# Measuring advocacy impact: Case study of a capacity building programme

By Sarah Rose, January 2015

*The following case study documents an ongoing capacity building initiative commissioned by Norwegian Church Aid, ChristianAid, and Church of Sweden in Southern Africa and undertaken by INTRAC consultants Sarah Rose and Jenny Ross.*

## Introduction

International NGOs are increasingly incorporating advocacy and change-related strategies into their work, recognising that service delivery can only partly tackle poverty. This rise in advocacy programming has resulted in an increase in pressure from donors to measure and demonstrate impact. For campaigners, this means there is amplified pressure to use monitoring techniques to assess constantly changing environments and adapt strategies accordingly. However, this increased pressure is not always matched by funding. Furthermore, many campaigners are unfamiliar with the process of monitoring and evaluating advocacy work and sceptical of the benefits.

Monitoring and evaluating advocacy comes with a unique set of challenges, many of which are documented in a recent INTRAC publication, '[More of an art than a science': Challenges and solutions in monitoring and evaluating advocacy]' (Sarah Rose, 2014). This case study builds on that paper and aims to document how Norwegian Church Aid, ChristianAid, and Church of Sweden are responding to some of these challenges through a long-term advocacy capacity building initiative undertaken by INTRAC. It aims to provide readers experiencing similar challenges with a set of ideas and an approach that can be replicated in other contexts.

This bespoke piece of work has allowed INTRAC to explore practical solutions to theoretical challenges, something relatively new to the organisation in the field of advocacy. The method has been particularly innovative due to the nature of consultation with partners. Rather than predefining an approach, Norwegian Church Aid, ChristianAid and Church of Sweden recognised that partner organisations were integral to the design of the initiative. It has also been successful due to the time committed to the processes, the genuine long-term commitment to change and partnership, and the recognition that participating organisations may not get it right immediately.

This paper uses the following terminology: Norwegian Church Aid, Christian Aid, and Church of Sweden are referred to as 'the funding partners' as they facilitated and funded the approach, developed the original terms of reference and work closely with participating partners in achieving advocacy objectives. These organisations also play a re-granter role working through partner organisations in the region. The Southern African organisations partnered with the funding partners are referred to as ‘partner organisations’ and the individual people participating in the process are referred to as ‘participating partners’ or ‘participants’.

## The challenge

In April 2013, Norwegian Church Aid in Southern Africa contacted INTRAC on behalf of Christian Aid and Church of Sweden to provide capacity building on advocacy planning, monitoring, evaluating and reporting (PMER) for partner organisations from South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Botswana.

Norwegian Church Aid, Christian Aid, and Church of Sweden are committed to working with civil society organisations and faith-based organisations across the region, recognising that to make substantial and sustainable changes in policy, behaviour, and practice, they need to support the capacity of local organisations. These local organisations work on a range of advocacy initiatives including improving transparency in the extractives industry, debt management, gender justice, HIV and climate change.

While this strategy has been effective in developing strong partnerships and allowing civil society organisations and faith-based organisations to access international funding opportunities, partner organisations were still struggling to show the impact they knew was taking place.

When Jenny Ross and I (the author) reviewed partner reports, it was difficult to see what changes they were making as a result of their advocacy work. But when we spoke to people and they explained the difficulty in their contexts and how enormous achievements were being made against the odds, we realised that perhaps they weren’t being asked the right questions.

The funding partners recognised that their PMER systems have, to date, been largely based on traditional service delivery and are not helpful in gathering information to demonstrate impact for advocacy initiatives. Along with their partner organisations they were struggling with setting meaningful indicators for advocacy work beyond measuring activities. They were also struggling with designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation systems that were not onerous; and encouraging advocates and campaigners to understand the value of monitoring and evaluation. A particular weakness was identified in the reporting and documenting of results from partners, a challenge that was also felt higher up the funding chain as Norwegian Church Aid, Christian Aid, and Church of Sweden were responsible for reporting to larger donors such as NORAD, Sida and the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

## A model for changes in capacity

It is broadly recognised that there are six outcomes an organisation can hope to achieve from advocacy work. These are changes in

- social norms,
- organisational capacity,
- alliances,
- base of support, and
- policies, which can all lead to changes in…

- impact.[1]

As changes in organisational capacity and alliances can ultimately lead to policy or behaviour change, for this project the funding partners focused on these two areas. A change in capacity would assist partners to better demonstrate advocacy impact and better respond to changes in the external environment, therefore strengthening their advocacy interventions. A change in the coordination between partners would allow individual organisations to learn from others and strengthen their strategies accordingly.

