

# Advocacy and Lobbying by a Local Government Association (LGA)

THIS IS A VNG INTERNATIONAL PRODUCT

Besides providing practical guidance, the document also sensitizes the reader to typical Local Government Association tasks and performance in advocacy, being a platform and delivering services to the membership. It will help define your approach; give you useful suggestions; and last but not least: provide inspiration to get started!



# Advocacy and Lobbying by a Local Government Association (LGA)



## **Colophon**

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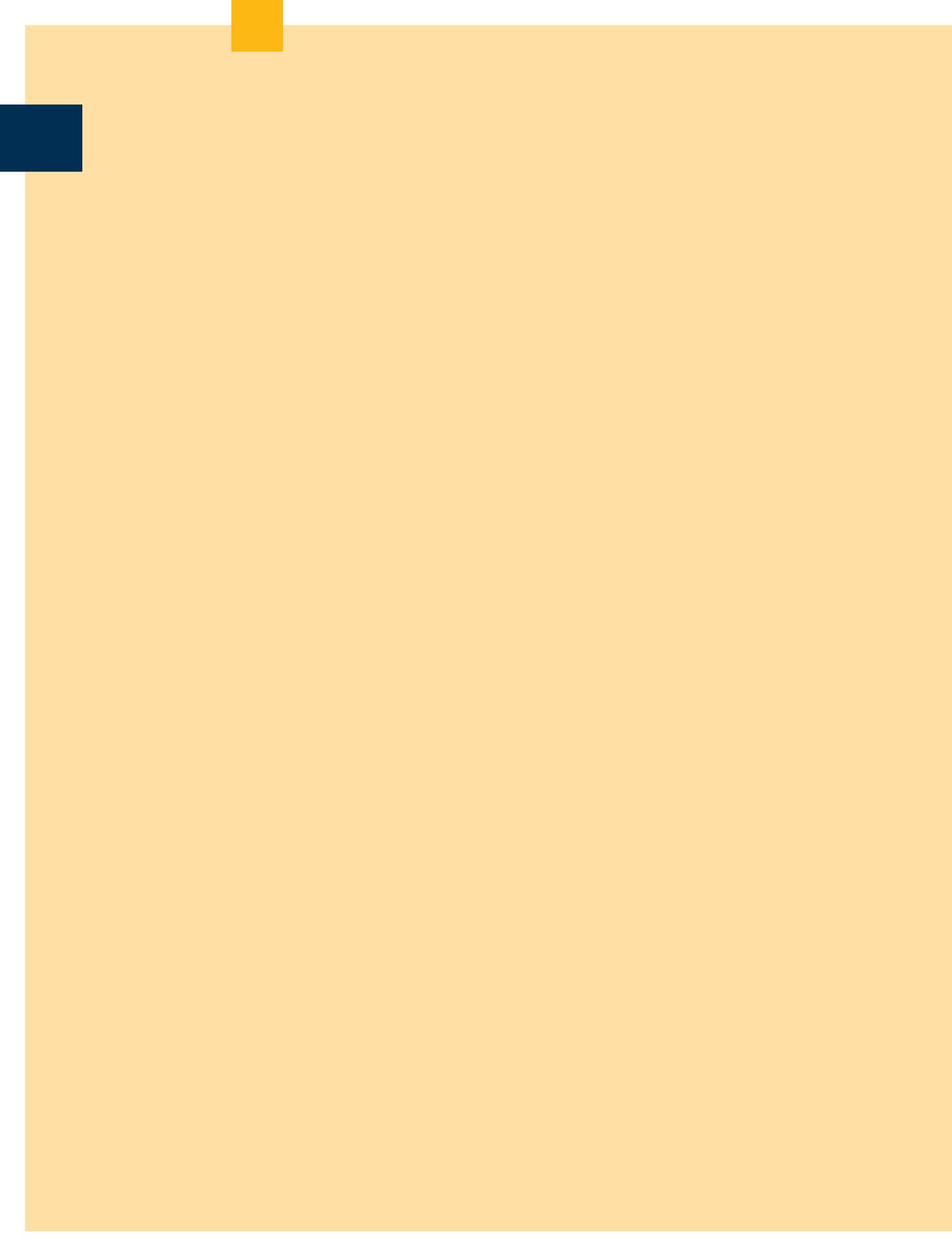
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# Introduction

Decentralisation of public functions and resources brings government closer to local people. Decentralisation allows them greater influence on how government is exercised locally.

Where should the balance be between centralisation and decentralisation? That depends on national circumstances. Some countries have a long-standing tradition of strong centralised governance; others show a tradition of more power for local governments. However, it is generally recognised that the greater the degree of decentralisation, the more likely government will respond to local needs and to expectations.

The European standard for decentralisation is specified by the Council of Europe in the **Charter of Local Self-Government**<sup>1</sup>. The charter states, 'local authorities are one of the main foundations of any democratic regime' and '*local government should manage a substantial part of public affairs under its own responsibility in the interest of local people*'.

Decentralisation does not happen all at once. It takes years. Central government must be willing to decentralise functions and resources (fiscal decentralisation). They must be confident that local governments can do a good job. Local governments must demonstrate that they are competent.

Therefore, there is always a tension between the readiness of central government and the demands of local government. Both sides have their own perceptions and priorities. Central and local governments must negotiate how to decentralise and how to strengthen local government.

To do this well, local government needs a strong **Local Government Association (LGA)**. LGAs have a particularly important role where (further) decentralisation needs to be advocated. A strong LGA will make a difference:

- The Government should see the LGA as a partner in strengthening decentralisation.
- Local governments, members of the LGA, will see their LGA as a source of services and representation.
- National and international organisations will see the LGA as a source of information and a partner in sponsoring programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> The Charter of Local Self-Government is not a voluntary but a binding agreement for all 47 member states of the Council of Europe. In situations of conflict between a national and a local government, the local government can appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

A key role of the LGA is to articulate the needs and concerns of local government to central government. Where members' needs surveys have been conducted, advocacy and lobbying always appear near or at the top of the list of most important LGA activities. Therefore, the LGA bears a responsibility to lobby on behalf of local governments. It must advocate legitimate policies and positions that will serve the interest of local government. It must be able to communicate and persuade. The LGA needs to use the best advocacy and lobbying techniques, and to present its principles and plans in an Advocacy Strategy. A strong LGA provides strong advocacy and shows the capacity for good lobbying.

