



# Advocacy at the Local Level: PROMOTING ACCESS TO LIFELONG EDUCATION FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

*Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth." – William Faulkner*

## What is LOCAL LEVEL ADVOCACY?

Local level advocacy is advocacy driven by communities. It involves engaging and influencing decision makers, stakeholders, and relevant audiences in communities, such as local politicians, civil society groups, local authorities, local leaders, school boards, etc. This can be to promote access to quality, lifelong education for girls and women and to raise awareness of the social, health and economic advantages of educating girls and women. At the same time, local level advocacy should build support among all community members to increase the receptiveness of decision makers towards set advocacy goals.

## Why Advocate for the EDUCATION OF GIRLS & WOMEN AT THE LOCAL LEVEL?

Effective advocacy often starts from grassroots movements in local communities. The issues and barriers that advocates need to deal with will vary from place to place. Advocacy at the local level highlights specific issues or barriers most relevant to the particular community. For example, indigenous women throughout the world are among the most marginalised groups of society and continue to face serious discrimination in terms of access to education. Local advocates in indigenous communities can use a tailored, culturally sensitive approach to promote the benefits of girls' and women's education to community members, local leaders, and local government. Such an approach may include evidence and recommendations to persuade them to implement legislation and introduce measures, for example culturally sensitive curricula, offering classes in indigenous languages, or developing radio teaching programmes that can be heard in remote communities. The purpose of local level advocacy is to effect change through influence at the local level.

### **Example:**

*GWI member, the Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW), is working with students in their Friendship Bridge Project, a programme providing scholarships and mentoring to undergraduate female students, to advocate for the elimination of child, early and forced marriage in Turkey. The Friendship Bridge students are from communities throughout Turkey and are able to advocate in their communities at the local level to build support for an end to child marriage. TAUW trains the students in advocacy and community sensitisation, for an end to child marriage, providing the students with tools and strategies for their advocacy projects. Over their summer break, the students undertake their advocacy project, advocating to families, local leaders and women's groups, to end child marriage. After the summer, the students report back to the project coordinator with an evaluation paper. The students provide an important link between TAUW and their local communities, to disseminate advocacy messages against child marriage from an insider perspective.*



## Who is the TARGET AUDIENCE?

Promoting access to quality, lifelong education for girls and women is about social and cultural change as well as resource allocation and legislative implementation. Local government is an important stakeholder because it can have a powerful influence on national policy and investment, and has a vested interest in implementing community-based solutions. For example, harmful practices such as child marriage and sexual violence – two systemic issues that affect the female population – often cause girls to drop out of school. The elimination of these practices can begin at the local level by engaging local leaders, including educational leaders (e.g. heads of schools, head teachers) and religious representatives - who are often predominantly male – in dialogue as to the numerous benefits associated with an educated community of boys and girls, men and women. Community members at large are key stakeholders in advocacy for girls' and women's education because change cannot happen without both men and women gaining a new perspective about a society in which everyone has access to quality, lifelong education. Furthermore, community support for an issue may increase the receptiveness of policy and decision makers to implement change. Changing the perspective of communities and local politicians or local government representatives can diffuse to higher levels of policymakers and authoritative powers.

**FACT:** The main reasons why Rwandan Batwa girls lack access to education are largely poverty, the attitude of Batwa parents and early marriage. Studies recommend raising awareness amongst Batwa parents of the importance of education for their daughters and encouraging them to prioritise education.

Kenya is divided into 47 counties, 262 divisions (*tarafa*). There are three classes of local authorities: City, Municipality, and Town authorities. Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu have City status. An advocate for change would have to consider which level of authority is required to influence educational progress.

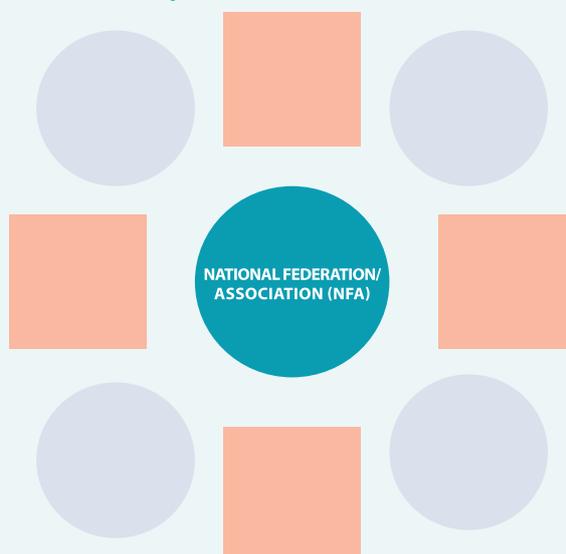
### Example:

In the rural village of Beir Anbar, an Egyptian community has recently called for an end to the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The entire community ranging from schoolchildren to village elders came together to denounce the practice as "violent", "wrong" and "harmful". The phasing out of the traditional practice of FGM has been initiated and supported by families, including boys and men, teachers and local authorities. The people of Beir Anbar are embracing a new tradition for their girls and women – a tradition of protecting and safeguarding their rights.<sup>1</sup>

### LOOKING AT THE ENVIRONMENT – WHO DO WE NEED TO INFLUENCE?

Use tools like the one below to map out all the various stakeholders and relationships that are existent or needed to carry out your advocacy plan. This will then enable you to identify your primary targets, by establishing whether you have strong, tenuous or no existing relationships and where relationships and activities need to be built or strengthened.

