

Messages: Informing, Persuading, and Moving to Action

Background Notes*

In today's society, we are bombarded by messages every day. The intent of the message may be to sell us a product, inform or educate us in some way, or change our opinion about an issue. An advocacy communication strategy follows many of the same principles as an advertising or social marketing campaign. It is essential to know your audience thoroughly and to deliver a concise, consistent message that is tailored to your audience's interests.

Most people shape their messages to the needs and interests of a particular audience as a matter of common sense. In other words, the message communicated to a parents' group about providing family planning services to adolescents would differ from the message transmitted to officials in the Ministry of Health.

Audience research—particularly qualitative research such as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews—helps identify appropriate messages for various policy audiences. Whoever the target audience may be, it is important to remember three other points about advocacy message development.

First, there should ideally be only one main point communicated or, if that is not possible, two or three at the most. It is better to leave people with a clear idea of one message than to confuse or overwhelm them with too many.

Second, messages should always be pretested with representatives of the target audience to ensure that the message sent is the one received. When a network develops an advocacy message directed toward the Minister of Health, for example, it is always useful to practice delivering the message to a supportive Ministry official as a test run. The Ministry official may offer valuable feedback about how the message is interpreted.

Third, the message should not only persuade through valid data and sound logic, but it should also describe the action the audience is being encouraged to take. The audience needs to know clearly what it is you want it to do, e.g., include reproductive health in the national health insurance package, support an advocacy campaign by attending a rally on the steps of Parliament.

This unit addresses the essential components of a message—content, language, messenger/source, format, and time/place of delivery. Participants are asked to apply what they know about advocacy message development through role-play scenarios with decision makers.

* Background notes adapted from Elaine Murphy. 1994. *Communicating Population and Family Planning Information to Policymakers*. Washington, DC: The Futures Group Int'l.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, participants will be able to

- Identify the elements of an effective advocacy message;
- Tailor a message to the interests of a particular target audience; and
- Develop and deliver an advocacy message in a variety of scenarios.

TIME

6 hours and 45 minutes

MATERIALS HANDOUTS

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Four to five advertising messages cut out of local magazines or newspapers
- Copies of handouts
 - III.4.1 Background Notes
 - III.4.2 Message Development Worksheet
- Video camera (if possible) to tape the role-plays and play for group feedback
- Sample role-play scenarios (for adaptation)

PREPARATION

- For Activity 1, write each of the following on a sheet of newsprint: Strongly Agree, Strongly Disagree, Undecided.
- For Activity 1, write down two controversial statements related to FP/RH. See Activity 1 for examples.
- For Activity 2, write the definition of advocacy communication on newsprint.
- For Activity 3, cut out four or five examples of advertising messages from magazines or newspapers. Each message should have a simple, promotional phrase such as “Tropical Airways gets you there on time!” as well as pictures/graphics and supplemental text. (Commercial messages work better than social marketing advertisements. If participants are too familiar with the subject matter, they might lose their objectivity.) Paste each message to a sheet of newsprint and post each newsprint page on a different wall in the training room so that all are visible.
- For Activity 5, read the role-play scenarios and adapt them to fit the advocacy objectives developed in Unit 2. Ideally, each scenario should depict a different medium for message delivery (e.g., face-to-face meeting, press conference, public debate). Copy the scenarios to distribute to each working group.

ACTIVITY 1

Techniques of Persuasion

Time: 45 minutes

1. Post one newsprint page (Strongly Agree) at one end of the longest wall in the training room, post the second newsprint page (Strongly Disagree) at the other end of the same wall, and post the third newsprint page (Undecided) in the middle of the wall.
2. On a slip of paper, write two controversial statements that will elicit both

strongly positive and strongly negative responses from participants. You should develop these statements according to the local environment. Past workshops have used the following successfully:

