


# CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY IN UGANDA: LESSONS LEARNED

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# Table of Contents

# Foreword

Uganda has traversed tumultuous times in both its social and political life since independence in 1962. In this period, citizens and their organizations have engaged with the state in various ways to change the policies and practices of government. One major way has been through advocacy. At its core, advocacy is about ordinary citizens doing ordinary things of extraordinary importance to change their lives. While there are several advocacy case-studies in Uganda, there has been no attempt to synthesize the lessons learnt from them. In this publication we have researched and synthesized several case studies with the goal of making a practical contribution to knowledge on advocacy efforts.

The selected cases help illuminate lessons on:

- 'how to' conduct a successful campaign
- which past strategies have been most effective for different advocacy questions
- which past strategies or campaigns have not worked and why; and
- which internal and external factors (e.g., policy environment, leadership, the use of media, public opinion) contributed to the success of the advocacy effort.

The four cases are all about Uganda and all are cases that have been spearheaded by local civil society.

In these cases we see the role of advocacy in creating conditions for determining social justice, political and civil liberties, and in giving voice to citizens and historically marginalized groups. These cases teach us about the power of an individual, constituency, or organization to shape public agendas and change public policies. Indeed for broader civil society, these cases go beyond specific objectives of providing the means to mobilize society, ideas, and resources; they also show how advocacy contributes to fostering democratic change.

Although these cases teach us something, it is important to also note that the levels of political freedom and economic development obviously determine the kinds of organizations that can advocate, and the issues they advocate for. It is also understandable that in countries with weak civil societies and/or governments that are not very receptive to non-governmental influence, advocacy programs may seem less appropriate than support to service delivery CSOs. But supporting local advocacy efforts in challenging environments is still a very appropriate and important initiative for all development partners and practitioners. Even if the anticipated results are minimal, it should be underscored that even small victories can be very influential in building public confidence and encouraging citizen participation. Furthermore, advocacy efforts sometimes help prevent a situation from deteriorating by, for example, raising awareness on human rights and gender based abuses.

I would like to thank all our colleagues who kindly agreed to be interviewed for this publication. We shall not name all of them but acknowledge their efforts. And I would like to thank the Aspen Institute's Advocacy Planning and Evaluation Program for offering this overview and analysis. We hope that this publication will assist all our partners in Uganda and across the globe to learn something about advocacy from our experience here.

**Richard Ssewakiryanga**
Executive Director
Uganda National NGO Forum

# Overview

Over several decades – and with increasing intensity in recent years – the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in Uganda has participated in vigorous efforts to shape public policy. The emergence of such civil society advocacy in Uganda, as one commentator notes, reflects the growing and welcome ability of civil society "to occupy space inadvertently ignored by government." This study underscores the potential for charitable service delivery groups and rights-based organizations to bring their knowledge of real human needs to bear on the policies that constrain equitable access to services and fair treatment under law. This study analyzes cross-cutting issues and lessons learned from four cases that span a range of issues, time frames, and levels of contribution to the desired policy impact. Discussion questions following this overview and each case study may inspire deeper reflection on the role of civil society advocacy in Uganda and in other settings. Each of these cases includes a chart[1] offering an overview of the public policy strategy that advocates have pursued.

- The Save Mabira Crusade (Mabira)[2]: An intense effort from August 2006 to October 2007 helped reverse a governmental decision to give a significant tract of protected forest to an agricultural developer. The "Crusade" and its broad array of partners and tactics helped produce a surprising official retreat within 14 months, but not without the loss of lives in a demonstration that turned violent.
- The Anti-Corruption Coalition in Uganda (ACCU)[3]: Sporadic efforts prior to 1999 to address corruption in Ugandan society were formalized officially in 2004 through the ACCU and highlighted for the past 12 years by an annual Anti-Corruption Week.
- The Domestic Relations Bill (DRB)[4] advocacy campaign 1940-2011: A very long-term and so far unsuccessful effort has sought to develop and pass a sweeping domestic relations bill to address persistent gender inequalities in property, marriage and divorce law.

