

Advocacy and Campaigning

10 Public mobilisation

Keywords: Theory of change, advocacy, campaign, mobilisation, partnership, be the voice, citizen engagement, popular mobilization

Duration: 2 hours



Introduction

Public mobilisation and, for Save the Children the mobilisation of children in particular, is a key element of campaigning and building support, as it shows public demand for the issue. Children are agents of change and Save the Children works to provide a platform for them to share and amplify their voice. .

We support the mobilisation of the public in order make lasting change for all children. Public demand for change is a useful part of convincing governments and others such as corporations and institutions to make the commitments needed for children. Public engagement in campaigns is also a way of improving governance and transparency by building demand from the public for a political commitment or policy change.

Learning Outcomes for this session

Knowledge and understanding

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

1. Understand why Save the Children mobilises the public as part of advocacy and campaigns.
2. Identify when to mobilise the public.
3. Understand how to mobilise the public.
4. Target mobilisation efforts at particular audiences.
5. Integrate mobilisation into advocacy and campaigns.

Practical and professional skills

Develop and implement an advocacy strategy in a humanitarian situation.

6. Excite, engage and focus public groups in support of our campaigns.
7. Effectively identify and apply different forms of mobilisation for particular audiences and campaigns.

Duration: 2 hours

1 Why Save the Children mobilises the public

If we accept our premise, that the Save the Children Fund must work for its own extinction, it must seek to abolish, for good and for all, the poverty which makes children suffer and stunts the race of which they are the parents. It must not be content to save children from the hardships of life – it must abolish these hardships; nor think it suffices to save them from immediate menace – it must place in their hands the means of saving themselves and so of saving the world.

Eglantyne Jebb, Founder of Save the Children (1927)

Save the Children was founded to eradicate child poverty, end injustice and hardship for children and empower children as agents of change. These ultimate goals will only be achieved through a series of smaller political successes over an extended period of time. This is how the arc of history is bent toward justice.

As an example, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in the United States in 1909. Martin Luther King Jr, its most famous leader, would not be born for another 20 years and the modern American Civil Rights Movement would not begin in earnest until 1945. The organisation's greatest success to date, the ratification of the 15th Amendment of the US constitution (the Voting Rights Act), would not be passed until 1965. Today the NAACP continues its works because the ultimate mission of the organisation – the equality of all persons and the elimination of race-based discrimination – is not yet complete.

Terminology

Public mobilisation is a set of organised activities to create an enabling environment for national and international political and policy change. Public mobilisation seeks to engage public audiences with our issues to inspire widespread support, motivate people to take action, and harness and demonstrate popular support. In doing this we demonstrate public pressure for change.