**An LGA has to be transparent. Always!** In a democracy, government, including local government, is expected to be transparent and to make public their goals, methods and actions. Ignoring the transparency imperative has major consequences. Therefore, establishing clear communication guidelines and frameworks is an obligation for any LGA.

This Handbook is designed to help LGAs develop their Advocacy and Lobbying Strategy, so do not hesitate to use it as a guide!

# 1 Advocacy and Lobbying by a Local Government Association

## 1 The purpose of advocacy and lobbying

The purpose of *advocacy and lobbying* is to help an LGA develop its influence on particular issues in the interest of better local government. *Advocacy and lobbying* mean representing the interests of local government to central governments and other stakeholders, and mean protecting the rights of local governments. We are talking about a core function of LGAs.

Objectives that the LGA wants to achieve, can be achieved more effectively if the LGA lobbies the right people and builds coalitions of people and organisations that have a mutual interest. These might range from a concerted attack on truancy in schools to the protection of a particular geographic area.

The LGA needs to push forward its arguments, based on knowledge and understanding: knowledge of the real needs, capacities and limitations of local governments, and understanding of the perceptions of central governments and other stakeholders, as well as the reasons behind these perceptions.

In a process of decentralisation, *advocacy and lobbying* should be developed as a foremost function. Local governments need functions and resources to be a proper local government. They need to make themselves felt and heard. This is a continuing process. Central governments do not easily give up their powers, competences and . . . budgets.

Central governments must be persuaded; they will not be bullied; weak arguments and mere assertions will bounce back. Advocacy and lobbying is about knowledge and persuasion.

## 2 Advocacy-lobbying: two components of one process

Although most people use the words *advocacy and lobbying* interchangeably, both are components of one process designed to achieve a goal. It is important to understand that you cannot lobby unless you have an advocacy position or a cause. But there is a distinction that is helpful to understand.

**Advocacy** can be defined as an act or process of advancing a cause. It is also a way of pleading for a particular crusade or movement, supporting a local autonomy movement or promoting the notion of political accountability.

**Lobbying** can be defined as conducting activities designed to influence legislation. In the interest of LGAs, lobbying in this case will be directed to members of a legislative body whereby lawmakers and public servants will be influenced towards desired actions or results. Influencing the legislation process does not only mean to push forward what the LGA wants (*active lobbying*). Sometimes it is necessary during a legislative process to try to change directions of certain developments or even to try to stop them (*reactive lobbying*).

Generally it could be said that advocacy is **strategic**, while lobbying is **tactical**.

The distinction between advocacy and lobbying is not always easy to describe and in most cases this does not matter. But it is important to keep the definitions in mind in countries where laws limit the lobbying activities of an LGA.

### **CASE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND A NEW CONSTITUTION IN KENYA**

When the Kenyan central government started a constitutional review process in 2002, ALGAK – the Association of Local Government Authorities of Kenya – started its lobby well prepared as it had already developed its position on the local government, approved by its members, together with research on the cost of devolution. ALGAK presented these to the Minister for Local Government and the Constitution Review Committee. By mid-2005 a first version of the new Constitution was ready, compiled on the basis of a lengthy and participatory process. This version included the entire ALGAK position. When this version went before Parliament, it underwent hasty rewriting by a hired consultant and little or nothing of the ALGAK position remained. Later that year the proposed new Constitution of Kenya was rejected in a national referendum. Since then ALGAK has continued to lobby for an amended Local Government Act. Although at first the Ministry for Local Government did not want to use the ALGAK input, it later invited ALGAK to present its suggestions, which remain identical to the ones put forward for the new Constitution. This Local Government Act Preliminary Bill will most probably be presented to Parliament before the December 2007 elections. The fact that ALGAK had a well-prepared position including financial consequences of devolution convinced central politicians to reconsider.

### **3 Engaging members in the process**

Involvement of the LGA's members in the advocacy and lobbying process can enhance the work to be done. The LGA can benefit by engaging members both in the internal positioning and externally in the work with stakeholders.

Harnessing the networks and trusted relationships of members can multiply the

impact of LGA campaigns. This can be accomplished by utilising a variety of experience and expertise to add depth and concrete examples to the content and the positioning of the LGA in the advocacy/lobbying process.

Where the LGA has initiated proposals for new policy or legislation, it should show that they have been developed in cooperation with the members of the LGA. This will strongly reflect the real interests of local government and increase the legitimacy of the proposals. For bringing together the different perspectives of its membership, the LGA can use several mechanisms. Examples are Policy Committees, research, consultation processes and participation of members in formal procedures.

Be aware of differences of opinions inside the association! They should be sorted out as far as possible before they become a part of the dialogue with central government or others. Where consensus is not possible, the LGA leadership will have to make its own judgement in the public interest. Sometimes it is even better to leave such issues to the government.

Additional advantages stem from the added coherence and alignment that engaging with members brings.

