

**Advocacy and Campaigning**

# 5 Understanding policy and power

Keywords: Policy, power, stakeholder,  
advocacy opportunities

Duration: 1.5 hours



## Introduction

By this stage you should be able to set advocacy goals and objectives. Once you have done this you need to work out how best to achieve them. To identify the best approach it is essential to understand the external environment. This session will help you explore how to understand different types of power and analyse policy processes as well as how to identify and maximise advocacy opportunities.

To help show you how to apply the stages of this process to your advocacy objectives we have taken one invented advocacy objective as the basis for most of the activities in this session: *'The government of Dreamland increases the percentage of the national budget allocated to health from 10% to 15% by 2015.'*

## Learning Outcomes for this session

### Knowledge and understanding

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

1. Explain the importance of mapping policy and power for advocacy.
2. Understand different types of power and from where Save the Children derives its own power.
3. Identify and prioritise advocacy opportunities.
4. Understand the importance of refreshing your analysis on a regular basis.

### Practical and professional skills

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

5. Carry out an in-depth analysis of the policy situation related to your advocacy issue.
6. Produce an advocacy and campaign planner setting out national, regional and international opportunities for advocacy.

**Duration: 1.5 hours**



# 1 Understanding policy and power

## Analysing politics, policy and power

Advocacy does not and cannot take place in a vacuum. Once you have identified your advocacy objectives you need to develop your understanding of the political realities surrounding your advocacy issue.

Defining and analysing power dynamics is an integral part of advocacy. Inadequate power analysis may lead to missed opportunities, poor strategic choices or risks. Power is dynamic and ever-changing, as many actors are constantly competing for power and space, including you!

Remember, this is not a static process. Politics, policy and power dynamics are often unpredictable. Positive opportunities for advocacy occur, and so do negative surprises, so carrying out ongoing analysis of the external environment is vital.

Political power does not always operate in visible ways, so it is important to consider the different types of power when you carry out your power analysis: see Table 1.

**Table 1 Types of power**

Type of power	Description	Example
Visible power	Observable decision-making processes, such as formal rules, structures, authorities and institutions	Elections, political parties, laws and budgets
Hidden power	Determines what is on the political agenda and includes a society's or government's informal/unwritten rules and practices. These dynamics are less obvious forces and thus are difficult to engage. They help to maintain current power relations by controlling who makes decisions and how they are made as well as what gets on to the agenda.	It may appear that a Minister is the main decision maker but in reality it is their adviser who makes all the decisions.
Invisible power	These power dynamics shape meaning in society. They render competing interests and problems invisible and ensure significant issues are kept 'off the table' and out of people's consciousness. These dynamics determine what information is concealed or inaccessible. They influence how people think, what beliefs dominate and how different groups of people see themselves.	Socialisation practices, stereotypes, gender roles, images in textbooks, the media and adverts

These different kinds of power usually operate simultaneously, and different strategies are required for tackling them.

### Save the Children's power base

Power relations are always unequal, but there are many situations in which those with seemingly less power can overcome those with more. In general, Save the Children's power derives from our:

- vision, commitment and values
- reputation and evidence gained from years of experience working with children and their communities
- legitimacy and credibility based on involving children
- rights-based approach
- staff's experience and knowledge
- large constituency of supporters
- key relationships with policy makers.

#### Activity 1 Sources of power

This exercise is aimed to help you reflect on Save the Children's sources of power and influence in your country. Fill in the table below, giving your assessment of whether the elements set out in the first column are strong, medium or weak sources of power in your national context. If you feel there are other additional areas from which Save the Children derives its power, please add additional rows.