- Sexuality education should be incorporated into the formal curriculum of primary school (grades one through six).
 - You are the director of emergency (or trauma) services for a local hospital. You learn that one of your nurses is HIV-positive and therefore you dismiss her from her post.
3. Explain that this activity is designed as a warm-up to the topic of message development. Participants will engage in an exercise on public opinion and persuasive techniques.
 4. Point out the three sheets of newsprint on the wall and explain that they represent a continuum of public opinion, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Participants should imagine that they are participating in a quick public opinion survey. Tell participants that you will read a statement aloud and that they will express their opinion by standing at the point on the continuum that best reflects their viewpoint. They need not stand precisely under any of the signs but rather may choose to position themselves at any point along the continuum as appropriate. The participants must react to the statement exactly as you read it—they may not alter or question it.
 5. Be certain that everyone understands the instructions before you read the first statement.
 6. Read the first statement slowly and clearly so that everyone hears the same words. Read the statement slowly a second time. Ask all participants to stand up and position themselves along the continuum according to their opinion.
 7. Once each participant has taken a position, explain that the purpose of the activity is to practice the skill of persuasion. Participants standing under “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” will try to convince the “undecideds” to move over and support their position. If any participant changes his/her opinion during the exercise, he/she should move to the appropriate point on the continuum.
 8. Turn first to those standing under “strongly agree.” Invite one or two participants to explain their position in an effort to persuade the “undecideds.” Check to see if any “undecideds” feel persuaded to move.
 9. Next, invite one or two participants who “strongly disagree” to articulate their position in an effort to persuade the “undecideds.”
 10. Finally, ask the remaining “undecideds” why they did not move and whether they feel inclined to change their minds.

Note to Facilitator: Try to manage the group in such a way that a heated argument does not develop. If the discussion gets too heated, simply remind participants that the objective of the activity is not to debate the issue but rather to convince an undecided audience.

11. After five to ten minutes have elapsed for the first statement, stop the discussion and read the second statement. Follow the instructions as for the first statement.



12. After five to ten minutes have elapsed for the second statement, stop the discussion and ask participants to return to their seats.
13. Moderate a discussion about what the participants learned from the exercise. Discussion questions and possible responses follow:
 - As you stood along the continuum, which persuasive techniques influenced you to change your position? (Try to pinpoint the specific argument or communication technique that led them to change their opinion.)
 - Use of facts and figures
 - Use of real-life, human examples
 - Appealing to individuals on a personal level
 - Listening to the speaker’s viewpoint
 - Did the speakers use any techniques that alienated you?
 - Loud/aggressive voice
 - Exaggeration of the facts
 - When the objective is to build support for your cause or issue, which is more effective—to debate with your adversaries or to persuade neutral parties?
 - The response may vary from one advocacy campaign to another; however, in many cases, an attack on the opposition simply heats up the debate. At times, an attack approach alienates a neutral public.
 - If any of the “undecideds” failed to change their opinion, why were the arguments unappealing and unpersuasive?

Transition

As demonstrated in the activity, advocacy communication often involves the ability to persuade a policymaker, an influential person, or the public to support the network’s position and to take action. This type of communication demands messages that are tailored to the specific audience the network is trying to reach. The communication could seek to inform an audience about an issue in order to generate support, persuade an audience to join and support the advocacy effort, or move the audience to take action and implement the desired policy change.

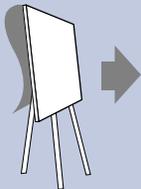
Advocacy Communication

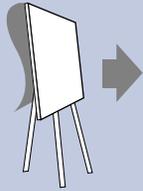
Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

1. Review the definition of advocacy communication on newsprint.

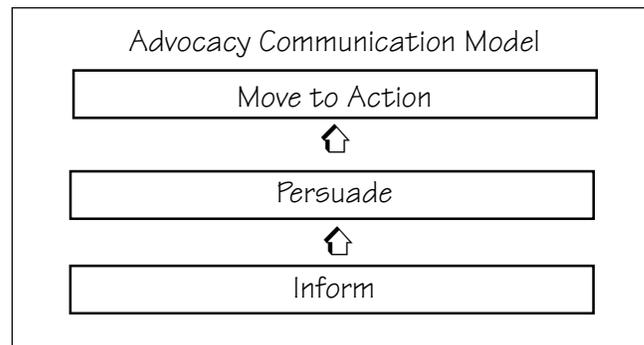
Advocacy Communication is any **planned** communication activity that *seeks to achieve one of the following communication goals: inform, persuade, or move to action.*