The intention at the outset was to bring their partner organisations together to look at how to combine the advocacy and PMER cycles with a focus on developing indicators, designing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, and reporting. To do this they required not a standard training methodology, but an approach that incorporated consultation on how best to design systems, improve reporting, and plan the capacity building programme.

While the funding partners did not expressly anticipate an 18-month programme when they first contracted INTRAC, they recognised that to change capacities, they would need to commit to a longer-term programme of support, designed in consultation with partner organisations.

The three funding partner organisations and their Southern African partners developed the programme model with INTRAC facilitation. The ultimate goal is to see an increase in advocacy impact and an increase in resource mobilisation for advocacy. This is to be accomplished through a dual focus on strengthening organisational capacity and strengthening coordination between partners.

The anticipated outcomes include:

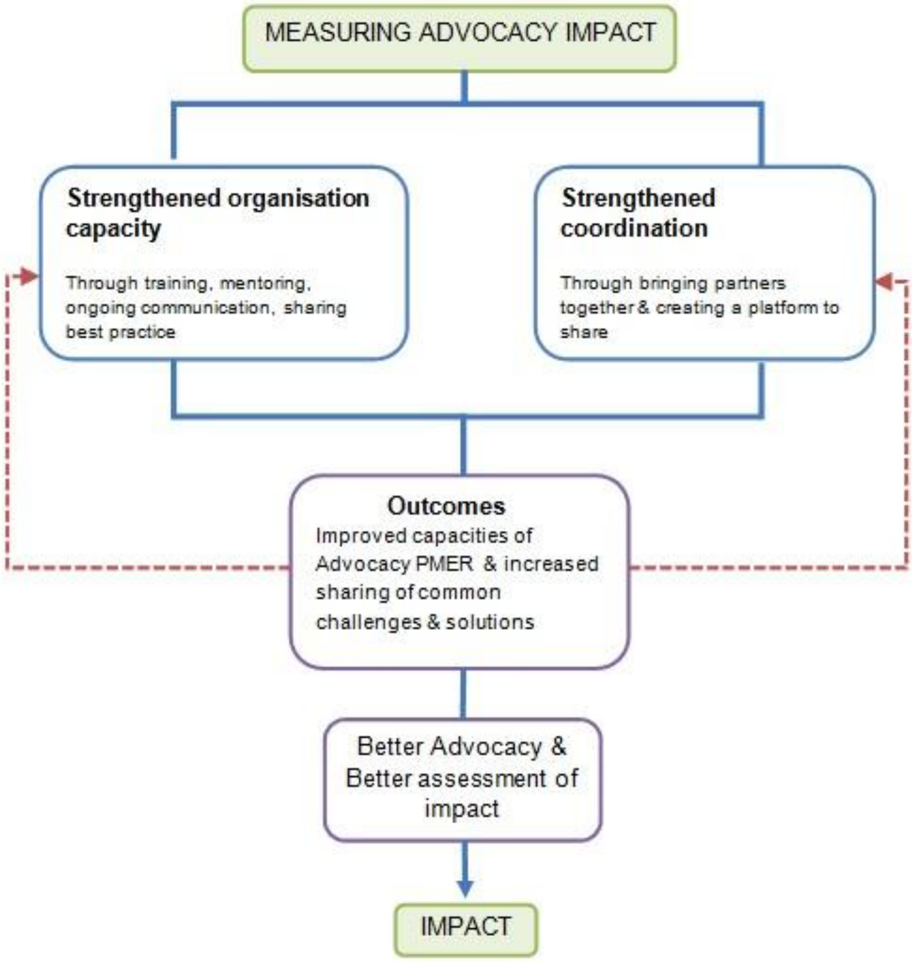
- Improved capacity to plan for advocacy
- Improved ability to set indicators, develop systems and collect relevant data
- Improved ability to report on advocacy initiatives and explain how and why plans change
- Increased sharing and communicating between partners about lessons learnt, common challenges and solutions

If these outcomes are met, the project would lead to better monitoring and evaluation of advocacy, more learning feeding into the strengthening of advocacy strategies, and ultimately increased impact.

