map

The Key Actors List

The Key Actors List is a list of those actors whom you believe have an ability to affect the outcome of your campaign. You should try and find out as much as you can about them and

what drives (motivates) them. This will improve your chances of being able to influence them.

Key Actors Table

The “Key Actors Table” is where each player is rated and categorized according to a number of factors. The factors used will depend on the needs of any particular campaign. In general, there may be five columns as follows:

- Actor: the name of the individual, group or institution
- Driver: the forces that motivate or drive an actor in a particular issue
- Process/risk: assesses the likelihood of an actor changing his or her position on an issue & the risks involved in targeting such an actor (e.g. a minister who is supportive of your cause may not be the best target if he or she is not influential in the FEC)
- Influenced by: other actors who can likely influence this particular actor
- Influences: other actors who are likely to be influenced by this actor

Key Actors Map

The Key Actors Map is a dynamic tool that can be used to analyze key players and the way they interact in the power structure. Key actors are mapped out in a two-dimensional diagram according to their “power” and “position.” “Power” indicates the level of ability of the actor to influence on a particular issue (the influence wielded). On the “Position” dimension, actors are rated according to how “positive” or helpful their views are to your cause. Those who are most helpful are placed furthest to the right of the diagram.

Each actor is analyzed according to risks associated with him or her and those with special risks are given a red star. Key actors that are positioned in the middle of the map tend to be the ones who can be influenced the most as they are more vulnerable to persuasion (they tend to be moderates). Your strongest support will be found in those furthest to the right. If they are more and also high up in the Power dimension, then your chances are bright!

The Power Analysis

By reviewing these documents at regular intervals, advocates can recognize emerging trends and the changes taking place. They can reveal defects in the planning of the advocacy campaign. They can therefore also be used in evaluations if these changes are significant for the advocacy activities.

Organizational Resources

An assessment of the institutional capacity of your organization to carry out the required activities will help the organization determine what can be achieved with its level resources. The strength of your organization may be competent staff or members who can implement aspects of the advocacy, such as media campaigns. Your organization may not have other internal resources to conduct litigation, lobby the legislature, etc. An assessment of its resources will not only help the organization to identify its strength, but can also reveal any shortcomings it might have.

The Challenges

What resources and expertise does your organization need to develop to enable it carry out the

planned campaign? Are there potential allies that possess these capacities that your organization lacks?

After identifying assets and resources, the organization must honestly assess any shortcomings that need to be addressed & resolved. The desired policy change and the forum in which it can be achieved may require access to certain expertise that the organization does not itself have. Acquiring required expertise, for instance, by partnering with another organization that possesses it or by hiring someone who has it, is a necessary step in preparing for an advocacy campaign.

The Message

A major aspect of the advocacy planning is clearly defining your issue. When the issue has been developed, the desired outcome determined and the institutions and players capable of ensuring the desired outcome identified, the messages needed to persuade the relevant actors should also be developed.

The messages being conveyed or the manner in which they are packaged may vary for different advocacy targets (institutions or individuals). Appropriate messages will have to be developed as may be suitable for each advocacy target. For instance, in an advocacy campaign for legislative reform, the strategies may involve:

- Litigation being conducted in the courts
- Lobbying taking place in Parliament
- Public enlightenment taking place through the Media, etc

The messages will be different for each of these targets or players

The Messenger

Your organization needs to carefully determine the most effective messenger for each audience. A very good litigation lawyer conducting the case in court may not be the most effective lobbyist at the National Assembly. The choice of the messenger can therefore be as critical as the content of the message itself.

The Delivery

How should you deliver the message? The medium through which the message is delivered will vary depending on the issue and the message. Often, an advocacy campaign will include the use of multiple media to ensure that the message is effectively and widely disseminated to a variety of target audiences.

Sequence of Steps

The timing of a campaign and the sequence in which the various components of a campaign are implemented can be decisive in achieving the desired outcome. A carefully considered timeline is also important in designing any advocacy campaign.

Evaluation

Your organization must be able to monitor the progress of the campaign and know whether the

advocacy is working. It should be able to make adjustments during the course of the campaign. Only honest, periodic, self-assessment of an advocacy campaign will enable the organization to assess its progress towards achieving its goal. The evaluation should review the effectiveness of each element in the plan & whether or not adjustments are needed in the overall strategy. A constant re-examination of the assumptions & external factors underlying the effectiveness of the plan and a realistic assessment of the implementation, are essential in successful advocacy.

The Advocacy Tools

To advocate effectively requires the use of many advocacy tools and techniques as well as strategies and tactics. There are a variety of advocacy tools available for conducting any advocacy campaign directed at different issues and levels of government. An advocacy campaign will usually not rely on one tool alone and it is important to combine many tools. The most effective advocacy efforts are those that are multi-faceted and combine multiple tools working together toward the desired policy change.

A multi-faceted advocacy campaign may involve lobbying, political education for officials of certain agencies or institutions such as the electoral commission, the police officers, etc. and awareness raising activities, successful litigation, etc.

