



**Neglect  
&  
Loss**



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## **The search for the meaning of advocacy**

In terms of seeking solutions to an endemic social problem, what does advocacy mean? How does it differ from other types of projects which are directed towards the achievement of some practical end?

Advocacy deals with ideas. The core of any advocacy work is to propagate an idea which contains an understanding of a defined social problem and the further development of the ideas about solutions to that identified social problem.

Therefore, the centre of advocacy is an idea or ideas. The assumption behind this is that if a problem is properly conceptualized and that conceptualization is shared with as many persons as possible, it would generate a societal discussion around that idea or ideas which in turn will clear the path towards the solving of the problem.

The very nature of the advocacy of ideas is that it is a struggle to expand the intellectual space within a society in a way that an existing social problem is better understood. If it is better understood, the assumption within an advocacy program is that such an understanding will lead to the development of consensus about the nature of the problem, the causes of the problem and also the solution to the problem.

A further assumption in an advocacy program is that society at large has still not reached an adequate understanding of the particular problem and that, that lack of understanding is the reason why the problem persists and that there is lesser resistance against a particular social evil that causes a negative impact on society.

An advocacy program attempts to address that issue of inadequate understanding that allows a particular social evil to prevail. Creating understanding requires that at the start some people who are faced with that problem have given some thought to the problem, its diverse manifestations, the causes which has created the problem and to some extent, some possible solutions to the problem.

Therefore, initiators of an advocacy program are persons who have previously engaged their minds through various means and devoted time to understand the various manifestations of the particular social problem, the history of the development of the problem, the roots of the development of that problem and also, have made attempts to understand as to why people have not yet put up adequate resistance to resolve this problem which creates many hardships, losses and causes destruction to their lives. Without such initiators, an advocacy program cannot begin. Therefore, the work of initiators is extremely crucial to the development of an advocacy program.

This means that the initiators have certain ideas. The initiators are aware that they have identified at least some aspects of this problem and the matters relating to this problem. The initiators believe that if their ideas are shared with others, it would make a start for generating responses from others which may lead to a richer collective understanding of the problem. The assumption behind that belief is that if there is a good collective understanding of that problem, there will be collective efforts to resolve that problem.

The initiators of the process can only predict the development of this collective understanding only in a very broad way because human responses to an idea depend on very many factors. All these factors are peculiar to each social context within which these ideas are discussed. Therefore, the expectations of the initiators would be to gauge the responses to their idea by first of all spreading the idea to the extent that they have understood the problem as widely as possible.

The advocacy program dealing with ideas is therefore aimed at the development of consensus particularly among those who are victims of the particular social problem so that the victims themselves could begin to participate in the problem solving process. The participation of victims in the problem solving process will depend to the extent that they have grasped the various aspects of the problem and had time to think it over in terms of the ways in which the problem could be overcome.

## The place of education and training in an advocacy program

The word 'training' could be used in so many different ways. If we are training a person for a particular trait, then it is mostly a practical affair of training the person's skills and sometimes where necessary, creating the understanding about the practical activity that they are engaged in. If a training program is geared towards training a group of persons to build wells or toilets or roads or even the distribution of some food or other material goods to others, then each of these activities require certain practical methodologies, organizational skills and certain attitudes suitable for that particular practical activity.

The training required for an advocacy program is not of that type. An advocacy program has to deal with ideas about understanding various aspects of societal problems. For example, if the identified problem is the lack of a proper system of rules within the society in order to manage that society in a fair and orderly manner, that is of a simple practical activity. It requires the understanding of many factors which in the modern concept includes what is meant by the law, what role the legal institutions play in creating fairness and orderly relationships, what role the absence of such a mechanism plays in creating disorder, violence, and also economic problems such as poverty and other related problems.

Thus, these trainings or educational activities cannot be done with a set of fixed criteria. It has to address particular audiences. It all depends on whether the audience has thought about these matters in the past, to what extent they have thought about these matters in the past and to what extent they have understood the problem. What the initiators of advocacy programs do is attempt to prove an existing understanding so as to bring them to a higher level of common understanding which could lead gradually towards identifying solutions and to commence activities to achieve these solutions.

