WORKING TOGETHER IN
HOW TO EFFECTIVELY STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY CAPACITY
LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE DCR PROGRAMME 2011-2015
COMPILED BY ELSKE VAN GORKUM, DCR ADVOCACY COORDINATOR
September 2015
Butembo: Transporter and his ‘chukudu’, a local transport scooter, used in Eastern Congo
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The MFS-II Pamoja “Partnering for Change” project is a collaborative programme of the Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR), which includes four Dutch international development organizations: CARE Nederland, Healthnet TPO, Save the Children Nederland and ZOA. It is funded by a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the period of 2011-2015. The programme is implemented in six fragile states on the African continent: Burundi, DR Congo, Liberia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. The Consortium members work jointly with local partners towards the implementation of the programme, while dealing with the considerable challenges that accompany working in fragile and thus unpredictable environments. The project has set out to achieve developmental goals in three main result areas: access to basic services, livelihoods and community governance. In addition to immediate implementation, it seeks to multiply its impact through a sizable advocacy component.

Rationale

The Pamoja programme attempts to address some of the most concerning issues in the programme countries. With all countries being traditionally beset by recurring conflicts, the governance structures have been equally damaged. The capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) to successfully influence the governance processes on behalf of citizens – in particular the most vulnerable groups – has been seriously pre-empted by the conflicts. These have also inflicted considerable damage in a more prosaic way: the trust between individuals in society has been disrupted, resulting in a fundamental absence of the building blocks necessary for a functional civil society.

Approach

DCR links community-based and systems approaches. This entails that communities are empowered to take charge of local development, which necessitates the existence of local ownership. A wide range of actors capable of influencing life at the community level are part of the approach (horizontal approach). In addition, the systems approach focuses on improving the chains of service delivery – it targets the relevant stakeholders across all levels of governance (vertical approach). The combination of these two approaches enhances the sustainability of the integrated strategy.

The approach relies on hybrid partnering: the Consortium members develop the capacities of the local CSOs and work in close concert with them to implement the programme. Thus, the shared implementation process as such works as a capacity-building exercise by enabling local CSOs to tap into the experience of the international NGOs.

Thematic Working Groups: advocacy

The four thematic working groups (Knowledge, Communication, Monitoring & Evaluation and Advocacy) of DCR have also been working according to this hybrid partnering approach. Extensive training was provided at all levels, and advocacy was strongly integrated in the execution of its programmes. This was new to many working in the field. A first step entailed recruiting and training DCR advocacy staff to equip them for the assessment and training of members’ staff, their local NGO-partners and ultimately representatives of civil society groups that have started to take up advocacy work to multiply the impact of the programme. DCR in turn partnered with INTRAC from Oxford to strengthen its efforts for capacity building in advocacy.

These intertwined advocacy capacity building exercises lead to a boost in advocacy activities from 2014 onwards, on a wide range of issues that have led to a long list of successes, all matching the local realities and advocacy space. Just a few examples to give a taste:
• DCR Liberia successfully pushed for the introduction of a Teachers Code of Conduct.
• In Sudan, research was done on integrating traditional leadership and modern-day village development structures. A new word for advocacy with a positive connotation was invented: “Monashra”, meaning something like ‘going with someone to look for his rights’; and government partners were taken to Burundi on an exchange.
• In South Sudan, the INGO platform successfully lobbied European governments at the Oslo donors conference and accessed additional funding for NGO activities; DCR played a forefront role in the coordination between South Sudan and Europe.
• In Uganda, community parliaments are in dialogue with local civil servants, army and police to improve their living conditions; school parliaments are in place to make schools more democratic by giving students a voice; trained community animal health workers are advocating for recognition of their diplomas. Meanwhile, the Kenyan government has already used their services to counter a foot-and-mouth epidemic in the border area.
• In Burundi, the concept of community parliaments was copied and passed on to lobby groups in which NGOs and civil society work together. DCR has been invited to vice-chair a committee to write a mental health act, which thus far does not yet exist in Burundi.
• In DR Congo, the government of the territory officially recognizes the local village Peace Committees as well as the outcomes of their local peace tribunals. Temporarily demobilized soldiers housed on the premises of a primary school who were harassing the local village (theft, rape, etc.) were moved and given a means of survival (goats, seeds and a piece of land). MONUSCO now protects both the school and the village. A deliberately obscured act aiming to protect land tenants (small-scale farmers) against large landowners was ‘dug up’. In less than a year, 66 contracts based on the act were signed to secure land use by small-scale farmers.

In this booklet, DCR’s advocacy working group has brought together a number of its ‘best practices’ to illustrate how comprehensive training, guidance and support of local staff may foster successes in the field of advocacy.  
An introduction by DCR’s advocacy coordinator gives an overview of the history and content of DCR’s advocacy work. This is followed by three different takes on the effectiveness of the programme:
• In part I, Jenny Ross and Isobel Wilson-Cleary from INTRAC provide a bird’s eye perspective of DCR’s advocacy capacity-building and advocacy efforts in the various programme countries.
• In part II, Daniel Nsekuye gives a ‘worm’s eye view’, highlighting the challenges in advocacy when working with one’s feet in the clay of Eastern Congo.
• Part III comprises a collection of stories from each of the six DCR countries, showing the everyday practice of DCR’s advocacy over the past years.

We trust it will prove an inspiring read!
How to effectively strengthen Advocacy Capacity – Lessons Learnt from the DCR programme 2011-2015

By Elske van Gorkum, DCR Advocacy coordinator, at CARE Netherlands

A short history

The Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) comprises four members: CARE Netherlands, HealthNet/TPO, Save the Children Netherlands and ZOA/lead. Its programme runs under the MFSII funding cycle of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, starting in January 2011 and ending in December 2015. DCR works in six fragile states in Africa: Burundi, DR Congo, Liberia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. In each country, one of the members has the lead of the consortium and hosts the DCR in-country staff. The DCR program has four thematic working groups, each hosted and coordinated by one of the member organisations: Monitoring & Evaluation (by ZOA), Communication (by Save the Children), Knowledge management (by HNTPO) and Advocacy (by CARE).

DCR’s Advocacy Strategy describes the three pillars of its programme as follows:

1. **Country-specific advocacy** will focus on topics of importance in and for the programming countries and will be based on country-specific advocacy strategies. It will take place in the countries themselves, but where relevant, the Consortium will also aim to influence the Dutch and the EU policies related to those countries. The topics, approaches and targets are likely to differ per country and will need to be adjusted to the circumstances on regular basis.

2. **Thematic advocacy** will cover emerging topics relevant to a larger number of programming countries. It will be mainly conducted in the Netherlands, and where possible also in the programming countries.

3. **Capacity building on advocacy** for local partners in programming countries is an important part of our advocacy interventions. The Consortium will attempt to strengthen their advocacy skills and capacities by facilitating strategic advocacy planning sessions, through trainings, and by advocating together on issues where we can formulate joint advocacy positions. This will contribute not only relevant policy change, but also to improving civil society capacity to achieve the same after the DCR programme has ended.

DCR’s advocacy working group prepared, starting in 2012, a research programme in three of DCR’s six countries. The objective of the study was to strengthen knowledge and understanding of stakeholder response strategies to situations of fragility. The report ‘Fragility by choice?’, written by Pyt Douma and Georg Frerks, was published in September 2013 as part of DCR’s so-called thematic advocacy.

However, in DCR’s 2013 annual meeting of country coordinators, held each year in October, it became apparent that local organisations were eagerly awaiting capacity building efforts to prepare their advocacy staff for advocacy work in their countries. Very little had been done thus far to prepare local advocates for their jobs. Only four people had received training, of whom three were no longer involved in DCR’s advocacy. It was hence decided that advocacy capacity building would become the heart of the programme for the remaining period (October 2013 – December 2015), to strongly reinforce the connection between the third and first pillar of DCR’s strategy, as lack of knowledge and understanding of advocacy were holding back the implementation of activities falling under the first pillar.
Need for strategic advocacy capacity strengthening

It was clear that there was a huge desire to scale up the capacity building efforts, not only in terms of the numbers of people to be trained, but, if our teams were to really take on advocacy, to expressly widen and deepen DCR’s skills training.

In many country offices, the need for advocacy was not wholeheartedly espoused by all staff, particularly in the higher echelons: in some country offices it was considered an ‘add-on’, taking away time, budget and energy from the so badly needed programme activities in the field, while others considered advocacy to be a highly risky involvement in host country politics for which one might easily be expelled from the country.

So what in fact was meant by widening and deepening capacity strengthening efforts?

Widening advocacy capacity strengthening efforts

Not only DCR’s, but also INTRAC’s experience has shown that advocacy becomes more effective when undertaken from a larger base. Peers in advocacy are needed to gain the necessary weight and to build mutual motivation.

With this in mind, DCR made a decision to widen capacity building efforts to include not only:

- DCR’s own advocacy staff, but also
- ZOA, Save, HNTPO and CARE overseas staff,
- local NGO-partners of programme members active in their respective countries and
- alliances in local civil society.

The DCR programme will come to an end in 2015; members may stay on in the countries involved, but will move on to different topics and places as funding opportunities demand. Local partners will generally remain present in the area, together with civil society representatives: they should be sufficiently comfortable and familiar with advocacy and lobby to be able to continue to independently influence local and national decision-makers. When advocacy is done in wider groups, strategies may be diversified and pressure more strongly exerted, thus enhancing the chances of success.

Deepening advocacy capacity strengthening efforts

The programme initiated with INTRACs Advocacy & Policy Influencing Blended Learning Course, which is a distance learning course using interactive approaches such as Skype, webinars, virtual meeting spaces, etc.
The objectives of this course are tailored so that at the end of the programme participants will:

- Be able to identify different approaches to advocacy and the values and strategies that underlie them
- Be familiar with the stages of the advocacy planning cycle and be better equipped to develop an advocacy strategy
- Be able to analyse the external environment and policy processes and identify appropriate ‘levers of influence’
- Be aware of power dynamics and the role they play in achieving advocacy success
- Have experience in examining how an integrated advocacy campaign can successfully combine lobbying, media work and popular mobilisation
- Have reviewed appropriate tools and methods for monitoring and evaluating advocacy initiatives.

Experience taught us that the more we wanted to reach out to civil society groups, the more pressing it became to offer training in languages accessible to our targeted would-be advocates. For this reason we contacted MDF, which offers advocacy training in French in the Great Lakes Region, and, together with INTRAC, we developed an Arabic version of the Blended Learning Course for participants in Sudan.