Using the Media

Utilizing the media in an advocacy context refers to the strategic use of media to advance a policy initiative or otherwise bolster an advocacy campaign. The media's essential characteristics make it an invaluable advocacy tool. Any advocacy organization, from the grassroots level to high-profile national organizations, can utilize the media.

Media refers to any medium that can be used to communicate a message, whereas mass media refers specifically to media that reach mass audiences, such as television, newspapers, magazines, radio, etc. The mass media can be the most effective type of media in an advocacy effort. But other forms of media can also play an important role, depending on the context.

Why is the Media Important?

The media can:

- Set an agenda for the public simply by reporting an issue
- Influence public debate by what it covers and the way it frames the issues
- Pressure policy makers to act in a certain way
- Project certain values which people imbibe

What do you need the media for?

Generally, you can use the media to:

- Increase the visibility of your organization (“name recognition”)
- Reach influential people in the society
- Bring about reform in public institutions
- Increase public awareness about certain issues
- Bring about improved service delivery

- Redress negative images or perceptions about your organization
- Increase coverage of issues that your organization is concerned about.
- Increase coverage of your organization's events and activities.
- Enhance the fundraising prospects of your organization

Information is central to your interaction with the media. You rely heavily on the media for information. But you also want to pass information along through the media. Information is crucial to your advocacy campaign.

Why is Information Important?

Generally, information can be used to:

- Educate citizens about your issue or the problem you are concerned about.
- Empower citizens to act in ways that promote citizen involvement in decision-making processes.
- Mobilize citizens for demonstrations, protests, petitions, etc.
- Stimulate a public discussion about your issue or policy initiative.
- To force decision-makers to account for their actions
- Present cases to citizens and decision-makers about your issue or a particular problem you are concerned about.
- Influence decision-makers to take action.
- Pressure allies, neutrals, and opponents to act in a particular way.
- Secure allies and engage opponents to be involved in a particular effort.

To be effective, you must be knowledgeable about the issues you are campaigning on. Nothing can be more disastrous than an ignorant person trying to convince others about an issue which he or she knows little or nothing about or who cannot substantiate claims.

The quality of information you have and are able to present will play a crucial role in achieving your objective

For information use to be effective, the information should be:

- **Relevant:** In order to be effective in mobilizing a particular constituency, the information must be relevant to the lives of those people or the issues that concern them.
- **Correct:** In order to be effective in influencing and pressuring decision makers, information must be accurate – never lie.
- **Current:** In order to be effective in stimulating discussions, information must be up-to-date and based on or linked to current issues or events.
- **Convincing:** In order to be effective in persuading people, the information must be convincing.
- **Conclusive:** In order to be effective in provoking action and initiating change, information must be conclusive.

Where can you find the information?

The information that you present to the media may be gathered through a variety of ways, including the following:

- Research – field and desk
- Through direct experience
- Interviews with those who have information
- Observations, etc

Whatever the source or means, you must have a systematic way of obtaining and verifying the information. You should also have a systematic way of providing the information to the media or other targets. You should analyze the information to reveal relationships, contradictions, patterns, trends, etc. The information should be aimed at creating create knowledge.

Effective Use of the Media

Using the media effectively is itself an art. It requires:

- Deliberate planning and hard work through a very professional process
- Adopting appropriate methodologies and strategies
- It should never be done in an *ad hoc* manner
- Your organization should offer relevant and timely stories to the media for use.
- Locate the issue in broader social, economic, or political trends and contexts.
- Use anniversaries and other significant events to peg stories.
- Use human interest stories to explain how the issue affects real people.
- Use personal stories to get the message across and put information in a context to make it meaningful and compelling.
- Provide factual and credible information
- Do not assume that the media exists to promote your organization or programmes.
- Actively seek the media and do not wait for them to come to you
- Keep the focus of a story on the issue and less on your organization or yourselves.
- Collaborate with the media to produce media messages (if you lack internal expertise).
- Provide contact information where people can get information, volunteer, report cases, or obtain services.
- Build relationships with journalists, journalist associations, and media advocacy groups, which may have similar agendas.

Building Alliances for Advocacy

In an advocacy campaign, it is important to build and maintain alliances. Your success will depend on the extent to which your efforts are supported. Anyone who shares your interest in finding solutions or eliminating a problem can become your ally. Securing allies and sympathisers therefore has a great effect on the success of your advocacy activities.

The Coalition strategy in advocacy is about building synergies. *Synergy* has its origins in theology and was then used to describe the cooperation between human effort and divine will. Synergy is variously described as “two or more discrete influences or agents acting in common to create an effect which is greater than the sum of the effects each is able to create independently” (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia); “...a mutually advantageous conjunction of distinct elements” (synergy2.sourceforge.net); “... behavior of whole systems unpredicted by the behavior of their parts taken separately” (Buckminster Fuller’s book, ‘*Synergetics*’); “...the combined effect of two or more things, processes, etc that exceeds the sum of their individual effects: *the synergy achieved by merging the two companies*” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary).