The diagram on the following page illustrates the theory of change of the programme:

[1] A guide to measuring advocacy and policy; prepared for the Annie Casey Foundation by Organisational Research Services: http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-aguidetomeasuringpolicyandadvocacy-2007.pdf

**The Advocacy PMER capacity building model of change**




## Assessing partner needs

In October 2013, we (Sarah Rose and Jenny Ross) began planning for the first meeting with the funding partners and the 25 partner organisations. As is normal practice for any INTRAC training workshop, we (the consultants) conducted a thorough needs assessment with participating partners through a survey and follow-up calls. This was to determine their different understandings of both advocacy and M&E, how their organisations adapted and changed strategies, and the value they put to M&E systems and indicator setting.

The assessment revealed that while most participating partners were familiar with developing and implementing advocacy strategies, very few had experience of collecting information to monitor and evaluate advocacy and many found M&E jargon overwhelming. In fact, most saw monitoring and evaluation as a box-ticking exercise for donors. Overall the benefits of M&E for advocacy planning were not well understood and very few participants spoke of the need to integrate M&E into advocacy planning in order to strengthen strategies.

Of particular concern were participants' perceptions that reporting on adaption and change might be viewed as failure, rather than it being an indication of understanding the complicated nature of advocacy and the need to constantly change due to the external environment.

Other challenges identified through the assessment included the lack of capacity and resources, the difficulty of quantifying the impact of work, the challenges of adhering to different donor requirements and developing frameworks that suited the culture of individual organisations.

We also reviewed the funding partners reporting structures and the extent to which they encouraged critical reflection and learning from partners. While many of the standard questions in reporting formats were included, the completed reports received were lacking of detail. This led us to ask whether the reporting structures were asking the right questions.

## The capacity building process

The capacity building programme progressed through a series of workshops held in South Africa, individual mentoring (both face-to-face and remote) and online webinars. At the time of writing, 18 months into the programme, it is evident that a significant strength of the initiative has been the flexibility to change and adapt at each stage to best meet partner needs. This adaptation has been a result of encouraging continuous feedback from participating partners through workshop evaluations, email discussions, and informal dialogue on what gaps still exist and the best way to fill them.

Another strength has been the recognition from the funding partners that in order to make major changes in the quality of reporting, the exercise could not solely focus on capacity building for partner organisations. They also needed to commit to looking at their own requirements, relationships and structures. Based on partner feedback, the funding partner organisations have made major changes to their requirements from partners and to their own internal systems. These are detailed below under 'Reporting'.

The process has involved the following stages:

### 1. The first meeting

Initially all participating partners met for a three-day workshop, providing the space to network, share challenges and problem solve. While the workshop covered many standard advocacy training elements, there were four particular areas of focus: addressing jargon, developing an advocacy roadmap, looking at reporting and ensuring follow-up.