ACTIVITY 2





2. Draw the Advocacy Communication Model* on newsprint and use the following notes to guide a discussion of communication:



- One necessity for effective communication is a clear understanding of the audience and the ability to see the issue from the audience’s perspective. This is a tremendous challenge—the ability to put yourself in your audience’s shoes and see how the audience members will benefit from supporting your cause.
- During the audience analysis, each working group identified the potential benefits to the target audience from supporting the advocacy objective/issue. In other words, how will each individual in the target audience benefit professionally, politically, or personally from supporting the issue (or conversely, what does each risk)? The answers to these questions should be considered and incorporated into the advocacy messages directed to each member of the target audience.
- Look at the model and note that advocacy communication (as well as IEC campaigns) often focuses on the first level—to inform a target audience. To move the audience along to higher stages, audience members need information to develop a thorough understanding of the issue, the situation, and the desired policy change.
- Once the audience is informed, the communication strategy moves to achieve the next higher-level objective to produce greater impact. That level seeks to persuade the audience to feel as strongly as the network does about the issue and to adopt the desired position.
- Once audience understanding and support are achieved, communication moves to the highest level, the point at which advocacy messages move the audience to act in support of the issue.
- Every advocacy communication effort should seek to reach the highest possible level—that is, to move the audience to action. As participants prepare to develop advocacy messages, they will determine the desired action for each audience and how to move the audiences to action through the advocacy messages.

Transition

The next few activities focus on developing persuasive advocacy messages by looking at the characteristics and elements of messages and practicing message development.

* Adapted from a model developed by CEDPA consultant Thomas Leonhardt

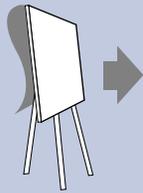
ACTIVITY 3

Elements and Characteristics of a Message

Time: 1 hour and 15 minutes

Warm Up (30 minutes)

1. Point out the four or five advertising messages that are posted around the room.
2. Read each message aloud and ask participants to stand next to the message that most appeals to them. Give the participants a minute or two to review each of the messages before they make their selection.
3. After everyone has selected a message, ask participants to talk with the others standing in their group to identify the characteristics of the message that make it appealing. Ask each group to write those appealing characteristics (or why the group likes the message) on the newsprint surrounding the message.
4. Invite each group to share its list of appealing characteristics. While the groups are reading their lists, capture the key characteristics on the flipchart. Be certain to include the characteristics shown below:



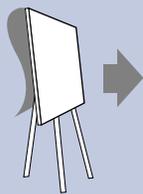
Characteristics of Effective Messages

- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Concise
- ✓ Appropriate language
- ✓ Content consistent with format
- ✓ Credible messenger (spokesperson)
- ✓ Tone and language consistent with the message (i.e., serious, humorous)

5. Conclude by reminding participants to keep these characteristics in mind when they begin developing FP/RH advocacy messages. It is important to remember that not everyone understands FP/RH issues or considers them priorities and that messages must be kept simple and precise in order to inform, persuade, and move audiences to act.

Elements of a Message (45 minutes)

1. Write the following elements of a message on newsprint:

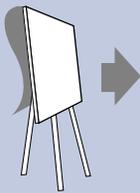


Five Elements of Messages

- ✓ Content/ideas
- ✓ Language
- ✓ Messenger/source
- ✓ Format/medium
- ✓ Time/place