Obviously, therefore, the most important reason for creating a coalition of CSOs is to increase their power and ability to achieve their objectives. This increased power and capacity arises from the fact that a civil society coalition has a number of advantages, especially when it is functioning properly and there is cooperation among members. The advantages include:

- Providing a forum for the joint consideration of problems
 - Combining the financial, material and human resources of each member of the coalition
 - Reducing competition for access to resources among or between coalition members
 - Being able to mobilize the interest of other people and groups
 - Being able to attract the attention of the media and people in influential positions
 - Strengthening solidarity and unity within the civil society movement
 - Being able to build the image and significance of the civil society sector in the eyes of members of the public and among government officials
 - Providing greater support for members against harassment and repression
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- Providing strength for members as weaker organizations benefit from stronger ones and all organizations benefit from the individual strengths of each member.
 - Conferring legitimacy on the group as it is seen to represent a wider constituency than any individual member of the coalition.

Types of Coalitions

Coalitions may encompass a variety of institutional and governance structures. They may be formal or informal. They may be permanent or temporary. They may be collectively funded or individual members may seek their own funding. They may have their own staff or individual members may volunteer or second their staff to the Coalition.

Coalitions may be loose networks of like-minded people with a common understanding of a problem or shared vision exploring ways of jointly addressing the issue. It may be an *ad hoc* group of people and organizations focused on the same or similar short term objectives. It may be a more cohesive grouping with well-defined objectives, a structure and some process for decision-making.

A coalition may be made up of individuals or organizations that join forces to pursue a common social change goal while maintaining their own autonomy. The coalition can include groups from different sectors of civil society with different ideologies. It may also involve organizations from only one sector e.g. women's organizations. Coalitions may be local, regional, or national or may operate at all the levels. They may also be international. They may be based on geographic groupings, e.g. the Coalition of South Eastern NGOs. They may also include multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic organizations.

The Challenge of Coalitions

Despite all its many advantages, working in coalitions also has its drawbacks. The building and running of coalitions is a complex issue. It is challenging to strike an appropriate balance between ensuring unity within the coalition and encouraging the diversity which is also its strength. For this reason, it creates certain challenges. The Challenges include:

- Requiring more complicated organization and logistics

- Difficulty is achieving consensus among a large number of individuals or CSOs with disparate organizational mandates, priorities and approaches.
- Difficulty in managing peers and directing activities among autonomous organizations
- Constant possibility of suspicion and rivalry between or among members

To minimize the effect of these challenges, it is important for all members to have a clear understanding of why the coalition was formed and what its processes are. Members should constantly remind themselves that the coalition is being formed because of:

The power of the coalition which lies primarily in the strength in its numbers: The more entities that are involved in advocacy and lobbying on public issues, the more powerful the effect they will have. Petty squabbles will result, at best, in an ineffective coalition and at worst, in a self-destructive one.

The power of coalition through the diversity of its members: Various types of organizations have various constituencies or groups of supporters, and therefore various bases for public and political support. A coalition is much stronger if it brings together organizations that are not seen as traditional partners.

The power of coalition which enables it to diversify its competencies, expertise, and capabilities: Various groups have various knowledge, capabilities and talents, which they can provide for a joint project. The know-how, contacts and experience which any member of the coalition has, either in working with the media, in organizing campaigns, accessing public authorities, etc. can benefit the coalition as a whole. Ironically, in many cases where tremendous achievements have been recorded in advocacy campaigns, the success has depended on a small number of people who were highly motivated and dynamic and served as catalyst for a larger group of people.

The creation of coalitions among CSOs remains one of the most important strategies for carrying out advocacy campaigns. The challenge therefore is to find ways to make them work better and realize their vast potential.

The civil society movements in Central and Eastern European countries have recorded impressive successes, gained social authority and international recognition due to their ability to work in coalitions. Based on these experiences of operating coalitions, some tried and tested rules for building and maintaining coalitions have been developed. These are the basic rules for building unity.

Coalition Etiquette: The Basic Rules for Building Unity

- Each member of the coalition should understand not only the way in which other members make decisions within their own organizations, but also the impact that this has on procedures and the functioning of the coalition.
- Members of the coalition should clarify the areas in which they have similar interests – i.e., those in which they want & are able, to cooperate – along with those upon which they do not agree and in which they have conflicting interests.
- Members should accept the diversity and division of tasks. A coalition cannot expect uniformity from its members in their actions and beliefs, but must respect their diversity and

learn to utilize it.