The measurements for such trainings cannot be fixed in advance. Under certain circumstances, the understanding may grow faster. Under certain circumstances, creating understanding may be difficult. For example, if there is a political climate at a given time, where there is a certain free space for people to think, to talk and to express their ideas and

organize themselves, within that atmosphere, the advocacy discourse on a particular problem may have more favourable responses. However, if there is deep repression, violence is constantly used in order to suppress any attempts to overcome the particular forms of suffering enforced by a particular social problem, if there is a generally created sense of fear, under those circumstances, the development of ideas through advocacy programs is difficult. However, it is under these difficult circumstances that the advocacy programs are mostly needed.

To give an example about the above stated favourable environments and not so favourable ones or in fact antagonistic environments, we can take a few examples. In American history, the period that is known as the McCarthy era, where the Senator Joseph McCarthy engaged in a campaign of what is called “the red scare” when the whole society was brought under enormous constraints to express their opinions freely for the fear that any expression of liberalism would be construed as favouring communism, that was not a favourable climate to work towards advocacy programs on solving the deeper social problems affecting the people of the United States. Similar examples can be given also from dictatorships such as that of Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin and there are other examples like social problems such as caste discrimination where the societal constraint was so deep that the carrying on of advocacy programs for the solving of the problems relating to the Dalits was extremely difficult.

Today, in many developing countries, the problems relating to the rule of law are of a similar kind. There is a resistance to the development of a social order based on the rule of law, and concepts of fairness on the basis of equality before the law. This affects not only the political and civil rights but also economic, social and cultural rights. Therefore, this situation creates a combination of repression and also increases societal inequality.

The development of an advocacy program towards the solution of that problem of societal collapse resulting from the inability to develop a fair legal structure within which an organized society can fulfill its aims of working towards fairness and dealing with the problems or extreme inequalities, is a difficult task.

In such difficult tasks, advocacy programs cannot ignore those difficulties. An advocacy program cannot also succumb to those difficulties. It has to find its way between taking an attitude of resignation and letting things go or it must try under difficult circumstances to propagate the ideas about understanding that problem and to make efforts to create a collective understanding of the problem.

Therefore, the aim of an advocacy program is the improvement of collective understanding.

The result that may come out of a collective agreement will depend on the extent to which an advocacy program succeeds in creating the collective understanding on the assumption that collective understanding will lead to a collective will to solve problems.

## **Measuring the impact of advocacy programs Dealing with Social Problems**

**Friedrich Nietzsche — 'He who has a way to live for can bear almost any how.  
'Friedrich Nietzsche**

The word advocacy is used for various purposes and in each case there is a different connotation attached to it. Commercial advertisements advocate the buying of their products and promotion of other commercially related objectives: political parties use the ideas of advocacy very often to promote their parties with the view that the voters may select them when there are electoral contest, politicians who are pursuing modernisation policies would use the word advocacy to mean greater industrialisation and improvement of modern technology in their countries within given period of time: a dictator like Hitler would use advocacy to promote his reasons for going into war and to create public support for their approach: an authoritarian totalitarian leader like Joseph Stalin would use advocacy to mean brainwashing of the entire population not only for a political programme but to completely change social relations and justify extreme forms of repression.

Thus in each area of human activity, there is an element of advocacy and with the communication changes, what it means is that in terms of modern communication changes the advocacy by various other names plays a central role in almost every activity.

**In this short essay, we use advocacy to mean those efforts to promote understanding and win support to matters relating to human dignity, equality before the law and respect for human rights. This unique use of the meaning of the term advocacy needs to be thoroughly grasped in trying to evolve the methods of seeing the various measures that are taken for such advocacy.**

### **Specify**

This general theme of promotion of human dignity, rule of law and human rights is broken down to separate aspects when people have to work on particular times, particular historical circumstances and particular types of changes that are needed to achieve the overall goal. Thus each project to use the term that is usually used in modern funders' jargon has a specificity.