2. Review each element of a message using the following notes:
- **Content/ideas.** The content refers to the central idea of the message. What is the main point you want to communicate to your audience? What single idea do you hope the audience will take away after receiving your message?
 - **Language.** Language consists of the words you choose for communicating your message. Is the language appropriate for your target audience? Is the word choice clear, or could it be interpreted differently by various audiences? Is it necessary to use a local dialect or vernacular to communicate the message?
 - **Messenger/source.** Source refers to the person or people delivering the message. Is the messenger credible to your target audience? Is it possible to include beneficiaries as spokespersons or messengers? For example, you might invite a community or religious leader to join you for a high-level meeting with a policymaker, you might ask a pregnant teen who has dropped out of school to speak to youth groups, etc.
Advocacy networks can send a powerful and more meaningful message to policymakers by letting the message come from a member of the affected population.
 - **Format/medium.** The format or medium is the communication channel you choose for delivering the message. What is the most compelling format to reach your target audience? Different channels are more effective for certain audiences.

Brainstorming: Ask the group to brainstorm a list of communication media for advocacy messages. Record the responses on the flipchart and be certain to include the following:



Message Medium	
✓ Face-to-face meetings	✓ Poster, flyers in public places
✓ Executive briefing packets	✓ Petition
✓ Public rallies	✓ Public debate
✓ Fact sheets	✓ Press release
✓ Policy forums	✓ Press conference
	✓ Contests to design posters, slogans

After the participants have brainstormed an exhaustive list of ways to deliver messages, ask them to think about the criteria they would use when choosing an appropriate medium. Possible responses may include the following:

- **Audience.** Some formats are more effective and more appropriate for specific audiences. For example, high-level policymakers have little time and many constituents. The message needs to give them the facts and move them to action

quickly; also, always leave information for them to read later. Effective media for policymakers include briefing packets, fact sheets, face-to-face meetings, and policy forums.

- **Cost.** Using mass media such as radio or television can be extremely costly. The advocacy network should seek out any free or reduced-cost opportunities if the mass media is the medium of choice.
 - **Risk.** When a network goes public with an advocacy issue—especially a controversial one—risk is always involved. Certain advocacy tactics entail more risk than others. Public debates and live forums highlighting both sides of an issue can turn into “heated” events. Nevertheless, risk can be minimized through careful planning, selection of speakers, rehearsals, etc.
 - **Visibility.** The advocacy network may choose one medium over another if it can make use of a contact or connection to raise the visibility of an event. Perhaps a celebrity or high-ranking public official is willing to pay a site visit to a project or make the opening speech at a meeting. Such an event may provide an excellent opportunity to recruit other decision makers and promote a particular advocacy objective.
- **Time/place.** When and where will the message be delivered? Are there other political events that you can link up with to draw more attention to the issue? Some advocacy groups connect their advocacy activities with events such as International Women’s Day or World AIDS Day. Is there an electoral campaign underway that might make policymakers more receptive than normal to your message?

Transition

By now, participants should have a basic understanding of the characteristics and elements of effective advocacy messages. The next activity provides an opportunity for the participants to practice developing and delivering advocacy messages to members of their target audiences.

ACTIVITY 4

Developing Advocacy Messages

Time: 1 hour

1. Ask participants to return to their audience analysis teams.
2. Distribute and review Handout III.4.2: Message Development Worksheet.
3. Instruct each team to select one of the individuals or institutions from its target audience analysis form and complete the Message Development Worksheet for that audience.
4. Allow 30 minutes to complete the task.
5. Invite each group to present a summary of its worksheet.
6. After each presentation, ask the other participants for their comments, questions, or suggestions. Use the following questions as a guide for the discussion:

ACTIVITY 5



- What was the central idea of each message? Was it clear?
- Was the content appropriate for the message’s audience? Why or why not?
- What additional information should be included? Omitted?
- Were data used effectively?
- Was the desired action clearly articulated? Was it appropriate?
- Do participants agree with the choice of format, spokespersons, time, and place?

