



USING THE STRATEGIC
ADVOCACY CANVAS



01

INTRODUCING THE STRATEGIC ADVOCACY CANVAS

The Strategic Advocacy Canvas is a tool, designed by Global Partners Digital, to help human rights defenders better understand the environment they are operating in, and build more effective advocacy strategies.

There isn't one 'right way' to use the canvas. Some might find it useful as a tool for experimentation, and testing out ideas; for example, mapping a hypothetical project to determine whether it is feasible. In other cases, it might be used more formally – perhaps to develop a long-term advocacy strategy for an existing project. Nor is the canvas sacred – tweaking, editing and adaptation is encouraged, and we'd love to see what you do with it.

So with this 'how to guide', we're not trying to prescribe one way of using the canvas. We just wanted to share some of the insights and feedback we've gained from our partners who have already trialled it: things to watch out for, common errors, and examples of good practice. Hopefully this will offer a useful supplement to the 'guiding questions' already included on the canvas, but if you have any questions, please feel free to drop Charles a message ([charles\[at\]gp-digital.org](mailto:charles@gp-digital.org)).

The guide takes you through each different section of the canvas:

Part I - Advocacy Strategy Summary

- Overarching goal
- Context

Part II - SMART Objectives and Advocacy Pathways

- Problem statement
- Objective
- Outcomes
- Processes and decision-making
- Target groups and individuals
- Partners/contributors
- Other opportunities
- Activities and outputs
- Resources
- Review and Evaluation

Then, at the end of the guide, we've created an outline of an *advocacy strategy template*, which should give you an idea of what the final outcome of using the canvas might look like.

PART I - ADVOCACY STRATEGY SUMMARY

The first part of the canvas is all about figuring out the background to your advocacy: or, in other words, *what* you want to do, and *why* you want to do it. By the time you've filled it out, you'll know what your overarching goal is, and understand the context you'll be operating in. This will set you up nicely for the second part of the canvas, which is all about *how* you're going to do it.

OVERARCHING GOAL

The overarching goal should be the guiding star of your advocacy – something which both describes the result you are looking to achieve in the long-term, and helps focus your activities in the short- and medium-term. This goal is likely to be too big to be achieved by just you alone, and should outlast the typical project cycle.

Getting the goal right is crucial for your strategy; yet it is something which people often struggle with. In our experience, the problem is usually not that the goal is too ambitious – it is that it is not ambitious enough. For example, an organisation may settle on the goal: *'including human rights language in a government cybersecurity policy'*. This is quite specific, narrow and easy to achieve, which means it is unlikely to sustain advocacy over a long period of time.

A better goal would be *'cybersecurity laws and policies in Kenya are human rights-respecting by design'* – specific enough to provide a clear focus, but broad enough to encompass a range of activities, with meaningful impact.

CONTEXT

Understanding the context in which you are working is critical to developing effective advocacy strategies and implementing your activities. Advocacy, after all, doesn't take place in a bubble; it responds to, and is shaped by, social, political, economic and technological trends.

So what we want to put in this section is the key trends – positive or negative – which will inform and shape your work. The main mistake people make here is describing the context in a superficial way. For example, a user might write *'increased government desire to control cyberspace'* as a trend in this section, which is vague, and doesn't really tell us much about what has been happening, or why. This user would get better insight from this section by pointing to specific examples of where the government has taken action to extend their control over cyberspace, and analysing what has driven this behaviour.

PART II - SMART OBJECTIVES AND ADVOCACY PATHWAYS

If the first part was all about *what* and *why*, this part is about *how*. Here, working from the goal and context you've already established, you'll first determine your problem statement, then set your objective – or objectives.

Then, for each objective (which has to be SMART, of course), you'll fill out the remaining sections on this half of the canvas. Taken together, these will give you a set of activities which both respond to your problem statement and help you achieve your objective.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement is a really important part of the canvas: it is what your objectives and activities ultimately respond to.

The problem statement has to do several things at once: it has to define the problem you want to solve; show where the problem has come from; show the general direction the problem is moving in (is it getting worse? Is there something coming up which is likely to change it?); and spell out the factors and trends which are driving the problem (whether social, technological, or political).

When filling out this section, a common mistake is to provide a static description of the problem as it stands today – for example, *'cybersecurity laws are threatening human rights'*.

Instead, it's better to think critically about the root cause of the problem and analyse what is driving it in a particular direction. For example: *'there has been an increase in cybercrime over the past two years; current legislation needs to be renewed to keep pace with this increasing threat; users' freedom of expression and privacy could be threatened due to the overly broad scope of the revised legislation'*. Doing this will help you see opportunities to influence the situation in a positive way, and will make identifying your objectives, and designing your activities, much easier.