- Before causing a commotion, collect and verify information. Do not depend upon one source of information – listen to various viewpoints before you make decisions. Issues are rarely simple & uncontroversial.
- Learn to politely disagree. If you are to work together, you must learn to disagree in a way that allows your further cooperation.
- Strictly divide your role as a member of an organization from that as a member of a coalition. It is particularly important to avoid speaking in the name of the coalition (or sounding as if you are doing so), if you, as an individual or an organization, have not been entrusted with this role by the coalition.
- Do not use the media to express your disagreement with the coalition. If you disagree with it, resolve this problem within the coalition itself.
- Share the credit and successes. If people and organizations work diligently, they should also receive praise. It is better to praise people too often than too infrequently.
- Early on, decide upon the method of decision-making within the coalition. Each member should be familiar with the decision-making procedure; it should be clear, accepted by everyone, and thoroughly applied. Decide upon the method of directing meetings of the Steering Committee (the duration, regularity, basic rules, minimum number of participants, etc.). Such procedural issues may lead to sharp conflicts despite the goodwill of members. It is therefore a good idea to prevent them with clear and mutually accepted rules.
- In advance, clarify the areas and levels of decision-making freedom for the executive arm of the coalition. According to decision type, divide them into areas in which the Steering Committee must decide and those in which the executive arm may decide.
- Agree upon the decision-making process in situations where a sharp conflict arises or persists between members. If these are important differences between members, which you are not able to resolve alone, you may use an independent mediator, arbitrator, or panel. It is a good idea to agree upon procedure before such problems arise.
- Agree upon the conditions under which it is possible to re-discuss a previously approved decision. Effective decision-making is very important for the effective functioning of the coalition and part of this is a common awareness of when it is appropriate to return to an approved decision and when it is not.

Anticipating and Overcoming Tensions in Coalitions

The Advocacy Institute has also developed “Tips for Anticipating and Overcoming Tensions in Coalition Building and Actions”. The tips are:

- **Recognize that conflict will occur** no matter how good all participants’ intentions are.
- **Mixed loyalties are unavoidable.** Coalition members owe their primary loyalty to their

own organization.

- **Coalitions have to be accountable to their purpose & mission.** They must sometimes take fast action but must do so without surprising their members.
- **Balancing unity and diversity is demanding.** You can avoid problems by examining whether potentially troublesome matters will be addressed.

Consider:

- Goal differences
- Ideological differences
- Different expectations on results of actions or efforts
- Power differences within the coalition
- Differences of commitment & intensity to coalition objectives
- Dealing with differences in financial and-kind commitments
- Differences in organizational style among different sized groups

Lobbying Decision Makers

Public policies play a central role in ensuring social justice, political and civil liberties, and protecting the long-term interests of people at large. Lobbying is a major advocacy tool which civil society organizations can adopt to influence public policy or to make an input into the legislative process.

Access to and persuasion of decision-makers, serve to broaden the scope of policy making to include citizen's voices in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Effective lobbying is achieved through the presentation of persuasive arguments to the policy-maker. This means the ability to transfer information which is condensed, digestible and persuasive.

For an organization to be persuasive, it must know the policy-maker and the system in which he or she operates. The Key Actors Table is an important tool in this regard. It helps the advocate to see the terrain more clearly and to understand the interplay of power and political forces.

Usually, in the beginning, an organization's lobbying strategy may only be reactive in simply seeking to defeat adverse policy. With time, groups become more proactive and begin to participate in shaping the policy environment in which they operate. For instance, CSOs have begun to campaign for legislative transparency and the keeping of voting records in the National Assembly to aid their advocacy activities

Characteristics of Effective Lobbying

- **Familiarity with the legislative process:** The organization should know the political system in which it is operating and how to use formal and informal mechanisms to apply pressure to decision-making processes.
- **Credible information:** The organization must provide credible information to persuade legislators to act in a specific manner.
- **Relationships with policy makers:** Relationships can be pursued in both formal and informal

settings. The organization should understand its opponents' interests and avoid demonizing them. A "holier-than-thou" attitude can frequently be counterproductive. Instead, the organization should seek to provide superior arguments.

- Familiarity with internal political dynamics: The organization should understand the positions of and relationships among various stakeholders. It should use these dynamics to its strategic advantage.

Mobilizing the Grassroots

Grassroots organizing requires moving people from spectator roles to active participants by persuading them to turn opinions into action that can influence outcomes. Grassroots leadership development is a critical component of supporting grassroots organizing.

Grassroots organizing helps to:

- Lend credibility, legitimacy and bargaining power to advocacy. Grassroots support and constituency size determine the credibility and legitimacy of any lobby, not the professional background or expertise of the lobbyist.
- Create tangible benefits in the lives of citizens, including increased levels of self-esteem, confidence, and efficacy.
- Bridge micro-level activism and macro-level policy initiatives. Advocacy initiatives that are practiced only at the macro level risk having urban elites take over the voice of the marginalized. People need to be able to speak for themselves

Effective Grassroots Organizing

- Grassroots leaders should be rooted in their communities.
- Grassroots leaders should not be people that are divorced from the conditions that affect their constituents; otherwise, they might not have credibility or be compelling.
- Grassroots organizing should involve direct participation by citizens themselves.

Utilizing the Legal System

Utilizing the legal system involves the filing of law suits and seeking of declarations to void certain actions and injunctions to restrain certain activities. This type of advocacy is usually most effective when used in a fair and independent judicial system. But even where there is weak rule of law situation, engaging the legal system can produce a favorable outcome, especially when combined with other advocacy tools, such as lobbying & using the media. An unjust court ruling may stir controversy or focus public attention on a particular issue & thereby become the impetus for legislative or executive action to produce the desired outcome.