*Jargon*

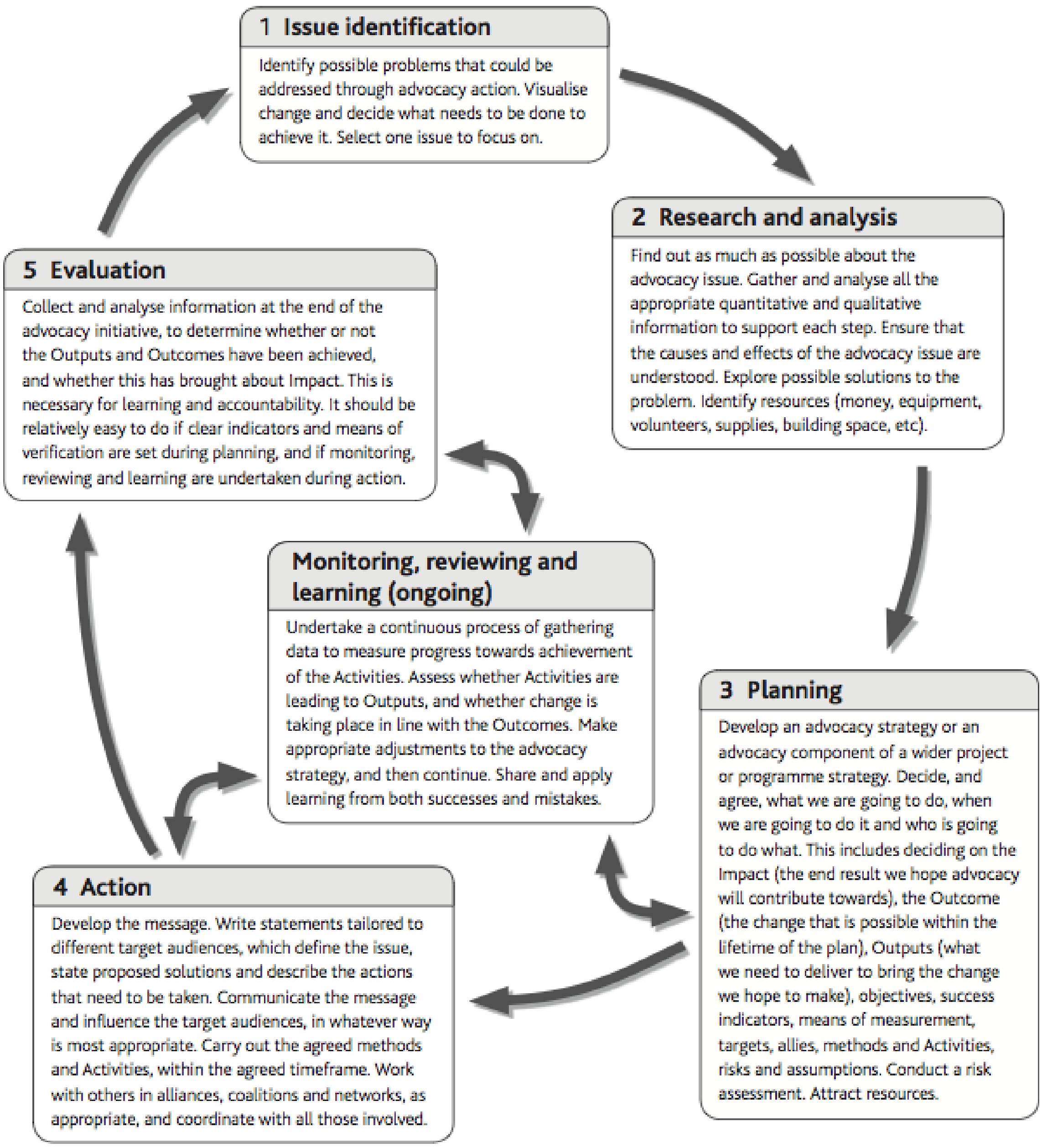
The participants were mainly experienced activists, well versed in the language of change, injustice and power. However, these same people felt the language of M&E, such as 'inputs', 'indicators', and 'outcomes' was disempowering and did not assist them in demonstrating the significant changes they were making across the region. Therefore, we spent workshop time looking at the language used by donors, funding partners and partner organisations. This led to an attempt to standardise and develop simple terms that would be easily understood for reporting purposes.

*An advocacy roadmap*

Drawing inspiration from outcome mapping and theory of change approaches, we (the facilitators) developed an advocacy planning methodology, which we called an advocacy roadmap that allowed participants to view advocacy planning in a more holistic manner.

This methodology incorporated elements of the standard advocacy cycle, as illustrated below.[2]

**The advocacy cycle**




[2] Tearfund Advocacy Toolkit: Overview of the Advocacy Cycle (2014)

Our roadmap, however, recognised that M&E is often addressed at the end of the planning process and more often ignored completely.

To put more emphasis on M&E, the roadmap took participants through a series of short teaching sessions and practical steps aimed at constructing a clear logic for advocacy initiatives. The step-by-step approach started with trying to gain clarity on how to get from the present situation to the goal; and the short and medium term outcomes we might see along the way. Next, we discussed how we would see if progress was being made, setting indicators. Third, we discussed how we would monitor and evaluate these plans using the indicators we had set ourselves. Only after that did we focus on the advocacy activities and messages. Our methodology incorporated rich pictures, diagrams, and role play.