DCR’s Advocacy Working Group (AWG) also found that DCR’s members as well as the local NGOs and civil society alliances DCR works with did not only lack knowledge on lobby and advocacy (L&A) as such, but also had little idea as to which capacities are needed to successfully engage in L&A. This was the reason why the AWG decided to develop an Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool, now widely known as the ACAT tool.

ACAT comprises of a handbook with self-assessment exercises at five levels, set up to be used as a trainers manual. INTRAC materials were used as a basis and INTRAC provided us with comments during its development.

The ACAT tool, while still in development, ‘travelled’ to all six DCR countries. The final document was published in September 2014. A printed and digital version are available in English and a digital version in French.

Members of the AWG and two consultants –both acquainted with the DCR programme- trained the country advocates of DCR in its use and they in turn took the training round to the programme areas. DCR’s country advocates were tasked to assess the members, partners and civil society affiliates and support them in strengthening the weaknesses emerging as action points from the ACAT-exercises.

In several countries, these exercises were used to form peer groups of advocates/local advocacy networks. In Burundi, these peer groups even carry the name “ACAT-groups”, and in Congo, DCR’s advocacy officer developed an advocacy pocket-guide specifically for the Congolese context entitled “La Société Civile et le Plaidoyer”. In 2015, the programme aims to equip these groups so that they are prepared to continue their activities in a future where the current external support will no longer be available.

The support of DCR’s own advocates in this process has been continuous, as each of these advocates was backed by one of the members of the AWG, where questions could be asked, information collected and requests for additional training filed. Our second annual advocacy meeting (Entebbe, July 2014) was fully devoted to a further deepening of advocacy knowledge. Jenny Ross flew in from London and
many were delighted to meet their trainer -whom they thus far had only met in cyberspace- in person. After Entebbe, Jenny remained available through Skype for distant coaching for the networks of peer advocates in each country.

Exchange visits started fairly late and have not been tested to the full under DCRs advocacy programme, but nevertheless they have provided evidence as to how cross-learning can take place. In June 2014, the advocacy officers from Congo and Burundi visited Uganda and copied aspects of the Ugandan example in their home settings. In Uganda –by far the safest of DCRs fragile states-, the advocacy team maintains relatively cordial relationships in its areas of work with government officials at all levels. The advocate from Congo decided to invest in strengthening similar ties with government officials in his own context and quickly noticed how this was helpful in instances where issues had to be advocated for at a later stage. The advocacy officer from Burundi was impressed by both the school and community parliaments and sought to copy this approach. In the Burundian context, the school parliaments were considered too threatening and could not be replicated, but the community parliaments were formed and have in the meantime been officially inaugurated with government consent.

Results
The results of the programme have been many. DCR’s advocacy work in the countries needed some time to get off the ground, but towards the end of 2014 results picked up pace after the boost in training efforts, and the topics selected gained diversity as well. We purposely left it to the country teams and partners working together to choose the topics they wanted to advocate for and this helped towards the successes. They were not contributing to topics brought in by outsiders, but truly fighting for issues of their immediate interest and concern. This greatly enhanced ownership. The successes and challenges of their work are the subject of this ‘legacy document’ and will be further explored in the core of this report.

Lessons learnt
The most disruptive factor in reaching advocacy successes at all levels of the DCR programme, i.e. from the Netherlands all the way down to community level in fragile states concerned, was: staff turnover. If true commitment is to be achieved, it is vital that this factor is successfully countered. Salaries may play a role, but possibly much more so a clear view of what is expected of the advocate, as well as back up and support of the advocacy work in the countries themselves. Potentially promising advocacy actions were hampered/stopped by country directors or managers viewing the advocacy work as too political, fearing the impact of advocacy on the visibility of their organisation, or as disruptive to the day-to-day business of regular project programming. Furthermore, communities often feel there is no space to take up advocacy issues in the field, as they fear the consequences of being seen to question or challenge policy.

Practice has proven that this fear of being ‘too political’ is often exaggerated, as most of the activities undertaken within DCRs advocacy fall in the categories of so-called soft policy influencing, i.e. advising and advocacy, rather than lobbying and activism. Our country advocates generally know intuitively where the boundaries of advocacy lie in their own context. In the “Evaluation of Advocacy Findings” meeting held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on April 21st, 2015, the Inspectorate for Development Cooperation and Policy Evaluation (IOB) also noted that ‘advising’ and ‘advocacy’ are the most safe ways to operate in fragile and restrictive environments.
DCR’s Sudan programme initially stayed out of advocacy completely and only after discussing the softest possible options during our first encounter in April 2013 has DCR Sudan entered into advocacy work. Although initially reluctant, the complete flexibility of the AWG approach provided DCR Sudan with growing confidence to embrace advocacy and over time they have become increasingly active in selecting their own advocacy priorities and approach. An exchange visit to Burundi in January 2015, for which DCR Sudan purposely selected government staff seconded to their programme, has greatly improved the access of DCR to the Sudanese government.

Networking/formation of peer interest groups is of key importance for reasons of clout, protection and sustainability. Individuals or single NGO’s can easily be ignored when bringing a plea, but if larger sections of a community jointly take forward their request to a decision maker, he/she may feel more inclined to take the request seriously. In more repressive contexts, working in peer groups may also protect the advocate(s). If advocacy is too much linked to one or a few individuals, chances are that the activity will cease to exist once that person leaves the area or organisation.

Finally it is important to build on a strong foundation of content knowledge: the advocate can only be successful if he/she can speak with sufficient authority, for which a knowledge/experience base is needed. One of DCR’s members has been requested to vice-chair a national government committee to draft a law on mental health. In terms of advocacy, this is a major success, but it must be paired with quality input if we are to truly gain the influence we are pursuing. Advocates can help in acquiring such a position, but will never be successful if the content specialists are not available or do not deliver. In Liberia, Sudan and Congo, DCR’s Knowledge Network and the Advocacy Working Group members have teamed up to undertake research projects aimed at bringing together the necessary evidence base for advocacy.

Finally, DCR can expressly support the opinion that was repeatedly stressed by all participants at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs meeting on the Evaluation Findings on MFSII advocacy, that strategies for lobby and advocacy require a long-term vision, that continues to expand as the trajectory lengthens, moving from local to national, regional and even global challenges.

Suggested adaptations

DCR’s AWG would advise all consortia and partners preparing for the new MoFA Dialogue & Dissent programme and anyone seeking to engage in local level advocacy trajectories to take the above recommendations to heart and kick-start their programmes with a strong, well-founded and multi-faceted training and coaching programme on advocacy knowledge and skills to assure that all partners involved operate on the basis of shared views. It is vital to involve the management of country offices and local partners from the very beginning, so that the advocacy work has both full internal support and a content base to work from.

This booklet offers a trilogy of takes on the DCR advocacy capacity strengthening programme from different angles:

In Part I, Jenny Ross and Isobel Wilson-Cleary, consultants at INTRAC (Oxford) -who took the role of advisor and coach in DCR’s advocacy programme- look at DCR’s capacity building efforts from the point of view of an outsider and subject matter specialist.
In Part II, **Daniel Nsekuye Makombe** - DCR’s advocate in Congo - shares some lessons he learned while doing advocacy ‘on the ground’ in the context of and within the limitations of a fragile state.

And finally, in Part III, **Marjon van Dalen** - a freelance journalist and acquainted with DCR as member of its Communication Working Group - has interviewed advocates from all (6) DCR countries to show some living examples of DCR’s advocacy successes and challenges.

*Transporting wood, Makamba, Burundi*
ADVOCACY CAPACITY BUILDING USING BLENDED LEARNING IN COMPLEX AND FRAGILE CONTEXTS
ADVOCACY CAPACITY BUILDING USING BLENDED LEARNING IN COMPLEX AND FRAGILE CONTEXTS: A CASE STUDY DRAWING ON THE EXPERIENCE OF DUTCH CONSORTIUM FOR REHABILITATION’ PARTICIPANTS IN INTRAC’S BLENDED LEARNING ADVOCACY AND POLICY INFLUENCING COURSE

Authors: Jenny Ross and Isobel Wilson-Cleary

Introduction

INTRAC and the Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) have worked together to strengthen advocacy capacity within DCR programmes and partners in Burundi, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Core to the capacity building approach has been the participation of 40 DCR-funded participants in INTRAC’s Advocacy and Policy Influencing Blended Learning Course.

Drawing on course evaluations and interviews with participants this paper shows how blended learning approaches can provide access to high quality capacity building support in remote and conflict-affected locations in a cost-effective way. In addition, it shares how the content and methodology of the training was able to address specific challenges of undertaking advocacy in fragile and conflict-affected environments.

What did we do?

INTRAC and DCR worked together on:

• Training in Supporting Southern Advocacy for members of the Advocacy Working Group in the Netherlands (October 2011)
• Delivery of Advocacy and Policy Influencing Blended Learning Training Course to 40 country programme staff and partners in 6 cohorts between September 2012 and January 2015. Participants were from Burundi (7 participants), Liberia (5 participants), South Sudan (9 participants), DRC (1 participant), Sudan (7 participants) and Uganda (11 participants). 24 participants were staff of DCR members and 16 were representatives of partner organisations.
• Support for development of a participatory Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool based on INTRAC Praxis Paper 25 ‘Capacity Building for Advocacy’. The tool was used in DCR countries facilitated by members of the Advocacy Working Group based in the Netherlands.
• Facilitation of DCR Advocacy Workshop July 2014 held in Uganda. The group consisted of members of the advocacy working group and representatives/focal points from each of the DCR countries.
• Tailored support through webinars and email.

Blended learning is an approach that combines different methodologies for learning. It usually involves a “blend” of online and/or face-to-face approaches. It can also include self-study and other forms of teaching and interaction.

1 The Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation is a collaborative venture between CARE, Healthnet TPO, Save the Children and ZOA. It is funded by the Dutch government for the period from 1 January 2011 up to 31 December 2015. The Consortium works in Burundi, South Sudan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Uganda. As part of the broader programme (which focuses predominantly on poverty alleviation and economic development) there is a core component which focuses on lobbying and advocacy both in the Netherlands and also supporting advocacy at the national and local level within the focus countries.