Members of the National Association for Professional Environmentalists meet with President Museveni concerning Mabira forest.

- Disability Advocacy in Uganda (PWD)[5]: Three efforts to improve the status of people with disabilities in Uganda, starting as early as 1970 in one case and as recently as 2005 in another, contributed to or benefited from passage of Uganda's People with Disabilities Act in 2006.

This overview identifies some broader observations about how advocacy works (or doesn't) under these quite different historical and socio-political contexts, with lessons that can be applied in Uganda and perhaps in other settings.

Our study focuses on the choices that advocates made and the contextual features that may have conditioned these choices. In our experience with many advocacy efforts in the United States and elsewhere, advocates typically make intuitive choices about their policy goal, target audience, tactics, and objectives, sometimes without fully understanding or exploring all the options available to them. This study examines key choices made by the Ugandan NGO advocates whose work is analyzed in the four cases. We describe some cross-cutting observations that might inform discussion of the cases and offer discussion questions that might promote deeper understanding of how to plan for more effective advocacy efforts in future.[6]

## Policy Objectives: What kind of policy goals did the campaigns seek to achieve?

Policy change can take many different forms, from simply drawing attention to an issue that is "off the radar" to encouraging the full funding and implementation of settled law, or preventing passage of a harmful initiative. The four campaigns examined in this study differ significantly in the types of policy objectives they pursued:

- The ACCU sought over the course of several years to shine the spotlight on various aspects of corruption in sectors like health policy, as well as broader efforts to track public sector expenditures. We might characterize this effort overall as **raising the salience** of a policy issue, that is, making the issue more visible and more politically significant to decision-makers.
- Save Mabira Crusade sought to **block a policy** – in this instance, the "de-gazetting" of a major tract within the protected Mabira forest preserve that would have permitted the conversion of national park land into a massive sugar plantation.
- The DRB effort – in fact a series of sporadic but impassioned efforts over the course of 72 years and counting – reflects primarily a concerted campaign for **policy adoption** in support of women's property rights and other basic protections.
- The three organizations highlighted in the PWD case sought to **raise the salience** of deaf-blind children and promote policy concerning road safety for blind individuals, and protection from sexual exploitation for girls and women with disabilities.

These choices appropriately reflect the range of contexts the advocates confronted. For example, the Mabira effort responded to a surprising Cabinet-level decision to give away a major tract of protected land. Blocking a policy is difficult; reversing a high-level decision is even tougher. Resistance to the Mabira campaign from the responsible Minister meant that considerable leverage was required. The advocates recognized the need for a rapid response and quickly brought together a surprising breadth of partners. Their organizing effort benefited from a relatively uncontroversial objective – saving a large tract of tropical forest – and a narrow and relatively unpopular adversary: Sugar Corporation of Uganda Limited, owned by the Mehta family.[7]

Raising the salience of an issue or an affected group, as the PWD and ACCU campaigns sought to do, often requires emphasis on public outreach through mass media and other channels. Producing significant popular pressure to overturn a settled government decision also requires effective outreach. But the choice of outreach tactics should be driven by advocates' choice of audience. The case studies suggest that this was not always the case.

## Audiences: Who needs to hear our message?

The audiences for these efforts vary significantly, but included people immediately positioned to make policy changes as well as popular constituencies quite removed from centers of power. Advocates should choose audiences and outreach strategies carefully, with an eye towards conserving resources. Advocates can never afford to reach the entire public effectively. But they must reach those with the authority to make change happen or those who can influence the decision-makers.