In measuring a particular advocacy programme the first issue that needs to be grasped is what is specific to this project. Some examples will be useful. The respect for equality before law is a general objective, Winning equality for the colored people in America, particularly those who are called the black people is a specific issue. The promotion of women's rights is a general issue. However, getting the right to education for the girl child in a particular society is a specific objective.

Prevention of torture is a general human rights objective, however, prevention of torture for political prisoners is a specific project: as against that preventing torture in normal criminal justice processes by the police is again a specific objective within the general



framework. Promotion of the freedom of expression, association and assembly is a general objective. The dealing with persons who have been persecuted for the use of the freedom of expression within a given political regime is a specific objective. Similar examples can be given into various areas.

Distinguishing specific and the general in terms of the actual work is at the core of effective **advocacy. For example, the American constitution guarantees the freedom of expression to everyone. However, for many centuries that everyone only meant the white people of the USA. If the advocacy is done to promote the freedom of expression of the black community who are now called Afro Americans, that is an extremely unique historical task beset with extremely unique problems relating to repression, relating to law, relating to police behavior and above all relating to the attitude of the different communities. On that specific issue, a larger section of the white community would think in one way and the Afro American community would think and experience it in a different way.**

By merely promoting freedom of expression in America we don't address the issue of the problem relating to freedom of expression in the black community and nowadays also in other communities in other parts of the world who have come to the USA. If we cannot understand that specificity, we simply cannot understand the particular struggle of that particular people.

This brings us to the issue that every serious advocacy issue in terms of human dignity and equality before law and human rights is very specific in nature. It is a historic task. History of every country, every locality is unique and specific. What that means is that there are unique problems in particular societies, particular communities at particular times. Just the geographical boundaries and cultural boundaries, the political boundaries and the other sociological boundaries including, the psychological factors of the human attitudes are all uniquely expressed within unique contexts.

## **INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS**

This brings us to a very vital issue as to who is an outsider to a struggle and who is an insider to the struggle. Depending on whether one is an outsider or insider, one's view will take a different shape.

Let us once again go back to the issue of black people (Afro Americans now) in the United States. When Frederic Douglass a former slave who escaped after suffering in early part of his life as a slave he brought into a movement against slavery with a unique perspective of an insider. He was the product of the very problems that he was struggling against, The manner in which he articulated the problem could not be articulated by anyone else even if he was sympathetic to the cause because they did not have the existential experience of being the part of the problem as well as being existential experience of being part of the struggle. Any advocacy programme that loses this distinction about the work of insiders and outsiders who may be sympathetic or not misses the point of an advocacy program.

We may explain this insider outsider perspective from another well-known historical example, this time from South Asia. Dr. B. R Ambedkar was from an untouchable family which means people who were so completely discriminated that they were considered to be so contemptible that no kind of contact could be had with them. He grew up with all the experiences and the sufferings associated with the untouchability as a school child and even after being qualified with two doctorates from Europe and England. When a very sympathetic ruler gave him a position, none of his subordinates wanted to come closer to him. Nobody was willing to rent him an apartment. He had to pretend to be of a different name and of a different caste in order to even get a place to stay. And of course these are simply lists of such desperation that goes into thousands of things which he went through all his life.

He emerged as the leader of these people and he even changed name of the untouchables to Dalit, meaning those who are engaged in struggle. In all his contributions both as a legislator, secretary of the draft committee of the constitution and the minister of law and above all his organizational work and writings, he articulated the perspective of an insider giving guidance to his people as how they could struggle to liberate themselves from their historical social imprisonment.

Mahatma Gandhi was also sympathetic towards the untouchables. He considered the existence of untouchability as one of the greatest sins of the Indian civilization. However, he was not able to provide the kind of vision and guidance to the Dalit population as Ambedkar did. Ambedkar is still the main inspiration of the Dalit movement in India and he has also influenced other moments like the black movement in the United States. His was an insider's vision, somebody who knew the problem from the existential point of view and was looking for an existential answer. Gandhi was a well-meaning good person who wished these others well and did whatever he could.