2 For further details of the course see: http://www.intrac.org/data/files/Course_Profiles/Advocacy_and_Policy_Influencing_Blended_Learning.pdf

The INTRAC blended learning advocacy and policy influencing course consists of:

• Four half day sessions delivered over webinar on consecutive days,
• Independent study by participants working through mini-workbooks on core advocacy approaches (lobbying, research, coalitions and alliances, social media, popular mobilisations, media),
• Coaching session with trainer with a focus on addressing challenges to using new knowledge and skills,
• Further half day session delivered six weeks after the original session focusing on consolidating learning and sharing of participants experience.

The course is part of INTRAC’s regular training calendar and DCR sponsored programme staff and partner organisation’s field officers participated alongside practitioners from a wide variety of civil society organisations.

Benefits of the approach

Providing access to training at the grassroots level
In our experience capacity building in conflict-affected and fragile environments often takes place in national capitals and is inaccessible to grassroots organisations or INGO staff based in more remote locations. Through the advocacy course, the DCR programme was able to extend its reach, offering an opportunity for field staff and partners who otherwise would not have had access to face-to-face training due to other commitments and/or costs.

This course provided us with an opportunity. We need changes in fragile states. We need to change a lot of attitudes, behaviour and bad laws which are slowing development. We need to train people at the grassroots so that they can advocate for the changes that are needed.

Balancing learning with work responsibilities
Many of the course participants were new to advocacy and it was not a priority area for their day-to-day work. It could have been difficult to ensure take up of training opportunities under these circumstance. Delivering the course through half-day sessions minimised the impact on their existing responsibilities and ensured high levels of take-up.

‘The cost to us was much less than if we would have travelled for the training as people could continue with their work. It was just a case of keeping the generator running a few extra hours whilst the course was taking place.’

Cost effectiveness
The total cost per participant for the blended learning course was around €1000 - a significant reduction on the cost of face-to-face training. Given that participants were often in geographically dispersed or in remote locations with poor transport links, the blended approach enabled everyone to come together to share learning without the additional expense of regional flights and accommodation. As a result it was possible for DCR to offer sponsorship for participants on 7 separate courses between November 2012 and June 2015. This also helped to mitigate the effect of staff turnover on the programme’s continuity as new staff could be quickly trained.
**Peer-learning**
The training offered the opportunity to learn from the advocacy experience of participants working in a wide range of contexts (not just the six DCR countries). Often the non-DCR participants had more experience in advocacy and were able to provide an international/global advocacy perspective. Across the six cohorts the broader group of participants represented a range of organisations including donor agencies, INGOs and the UN.

**Reduced security risks**
In Sudan there would have been significant risk in bringing staff and partners together for training on advocacy. Providing online training initially in English and later in Arabic provided opportunities for participants to learn about advocacy without attracting the attention of the government authorities. In addition, in South Sudan participants were able to join the course despite the upsurge in violence in the country which might have prevented travel to attend face-to-face training.

**Focus on applying tools**
In face-to-face training, participants often work through an illustrative case study or example in groups to try tools and approaches. The focus on independent working ensured participants had the opportunity to apply all the tools to their own context and develop the foundations of their own advocacy strategy within the timeframe of the course. This facilitated the application of learning and also the training of others within participants’ contexts in the use of tools and approaches. Participants had the freedom to select the independent study modules (mini-workbooks) which were most relevant to their context.

The coaching session further supported the use of learning as it was able to focus on challenges to implementation of the strategy that had been developed. One participant noted that the course was more intensive than a face-to-face equivalent as you cannot just ‘tune out’ and expect the other participants to do the hard work – you are on your own!

**Challenges and mitigation**

**Using new technology**
As with many participants in INTRAC’s blended learning courses, none of the DCR participants had been involved in an online training before. Some had very limited access to technology and the internet, without Skype accounts or regular access to email.

We undertook calls with participants prior to the course starting to ensure that participants became more familiar with using the technology effectively to engage with the course content fully. Each day participants were asked to log on to the webinar an hour before the training began in order to troubleshoot any problems before the course started.

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4 Participants worked through mini-workbooks independently for each of the core advocacy tactics (lobbying, research, coalitions, networks and alliances, popular mobilisation, media, social media). This was also beneficial because participants did not have to participate in sessions which were of limited relevance to them (e.g. social media use is limited in some of the contexts).
Interruption connectivity and a lack of consistent power
In some instances the internet connection that participants were using was unstable or was affected by power cuts. To mitigate this risk participants were provided with a comprehensive course guide, individual workbook, and the course presentations before the sessions, as well as access to the recordings after every session. We also used Skype to facilitate further remote support throughout the duration of each course.

In some instances, participants travelled to other locations with more reliable connection/power during the course duration. As a result of the unstable nature of internet connectivity for some participants we were not always able to use all of the interactive functionality of the webinar (virtual breakout groups, opportunities for buddying) and so sessions became more focused on whole group input and discussions.

Establishing rapport and building relationships virtually
A number of participants noted that they missed the interactivity of a face-to-face training. This was partly mitigated by calls with the trainer before the course and the one-to-one coaching session. In some courses it was possible to use webinar break out groups and create ‘buddy’ groups to strengthen the rapport within the group. In addition, some DCR participants were able to meet as part of the advocacy capacity assessment process, advocacy exchanges and at the annual meetings for the advocacy focal points held in Kampala. The blended learning course provided another opportunity to strengthen the peer learning aspect of the overall DCR programme.

Core content and methodology
Participants highlighted how the following elements of the training content and methodology were particularly helpful in addressing the challenges that they faced.

Focus on building analytical skills
The course was broken down into simple stages of an advocacy cycle with a strong focus on analysis to build the confidence of participants and ensure advocacy activities were linked to the overall strategy and were change-oriented.

A simplified version of a theory of change approach was used to support participants to think through what needed to change, what the role of their organisation could be and what the obstacles to change were. Outcome-focused planning approaches gave participants the flexibility to adapt their activities when there were changes in the context or as they learned which approaches were effective and which were not.

“As a new advocacy officer, I was afraid because I did not understand what I should do, but now I feel confident.”

5 In October 2014, INTRAC began delivering a new course ‘Influencing and Supporting Change in Complex Contexts’ which was informed by the experience of training DCR participants and their feedback on the usefulness of elements of the blended learning course

6 The importance of iterative and adaptive approaches to development have been highlighted in recent debates around doing development differently http://doingdevelopmentdifferently.com/the-ddd-manifesto/
Effective planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME)
For many DCR participants, the often intangible and long-term nature of progress and results in advocacy compared to those in service delivery has been a source of frustration and sometimes tension. There were instances of participants coming into conflict with their managers (who often had a strong service delivery background) when trying to report advocacy results.

Over the six training courses, the sessions on PME were gradually strengthened to ensure that participants were more equipped to measure progress and identify the steps to change (intermediate outcomes 7). Key to the PME approach was identifying a range of advocacy-related outcomes (not just changes in policy) as in many instances the obstacles to change were the attitudes of local government representatives and communities rather than bad policies or laws.

Managing risk
Initially many DCR participants were pre-occupied with the risks associated with advocacy, engaging in advocacy can lead to organisations and individuals being perceived as oppositional or creating conflict. There were concerns that strengthening advocacy would attract the attention of the government and potentially put service delivery programmes or the individuals involved at risk 8.

“At the beginning I was worried and anxious. Even some small things can cause trouble – people have contradictory ideas and accuse you of playing politics.”

Often participants equated advocacy with people marching on the streets – the course explored non-confrontational advocacy approaches which encouraged dialogue and collaboration which are more applicable in DCR contexts.

Participants also appreciated the focus on developing appropriate advocacy messages, recognising that telling decision-makers or communities what they should do often increased resistance and caused conflict.

“Before the training any attempt to advocate for something could turn quickly into a quarrel but now I know more how to organise myself.”

The course provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on how they would explain their legitimacy when challenged (whether that was by the Government, local leaders or communities). This often also helped participants when they had to convince their own colleagues, their organisational partners and communities of the value and legitimacy of engaging in advocacy following their training.

7 The parallel development of INTRAC’s Advocacy Planning Monitoring and Evaluation course supported the strengthening of the blended learning course in these areas.

8 In 2009 a number of humanitarian NGOs were expelled by the Sudanese Government. It is widely believed that the advocacy work of some of these NGOs was a contributing factor in their expulsion.
Understanding the political reality

In DCR contexts, often the Government may be unwilling or unable to uphold and execute its responsibilities in relation to its citizens. In these contexts, simply re-iterating the responsibilities of government actors as an advocacy approach is often ineffective and may be risky. To be successful (and safe) participants were encouraged to deepen their analysis of the interests and incentives of stakeholders and recognise power dynamics at play.

Through the use of stakeholder and power analysis tools participants were able to identify and analyse the complex web of formal and informal power relationships as part of their strategy development. They were also able to identify where social and cultural attitudes (rather than Government policy) were the major obstacles to change. In many instances, the advocacy strategy developed by DCR participants focused on creating new spaces for dialogue between citizens and government and looking for opportunities to create momentum for change. Such approaches are consistent with emerging ideas about how to apply complexity theory to development.

Most coaching sessions with DCR participants focused on how to deal with problems in key relationships: how to deal with a local leader who wouldn’t meet with representatives as they were from the ‘wrong’ tribe; how to resolve a stand-off between the local government representative and community leaders about the alleged corruption of the local government official; and how to convince parents from cattle owning families that there were long-term benefits of educating their children (particularly their daughters) when there were short-term costs involved in doing this if the children were not available to look after the cattle.

What difference did the training make?

It is difficult to attribute changes directly to the training as distinct from the broader capacity building and programme activities. However those who participated in the advocacy course gave the following examples of how the course had contributed to changes at multiple levels in their post-course evaluations and interviews.

**Individual capacity and commitment**

The forty participants who participated in the course as part of the programme saw an increase in their knowledge, confidence and understanding of advocacy. In evaluations, there was a clear commitment to use their new knowledge to strengthen the impact of their work; 90% of participants gave examples of how they were going to apply their learning.

‘The training we had actually gave us confidence. At the beginning we were not even daring to talk about advocacy. We didn’t know much about it. Now we feel like we are fluent. I can fill my mouth with the words of advocacy and feel confident.’

‘In our context [Sudan] you are not going to be able to come back at the end of a five year programme and say – these are the policies we changed. What has been created is cells of advocacy – people who have the confidence and skills. There are now people who say advocacy is possible. Not just the NGO people but communities, local partners and even some within the government.’