OBJECTIVE

Defining your objectives is arguably the most important stage of the advocacy strategy design process. Having SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound)

objectives will enable you to vividly describe what you want (your outcomes – see below) and determine what you need to do to achieve it.

By this point you should have a clear sense of your long-term goal and the specific problem you are trying to solve. Build your objectives from this analysis, thinking realistically about what you/your organisation is able to achieve in a given time-frame.

Some questions you might ask yourself to see if an objective is SMART: can I vividly describe what success would look like? Do I/my organisation have the necessary skills to be able to achieve this? Do I have a clear sense of when I need to have achieved this by?

As you start to define your objective, you may suddenly realise that your problem statement is too broad, or combines multiple problems; and that, therefore, you can't actually develop a SMART objective. This is a common problem in strategic advocacy – if it happens, try going back to your problem statement and refining it further so that you can develop a SMART objective which responds to it.

OUTCOMES

In this section, you should clearly describe the expected results of your activities, articulating what success would look like if you achieve your SMART objective.

A common mistake here is to get outcomes confused with activ-

ities. In fact, the difference is actually very simple to understand: outcomes describe the *change* (e.g. an increase in capacity among 10 human rights defenders); while activities describe the *action* (e.g. deliver training to 10 human rights defenders).

Depending on your objective, you may have only one outcome or several. The exact change you want to achieve will depend on your activities, so you may find this section easier to complete once you have agreed your activities (see below).

PROCESSES AND DECISION MAKING

In this section, the aim is to map out the possible processes you might engage in to achieve your objective. This is an important part of the canvas because it will show you where, when, and with which actors you will need to engage. For example, say I want to engage on encryption policies. In this section I might write, *'Open consultation on national encryption law, July 2018; to be attended by Tom A from the Telecommunications Ministry.'*

When identifying and mapping these processes, think about what information you will need to effectively engage. Is the process open to all stakeholders? Is there a set timeline for the process? Which agency or department is in charge of the process?

In some cases, this might not be relevant for your project – for example, if your objective is simply awareness-raising, and does not require engagement in a decision-making process. If this is the case, feel free to skip this section.

TARGET GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

This section is focused on identifying who you need to influence to achieve your objective. In our experience, it helps to start broad – identifying the relevant government department, company, or other organisation, before narrowing down to the individuals within each of these organisations which hold influence. It can also be helpful to indicate here what kind of influence each individual has, and what your relationship with them is like.

Here's an example: *'John B at TeleCorp, responsible for privacy and data protection policies. Good connections to government security actors. We have a good relationship with him. He would be a useful ally during the stakeholder consultations.'*

PARTNERS / CONTRIBUTORS

This section is focused on identifying who can help you in your advocacy to achieve your objectives. Are there other NGOs which are also working towards this objective? Which businesses

may be aligned with your overarching goal and objective, and might want to partner with you? Are there individuals within government who also support your objective, and with whom you could collaborate?

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

When developing an advocacy strategy, it's important to identify other opportunities that can support your efforts. This might include existing commitments that you can use to strengthen your argument (e.g. international human rights law or national legislation), opportunities to meet with and influence decision-makers, data sources or research that supports your argument, existing training materials, or technologies that could help amplify your efforts.

ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

After analysing your environment and refining what you are looking to achieve, now you need to figure out *how* you are going to do it. This should be quite simple now, with everything you've already done. You just need to take a look at all the different factors you have analysed in the sections above, and use this information to determine:

- What activities would work best for your objectives;
- When they should happen;
- Who you should do them with.

After completing this section, you should have a clear road map, with a detailed timeline and milestones.

RESOURCES

OK, so you've planned your activities. Now you have to figure out how you're going to resource them.

What are the hard costs involved (eg travel costs to attend meetings, or design and printing costs for a publication)? Will new personnel be necessary? What percentage of time will you dedicate from your existing team members?

Accurately tracking time and costs is essential for advocacy. It's the only way to really determine the efficiency of your activities, and it will also help you design more effective advocacy strategies in the future.

REVIEW / EVALUATION

Advocacy doesn't take place in a vacuum. Trends change, sudden environmental changes occur, and opportunities can suddenly arise – or close. As a result, even the best-laid plans may require revision.

This is why regular review and evaluation are so crucial – and this section is where you plan how you will undertake it. Here, you should ask yourself:

- How will I know I am making progress towards my objective? (e.g. have my requests to meet with key decision-makers been met? Do initial drafts of a law/policy reflect my position?)
- How frequently will I review and evaluate my progress according to these metrics? (e.g. once a month or quarterly)
- What will I do if circumstances suddenly change?

In our experience, regular – even constant – review is the best way to make sure your project is staying on track. But you should also try to predict, as far as possible, the ways in which your plans might suddenly have to change.

