



## 2.4 COMMUNICATIONS AND ADVOCACY

### 2.4.1 Overview

The goal of REACH advocacy is to ensure that nutrition and related issues are high on the political agenda, and where applicable, to promote the use of REACH as an effective UN mechanism to scale-up nutrition. The broad REACH communications strategy will ensure that all the key actors increasingly share a common understanding of the prevailing nutrition problems and their solutions. The strategy should be country- or even context-specific. Ultimately, it should help influence policy and decision-making in order to enhance priority nutrition actions, strengthen capacity, coherence and accountability, and thereby augment the effectiveness of nutrition actions at all levels. It is important to ensure that key messages and information communicated are consistent so as to avoid confusion. It is, furthermore, critical to understand that a communications strategy and plan is NOT a set of messages; rather, it is a framework for information exchange that *informs* key actors and allows them to *discuss, negotiate and seek consensus* on the best way forward. Lastly, REACH communication and advocacy efforts should support the Scaling-up Nutrition (SUN) movement in designated SUN countries (see Section 5.2.4 for an overview of the various nutrition-related coordination mechanisms).

### 2.4.2 Communications versus Advocacy

There are inherent linkages between REACH advocacy and communications plans and activities. Whereas advocacy is primarily focused on raising awareness and bolstering commitment to scaling-up nutrition actions (generally among high level leaders), the communications plan is a more comprehensive undertaking which defines sustained communication processes for all key actors in the scale-up process as part of greater capacity development efforts. Advocacy may be for specific, sometimes, short-term purposes such as persuading a high-level government leader to call for and to take part in a National Nutrition Summit. Still, it is advisable to establish an Advocacy Strategy to help ensure that short-term actions/activities are coherent and promote overarching goals. The strategy should be updated as opportunities arise. On the other hand, the REACH country communication strategy should be carefully developed and normally requires the assistance of one or several communication experts. These specialists are often available in the country offices of REACH agencies. It may also be helpful to engage an external specialist experienced in nutrition communication strategy development.

The formulation of REACH country communication and advocacy strategies/plans is an integral aspect of the planning process in the *Support* phase. Facilitators should work with the communication specialists on the formulation of a communication and advocacy strategies/plans, providing them with updated information from the REACH Situation Analysis exercises. More specifically, facilitators should help them identify the following:

- Key problems and causes to be addressed;
- Priority actions selected; and
- Key actors related to these actions and their needs for awareness, information, 'coaching' and 'convincing' in order to accelerate action.

Facilitators play an important role in helping to ensure that the communication plan is part of a plan to scale-up nutrition actions, not a *separate*, 'stand-alone' exercise that quickly loses value.

### 2.4.3 Preparing an advocacy strategy

The following guidelines highlight the major steps and/or considerations for devising an advocacy strategy. Overall, the strategy should be flexible, recognising that the nutrition situation will likely evolve over time. Advocates may also change in the medium-term. As a result, the strategy should be updated regularly while adhering to certain parameters. The original objectives of the strategy, however, should change to a lesser extent. Furthermore, advocacy campaigns often come in waves. Facilitators should make sure there is frequent and regular activity, bearing in mind that people have other responsibilities. Facilitators should manage the level of engagement required of them accordingly, and make sure the team celebrates and communicates small victories.



In addition to the below guidelines, specific advocacy tasks are mentioned in successive sections of the manual for the respective REACH exercises and/or supporting activities.

1. **Analysis of advocacy issues.** Analysis is the essential first step to effective advocacy. All advocacy efforts should begin with accurate information and an in-depth understanding of the issue at hand. Understanding the relevant local political and social structures and dynamics is very important, as it is very easy to advocate for the right issue to the wrong people, or in the wrong way. Facilitators should discuss with technical stakeholders the relevant issues and establish a priority list.
2. **Establish measurable goals and SMART objectives** (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound)<sup>1</sup>. The information collected during Step 1 provides the basis for the development of advocacy goals and objectives. In defining advocacy objectives, the following questions should be asked:
  - What needs to change?
  - Why is change necessary?
  - How much change is required, what do we want to change?
  - Who can make the change?
  - Where and when should change take place?
  - How will change be measured?
3. **Identify long and short-term objectives:** Long-term objectives may not be attainable immediately, but short-term objectives will help build towards those in more concrete ways. For example, a long-term objective may be to mainstream nutrition indicators in a national development policy. One of the possible short-term objectives leading to this long-term objective could be to identify the decision-makers responsible for writing this policy and their attitudes toward including nutrition in the policy. Ensure objectives are defined in a way that triggers specific actions, engages people, and can be sustained over time. Moreover, make sure that the objectives are big enough to matter, but small enough to get results.
4. **Identify target audiences and stakeholders.** During the early stages of REACH (e.g. the *Preparation* and *Situation Analysis* phases), list all relevant parties that have interests or influence related to reducing undernutrition. These parties may be broken into three categories: supporters, opponents and undecided.
5. **Create a Power Map:** Draft a Power Map to capture the most influential actors, the ones with formal authority to approve changes and the ones with informal authority who still have influence on the decision-making process. Identify who they are and what pressure points are available to move them.
6. **Select messages and tactics.** Once the target audiences and stakeholders have been identified, tailor messages and determine the appropriate actions and tactics for their delivery.