‘There has been a tremendous improvement at the level of individual capacity. We can see it in the reports, the quality of planning and execution. When the capacity of the individual improves it has an effect on the organisation. Because we have all been trained in the same approach – we speak the same language – partners are now able to identify when they are making change through advocacy and are more able to document the impact.’

‘We had a governance-focused training. Some of the participants had been on the advocacy course. They were so confident – they were challenging the trainer – saying we can achieve results quicker if we combine this with advocacy.’

**Organisational capacity and commitment**

Many participants have used the course to build the capacity of their wider organisation in terms of advocacy. Some organisations that were initially skeptical about advocacy are in the process of developing advocacy programmes or integrating advocacy within their existing work, with some partners beginning to attract small amounts of advocacy funding to support their work. For example, Sudan and Burundi have been selected by CARE and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for continued advocacy under the ‘Dialogue & Dissent’ framework offering opportunities to build upon DCR’s experiences.

‘It is true that advocacy was a daily activity in my project inspired by the training. In future projects within my organisation, advocacy will be part of the logical framework.’

‘I have seen the growth in the capacity of staff and partners. In recent advocacy relating to a land conflict, a group of four individuals who had been trained were able to develop their plan, thinking about the message and the right channels to transmit them. They pro-actively thought about issues of risk and they felt very confident.’ Uganda focal point
‘At the beginning, we thought advocacy was impossible in our context. Now we are developing an advocacy-focused programme. This wouldn't have been possible without the capacity building we received which deepened our skills and understanding.’

Community capacity and commitment
Both the training course and the advocacy capacity assessment process include a strong focus on stakeholder analysis. In many instances, participants identified where there were other actors who would benefit from strengthened advocacy capacity. This included traditional and religious leaders and community groups. Although the original training course was not designed as a ‘training of trainers’, the step-by-step approach using simple analytical tools made it possible for participants to share it with colleagues and others working within their context without additional support. One of DCRs advocacy focal points developed a small manual “Civil Society & Advocacy” based on the materials of INTRAC and others for local use.

‘We have shared our new knowledge with the school management committees and the parent teacher associations. They are lobbying and taking more ownership of their schools. We have seen the farmers groups we work with grow into formal networks. They are now able to bargain for better prices.’

“Through advocacy capacity assessment process we identified the importance of engaging and building the advocacy capacity of religious leaders in given their power and influence within the local community.”

Relationships between key stakeholders
Participants have also taken the lead in creating new spaces for dialogue and engagement between citizens and government. In Uganda, in addition to school management committees and farmers groups, community and school parliaments have been trained. In Burundi, provincial advocacy committees have been set up in addition to community parliaments in two provinces. Bringing about change in complex and fragile contexts is a long-term process and these new “claimed spaces” 10 are critical to successful advocacy and building more inclusive governance.

Even in Sudan where visibly engaging in advocacy involves considerable risk, the participants in the training have been able to use the tools and approaches that they have learned in their work and find ways of working more constructively with stakeholders. Secondments of government officials to work with service delivery organisations has built greater understanding of the challenges that exist and has helped to build trust and reduce mutual suspicion.

In Burundi the DCR advocacy officer started a process of advocating for community parliaments to be set up following an exchange visit to Uganda. Initially there was a lot of resistance as it was seen as a challenge to the national parliament. However, after a series of lobbying meetings and extensive dialogue, there was greater understanding that the purpose of community parliaments is to provide an opportunity for dialogue between ordinary people and service providers rather than an act of rebellion. Subsequently, the government launched the community parliament in two districts.

10 In John Gaventas’ model for analysing power (the power cube) he talks about the importance of claimed spaces in enabling citizen action and participation. These are spaces for dialogue and debate that are created by those with less power (www.powercube.net).
Through these new spaces and discussions it has been possible to empower communities and given them a greater sense of their own agency. In Uganda school management committees have raised funds to build new school blocks and also are they engaging with local government officials. In Sudan, when the local municipal water official wanted to change the location of a new borehole (disregarding the outcome of an extensive consultation process) the community mobilised its own leaders to raise their objections directly with the official. As a result, the decision was reversed and in future the municipal water office will participate in the community discussion processes.

‘The most useful thing I learnt in the class was the focus on the message. We based our messages on our research. We called specialists on mental health together and they gave us the sound scientific arguments that nobody could oppose.’

Policy and practice
The enabling environment for policy change varied widely across the six countries but the results that were achieved both at the national and local level were impressive given the slow start of the capacity building element of the programme. In some countries changes in the context – such as the outbreak of Ebola in Liberia, instability in Burundi and renewed conflict in South Sudan – made progress in advocacy more challenging.

(Government) Attention and resources are focused on the war. We are trying to advocate for increased procurement of drugs to treat mental health issues but we keep on being told there is no money because of the war.

In Burundi, significant progress has been made – but the sustainability of the changes is unclear at the time of writing due to the political instability in the country. A coordinated advocacy campaign (combining research, workshops, lobbying and radio spots) has led to the setting up of a mental health commission by the Minister of Health to work on a mental health act. The commission is made up of representatives of the Ministry of Health and mental health and legal specialists from outside the Ministry and co-chaired by the DCR advocacy officer.

People’s lives
Participants gave examples during interviews of where they felt that their advocacy work has had a direct impact on the lives of the poor and vulnerable. Participants identified instances where land disputes have been resolved, farmers have received better prices for their crops, more children have been sent to school, people have increased access to water and fewer girls have been raped.

‘In one area, there has been real progress on the issue of defilement (rape). Partners have been able to work with district leaders, parents, the police and schools to push for those who are responsible to be arrested. Some of the local leaders are now coming up with a byelaw and levels of rape are being actively monitored. In one of the schools which we have worked with there has been no new cases since the first arrest took place.’
Key Learning

Blended learning has significant potential as an approach to strengthen and extend the reach of multi-country advocacy capacity building programmes. It is cost effective and has the potential to reach groups in remote and insecure locations. The DCR programme more broadly highlights the potential of investing in advocacy capacity building in conflict-affected and fragile states.

Staff and partners in complex environments are often already engaged in influencing local government officials and other key stakeholders. They just don’t equate this with advocacy. The course built on this pre-existing experience helping participants to systematise and be more strategic in their relationship-building. This built confidence and increased commitment to advocacy approaches.

Capacity building programmes should support participants to train others and pass on their learning to members of community based groups and structures. The demand for advocacy training at the community/grassroots level is high. The training led by participants has contributed to increased advocacy capacity at the local level which is an important to the long term impact of the DCR programme.

Capacity building support needs to be provided on a long-term basis as bringing about change through advocacy can be slow and unpredictable. The DCR programme began to see tangible success in its final year (year four of five). In some countries there are groups and structures in place that will support sustainability, in others not. It is important to start the capacity strengthening process as soon as possible within any new programme in order to be able to see tangible results within a programme or project timeframe.

Leadership, coordination and ownership at country level is key to results. The advocacy focal points who coordinated country-level activities were very influential in terms of the overall success of the advocacy capacity building programme. Interestingly two of the most successful focal points (Burundi and DRC) did not have a traditional NGO/CSO background but instead were a former journalist and a trained lawyer who had worked as a political advisor, respectively. They demonstrated the kind of entrepreneurial approach which has been identified as helpful in supporting local advocacy in other programmes. ¹¹

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¹¹ In the evaluation of the Mwananchi programme the importance of local CSOs being seen as political entrepreneurs as opposed to local project implementers was a key finding. http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8561.pdf

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INTRAC SUPPORT

- **TRAINING COURSE**
- **COACHING** = issues, activities, support
- **SIGNPOSTING TO INFORMATION**
  - EXAMPLES/TOOLS
- **WEBINARS/SKYPE ON SPECIFIC TOPICS**
- **HARVESTING OF EXPERIENCES**
  - SHARING
- **IN-COUNTRY SUPPORT**
- **FACILITATED PEER LEARNING**

**How to write them up**

**INTERESTING TITLE**

**THE BACKGROUND/YOUR OVERALL STRATEGY**

**YOUR ACTIVITY/ACTIVITIES**
  - WHAT DID YOU DO....

**THE RESULT/WHAT CHANGED OR WHAT DIDN’T**

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN/WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY/THENSAME**

**QUOTE FROM STAKEHOLDER/EVALUATION**

**NICE PHOTO**

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*Sheets from DCR’s advocacy training by Jenny Ross/INTRAC, Entebbe, July 2014*
CHALLENGES OF ADVOCACY IN A FRAGILE CONTEXT: THE CASE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.
CHALLENGES OF ADVOCACY IN A FRAGILE CONTEXT: THE CASE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.

By Daniel NSEKUYE MAKOMBE, Advocacy Officer DCR/ DR Congo

I. Introduction

In DR Congo, as part of the Pamoja programme implemented by Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) 2011-2015, with support of Advocacy Working Group (AWG) in the Netherlands, we carried out advocacy activities in three ways: advocacy for the community, advocacy with the community and advocacy by the community. The experience acquired in this area of work within the framework of the Pamoja project is the main motivation for writing this article.

The Fragile Context of DR Congo

A state is fragile when the government and the state structures do not have the means and/or the political will to assure the citizens’ security and protection, nor to manage public affairs efficiently and combat poverty among the population. ¹

According to this definition, DR Congo is a fragile state. The size and diversity of the problems facing DRC have pushed fragility to alarming, chronic levels of fragility, which largely explains the resistance to advocacy.

First of all, because in the majority of cases conflicts are solved though reaching consensus, influencing activities (advocating) should not deviate too much from what is feasible to achieve. Any other ideas, even if beneficial, come second to that.

Secondly, decision makers (who themselves have often reached their position through consensus processes) tend to satisfy those who have mandated them. Therefore their competences in their work are not evaluated on the basis of the way they serve the nation or their community, but of how they serve their constituency (be it political, ethnical or other).

Finally, technical and financial partners (INGO's) that usually come to our aid in development, tend to impose their vision upon us in a way that does not always corroborate with our real needs.

II. Advocacy Challenges in DR Congo concerning fragility

A. Challenges in working with the Congolese Government

1) Government priorities

In post-conflict states such as DR Congo, it is normal that the government prioritises improving social, security, political and economic issues. In relation to advocacy, decision makers sometimes use these priorities as an argument to oppose requests for change.