- The ACCU case study focuses primarily on its ten-year record of holding an annual Anti-Corruption Week. The focus of each week has varied from year to year, with the topic chosen collectively by the ACCU. Initially, ACCU sought to raise consciousness among members of the general public about the severity and ubiquity of corruption. It apparently did not address itself to specific decision-makers. But as it grew in breadth and recognition, Anti-Corruption Week seemed increasingly to address itself to senior government officials closest to the issue of choice; this narrowed the primary audience and may have helped advocates focus their efforts and increase their impact.
- Save Mabira Crusade addressed itself from the beginning to a relative handful of key Members of Parliament and members of the Cabinet with the authority to reverse the initial decision to give away part of the Mabira forest to an agricultural developer. At the same time, however, the campaign used multiple channels to reach broader audiences, encouraging various potentially influential constituencies to contact Ministers and Members of Parliament. Audiences included parishioners in major Ugandan churches, workers in the sugar plantations, and sugar consumers – who were urged to boycott products from the proposed beneficiary of the forest give-away.
- Over its several decades of activity, the DRB effort has sought to engage traditional leaders, jurists, parliamentarians, and members of the general public in support of expanded rights for women. In recent years, the campaign made

specific overtures to religious leaders in an effort to resolve deep differences between Uganda's Christian and Muslim citizens regarding laws governing marriage, divorce, and property. A parallel effort addressed specific Members of Parliament, sometimes via their peers, at critical moments in the process of Parliamentary review.

- The disability rights advocates engaged in the varied PWD efforts took their messages to Parliament in pursuit of special provisions within the 2006 People With Disabilities Act. But they sought as well to reach broader publics in order to reduce the stigma attached to disabilities. In addition, they asked others in the disability movement itself to ensure that the special needs of the "deaf-blind" and of girls and women were taken into account.

Campaigns may choose to focus their outreach on a narrow group of decision-makers who need to be aware of a specific concern. This can often be accomplished without the use of mass media. In some cases, nothing more than a handful of face-to-face meetings are necessary. Or advocates may choose to invest in the broader reach made possible by vernacular radio and newspapers, as well as new mobile-phone and other social media tools.

The DRB and Mabira efforts reached out to religious groups in ways consistent with their objectives. Women's rights advocates recognized that traditional understandings of marriage, divorce and property rights were defined in part by religious beliefs. Advocates sought first to reconcile different beliefs to create a common standard in national law. But in recent years, the DRB campaign was forced to accept a parliamentary decision to divide the Bill "into three: one for Muslims, another for Christians and another for the general public." The case study suggests that this split both reflected and contributed to underlying divisions in Ugandan society. As a practical matter for advocates, it meant that common, rights-based messages intended for the general public were less effective. Distinct approaches for distinct audiences were required.

Mabira campaigners focused on the Uganda Joint Christian Council as an avenue for mass mobilizations and "to evoke a spiritual appeal to the advocacy effort". Advocates spoke of the clergy's ability to deliver sermons, prayers and special appeals from the pulpit that contributed to broad popular pressure to overturn the forest give-away.

Popular outreach can broaden the constituencies speaking out for a policy change. But it can be costly to reach a national audience. And as advocates associated with the DRB conceded, a campaign that reaches out to the very poorest members of society may reach them during periods when they are facing "biting poverty and numerous hardships." The attempt to broaden the audience and support in this way for the DRB may have backfired: the case study noted that the campaign became viewed as elitist and disconnected from the daily concerns of average Ugandans who "couldn't relate the campaign with their lived realities."

The PWD efforts tried to overcome the stigma attached to people with disabilities. This necessitated some outreach to the general public. But advocates for blind Ugandans echoed the advice of many advocacy communications advisors: "it is good to target people who matter when advocating rather than targeting everybody." The PWD study also acknowledged that some of their outreach targeted others in the disability movement itself in order to overcome "strong rivalries" between categories of disabilities. Successful advocacy almost always involves multiple stakeholders pursuing different strategies. That can require coordination that creates a whole greater than the sum of its parts. And it requires overcoming such "strong rivalries."