However, the organization should carefully consider the implications of engaging the legal system because an undesired outcome could undermine the overall strategy. It could give opponents justification to oppose other advocacy efforts, such as lobbying. In many cases, the legal system should be used as a last resort.

But litigation can be employed at various times and for different purposes in an advocacy

campaign. It may be appropriate to engage the legal system from the beginning of an advocacy campaign. This should, however, be determined during the strategic planning process that should precede any advocacy effort.

Litigation can be used:

- To demonstrate that a certain government action or policy is unconstitutional
- To get access to information which the organization needs for its advocacy
- To seek an injunction with which to prevent the taking of a specific course of action
- To gain time to make more effective use of other advocacy tools, such as gathering information or mobilizing the grassroots

Effective Use of the Legal System

Before initiating any legal action, careful consideration should be given to external factors such as:

- The likelihood of a fair trial
- The likely consequences of an unfavorable outcome
- The possible impact of a favorable outcome.

You should use skilled lawyers who are knowledgeable about the issue. You should coordinate the use of the legal system with other advocacy tools. Where the judicial system is weak or lacking in independence, legal action will only be effective when it is part of an advocacy campaign involving other tools such as the use of the media, building coalitions and using information.

Conclusion

These are broad tips or guidelines which can improve our chances of successful advocacy. Other factors may also influence the outcome. Every advocacy strategy should try to identify (anticipate) these factors and plan for them. The plan should seek to neutralize them, if they are negative, or take advantage of them, if they are positive.

Understanding the Decision-Making Process in the Executive, the National and State Assemblies, the Party, and the Constituency

Introduction

Decision-making pervades all organizational structures be it governmental or institutional. In government circles decision-making process differs depending on the model of government that is being operated. Under a military government, decision-making power resides with the highest designated authority. In the case of Babangida and Abdulsalami Abubakar's administration, the highest decision-making body was the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). Under Murtala Mohamed and Obasanjo, we had the Supreme Military Council (SMC). Even though this group of cabals forms the highest decision-making body, most often, the overall figure head such as the Military President himself may be wielding a lot more powers, thereby influencing most of the decisions of the selected members of the cabal. Under a Fascist model, the Czar is a power unto himself, and wields all the powers as well as take or influences the most vital decisions. However, for the benefit of the above topic, this paper shall focus essentially on Decision-making process at the levels of government institutions in a democracy.

A popular definition of democracy says its 'government of the people, by the people and for the people'. By this definition, a democratic government becomes the agent of the people. That is why the basis of representation in a democracy is the human person. Thus, neither birth, wisdom nor wealth confers on its possessor an exclusive right to legislate control or make decisions on behalf of the people without their consent. The power being exercised through representation emanates from the people, and is transiently delegated by society to be wielded for its benefit.

Democratic governance is globally favored for its numerous principles which includes but not limited to participation in decision-making. It has been argued that democracy allows majority to have their way but creates room for minority to have their say. Therefore, it is expected that any decision-making process takes into cognizance of the rights of the individual or citizenry who are the basis of representative governance for that matter. In short, participatory decision-making process is a corollary of good governance.

In order to understand and appreciate the decision-making process in the various levels of governance, we must begin by defining the concept itself. Once this is well spelt out, examined and analyzed given experiences of the past, the question arises how the process works in these identified institutions of government. We shall probably also relate the experiences to the current situation in Nigeria? There is no doubt Nigeria has experienced alternating cycles of governance between civil and military regimes and therefore models of decision-making process for over four decades. Of these forty years, the military ruled in two long stretches of twenty eight (28) years (1966-1979, 1984- 1999).

The period 1999 to date is the longest democratic experience Nigeria has experienced; therefore, the following salient questions would be addressed.

- How do different actors influence decision-making in the various levels of governance during this period?

- With hindsight what lessons have been learnt?
- What are the challenges posed for the future?

These are some of the salient questions this paper seeks to answer.

Concept of Decision- Making

Without necessarily restricting the understanding of Decision-Making Process to governance, every decision-making platform be it an industry, a bank, a Corporation, Education institution, etc, there are laid down rules and procedures which must be followed in order to arrive at decisions. Sometimes, the final decision may require the discretion of the CEO/MD or whoever is the overall head to make. There are also conventions based on the principle of ‘two heads being better than one’, hence, the tradition of consulting with deputies, board members management and heads of units are in common practice.

There are however fundamental consideration which may precede or inform important decisions as follows; identifying the problem, looking for alternatives, critically evaluating alternatives, suggesting good alternatives, selecting best alternatives and implementing the best alternatives. Decisions are not made in a vacuum; there must be alternatives to elicit decision-making in a course of action.

Under a democracy therefore, decision-making is the act of following procedures in arriving at decisions be it within or among the levels and organs of government such as the Executive arms, the National and State Assemblies, the Political Party, and the Constituencies. In political governance, there are also laid down rules and regulations as laid down in the constitution. The process of arriving at decision is well defined at the level of government – from the Executive President, Governors, the Legislative houses and the Local Governments.