We give the example of the occupation of a part of a primary school yard in Vulingongo, on the fringes of Lubero town, by military forces. This school had been rehabilitated under the DCR programme. On

¹ OECD : the dictionary of international trade, www.glossary-international.com
the 4th of July 2013, we were informed by Save the Children about the occupation of part of the school yard by military forces belonging to Congolese Army.

Advocating the military in times of armed conflict is a great challenge and is not easily supported by anybody. Nevertheless, we decided to initiate a lobby towards the commander of the 8th military region/Nord Kivu, (General BAHUMA, to whom we pay tribute), requesting the military hierarchy to take a decision to remove the soldiers from the school yard and relocate them elsewhere. Initially, the commander refused, informing us that “the priority of the State in that time was to restore security to the population in a region where armed groups proliferated, and that stationing military forces in the school grounds was an integral part of the army command’s strategy to neutralize the enemy’s assaults”.

We pursued our efforts by presenting relevant facts and arguments, namely: military objects left in the school yard (see photo below), the risk of the school being attacked by insurgents; the fear of female students of being raped (due to the coming and going of soldiers); children emulating military activities, etc., and organising a field visit for the army commander. This appeared to convince him and he promised to act. Some days later we noted with satisfaction that the soldiers were no longer in the school yard. They had been moved on to an area slightly further away from the school.

To address challenges such as this:
- Be sure to acquaint yourself with the priorities of the government in the areas in which you intend to carry out advocacy,
- Collect strong evidence to be convincing.

2 Photos taken from the alert document transmitted by Save the Children at Lubero on 4th of July 2013.

a) The rehabilitated School by Save the Children in Vulingongo, overlooked by military huts;
b) A student playing with a cartridge abandoned by the soldiers in the school yard;
c) Cartridges left by soldiers in the school yard.
2) Politicized environment:

Many fragile states are characterised by an administrative and professional environment that is rife with all kinds of party political ideologies and affiliations. DR Congo is no exception. These are challenges that we have to deal with in our advocacy work. Advocates are advised to remain as neutral as possible. An example from the domain of food security, where DCR was distributing agricultural inputs (e.g. seeds, fertilizer and the like) among beneficiary farmers, which led to land conflicts between landowners and farmers, tearing communities apart.

We initiated a lobby to the Provincial Assembly (the government level directly under the State level, see footnote 4) advocating for an Edict, i.e. a provincial law, aimed at regulating relations between farmers and landowners. Our research uncovered that more than one year before such a provincial law had already been voted and promulgated. However, this was not known in the community and the conflicts persisted.

We were forced to draw the bitter conclusion that the policy context was so politicized that a signed public law was snuffed out. The law in question had been suppressed by groups not at ease with it, because they were either landowners themselves or political opponents of those who presented the original legislative proposal in the Provincial Assembly. It proved very difficult to unearth the law in question. It was not available in the community nor at the provincial assembly, the province governorate or even at the Provincial Ministry of Land Affairs. It was by means of non-official sources that we eventually managed to secure a copy which we quickly disseminated in a wide range of social groups as well as announcing it in radio broadcasts to prevent it from ‘disappearing’ once again.

On top of this, we proposed a contract template in accordance with this ‘rediscovered’ law, to formalize conventions between landowners and farmers. In the meantime, 66 such contracts have been concluded between DCR beneficiary farmers and landowners, which greatly enhances the economic power of the famers involved.

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3 An Edict is a provincial law voted by the provincial assembly and promulgated by the provincial governor.
To address a challenge of this kind, it is advisable to:
- Avoid undue controversy,
- Remain neutral,
- Ensure you’re well acquainted with the political arena relating to your area of advocacy,
- Singly focus on your goal.

3) (Lack of) decision maker interest:
It may happen that a decision maker does not show much interest in an advocacy topic you bring forward, because it is against his own interest. His (lack of) interest may be direct or indirect:
- **Direct**, i.e. having to do with the decision maker himself. Advocates will have to take this into consideration when phrasing their policy ask. This in order to stimulate the targeted decision maker to act, because as the saying goes: “No interest, no action”. Advocates may demonstrate to the decision maker that it is in his interest to act, because the community will remember him doing so at election time.

- **Indirect**, i.e. associated with the community. For example, a community development programme which is not running as it should, where an advocate would aim for change to increase the programme’s efficiency for the benefit of community.

We were faced with such a case when we were meeting the Chief of the Provincial Division for Planning to acquire recognition of local Development Committees set up by DCR. The official practice is to draw up development plans and set up development committees at the level of the chieftainship. But DCR’s preferred approach is to set up development committees at the village level and tailor its development plans to this lowest tier in the administrative hierarchy. This allows even the most marginalised people to express their opinion and be heard. We requested the authorities to incorporate the development plans as conceived by the village-level development committees into the chieftainship plans. It was difficult to convince the targeted decision maker to do so, since it was his interest to stick to the old ways, despite the fact that this was less efficient.

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4 Administrative Subdivision of DRCongo:
- State – Provinces – District - Territories – Chieftainships or Sectors – Groups - Villages. (Rural)
- State – Provinces - Towns- Municipalities – Neighbourhoods(Urban)

At chieftainship level, there are unelected village representatives (chiefs) who participate in meetings of the development committee for the planning and sometimes they don’t truly represent the communities needs and don’t inform communities what was decided in chieftainship’s meetings, while community members in villages are elected by and work in direct collaboration with the villagers themselves.
To kindle decision maker interest, it is advisable to:
- Pinpoint opportune moments (e.g., election periods, social campaigns, legislative or community debates),
- Deploy lobbying at a superior level,
- Set up pilot projects in order to provide practical examples for change,
- Invite decision makers for field visits so they can acquaint themselves with local realities.

4) Continuity of relationships with decision makers
Policy asks can be seriously delayed in cases where the decision maker takes ample time to come to grips with the request and/or to check his decision against existing jurisprudence, or when the decision maker leaves his post before a decision is taken (due to staff transfers, revocation, death or illness). This does not make the advocacy work any easier.

When we worked on the case of the Primary School in Vulingongo being occupied by military forces (example number 1 of this article), the responsible Territory Administrator was transferred while working on the case. His substitute took time to take up his post. Meanwhile, the school children were left for two months without any solution. This spurred us to directly contact the higher levels of the National Army.

To face challenges of this kind, it is advisable to:
- Stay vigilant to be able to make the acquaintance of the new decision maker immediately upon his arrival,
- Seek contacts higher up if needed.

5) Limitations in the mandate of decision makers
It may be that the decision maker you are dealing with is not mandated to come up with a satisfactory and durable solution. Based on the principle that lobby goals must be defined to be achievable, in such cases it serves no further purpose to continue to address that decision maker with your policy ask.

As example we take the case of free primary education for all.
In DR Congo, the constitution states that primary education should be free for all. However, in practice, parents pay a premium to teachers to bring their salary to subsistence level. It is painful to find poor children on the streets, who, despite the official absence of levies and fees, are deprived of primary education because their parents can't pay this premium.
The decision maker immediately responsible for issues relating to access to primary education is the Provincial Minister of Education. However, he has shown himself unable to effectuate the necessary changes regarding the remuneration of teachers.
Changing this situation requires directing a lobby towards the President of Republic and/or the National Ministry of Education. We are planning a trajectory to do so in Kinshasa, the national capital of DR Congo. We envisage to approach the Dutch embassy to support us when we meet with the National Ministry of Education.

To face challenges of this kind, it is advisable to:
- Undertake research to identify the competent authority in order to direct your policy ask at the right level
- Use the diplomatic representations of your INGO partners.
6) Informal channels can be more important than formal ones

Practice shows that often the visible power is not necessarily the real decision maker. An invisible power is instead the source of decisions.

An example: the Alternative Learning Program (ALP) classes taught by Save the Children lost students due to the fact that each year, in April, the Catholic Church organises classes to prepare children for baptism, communion and confirmation. These catechism classes take place every afternoon during the whole of the month of March. Due to a lack of infrastructure, ALP classes are also taught in the afternoons. The students can’t attend both classes at the same time and tend to prefer to go to the catechism classes – which severely disrupted the ALProgramme.

Where the pastoral animator who plans the calendar for the catechism classes might have seemed the most logical decision maker to target, in practice it turned out to be the parish priest who was the real decision maker behind the planning of the catechism classes. When we discovered that, we addressed the priest and the calendar was reviewed, with the result that, for 2015, ALP and catechism classes no longer clash.

To deal with challenge of this kind, it is advisable to:
- Analyse a situation in depth to discover the invisible power/decision maker to target
- Take your question to a higher level if needed.

B. Challenges in working with technical and financial partners (NGOs)

7) Weak relations due to mutual mistrust

In Congo in general and in Nord Kivu, Sud Kivu and Maniema in particular, relations between the political and administrative authorities (government) and technical and financial partners (the Non-Governmental Organisations, NGOs) tend to be characterised by unjustified levels of mistrust, instigated by rivalries and fuelled by mutual accusations. The authorities portray the NGOs as opportunists enriching themselves with project money apparently for the benefit of the population, while the NGOs qualify the authorities as incompetent and pursuing selfish interests. The atmosphere of mistrust makes both parties reluctant to engage with one another and the authorities tend to doubt the real intentions of advocates pleading for NGO causes.

As we were preparing one of our lobby asks, the President of Lubero Peace Court 5 pointed out that there is no advocacy without decision makers. He expressed concern about the weakness of the relationship between the governmental authorities and the NGOs, despite the fact that both profess to work for the community. And he criticized NGO attitudes to only contact the authorities when problems arise, as many of these might be avoided if government-NGO relations were better.

After an exchange visit to Uganda, where we witnessed a close cooperation between DCR and the local authorities, DCR Congo, together with its partners, took the initiative to meet up with Congolese authorities with the aim to break down this mistrust. As a result, relations have become a lot stronger and more cordial.

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5 In DR of Congo, the hierarchy of judicial bodies is as follows: Supreme Court (National level) – Court of Appeal (Province) – High Court (District) – Peace Court (Territory) – Main court (Chieftainship) – Secondary court (Group).
**To face this type of challenge, it is advisable to:**
- Invest in building strong relationships with decision makers; do not only target them when you require them to act, but also pay courtesy visits to keep one another informed on every day developments,
- Set up regular meetings between decision makers and the NGO community.

