

Using Impact stories to assess Save the Children's contribution to advocacy successes

This process was designed in consultation with staff from SCI's Global Campaigns, International Programmes, Global Themes and member offices. The methodology presented was tested under the EVERY ONE campaign and refined according to participants' feedback and lessons learned.

Why do we need impact stories?

It is widely acknowledged that demonstrating impact and organisational attribution in advocacy work is difficult, given the numerous actors and constantly changing external environment. Along with the added pressure of numerical reporting, this can result in a poor understanding of how we contribute to changes in the external environment and a poor reflection on learning which impacts on our ability to strengthen advocacy initiatives.

As Save the Children enters a new strategic period, results framework and global campaign, we are developing new approaches and methodologies to better demonstrate, report and learn from our advocacy and campaigning successes (and failures).

This new approach has a number of critical features:

1. A global mandatory advocacy indicator (the number of policy, budgetary and administrative changes adopted with Save the Children support that will help ensure the rights of all deprived and excluded children to survive, learn and be protected are fulfilled.)
2. Rating scales to assess our advocacy impact
3. A new and streamlined mid-year and annual reporting process, including a revised Advocacy Monitoring Tool (AMT), which is now called Advocacy and Campaign Impact Report
4. Impact stories

While the new Advocacy and Campaign Impact Report will track and record information and changes to advocacy strategies year on year, impact stories will be used to document and assess our contribution when we achieve our advocacy objectives in a specific situation – either a country, or an issue.

Impact stories give us space to reflect on the specific contribution we have made, make logical arguments for causality and support this with external information and evidence. Additionally, they will allow us to showcase how we are using institutional funding in reaching the most vulnerable children through advocacy work, in a robust and externally validated manner.

These narratives will be used to address two advocacy learning questions as part of the organisation's results framework:

1. *What are the necessary conditions to achieve advocacy impact for deprived and excluded groups of children to survive, learn and be protected from violence?*
2. *What advocacy and campaigning models are effective in which contexts?*

While the impact story methodology will be used widely across the organisation, it will be tested and refined using the Every Last Child campaign as a platform.

How is an impact story different from a case study or blog?

Traditional case studies, stories or blogs are used in Save the Children as communications pieces. They have a quick turn-around and answer the following questions:

- What happened and why was it needed?
- What was Save the Children's role in it?
- What is the possible impact on children?
- An example (child's story) and/or quotes
- Next steps

An impact story is a more in-depth case study that examines the context, methodology, evidence, response and next steps of advocacy work. As a qualitative tool, its primary focus is to develop a narrative of how change has happened, our contribution to this change and is backed by, most importantly, external validation.

Communications blogs and case studies are often the first step in the process of writing an impact story. Once a story is submitted using SCI communications channels, if a potential impact story is identified, the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) team will contact the office to discuss interest in documenting the story, capacity available and support required, as well as agreeing on next steps.

What is the format of an impact story?

An impact story is generally written using the following formula:

Situation: What prompted the advocacy work?

Response: How did you respond?

Results: Who benefited? What resulted?

Evidence: What's the evidence?

For each section there are a set of questions that you should consider internally and ask external stakeholders. It is vital that an impact story includes input from external stakeholders who can corroborate the information, and hopefully provide insights from an outsider perspective on both results and evidence.

Guiding Questions:

If you are able to find answers to most of these questions, then you have written the bulk of your story and it might be worth asking your communications advisor to help you with the final stages of drafting.

Situation:

- Why did you develop the advocacy strategy?
- What problem, issue or concern needed addressing?
- Why was it important?
- Who was involved? How did you select who to involve?
- What is the context for campaigning and advocacy? (i.e. is it a restrictive environment or do civil society have access to decision makers and the media?)

Response:

- What changes were you trying to achieve? Did you agree on a set of clear objectives at the outset?
- How did you select which policies to target? Who was involved in selecting these targets?
- Did you clearly map out how Save the Children would contribute to changes in policy?
- Did you have a clear set of indicators or can you set some retrospectively?
- Who were you working with? (If you were working in coalition, what did you add to the coalition?)
- If you worked in coalition, how did you ensure equal and active engagement of partners?
- What activities were involved?
- How was the work funded? What impact did the type of funding have on your work?
- What approaches and tactics worked well and what didn't?