Actors in the decision-making process

Beginning with the **Executive** at the federal level, although there is a Federal Executive Council which revolves around the Presidency and considers and decides on every course of action, the President is the overall head and commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces. As the President and head of government, the powers of the executive is vested in him, he exercises these powers directly or through the Vice-President, Ministers, personal aides and officers in the public services of the federation. The President enjoys constitutionally guaranteed exercise of veto powers, which in some cases can also be set aside or overruled by the National Assembly depending on the nature and implication of the particular veto being exercised, this also means that the president does not have a blank cheque in the exercise of that veto especially if it is deemed abused or exercised arbitrarily. Most of the decisions taken by him are subject to the approval of Senate.

The **National Assembly**’s functions and spheres of influence in government are clearly spelt out in the Constitution. The Constitution itself sets the targets and guidelines for the smooth running of the corporate existence of Nigeria. It guides against the abuse of office by public officers, this is apart from spelling out the functions and qualifications for holding such offices. The section on objectives and directive principle of State policy in the Constitution provides for sanctions of defaulting public office holders whose policies and actions are inimical to the expected progress

of state. Thus, the National Assembly has two chambers, the Upper Chamber known as the Senate and the lower Chamber known as the House of Representatives. The two houses are constitutionally vested with the federation's law-making powers. They therefore compliment each other in their roles, especially as far reaching laws or decisions made in either of the houses pass through the other for ratification. Important propositions emanating from the executive are also forwarded to the Senate Chambers for consideration and ratification. Both houses rely on their constituted committees to consider myriads of issues before presenting findings to the committee of the whole house for final debate and adoption.

This procedure obtainable at the federal level is replicated at the State levels where the **House of Assembly** makes and takes decisions that affect those they are accountable to, courtesy of the representative principle; although the Governor is the Chief Executive as well as the Chief Security Officer of the state. Decision-making process here revolves around and between the governor, the State Executive Council which he presides over and the State Assembly that actually makes laws and decides how it operates for the benefit of the people. Far reaching decisions by the governor are also subjected to the perusal and approval of the State House of Assembly prior to its final adoption and implementation. Since a State Governor also enjoys veto powers guaranteed by the Constitution, the State Assembly while carrying out their law-making responsibilities also provides checks to ensure the exercise of veto is not used arbitrarily in a manner that is antithetical to democratic tenets.

At the **constituency** level, decision-making process takes effect along the line of consultation between a representative and his people, either through 'constituency outreach', individual inputs dropped in form of letters at designated constituency offices or periodical meetings with the people, which offers LGA chairmen, councilors and traditional rulers and majority of constituency members ample opportunity to confer with their representative and to express their views and influence constituency position and decisions. This representation could be at federal or state levels. Thus, every member of the house at any level represents a particular people or interest, also referred to as constituency. In other words, members of a constituency can take a decision or a stand on any issue through their representative using any of the platforms identified. This system has been very efficacious given its representative and participatory nature.

At the **Political Party level**, there are also general principles and procedure of arriving at decision-making. The party has its own Charter/Constitution which like the national Constitution operates on certain lines within the party hierarchy. Parties have structures and laid down rules and responsibilities which are followed accordingly to arriving at decisions. Political parties have national, state and Ward level structures for operational ease. Thus, there are the national working committee, the state working committee as well as the ward level structure. There is also the national executive committee, which is the highest decision-making body of the party. Each of these committees is vested with different powers to move the party forward at the level where they have jurisdiction. The chairman of the party wields a lot of influence in the party and can in like manner influence decisions. For a ruling party however, the President automatically becomes the overall head of the party and. It is therefore not unusual that party decision making process may revolve around him.

Be that as it may, the overriding consideration in any decision-making process at whatever sector or level should be transparency and accountability, and more importantly, that other alternatives

have been weighed critically. At government level for example, the President is accountable to the nation directly and through the elected representatives – particularly the Senate.

Experiences and lessons of the recent past

The recent attempt at elongating the tenure of office of the incumbent president provided a formidable challenge to the checks and balances principles provided for by the Constitution on matters such as Constitutional amendment. In the same vein, the dramatic attempt also proved the efficacy of the principle when it was invoked to kill the so called bill that generated a lot of controversy and was threatening to tear the country apart. It is important to say here that the final decision regarding that bill was taken at the Senate Chambers, when it set aside all the overbearing influences of the executive as well as the position of the House of Representatives to nullify the bill.

In countries such as Britain where unwritten constitution is practiced and from where Nigeria's Civil Service inherited a well-established, well-defined decision-making process, traditional rules and procedures still hold sway in aiding decision-making process. This is because the practice has been institutionalized by usage over the centuries.

“An unwritten constitution is one in which the basic laws and principles guiding the state are not codified or written down expressly in a document”.