**8) Limited advocacy capacities of staff**
For many local NGOs and INGOs, advocacy as part of development work is absolutely new and they are facing challenges in relation to the capacity, courage and commitment of staff regarding advocacy. While some found it difficult to take it up, once the first steps were taken it proved to be very rewarding. NGOs, particularly in fragile contexts, are not used to approaching authorities, and for some, approaching decision makers with a policy ask was viewed as ‘interfering in politics’, and as such like swearing in church.

With the help of the AWG, we have invested in assessing and reinforcing staff capacities for lobby and advocacy. We have taken our local partners along on courtesy visits to different authorities (political, administrative, military, legal etc.) in order to dispel their fear and mistrust. Both parties (authorities and NGOs) have come to conclude that there is no reason for mistrust caused by stereotypes.

To address this challenge, it is advisable to:
- Assess staff competencies for advocacy,
- Strengthen advocacy capacity of staff and network partners,
- Invite sister organisations that are more experienced to speak to your organisation/network about the area in which you need more information (training, data sharing),
- Create networks with NGOs and civil society partners to gain power/strength,
- Engage in courtesy visits to test the waters,
- Analyse the context to better understand political procedures,
- Identify other players and key allies to build effective coalitions.

**9) The partisan interests of organizations’ agents**
Inside humanitarian or development NGOs, different players may have different interests regarding advocacy issues. Influential people within the organisation may counter certain positions for opportunistic reasons. In such cases, confidentiality is no longer guaranteed. This can seriously hamper the advocacy activities undertaken.

We witnessed such a case with one of our local partners in Sud Kivu. In their region, farmers were struggling with a lack of arable land, while at the same time, large parcels of land were concentrated in the hands of a few owners, who failed to exploit it. Our local partner was advocating for the equitable sharing of arable land, urging the National Commission for Land Reforms (CoNaRef) to pass an agrarian reform proposal. However, they were confronted with one of their members strongly resisting their advocacy activities from within. It soon became apparent that the individual concerned was himself one of these landowners owning large tracts of unexploited land.

To deal with challenges of this nature, it is necessary to:
- Select your lobby partners carefully,
- Make sure that the team shares the same vision.
10) Internal friction

Often internal friction is caused by diverging views. The levels of agreement on the importance of advocacy work as part of a development strategy can play a major role. Apparently the DCR consortium added the advocacy pillar at a later stage, while not all member organisations were prepared for it. For those working on advocacy for the first time, advocacy tasks were seen as additional work on top of the service delivery, which caused discomfort. This is shown by:

a) the fact that none of the DCR members has staff specifically tasked with advocacy work in Congo, and
b) none of the members included advocacy in the job descriptions of their programme staff.

Advocacy work may be obstructed or silenced when decision makers within an NGO are – wrongly - of the opinion that advocacy work must be qualified as ‘getting involved in politics’.

To address challenges of this nature, it is necessary to:
- Be sure to have the right information and calculate any possible risk,
- Be sure to have the support of the higher echelons in your organisation (supervisor/s),
- Include lobby and advocacy in job descriptions, preferably at the moment of recruitment,
- Be resilient, i.e. never give up: resist shocks, but pursue your goal.

II) The ‘competition’ of international organisations

In most cases, a superiority complex is observed both in UN-agencies and large international (humanitarian) NGOs. UN-agencies want advocacy topics to be determined by themselves and not come from others. It is important, however, that the humanitarian community does not lose track of its ultimate goal: the protection and well-being of local communities.

In the case of the military occupation of the Vulingongo school yard, MONUSCO became frustrated because DCR had taken up the issue, while they considered it to fall under their mandate and field of expertise. DCR left the follow-up and monitoring of the case in the hands of MONUSCO as a much more ‘heavy weight’ player in the field, thus increasing the chances of longer –term success. For DCR, it was more important to have a school yard free from army activity than to officially claim the credit for that particular advocacy action.

To address this type of challenge, it is advisable to:
- Work in networks or coalitions,
- Never give up/be resilient,
- Beware of contradictory views.
C. Conclusion

In this article, we discussed lobby and advocacy experiences in DR Congo, providing the reader with eleven challenges that anybody engaging in lobby and advocacy work in a fragile context may encounter. Without pretending to have provided an exhaustive list, these are all challenges that can potentially constitute an obstacle to advocacy work.

No manual can provide all the answers on how to behave to face all lobbying challenges. The reader wanting to use the different tips indicated above, must always resort to his/her common sense and balanced judgement.

Advocates are advised to:

- Make an effort to understand the environment in which they live and work in depth; to be aware of and minimise any risks that may present themselves and know how to react in case of emergency. It is also important to guarantee a security assurance at both the local and the international level for the development advocate’s protection; this holds even stronger for those who work in sensitive areas such as human rights;
- Act responsibly: Be sure to understand how your (lack of) action may pose risks to your safety;
- Act cautiously and do not expose yourself to unnecessary risks;
- Focus on building sustainable relations with decision makers at all levels throughout official networks.

As a closing remark, we would like to stress that advocates should be a pillar on whom the community can count to support them in overcoming their difficulties and regaining their dignity, as they are on top of the wider context in all its dimensions and have at their fingertips all the techniques to influence decision makers for the common good.
EXAMPLES OF DCR’S ADVOCACY SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES
THE COMMUNITY PARLIAMENT: A PLATFORM FOR CHANGE IN UGANDA

“We did not know that we had the right to question our leaders and to demand accountability regarding funds allocated for the development of our community. We now feel empowered that our views finally matter when it comes to prioritising the development of our people,” says Rev. Benjamin Lochepe, the speaker of Nabokotom community parliament in the Amudat district in the Karamoja region of Uganda. He speaks about the positive effects of the community parliament.

The community parliament, implemented by ZOA and her partner AIDI (Amudat Inter-religious Development Initiatives) under the DCR programme, is a concept that aims to provide a platform for self-inspection which ensures that communities are able to examine and address their development needs. Besides that, it also provides a platform to promote social accountability of local leaders for the needs of their communities.

The parliaments have registered commendable successes. According to Alfred Logwe, the Amudat sub-county chief (head of civil service in the sub-county), the community parliament has been a very useful platform for women to raise their voices and contribute to decision-making processes in the community.

In the traditional Pokot culture men refer to their wives as “the child”. This shows that the status of women is very low compared to that of men. The voice of a woman is not important. Women have no voice. But after the introduction of the community parliament things have changed. Women have been empowered, have started to raise their voices and are now seen discussing and sitting alongside men in decision-making processes. One woman raised the issue why the land at the riverbed was not being used for agriculture. After discussing the issue in the community parliament, the local government supported her idea. With the help of the ZOA agricultural project, the women are now growing various vegetable crops. The sales profits benefit the community parliament. The lady that brought up the idea has now been awarded the title “woman of the year” by the local government. “The community parliaments will now even serve as platforms to engage our residents to contribute to the planning processes that lead to the Sub-county Development Plan,” according to Logwe, the Amudat county chief.

It has not been all rosy for the community parliaments, as they have often encountered resistance and criticism from sections of the political leadership, who accuse the parliaments of working with political opponents to get rid of them. However, the parliaments keep stressing that they are only interested in service delivery for the community itself.

“We are not a political parliament. We only want improvement of service delivery and we want to create better living conditions for the people in our community,” insists Peter Lokonoi, the deputy speaker of Nabokotom parliament.

But the efforts of this community group have impressed some sections of the district leadership. Stephen Nsubuga Bewayo, the Resident District Commissioner, advises that the activities of the parliament are within citizens’ constitutional rights to participate in the development of their community. “If people are demanding public services, as a leader or public officer you must be accountable to them,” he stresses.
He adds that the parliaments have empowered the communities to demand for services, and also provided local leaders with a platform to sensitise and mobilise the population for development. The district has used the Nabokotom parliament to mobilise the community of pastoralists to embrace agriculture, as well as to engage the communities on negative cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriages.

Rev. Benjamin Lochepe speaker of the Nabokotom community parliament, Amudat, Karamodja
COMMUNITY PARLIAMENTS FUNCTION IN BURUNDI

In this picture, the village head welcomes the new community parliament in his village. It is perceived as a great achievement and a platform for change. It enables people to exchange ideas. In the rural countryside of Burundi, most people cannot read and write. Many make a living as subsistence farmers. Often the peasants fear the ones that can read and write. “Most literate people hardly listen to the farmers because they underestimate them due to their lack of education. Instead of feeling concern for the poor farmers’ welfare, some literate people and civil servants rather ask for bribes when providing them with some services” says one frustrated farmer in the hills. “Burundi police daily mistreat peasants and even loot their goods! Ordinary people have no forum to discuss what happens to them everyday, they need to demand for more justice to them and advocate for a change in attitude on both sides.”

After the introduction of the community parliament, ordinary people learnt how to approach the service providers and decision makers. In their turn, the latter learnt to listen to the services receivers in a more respectful way! Moreover, people are prioritizing the urgent development needs in their own village. There are three community parliaments: in Muyinga, Gitega and Makamba provinces. In the first two areas, parliaments are fully functioning. In Makamba, one is currently being set up.

Jean Pierre, our DCR officer in Burundi, shares: “The idea of a community parliament came to me after an advocacy exchange visit in Uganda. This visit was organized in June 2014 between DCR Uganda as a host and DCR-Burundi and Congo as guests. The group travelled to Northern and Eastern Uganda to learn about the achievements of DCR-Uganda. We witnessed a lot of interesting activities but the Pokot community parliament struck me most and inspired me to duplicate a community parliament in my home country Burundi. Burundi people living in remote
areas never get any chance to meet the civil servants, while they desperately need them. The gap between service providers and service beneficiaries is too wide. In the framework of Advocacy, DCR Burundi’s aim was to assist ordinary villagers in remote areas of Burundi and enabling them to participate in the development of their own villages. Community parliaments were also a good tool to help communities meet among themselves to discuss any issue regarding their lives, such as quitting backward behaviour, gender-based violence, to promote peaceful cohabitation, to improve hygiene and sanitation, and other useful practices for a better life for all.”

Establishing a community parliament was not as easy as it seemed to be. Burundian authorities were at first reluctant to embrace the proposal of a community parliament. They argued that Burundi already has a national parliament with elected MPs. They first perceived the community parliament as a subtle form of criticism of the national assembly, formed by elected MPs at the national level. Their reluctance subsided once they understood the positive intent and efficiency of the community parliaments.