### Activities: How do we make ourselves heard?

The four campaigns all undertook many types of advocacy activities in pursuit of their objectives. Indeed, the activities described are quite consistent over the decades – with an increasing emphasis on cell-phone and internet outreach in recent years, of course. But how did the campaigns make the most of these many activities? The Mabira campaign case study offered the most specific information about the coordination mechanism: "An Organising Committee of about twenty (20) people was formed to steer the effort." The ACCU developed a "formal coalition" in the course of several organizing meetings in 2000 and 2001 to "speak with a united voice and build synergies" in response to corruption across Uganda. In other cases, coordination may have been less formal, or perhaps less well-defined in the study.

- Mabira, DRB and ACCU involved broad multi-stakeholder coalitions carrying out multiple activities to reach multiple target audiences. Participating organizations as diverse as the Uganda Taxi Operators Association, the Kingdoms of Buganda and Busoga, the Uganda Joint Christian Council, and Irish Aid lent their sup-

port to one effort or another. The studies offer varying levels of detail about how the coalitions were managed; but all recognize that coalition governance and coordination have a significant impact on advocacy outcomes.

- The PWD advocates are all members of the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU). NUDIPU is credited with coordinating efforts to advance disability rights, but the study offers little detail about how NUDIPU did this. Instead, the PWD study highlights the specific contributions of member organizations pursuing their specific interests: recognition of the need for special services for deaf-blind individuals; better driver education to promote road safety for blind Ugandans; and more awareness of the need to protect girls and women with disabilities from sexual abuse. The efforts appear to have proceeded without coordination. But all served to some extent to advance a rights-based perspective on the needs of people with disabilities.
- Activities to engage and manage multiple partners, like meetings and conference calls and email communications in recent years, can consume valuable time for coalition members and the work of staff dedicated to this purpose. But all could be seen to build advocacy capacity that accumulated over time and – at least arguably – positioned the coalitions better to reach their policy objectives.
- Coalitional coordination would mean nothing unless the activities that the coalitions facilitate or undertake are well-chosen and effective. The case studies report a remarkably similar set of activities. Indeed, the DRB case study authors note wryly: "For the last 20-25 years within the general civil society movement, the same strategies have been used, reused and overused that include: research, demonstrations, policy papers, dialogues, workshops, trainings and media work." Among them, these campaigns employed more or less consistently some combination of petition drives, mass rallies, letters to Parliamentarians, delegation visits to government Ministers, billboards, theme song competitions, letters to the editor, community theater, radio advertisements, SMS campaigns via cell phones, and other tactical elements.
- All the campaigns made direct or indirect contact with Members of Parliament. The DRB and PWD advocates could reach out to Members who were part of the constituency directly affected by the legislation or policies advocates were promoting. Several women Members were key champions for the DRB. The 2006 People With Disabilities Act required that at least five seats in Parliament be reserved for people with disabilities. The Act makes similar provision at the regional and district level. In the case of the DRB, this access was in some ways a double-edged sword: politically powerful women provided significant advantages; but the study argues that support from well-connected and "elite" women could be and was used by opponents of the law, including President Museveni, at times to portray the DRB as "anti-African" and driven by elites.

## Interim Objectives or Benchmarks: How do we know we're making progress?

These brief case studies don't provide detailed information about how coalition leaders took stock of their progress and adjusted strategy and tactics. The narratives indicate that they did so: all of them portray dedicated advocates identifying the need for strategic and tactical shifts as the context changed.

- The Mabira campaign recognized that its effort risked being dismissed as partisan when some opposition politicians spoke out in support. The campaign was able to offset this in part because it had cultivated support from "representatives of government statutory bodies such as the National Environmental Management Authority and the National Forest Authority." This tactical move apparently helped reduce the political tension that could have derailed the campaign.
- ACCU members appear to have taken stock annually of what issues offered the best opportunity to gain public support, gauging the political pressures and the salience of questions including access to water, health services, primary education, public procurement, and fighting the culture of impunity among high officials. It is less clear from the case study how the ACCU assessed its impact or used that assessment to adjust its strategy or tactics; instead, each campaign seems to have used variations on the same

set of activities. But ACCU has apparently made the strategic decision to campaign on the same topic for two years at a time to give its network of advocates time to gain expertise, reach out to appropriate audiences, and sustain pressure on policymakers.