It is important to note, that between the period Nigeria operated a Republican system through the advent of military expedition in politics, little or nothing was done to fundamentally address deficiency in the decision-making process. What we perhaps witnessed most often is over centralization and over concentration of decision-making power in the hands of a few cabals called leaders.

Many political analysts and commentators have raised the point that the haste with which transition from military to civilian regime took place in 1999 almost undermined the fact that the legislative arm of government was neglected for over three decades except for the brief 1979 – 1983 civilian “Intervention”. Apart from the decay resulting from years of neglect, those who were elected were not adequately prepared for the tasks before them unlike the Judiciary and Executive arms that have been around and active for some while. The true picture of the scenario then was aptly painted as follows;

“The political temperament of the country yielded a hasty transition programme that almost undermined the inevitable place of the legislature in democratic rule. The basic personnel and infrastructural facilities required for effective legislative process were alarmingly unavailable while the elected legislators were subject to improvised legislative procedure, gamble guesswork without any reference point” (Obusom Anyaegbunam, 2000)

Even the Clerks and Officers of the Legislative Houses have long gone out of practice and had to be retrained in the area of modern Legislative procedure. If it was this bad for the average legislator, it was apparently worse for the women legislators many of whom were making their debut in political and decision-making terrain. In the first two years of legislative activity, only few Bills emanating mainly from the Presidency were introduced in the National Assembly whereas several Motions were raised.

Understanding Bills and Motions

The difference between a Bill and a Motion need to be understood. A Motion is a “legislative prayer” to the legislature or the Executive arm of Government. When the Presidency or the Governor as the case may be, expresses the collective desire of the populace on a matter of utmost importance within his constituency, state or the entire country.

On the other hand a Bill is “a potential law” in the sense that the Draft Bill is a requirement by the constitution that through its adoption or passage by a required number of legislators, the chief Executive’s assent or legislative veto translate into law.

A Bill when introduced by the executive arm of government is referred to as Government Bill. But when initiated by a legislator or a group of them, it is called Members Bill. If initiated by other interest groups such as civil society groups, Professional Associations and Unions through sponsorship in the legislature, it is referred to as Private Members Bill. An example is the on-going Freedom of Information Bill or the Gender Violence Bill or even the Child Rights Bill, Affirmative Action Bill which a coalition of women groups is trying to introduce at both National and State Assemblies level.

Current Practice of Decision-Making at National and State Assemblies

Without going through the details of a typical Bill, which is beyond the bounds of this paper, it is important to note the steps to be taken before a Bill is enacted. First the Bill is introduced depending on who is sponsoring the Bill (Executive Members or Private Members). It goes through the first and second reading, after the second reading, it goes into committee stage in which a specialized committee examines and debate the issues raised by the Bill.

The Bill is then passed on for Public Hearing. At this stage the public has the opportunity to speak for or against the Bill as well as make inputs.

Public hearing of a Private Members Bill can attract a lot of public attention depending on the sponsor. It is a period for intense lobbying of the legislators and the public alike so that the Bill can be passed into Law and not killed at the 3rd reading.

The Freedom of Information Bill is one of such Bills, especially as it concerns the media that is a major stakeholder.

The Bill then goes for third reading where the Draft Bill is subjected to another round of scrutiny by the legislative houses, if adopted, it is passed onto the Upper House (Senate) for another round of passage process before it is sent for Executive assent – meaning that it has been signed into law as an Act of parliament. The same process obtains in the State Assemblies. The only difference is that there is no Upper House in which case the Bill goes straight for Executive assent of the Governor in order to become law.

Challenges of Decision making

The essence of this brief description of decision-making process in the National and State Assemblies is to highlight the intricacies and complex nature of law-making as well as the professional demands of legislation and why legislators require qualified legislative aides. The current breeds of legislators are only just beginning to appreciate the basic tenets and rigorous

demand of law-making. In recent years, legislators have been assisted by international NGOs and funding agencies to establish Constituency offices as well as train their aides for effective participation in the law-making process.

Chairmen of specialized Committees of the House have come to appreciate the need for researchers/professional lobbyists on different subject matters.

Civil society groups have equally been active in networking with legislators to promote Bills or proffer amendments to existing Bills on various issues of interest, for example the Electoral Act has been of great interest not only to the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), but also to the Electoral Reform Network (ERN) and other stakeholders.

Although legislators at the National and State levels have undergone training on various levels of law-making at home and abroad, there is no substitute for learning from experience. Nigeria's domestic political climate and practices is unique in many respects and this has to be recognized.

The levels of political education for both the legislators and their Constituencies is still relatively low compared to the United States model of Presidential system which Nigeria has copied as well as the British Parliamentary system which our Colonial experience bequeathed on us at pre and post- independence.

There are now various aspects of modern decision-making options which need to be learned and practiced. One of such option includes Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism (arbitration, mediation and negotiation), effective conduct and use of Public Hearing and Lobbying system. There is an increasing need to develop a Corps of professional political and legislative aides to assist decision makers in the decision making process.