For example, say an activity you have planned depends on you attending a certain process. Later, it turns out that this process is actually closed to non-state actors, and you will not be able to attend it after all. A good review and evaluation plan will have anticipated this possibility, and built in moments for 'course correction' into the project timeline.

Of course, sometimes things happen which you couldn't ever have predicted. Then, an unplanned, immediate review process may be needed.

THE STRATEGIC ADVOCACY CANVAS

GOAL

What is your long-term goal? This is an ambitious statement which is most likely unrealisable in the short-term

CONTEXT

How would you describe the overall situation in which you will be working in relation to your goal? What are the overarching trends (social, political, economic and technological), both short- and long-term, which frame the work you will carry out in pursuit of your goal?

OBJECTIVE 01

What is your specific advocacy objective?

Objectives should:

- *Contribute towards your goal*
- *Be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound)*

OBJECTIVE 02

What is your specific advocacy objective?

Objectives should:

- *Contribute towards your goal*
- *Be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound)*

OBJECTIVE 03

What is your specific advocacy objective?

Objectives should:

- *Contribute towards your goal*
- *Be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound)*

OBJECTIVE 04

What is your specific advocacy objective?

Objectives should:

- *Contribute towards your goal*
- *Be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound)*

<p>OBJECTIVE</p> <p>What is your specific advocacy objective?</p> <p>Objectives should be <i>SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timebound)</i></p>	<p>PROBLEM STATEMENT</p> <p>What is the problem you are trying to solve? The problem statement should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the specific issue • the context / history of the issue • the trends – the general direction the issue is moving in • the driving factors – what is behind these trends? These could include political, economic, socio-cultural and technological factors.
<p>OUTCOMES</p> <p>What is the specific change you want to see? Your outcomes should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be measurable • capture the exact change you would like to realise during your advocacy 	

MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM

<p>PROCESSES AND DECISION-MAKING</p> <p><i>Understanding how and when key decisions are made is essential to being a strategic advocate.</i></p> <p><i>Mapping the decision-making processes that influence your objectives and when key decisions will be made will help inform where and how to engage.</i></p>	<p>TARGET GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS</p> <p><i>Who do you need to influence to achieve your objectives? Which organisations have influence within your problem statement? Which specific individuals within these organisations will you need to work with?</i></p>	<p>PARTNERS / CONTRIBUTORS</p> <p><i>Which organisations/groups are aligned with your objectives? Who has resources or contacts that your advocacy would benefit from? Who can contribute towards you achieving your objectives?</i></p>	<p>OTHER OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p><i>What opportunities can help you achieve your objective?</i></p> <p><i>What changes/trends do you see that could contribute to and amplify your efforts?</i></p>
--	--	---	---

ADVOCACY PATHWAY

<p>ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS</p> <p><i>What are the specific activities you plan to undertake to achieve your objective? How do these utilise the opportunities, trends and other factors identified in your mapping?</i></p> <p><i>When will you complete these activities? How does the timing correspond to the processes and decision-making opportunities identified in your mapping?</i></p> <p><i>How will you engage? Who will you partner with? What evidence will you use?</i></p>	<p>RESOURCES</p> <p><i>Who will be involved in delivering this advocacy pathway?</i></p> <p><i>What financial resources will this advocacy pathway require?</i></p>	<p>REVIEW / EVALUATION</p> <p><i>What is your process for reviewing and evaluating your advocacy pathway? When will you consider adapting your plan? How do you know whether you are working towards your objective?</i></p>
--	--	---

GOAL

CONTEXT

OBJECTIVE 01

OBJECTIVE 02

OBJECTIVE 03

OBJECTIVE 04

OBJECTIVE	PROBLEM STATEMENT
OUTCOMES	

MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM

<p>PROCESSES AND DECISION-MAKING</p>	<p>TARGET GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS</p>	<p>PARTNERS / CONTRIBUTORS</p>	<p>OTHER OPPORTUNITIES</p>
--	--	------------------------------------	----------------------------

ADVOCACY PATHWAY

<p>ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS</p>	<p>RESOURCES</p>	<p>REVIEW / EVALUATION</p>
-------------------------------	------------------	----------------------------

ADVOCACY STRATEGY TEMPLATE

ADVOCACY STRATEGY

GOAL

CONTEXT

OBJECTIVE 1

OBJECTIVE

OUTCOMES

ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

OBJECTIVE 2

OBJECTIVE

OUTCOMES

ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

OBJECTIVE 3

OBJECTIVE

OUTCOMES

ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS



Global Partners Digital
SECOND HOME, 68 HANBURY STREET, LONDON, E1 5JL
+44 (0)203 818 3258 INFO@GP-DIGITAL.ORG