### **CASE ADKASI: REGULATING THE FEES OF COUNCIL MEMBERS**

**ADKASI is the local government association that represents the interests of elected council members in Kabupaten – district or county areas that are not cities. There are 351 such councils. ADKASI is one of five local government associations (LGAs) in Indonesia, three representing executive officers, (governors of provinces, mayors of cities, and bupati of Kabupaten) and two are comprised of elected councillors. Council members received fees and allowances, by virtue of regulation PP2000/11. This was, on the one hand, considered by council members to be both unclear and ungenerous, and by others to be unclear and overgenerous!**

**ADKASI membership resolved to seek to clarify the regulation, and to ensure that it represented a fair recompense for the work of a councillor.**

**The LGAs convened a joint residential workshop to prepare a new draft regulation, which was then followed by representations to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) that has responsibility in Indonesia for the regulation of local government. MOHA prepared a new draft decree based upon the representations made by the Associations. This led to the regulation 37 of 2006 that provided for new 'generous' allowances for members, effectively retroactive to the beginning of 2006. This represented a success of advocacy by ADKASI and its partners.**

**The public reaction, however, was one of anger and led to heated debates within the media, creating a serious risk of the regulation being repealed.**

This is the period when ADKASI increased its active lobbying. The Association managed to lobby the media for more balanced reporting, including the publication of ADKASI members' perspectives, organising events that included the invitation of hostile speakers, and publishing the opinions of activists in its newsletter, with the purpose of sharing different views. It also organised a mass lobby of the Indonesian parliament (DPR) to express the views of councillors, with significant media attention. Although dealing with an issue creating hostility, it succeeded in raising its profile and 'making its case'.

The ultimate result was the annulment of the regulation, and its replacement with an acceptable alternative – regulation 21 of 2007. It created several categories of allowance and removed the retrospection. However, it achieved the original objective of clarifying and increasing allowances.

The key actions involved were these:

- Moving from advocacy to active lobbying as a result of events;
- Persuasion and communication;
- Involving different local government associations;
- Understanding the political dynamic and using the appropriate arena; and
- Using advocacy coalitions.

For further information, contact: [www.adkasi.org](http://www.adkasi.org)

#### 4 Persuasion, communication and strategic planning

As said before, central government must be persuaded and influenced. Weak arguments and mere assertions will bounce back: *advocacy and lobbying* is about knowledge and persuasion. Persuasion depends on good communication.

A good **Advocacy Strategy** identifies the issues that are important for the LGA to advocate and the tactics to be used. A good **Communication Strategy** will enhance an LGA's ability to communicate its advocacy. As communication is now recognised as a key element in the management of an LGA, it is important to be aware that efficient communication is more than a simple transfer of information. It must be bi-directional and open to exchanges and feedback. The Advocacy and Communication strategies together will enhance the LGA's ability to exercise its national influence<sup>2</sup>.

The Advocacy Strategy and the Communication Strategy are not only related to each other, but both are also management tools related to the LGA's overall

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<sup>2</sup> See the VNG International publication: *Developing a Communication Strategy for a Local Government Association*.

**Strategic Planning.** Strategic planning specifies the tasks and objectives the organisation seeks to accomplish (the vision and the mission of the organisation) and these must be gradually realised. Generally speaking, an LGA can only perform effectively and efficiently on the condition that there is clear and common agreement on the strategic planning<sup>3</sup>.

If an LGA is able to combine coherently these three aspects of its outreach, using all the knowledge and the persuasion at its disposal, the results will be far stronger. Coherence and cooperation are essential as described in the next sections.

## **5 A Local Government Association has only one face**

Advocacy policy and decision making is reserved for the Board of the LGA. Operational responsibilities related to the achievement of strategic objectives and goals must be allocated to the Executive Director and his staff.

Therefore it is of the greatest importance that the LGA shows one face in its appearance to the outside world. It is the responsibility of both the Board and the Executive Director to assure this.

For people confronted with different representatives of an LGA and for various reasons by the same LGA, it must be clear and recognisable that the 'sender' is the same. Therefore a 'one-face policy' is indispensable. This 'one-face policy' has to be the responsibility of the LGA's leadership and executive management.

## **6 Various Local Government Associations in one country?**

Should various LGAs in one country lobby with differing points of view and with no co-ordination, they considerably diminish their effectiveness. The separate voices may represent different political parties, different personalities, different geographical areas or different local size (e.g., cities / villages). To leave it to central government to distinguish among the different voices is to give the central government an excuse to do nothing.

Where there are several LGAs in a country, serious consideration should be given to bringing them together, whether in a single organisation or a federation, in the interests of a united local government. Local government must speak with one powerful voice!

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<sup>3</sup> See the VNG International publication: *Strategic Planning in a Local Government Association*.

## CASE IMPROVING RELATIONS IN MOLDOVA

Concerning the relations between central and local government in Moldova, there were several obstacles that caused misunderstandings in communication. This was also reflected in legislation concerning local government. A complex political situation had to be tackled.

The **first** objective was to improve communication and cooperation among the six Moldovan Local Government Associations in order to approach national government and parliament with 'one clear message'. After meetings of representatives of the associations and two parliamentary commissions, a coordinating group of associations was established. Regular contact between the parliament and the steering group could now begin. The next (but far more difficult) step was to establish a similar relationship with the government.

A **second** objective for the coordinating group was to deliberate about improving communication between the Local Government Associations and their membership. This required an enormous effort and longer term planning because the associations were not by any measure strong organisations. Not only a lack of money for means and staff, but also the fact that many mayors were members of more than one association for political and regional reasons, caused a widespread duplication of effort by the associations.

### 7 Understand the political dynamic and arena

A sound understanding of the political, social and economic dynamic is essential to crafting an effective advocacy or lobbying effort. It is essential to recognise the full picture of proceedings, interests, responsibilities and channels of influence and how these relate to each other. This applies not only to the external environment, but also within the LGA itself, where there may be different perspectives to reconcile, arising from political or other interests.

Understanding this web allows efforts of the LGA to be focused and results to be maximised. Modern policy making is no longer linear. To be truly effective the LGA needs to relate to the interests of the full range of stakeholders and use multiple points of entry.

## **CASE THE IMPORTANCE OF ANALYSING THE POLITICAL CONTEXT: THE DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PACT IN PANAMA**

### **CASE STUDY OF A SUCCESSFUL ALLIANCE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY**

A useful tool in political negotiations and one that increases the influence of a Local Government Association is the creation of strategic alliances with other actors who have credibility and who have the same objectives. However, in order for this to happen, it is essential that the Local Government Association has the capacity to continuously analyse the political context, to use such tools as 'maps of actors' and to prepare political and lobbying strategies and plans.