In spite of the spate of impeachment of Speakers, Presidents of Senate and even Governors in the last few years, procedures and processes are only being learnt. Besides, unless the legislators themselves understand the underlying principles involved and the limits of their own powers and position as law and decision-makers, we shall continue to witness the crude manner in which political and party disputes are settled. It is on record that legislators even in the first post-independence civilian regimes had resorted to "fist cuffs" and breaking of the Mace (The symbolic Authority of the legislature) in order to settle scores on the floor of the House. There had been ugly scenarios of fist fighting and slapping among members in both Upper and Lower Houses of Assembly.

The nature of decision-making at party levels also makes it difficult for Constituencies to recall their legislators who they feel are no longer representing their interest. Although it has been argued that this has nothing to do with the Assemblies directly as such, but rather with INEC. The situation is compounded by the increasing influence of "Political Godfathers" who may instigate impeachment process against incumbent Speakers and Governors from their 'sitting rooms' and to install loyal ones as witnessed in Anambra and Oyo States in the last two years. The experience of Ekiti, Bayelsa and Plateau States also reveal the level of crudeness sometimes employed at decision making process which often degenerates into physical disputes. In all cases the National Executive of the party in power has waded in to settle such disputes at state levels.

Significantly, the non-representation of women at decision-making levels of political parties Constituency and State level have militated seriously against the adoption of women as candidates and have impaired their prospects of becoming elected legislators.

Conclusion

Given the challenges of decision-making at every level of power, be it at the National and State Assemblies, the Political parties, the Executives and the Constituencies, there is a need for capacity building, especially for all party operatives, legislative aides and political aspirants to improve decision-making performance. When and if these actors understand the power dynamics and responsibilities of their office, the spate and viciousness of disputes at all levels will not only reduce but would guarantee dignified settlement of differences

As Nigeria moves towards the 2007 elections, it is important to embark on massive political education (civic education) of both the electorate and aspirants on the need to adhere to procedure that leads to decision making at all levels as laid out in the Charter/ Constitution, articles of association and in the Nigerian Constitution as the case may be.

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ABOUT TRANSITION MONITORING GROUP

Transition Monitoring Group [TMG] is a coalition of human rights and civil society organisations founded in 1998 by 60 civil society groups with the objectives to develop integrity in the electoral process by monitoring and reporting on prosecution of the political programme, to observe and monitor the conduct of elections in Nigeria, to promote accountability, transparency and responsiveness among political leaders and in the public sector, to encourage and promote participation of citizens especially women and marginalised groups in the political process, to assist in capacity building for member organizations, to provide civic education, encourage wider dissemination of voter education materials, to lobby and campaign for the promulgation of human rights and people oriented legislation, to assist in mediating and resolving disputes arising within the electoral process, to engage in programmes that will strengthen the legal system and guarantee a free and independent judiciary and other democratic institutions, to network with groups and associations with similar goals and objectives. In the last five years its membership has increased to over 230 groups. The coalition started its activities with the monitoring of 1998 /1999 Nigerian general elections, organised voter education projects across the country to encourage participation, proper voting procedures, and peace education and encouraged participation of women. These activities have been sustained with the observation of the 2003/2004 general and local elections as well as voter and civic education aimed at enhancing and promoting the sustenance of democratic governance in Nigeria.

The Coordinating Committee Members of the TMG for the period 2005-2007 are:

1. Innocent Chukwuma Center for law enforcement education(CLEEN) [**Chair**]
2. Mashood Erubami- Centre for Human Rights Research and Development [**Vice Chair**]
3. Priscilla Achakpa Women's Environmental Programme [**Treasurer**].
4. Edetaen Ojo [**Publicity Secretary**]
5. Mohammed Wuyo- Borno Coalition for Democracy and Progress
7. Rommy Mom – Lawyers Alert
8. Osita Nnamani Ogbu - Centre for the Advancement of Democracy and the Rule of Law
9. Nze Eddy Ezurike - Community Health and Development Advisory Trust
10. Rebecca Sako-John- League of Democratic Women
12. Titus Mann - Civil Liberties Organization
13. Rose Ekeleme – International Association for Volunteer Effort
14. Ibrahim Muazzam-Center for Research and Documentation
15. Festus Okoye - Human Rights Monitor
16. Clement Wasah - Community Actions for Popular Participation
17. Oby Nwankwo - Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre
18. Yemi Olukoya Centre for Reproductive Health and Aromatherapy Development
19. Mimidoo Achakpa -Women's Right to Education Programme
20. Y. Z Yau - Centre for Information Technology and Development,

The Secretariat is presently made up of 9 full time staff as stated in the chart below:

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|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Mabel Ade | National Coordinator |
| 2. Chibuike Mgbeahurike | Program Officer |
| 3. Oluwaseyi Ojo | Program Assistant |
| 4. Qudus Adekogbe | Accountant |
| 5. Nnenna Eke | Secretary/Admin. Officer |
| 6. Ogechi Obialo | Administrative Assistant |
| 7. Innocent Onaji | Driver |
| 8. Miriam Nweke | Office Assistant |
| 9. Jubril Audi | Security Officer |