- Accounts of the PWD efforts suggest subtle changes in direction, perhaps in response to ongoing internal discussions about what worked better. Advocates showed the ability to seize advocacy opportunities. For example, advocacy for better road safety efforts built on a single tragic incident in 2007 when a blind individual was struck and seriously hurt by a motorcycle. A long-time effort to promote road safety was energized by the event, which happened also to occur shortly before national celebration for World Sight Day, "providing a platform to push high the agenda." The Uganda National Association for the Blind could seize this opportunity because it had built the capacity to do so over the years.
- Because of its extraordinary duration, the DRB case includes the most twists and turns in its advocacy strategy, and the richest commentary over how and why those adjustments occurred. Its concluding sections provide a subtle analysis of the changing political and economic contexts that have hindered the still-unsuccessful effort, but also a glimmer of optimism about what has been gained: "The DRB Advocacy Campaign has been a long journey of pain, struggle, celebration, learning, unlearning, relearning and strategizing…. This campaign has allowed for dispelling many myths and presumptions about women as a social group; about the public/private dichotomy as well as the major question of who holds the governance and decision making powers in Uganda."

This comment captures some of the ways that advocates build capacity even when they do not achieve the desired policy change. Campaigns may spend years – or even decades – building broader understanding of their issue and the potential for legislative or policy movement. The DRB advocates have not found the right moment yet, but their patient efforts have extended support beyond a handful of women to a broader, diverse constituency. ACCU has secured the engagement of Ugandans from many social classes and regions by spreading its efforts to nine regional anti-corruption coalitions with some 1000 independent budget monitors. That capacity remains available to be tapped throughout the year – perhaps when a local scandal creates the opportunity to put pressure on a corrupt official.

Public understanding and local advocacy experience are capacities that can be nurtured, measured, and later tapped when the moment is propitious. In the same way, advocates can gradually improve their network of contacts with policymakers, bringing representatives of new constituencies to see the importance of an issue. New voices and messengers can have a cumulative effect on even the most resolute opponents, as seemed to be the case in the Mabira campaign.

Advocacy capacity – whether described as new constituents, new champions, or expanding networks of contacts – is of course only a means to the policy end. But capacity matters. Measuring capacity and recording advances can provide valuable reassurance to advocates, board members, and funders who may be frustrated by slow progress towards the desired policy changes.

## Cross-Cutting Questions:

- **Top-Down or Bottom-Up?** Tensions emerged in recent years in the DRB between grassroots advocates and "elite" advocates whose concerns about property rights seemed self-interested, and out of touch with the concerns of poor rural women. And Uganda's poorest citizens were simply under such economic pressure in recent years that they were perhaps less willing to engage in mass mobilizations.

  The Save Mabira Crusade, on the other hand, managed to organize traditional chiefs, taxi drivers, rural communities, and the Anglican Archbishop among many others, suggesting that the "top" and "bottom" can join forces when the issue touches people deeply enough. It could be that the very specific target of Mabira Crusade advocacy helped bring together this broad array of forces: the potential beneficiaries of the forest give-away were a large company managed by a single prominent family and (perhaps) the politicians who had promised to assist the family by facilitating this land deal. Those who favored the land deal had no broad constituencies on their side. In this instance, it appears, popular opinion and popular indignation were too powerful to resist.
- **One big push or sustained pressure?** The annual Anti-Corruption Week that is the focus of ACCU's

work requires one big advocacy push each year. ACCU's growth into a national movement suggests that its approach is attractive to advocates. The case study suggests that some government officials over the years have responded to the intense one-week pressure, which includes multiple newspaper articles, demonstrations, radio dramas, and other coordinated efforts: in 2004, for example, "some ministers confessed that they had received a directive from the Cabinet…to attend anti-corruption week activities" and by week's end the Prime Minister announced plans to prosecute two ministers for corruption.