Decentralisation in Panama began around 1997. In that year, the Civil Society Assembly, together with UNDP representatives in Panama, agreed to prepare a long-term 'Vision for the Nation'. The political parties later joined this initiative. The process produced a plan called 'National Vision 2020', which set out a consensual vision on many issues, including that of decentralisation. The interesting thing about the pact is that it allowed civil society to make the issue its own and, together with politicians, to sign the national agreement, which provided a basis for starting the process of decentralisation.

Still in June 2001, a National Congress of Mayors and Town Councillors highlighted the limited progress achieved regarding the commitments made in the implementation of the National Vision 2020 agenda. But in 2004 the pressure from the Local Government Association and civil society resulted in the draft of a constitutional reform that was then introduced. It incorporated decentralisation as part of the government programme. Combined with other changes to the structure of local government and the development and implementation of the Programme for Municipal Capacity Building and Decentralisation, implemented by the Ministry of Economy and Finance, this reform clearly showed that the country has finally found a way forward in the field of political decentralisation.

The Local Government Association AMUPA and the National Coordination for Decentralisation and Local Development continue to play an important role in facilitating political decentralisation. These organisations act as mediators between central and local government on the issue of decentralisation.

## **8 Developing legitimacy**

Where an LGA has initiated proposals for new policy or legislation, it should be able to show how the proposals have been developed to reflect the real interests of local government. This will give such proposals greater legitimacy. And legitimacy brings authority along with it!

The LGA's research function can be particularly important so that legitimacy is not undermined by poorly researched arguments. Legitimacy is also enhanced by the sense of responsibility with which such issues are negotiated. Where the LGA achieves its negotiating objectives, it must take responsibility for the outcome. Effective negotiations require good faith on both sides. Nothing is worse than winning the argument and doing nothing about it subsequently.

### **CASE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION OF ZAMBIA'S (LGAZ) PARTICIPATION IN THE 10TH EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT FUNDING PROGRAMMING**

The revised text of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) signed between the African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) states and the European Union (EU) in 2005 clearly recognises local governments (LGs) as key agents of development that should participate in all aspects of development cooperation, i.e., programming, formulation, implementation and evaluation of the ACP-EU development policies.

The case of the Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ) started in early 2006 at the beginning of the Tenth European Development Funding programming exercise. At that point, the ACP Local Government Platform advised LGAs to contact the National Authorising Officer (NAO) and the Delegation of the European Commission (EC) of their country in order to participate in the dialogue taking place in each ACP country, a discussion of the strategies and programmes of ACP-EU cooperation under the Tenth EDF (2008-2013). LGAZ sent a first letter to the NAO explaining their willingness to be involved in the programming process. They received a negative response explaining that although local governments are recognised as important agents of development, there is no provision predicted for them in the future EDF. With this information the ACP Platform contacted the EC headquarters and the ACP Secretariat and complained that if in theory local governments are encouraged to be involved in the cooperation process, in practice they are still excluded from the process. The Platform requested therefore that official parties inform the NAOs/EC Delegations of the new provision foreseen for local government and to send a strong political signal to the latter to make a change in attitude. In the meantime LGAZ sent a formal letter to the EC delegation. Not much later LGAZ was formally invited by the EC Delegation to have a first meeting. Various points were agreed upon during the meeting, including these: the LGAZ will be involved in all future meetings of the Tenth EDF programming; consideration will be made to extend EDF support to local government through the focal areas relating to district infrastructure and the non-focal sectors of agriculture and food security; consideration will also be made of support to selected urban local governments with respect to appropriate planning and upgrading road infrastructure; also the EC will support good governance and in particular decentralisation. Lastly, both parties agreed that the LGAZ will be given support to lobby for increased allocation of budget resources to local government funded from the EU direct budget support.

As a result, the LGAZ is now fully involved in all meetings related to the Tenth EDF exercise. Their comments on the Country Strategy Paper have been taken into account in the finalisation of the document. Shortly the LGAZ will be invited to another meeting with the Delegation to discuss possible specific areas of assistance from which they could benefit in the decentralisation implementation process.

The LGAZ case has served as a stimulus to other national associations which contacted the ACP Platform in order to secure similar support. Some of them have begun the process and are on the right track to get similar results.

## 9 Partnership with Central Government

An LGA must develop its policy and legislative proposals and seek to influence central government. This might include the following:

- Next steps in decentralising competencies and resources;
- Proposals for new legislation;
- Employment of local government officials;
- Raising standards in service provision;
- Joint action (for example, poverty).

An LGA needs to understand the perspectives of central government to make any dialogue as constructive as possible. Most governments would welcome the idea of working in partnership with the LGA to improve local government. In partnership with a good LGA, a Government would achieve more than it could have done alone.

There is a mutual interest in introducing new policies and legislation more effectively where these serve interests of local government. While central government and the LGA will have their own agendas, it is important to find common ground.

For example, a new policy or piece of legislation can be preceded by targeted training for those in local governments responsible for its implementation. This can be better achieved where there is good dialogue between the parties.

Early consultation on draft proposals for new policy or legislation by either side is evidence of effective dialogue. In some countries this kind of partnership works well and is sometimes underpinned by a Cooperative Agreement.

Such partnership can operate, for example, through bi-monthly meetings, LGA participation in decentralisation commissions and Parliamentary committees, and participation of the government in the LGA's General Assembly and relevant committees.

Partnership between local and central governments in the interest of better local governance should be welcomed.

## CASE THE IMPORTANCE OF USING ELECTIONS TO PROMOTE A CAUSE: THE NATIONAL PACT FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN GUATEMALA

The use of elections to promote a cause is a real art form and the following example shows how a carefully prepared plan for strategic negotiation can take advantage of the windows of opportunity provided by elections.

