



CONCEPT

HEKS Advocacy Concept for Development Cooperation

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1 Introduction

The fact that the number of people living in poverty is growing in spite of increasing food production and prosperity worldwide is evidence that development programmes can only be sustainable if social, political and economic structures within a society are designed to give disadvantaged and marginalised people access to basic resources. In conjunction with other measures, therefore, advocacy activities are an essential part of sustainable development co-operation.

Advocacy is crucial if people are to claim their rights and those responsible (usually governments and other authorities) are to be held to account. Advocacy is thus an intrinsic part of the HEKS concept of a human rights-based approach (HRBA). It brings questions on the balance of power, injustice and inequality to the table. Advocacy is therefore a central element in our efforts towards a just and peaceful world. By doing advocacy work HEKS exposes itself to publicity, thus influencing the perception of the aid agency by stakeholders such as the Federation of Churches, cantonal churches and donors.

The role of advocacy in HEKS development cooperation

As a development organisation, HEKS regards advocacy work as an opportunity to effectively complement and consolidate its development programmes. HEKS is indeed convinced that advocacy activities can strengthen the sustainability of its projects. There are numerous examples of the struggle of smallholders for land in Asia, Central and South America, and Africa. Tens of thousands of hectares of farmland have passed into the ownership of small farmers over the last two to three decades. Often this was achieved only after long processes marked by protracted legal battles in court, by demonstrations or sit-ins and by media reports on the rights and demands of poor farmers. Our partner organisations had to take risks time and again, to expose themselves and to occasionally learn to deal with threats against their leaders. It is only thanks to their fearless commitment to landless smallholders and the material and moral support of HEKS that the great successes of recent years have been possible.

It should be emphasised, however, that HEKS sees itself primarily as a development agency and not as a human rights organisation. This self-image has the following implications for the role of advocacy in HEKS programmes:

- Advocacy is a possible component of a HEKS development project – not the other way around. The core business of HEKS is and remains development cooperation. Advocacy may be a part of this if it appears to be necessary and useful. Advocacy does not necessarily have to be a component of all HEKS projects.

- Advocacy must always be rooted in a country programme and the related projects. Actual initiatives and the agenda for advocacy activities emerge in close collaboration with our partners. HEKS acts here as a facilitator and/or intercessor for its partner organisations' requests for advocacy or becomes involved within international networks that campaign on a specific matter.
- In Switzerland HEKS will only become involved in partners' concerns if they are complementary to the efforts of partner organisations, originate from HEKS projects and are in keeping with HEKS strategy.

The aim of this document is to rewrite the framework for the advocacy work of the International Division of HEKS. At the same time, its purpose is to structure and systematize the experience in advocacy work developed over the years by HEKS and its partner organisations. The document is therefore based on a variety of practical experiences in HEKS focus countries.

The concept has been developed by a working group, which represented the different levels of work done abroad by HEKS: CDs in HEKS focus countries, DOs in Switzerland, TAs and HoDs. It was also developed in close collaboration with the HEKS Communication Division. It was then discussed and further elaborated within the divisional management. Finally, it was adopted by the HEKS management body and the Board of Trustees.

Important guidelines are defined in the first section. The second section rewrites the framework for advocacy work. Standard procedures are described in section 4.



2 Definition and Parameters of Advocacy

2.1 Definition

Advocacy refers to organised efforts by citizens to influence the formulation and implementation of legislation and programmes by persuading and pressuring state authorities, international financial institutions, and other influential figures in politics, business and civil society.

Advocacy is not to be restricted to, or confused with, lobbying. Lobbying denotes the representation of political interests and the influencing of decisions made by the legislative and executive authorities and thus only represents a part of advocacy.

Advocacy can be understood as a tool for real participation by citizens in decision-making by government and other powerful bodies. It is one of the ways in which different sectors of civil society can put forward their agendas and have an impact on public policies, by participating in a democratic and systematic way in decision-making processes about matters that affect their lives.

Advocacy can be seen as a cumulative process which is based on a broad strategy with several interrelated activities. At the same time, creativity and persistence are important and a variety of further activities may be added over time. Through a series of small victories on specific

issues that may not in themselves appear to be of great consequence, an organisation or coalition gradually develops its ability to exert an influence on society, which in turn enables it to instigate and promote policy changes.