Results:

- What were the changes, key achievements and benefits of the advocacy/campaign? (e.g. to policies, practices, social action, social, economic and environmental conditions, knowledge, skills, motivation and behaviour)
- What were the critical steps that led to these particular results or successes?
- How did our partners contribute to, or lead, the advocacy work?
- What is the significance of this outcome in your context?
- Was the change different (negative or positive) from your original objectives?
- What setbacks, gaps or missed opportunities were there and how did you deal with these?
- What negative outcomes did you experience?



- How often did you assess and reflect on your original plan and did you need to change it according to internal or external factors?
- Given your context, what were the facilitating factors that helped you (and partners, if applicable) achieve your objective(s)?
- What are the next steps?
- What did you learn? (How have you learned and adapted your strategies or how will you change your strategy?)

Evidence:

- What evidence do you have of the impact of the campaigning and advocacy work conducted by Save the Children?
- Did you map and gather evidence throughout your work over time? If not, how will you implement this learning?
- How were the changes attributable to the work of your organisation? With what degree of confidence can you state the change? Or what did you contribute?
- Are there external stakeholders who can verify your contribution? Please provide evidence/quotes/testimonials.

It is important to include direct quotes, images and reference to media coverage where possible to illustrate the external confirmation of your analysis. Carefully select this evidence, and choose quality over quantity.

Suggested Structure

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Background/Context
- Partnership
- Strategy
- Results
- Evidence
- Next steps

Process

- **Step 1.** Submit your story using the communications channels.
- **Step 2.** The MEAL team will contact your office to agree on responsibilities, support needed and next steps, while liaising with the thematic teams.
- **Step 3.** Convene an internal meeting between the key people involved in your advocacy strategy to agree on what was the most significant change or impact your advocacy work has had in the last year.
- Once you have agreed on this, use the questions above as a guide to gathering information internally from the team about why this has been a significant change and how it relates to your context.
- **Step 4.** External validation is a key element of an impact story, for credibility and learning purposes, so it is important to collect quotes and views from external key people you worked with.

Sensitive Issues:

In writing your impact story you may uncover information that you may not want to publish. Often the best learning is from mistakes or failure and reporting this publically can have an impact on relationships you have with your stakeholders. Given the most effective learning happens from mistakes it is important to include this as a footnote and clearly mark information that should remain confidential.



Packaging and distributing your story

Once your story is finalised, the Communications and MEAL teams can support you in creating an engaging package for the story (using, for example, creative designs with illustrative pictures, videos and timelines) and ensuring that your success is widely shared with all relevant audiences. This will involve using internal communications channels such as:

- Global Campaigns Team email updates
- Campaign OneNet page
- SC Weekly
- IP / Humanitarian / Thematic / Regional / National newsletters
- Campaign calls (task group, strategy group, communications group)
- Partner websites or communication channels

External audiences for your impact stories

Based on your level of confidence and the strength of your impact story, it may be worth considering what external audiences would benefit from reading your impact story. You may want to consider discussing this audience with your country leadership and ensure that the story is present in the most relevant format (written, video, translation etc). Some audiences to consider:

1. The beneficiaries of your advocacy efforts – often this group has contributed towards the impact story and you should always ensure you are communicating back to them with the final product
2. Your partners
3. The sector in which you work – either at a knowledge sharing forum (conference, working group, etc.) or via a publication (peer review journal, sector newsletter or online platform)
4. Donors that may be interested in this sector
5. The Save the Children website and social media channels (if you wish to share your story externally)

In the links below you will find examples of impact stories:

- “Evaluating the successes and challenges of working in partnership to achieve sustainable impact - Pneumonia Vaccine and Community Case Management: Bangladesh”, Save the Children: click [here for story](#) and [here for video](#)
- [Action Aid: Stories of Change](#)

Contacts

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