The ‘ACAT-group’ - the provincial advocacy group, which was trained by DCR - came together and designed an action plan which took into account the concerns of the decision makers, demonstrating that the community parliaments aim at serving the interests of the local communities. In February 2015, the district authorities officially recognized the community parliaments in big ceremonies coloured by traditional dances and official speeches.
SUDAN STAFF INSPIRED BY ADVOCACY IN BURUNDI

Sudan and Burundi both experienced a devastating civil war. The experience was even more painful for the population because both wars were fought between neighbours. Unlike Darfur, Burundi started a number of effective peacebuilding and reconciliation activities among the different community groups. The DCR team in Sudan thought they could learn from the Burundi experience, in particular because of the similarities in their history. Thus DCR organized an exchange visit: five Darfur members of mid-level service-providing ministries went to Burundi to exchange ideas and learn from the DCR programme in that country. The exchange visit generated many new insights that may potentially be introduced in Sudan.

The visitors met with the community parliaments in Burundi, which were recently introduced by DCR and are functioning well. These community parliaments address community-based concerns directly with the decision makers. They have so far received timely responses from the Burundian government officials, who acknowledge them and cooperate with them in a positive manner. Ustaz Awadelkareem Adam from the Sudanese Ministry of Education comments: “It is good for government and communities to meet face-to-face and discuss issues of common concern. We saw in Burundi how this can be done with clear freedom, transparently and in a respectful manner. In the field of education in Sudan we should look at in what way we can encourage communities and particularly Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) to prioritize their needs and bring them to the officials”.

Hamid Aboh, a participant from the South Darfur State Ministry of Agriculture, says: “There are many things I learned from the visit to Burundi, both regarding advocacy and issues related to agriculture. I saw how a small country like Burundi is in large part self-sufficient in terms of its food production, while Sudan is a net food importer. Sudan should work towards a larger share of self-sufficiency in its food production and should move away from genetically manipulated cottonseeds that are carcinogenic. Since my visit to Burundi, I have started advocating among colleagues to promote a higher degree of self-sufficiency in food production. That will surely help increase national economic stability.”

The formation of and support for Peace Clubs, confronting land issues and the inclusion of youth and women in communal and public activities have and will continue to return peace dividends in terms of increasing stability and recovery. The Sudan team was impressed by the results they saw in Burundi and they have taken these ideas back home. Mohamed Ibrahim from the State Ministry of Social Welfare said: “Village Development Committees and Peace Committees are present in Sudan, but do not yet engage in advocacy. In Burundi, we saw how the ACAT-trainees work with these committees to become active advocates. In Sudan, there is a curriculum for CBOs, which is not being applied yet. I would like to start such courses as soon as the war in Darfur comes to an end.”

Burundian hosts and Sudanese guests during the advocacy exchange visit, January 2015
The Sudanese visitors saw advocacy in progress while in Gitega en Muyinga. They witnessed it from the point of view of the advocates preparing their plans and choosing the contacts, but also from the point of view of the targeted officials.

Dr. Mohamed Abdelhameed from the Ministry of Animal Husbandry said with excitement: “In Burundi, I heard about something called ‘scorecard’ for the first time in my life. It is a tool to facilitate cooperation between communities and service providers, which seems highly useful in our Sudanese context. Upon return in Nyala, I received a call from CARE Sudan inviting me to a workshop on that very same scorecard! I could bring the things I learned from CARE Burundi in Gitega to our workshop in Khartoum.

Let me give an example: When a pastoralist came to me complaining that his animals were sick, I could fully inform him about diseases occurring at the beginning of the rainy season, and explain about the roles of both the Ministry of Animal Husbandry and communities in the prevention of such diseases. Based on this information, the pastoralist in question felt empowered to notify the veterinary epidemiology department to request for a vaccination rally. It is the role of this department to organise such rallies, and even though this year they may have come too late, I do hope that next year both the pastoralists and the workers at the department of epidemiology will know their roles. The communities, now aware of their role, will surely notify the Department of Animal Husbandry well in time next year to prevent diseases from occurring and spreading rapidly.”
One out of five schoolchildren in Liberia is abused by teachers or school staff. A horrible figure, but it is the sad reality in Liberia. Two teenage girls studying at Dixville public school in Montserrado County became pregnant because they were raped by their teachers. This happened in 2014. As a result the girls dropped out of school and will have to live with the consequences for the rest of their lives. This is only one example out of many. ,,The misbehaviour of teachers in Liberia is felt as a huge problem that urgently needs to be addressed,’’ says Emmanuel Goko, DCR/Save the Children officer in Liberia.

Sometimes teachers come to class late, drunk or under influence of drugs. Pupils are abused verbally and sometimes sexually. Studies sadly reveal that school-based violence is a common phenomenon in Liberian schools. A quarter of the schoolchildren interviewed in 2012 revealed that they had been forced to have sex against their will. This is a significant problem, both for boys and girls in schools. In a survey published in 2014 by Save the Children and three other organisations, a respondent commented: ,,Given the widespread poverty in Liberia, this problem is a big challenge. If parents are poor and want to keep their children in school, the students have to look elsewhere for money. Since young girls have little to offer except their bodies, transactional sex is a common practise all over Liberia”. In the same survey, a Liberian man said: ,,Although the parents are not proud, they may see this behaviour of the teacher as a good source of cash. In other instances the family may even feel proud, because they think the teacher will marry their child”.

Emmanuel Goko explains that the issue of mal-conduct by teachers was taken up and prioritised by Save the Children in Liberia. ,,Because a school should be considered a safe place”. The difficulty was how to address these challenges properly, since the responsibility of teachers was completely unclear and not properly set down in writing. Both parents and children did not know where to go to lodge their complaints. Another complicating issue is that most victims keep quiet out of shame or fear of being blamed or stigmatised. Only a third of the schoolchildren who suffered sexual violence reported it.

In an attempt to address this issue, Save the Children introduced a Code of Conduct for Teachers and school administrators. In collaboration with the Educational Forum Liberia, they tried to lobby for good moral and ethical standards as well as increased discipline. The overall objective of the Teachers Code of Conduct (TCC) is to ensure that Liberian school environment is safe, gender-sensitive, student-friendly and free from violence. Research was carried out in four counties in Liberia. The results were very helpful in gaining official approval for the Code of Conduct for Teachers. In the meantime, 50,000 copies were printed and disseminated to more than 5000 schools across the country. The rights of the child as well as a proper teacher/student relationship are now clearly established, in line with official UN documents and in consonance with the Education Reform Act of 2011.

Unfortunately, the outbreak of Ebola in Liberia delayed further implementation of the Teacher’s Code of Conduct and a framework to measure its effectiveness. But now that the ebola threat is waning, the effort to roll out the TCC is picking up again. In the case of the two girls raped in Dixville public school, successful action was taken. A newly set up child rights club reported the case. As a result, the two teachers were formally charged and the case was taken up by the County Education Officer and afterwards the Deputy Education Minister. An investigation followed and the two teachers were dismissed and the schoolmaster was removed from his position.
DCR ENGAGES UGANDAN MEDIA TO RESCUE EVICTED POKOT SCHOOL CHILDREN

The DCR team in Uganda has engaged the media to lead a national-level advocacy campaign to reverse the eviction of a school supported by the Pamoja project. Naporokocha ABEK centre in Karita Sub-County, Amudat district was turned out of its permanent building following the eviction of the community from a disputed piece of land by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA). ABEK stands for Alternative Basic Education for Karamoja. ABEK provides education programmes tailored to the needs of the nomadic children of the region who find formal education unsuitable to their life style.

The Uganda Wildlife Authority claims the disputed land is a game reserve and a habitat for the roan antelope facing a threat of extinction. “Those animals (roan antelopes) have nearly become extinct and because their breeding ground is in Naporokocha, we don’t want people encroaching on that land,” Charles Tumwesigye, the UWA Deputy Director for Conservation, told The Observer newspaper in an interview following a DCR-organised media visit to Karamoja in eastern Uganda.

Following the eviction of the ABEK centre, the teachers relocated their pupils to study in an unsafe learning environment under some trees in the open air, about five kilometres away from their former school. According to John Rionongole, a teacher at the Naporokocha ABEK centre, the displacement has come at a huge cost. “Enrolment has dropped by about 50% from 150 to 80 school children, either because either the parents have migrated to distant locations far away from the new temporary centre, or the children are no longer motivated to go to school as the facilities in their former school were what made attendance attractive to the children,” he said.

While the media advocacy campaign has not yet resolved the stand-off between the community and the UWA, it has certainly managed to attract attention and raise awareness among the Ugandan public and created an atmosphere of change. The district leaders are concerned that the eviction will stagnate education in the Amudat district, which, at 3 percent, has the lowest literacy rate in Uganda. “We will continue to engage with the UWA to persuade them to reverse their decision so that the Pokot children in Amudat have a chance at education,” says Stephen Nsubuga Bewayo, the Ugandan President’s top political representative in the district.

DCR, whose member Save the Children is implementing the ABEK programme, maintains a will to continue to dialogue with the UWA and local government authorities in Amudat so that the children can have access to education in a safe and learning-friendly environment. “It is disappointing, since the earlier accomplishments of the DCR project are going to waste despite the huge funds invested into the project. But we have a responsibility to both the children who are the principal beneficiaries, as well as to the donors supporting the project,” says Moses Kasajja, the Regional Manager of Save the Children in the Karamoja region.
HOPE FOR THE MENTALLY ILL IN BURUNDI

It is common practice in Burundi for families who have a family member suffering from mental illness to abandon such a person. These people are left on the streets, far away from home, because they are considered an ‘embarrassment’ to the family. These abandoned mentally ill individuals can constitute a danger to the public, especially when they start behaving aggressively. They can often be seen throwing stones at passers-by, schoolchildren or cars driving by.

On a population of nine million people, there is only one psychiatric centre specialized in mental health issues and there is only one Burundian doctor in this domain. In Kibuye, HNTPO is demonstrating that many of those suffering from mental illness can get better and contribute to society again. Normal medical clinics in Burundi do not have drugs available to treat mental health problems, their staff is not qualified and only very few know how to handle such patients.

Burundi is among the few countries in the world whose mentally ill are still being neglected, not only because of a lack of knowledge, but also because there is no law to protect this vulnerable group. DCR has been struggling since 2011 to get a Mental Health Act signed, but without success. Fortunately, there is progress now. On April 15th 2015, the Burundian Minister of Public Health, Dr Sabine Ntakarutimana, appointed a six-member commission in charge of designing a proposal for a Burundi Mental Health Act.