In 2006, the National Association of Guatemalan Municipalities (ANAM) began to lobby for the introduction of a **National Local Development Pact**. In February 2007, VNG International formed, together with ANAM, a strategic alliance since both sought to promote political conditions favourable to obtaining political party support for local government and decentralisation. Toward this end, they drafted a Strategic Plan for Political Negotiation. VNG/ANAM began to make contact with the mid-level structures and activists of all the political parties, in order to broaden their scope for making proposals during the electoral period. In the end, this was reflected in the number of government programmes for municipal government presented at the elections (11 of the 15 parties). This political lobbying and creation of negotiating forums also led to raising the issue of decentralisation in specific inter-party forums.

In November, 2007, VNG/ANAM managed to persuade the two remaining candidates to sign a **Charter for Local and Municipal Development** aimed at the local government representatives elected in the first round of the elections.

In the context of the commitments set out in the Charter, Alvaro Colóm's victory in the presidential election was followed by intense lobbying of the new president's team to persuade it to publicly announce a Guatemalan Local Development Pact as a joint central government and ANAM initiative.

The **Declaration of Commitment to Local Development** was the historic expression of the political will shown by the country's main political forces, the government and the representatives of municipal governments, which have an essential role in the democratic governance in Guatemala.

We can learn various things from the Guatemalan experience:

- a Elections present an unbeatable window of opportunity in which to exert public pressure on candidates to sign agreements that promote decentralisation and municipal development (the importance of choosing the right political moment).
- b The political parties should see themselves as essential actors. As far as possible, we must find ways to achieve a permanent dialogue with them.
- c The achievement of a political objective cannot be accomplished in the short term and is not a question of "all or nothing". On the contrary, the pact in Guatemala required a constant investment of time over 18 months, working first with the political parties, then with the candidates, then with the finalists in the second round and finally with the president-elect. It is important to

continue to exert pressure and to maintain a robust presence during the period in question.

- d It is impossible to take an 'individual' path in politics. The pact in Guatemala was achieved because ANAM finally agreed to promote it as a joint effort with the central government, with both 'sharing the glory'. Prior to 2008, all ANAM's efforts to get the pact signed, as an exclusively municipal action, had failed.
- e It is important to take into account that the issues under negotiation are constantly changing in accordance with political developments. During the campaign, there were no negotiations with the presidential candidate, but once he was elected, negotiations took place with the most influential advisers in his team. It would be difficult for the president to be directly involved in these negotiations, not because he was uninterested but simply as a practical political matter.
- f It is important to depend on the assistance of a 'third objective actor' that can add an element of 'impartiality' to the process. At the end of the day, the pact in Guatemala was signed thanks to the efforts, mediation and continuous assistance of VNG. It had a certain degree of 'neutrality', which earned the trust of actors and encouraged them to sit down at the table, to negotiate and finally to sign.

## 10 Advocacy coalitions

Coalitions with other organisations can be valuable in supporting particular objectives in the Advocacy Strategy. To influence lawmakers, a coalition can be a useful contribution to finding agreement and increasing the LGA's voice. Coalitions can be formed for a short or for a longer process.

An important question that a coalition asks at the beginning is this: is the power of the coalition significantly stronger than the addition of the individual powers of the intended coalition partners?

Tensions in a coalition can easily arise, as each member of a coalition has its own interests and priorities. Tensions should be managed rather than ignored; the issues should be addressed constructively so that conflict is avoided or at least does not begin to dominate.

Coalitions can operate at less formal or more formal levels; greater effectiveness is often achieved by the less formal structures:

- Networks – organisations do not meet but share information;
- Ad hoc structure – where one organisation takes the lead but with no formal structure.

A more formal structure is a structure with membership criteria, meetings and even staff members being part of the coalition.

Coalitions can also create a stronger public image, bring together ideas and resources, avoid duplication and save energy. They can link groups at community, regional and national levels. They can bring newer advocates together with more experienced ones so that expertise and commitment can be shared.

### **CASE ADVOCACY TO IMPROVE MUNICIPAL PROPERTY OWNERSHIP IN SERBIA**

In Serbia most municipal property is still owned by the State under the Law of Assets. This reduces the capacity of municipalities to promote local economic development.

The Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM) worked with the local private sector to launch a practical and innovative research and advocacy campaign. The research revealed the extent of the consequent economic loss: it was some 1.3 billion Euros nationwide over a 10-year period. The research also predicted continuing losses of 100 million Euros for each year in the future unless the law was amended.

The figures were difficult to ignore. Local stakeholders and the media were interested. At SCTM's following Annual Conference, a large counter in the hall added 4 Euros to the 1.3 billion Euros every second to show the scale of the continuing loss. This display was eye-catching and various speakers drew attention to this long-neglected problem.

While the SCTM was awaiting amendments to the Law, the Conference already knew it had broken new ground. The issue did not fade away and the pressure intensified for action to be taken. Amendments were made and successfully passed Parliament a year later.

## 2 The Advocacy Strategy

### 1 Content of the strategy

An Advocacy Strategy for a Local Government Association involves the following elements:

- 1 Aims and objectives
- 2 Initiatives to launch
- 3 Target audience
- 4 Existing resources, experience and connections of the Local Government Association
- 5 Which messages for which audiences
- 6 Who delivers these messages and in what way
- 7 Timing of delivery of the messages
- 8 How to launch the strategy
- 9 Permanent monitoring of the progress
- 10 Permanent evaluation of monitoring results
- 11 (If necessary) change of approach

### 2 Outward-looking and inward-looking dimensions

An Advocacy Strategy has an outward-looking and an inward-looking dimension:

- The **outward-looking dimension** specifies the aims and objectives that the LGA is seeking to achieve through advocacy and lobbying and how it will achieve them. What are the issues for which the LGA must lead the advocacy?

The Strategy should show how the LGA will launch initiatives, draw people in and sustain the effort over time. The target audience needs to be clearly identified and tactics for persuading them need to be resolved. What messages do they need to hear? Who will best deliver messages? What will be the best means of delivery?