2.2 Scope

As noted above, advocacy is mainly about persuading and pressuring powerful decision makers. This implies action on different levels of society. Depending on the core causes of rights violations and on the position of the decision makers, protagonists at local, regional, national or international level have to be approached and involved if problems are to be tackled at the roots.

Depending on circumstances, protagonists whom one would like to influence or hold accountable with regard to a particular issue can be found on various levels, which requires a multidimensional approach. The protagonists whom one seeks to make aware of advocacy work may thus range from a municipal council member to international entities.

Advocacy efforts vary widely in scope, intensity and impact. Beside the advocate's capacities and objectives, these variables also depend considerably on the actual context. Methods and approaches, but also expectations regarding the results, differ significantly between democratic states, which have an active civil society and an effective legal system, and so-called failed states or a restrictive regime. In the latter the space to act is considerably restricted and it is important to keep in mind the security of partners and of the local population in general. An ongoing conflict sensitivity monitoring and risk assessment is therefore crucial. Through international observers and links with international networks this obstacle can be counteracted to some extent. However, advocacy work in failed states and restrictive regimes is all the more important in the empowering of civil society and in holding the state accountable as duty bearer. In these cases the space to engage in advocacy is a lot greater from abroad and the international community is accountable to act. Targets of such advocacy efforts may include leading players in business, politics and civil society or religious leaders as well as UN bodies. Creating strategic alliances and coalitions is therefore a prerequisite: not only does this increase the impact, it also shares the burdens and risks among several stakeholders - which makes individual organisations less vulnerable.

2.3 Target groups

On an international level as well as in Switzerland, those directly addressed by advocacy work are not only governmental or political institutions. Advocacy can also be applied to leading figures in business and civil society, or to religious and moral authorities in society. Even though

these non-governmental protagonists do not have direct legislative, judicial or executive responsibilities, they might be more relevant and have more influence regarding certain matters of concern than state institutions.

As a matter of fact, church groups and stakeholders for example are able to mobilise their members and often have considerable leverage in society. In this sense they multiply and strengthen the impact of advocacy efforts. However, it has to be taken into account that the various members of churches represent the whole spectrum of society: by no means all members are in favour of change and there may be some who help to reinforce existing social hierarchies.

2.4 Activities

Advocacy work consists of various activities that pursue a common aim: access to decision makers to influence them on matters of importance to a particular group or to society in general. Effective advocacy work is based upon a thorough analysis of the relevant influential stakeholders and structures, and on a related strategy which takes into account their own resources and possibilities, and which is aimed at a specific goal. Isolated campaigns that do not contribute to the overall strategy are ineffective and are better left out.

There are many different ways of exerting influence, so creativity and thinking out of the box should be encouraged¹.

2.5 Decision levels

According to the Regulations² the HEKS Board of Trustees is the highest governing body that takes decisions on matters and activities of strategic importance and has final authority for decisions relating to the topics outlined in section 4.3.

Advocacy efforts at an international level are regulated within the framework of HEKS country programmes.

1 The following document from ICCO describes in a practical way how to develop advocacy campaigns in 10 steps: ICCO Guidelines for Lobby and Advocacy, 2010.

2 HEKS Foundation regulation



3 Framework for HEKS Advocacy

3.1 Scope of HEKS advocacy

Advocacy efforts can be undertaken at different levels which must be clearly distinguished:

Level 1: HEKS partner organisations are involved on their own behalf in advocacy work – mostly on a national level, but sometimes internationally as well.

Level 2: HEKS offices support the partner organisations in conducting information campaigns and lobbying activities with regard to specific issues. HEKS works together with partners on issues that are relevant to HEKS country programmes and actual project work. The result of this on the one hand is to strengthen negotiating power vis-à-vis various government bodies and other social groups and, on the other hand, to highlight misconduct and breaches of law as well as the experiences and successes of the work. In such cases, HEKS offices act as facilitators between HEKS partners and as advocates vis-à-vis government bodies and/or society groups. However HEKS offices do not appear in public as initiators of their own advocacy activities. Instead, they support those of their partners or of the regional/ national platforms of which they are members³.

³ e.g. AIDA platform in Israel

Level 3: At a Swiss or international level **HEKS HQ** can in selected cases support advocacy initiatives launched by partners on a country level or join up with interest groups and international networks in order to strengthen the sustainability of HEKS programmes.