## Activity 1 (continued)

Where does Save the Children derive its power from?	Situation in Dreamland	Your example
Vision, commitment and values	Strong: Save the Children's commitment to addressing child health issues has been recognised by the Minister of Health on numerous occasions	
Reputation and evidence gained from years of experience working with children and their communities	Medium: Our programming work in child health is relatively new. However, our longstanding work in other areas and our global reputation mean we are in a strong position	
Legitimacy and credibility based on involving children	Strong: Child participation work in-country is very strong and has helped to secure the support of affected communities	
Rights-based approach	Weak: Laws governing INGOs restrict the rights-based work we can do. This needs managing carefully	
Experience and knowledge of our staff	Medium: Country Director holds a very strong relationship with senior stakeholders and has been in position for many years. We still have work to do to strengthen the reputation of our staff in health	
Large constituency of supporters	Strong: 10,000 supporters already signed up to database in six months and many more engaging with the issue through other means, e.g. social media	
Key relationships with policy makers	Medium: strong relationship with some Ministries; however, links to Ministry of Health need strengthening	

**Comment**

Hopefully this exercise has helped you reflect on Save the Children's relative strengths and weaknesses in your country. It can be easy to take for granted some of Save the Children's strengths and forget that many of these may not be obvious to external stakeholders. Being able to articulate our strengths and weaknesses will not only help you to position yourself effectively in country but will also help you to identify gaps to be addressed and work out how to maximise your power.

## Tools for power analysis: force field analysis

Once you have identified your advocacy objectives you need to carry out a comprehensive analysis of policy processes and power relations. This kind of power analysis will help you to see your advocacy work as a long-term process, identifying when and where you might be able to intervene.

There are many tools which can help you do this. One such tool is **Force Field Analysis**, developed in the 1940s by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (e.g. Lewin, 1951). It is commonly used in advocacy to help you better understand the pressures acting in support of or against the objective you are trying to achieve. This is done through identifying both the policies, people and other factors that can support your aims and those that may act as 'restraining forces'.

### How to carry out a force field analysis

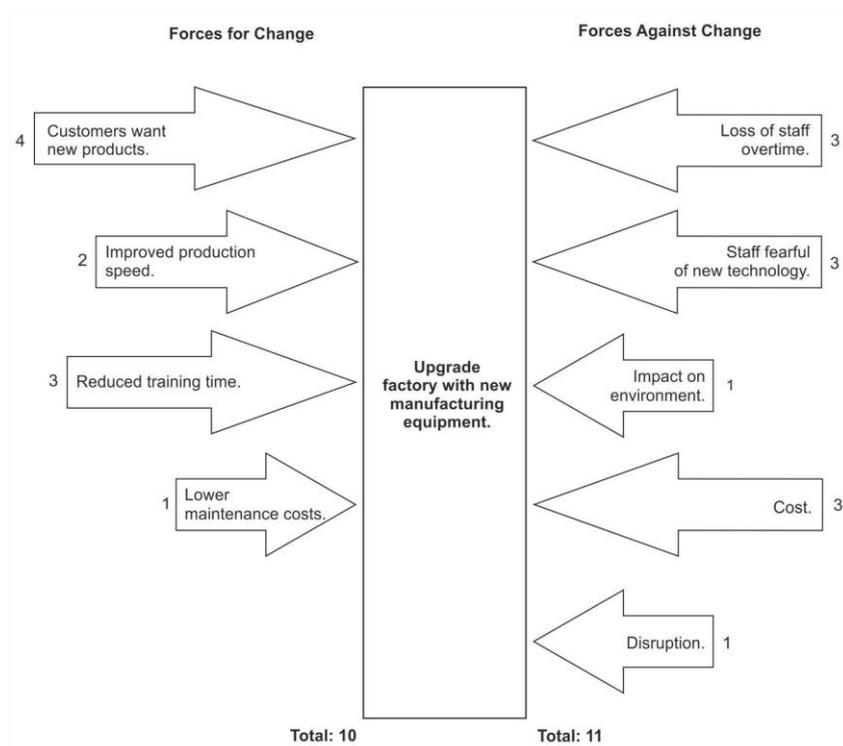
It's important to read through this section before attempting the next activity.

Step 1: Write your advocacy objective in the centre of a blank page.

Step 2: List all the factors in support of the change in a column on the left.

Step 3: List all the factors acting against the change in a column on the right.

Step 4: Score each factor according to its relevant impact with 1 = weak impact and 5 = strong impact. Add up the total scores for each column.



**Figure 1** Example of a force field analysis

Source: Mind Tools (2006–14)

### Tips for carrying out an effective force field analysis

**Involve others:** getting a variety of perspectives is important and will help you build a more comprehensive picture of the external environment.