**Visual example of the advocacy roadmap exercise**

We then asked the participants to utilise their advocacy skills by collectively interrogating the logic of their peers and providing critical feedback to strengthen plans through a series of questions – see box below.

**Questions used to interrogate advocacy planning logic**

- Why would this plan fail to progress, what assumptions and risks have been identified, and how has the team considered mitigating factors?
- What alternative approaches could you consider?
- Why are you doing a particular activity?
- Why is this the right approach?
- What changes (internal and external) might lead you to having to change the approach?
- What information has informed the development of this strategy?
- What evidence do you have that has informed your analysis of who has power and what needs to change?
- Do you have the resources to implement this plan?

This approach worked well for activists, allowing them space for dialogue, making linkages and challenging each other. Many of the participants commented that this methodology would be something they would like to adapt and use within their own organisations.

*Reporting*

The funding partners decided to address the challenges of reporting in an innovative way. Rather than merely providing generic guidance on what makes a good report, Norwegian Church Aid, Christian Aid, and Church of Sweden agreed to design one template report that partners could use for reporting to all three organisations, thereby avoiding duplication and time wasting.

Additionally, the workshop featured a series of sessions facilitated over two days and designed to create an opportunity for partner organisations to jointly diagnose the major challenges in reporting. This was prompted by questions such as *'what questions would donors need to ask you to allow you to report more accurately and with better detail?'* or *'is the language in reports clear?'*

Through this process, participants jointly constructed a set of reporting questions that they felt would better encourage them to demonstrate impact and share learning. We, as facilitators, ensured that global funding partner reporting requirements were not lost in discussions.

This consultation represented a significant achievement. By addressing the problem of reporting quality through a series of questions on how to improve reporting (both for the funding partners and partners), it immediately addressed any potential conflict or issues of blame. The participatory process ensured wide buy-in and understanding of what was required and the reasons. It also allowed the funding partners to better understand how difficult reporting requirements can be across different contexts and cultures.

The funding partners have since seen an increase in quality of reports from partners that have utilised the new format.

*Follow-up support*

The first workshop ended with a consultation between participants and funding partners to determine the design of an ongoing methodology for the capacity building initiative. Designed around a series of prompt questions such as '*How can you implement learning?', 'What will the major constraints be?', and 'How can funding partners support you?',* this consultation allowed us to design an ongoing approach which was highly adaptive and relevant to the needs of each organisation.

## 2. The second meeting

To maintain momentum and respond to ongoing challenges, we asked the funding partners to bring partners together again six months after the first meeting. The purpose was to provide a platform for more learning and sharing and to encourage participating partners to reflect on how work has changed. It provided a good opportunity to monitor how the capacity building initiative was going.

Between the first and second workshop, we (the consultants) provided participating partners remote mentoring support, mainly on their project plans for the next planning cycle. This mentoring, usually conducted via Skype, helped to highlight some of the ongoing challenges that participants were facing, particularly around how they encouraged others within their organisations to change.

***What changed in the six months between workshops?***

During discussions participating partners noted the following changes between the initial workshop, follow-up mentoring and the second workshop:

- People viewed and approached reporting differently and adapted their own organisational templates to reflect this.
- Many organisations took away from the sessions on reporting that collecting impact stories would be a valuable way of demonstrating change. In one case an organisation was looking at the possibility of collecting stories orally in communities where there is a language barrier, with the idea of using these to show progress to the funding partners.
- The funding partners reported that the quality funding applications and strategic plans have significantly strengthened their relationship with partners and increased their ability to clearly articulate the theory of change behind advocacy initiatives.
- The funding partners reported that those partners using the new structure had submitted significantly stronger reports and funding proposals.
- A few organisations had used the advocacy roadmap methodology and integrated it into strategic planning documents and project proposals.
- Some organisations had shared what they had learnt with other organisations they partnered with and within their own organisations, using the same materials and approach (‘step down’ training).
- A few organisations had designed, or begun to design, M&E systems for the first time, along with setting themselves stronger indicators for their work.
- Most organisations were starting to question purely metrics-based indicators on activities.
- A few organisations reported that they had completed an evaluation of their work for the first time.
- One organisation stated that, as a result of the workshop, they had set aside budget to hire an M&E officer and started streamlining reporting.
- All had reported a great enthusiasm and excitement in sharing and trying to implement the learning.