#### Stakeholder Map



Identify who your key stakeholders are, what their relationship is to you and whether they have relationships with each other. Use different colours to identify those that are a priority, those that are important (coral), and those that are relevant but not the focus now etc.

#### KEY

-  Priority stakeholder
-  Important stakeholder
-  Strong relationship
-  Loose relationship
- No relationship is indicated by the absence of a line

1. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2014/12/1/A-rural-community-calls-for-an-end-to-FGM.html>

# How do you ADVOCATE?

There are different levels of engagement and tools which can support advocacy geared towards GWI goals e.g. with the general public, education stakeholders, and policymakers. Advocacy will need to be tailored to the level of engagement through a locally and culturally relevant method of delivery which will reach that audience. By identifying challenges that restrict girls' and women's access to education within the community, local advocates can approach stakeholders directly to ask them to help alleviate the problem. Advocacy activities may include:

- **To reach the general public:** social media, leaflets, radio, website, local events, surveys, polls, etc.
- **To reach education stakeholders:** share testimonials, invite support for your recommended policy for girls' and women's education, share your news, meetings, round tables, discussion evenings, plus all the above.
- **To reach policymakers:** write letters, share your policy on girls' and women's education, recommend actions, suggest a meeting, attend relevant local events, invite policymakers to your events, join other partners to create an event focused on your goal, etc.
- **To reach religious leaders:** write letters, arrange meetings, involve other stakeholders to whom the religious leaders listen
- **To reach community elders:** meetings, peer groups, case histories

## Example:

- Approach your local leader or write a letter to your local politician or local radio station.
- Raise awareness by using social media or arranging an event.
- Associate with a civil society group or other non-governmental organisations and mark international and global events.

Remember that activities must be sustained over time to ensure change.



Some very effective advocacy groups have carried out a mixture of radical tactics such as demonstrations, sit-ins, fax and mail campaigns. While these have immediate impact, notably by their aggravation factor, longer-term effects are often seen in well-considered, planned advocacy campaigns that include a mixture of tactics, particularly at the local level.

## KEYS TO EFFECTIVENESS IN APPROACHING DECISION MAKERS

- Target the right officials
- Tailor your messages – be sensitive to the needs of the interlocutor
- Establish an ongoing relationship with officials
- Be timely and present information early in the legislation/ decision-making process
- Give objective facts with balanced, credible information and avoid emotion

## ADVOCACY PLANNING CYCLE





## Where do you ADVOCATE?

Depending on the stakeholder and activity you wish to engage, local level advocacy can be done in public spaces, for example local libraries, town or city halls, tribal meetings, schools, universities and all institutions of learning, community centres or at the local radio or television station.



Advocacy can also be done online, through personal emails, wider mailings, regular correspondence and e-surveys that are then used in media work.

## GWI ADVOCACY SUCCESS STORY *at Local Level*

The members of the Finnish Federation of University Women (FFUW) administer a very successful network, Let's Read Together, which brings together Finnish and immigrant women. Those who are illiterate, or do not know Finnish, get help and support. Finnish women learn to understand other cultures. Let's Read Together has expanded into more than 70 groups (for a population of 5 million) with more than 400 Finnish women and 1,100 immigrant women taking part annually. Through local advocacy to demonstrate the programme's success, Let's Read Together is now supported by the government.



## Using INTERNATIONAL DAYS

Depending on the type of activity and duration envisaged, local advocacy can take place at any time, whether on a specific goal that is time-bound or on a longer-term goal. However, it is important to be strategic and identify when your advocacy message is most likely to be heard. For example, the most effective timing in relation to local government might be before a local election.



International  
Women's Day

An effective time to raise awareness within the community by engaging with stakeholders or organising events is around global events; for example International Women's Day (8 March) and International Day of the Girl Child (11 October), which take place on the same date every year. These provide a strong backdrop as many voices may be calling for the same thing. Such days are an opportunity to join forces with other NGOs and civil society groups that have the same or similar goals, to approach decision-makers together with one voice.

Events linked to specific days such as advocacy on International Women's Day may include a local school visit for local government, a flash mob followed by a discussion, a round table discussion with relevant stakeholders, media action, a letter campaign to local decision-makers, etc. However, the event in itself is not enough, there must be follow up meetings and correspondence in order to follow through on what is being requested.

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