**Give yourself enough time:** it is easy to underestimate how long this kind of exercise can take.

**Be comprehensive:** list as many factors as you can. Don't worry about putting things down that you think others might see as stupid.

**This is just one tool:** it is important you try a variety of approaches and find the one you are most comfortable with in order to build a more objective picture of the policy environment.

### Using your force field analysis

Once you have carried out your analysis you can use it to:

1. Decide whether to go ahead in pursuing the objective you have identified
2. Increase your chances of success by helping you understand how to harness supportive factors and overcome opposing ones.

You should regularly review and update the analysis to take into account new political and policy developments.

### Activity 2 Force field analysis

Now that you have read through the section above, take one of your advocacy objectives and conduct a Force Field Analysis following the steps outlined above. An example is given below using our identified advocacy objective. If possible do this with other colleagues. Once you have carried out the Force Field Analysis consider the following questions?

1. Does your advocacy objective need to be amended in light of this analysis?
2. What strategies do you need to employ to overcome the forces acting against the change that you have identified?

#### *Objective*

The Government of Dreamland increases the percentage of the national budget allocated to health from 10% to 15% by 2015.

Blank worksheet for you to complete

*Type the question or problem being analysed here*

Positive forces	Ranking	Negative forces	Ranking

**Comment**

Hopefully this exercise has helped you to consider some factors that you may not have already taken into account in relation to your advocacy objective. In order to ensure you have been as comprehensive as possible, it may help to see whether you have included political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors in your analysis. It is best to put down as many factors as possible and then reduce them down depending on their level of importance.

The above example shows that the criteria acting against the objective are stronger than those in support. Although this can be off-putting, remember it doesn't mean you should abandon this objective – instead it means that you need to take these factors into account and develop strategies to overcome them.

**Other power mapping tools**

Another model for assessing power relations is called PowerCube. Although we haven't covered it in this session you can look at this model online at <http://www.powercube.net>

As described on the website, PowerCube is 'a resource for understanding power relations in efforts to bring about social change. Powercube.net contains practical and conceptual materials to help us think about how to respond to power relations within organisations and in wider social and political spaces.'

## 2 Analysing the policy environment

The previous section set out some general principles for understanding power. In this section we will look specifically at the policy-making environment. You will read an introduction to how to map and analyse both the policy process and the various factors affecting the policy changes that you want to achieve. You will also look at how to understand power relations in the context of policy change.

### What is the policy environment?

To do advocacy we need a thorough understanding of the opportunities we have to influence the policy process, how policies are made and the political climate in which they take place. It is important to understand both formal and informal policy-making processes and be able to distinguish between them.

Knowledge of the policy environment allows you to:

- identify and recognise advocacy opportunities
- flag the possible entry points to the policy process
- guide selection of the advocacy issues.

### Understanding a country's policy process

Policy making takes place in a dynamic web of interacting forces. You need to be able to identify the various factors that could affect policy decisions to help you develop appropriate advocacy strategies. What options for policy change exist and where are your potential entry points?

You need to analyse the political system, the policy-making process and its internal power dynamics. Policy making can be through formal, informal and/or alternative processes.

### Stages of decision making

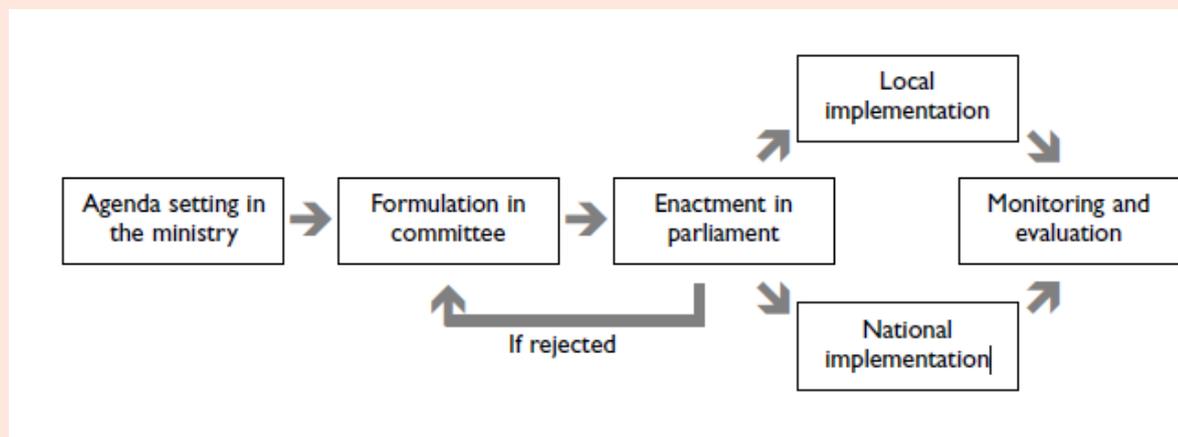
There are five basic stages of decision making in policy processes. The exact procedures and techniques vary widely between institutions, but these stages are present in some form in all decision-making processes:

1. Agenda setting
2. Formulation of policy
3. Enactment of policy
4. Implementation and evaluation
5. Monitoring and evaluation

### Activity 3 Analysing your objectives

1. Take one of your advocacy objectives and answer the following questions. This will help you to identify the policy change needed to achieve your objective.
2. What organisation or policy-making body will make the decision you are trying to influence?
3. What is the formal decision-making process for this institution? What are the steps in the formal process?
4. When are the opportunities for influencing the process (official and unofficial)?
5. Who are the decision makers at each stage? Who really has the power to make the decisions that will bring about change?
6. What is the level of attention on your issue? Is it a priority or a neglected area? Is there a wide and public discussion on the subject or is it clouded in social taboos?

Once you have answered these questions, draw a diagram setting out the process. Figure 2 is an example of a policy map.



**Figure 2 Sample policy map**

Now that you have drawn your policy map, fill in the table below. This will help to build your knowledge on how change happens and enable you to develop a more effective advocacy strategy. I have provided an example for the first stage of the process – agenda setting – using our advocacy objective.

<b>Phases</b>	<b>Decision-makers and influentials involved</b>	<b>Formal decision-making process</b>	<b>Informal decision-making process</b>	<b>Approximate date of action</b>	<b>How can we influence the process at this stage</b>
Agenda setting	The Ministry of Health develops the proposal to put forward to the Ministry of Finance for the allocation of the annual budget. A team in the department of financing are assigned the task of developing the proposal fully	Proposal submitted to department head, then Permanent Secretary before Ministerial sign-off is given. Input from other social sector departments is sought at specific moments of the process	Informal discussions held with stakeholders including civil society organisations, professional associations and contacts in Ministry of Finance to assess support	Proposal submitted to Ministry of Finance at end of February	Meet with officials to introduce our proposal and to gain their interest, support and enthusiasm Be helpful to these offices with other issues they are working on, when appropriate. Become knowledgeable about issues the key decision makers are interested in. Meet with groups that might support the programme, such as professional associations, child health and health organisations, to enlist their support Work closely with the person or people tasked with developing the proposal
Agenda setting					
Formulation and enactment					
Implementation and enforcement					
Monitoring and evaluation					

### *Comment*

I find that it is quite easy to map out the formal policy processes as they usually are quite open and transparent. However, I also know that a lot of policy making is done through other channels, which might be much harder to have a good overview of or get information about. These are what are normally called informal or alternative policy-making processes. Don't worry if you are not able to answer all of the questions in the table at this stage. This process is designed to help you identify the gaps in your knowledge and address them accordingly.

It is important to bear in mind that:

- Policy issues include the absence of policy, inadequate policies or the improper enforcement of policies.
- No two countries formulate policy in exactly the same way.
- Policy and power dynamics change, therefore your mapping and analysis need to be revised and updated in order to be accurate.

Note: Budgets are the most powerful policy produced by governments – they reveal their true priorities. Budget analysis is thus an important part of understanding the policy process – see Session 12 on budget analysis and tracking.

## Different kinds of policy processes

### *Policy processes*

**Formal process:** the official procedure as stated by law or by documented organisational policy. For example: policy changes proposed by the government need to be approved by the parliament.

