INSPIRE 01

ADVOCACY AND FOLLOW-UP

The final step to Decoding Injustice is to inspire systems change by leveraging evidence creatively in both formal and informal ways. Here, activists and changemakers will find recommendations on how to wrap up findings, and different advocacy strategies to make them spark transformation.

Key Questions

How can we inspire change once a report is done?

What materials should accompany the report?

What other accountability mechanisms can be harnessed to advocate for the report's implementation?

CENTER for ECONOMIC and SOCIAL RIGHTS

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Introduction

Publishing findings and recommendations is often the most tangible output of a research project — but it's definitely not the end of the process. In order to inspire concrete change, it's crucial to develop a strategy aimed at building sustained pressure on decision-makers to act. This means doing advocacy around the findings and recommendations of your research, in order to challenge the imbalances of power in policy-making that sustain the status quo.

This note highlights issues to consider when finalizing your findings with different advocacy objectives in mind. It then explores some of the tools that are available to plan advocacy and push for accountability. In particular, it sets out some of the different tactics that can be used for engaging with different stakeholders. This includes engaging with formal accountability mechanisms that are mandated to ensure that governments and other powerful actors act in line with their human rights obligations.

Finalizing and Publishing Findings

Reports and other types of documents that share research findings are pieces of *persuasive communication* that serve multiple purposes.

Investigation	Presents the evidence collected and the findings
Analysis	Provides the underlying context and causes
Information	Gives basic data to inform the community
Education	Increases knowledge of human rights
Recommendation	Makes the case for the recommendations
Empowerment	Offers victims and their supporters a basis for advocacy and action

Source: *Asia Pacific Forum on National Human Rights Institutions (2012).*

Because of these various purposes, when finalizing research it is important to think about how to present findings and conclusions in a way that can influence subsequent advocacy strategies. To help in doing this, it's good practice to circulate draft findings to solicit comments from the community or communities you are working with. It may also be appropriate to invite feedback from other stakeholders who have been involved in the research.

VALIDATING FINDINGS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Findings, conclusions and recommendations must be relevant to the local context and local constraints. This could be verified by holding community validation workshops, for example. When presenting initial findings to an affected community, some questions to ask include:

- Is the information presented an accurate reflection of the situation?
- Does the analysis correctly identify which rights are not realized, who is affected, what the authorities are doing, who the stakeholders are, and what should be done to improve the situation? If not, what should be clearer?
- What other comments or recommendations are there?

Sharing initial findings can also encourage a sense of investment and ownership, which is crucial in building public support and sustaining the pressure on relevant decision-makers to act on your recommendations.

There is a chance, however, that you may receive conflicting comments; for example, about whether accessibility to or quality of a particular service should be more of a priority, or about what contextual factors are the most relevant. It may not be possible to integrate all the comments you receive, so responsibility for agreeing on the final draft should be clearly defined. If there is a major difference of opinion among team members or other stakeholders about the findings and conclusions, and there is a failure to come to an agreement, it might be necessary to note the difference of opinion in the findings.

REQUESTING AN OFFICIAL RESPONSE

In some cases, it may be appropriate to give the relevant duty bearers the opportunity to make an official response. Some NGOs share their initial findings with duty bearers prior to publishing them to encourage a broader search for solutions. Even in cases where a request for an official response is not answered, the fact that a request was made but unanswered can be noted.

However, there may be circumstances in which you may not want to share the report in advance. For example, there may be a risk that the duty bearer could use the draft report to prepare a media campaign to discredit the research and refute its findings. So it's important to consider potential reactions they might have to the report: Are they likely to engage substantively in the implementation of your recommendations? Engage, with limited commitment, in implementing some of your recommendations? Engage, but not agree with your findings? Ignore and not even read them? Be completely against the findings and work to discredit them? The answers to these questions will influence the way you go about advocating for action on the report.

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

To have a positive impact, research findings need to be able to withstand critical bureaucratic and academic examination, but they also must be able to be read and understood by a wider audience. Other factors about how the findings and recommendations are presented will also have an impact on their effectiveness, such as:

- The **title,** which should communicate in an official way what the report is about, but can also communicate a stronger message by expressing a key message in a few words.
- The **cover**, which might include a photograph, drawing or illustration to communicate the key message in a visual format.
- The **design and layout** (including graphics, font, print size, colors, highlights, text boxes), which can affect how easy the report is to read and understand. Design can play an important role in highlighting the principal messages or particular aspects of the report.