However, when it came to an independence struggle, Gandhi was an insider. Gandhi was a part of people who were subjugated under a colony. British Empire dominated over their lives. Their country belonged to the British crown. In that his vision was to gain independence from Britain at all costs. In that struggle he was an insider. Colonialism was an existential problem for him and independence an existential solution to that problem.

The philosophical explanation of the insider outsider perspectives:

Fredric Nietzsche, famously said something to the effect that if a person knows why he could do anything. Knowing why you do something is the most essential philosophical question that is associated with an advocacy programme.

The same idea was later rearticulated many times by Victor Frankel the former concentration camp survivor who wrote the famous book the man's search for meaning and articulated the problem of search of meaning reducing into knowing why. Martin Luther King in the United States further elaborated the problem by saying that if anyone could answer why they would find the how. Thus, when assessing an advocacy programme

the most important issue that should be considered is why this programme developed and whether it is justifiable to answer partially or fully to that question why this is being undertaken. If that point is missed then everything is missed. In terms of a particular project, unique to particular countries, what should be asked is why that project should be undertaken under those particular historical circumstances. If our project is about dealing with the institutional backwardness or obstructions to access to justice as a methodology to deprive all rights including the defeat of all attempts to improve the conditions of the poor then the question that should be asked is this is a fundamentally valid idea. When we say fundamentally valid it does not merely mean a good idea or something that is okay but something which is far more fundamental. That is, do the historical conditions of this particular country or particular countries justify the selection of this particular objective as an answer to the problem that requires an answer? And it does not merely require some answer but it requires an answer without which the society cannot achieve the overall objectives of human dignity, the equality before law and human rights. Thus we bring to the core of ourselves. In a short form it means the objectives articulated in the Article 2 of the ICCPR and the SDG 16 of the United Nations for 2030 are so fundamental to these societies that without which not a single step can be taken forward in achieving the other overall goals.

Therefore, considerable time should be spent in measuring the validity of this project. That means the validity of the answer to why meaning justification for the particular objective in the particular historical context in the particular societies.

Who would answer that question as to the validity of these objectives? Above all those who can answer to that are the insiders meaning those who live in these countries and who suffer from the absence of the realization of these objectives. They have an existential experience as to whether you could achieve respect for human dignity if for example the policing system of the country is so backwards it relies heavily on the use of torture and ill treatment for the poor as their tool for investigating into crime and also of social control? It is only an insider who knows what it means going to a court which will frustrate all his requests for justice and instead push back to a worse position than from where he started.

It is a rape victim who would know whether the justice system in her country would be able to grant justice. It is a young woman who has to go out of her house office for education, or work or for social purposes. That could answer the question whether they feel safe and protected while outside their homes.

It is the trade unionists of a particular country who answer whether the rights of trade unions are respected in that country or not. It is the people engaged in media work that could assess whether they are exposed to direct or indirect censorship and other kinds of punishments if they engage in the free exercise of their profession. To this we can add a whole other list.

For an insider to answer these questions, they do not need to read books or engage in any other kind of references. They can talk about these problems from their life experiences. If their life experiences show that everything is fine and that all these rights are guaranteed

then the insider story is one that affirms that the system is working well. But if the general will of the insider is such that it is negative either completely or to a great degree, that means that the proper problem has been understood in terms of an advocacy work to change it.

Therefore, any proper measurement or evaluation must first answer the question: is the objective of pursuing the Article 2 and the SDG 16 valid and a fundamentally important issue to be pursued in the particular context in which this project is being operated. Without answering the why going into all other factors will merely be a diversion of discussion to the trivialities rather M & E issues.

