



**HEALTH
POLICY
PROJECT**

Policy Advocacy Rapid Assessment Tool for CSOs

MARCH 2016



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Recommended Citation: Beardsley, Kipling. 2016. *Policy Advocacy Rapid Assessment Tool for CSOs*. Washington, DC: Health Policy Project.

The Health Policy Project is a five-year cooperative agreement funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-10-00067, beginning September 30, 2010. The project's HIV activities are supported by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). It is implemented by Futures Group, in collaboration with Plan International USA, Avenir Health (formerly Futures Institute), Partners in Population and Development, Africa Regional Office (PPD ARO), Population Reference Bureau (PRB), RTI International, and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood (WRA).

Policy Advocacy Rapid Assessment Tool for CSOS

This publication was prepared by Kipling Beardsley of the Health Policy Project.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This tool is a streamlined version of the Local Capacity Initiative Facilitated Discussion and Capacity Assessment Tool developed by the staff of the JSI, FHI 360, Futures Group, and Plan including: Yadira Almodovar-Diaz, Kip Beardsley, Helen Cornman, Anne Jorgensen, and Amita Mehrotra.

The author would like to acknowledge that policy and advocacy content as well as the methodology for assessing capacity data come from the Health Policy Project Organizational Capacity Assessment Suite of Tools (Health Policy Project 2014) which help organizations or institutions along the path to becoming organizations capable of fulfilling the functions necessary to achieve health policy objectives in low- and middle-income countries. The suite simultaneously shows how to orient key organizational stakeholders to relevant capacity issues and how to conduct a **self-assessment** and **scoring process**. The tools then guide participants through a **results debrief** and **action planning** for strategic capacity improvements. The suite is found at <http://www.healthpolicyproject.com/index.cfm?ID=OCAtool>.

Finally, the author would like to thank the LCI Steering Committee (comprised of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, and the U.S. Agency for International Development) for funding the project and supporting the development of this tool. We are also grateful for all of the support and comments from the Steering Committee in the development of this tool.

PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL

This tool is used to facilitate an overarching conversation with small to medium sized CSO. Scoring is meant to be qualitative and based on a consensus of the participants and is to be used as a simple process of identifying low capacity / high priority areas for further technical assistance and capacity development. The tool addresses six major sections topics related to policy advocacy.

The tool can be customized to the organization’s focus by searching and replacing the bracketed text (e.g. [service(s)]) with the appropriate target population and service area

Suggested Participants

This discussion can be an opportunity to engage staff at all levels of the organization including field staff, program design, evaluation, and senior leadership. Optimally, not more than 6–8 people would participate.

METHODOLOGY

Each technical area assessment begins with a targeted discussion of key technical components. These discussions include developing a common understanding of the definition and performance ideal as well as some probing questions that encourage the participants to describe, reflect on, and interpret past experiences in each technical area. Next, the participants collectively score specific capacity indicators (scale of 0 [don’t know], 1 [strongly disagree] to 4 [strongly agree]), and discuss and score the same indicators for importance for the organization to conduct its work (1 [not important] to 5 [important]).

Again, it can be easy to for the conversation to get tied up in small differences between the scores (e.g., between a 2 and 3). So be sure to emphasize that the scoring is simply a task to try to identify priorities. It might also be helpful to get to consensus on the top and bottom scores and then work on the middle.

CONSOLIDATING INFORMATION

Assessment information gathered from the discussion and scoring can now serve to identify areas of high importance and low capacity. Scan the scores to identify priorities scored a 4/5 and capacities scored a 1/2. Once you have identified these capacity needs, make sure to vet with the participants and assure that these are aligned with the conversation has occurred.

| | |
|---|---|
| Capacities of high importance and high capacity | Capacities of high importance and low capacity—focus of capacity development activities |
| Capacities of low importance and high capacity | Capacities of low importance and low capacity |

Also note that each topic is divided into similar sections, so you may see common themes. For example, the organization may consistently identify priority needs around communication, but may not identify building the capacity of other organizations if this is not part of their mandate.

POLICY ANALYSIS

Definition

Policy analysis is the process through which policy solutions to social/health issues are identified, analyzed, and presented to policymakers for consideration. Policymakers weigh their decisions based on various criteria. Thus, policy analysis extends beyond data analysis to support decisions based on the technical aspects of an issue and focuses on the political costs and benefits of policy reform. Policy analysis is also needed to guide policy specifications, including provisions for financing, the lead agencies/organizations for multisectoral coordination, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and client access and equity.