**Informal process:** activities and procedures in the decision-making process that occur concurrently with the formal process but are not required by law or organisational policy. For example: you may know that a minister will not make a decision on an important issue without consulting a specific trusted adviser. Although this is not a formal step of the procedure, building a good relationship with the adviser could be an important advocacy strategy.

**Alternative process:** a process to influence decision making that exists outside the official process. For example, if the president of an organisation feels that a decision by the board of directors is not warranted for a minor policy change, he or she can discuss the change with key staff, make a decision and implement the change without official action.

### Activity 4 Power in the policy process

Go back to the diagram of the policy process that you developed in Activity 3.

- What are the informal workings or behind-the-scenes actions for the decision-making process? Mark these on your diagram.
- What kind of power do the decision makers you have already mapped on the diagram hold? Are there decision-makers with informal or hidden power that you did not include in the previous exercise? Please write them in now and mark what kind of power they have.

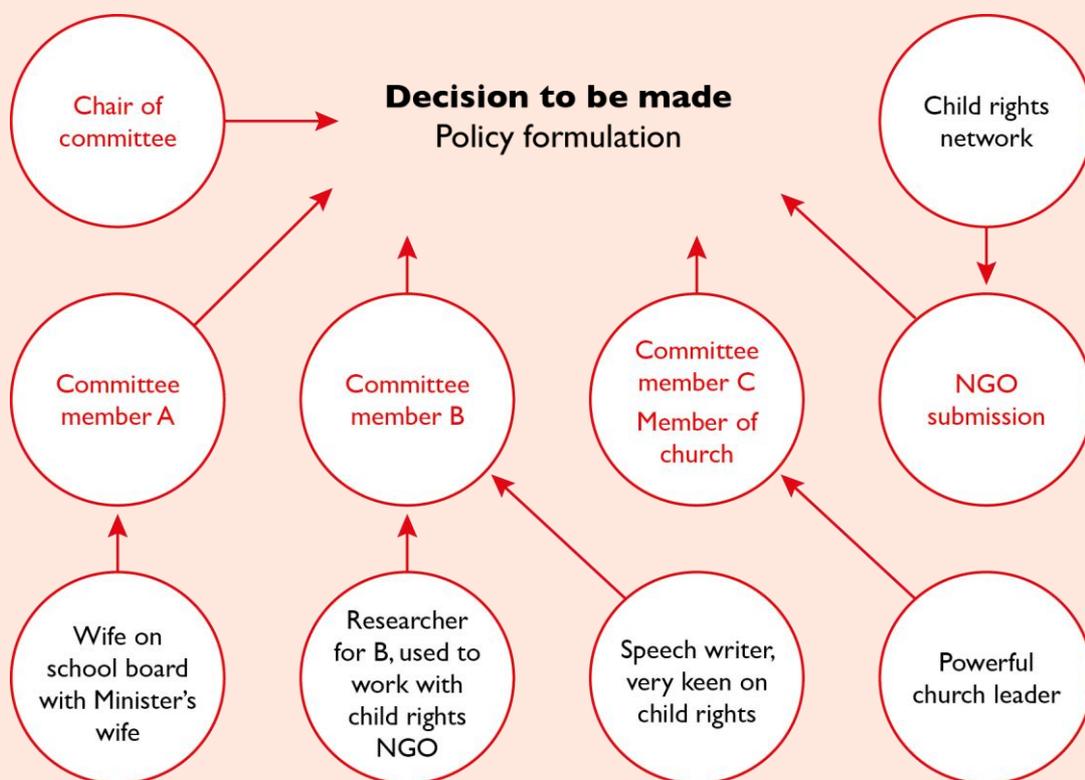


Figure 3 Policy map with decision makers' roles

#### Comment

I find that when doing any context analysis I benefit from starting by looking at the context from a 'bird's eye perspective', instead of looking at it from my own perspective. By only looking at it from my own perspective I might overlook or completely miss important factors, which in turn might lead to missed opportunities. Once I have developed a more comprehensive analysis, it is easier to shift perspective and look at it from where I stand, and then start to look at advocacy opportunities and entry points (see next section).

## 3 Identifying advocacy opportunities

### Types of advocacy opportunities

An important part of understanding the external environment for advocacy is being able to identify and maximise advocacy opportunities. These opportunities can be used in numerous ways, most obviously to get your message across directly to the decision maker you are seeking to influence, but also to build alliances and raise awareness of your issue.