However, despite the many improvements detailed in the box above, participating partners were still reporting that power dynamics and institutional arrangements prevented them from making the changes they would like to see. Additionally, many were still struggling with setting indicators and developing M&E systems that could be integrated into existing systems. The workshop aimed at collectively solving challenges using a series of practical exercises and role play.

*Ongoing support and action planning*

The facilitators and funding partners recognised at this point in the process that the funding partner organisations had made a significant investment in bringing partners together and contracting INTRAC to mentor. As such, there was a slight shift in their emphasis towards encouraging each partner to commit to concrete actions that would be followed up.

One such exercise as part of this process was to encourage partner organisations to explore what they still needed to do through a needs assessment triangle (depicted in the box below). However, to increase ownership and their own expectations of themselves, we asked partners to document what they would do themselves and develop an action plan for this in the workshop. For example, one organisation agreed to further develop their advocacy roadmap and share it with the group. This provided participating partners with an opportunity (often a luxury) to reflect on their own individual work plans. Critically, it provided a benchmark for the consultants against which to measure progress and provide follow-up mentoring.

**Needs assessment triangle**


| Level | Specifics |
|---|---|
| I can do it myself | Review learnings & formulate ways/tools to share with staff/board. – take this to ED. |
| I can do it with others | Brainstorm with ED & then securing staff & board buy-in to process. Engaging in a participatory process to ensure ownership (facilitated primarily by self & ED? – yet to be confirmed). |
| I can do it with help | Remote support valued from INTRAC – email exchange, potential Skype contact. Utilising tools/exercises/book obtained from web (best practice) & provided by INTRAC. |

*Evaluating the initiative*

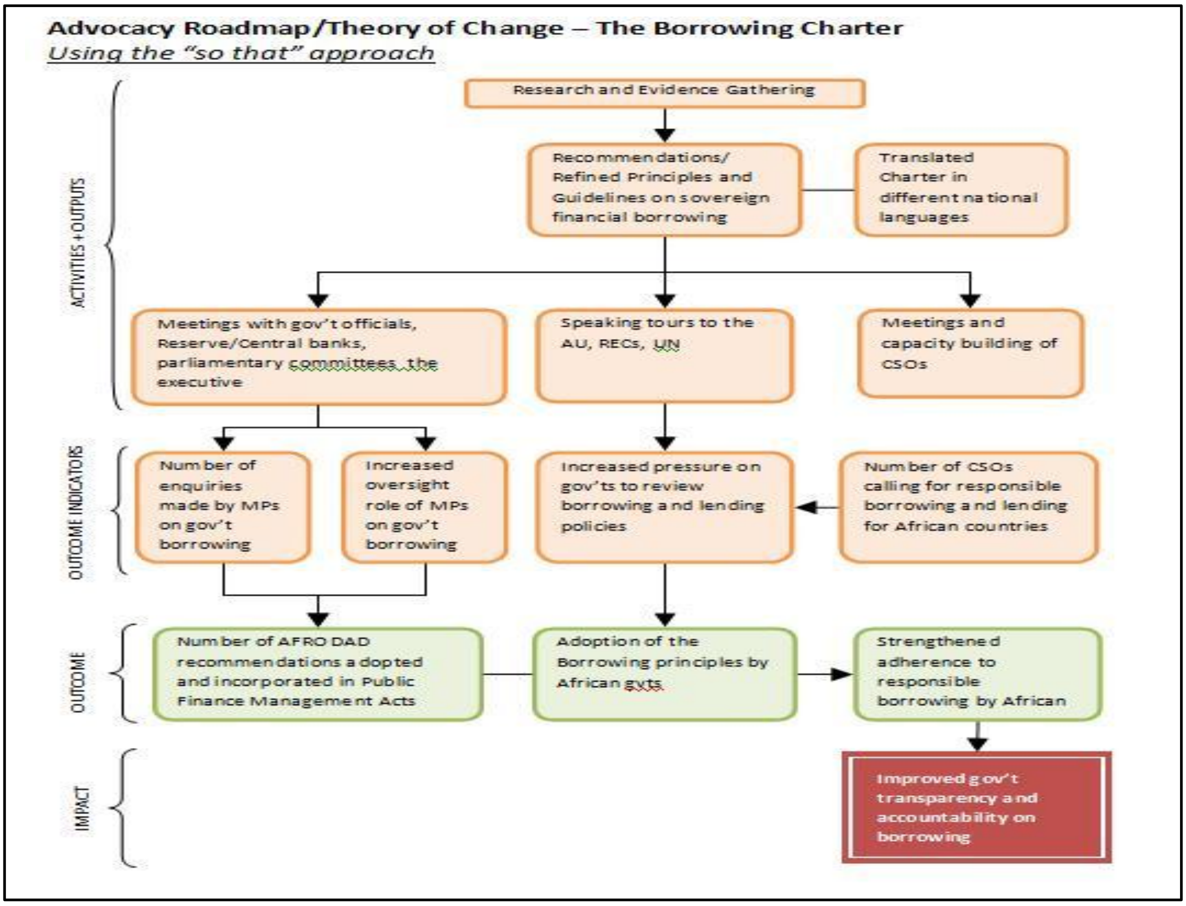
Building on the success of the consultation on reporting, the funding partners and partners agreed the second meeting would also provide participants with an opportunity to provide recommendations on how the capacity building process would be evaluated and what indicators of success might be set against the objectives of the initiative. Suggestions included recorded feedback, exchange visits and sharing of advocacy roadmaps and systems.