- The **inward-looking dimension** of the Advocacy Strategy will consider the LGA's existing resources, experience and connections on which to build. Do not start from scratch; build on what you have. How should the Strategy be launched? How will consensus be defined? How will progress be monitored? Evaluation is important. It may be necessary to make changes to the approach if the Strategy is not working properly.

### 3 Monitoring the process

It is essential that a close watch be kept on political proceedings and audiences outside the immediate political arena.

#### Monitoring

- Provides for opportunities for input into policymaking;
- Allows for a reaction to statements made about the LGA which may have an impact on the LGA's reputation;
- Keeps you up to date with developments relevant to your strategy; and
- Provides a record of the decisions taken by parliament, government and other stakeholders.

It is imperative that early warning systems are established. Through a comprehensive monitoring system, the LGA can identify the policy or legislation that will affect local government. The earlier this is spotted, the earlier its impact can be assessed and the earlier something can be done about it.

Monitoring, eyes and ears of the organisation should include websites, media, press releases, speeches etc, and provides for the raw materials upon which successful advocacy and lobbying activities can be based.

#### **CASE THE IMPORTANCE OF PERMANENT POLITICAL MONITORING: THE CASE OF VISION COLOMBIA 2019**

**A Local Government Association must be ready to take advantage of the opportunities that arise for advancing its political agenda.**

In Colombia a process of decentralisation has since the 1960s promoted a change from a centralised to a decentralised state, and significant progress in decentralisation has been made. Despite this progress, sub-national territorial units have very different capacities to make the most of their powers. Many obstacles stop them taking advantage of the economies of scale and therefore hampering the local development processes.

Precisely for this reason the government of President Alvaro Uribe laid the foundations for the launch of an ambitious national development plan called 'Vision Colombia 2019: the Centenary'. This plan aimed to establish a framework for political negotiation and consensus that would allow the country to achieve a profoundly democratic political model and an inclusive social economic model.

But despite the political will of the government to extend the process of decentralisation and the major political and operational advances, it lagged behind in the field of economic decentralisation, which is the main intent of the plan.

The Colombian Federation of Municipalities took the opportunity to put forward amendments to the plan and fully participated in the political negotiations that took place during the consultation period. It was recognised as a valid interlocutor, even though this was a central government and not a municipal initiative. In this way, municipal action promoted the inclusion of a major focus on local government in the government's proposals for a national development plan.

This case shows that politics often presents opportunities to advance the basic agendas of the municipal sector at the highest political level, but that it is very difficult for a Local Government Association to be in a position to negotiate successfully.

#### 4 Research

The Advocacy Strategy and activities must be built on good research. Arguments supporting positions must be objective, comprehensive and robust. The LGA must know what it is talking about and must be able to make its case at the highest levels and in challenging circumstances.

The LGA should be capable of preparing and reviewing draft legislation. It could, for example, analyse the impact of local governments on public resource flows; or set out the training implications of forthcoming legislation. This requires a capacity of the LGA to analyse issues, assess options and prepare recommendations.

Research adds necessary legitimacy to policy and legislative proposals. A good LGA will avail itself of its research capacity to do the following:

- Identify and understand best practice;
- Consult local governments through surveys and targeted interviews to develop quantitative and qualitative findings;
- Use formal committees of the LGA to consider policy papers and make recommendations;
- Consult NGOs and other stakeholders systematically.

The LGA should develop its own research capacity to provide intellectual support throughout the organisation. It should also seek to build connections with other research institutions such as universities and policy centres in order to both expand their research capacity and to bring in partners that can support them in meeting the challenges of decentralisation.

## **CASE INITIATIVE FOR A PROPOSED LAW ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCES IN SERBIA**

The Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM) took the initiative to prepare and to propose a bill for Local Government Finances and to negotiate with the Ministry of Finance to take it forward in a legislative package. Later this was adopted by central government.

The SCTM began by conducting a number of detailed studies on such issues as tax rates, fees and charges. These provided the foundation for the proposed law; the SCTM was consulted every step of the way and liaised extensively with the central government and its members, especially the members of its Committee on Budget and Finance.

The law marks a significant change in the system of intergovernmental financial relations. It greatly enhances the predictability, transparency and equitability of local government finances. The most significant innovation has been transforming property tax into an important source of revenue for local governments and transferring the collection functions to the local level. The tax will become an effective tool for local economic development.

The lesson is that the SCTM did not wait to comment on draft legislation from the Finance Ministry, but rather first presented a draft to the Ministry as a platform for future negotiations. This demonstrates that a proactive Local Government Association can have a decisive impact on legislation that affects local government.

### **5 Analysing the arena**

A sound understanding of the political, social and economic dynamic is essential to crafting an effective advocacy or lobbying effort. It is essential to recognise the full picture of proceedings, interests, responsibilities and channels of influence and how these relate to each other.

Understanding this web allows efforts to be focused and results to be maximised. To be truly effective, the LGA needs to convey to its policy the full range of stakeholder interests and use multiple points of entry.

For each selected aim of the advocacy and lobbying process, the LGA must identify the relevant stakeholders before it begins action. A complete inventory should be made of the own organisation, government officials, parliamentarians, other organisations, interest groups, etc. The list is not biased towards only friends or enemies or towards only formal entities.

Consider a checklist of the relevant parties and the action required. A suggested model is annexed, together with a possible planning template.

The identified stakeholders must be assessed in terms of relevance. To be relevant means here 'expected to intervene actively and to possess sufficient influence capability to become effective.' Stakeholders are placed along two continua: one ranging from expected to be active to passive and the other from strong to weak in terms of ability to act. Find out by what interest every stakeholder is driven and what position is probably taken in the arena.

The analysis will make clear the strength (or weakness) of the LGA's position and will also show who could be a potential partner (or enemy).

*(See also paragraph 10 on Advocacy coalition in Chapter 1)*

## **6 Strategic contact programme**

A contact programme should be prepared by the LGA to enter the arena and to contact the other stakeholders. With a thorough analysis of the players in the advocacy and lobby arena, indications for the contact programme will be provided.