Performance ideal

At the highest level of performance, organizations and individuals should have the skills to regularly and systematically use data and research to define a problem that needs to be addressed through policy action as well as alternative solutions to the problem.

Discussion questions

- What are some of the barriers that your clients face in accessing health services?
- Have you identified policies that create barriers to services?
- How have you/would you address these policy barriers?
- What do you think is your organization's unique strength in terms of contributing to the evidence base for making good policy decisions—at the government level? At the clinic level? Within the private sector?

| Capacity Ranking 1 (low) – 5 (high) Priority Ranking 1 (low) – 7 (high) | Rank Capacity | Rank Priority |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| Technical knowledge of policy environment and processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of laws, policies, ordinances, guidelines, and programs at national or decentralized levels that impact availability, utilization, and quality of [service(s)] services for [target population(s)] | | |
| Technical knowledge of programmatic content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the links between gender-based violence and barriers to [service(s)] services for [target population(s)] Perspective and approach to gender includes consideration of women, men, and gay/lesbian/transgender people | | |
| Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to develop a coherent analysis of barriers to [service(s)] services for [target population(s)], explain their magnitude, identify principal causes, and alternative policy solutions | | |
| Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and facilitation of participatory assessments with communities and [target population(s)] to identify policy barriers to [service(s)] services utilization Use of qualitative and quantitative methods to gather evidence on the [service(s)] services needs and priorities of [target population(s)] and the effect of policies on service utilization Incorporating input from [target population(s)] and their advocates into its policy analysis activities | | |
| Networking/coalition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing and maintaining strong working linkages with local, regional, or national experts in statistics, health economics, political science, and policy research and analysis | | |
| Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representing policy analyses in policy forums and disseminating them externally | | |
| Capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the capacity of [target population(s)] and their advocates to assess the barriers to [service(s)] service utilization by [target population(s)], their policy roots, and the appropriateness of proposed solutions Strengthening the capacity of local, regional, or national policymakers to understand and address findings of policy analyses | | |

POLICY ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION

Definition

While effective and responsive policies must be based on evidence, there is often a gap between research and policymaking. Policy communication makes quantitative and qualitative data accessible for use by policymakers and advocates and often includes a policy position or policy recommendations in communication products with the purpose of persuading policymakers to act. Key knowledge translation capabilities include understanding barriers to the use of data and research, being able to identify policymakers' information needs, and communicating research findings through a variety of channels (e.g., written formats, oral presentations, information graphics, media briefings, etc.) (Ashford, 2006; Population Reference Bureau, 2003). In addition, policy communication capabilities include the ability to articulate evidence-based policy recommendations and develop and implement persuasive communication strategies.

Performance ideal

High capacity for advocacy means being able to effectively communicate and influence the policy process. Advocacy efforts are targeted, strategic, and based on convincing evidence and community consultation. Organizations and individuals constructively engage in multi-stakeholder dialogues with policymakers and decision makers to represent the needs and interests of its constituents. They correspondingly communicate policy implications regularly to constituents and mobilize them to become active in advocacy activities.

Discussion questions

- Are there examples of successful civil society advocacy, perhaps not even in health, that you can describe?
- Can you share any evidence about the outcomes of this advocacy? What went well or not so well? Why?
- What policy advocacy communications materials have you developed in the past 12 months?
- What types of data sources did you draw from to prepare the materials? How were they distributed?
- What do you see as your greatest strength as an advocacy organization? Challenges?

| Capacity Ranking 1 (low) – 5 (high) Priority Ranking 1 (low) – 4 (high) | Rank Capacity | Rank Priority |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| Technical knowledge of policy environment and processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the policymaking and implementation processes at national or local levels and opportunities for advocacy | | |
| Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding how to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of proposed policy actions • Identifying target audiences and analyzing their position for potential support or opposition to particular policy proposals | | |
| Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the information needs of policymakers and appropriate materials and channels for delivering information • Producing public annual or semi-annual reports that reflect the organization’s progress toward achieving stated policy goals and objectives | | |
| Operational/management systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocating sufficient resources (time, money, and staff) to support its policy and advocacy efforts • Including responsibility for policy and advocacy activities in the job descriptions of designated staff • Assessing policy and advocacy skills and achievements within the staff appraisal system for designated staff | | |

ADDRESSING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

Definition

Policies and programs often do not roll out exactly according to plan; they face unforeseen barriers and challenges. Furthermore, in the act of implementing a newly adopted policy, implementation and monitoring processes may reveal unintended consequences that must be remedied—for example, inequitable distribution in service coverage. Addressing barriers requires individual and institutional skills and competencies to understand the policy environment governing the health system and the configuration of the health system in the context of the government structure and the needs of beneficiaries/clients and implementers.

