

Advocacy as a Strategy for Social Change: A Qualitative Analysis of the Perceptions of UN and Non-UN Development Workers

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ABSTRACT Advocacy is an important strategy in achieving change in international development programming. Different aid agencies design and implement advocacy programmes to influence the political climate, policy and programme decisions, public agenda, resource allocation and social norms and practices. Despite the extensive recognition of the importance of advocacy in development discourse, its effectiveness is sometimes questioned. This study sought to explore the understanding of advocacy by development workers and identify new approaches to make it more effective. In-depth interviews were conducted with some 65 development professionals from at least 30 UN and non-UN development agencies. The findings reveal that advocacy is still broadly perceived as indispensable in achieving social outcomes but many development workers are ill-equipped for this function. The study identifies major causes of advocacy ineffectiveness such as lack of strategic approach, deficient issue framing and positioning and weak application of the science and art of social influence. It concludes that without a critical consideration of the complex interplay of local, national and international forces which frame political and social environments, advocacy will not be able effect change at the population level. The study recommends more research on how leadership enhances advocacy effectiveness.