Delivering Advocacy Messages

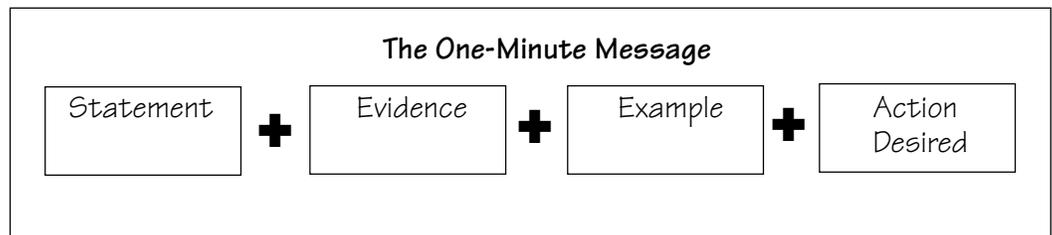
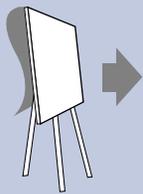
Time: 1 hour and 45 minutes

The One-Minute Message (15 minutes)

Note to Facilitator: The final activity involves participants in delivering advocacy messages to decision makers. This learning exercise is most effective if the facilitator has had a chance to adapt the role-play scenarios to each of the advocacy objectives developed by the network. If possible, provide each team with a distinct scenario that reflects the team’s objective and target audience. Sample role-play scenarios are provided for adaptation.

1. Introduce the activity by reminding participants of the importance of presenting messages that are clear and concise.
2. Draw the “one-minute message” on newsprint. Use the following notes to provide an overview:
 - A critical component of advocacy campaigns is media attention. Advocacy networks may invite journalists to attend selected events to increase the visibility of the issue and to ensure that their message reaches a wider audience. Media presence usually means that someone from the network will be interviewed about the event and the issue. In any interaction with mass media, it is vital that the spokesperson communicate both the main idea and the desired action of the advocacy message in 30 to 60 seconds.
 - Mass media coverage of events and interviews is normally distilled into a 30- to 60-second tape for use on the television or radio news. To ensure that the central points of the message are communicated during this brief transmission, spokespersons must be skilled at delivering “the one-minute message.” This simple model will help focus the speaker on constructing or tailoring a message for a television or radio interview.
 - The “one-minute message” includes four components as follows:
 - **Statement.** The statement is the central idea of the message (as defined on the Message Development Worksheet). The spokesperson should be able to present the “essence” of his/her message in several strong sentences.

- **Evidence.** The evidence supports the statement or central idea with facts and/or figures. The message should include limited data that the audience can easily understand—such as “only two out of five adults of reproductive age have access to FP services” rather than “4,253,800 adults of reproductive age have access to FP services”.
- **Example.** After providing the facts, the spokesperson should add a human face to the story. An anecdote based on a personal experience can personalize the facts and figures.
- **Action Desired.** The desired action is what you want the audience to do as a result of hearing the message. The advocacy objective should be stated clearly to the target audience as an invitation for action!



3. Read the following example provided by an advocacy network working on domestic violence:

Statement. Domestic violence against women must be stopped. Violence against women has long been tolerated and women have suffered in silence. The seriousness and scope of the problem has been ignored.

Evidence. In the United States, one woman is physically abused every eight seconds and one is raped every six minutes. According to a 1992 U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee report, spousal abuse is more common in the U.S. than automobile accidents, muggings, and cancer deaths combined.

Example. Our network has been supporting a woman named Maria. One year ago, Maria was successfully balancing motherhood and a career. However, she became involved with an abusive partner and her life has never been the same. Maria recently lost her job because of tardiness, and her children have been disciplined at school for aggression and misbehavior. Maria is one of the millions of women suffering from domestic violence.

4. Ask participants what is missing from the message—the action desired from the audience. Does the network want a particular policymaking body to enact stricter punishments for abusers? To provide funding for women’s shelters? The message must clearly articulate what is desired.