Performance ideal

Attention to barriers continues during policy implementation—closely linked to policy monitoring—to track outcomes, identify challenges, and be alert to unintended consequences or inequities. Individuals are able to gather and synthesize different types of information and from various sources. Organizations elicit feedback from implementers, partners, and beneficiaries to identify barriers, explore root causes, and seek solutions.

Discussion questions

- What are some of the stumbling blocks to effective implementation of policies/programs (e.g., opposition from key stakeholders, inadequate human or financial resources, lack of clarity on operational guidelines or roles and responsibilities for implementation, stigma against client populations, and conflicts with existing policies)?

| Capacity Ranking 1 (low) – 5 (high) Priority Ranking 1 (low) – 5 (high) | Rank Capacity | Rank Priority |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Technical knowledge of policy environment and processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the configuration of the government health system for [service(s)] services for [target population(s)] • Understanding mechanisms to ensure compliance with policy directives and understand incentives for compliance as well as sanctions for noncompliance | | |
| Technical knowledge of programmatic content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the existing gender-based violence referral network and available services | | |
| Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of the differential impacts of policy (existing or proposed) on service utilization by women and girls, men and boys, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations • Organizing and synthesizing information on policy implementation and takes relevant follow-up action | | |
| Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication of findings of policy implementation monitoring through a variety of communication channels (e.g., media, publications, etc.) | | |
| Capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening capacity among [target population(s)] and their advocates to enable them to monitor policy implementation and take relevant action • Strengthening capacity among local, regional, or national policymakers to understand policy implementation monitoring data and take relevant action | | |

NETWORKING AND MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION

Definition

Networking and multisectoral coordination are important and effective strategies for mobilizing and coordinating individuals and institutions to influence policy processes and outcomes. Multisectoral coordination refers to the bringing together of various stakeholder groups (e.g., government, civil society, the private sector) and topic areas (e.g., health, environment, economy) to work together to achieve a policy outcome. Key capabilities in networking and multisectoral coordination include recognizing the value of engaging different sectors and parties in the policy process and the ability to engage with a diverse group of stakeholders, effectively participate in policy dialogue, and strengthen partnerships and relationships. Multisectoral coordination requires strong leadership to motivate groups of stakeholders to action, set an agenda that is responsive to the needs of multiple stakeholder groups, and mobilize participation.

Performance ideal

An organization that successfully develops and sustains strong, supportive relationships with other organizations (or groups, divisions, communities, and institutions working in a variety of technical areas) has an internal culture and leadership that values and promotes collaboration and sharing as a key operating principle.

Discussion questions

- How has collaboration with others helped you achieve your objectives?
- Are you individually or as an organization a member of any formal coalitions or networks?

| Capacity Ranking 1 (low) – 5 (high) Priority Ranking 1 (low) – 3 (high) | Rank Capacity | Rank Priority |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Technical knowledge of programmatic content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of organizations working in sectors that impact the ability of [target population(s)] to access services (for example: media, private sector, government, civil society, faith communities, and donor community) • Awareness of the activities of network(s)/coalition(s) that impact [service(s)] services for [target population(s)] | | |
| Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing and leveraging information and resources with other advocacy groups and organizations • Managing group dynamics among collaborating partners (develop consensus, manage conflict, facilitate exchange, and ensure commitment to take action) • Establishing and maintaining collaborative and mutually supportive relationships with external groups and organizations representing diverse constituencies (e.g., youth, women, service providers, marginalized populations, health professionals, and media) • Maintaining constructive links with diverse sectors (e.g., health, youth and sport, human rights, gender, uniformed services, education) | | |
| Capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the capacity of [target population(s)] and their advocates to effectively participate in networks and coalitions | | |

ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

Definition

An accountability system establishes the processes for monitoring, analyzing, and improving the performance of an institution. Establishing accountability systems—when used in concert with other practices to increase accountability—is one mechanism for achieving good governance outcomes. The system includes procedures and tools for monitoring and evaluating progress in the activities of the institution.

Performance ideal

Citizens, community groups, the media, and civil society have a broad range of options to hold government officials and institutions accountable. For accountability systems to work, these groups need the capacity to pick the appropriate method of engagement for a given issue. While some organizations are more adept at detailed analysis of government information, others excel at conducting public demonstrations or more visible advocacy methods. Capacity for investigative journalism within the media is also a key pillar of holding government accountable for service commitments. Accountability relies on non-state actors who are able to fill all of these roles.