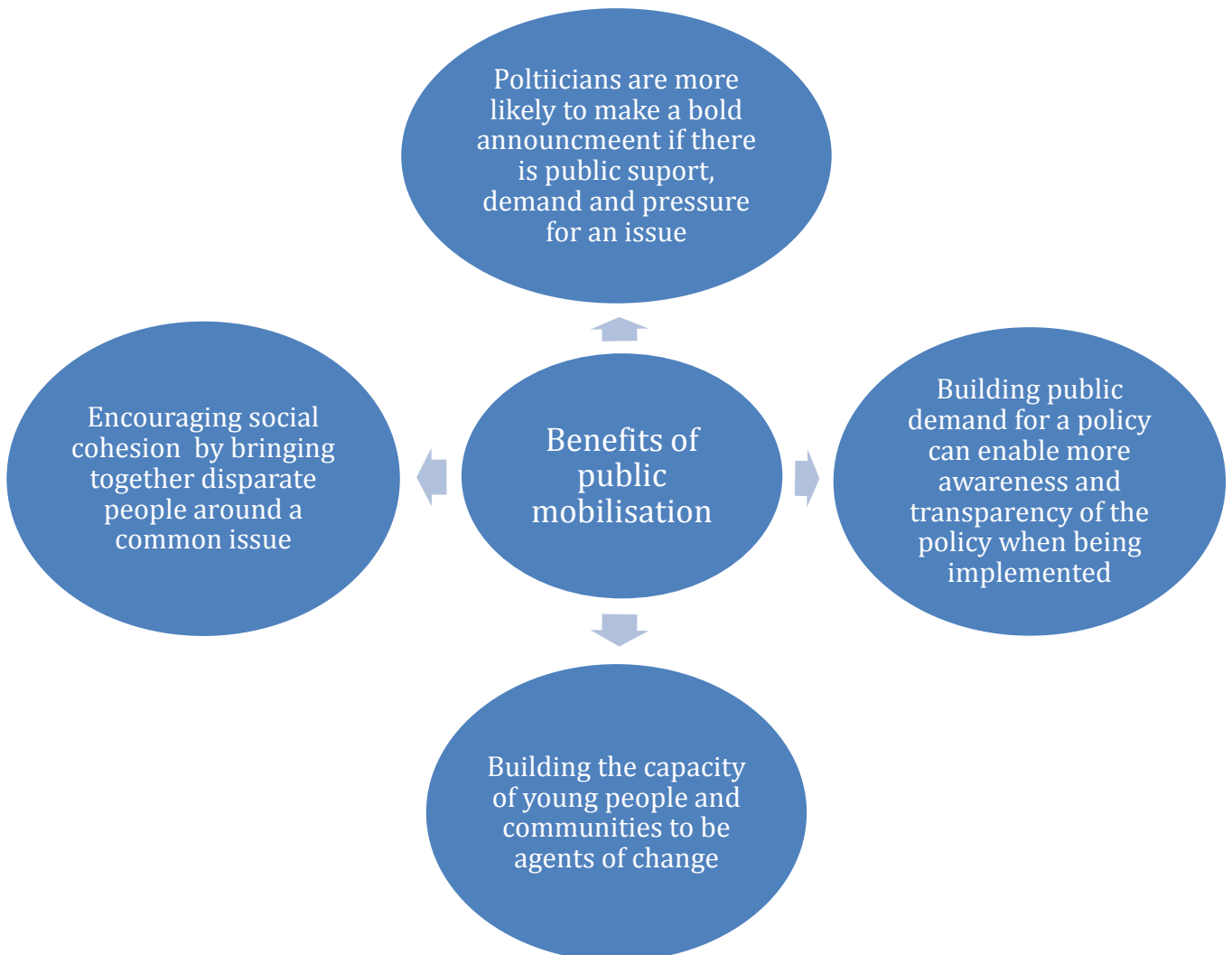
Save the Children tends to use the terms **public mobilisation**, **popular mobilisation** and **social mobilisation** interchangeably. Public mobilisation in this module is substantially different in aims and methodology from our programme work to shape public behaviour and increase programme coverage using **Behaviour Change Communications** or **Information, Education, Communication (IEC)**.

Showing strong public support for an issue can sometimes also encourage bold political leadership at the highest levels, providing a leap forward in commitments for children. This is demonstrated in the example of the debt relief campaign in Box 1. It can also stop governments backtracking on their public commitments, as demonstrated in Box 2 where public action stopped the Sierra Leone government reducing expenditure on its commitment to free public health.

Activity 1

List three reasons why mobilising the public is vital if Save the Children is to achieve its advocacy and campaign goals.

Comment - Figure 1 lists some of the benefits you may have thought of.



Box 1 Jubilee Debt Campaign

Before 2000 many organisations came together to build a campaign to tackle the crippling debt being faced by many developing countries around the world. The issue of debt relief was complicated and international, but a high-profile campaign supported by civil society groups, charities, unions and faith organisations helped mobilise thousands of people around the world in numerous different events and activities to show public demand to ‘drop the debt’. The widespread public support for the issue meant that world leaders at the G8 summit saw a political and popular benefit to cutting the debt and announced that they were dropping the debt obligations of the most indebted states.

The significance of this move was borne out in the statement:

Let us, above all, be clear that, without a convincing programme of debt relief to start the new millennium, our objective of halving world poverty by 2015 will be only a pipe dream.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, 2000

2 Strategies and tactics

Successful campaigns and advocacy strategies use lots of different mobilisation tactics to keep an issue fresh and on the agenda of decision makers. Online activism ('click-activism') has become increasingly important to Save the Children and other organisations. Jubilee 2000 was characterised by ground-breaking use of the internet and web for worldwide outreach, education and mobilisation but the power of live actions and activities should not be forgotten. This is shown in the example of the more recent campaign for the Nigerian health bill (see Box 3 below).

Political change campaigns mobilise people at different times, but are particularly relevant in the run-up to major decision-making moments. Often people refer to campaigns 'catching the wave'; this is the moment, sometimes but not always linked to outside moments such as summits and elections, when public opinion and engagement crest on an issue and 'the tide turns' and change comes.