If the circumstances look positive, the LGA can confine itself to keeping the supporting stakeholders on board and, if possible, even to arrange a 'free ride.' If, on the other hand, the circumstances are negative, then it is best to approach the most important opponents in order to divide, if possible, the opposition and also some of the waverers in order to get them on board.

If the arena is undetermined, then it is rational to approach the most primary stakeholder(s) as either wavering or indifferent (or perhaps are just giving this impression). A little bit of argumentation and negotiation can secure support of your aims.

## **7 Content for contacting**

In essence, you are making contact with those who are making, or who can influence, an outcome or decision. Before entering the playing field, answers to the following essential questions must be prepared:

- What is exactly the change the LGA proposes to make in relation to current policies?
- Where in the decision making process is the relevant policy guideline? Knowing where it is will help you to decide with whom you need to engage.
- What is the LGA's goal?
- What outcome do you want?
- How do you convince that a change is needed?
- What do you need to be able to prove the LGA's case?
- What is your message?

Always be prepared for a potential consequence of your effort!

## CASE IMPROVING THE VNG LOBBY OF THE DUTCH PARLIAMENT

Until 2006 the Association of the Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) communicated with the Netherlands Parliament mostly by letter. In 2006 VNG came to the conclusion that this was an insufficient and too anonymous form of communication. By using this method, the name of the organisation was well-known among Members of Parliament but VNG's capabilities and activities remained unknown. Consequently VNG let opportunities slip away because it lacked proper contacts with Members of Parliament, the political tier, that were needed to improve the position of VNG in negotiations with the civil servants, the executive tier, of the Ministerial Departments. Hence VNG should commit itself more to lobbying Parliament and less to writing reports. Lobbying is the key to greater success.

At the same time the VNG staff members need to realize that approaching a Member of Parliament is important when trying to lobby. These contacts are far more easily made and maintained than we often think. It is important to know the persons involved and to let them know whom they can approach at VNG for certain topics related to local government issues. It is also important which topics are within the purview of each Member of Parliament, so that a particular file can be matched with the right Member of Parliament. When starting a certain lobbying activity on a certain topic, the best way to approach a Member of Parliament is through his or her personal assistant. During a first contact, obtain this necessary information from the Member of Parliament: on which subject does the Member want to profile himself? After this initial contact has been made the VNG staff member will no longer hesitate to contact a Member of Parliament when something happens in Parliament which is of importance to VNG. Also VNG offers Members of Parliament a yearly breakfast session the day after the annual budget has been presented by the Cabinet of Ministers, another excellent and informal lobbying opportunity for VNG staff members.

### 8 Timing of the fieldwork

Enter the arena as early as possible to prearrange the playing field and take the lead, is an old adage that is quite often worthwhile. But an early player is also visible at an early stage and can be bypassed by slower starters.

Successful timing is always a difficult balance between being not too early and not too late. Timing depends on the situation and has to be considered before each action. Time schedules of proceedings can change due to politics or slowing down for practical reasons.

Always be flexible and prepared to adjust your planning.

## **CASE MUAN: ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING FOR RESTRUCTURING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF STATE RESTRUCTURING**

The Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN) is one of three local government associations (LGAs) in Nepal. It represents the interests of its fifty-eight members who comprise the urban municipalities of Nepal. The other two LGAs are NAVIN that represents rural villages, and ADDCN that represent rural districts.

Following a period of armed conflict, elections were held to establish a Constituent Assembly, whose function was to review and create a new constitution for the Republic of Nepal. Because of the far-reaching nature of its remit, it seemed unlikely that the Constituent Assembly would turn its attention to the issue of local government for some considerable time after it had started sitting. Nonetheless, given a long period of local government without the legitimacy of local elections, and the need to protect the interests of local government during the hiatus, the three local government associations advocated a provisional local self-government law to provide security for local government in the interim.

The mechanisms adopted included these:

- A national consultation workshop, chaired by MuAN, including representatives of the political parties, the government, all three LGAs and concerned stakeholders in the field of governance. It examined achievements and weaknesses to date, and drafted proposals concerning the provision of local government in an interim constitution, and the future structure of local governance.
- A workshop on the Constituent Assembly and restructuring of the state organised by NAVIN, but including ADDCN and MuAN, with the objective of preparing common proposals on the role of the Assembly, and the restructuring of the state.

This shared work led to a joint Briefing Paper from all three LGAs, that was submitted to the interim constitution drafting committee, a parliamentary group, and the recommendations were included in Part 17 of the interim constitution of Nepal 2007.

This example shows the importance of these:

- Engaging LGA members in the process
- Creating a coalition of all LGAs in a single country
- Working in partnership with central government
- The importance of advocacy coalitions.

For further information, contact: [muan@ntc.net.np](mailto:muan@ntc.net.np)

## 9 Responsibility

The responsibility for developing and delivering the Advocacy Strategy must be clear. The Executive Director will play a key role as the objectives of the Strategy will reflect the issues seen as important by the LGA's Board. The messages must be seen to be coming from the heart of local government itself and must also appeal to the self-interest of the audience.

There should be no doubt within the LGA as to who are the authorised spokespersons who can speak or negotiate on behalf of the LGA. It is essential to identify them to ensure unity of purpose and clarity of message. Generally this would include senior members, together with the relevant officials, who should be nominated at the outset.

It is the responsibility of the Executive Director to base the Advocacy Strategy on the LGA's Strategic Planning and to connect the Strategy with the LGA's Communication Strategy.

## 10 Template for the Advocacy Strategy

### LOOKING OUTWARD

#### Objectives

- Distinguish short and long term goals
- What policy changes are sought?
- How to build consensus around initiatives?

#### Audiences

- Who has the authority to deliver change?
- Who can influence those with authority?

#### Messages

- How to craft the messages to make them persuasive?
- Are the messages rooted in the same basic truth?
- Are the messages tailored to different audiences?