DCR-Burundi implemented a strategic advocacy plan comprising a range of actions, including workshops on content matter, broadcasted radio discussions, radio campaigns, lobbying of the parliament and lobbying inside the ministry of public health, to bring change for the mentally ill in Burundi. DCR’s Advocacy Officer, Jean-Pierre Nkunzimana, used the knowledge gained from his training by INTRAC, the introduction of the ACAT-tool and advocacy exchange visits to approach decision makers and work on convincing them to change their attitude.

Hope emerged on the horizon when in November 2014, spurred by DCR’s lobby efforts, a member of the National Assembly asked the Minister of Health to present her vision and plan on managing the vulnerable group of the mentally ill in the country. The Minister did not have a strategic vision ready on the issue, but she did have the courage to consult the DCR advocate who had been working on these issues. He in turn could bring in Dr Deo Mboninyibuka and Norbert Munyentwari, HNTPO’s specialists on Mental Health, to work on the content of the Act. It is hoped that this lobbying effort will soon lead to tangible results: a Mental Health Act for Burundi, signed by the Burundian Parliament.
The photo shows specialists from the Ministry of Health, universities and NGOs discussing mental health issues in a radio campaign to bring the issue to the attention of a nationwide audience in Burundi.

Invitation letter by Burundian Minister of Health to invite specialists to develop a Mental Health Law
SUCCESS FOR DCR MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY IN SOUTH SUDAN

The war in South Sudan has left deep traces. Not only in the politics of the country, but also in the minds of the people. A post-conflict report on South Sudan speaks of depression rates as high as 50% of the population. Another study among South Sudanese ex-combatants reports that 15% wish they were dead or have thoughts of self-harm. 36% meet the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. Enough reasons for DCR to focus their lobbying efforts in the country on the National Minister of Health to improve mental health facilities for the people of South Sudan. A baseline research carried out by DCR in 2012 summarizes that depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and substance abuse are major mental health issues affecting the country.

In South Sudan, many patients with mental illnesses end up in prisons despite the fact they have not committed any crime. It’s the lack of knowledge or the lack of medical facilities that makes authorities decide to lock these people up in prison. They are kept in custody to protect them from causing any harm to themselves or others. Juba prison alone has 141 mentally ill patients, 125 male and 16 female.

DCR decided to take up the challenge and designed an advocacy strategy to influence the National Minister of Health to act on the status of mental health in the new nation with the following focus:

• To prioritize mental health issues in the republic of South Sudan, since everyone is affected due the prolonged wars fought in the country;
• To develop, strengthen and scale up comprehensive community-oriented mental health services through integration in the basic package of services being delivered in Primary Health Care Centres (PHCCs);
• To enhance the capacity of PHCCs workers at all levels to provide integrated mental health care in the country;
• To develop a mental health body (directorate) that will oversee the drafting of a mental health policy in South Sudan;
• To include the psychiatric drugs on the government central drugs list during the procurement process.

The DCR advocacy strategy, comprising joint advocacy initiatives, led to some remarkable successes in 2014 when the National minister of health formed the directorate of mental health at the national level.

• Formation of a directorate of mental health at the National Ministry of Health;
• Appointment of a psychiatrist Dr. Atong Ayuel Longar as the director of mental health at the newly formed directorate at the National MOH;
• Establishment of a psychiatric ward at Juba Teaching Hospital to take care of the mentally ill patients;
• Formation of a South Sudan Mental Health Platform, which should meet at the end of every month to discuss mental health issues, chaired by the director of mental health and co-chaired by HealthNet/TPO;
• Inclusion of psychiatric drugs on the government central procurement drug list; this is soon to be confirmed;
• Formation of Payam mental health and psychosocial support platforms at the Payams –comparable to municipality level- in which DCR is operating in Jur River County, Western Bahr el Ghazal State;
• Partial integration of mental health and psychosocial support into primary health centre. It is partial because of lack of qualified psychiatric nurses at the PHCCs;
• Free treatment campaign for mentally ill patients, resulting in a total of 150 patients that were reached in Juba alone.
Despite all of the above successes, there are many challenges still ahead, relating to a lack of both human and fiscal resources to support the mental health sector in South Sudan. Competing government priorities, which led to the neglect of the mental health sector and cultural norms attached to mental illness, are some of the outstanding challenges faced. Nevertheless, a good start has been made to tackle the issue.

Mr. Kambale Matamba is in his cornfield, looking forward to a good harvest.
SECURITY OF TENURE FOR FARMERS IN KIVU

In Mulo village, not far from Lubero town, we find Mr. Kambale Matamba depressed after being arbitrarily chased off the land he had leased from one of the large landowners in his area. Mr. Kambale tells us: “I had already cleared the land, finished ploughing and had sown my maize when the owner, from whom I had leased that land, came to chase me away. He told me that he had found a new tenant, who was willing to pay a higher rent. I have not only done the work for someone else, but I have also lost the seeds that I planted. It will be difficult to find new land to lease in this area and if I succeed, chances are that it will take too long for me to prepare it and sow again as the rains have already started. How will I make sure my family does not starve when I have no crops to harvest?”

Unfortunately, Mister Kambale was not aware of the rights he has under the edict (provincial law) that was approved more than a year ago by the provincial government of North Kivu in DR Congo. This is, however, not surprising, since that law was concealed by a number of local politicians who rejected it, either because they were landowners themselves or because they were political opponents of the ones bringing the edict to vote. The edict was not available in the community, nor could it be obtained at the provincial government, or even at the Provincial Ministry of Land Affairs. Fortunately, after a long search, DCR’s advocacy officer Daniel Nsekuye was able to secure a copy of the law and quickly disseminated it widely among allies in the fight for just access to farmland. Nsekuye and the members of his DCR team in Lubero also informed farmers about the existence of the edict by means of a radio campaign to prevent it from being snuffed out again. Nsekuye said: “I knew I had to act quickly and thoroughly to make sure that soon many people would know about the law and that copies would be available both with the government, but also with NGO’s and community groups to prevent it from ‘disappearing’ once again.”

DCR went further in making sure this edict would benefit a large number of small farmers who depend on rented land for their subsistence. DCR arranged for the law to be translated in both Swahili and Kinande, the local language of the area. The law and its translations were published in a small informative booklet of which 1000 copies were distributed among small farmers in many villages. Social gatherings of Village Development Committees and Savings & Loans-groups, church groups and the like were used to inform people about their rights.

The booklet also contains an exemplary contract that can be used by farmers when they come to a rental agreement with a landowner. These contracts can be used before a tribunal should a disagreement on land tenure issues arise.

By March 2015, sixty-six contracts between farmers and landlords had been signed already and a growing demand for the booklet made DCR decide to go for a reprint. Mr. Kambale Matemba is now counted among the frontrunners informing others about their rights and he is convinced that he will never, ever step into an agreement with a landowner without making sure there is a contract underlying the tenure.
JOINT HUMANITARIAN ADVOCACY FOR SOUTH SUDAN

Halfway through the DCR program, in December 2013, a war erupted in South Sudan which has had devastating consequences: millions have fled their homes; thousands of men, women and children were killed. The CARE International DCR program in Malakal, Upper Nile State, was destroyed and the population in this area fled. The Save the Children DCR program in Pagak, close to the Ethiopian border, had to be abandoned as it became impossible to access the site. DCR was able to move funds to other DCR partners to continue and expand DCR activities in areas that remained accessible. These include Wau in Western Bhar el Gazal and Limbe in Central Equatoria.

The conflict and the resulting movement of internally displaced people created significant problems requiring a country-wide solution. DCR decided to advocate the Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs for humanitarian funding for Dutch agencies operating in South Sudan, so that they might come to the aid of the affected population. DCR played a key role in bringing Dutch partners of its network together in Juba, and was able to foster a collaborative effort to advocate for humanitarian funds. On August 15, 2014, DCR called a meeting for all Dutch funded partners and the Dutch Embassy in Juba. In this meeting the need for direct bilateral aid support was raised with the Ambassador, who passed the message on to the Ministry in The Hague.

In September 2014, the Dutch Minister of International Trade and Development Cooperation, Mrs. Liliane Ploumen, visited Juba, where Aidan Goldsmith, the DCR Country Coordinator, was able to directly speak with her. After the meeting Aidan reflected: “I enjoyed meeting and talking with Ms Ploumen, she was very generous with her time. My colleagues and I were able to convey the pressing need for direct bi-lateral aid support was raised with the Ambassador, who passed the message on to the Ministry in The Hague.

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This concept of joint humanitarian programming in South Sudan was taken to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Save the Children Netherlands’ humanitarian coordinator Stan Klinkenberg, resulting in the submission of a concept note based on the discussions held. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to fund Save the Children to manage an umbrella grant in which Dutch partners are jointly responding to the South Sudan humanitarian crisis. For the first year, starting 2015, an amount of almost €11 million was allocated to be shared between 11 NGOs, including all the DCR members working in South Sudan.

Asked to look back to the approach taken, Stan Klinkenberg commented: “DCR played a key role in advocating for this innovative manner of Dutch humanitarian funding, through which Dutch funded partners are now able to respond to the massive needs of communities in South Sudan. We hope to be able to continue the South Sudan Joint Response in 2016 with new funding of the Dutch Ministry. The example of the Dutch South Sudan Joint Response was received so positively by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs that it was copied in other current humanitarian crisis situations too, and has already resulted in 10 joint responses around the globe.”
War causes a great deal of damage in a country. People have to escape the violence, thus losing their homes, familiar environments and jobs. Or even worse: their families. And the problems do not end when the war is over. What remains is chaos. Then where do you start, when you’ve literally been left with nothing?

A large number of African communities are exposed to acts of war. The Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation (DCR) works together with the inhabitants on the rehabilitation of a number of communities. The DCR is a collaborative venture of four social organizations that are active in different areas. The DCR is financed by the (Dutch) Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The DCR’s most important activities are: improving basic facilities, creating employment and strengthening community ties. In this way, we want to contribute to greater stability and sustainable economic growth in six (post) conflict countries, since these are ultimately the best weapons against war.

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HOW TO EFFECTIVELY STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY CAPACITY

LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE DCR PROGRAMME 2011-2015
COMPILED BY ELSKE VAN GORKUM, DCR ADVOCACY COORDINATOR

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