## **Myanmar Situation Update (7-13 June 2021)**

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Myanmar's ousted State Councilor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi faced her second in-person court hearing on 7 June in Naypyitaw that court announced the charges filed against her will finish within 180 days. Media also reported on Thursday the junta charged her under the anti-corruption law, bringing to seven the number of legal cases brought against her since the military coup on 1 February, 2021.

UNDP estimates that the poverty level is increasing rapidly which is 48.2% at present, and assumes reasons were COVID19 pandemic and the military takeover. This was not seen since 2005. Almost a quarter of all factories in the Japan-backed Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Yangon have suspended operations amid post-coup turmoil.

The protests continued in different parts of Myanmar despite the brutal crackdown by the military junta and the unsettled situation continued even in the fifth month after the coup. The clashes between military and the civilian resistance forces and ethnic armed organizations also emerged in several places in Myanmar, such as in Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Bago, Magway, Shan, Mandalay, Sagaing and Yangon States/Regions.

Three Indian states including Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland are currently sheltering around 16,000 people from Myanmar, civil society groups and government official's estimate, with the number expected to rise in coming months as the situation in Chin state has not improved over the last couple of months.

Five DVB journalists who were charged and convicted for illegal entry to Thailand were reported to have arrived in a "third country" to seek asylum.

There were intense fighting reported in Demoso, Loikaw and Hpruso townships during this week. The Junta has carried out airstrikes on civilian resistance fighters and used artillery on civilian areas. It has also brought hundreds of reinforcements into Kayah State. The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), which is over 60 years old, is backing the civilian resistance of the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force (KNDF) and People's Defense Force (PDF). According to Progressive Karenni People Force (PKPF), 50 civilians were killed from March 19 to June 11 in Kayah State following the coup

According to the aid groups, more than a quarter of a million civilians in seven regions of Myanmar have been displaced by clashes between the military and militias or fighting between ethnic armies. IDPs in Kayah and Chin States are in shortage of food supplies and medicines as the junta blocked all the routes to Kayah and Mindat of Chin State, destroying supplies of rice and medicine intended for IDPs.

The United Nations calls on the security forces in Myanmar to allow safe passage of humanitarian supplies and personnel and to facilitate the direct provision of relief

assistance by the UN and its partners to all those in need in Kayah, as well as other states and regions across the country where there are urgent humanitarian needs while the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet stated this week that credible reports indicate that security forces have used civilians as human shields, shelled civilian homes and churches in Loikaw, Phekon and Demoso in Kayah state and blocked humanitarian access.

According to the information compiled by ANFREL, at least 37 bomb blasts happened across Myanmar in the past week. It was reported that at least 9 people were injured.

The most high-profile interaction between the Myanmar military and China took place this week during talks in Chongqing, China between Southeast Asian foreign ministers and China. Junta's appointed foreign affairs point person Wunna Maung Lwin attended the meeting involving the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and also the meeting with the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation group, the body that China and the five Southeast Asian countries part of co-chaired by China and Myanmar.

Following the G8 Summit last week, the Myanmar community across the world has increased the number of protests in different parts of the world calling from the world leaders for their support to fight against the military junta that staged the coup on 1 February. Around 400 Myanmar people who live in the UK joined a protest against the Myanmar coup in Cornwall where the G7 summit is being held and some more were held in USA, Italy, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Belgium, Australia, Netherland, Canada, Finland, Norway, Ireland and Czech Republic on 12th and 13th of June. The Burma Spring Benefit Film Festival, which features more than 30 films from or about Myanmar, will run until June 20 aiming to draw attention to Myanmar's political crisis while raising money for groups inside the country striving to restore democracy and alleviate hardship.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), as of 13 June, 863 people were killed by the junta. 4,863 people are currently under detention and 178 are sentenced. 1,936 warrants have been issued. 31 were sentenced to death, 14 people to three years, 39 people to 20 years, 5 people to 7 years imprisonment. There were at least 21 deaths after bodies were returned to families bearing the marks of torture, although the exact number is unknown. Among them were active members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), election officials, pro-democracy activists and young people.

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