#### Messengers

- One message can have different impacts depending on the messenger.
- Who are the most credible messengers for different audiences?
- Which messages require technical expertise or personal experience?
- What information or training do the messengers need?

#### Delivery

- What would be the best mix of methods to deliver the message in a specific situation?
- Tactics can range from gentle lobbying to direct action.
- What would be the best mix of methods for a given situation?

## LOOKING INWARD

### Resources

What is available from past advocacy work, alliances, staff and other people's capacity, information and political intelligence?  
Does the budget match the demand?

### Gaps

Take stock of current resources.  
Identify additional resources you may need – alliances to be built, capacities to be developed, such as links with the media or research to be undertaken.

### First efforts

Set goals that would bring the appropriate people together  
Try to succeed early: something achievable that lays the groundwork for the next step.

### Monitoring

Do the messages reach the target? Do the messages need to be amended?  
Does each alliance contribute something?  
Is the media listening?

### Evaluation

Are corrections necessary? Discard what does not work.

## Key Messages

- The LGA must equally develop its information, networking and service functions in order to generate widespread understanding and support for local government and to build capacity among local governments.
- Advocacy is about knowledge and persuasions; central government must be persuaded, not begged.
- Advocacy is not one-way; it is about negotiating. Negotiations carry future obligations on both sides; the LGA must also take responsibility for the outcome of the negotiations.
- The most powerful advocacy comes from coalitions that the LGA builds in support of local government.
- Good advocacy requires good communication. Therefore the Advocacy Strategy should be supported by the Communication Strategy. Both strategies have to be linked to the LGA's overall Strategic Planning.
- Speaking to central government with one voice is more powerful than babble; the LGA needs transparent mechanisms to create its legitimate voice.
- The Advocacy Strategy must build on good research and policy analysis.
- The LGA should understand the points of view of the central government well.
- The LGA should be respected enough to work in partnership with central government to deliver good local government.
- A good LGA will have its own mechanisms for bringing together the different perspectives of its members.

# The Golden Rules for Advocacy and Lobbying

- Know how policy and decisions are made.
- Consider your alliances and coalitions.
- Have a permanent monitoring system so you know what is happening.
- Become involved early in the process
- Explore the arena and ensure that you know who the key people are.
- Be clear about what you ask
- Pre-empt how you may be argued against and build your defence.
- Tailor your messages depending on whom you are approaching.
- Be flexible in your planning.

# Pitfalls in Advocacy and Lobbying

## Self-Assessment

Consider how much your LGA suffers from the pitfalls below.  
For any failure, consider what action might be taken to reduce it.

| 20 pitfalls in Advocacy and Lobbying by an LGA  | Is this a common occurrence (Y/N) | Action... |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failing to define a policy issue clearly</li> <li>• Failing to identify the specific audience</li> <li>• Domination of policy formulation by outspoken members</li> <li>• Divisive politicisation of policy issues</li> <li>• Aggressive stance towards central government</li> <li>• Policy positions that are only reactive and do not introduce new ideas</li> <li>• Isolation of the LGA through lack of consultation with stakeholders</li> <li>• Insufficient involvement of member local governments</li> <li>• Lack of interest by Board and Management for Advocacy and Lobbying Strategy activities</li> <li>• Failing to establish advocacy and communication strategies</li> <li>• Allowing policy to become out of date</li> <li>• Leaving policy 'on the shelf' and not implementing it</li> <li>• Lack of coordination of external contacts by LGA staff</li> <li>• Striving to do everything at once and losing focus</li> <li>• Not having permanent channels of communication with the local government ministry and with parliament</li> <li>• Thinking too much from your own perspective without the aim of a win-win outcome</li> <li>• Using a wish-list approach without the confidence of being a strong partner in government</li> <li>• Not working with strategic allies</li> <li>• Spending too much time in discussion rather than taking action</li> <li>• Certain members being allowed to use the LGA to promote their own interests</li> </ul> |                                   |           |

# Checklist

- What is the issue?
- What is the Association's objective?
- What is the desired outcome?
- What is an acceptable outcome?
- Which Commission?
- Which experts?
- Data and research needs?
- Who are potential partners?
- What resources are needed?
- Targets for lobbying
  - Primary?
  - Secondary?
- Parliamentary contacts?
- Media contacts?
- Member feedback?
- Spokespersons?

# Template and Strategic Objectives

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**Action Plan Template**

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**Lobbying issue**

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**Purpose**

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**Desired outcome**

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**Acceptable outcome**

| Requirements               | Details     | Deadlines | Responsible | Result         |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|----------------|
| Nominate decision maker(s) | Name        | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Select experts             | Names       | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Identify data needs        | List        | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Partners                   | Names       | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Resource needs             | Budget Time | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Primary targets            | List        | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Secondary targets          | List        | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Parliamentary contacts     | Names       | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Media contacts             | List        | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Member feedback            | Specify     | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |
| Spokespersons              | Names       | Dates     | Name        | Outcome record |

# VNG International

## International co-operation agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities

*Committed to strengthening democratic local government worldwide*

The key task of VNG International is strengthening democratic local government. It is a small, dynamic company annually managing some 60 plus projects and programmes with a focus on decentralisation and capacity-building. VNG International supports local governments, their associations and training institutions in developing countries and countries in transition.

### **VNG International's approach**

For VNG International, strengthening democratic local government means working on three inter-related levels:

- The individual level – training and motivating municipal staff and elected representatives
- The organisational level – advising local governments on their organisation structures and working methods
- The institutional level – adapting financial relations, laws and institutional arrangements

The VNG International approach builds on:

- Colleague-to-colleague co-operation
- Institutional linking

'Advocacy and Lobbying by a Local Government Association' is a practical, easy-reference manual designed to help prepare for and undertake lobbying activities. It primarily targets the political and executive management of an association. The document is, however, not a blue-print. With the context of each country and the conditions of each initiative so different, approaches will surely have to be tailored to circumstance.



United Cities and Local Governments  
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