Discussion questions

- What is the existence and functionality of governmental oversight mechanisms and institutions, such as an anti-corruption agency, ombudsman's office, or audit office?
- Has your organization observed or worked with stakeholders who report being denied services or other issues related to access? Has your organization taken any steps to address these or bring these to the attention of higher authorities? If yes, what happened?

| Capacity Ranking 1 (low) – 5 (high) Priority Ranking 1 (low) – 5 (high) | Rank Capacity | Rank Priority |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Technical knowledge of policy environment and processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of legal and regulatory frameworks that hold [service(s)] service providers accountable | | |
| Technical knowledge of programmatic content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledgeable of specific standards for service delivery and provider performance for providing [service(s)] services for [target population(s)] | | |
| Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing and implementing formal channels and mechanisms to solicit feedback and information on [service(s)] services from [target population(s)] and their advocates Developing and implementing systems for requesting information from the government and can challenge the government if relevant information is not disclosed | | |
| Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting the knowledge of [target population(s)] regarding their rights and mechanisms for redress when rights are violated Convincing media outlets to report on stories relating to the accessibility and quality of [service(s)] services Developing and maintaining dialogue with politicians, government officials, legislators, media, and non-state actors on service auditing and monitoring issues | | |
| Capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the capacity of [target population(s)] and their advocates to frameworks and dynamics holding service providers accountable Strengthening the capacity of [target population(s)] and their advocates to request information from government and challenge government if relevant information is not disclosed | | |

POLICY DIALOGUE

Definition

Policy dialogue engages various sectors and stakeholders and gives people a voice in the decisions that affect their lives and health; keeps attention on health issues throughout the process—from policy formulation to implementation and monitoring; and encourages consensus for policy action. Policy dialogue involves discussions among stakeholders to raise issues, share perspectives, find common ground, and reach agreement or consensus, if possible, on policy solutions. Meaningful policy dialogue requires governments and policymakers to be able to facilitate participatory processes and engage and form partnerships with diverse stakeholders. Dialogue requires the participation of civil society actors who represent relevant constituencies and are capable of engaging in effective advocacy, able to present evidence-informed arguments, and are knowledgeable about the policy process. Effective policy dialogue requires all involved parties to have strong communication, negotiation, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills.

Performance ideal

High capacity in policy dialogue suggests stakeholders are able to hold or participate in an open, inclusive, and informed dialogue toward the best possible policies. During dialogue, participants should be able to freely contribute their knowledge, expertise, and ideas. Their views should be listened to and considered. Dialogue may be more effective when it draws on relevant data or evidence, including analyses, case studies, or pilot or demonstration projects. At its best, policy dialogue provides an avenue for improving mutual understanding, identifying priorities, enhancing ownership and participation, finding common ground, building constituencies and resolve for change, and influencing policy.

Discussion questions

- How does the government recognize the legitimacy of citizen participation in the policy process? What about the key and vulnerable populations?
- What is your organization's experience with policy dialogue in the last year? At the national level? At the provincial/district/state level? At service delivery points?
- What were your priorities and what were the compromises you had to make?

| Capacity Ranking 1 (low) – 5 (high) Priority Ranking 1 (low) – 4 (high) | Rank Capacity | Rank Priority |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzing alternative policy options | | |
| Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging diverse stakeholders, including program implementers and beneficiaries, in constructive policy dialogue to identify and address barriers to [service(s)] services for [target population(s)] | | |
| Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negotiating effectively and problem solving; raising difficult issues with a view to a positive resolution Discussing and engaging in a dialogue of multiple policy alternatives | | |
| Capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the capacity of [target population(s)] and their advocates to negotiate effectively and problem solve; to raise difficult issues with a view to a positive resolution Strengthening the capacity of [target population(s)] and their advocates to discuss and engage in a dialogue of multiple policy alternatives as well as analyze alternative policy options | | |

ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND SYSTEMS

If organizational management and systems are of interest, facilitate a conversation about the following topics and note any significant gaps that are identified.

Governance

- Mission and values statements of organization
- Board membership (recruitment/composition/terms)
- Engagement of board in advocacy
- Engagement of board in fundraising
- Basic board functions
 - Reviewing performance
 - Reviewing financial and activity reports
 - Approving the annual budget and work plan
 - Assessing the performance of the most senior leadership as well as its own function as a board

Resource mobilization

- Identification of external social, political, and environmental trends that impact the organization.
- Diversification of funding base.
- Identification of income-generating activities.
- Development of a clearly defined resource mobilization strategy
- Proposal writing.

Management systems

- Personnel policies
- Human resources
- Financial policies / systems



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