Role-Plays (1 hour and 30 minutes)

1. Distribute the related role-play scenario to each group. Give participants time both to read the scenario and ask questions for clarification.
2. Explain that each group is going to develop a 10-minute role-play demonstrating how it chose to develop and deliver its message described in the scenario.
3. Encourage participants to refer to the “one-minute message” if they are going to be interviewed by the mass media during their role-play
4. Allow 45 minutes to develop the message and design the role-play and assign parts.
5. Encourage participants to use any materials or props they may need.
6. When the groups are ready to present their role-plays, arrange the chairs theatre-style. Invite each group to introduce its role-play by summarizing the scenario.
7. Following each role-play, ask the full group for feedback. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:
 - Was the central advocacy message clear? What was it?
 - Put yourselves in the place of the target audience. Were you informed, persuaded, and moved to act?
 - Which communication techniques pushed the audience up the advocacy communication scale?
 - What was the most effective part of the message?
 - What, if anything, would you add or do differently?

SUMMARY

Developing and delivering effective advocacy messages require a basic understanding of communication, knowledge of what makes an effective message, skill in crafting messages that include the essential elements, and the ability to select the most appropriate medium based on a variety of criteria. **Distribute handouts for Unit 4.**

MOVING AHEAD

The next unit looks at different techniques of data collection and analysis. Whether the network involves itself in data collection activities or relies on secondary analyses, the qualitative and quantitative data collected will enhance and support each step in the advocacy process.

Sample Role-Play Scenarios

Scenario 1

You represent an NGO network comprised of organizations that seek to protect the human rights of girls and young women. Through ongoing monitoring of the parliamentary record, your organization learns that the Child Welfare Committee is considering a piece of draft legislation. After previewing the legislation, you determine that the content is consistent with your vision and advocacy goal. You were able to secure a meeting with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Child Welfare Committee. Prepare a 10-minute role-play depicting your meeting with the committee members where you try to persuade them to support the legislation.

Scenario 2

Your network works to promote gender equity in rural communities. It has come to your attention that an international agency has planned a water and sanitation project for one of the communities where your organization works. Through conversations with the agency, you learn that there are no plans to incorporate a gender focus into the project design. The network sees the project's potential value but feels that the project will be more sustainable if an analysis of gender relations is integrated into the design, monitoring, and evaluation phases. The Village Council in the target community is holding a special hearing to address this issue. The network has been invited to present its view. Prepare a 10-minute role-play depicting the special hearing and your efforts to convince the council and the community of the value of gender analysis. (You can ask the other participants to play the role of the community; however, you may want to plant several supporters and critics in the group to make the role-play more interesting.)

Scenario 3

Your FP/RH advocacy network works to provide reproductive health care and education to adolescents. In the past year, the Ministry of Education (MOE) initiated a small-scale, pilot project that introduced a sexuality/reproductive health module into the secondary school curriculum. Your initial inquiries suggest that the MOE does not intend to mainstream the education program due to perceived opposition from religious groups. To build public support and persuade MOE officials to expand the program, your network is hosting a public debate about the advantages and disadvantages of providing reproductive health services and education to youth. Prepare a 10-minute role-play dramatizing the debate, including how you manage the participation of TV journalists.

Scenario 4

Your network promotes the sustainable use of natural resources. For the past several years, the network has been working with rural communities that border on a large, forested area that was recently purchased by a multinational paper company. One day, several representatives of the network are at the airport preparing to leave for a conference. In the departure area, they recognize the general manager of the paper company, who is preparing to depart on a different flight. You decide to approach the paper company executive and urge him or her to pay a site visit to some of the rural communities in question and learn more about their interests in the forest. Prepare a 10-minute role-play where you try to convince the general manager to pay a first-hand visit to the people who are affected by the company's development plan.

Handout III.4.1

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Third, the message should not only persuade through valid data and sound logic, but it should also describe the action the audience is being encouraged to take. The audience needs to know clearly what it is you want it to do, e.g., include reproductive health in the national health insurance package, support an advocacy campaign by attending a rally on the steps of Parliament.

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Handout III.4.2

Message Development Worksheet*

Target audience	
Action you want the audience to take	
Message content	
Format(s)	
Messengers	
Time and Place for Delivery	

*This worksheet is borrowed from Ritu R. Sharma. 1997. *Advocacy Training Guide*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development.