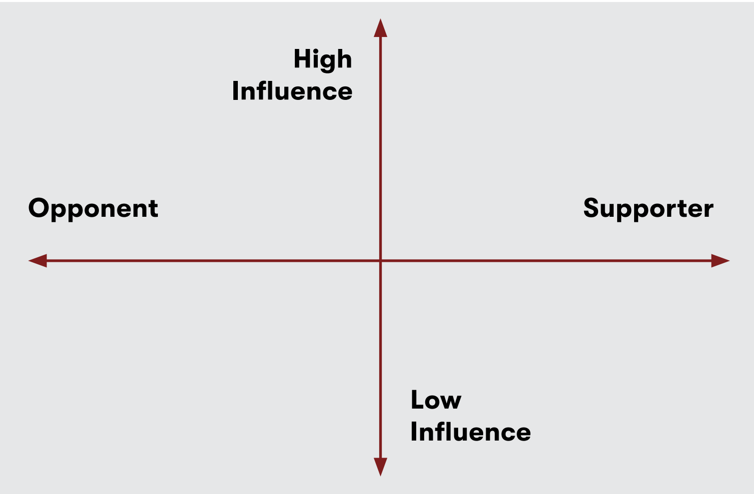
While these are certainly more micro level considerations, they are far from irrelevant.

Preparing for Advocacy

The actions outlined in this note — finalizing your research findings, developing additional advocacy materials and carrying out follow-up activities with national and international accountability mechanisms — can all be incorporated into an **advocacy strategy**. This should be developed around the time that you draft your findings, or earlier. It should clearly identify what needs to be done, by whom and by when. Indicators for measuring your impact should also be included.

A stakeholder map is a tool that can assist in the preparation of an advocacy strategy. Stakeholders include anyone involved or impacted by the change you are seeking (e.g. members of affected communities, the media, government officials). Mapping these individuals and groups helps to identify supporters, neutral parties and opponents:

- **Supporters** are the people who are already engaged, and support your recommendations.
- **Neutral parties** are the people who neither oppose nor support your recommendations.
- **Opponents** are people who actively oppose your recommendations.



The stakeholder map can help to identify how influential different stakeholders will be in facilitating or blocking action. Drawing lines between stakeholders that have relationships can also help identify intermediaries and knowledge brokers who can influence the stakeholders that you might not be able to reach. In doing this mapping, it is important to not overlook those stakeholders who are directly affected by the issue but may lack influence. Consider how you can support them to advocate for actions that could make a difference on the ground.

As discussed previously, different stakeholders will have different information needs and will be more or less influenced by different advocacy approaches. For instance, generally speaking supporters need to be mobilized, neutral parties need to be educated (to transform them into supporters), and opponents need to be countered.

Defining Advocacy Actions

To leverage your findings and conclusions, there are different tactics to engage with different stakeholder groups. While all of these actions aim at building pressure on decision-makers, some of them do so indirectly. The selection of actions to be executed must be guided by the advocacy strategy, the time available, and the resources in hand.