Save the Children works with many of the leading non-profit, advocacy and humanitarian organisations to help build public support and provide the tools that empower communities and young people to act and be part of an influential movement for change. By bringing our voices together, we believe we can have an even greater impact in the fight for children's rights.

The power of the public to influence decision makers varies from country to country. In some countries citizens can exert considerable influence on decision makers through democratic processes. In others, people's voices, individually or collectively, are much more limited. You need to be realistic about how the public can really help you achieve goals and how you can best support communities and groups in different environments. There are also different periods of time when public mobilisation is more or less sensitive, such as when an election is due or a new budget planning round is about to commence. These contextual issues need to be kept in mind as you plan your strategy and look at how to mobilise the public.

Box 2 Sierra Leone: public mobilisation for health

In 2010 the government of Sierra Leone made a very public commitment to free health care and since this announcement Save the Children and partners have been tracking progress and campaigning for effective implementation. Central to the success of the initiative is the need for an increased health budget and transparency about investments in health across the country.

In 2012 Save the Children and partners conducted a budget tracking exercise and discovered that the government of Sierra Leone was planning on reducing the national health budget despite promises to increase it.

Save the Children and the civil society organisation Health Alert shared the findings across the media and with communities across the country. Community groups in the capital, Freetown, decided that they should mobilise in order to show the government the public support for free health care. Hundreds of pregnant women and children mobilised and walked to the parliamentary building where government officials met with civil society leaders and discussed the issue. The community was able to show public demand for free health care and the government reassessed the budget and changed its decision to reduce the health budget.

Box 3 Nigeria: public mobilisation for the health bill

The government of Nigeria is in the process of developing a new health bill that would guarantee the right to health for all. In 2011 the process wasn't moving fast enough and civil society organisations supported by Save the Children recommended that they should mobilise in order to show public support for health care. The public mobilisation event brought thousands of ordinary people on to the street to show the support for the bill. The mobilisation helped create pressure and showed public concern for health. At the time of writing the bill has been passed and has now gone to the President to be signed.

Activity 2

Read the '[Voices for Change, Nigeria](#)' document ([click here to download](#)) and answer the following questions.

- What is the advocacy goal of this case study?
- How many versions of the health bill have there been, and what does this suggest to you?
- What different approaches and support were used to campaign for the health bill?
- Why did the bill fail at the final hurdle, the President's Office, and what lesson can be learnt?
- Despite the health bill not passing into law, have there been other benefits from the campaign?
- Taking the section 'Lessons learned', present this information in your own words as a checklist for successful campaigning.

Comment

1. The goal is to strengthen the health sector in Nigeria.
2. There had been six versions of the health bill when the case study was written in 2013. What this suggests is that there are a range of interests involving different groups and people that are thwarting the passing of the bill. These need to be engaged if the bill is to successfully pass into law.
3. Lobbying, redrafting, generating media interest, UN spearheading, technical support, supporting the Nigerian government delegation to UNGA, working with partners, hosting meetings, consulting diverse stakeholders such as schools and religious groups. You will learn more about the different types of mobilisation later in this session.
4. The bill failed with the President's Office because they had not been sufficiently engaged, and they had the power to take no action and frustrate the passing of the bill into law.
5. Civil society has become more vibrant and more active in contesting and campaigning for change. New coalitions have formed which are broader and more strategic in their approach.

3 Tools, activities and approaches

Tools

Petitions: internet petitions; action cards; giant petitions (patchworks) – anything where numbers matter. When specialists or VIPs put their names to these types of initiatives it can help to mobilise public support.

Mass communications: arts events: posters, billboards, radio, internet or TV advertising; organising pop concerts, festivals or other events that engage large numbers of people; or PR activity with celebrities, art exhibitions or auctions.

Letter writing: lots of people writing to decision makers or other influentials; you can help by providing sample letters or postcards with talking points. You can also provide pre-written postcards.

Activities and stunts

Use the system: use of parliamentary procedures, legal cases, Freedom of Information requests or judicial review; creative use of government statistics and announcements; use of obscure procedures; get ordinary people involved in government consultations.

Disinvestment: the use of a concerted economic boycott to pressure a government, industry or company towards a change in policy.