However, the "one-off" focus of the anti-corruption weeks makes it more difficult to sustain pressure, and in 2009 the ACCU decided to "focus on a sector for more than one year in order to make the interventions…more sustainable." More significant, perhaps, "For some of the campaigns, respondents felt that a week was [only] enough to gain some awareness and not to actually change any decision maker's mindset."

But the week-long effort provided one opportunity for the country's anti-corruption groups to come together around a common theme, and to "develop campaign themes for their longer terms [sic] advocacy initiatives" and learn about "tools geared towards creating public awareness about the problem of corruption, monitoring public institutions, encouraging citizens' participation…and opening channels of communication between government actors at different levels and their citizens." This annual burst of activity may provide momentum that carries the local groups through their own steady efforts in their home regions and communities.

The DRB is of course farthest from a one-off campaign: its patient effort over decades has waxed and waned in function of larger political and social forces in Uganda, but it never disappeared completely. The case study suggests that the campaign has at times suffered from poor political timing: "it often comes to Parliament before the elections which makes it appear like a political matter and it is rushed which was perceived as an agenda to ambush Parliamentarians to pass the bill." Its sustained effort has built a broad and diverse coalition and significant Parliamentary support; getting the timing right seems within the campaign's tactical reach. But the history of DRB advocacy suggest that advocates were not always in control of events – and indeed, advocates almost never are.

- **Outputs or Outcomes?** The ACCU case study notes that its original impetus came in part from a study of anti-corruption efforts at the time of the coalition's formation. The study noted that early advocacy efforts had helped bring about the creation of government institutions that had the formal power to investigate, prosecute, and punish corrupt officials. The output of the earlier efforts appeared impressive. But these institutions in fact did not investigate, prosecute or punish corruption. The desired outcome – a real reduction in corrupt behavior - remained elusive.

  ACCU set out to ensure that the outcome of its actions would be more meaningful. Its objectives included lobbying for changes in Ugandan laws and – significantly – "to advocate and lobby key decision makers to implement the proposed changes." ACCU's emphasis on policy implementation underscores their attention to achieving meaningful outcomes.

  Most advocates can count the number of op-eds they publish, or the number of people who participate in days of action or street demonstra-

tions. Achieving and counting these outputs is necessary. But demonstrating that real change occurs requires keeping track of outcomes. The Mabira campaign benefited from a clear measure of success: the government reversed its decision, and the forest was preserved. Achieving this outcome is impressive. Campaign participants seek to ensure that it is not reversed. According to a Member of Parliament interviewed for the Mabira case study, "an enthusiastic group of Whistle Blowers …especially the communities living around Mabira Forest Reserve… keep calling the Honorable MP to pass on alerts whenever there is a suspicious issue."

In this and other instances across the case studies, advocates wisely kept their eye on achieving and protecting real changes that improve the lives of Ugandans.

## Overview Discussion Questions:

1. Why have some of the advocacy efforts examined here moved so quickly, like the Mabira forest preservation effort, and others, like the DRB, moved so slowly? What contextual factors help dictate the speed of policy change? How can advocates anticipate or take these factors into account in their planning?
2. All four advocacy efforts appear to have used very similar tactics and activities. How can advocates choose which tactics are likely to be most effective?