While each advocacy objective will involve different messages for different audiences, one core message should be developed which clearly summarises the overall goal and the desired change. The core message will be primarily influenced by the most urgent causes of undernutrition identified by Step 1. In the implementation of the advocacy strategy, the core message will serve as

a basis for compelling media and communication campaign content such as slogans, sound bites/quotes and stories for media and communication campaigns. Key messages will tailor the

**Keep in mind...**

- ✓ Ensure that all partners buy into the same message. Take time to discuss one-to-one with the key partners.
- ✓ Make sure that the UN nutrition focal points have reviewed and signed-off on the messages with their respective Country Directors (Representatives), as often these persons will be responsible for implementing the strategy (e.g. through meetings with government officials, delivering speeches at events, interviews), not the UN focal point themselves.

<sup>1</sup> Doran, GT (1981). "Management Review."



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core message to appeal to different individuals or groups based on their interests and capacity to influence nutrition decisions. These messages should be based on a review of what information the specific audience needs/wants to receive, what kind of action is required of them to influence decisions. Key messages should be clear, compelling and engaging and use language to suit specific audiences (Table 6).

Likewise, the tactics for communicating these messages should be tailored to ensure that they reach the target audiences. Facilitators should be mindful that there is a fine line between how government and other stakeholders interact in the preparation and implementation of an advocacy strategy. Advocacy activities usually target senior levels of government, while technical coordination groups are often comprised of junior members of government and other partners. Keep this in mind when selecting communication tactics and engage many different parties to explore creative options.

7. **Develop an action plan.** Partners should play an active role in the strategy design process as well as the development of the action plan to ensure mutual ownership and commitment. An Advocacy action plan details specific activities to be undertaken, their timeframe and deadlines, those stakeholders responsible for carrying out specific tasks and the resources required. Try to build from existing resources including past advocacy work, established alliances and/or resource persons. The action plan should be revised and endorsed by them and by senior levels to ensure buy-in. It is equally helpful to build advocacy alliances, if necessary (with media, academia, etc.).
8. **Monitoring and evaluation.** Attributing causality is notoriously difficult in advocacy work. How does one know if action 'X' achieved intended result 'Y'? If the result is achieved, how does one determine which specific advocacy efforts were responsible, or if the result occurred due to the combined efforts of the humanitarian community, or whether it had nothing to do with either, instead reflecting some other shift in the political/economic/social circumstances?

The more specific, tangible and measurable the objectives are, the more accurate the quantitative and qualitative indicators will be in assessing the advocacy strategy's contribution to achievements. Action plans should incorporate reflection, learning and flexibility to determine their effectiveness in meeting the strategy's goals and objectives; it is therefore recommended that milestones and output indicators are included in the Advocacy action plan to track progress and take corrective actions, when needed.

**Table 6. Tips for Selecting Advocacy Messages and Tactics**

*Knowing what to communicate to whom, when and how*

Tips	Considerations
<p>Select messages according to target audience</p> <p><i>e.g. Identify messages which can influence decision-makers, technical staff, supporters, etc.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ensure messages are persuasive and adapted to the specific purpose.</li> <li>➤ Ensure that advocacy messages cover at least:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Why the advocacy objective is the right thing to do on the merits (e.g. "Increasing funds for children's health saves lives.")</li> <li>2) Why it is in the political interest of the authority to do it ("We have a coalition of fifty groups supporting this proposal ")</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
<p>Identify who the strategy's "messengers" may be</p> <p><i>Keep in mind that the same message has a different impact depending on who communicates it.</i></p> <p><i>Messages should be adjusted to the "messenger" and the specific audience she/he is intended to reach.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Experts</b> whose credibility is largely technical such as academics and professors, senior technical staff, well-respected research institutions or others.</li> <li>➤ <b>Authentic Voices</b> of the people who can speak from personal experience such as program beneficiaries or vulnerable households, or program field workers.</li> <li>➤ <b>People with Clout</b> (Influence) who have access to the political connections that make authorities want to listen, such as "nutrition champions" (e.g. a former Head of state, good will ambassadors, a First Lady, etc.).</li> </ul>



<p>Identify communication tactics</p> <p><i>When selecting tactics, it is vital that the channels and messengers to be used for message delivery are selected in accordance with the target audiences and stakeholders defined in Step 3.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Written technical memos/policy briefs (based on evidence-based research, arguments, proposed actions)</li> <li>➤ Public conferences or debates, workshops, technical meetings, etc.</li> <li>➤ Talking points (high-level meetings)</li> <li>➤ Participation of key resource persons in high-level meetings (UNCT, UN RC, representatives of civil society, representatives of nutrition donor group if they exist, etc.)</li> <li>➤ Public campaigns</li> <li>➤ Dialogue and negotiation networking: building alliances and partnerships</li> <li>➤ Production and dissemination of information materials; and media relations.</li> </ul>
<p>Select the communication vehicles</p> <p><i>To deliver messages, vehicles should be chosen according to the target audiences, the nature of the message and available resources.</i></p> <p><i>Communication vehicles should be well-prioritized, coordinated and orchestrated.</i></p> <p><i>How and when to communicate is critical.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ For social mobilization, use grassroots movements.</li> <li>➤ For garnering public attention, use available media and press coverage and nutrition champions.</li> <li>➤ For capturing attention of special interest groups, use representative women/men, artists, etc.</li> <li>➤ For working on technical issues and policy, use analysis, academics.</li> <li>➤ For behind-the-scenes efforts, lobby high-level partners and local opinion leaders.</li> </ul>

### 2.4.1 Preparing a communications strategy

This portion of the manual will be developed by a communication specialist and integrated in a subsequent version.