You can use any social or political event that relates to your advocacy issue during the decision-making period as an advocacy opportunity. You may find there are no specific pre-existing opportunities relating to your goal and even if they do exist you may find that they are not the right opportunities for your issue. If this is the case you should work to create opportunities yourself or in coalition.

Relevant social or political events might include:

- Launch of new policies and programmes
- National Budgets
- Parliamentary debates/committees
- Elections
- Report launches
- Conferences and workshops
- Consultations on major policy reviews
- International days
- Special occasions/ holidays
- VIP visits and events
- International instruments and reporting processes
- Regional meetings
- Global summits and meetings

### Activity 5 Advocacy opportunities

The table below contains examples of some of the different types of advocacy opportunities outlined above. On your own or with a colleague, add in other examples you can think of which are relevant to your national context. Make sure you think nationally, regionally and globally and include the date where possible. If you feel that there are other categories of events which are not included in the table, please add them.

For example, some of the relevant moments for our advocacy objective could be:

**National policy:** May – budget announcement in parliament

**Regional summits:** January – Health Ministers meeting

**Global summit:** September – UN General Assembly (focus on child health)

**Special occasion:** June – Anniversary of Independence

Type of advocacy opportunity	National	Regional	International
Policy/programme/report launches			
Special occasions/holidays			
International/regional national days			
(International) instruments and reporting processes			
Regional meetings			
Global summits and meetings			

### Activity 5 (continued)

#### *Comment*

I find it is helpful to work with others to identify advocacy opportunities as often colleagues are likely to be aware of other opportunities. If you have struggled to find regional and international opportunities you may want to think about which colleagues within Save the Children can help you fill in those gaps. For example, Save the Children has four advocacy offices in New York, Geneva, Brussels and Addis Ababa as well as the Global Campaign Team who can help provide information on upcoming opportunities. It's important to make sure you keep the list up to date and it may be helpful to identify one person in your office who is responsible for doing this and circulating it regularly.

### Maximising advocacy opportunities

Completing the table above should hopefully have illustrated to you that there are many national, regional and international opportunities for advocacy. Using these opportunities demands times and resources, so it is important to choose your opportunities carefully on the basis that they provide some or all of the following:

- Potential for change: it should be at a stage of the decision-making process that could influence its outcome in some way.
- Potential for influencing decision makers: decision makers will either be there, or have a vested interest in the outcome of the event.
- Potential for networking: with potential allies, with journalists, in order to form or strengthen relationships and get your message across.
- Opportunity for meeting decision makers or influential people: to form relationships, or deliver your message.
- Media attention: so that you can raise public awareness of the issue and raise the profile of Save the Children in relation to it.
- A focus on children: with an opportunity to involve children if appropriate.
- An agenda that is not too crowded: so the issue is not overshadowed by other concerns.

In order to take advantage of an advocacy opportunity, you must have:

- a clear idea of what you intend to achieve by attending or organising the event and how it will help achieve your advocacy objective
- adequate time to plan, to make the best use of all available resources
- a clear advocacy message
- the right supporting materials to help deliver the message effectively: reports with executive summary, briefings, materials, etc.

Remember, advocacy is a constantly evolving process so it is important that you are constantly on the lookout for new opportunities. Often these will arise out of the blue and may be driven by unexpected events.

Tips to help you spot advocacy opportunities:

- Stay up to date with current affairs through reading national and international media.
- Set up Google alerts relating to your advocacy objectives.
- Use personal contacts – networking can help you identify less obvious advocacy opportunities.
- Sign up to national and international newsletters from relevant organisations.
- Use the Save the Children network – Save the Children’s advocacy offices in Geneva, Brussels, Addis and New York can help you link up national objectives to regional opportunities.

### Case study: Afghanistan

As part of a network of NGOs, we helped lobby international donors in advance of the Tokyo conference on aid for Afghanistan, with a focus on the need for continued investment in health services. At the conference the international community pledged US\$16 billion in development assistance for 2012–2015, including specific commitments to health care. The government’s national priority programme, Health for All Afghans, which was presented at the conference, reflected our advocacy on health workers and nutrition – including commitments to invest in community health workers and midwives, improved case management of malnutrition and increased access to therapeutic and supplementary feeding.