## 3. Online support and mentoring

After concluding the second visit, we, the partner organisations, and funding partners all agreed that resources would be better utilised providing one-to-one support for a smaller group of organisations, with opportunities for the wider group to come together and share learning through more cost-effective online means. One such learning event was a webinar during which one of the organisations presented the result of their advocacy roadmap, depicted below. We as consultants also held regular informal Skype discussions with individual participants and compiled an email bulletin, sent to the whole group, sharing case studies and examples of best practice across the sector.

These opportunities helped keep up the momentum and provided chances for participants to reflect on ongoing challenges. It also provided funding partners the opportunity to have regular dialogue with partner organisations about what was and wasn't working.

**Advocacy roadmap by The African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD)**



**4. Organisational tailor-made mentoring/training**

The funding partners contracted INTRAC to provide a series of individual tailor-made consultancies to self - selected partner organisations in order to address the specific issues they were facing. These included developing indicators, training across organisations in advocacy PMER, and development and/or review of M&E systems.

Further building on the recognition that the funding partners had made significant resources available for partners, partners were asked to share the costs of these consultancies. This was also an important opportunity to secure senior leadership buy-in.

**Changes in funding partner organisations**

Although this initiative has been aimed primarily at partner organisations, Christian Aid, Norwegian Church Aid and Church of Sweden have experienced significant changes in the Southern African region in the way they think about, plan for and capture impact.

There has been an increased level of discussion and sharing with partners, there has been a review and strengthening of systems and a renewed focus on better planning and asking the right questions.

## An ongoing process

While this process included a number of opportunities to follow up over the course of 18 months, both funding partners and partner organisations recognised that change will take time. At the time of writing, a smaller committed group of partner organisations has emerged. They are making significant achievements in how they plan for and demonstrate outcomes and they will need time to embed this within their organisations.

Alongside this, the funding partner organisations have demonstrated considerable commitment in supporting change and have recognised the need to maintain ongoing dialogue with each organisation.

The funding partners anticipate that the group will be brought together a year from now to assess progress and evaluate the approach.

## Lesson learning

*'Over a one-year period our programme team has grown in our understanding of and reflections on PMER processes, participating in training and mentoring ourselves while at the same time accompanying and supporting partners on the journey. This has sharpened our skills and capacitated us to support our partners in the future.'*
*– Norwegian Church Aid*

While the donor community increasingly demands accountability and demonstration of results, funding is primarily focused on delivering results. Many organisations therefore find it difficult to develop appropriate systems for monitoring, evaluating and learning.