Objective	Target audience	Actions	Description
Build wide support for a cause	General public	**Communications campaign**	A set of clear, attractive messages to be disseminated via different channels to your audience (such as traditional and social media). In many cases, visual storytelling using graphic design, infographics, illustration, photography or video may convey information in the most engaging and informative way.
		Digital communications campaign	A social media-only campaign built around a set of clear, attractive messages specifically tailored to get people's attention in an online space. It may include "popular" versions of your report, such as shorter, more visual and less technical version of the full report, as well as videos, graphics, gifs, blog posts, newsletters, etc.
		Advertising	Paid promotion of clear, attractive messages through traditional (TV, radio, newspapers) and digital (online media, social media) channels.
		Petitions	Getting large numbers of people to sign a document calling for a certain action by those in power, particularly political figures.
		Rallies	Bringing people together in public settings to show support for a cause.
Generate awareness about an issue	General public or specific audience (depending on your particular strategy)	**Specialist convenings**	Opportunities to share your findings with experts on the issues highlighted by your report, such as seminars and workshops.
		Public statement	A document that calls attention to a violation, and that may be sent to politicians, public officials, NGOs and other stakeholders at the sub-national, national, regional and international levels.
Get others to join your advocacy efforts	General public or specific audience (depending on strategy)	**Community organizing**	Actions to inform and unite people to work for a cause, such as holding meetings, assemblies and workshops, forming coalitions, etc.
		Canvassing	Visiting people's homes and starting conversations with them on the issues you are seeking support for.
Influence decision-makers	People with high influence in the area you want to impact	**Lobbying**	Trying to influence decision-makers via one-on-one conversations. Requires a good "pitch" or persuasive set of key messages.
		Policy memorandum	Providing detailed, tailored information to specific duty-bearers, outlining what action is needed from them; for example, to change a policy. Initially, these are not public documents. A good tactic is to inform the official that it will be published at a later date, to encourage the official to respond.
Gain media attention	Media audiences	**Press management**	Getting your message across to the audiences of targeted media outlets. This can be achieved by approaching outlets to publish articles, interviews, editorials or op-eds about your cause. A succinct press release is usually a good start in getting editors/journalists' attention.
		Influencers	Gaining the support of individuals with relevant social media followings to publicize your report or communication campaign. Their image and practices should be aligned with your values.

Preparing a Communications Campaign

In most cases, advocacy strategies require communications campaigns that make findings visible to certain groups and inspire them to take action around them. In this way, communication campaigns support advocacy efforts, and can be executed at different points in the process of disseminating your findings, depending on what you need audiences to think, feel, or do.

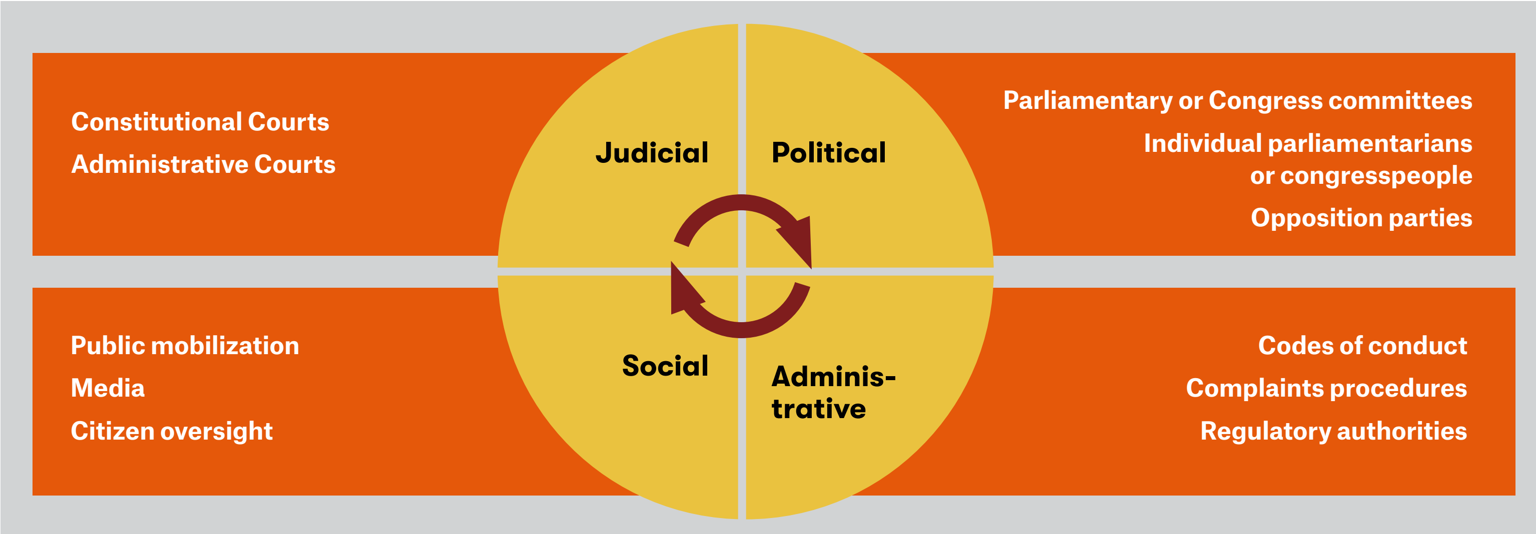
To develop a successful communications strategy, the most important step is to understand what you need to say to certain audiences to persuade them. A quick way to start outlining a communications strategy is to answer these questions:

1. **Define your audience(s):** Who is this campaign aimed at?	Depending on the nature of the topics you cover in your report, you will need to impact groups with different positions within a society. List those that you will definitely want to reach with the results of your research.
1. **Set objectives:** What do you want them to do, think or feel?	For each of these groups, state in one sentence what they should do, think and/or feel after they have been exposed to your communications campaign, in alignment with your advocacy objectives.
1. **Craft the message:** What do you need to say to them in order to achieve your objectives?	Thinking about your audiences, their lives, contexts and aspirations, and what messages can motivate them to act, think or feel as laid out in your objectives. If you don't have enough information about them, you can review demographic data and opinion polls, or conduct your own interviews.
1. **Tune the channel:** What is the most appropriate medium through which your message can be received?	How are these audiences connected to the world? What is their routine like? Which types of media do they get their information from? How much information are they receiving daily through each channel? The answer to these questions will help you choose the best way to send your message to ensure that it is heard.
1. **Determine success:** How can you measure if your objectives have been achieved?	To know if your message is getting across, define in advance the indicators that you'll use to monitor your progress. They can be quantitative (for example, the number of likes on a post or views of a video), or qualitative (the tone and content of press coverage, analysis of the content of social media responses, etc).

Engaging Accountability Mechanisms

Civil society organizations do not have the power to enforce the recommendations they make. For this reason, it is crucial to leverage other accountability mechanisms.

These include:



There is a broad range of follow-up activities that can be carried out after the launch of a research report to engage these various mechanisms over a longer-term period, including:

- Organizing workshops and seminars to share the report and accompanying materials with affected communities.
- Distributing the report to relevant government agencies and other relevant actors.
- Organizing roundtables to initiate a dialogue with relevant government actors to discuss the report's recommendations and their implementation of the recommendations.
- Organizing advocacy and media campaigns at the national level (with journalists, various ministries, civil society organizations, other policy-makers) for implementation of the report's recommendations.
- Undertaking advocacy, both regionally and internationally, for implementation of the report's recommendations.
- Based on the report's conclusions and with the concerned communities' support, assessing the possibility of taking legal action to obtain reparation or to ensure that those responsible for the violations are brought before the courts.
- Exploring other ways to lobby and pressure various stakeholders beyond the State, such as highlighting the role of development banks in financing investment projects, approaching the OECD's national contact point, and making contact with the World Bank.
- Continuously monitoring the implementation of recommendations; for example, reporting on progress — or the lack of progress — in future annual reports.

These activities are part of a longer-term process, so a separate action plan should be developed for each activity. It is clearly not possible to do everything, so it will be necessary to choose from the follow-up actions described above, based on your specific context and advocacy goals. This includes focusing on the priorities of the community or communities you're working with, as well as the outcomes of any dialogue with relevant stakeholders.

Evaluating Impact

As with all activities that civil society organizations undertake, it's important to review advocacy efforts to identify the outcomes they achieved and the impact they had on the ground. There are a multitude of methods that can be employed, but all evaluations should focus on answering at least the following broad questions:

- What went well?
- What could have been done better?
- What do stakeholders think of the work, in terms of its process and outcomes?
- What results were achieved?
- What lessons have been learned that can be applied to future initiatives?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In order to inspire change, it's crucial to build sustained pressure on decision-makers to act, through advocacy that challenges the imbalances of power in policy-making that sustain the status quo.

The findings and recommendations of your research play a critical role in doing this. But, to be effective, finalizing them, developing additional advocacy materials and then carrying out follow-up activities with national and international accountability mechanisms — should all be incorporated into an advocacy strategy, so it is clear what needs to be done, by whom and by when. Indicators for measuring your impact should also be included.

Different tactics can be used for engaging when dealing with different stakeholders. This includes engaging with formal accountability mechanisms that are mandated to ensure that governments and other powerful actors act in line with their human rights obligations. These mechanisms were introduced briefly in this note. The second and third notes in this module dive deeper into two particular mechanisms: United Nations Treaty Bodies and national courts, respectively.