## Activity 6 Advocacy timeline

On a sheet of paper draw a timeline or calendar, starting from now, with your objective at the end.

- Map out the key stages in the decision-making process (from your policy mapping exercises earlier on) and mark these on the timeline. Highlight opportunities for civil society to take part in this process.
- Discuss social or political events that are likely to impact on the decision-making process. Mark these events in sequence on your timeline, in a different colour. This gives a simple picture of the external environment in which your advocacy will unfold.
- Identify which key decision makers will be most important at different stages of the timeline. You will be able to add more to this timeline as we look further at advocacy targets and the best approaches to influencing them.

For example, taking our advocacy objective we know that the budget proposal is finalised in February so we could use the regional meeting of health ministers in January to hold governments to account for meeting the regional target. This could be done through trying to get an official resolution passed or through a public campaign.

### Comment

I find it can be easy to overload your advocacy calendar, so you might find it helpful to try and identify the top three opportunities for each objective. You also need to make sure that these are situated in a wider context; for example, are other parts of your organisation planning events on similar days? Are there other external events which may be unrelated to your advocacy objective but which might influence the attention given to the event you identified, for example major sporting events? Have you also taken into account the practicalities of engaging with certain events? For instance, if you have identified a national conference do you have the resources to attend?

Figure 4 shows a completed example.

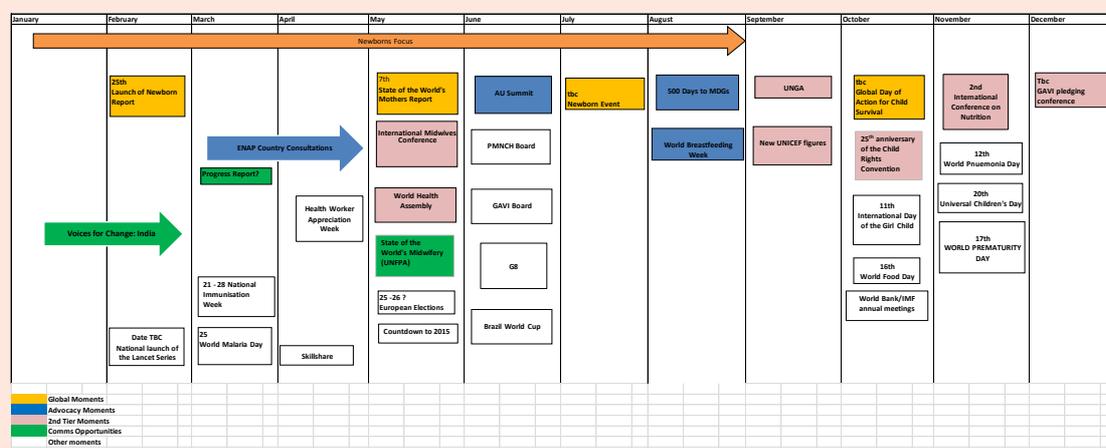


Figure 4 Example of an advocacy calendar

## Summary

This session looked at how to understand policy and power in order to develop a successful advocacy strategy. You learnt about different kinds of power, the stages in the policy-making process and different kinds of advocacy opportunities. After completing this session you should:

- be able to explain the importance of mapping policy and power for advocacy
- understand different types of power and where Save the Children derives its power from
- be able to identify and prioritise advocacy opportunities
- feel confident about carrying out policy analysis
- be able to produce an advocacy and campaigns planner setting out national, regional and international opportunities for advocacy.

## References

Lewin, K. (1951) *Field Theory in Social Science*, New York, Harper & Row.

## Further resources

*Mind Tools (2006–14) 'Force Field Analysis'*,  
[http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED\\_06.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_06.htm)

*ODI Toolkit, Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organisations.* <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/188.pdf>

*UNICEF advocacy toolkit:* [http://www.unicef.org/cbsc/files/Advocacy\\_Toolkit-2.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/cbsc/files/Advocacy_Toolkit-2.pdf)

## Acknowledgements

*This session was authored by Alice MacDonald*