The Advocacy PMER capacity building initiative has been a significant investment on the part of Church of Sweden, Norwegian Church Aid and Christian Aid and demonstrates a unique way of working. The method recognises that change takes time and that in order to get the best out of similar capacity building approaches, consultation is key. As one participant eloquently put it: 'I keep having my capacity built in areas that I already know how to do.'

By funding this initiative, the funding partners have also secured the trust of many partner organisations, which have come to believe that they are in genuine partnerships with funding partner organisations that are in it for the long haul.

Some of the lessons learnt include:

1. Advocates know what constitutes significant impact, but often the language of M&E, reporting processes, and planning systems is not meaningful to them. Deconstructing these processes into simple methodologies assists them in articulating indicators and setting up M&E systems.
2. The funding partner organisations have learnt that to get the best possible quality of reporting and learning of lessons, it is worth consulting with partners to ask if they are being asked the right questions and if the language of reporting structures translates into their cultures and contexts.
3. Funding partner organisations have also learnt that partners find the informal side of the relationship invaluable. It is important to pick up the phone and have regular short interactions rather than just wait for the quarterly reports.
4. It is essential to consult at the beginning, middle, and end of the process about the challenges partners are facing, what changes have been made and how to design and redesign methodologies.
5. Once you have gained trust and demonstrated the value of an initiative such as this, to increase senior leadership buy-in and encourage long-term changes, it is important to explore what resources and investment partner organisations will contribute to such capacity building initiatives.

The organisations we worked with came to this project at varying starting points and used the capacity building programme to achieve quite different things at an individual and organisational level. For some, the process has allowed them to further define and develop the theory of change behind their advocacy work. For others, it has been about finding ways to articulate the context in which they work and demonstrate how relatively small changes in their environments are actually big achievements.

This paper has aimed to document and share the process by which the above achievements have been made and we, the consultants, agree that a similar approach could be replicated in other regions and with other organisations if developed in a highly consultative way, recognising that change takes time.

## References and source materials

INTRAC is an organisation dedicated to strengthening civil society, and as such we are always enthusiastic to share information that might be useful to others. Below is a set of references which provide many of the source materials for our Advocacy Monitoring and Evaluation training and this particular piece of work. This list of resources continues to grow so please get in touch if you would like more information.


**A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy – Annie E. Casey Foundation**
http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/DA3622H5000.pdf

**Handbook of Data Collection Tools Companion to 'A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy' – Annie E. Casey Foundation**
http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publicationsandresources/a_handbook_of_data_collection_tools.pdf

**Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance Monitoring & Evaluation of Advocacy Campaigns: Literature Review**
http://www.e-alliance.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/docs/Advocacy_Capacity/2011/11._EAA_M_E_Literature_Review.pdf

**Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance Advocacy Evaluation Guide**
http://www.e-alliance.ch/en/s/advocacy-capacity/resources/evaluating-advocacy-activities/

**Tracking Progress in Advocacy: Why and How to Monitor and Evaluate Advocacy Projects and Programmes – Maureen O'Flynn**
http://www.intrac.org/resources.php?action=resource&id=672

**Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in NGO Advocacy – Oxfam Report**
http://www.oxfamamerica.org/files/mel-in-ngo-advocacy-full-report

**Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study – ActionAid**
http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0708/doc21800.pdf

**The elusive craft of monitoring advocacy**
http://www.hewlett.org/uploads/documents/Elusive_Craft.pdf

**Save the Children's Advocacy Matters Toolkit**
http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/advocacy-matters-helping-children-change-their-world

**A guide to monitoring and evaluating policy influencing – ODI**
http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/5252-monitoring-evaluation-me-policy-influence

**Monitoring Government Policies: A toolkit for Civil Society Organisations in Africa – CAFOS, Christian Aid and Trocaire, 2007**
http://www.commdev.org/userfiles/files/1818_file_monitoringgovernmentpolicies.pdf

**Advocacy Evaluation Mini-Toolkit: Tips and Tools for Busy Organisations – LFA group**
http://intelligentmeasurement.net/2013/10/08/advocacy-evaluation-mini-tool-kit/



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