HEKS is involved as an organisation at levels 2 and 3. The framework outlined below serves as a guide:

- For HO in the definition and implementation of their supporting role.
- For HEKS HQ in the selection of advocacy initiatives in which HEKS is involved at Swiss or international level.

3.2 Objectives

The **overarching goal** of HEKS advocacy is to support and complement HEKS programmes in order to ensure the equal implementation and observation of human rights and a life of dignity for all human beings.

The **specific goals** of HEKS advocacy are:

- To contribute to an improved and sustainable livelihood and to a fair and peaceful society
- To contribute to a change in political, economic or social structures that oppress people
- To achieve better sustainability of HEKS programmes in which people act as self-determined individuals or groups

HEKS advocacy work aims to create added value for beneficiaries and partner organisations.

3.3 Added value of advocacy in development cooperation

As mentioned in the introduction, HEKS views advocacy as a meaningful complement to its actual development work. Advocacy work brings along relevant changes in line with principles shared by HEKS and its partners such as: empowerment, participation, gender equality or partnership

- Advocacy contributes to the **empowerment of rights holders**, particularly as citizens, and is of central importance in giving them a voice in claiming their rights.
- Advocacy strengthens **citizen participation** in decision-making about laws, decrees and programmes and promotes a transparent political culture. Furthermore it strengthens civil society.

- Advocacy is an important and effective tool in the struggle for **gender equality** as well as for **equal rights for minorities and marginalised groups**.
- Advocacy can be practised on several levels and requires good coordination and knowledge sharing between those involved. It thus promotes and strengthens the **partnerships** between HEKS and its partner organizations.
- Advocacy focuses on changes in political, social, economic or cultural realities and **structures**, which is indispensable in making development cooperation and peace-building effective and sustainable.
- Advocacy can be of the utmost importance in **conflict handling**. In many instances it has been effectively practised in peace work through every phase of a conflict by stakeholders in civil society.⁴
- Advocacy allows us to pursue a **holistic approach** and to take into account the transnational character of power structures and connections in today's globalised world.

3.4 Criteria to engage in advocacy

The following criteria apply for the selection of the advocacy efforts that emanate from HO as well as for the selection of advocacy activities involving HEKS HQ at Swiss or international level.

3.4.1 Thematic focus

HEKS will engage in selected issues that are relevant to the whole ID programme:

- HO will support partners' advocacy efforts on issues that are defined and developed in the respective country programmes.
- HEKS HQ will primarily engage in advocacy for human rights, preferably with a focus on the first step of the HEKS intervention model, i.e. rights ensuring access to resources (such as land or water) and the right to food. This focus is the widely accepted common denominator for the majority of country programmes.
- As HEKS also implements humanitarian aid programmes, international law may also be taken into consideration for specific advocacy efforts in the field of humanitarian aid.

⁴ Source: Paffenholz T., 2009, Civil Society and Peacebuilding. Summary of Results of a Comparative Research Project, CCDP Working Paper, Geneva, The Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding.

3.4.2 General criteria

Furthermore, advocacy initiatives must be:

- **Rooted in projects:** advocacy must have obvious links with ongoing HEKS programmes and be relevant for the beneficiaries of HEKS projects. Advocacy initiatives must be complementary to the objectives of the projects from which they have arisen.
- **Based on human rights:** advocacy must pursue equal implementation of human rights for everybody.
- **In harmony with HEKS focal countries and themes:** the geographical and thematic concentration criteria HEKS applies in its programmes are also valid for advocacy.
- **Effective:** HEKS engages in initiatives which can reasonably be assumed to have an impact and refrains from simply duplicating others' efforts. In this sense, HEKS will take into consideration the relationship between the resources to be invested and the results to be expected.
- **Taking calculated risks:** before launching advocacy initiatives, HEKS will weigh up the possible impact on the security of partners and beneficiaries. It is to a large extent up to the partners to decide whether to engage in advocacy and how far they are ready to go, as they are the ones who have to bear the risks

3.4.3 Guiding principles

When engaging in advocacy, HEKS remains true to its own identity. It will therefore ensure that its actions are in keeping with the following principles:

- **Solidarity based on human rights:** Advocacy is also a sign of solidarity. HEKS understands solidarity as a concern that everybody should benefit from the implementation of his/her human rights. HEKS will therefore refrain from solidarity actions which are not clearly linked with human rights.
- **Non-violence:** HEKS explicitly distances itself from any violent action.
- **Accountability:** HEKS does not engage in advocacy for its own sake. Advocacy is legitimate only if it helps to improve the situation of disadvantaged people. HEKS will monitor whether disadvantaged people have experienced such an improvement.
- **Working in alliances:** Whenever reasonable and possible, HEKS will work in networks and seek allies with similar goals and values.
- **Constructive confrontation:** Before going public, HEKS HQ will seek discussion with the involved parties. HEKS pursues dialogue wherever possible and confrontation whenever necessary. HEKS will at all times be careful to base its position on sound

sources and accurate documentation. HEKS does not understand advocacy as a way to just “make noise” in public.

