

Chapter 17

Advocacy as a Strategy for Sustainable Development and Economic Growth: What Civil Society Organizations Need to Know

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ABSTRACT

This chapter argues that civil society organizations have an important role to play in the attainment of sustainable development when the concept and practice of advocacy are transformed into a governance strategy. They can play this role by means of their core mandate of social transformation and attainment of social justice. The mechanisms they use to attain their goal have been identified in the chapter as participation, empowerment, education, and values. To show how advocacy can bring about social transformation for sustainability and growth, the chapter postulates a new development paradigm as model to follow with the necessary mapping in advocacy work. The dynamics of the relationship between advocacy and development are described and the framework for further research is outlined using principles of John Rawls' social and political philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Advocacy has become an important tool and strategy for sustainable development and economic growth under the neo-liberal agenda, where decentralization has also become a major policy and decision-making tool to drive development. This is clearly a shift from earlier forms of state control to market oriented ideologies. This has called for more participation of individuals and organizations in decision-making for local outcomes in areas of development programs. Civil society organizations (CSOs) therefore found ground for their activities, especially in enhancing empowerment, democratic participation at local level

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for development. Advocacy came in as a strong element in shaping local/regional and even international agenda by highlighting issues of the marginalized.

The fact is that current development models, especially those being applied in Africa, do not take advocacy as a governance strategy for sustainable development and economic growth. This chapter states that when advocacy is structured well and practiced accordingly, it can be means of staining social transformation, development and sustainable growth in Africa. The limit of this statement as it will apply in the chapter falls within the neo-liberal economic philosophy since it is the reigning ideology with its tenets of democracy and rule of law. The significance of the chapter is to bring to the fore the important place of advocacy in social engineering and the need for it be taught in university faculties from its social dimension.

However, the fundamental critique of the neo-liberalist thought, which is about juxtaposing of social justice and long term economic stability, was pointed out by Oppenheim (1998) and Ledwith (2010), when Ledwith said “it is this yoking together of the economic and the social (justice) which has formed the kernel of one powerful critique of neo-liberalism” (p. 12). The point is that commitment to social justice brings about empowerment, participation and partnership. However, the free market tenet of neo-liberalism is accused of being one of the causes of social injustice where there is a greater inequality and a widening gap in income in the world between the lowest 10% and the highest 10%.

In recent Al Jazeera news program *UpFront*, (Washington DC, 17th June 2016) the secretary general of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) agreed tacitly that the widening inequality gap and poverty are the direct result of the neoliberal policies of the United States and the United Kingdom, beginning from the 1980s. Many databases, such as those from African Development Bank and OECD income distribution and poverty dataset, indicate an increasing income gap between the rich and the poor.

The concern is that inequalities and poverty were and still remain the result of the neoliberal mechanisms of deregulation, decentralization, restructuring, and privatization. It is in this sense that advocacy by civil society for change and transformation is fundamental for injecting some normative structures to regulate neo-liberal economic practice. For advocacy to be effective it must emphasize its core mandate of intervening for social justice and transformation at all levels – community, regional, national, and international. This mandate makes advocacy a worthwhile venture to undertake.

It is the thesis of this chapter that advocacy can be a governance strategy for sustainable development and economic growth on the one and only condition that it is done in a systematic and structured manner. As a result, CSOs have to know what to do and how to do advocacy systematically. The endeavor of advocacy cannot be separated from politics and power relations that our world knows today. At the core of any advocacy work is political decision-making and how it benefits the people. Mastery of the political system in advocacy is therefore inevitable. Advocacy implies a value system to defend in policy making and implementation. The engagement of advocacy is therefore on two levels namely direct advocacy and grassroots participatory advocacy.

In general, a CSO is engaging in direct advocacy when it states and acts directly on behalf of individuals and groups and participating in grassroots advocacy when it mobilizes the general public to participate in the formulation of public policy affecting them. It is important to note that many CSOs, which some equate inadvertently to NGOs, operate on these two levels simultaneously. Advocacy as it will be used and defined later in the next section and hence throughout the chapter will involve this double engagement.

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