

A1. What is advocacy?

Advocacy is a concept and practice that is familiar to all CSOs, as it is at the heart of what they do. But there are as many definitions of advocacy as there are CSOs, as it may mean something slightly different for each of them according to their context, the people who compose them and what they seek to achieve.

To ensure clarity, particularly for those for whom the concept and practice of advocacy are new, this toolkit adopts the systematized definitions of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Western Hemisphere Region in their Handbook for advocacy planning (82) (Box 7).

Box 7. Definitions of advocacy from civil society actors from around the world

"Advocacy is speaking up, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, and directing decision makers toward a solution. Advocacy is working with other people and organizations to make a difference. "

CEDPA: Cairo, Beijing and Beyond: A Handbook on Advocacy for Women Leaders.

"Advocacy is a process that involves a series of political actions conducted by organized citizens in order to transform power relations. The purpose of advocacy is to achieve specific changes that benefit the population involved in this process. These changes can take place in the public or private sector. Effective advocacy is conducted according to a strategic plan and within a reasonable time frame."

Fundación Arias (Arias Foundation)

"Advocacy refers to the planned process of organized citizens to influence public policy and programs."

Corporación PARTICIPA 2003

"Advocacy is defined as the promotion of a cause or the influencing of policy, funding streams or other politically determined activity."

Advocates for Youth: Advocacy 101

"Advocacy is a set of targeted actions addressed to decision makers in support of a specific political cause."

Policy Project, 1999

"Advocacy is the deliberate process of influencing political decision makers."

Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), 1999

"Advocacy is a set of political actions implemented according to a strategic plan and aiming to focus the attention of the community on a specific problem and guide decision makers toward a solution."

International Planned Parenthood Federation – Western Hemisphere Region

These definitions infer that advocacy entails, in simple terms, the actions of a group (almost always citizens or organizations) to influence a decision-maker, policy-maker or power broker to do something different for the benefit of a particular community or public issue. In the same handbook, the IPPF suggests that advocacy – as opposed to strategies such as public education, public relations, community mobilization, lobbying and fundraising – entails: targeting a decision-maker and having a political or policy change as a goal (82).

Facilitators can also use the definitions that they or their civil society partners use to define or refer to advocacy. The aim is that participants understand that advocacy is asking someone in power to make or change a decision related to the issue or problem that their organization addresses.