

1. *Building Networks in New Countries*

It can be challenging to establish or build upon existing advocacy capacity for one's issue in a country where untapped or limited capacity presently exists. Traditional means of accomplishing this have included advertising for the necessary staff, initiating a tender process in which existing organizations bid to provide the services, contracting external consultants to deliver these services, or utilizing consultants to conduct training workshops to “retool” existing advocates.

The limitation of many of these approaches is that, while they often identify skilled and knowledgeable people, they risk overlooking other individuals with potentially great passion, energy and dedication for the issue. This is why the ACTION project has placed an emphasis on building in-country teams and networks through a three-step process of **identifying core stakeholders, mentoring** and **building networks around “defining” issues and events.**

1. Identifying Core Stakeholders. At the start of the ACTION project, there were no active TB-specific political advocacy organizations in Kenya. Moreover, although several HIV/AIDS organizations and networks and some malaria partners were active on disease-specific issues, there was limited strategic coordination of efforts to address problems with Kenya's Global Fund grants for all three diseases.

The first step in building TB advocacy capacity in Kenya was to become familiar with the local civil society advocacy scene. ACTION team members and in-country partner and patient advocate Lucy Chesire conferred with trusted local allies as well as with external allies with knowledge and experience in Kenya to collect recommendations of groups and individuals to be considered as potential advocacy partners. ACTION also conducted web-based research on nearly 200 Kenya-based organizations with some experience in advocacy, including those involved in broader health, development, and social justice issues. ACTION then narrowed its list to 15 advocacy organizations that seemed particularly effective. Well-aware that what appears on an organization's website or publications does not necessarily reflect reality, the short list served as a starting point from which one-on-one meetings could be organized for the purpose of further exploring the reputations of different advocates and organizations in Kenya.

After this series of informal individual meetings, small “stakeholders forums” were organized with different constituencies for the stated purpose of discussing and defining a clear set of goals for TB advocacy in the country. Another purpose was for ACTION team members to observe during the course of the forums which individuals and organizations demonstrated potential for becoming core stakeholders. This talent-scouting eventually led to the identification of a partner organization, the Kenya AIDS NGOs Consortium (KANCO), and a team of committed individuals who were willing to take TB advocacy forward in Kenya.

2. Mentoring. In many international development initiatives, “training” has become nearly synonymous with “capacity building.” The skills and instincts of effective advocacy, however, are best shared by working alongside other skilled advocates. This is not unlike how most of the world's most successful policymakers have learned more about their craft from working alongside talented colleagues and mentors, than from books, workshops or graduate programs.

Time consuming as it is, mentoring and joint strategy development and support in implementation has played an essential role in nurturing the development of new core stakeholders for the project. In the case of Kenya, four different ACTION team members spent a combined total of nearly two months in Kenya working alongside the new team housed at KANCO, complementing Lucy Chesire's ongoing, on the ground support, guidance and training.



3. Building Networks around “Defining” Issues and Events. An effective way to fuel the engagement of existing stakeholders or the emergence of a new organization or network is to identify one or two initial short- to medium-term goals that are clear, meaningful and achievable. These “defining” issues or events initially serve to rally involvement and support, and eventually - once achieved - help to solidify the network's identity.

This has proven essential for the emergence of a larger network of Kenyan stakeholders, the United Civil Society Coalition against AIDS, TB and Malaria (UCC-ATM). Hatched at a KANCO-convened meeting, the coalition has brought together representatives from approximately 20 civil society organizations who had not previously worked together in a coordinated, sustainable way to address and advance common interests.

Putting aside competition for limited resources and space in the advocacy agenda, members of the UCC-ATM began advocating with a unified voice for greater transparency and accountability in the government's handling of Global Fund grants for all three diseases. In particular, the signing and implementation of two Global Fund grants had been delayed by the government for well over a year. This provided the network with a defining and unifying issue around which to mobilize.

UCC-ATM activities and complementary ACTION project efforts, combined with efforts by the Global Fund secretariat and allies in the Kenyan government, resulted in the two Global Fund TB grants being signed within months of the UCC-ATM's emergence. The UCC-ATM is continuing to monitor these and other Global Fund grants for TB, as well as HIV/AIDS and malaria, to ensure the flow of resources to intended recipients, potentially helping address similar problems with other sources of donor funding and yielding benefits for all three diseases. The network is now also applying itself toward improving the structure and functioning of the Global Fund country coordinating mechanism (CCM) in Kenya. In addition, KANCO and other ACTION partners have engaged the coalition to work together to encourage the Kenyan government to declare a national TB emergency. During the Global Fund's 2006 Partners' Forum in South Africa, ACTION partners shared this model of collective advocacy with other country delegates.

In summary, establishing advocacy capacity in a new country or region requires significant investment in talent-scouting, mentoring and identifying meaningful, winnable objectives. The best advocacy plans and strategies are unlikely to succeed unless this is first accomplished.

Tips & Suggestions

1. In setting up operations in a new country, invest whatever time it takes to identify and cultivate a person or core group from that country to lead these efforts.
2. Have the team set a common, clear, simple and time-bounded goal from the onset.
3. Start with a small, committed set of partners, while eventually working to ensure inclusiveness and collaboration with a larger group of stakeholders.
4. Avoid duplication or competition with existing networks.
5. Maintain regular communications to support strategy developments and be prepared to react to new developments.
6. Identify focal points in each partner's organization, including one responsible for facilitating communication among the coalition.
7. One of the key elements of success in a new network is the sense that the initiative is owned by each member and not by one organization or person. This creates a shared sense of responsibility and commitment, as well as transparency.