- **Integrity and sincerity:** In conflict situations, the truth is always contested and claimed by the various conflict parties. In its advocacy work HEKS always keeps to facts and is transparent regarding its sources of information.
- **Closeness to the people:** HEKS focuses its advocacy activities on the needs of its beneficiaries. In the process HEKS always stays in close contact with the interested public in Switzerland in order to raise awareness of the situation in the project countries and to provide information on developments.
- Furthermore, the general **values and core beliefs** of HEKS also apply to advocacy work.

3.5 Participation in advocacy networks

HEKS may become involved in advocacy efforts at national or international level in line with the above-mentioned criteria in two different (complementary and not exclusive) ways:

- Together with its partner organisations
- By joining NGO networks or coalitions: working with like-minded NGOs can give more weight to advocacy efforts and enables the risks of taking up positions to be shared between different organisations. Taking part in a broader coalition makes it possible to reduce the risks in very exposed situations.

Whenever meaningful and possible, HEKS should assess potential synergies with international networks – especially those with which HEKS is naturally involved as an ecumenical organisation (e.g. ACT, APRODEV, Bread for All, Alliance Sud etc.). The scope of financial and human resources that HEKS can invest in such networks is defined under section 4.3.2.



4 Procedures and Resources

The processes outlined below show who are the decision makers in which case, which protagonists have a say and which protagonists need to be informed of the exact procedure. The responsibility of information always lies with the decision makers.

4.1 HEKS partner level

HEKS partner organisations are often involved in advocacy efforts independently of support from HEKS. In most cases they are involved at national level in their respective countries. HEKS is primarily concerned if such efforts happen within the framework of projects directly financed by HEKS. In such cases advocacy work must be part of the approved project and the responsible HO must always be consulted in the event of any additional advocacy activities.

4.2 HEKS office level

In their networking and facilitating role, HEKS offices can coordinate advocacy concerns shared by HEKS partner organisations. Partners however act in their own names. On the one

hand, because HEKS sees itself in a subsidiary role and, on the other hand, because HEKS as a foreign organisation could risk being banned if it adopts too high a profile on political issues.

Possible networking and facilitating activities of the HO are to be rewritten in the approved country programme. Any activities within the framework of a regional or national platform that serve similar aims and that provide for HEKS support for the activities of these platforms must also be included in the country programmes. Such activities will be carried out under the name of the respective platform.

4.3 HEKS HQ level

In selected cases (see criteria under 3.4) HEKS HQ can raise advocacy initiatives in individual countries to Swiss or international level.

A distinction may be made here between three cases with different procedures:

4.3.1 Short-term advocacy activities

Short-term activities depend directly on current circumstances and cannot therefore be planned - for example a coup d'état⁵. In such cases, it can make sense for HEKS HQ to take up an initiative by HEKS partner organisations at Swiss and/or international level.

4.3.2 Long-term advocacy activities

Advocacy initiatives are in general long-term efforts that can be planned in advance. Long-term advocacy initiatives (e.g. participation in a coalition of NGOs, financial support and participation in international advocacy networks) follow the same procedure as any HEKS project to be submitted to the Executive Board for approval within the framework of a country programme.

4.3.3 Advocacy activities as part of HEKS campaigns

Regular HEKS campaigns (e.g. winter campaigns) can also be used to support advocacy concerns. The impact of advocacy work can be greatly enhanced by means of coordinated communication (advertising, fundraising, events, PR). On the other hand, HEKS can only pick up on a few issues within its campaigns. These must also lie unmistakably within the scope of the profile of HEKS, its strategy and its communications resources.

⁵ HEKS HQ was for example confronted with such situations in Zimbabwe in 2007 after the elections were cancelled or in 2009 after the military coup in Honduras.

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