Child-led and child-centred campaigns and advocacy (see Session 9 on child participation) are variations on the above themes: debating clubs (inviting politicians); youth forums; youth parliaments; speakers' tours; children's choirs, bands, theatre groups performing in halls or in the streets; essay/poetry/drawing/painting competitions; marches or vigils with visual props/symbols; exhibitions, showings of photos or videos taken by children; peer education.

Some specific Save the Children examples are described below.

Public hearings

Save the Children supports various civil society organisations and excluded communities within urban areas of Delhi, India. As part of this work Save the Children and partners often mobilise the community to participate in public hearings in front of local officials, government, civil society leaders and the media. Hundreds of people from the community are able to voice their concerns about issues and have their voices heard directly.

Petitions

In advance of the annual budget in India Save the Children organised a postcard campaign calling on the government to increase the health budget. Thousands of postcards (in local languages) were signed and sent to the Finance Minister showing support for health care, and in one area there were so many postcards that Save the Children was asked to help out at the post office.

Awareness-raising events

The breakthrough for Save the Children's global EVERY ONE campaign says that 'public attitudes will not tolerate high levels of child mortality'. In order to ensure bold commitments are made, Save the Children is trying to change public opinions about health care across a population or within certain groups such as the middle class, influential groups, politicians, and the public in a particular region or state.

A recent example of this was Save the Children's Global Day of Action where over 80,000 children took part in mobilisation activities in more than 60 countries to raise awareness of child survival. The mobilisation activities provided a space for policy makers and politicians to meet directly with children.

Mass rallies and marches

Mass rallies and marches can be effective tools and, although not a common tactic for Save the Children, have been used, as was the case in Nigeria. They can harness the energy of the community and direct it at a target that can make change happen, whether a government, public institution or corporation. There is a long and proud tradition of non-violent rallies and marches. These kinds of activities are usually more forthrightly political in tone and action than an awareness-raising event such as the Race for Survival or something like the 1988 tribute concert to Nelson Mandela. Because the political quality of a march or rally is more acute, these kinds of activities must be carefully planned, with special attention paid to ensuring sufficient and well-trained marshals to guarantee participant safety – particularly important when children are involved.

4 Planning public mobilisation

Before you start: identify target groups, communities and audiences and know how to engage with them.

The planning of any campaign should be done in conjunction with and with the support of affected communities. This should start with consultations and then joint planning meetings in collaboration with local civil society organisations.

It is important to also understand the external context surrounding your campaign. Ask why a policy or political commitment is *not* being made. Explore why it would be beneficial to show visible public support for an issue. There are often political reasons why a change has not been made and this needs to be taken into account.

The following points will assist you in planning a public mobilisation activity and integrating it into your advocacy and campaign strategy:

1. What is your issue?
2. Why hasn't it changed yet?
3. Map out the forces for and against.
4. Who is your target(s) and how do they view the issue?
5. What is your message? Remember to keep it simple; have a clear call to action and only one action at a time.
6. Start where your audience is.
7. Create a critical path for the message/action to achieve a specific goal. ‘
8. Build alliances to increase effectiveness and boost legitimacy.
9. To achieve the desired policy change a narrow focus works best to mobilise a broad constituency. For example, environmental groups that want to improve ocean ecosystems may focus on saving whales.
10. What are you *doing* – occupying, marching, lobbying, running?
11. Develop straightforward messages – say what you mean.
12. Articulate the conflict – from a strategic point of view conflict is necessary to change the status quo; from a tactical point of view conflict is needed to galvanise people and to interest media.
13. Remember campaigning is a conversation – important as it is to communicate your message, it is just as important to hear what others are saying.
14. Get the right people – mobilisation requires a diverse skill set.

15. Carefully track progress to ensure forward momentum, capturing successes and setbacks and reflecting on them to learn.
16. Credit and attribution can be a 'win-win' situation if handled well, supporting existing relationships and providing testimonies for further successful campaigning and partnerships.

Activity 4

Review the examples of Save the Children public mobilisation activities and the public mobilisation checklist above. Thinking about your policy/political change goals, what are the best tool(s) or tactic(s)? Using the checklist, write up a four-paragraph draft plan.

Summary

This unit has looked at popular mobilisation. It should have enabled you to:

- understand why mobilisation is instrumental for advocacy and campaigns
- identify when to undertake mobilisation for advocacy and campaigning
- know how to engage with a public
- target mobilisation efforts for greatest effectiveness.

Reference

Jebb, E. (1927) International Responsibilities for Child Welfare, Save the Children International Union.

Acknowledgements

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