Endnotes

1. These charts are adapted from Julia Coffman, *Foundations and Public Policy Grantmaking* (James Irvine Foundation: March 2008).
2. This summary is based on *The Save Mabira Crusade Advocacy Case Study*, by Richard Ssewakiryanga and Allen Ruhangataremwa (June 2011).
3. This summary is based on *The Anti- Corruption Coalition in Uganda and the Development of the Anti- Corruption Week* by Richard Ssewakiryanga and Edmond Owor (July 2011).
4. This summary is based on *Advocacy Case Study on the Domestic Relations Advocacy Bill (1940-2011)* by Solome Nakimbugwe and Richard Ssewakiryanga (July 2011).
5. This summary is based on *Advocacy Case Study on the Disability Advocacy in Uganda* by Richard Ssewakiryanga and Edmond Owor (July 2011).
6. As an organizing framework, we are using a menu of choices that advocates make as they plan a campaign. A team of evaluation specialists led by Julia Coffman formalized this menu as the Composite Logic Model in 2007. The Aspen Institute's Advocacy Planning and Evaluation Program has since modified that model and incorporated it into a web-based tool, the Advocacy Progress Planner (APP). The Composite Logic Model and the APP can help advocates broaden their thinking and make more informed choices as they begin a campaign.
7. The Mabira study notes that the principal apparent beneficiary of the proposal to give away part of Mabira forest was "the Sugar Corporation of Uganda Limited (SCOUL) owned by Mehta Family." The study acknowledges that the opposition to the plan "threatened to take on a racial twist" when "a Hindu Temple…in central Kampala was stoned…."

# Case Study #1: The Save Mabira Crusade (Mabira)

**The Save Mabira Crusade (Mabira): An intense effort in a brief span from August 2006 to October 2007 helped reverse a governmental decision to give a significant tract of protected forest to an agricultural developer. The "Crusade" and its broad array of partners and tactics helped produce a surprising official retreat within 14 months, but not without the loss of lives in a demonstration that turned violent.**[1]

The Save Mabira Crusade sought to block a policy – the "de-gazetting" of a major tract within the protected Mabira forest preserve, permitting the conversion of national park land into a massive sugar plantation. Powerful forces in the government, including the responsible Minister, supported the forest give-away. The advocates recognized the need for a rapid response and quickly brought together a broad coalition of partners, including members of the Environment Natural Resources Working Group, Members of Parliament, religious leaders, traditional chiefs, and other influential citizens.

Save Mabira Crusade addressed itself from the beginning to a relative handful of key Members of Parliament and members of the Cabinet with the authority to reverse the initial decision. At the same time, however, the campaign used multiple channels to reach broader audiences, encouraging potentially influential constituencies to contact Ministers and Members of Parliament. Audiences included parishioners in major Ugandan churches, workers in the sugar plantations, and sugar consumers – who were urged to boycott products from the proposed beneficiary of the forest give-away. Groups as diverse as taxi drivers in Kampala and diplomats from donor countries were asked to convey messages opposing the forest give-away. International environmental NGOs worked through other channels. Even Ministers of Finance from Commonwealth countries who had gathered for a meeting on climate change pressured their Ugandan counterpart to reverse the planned land seizure.

Mabira campaigners focused on the Uganda Joint Christian Council as an avenue for mass mobilizations and "to evoke a spiritual appeal to the advocacy effort." Advocates spoke of their ability to encourage sermons, prayers and special appeals from the pulpit that contributed to broad popular pressure to overturn the forest give-away. The campaign relied on multiple tactics, however, including research from Ugandan and international specialists outlining the environmental consequences of cutting down the more than 17,000 hectares of natural tropical forest slated for destruction. The campaign could make both a rational appeal based on the scientific case for protecting Mabira, and an ethical or religious case based on the need to steward Uganda's resources for future generations. Both arguments were employed, and amplified through multiple channels.

Citizens demonstrating to save the Mabira forest.

The Mabira campaign case study notes that strategic and tactical decisions were coordinated through a 20-person "Organising Committee." The Committee claims to have engaged as many as two million Ugandans in its mobilization efforts, using an array of print, radio, television talk shows, and social media. The Organising Committee allocated responsibilities among coalition partners, who were "given the liberty to take up tasks and innovate strategies."

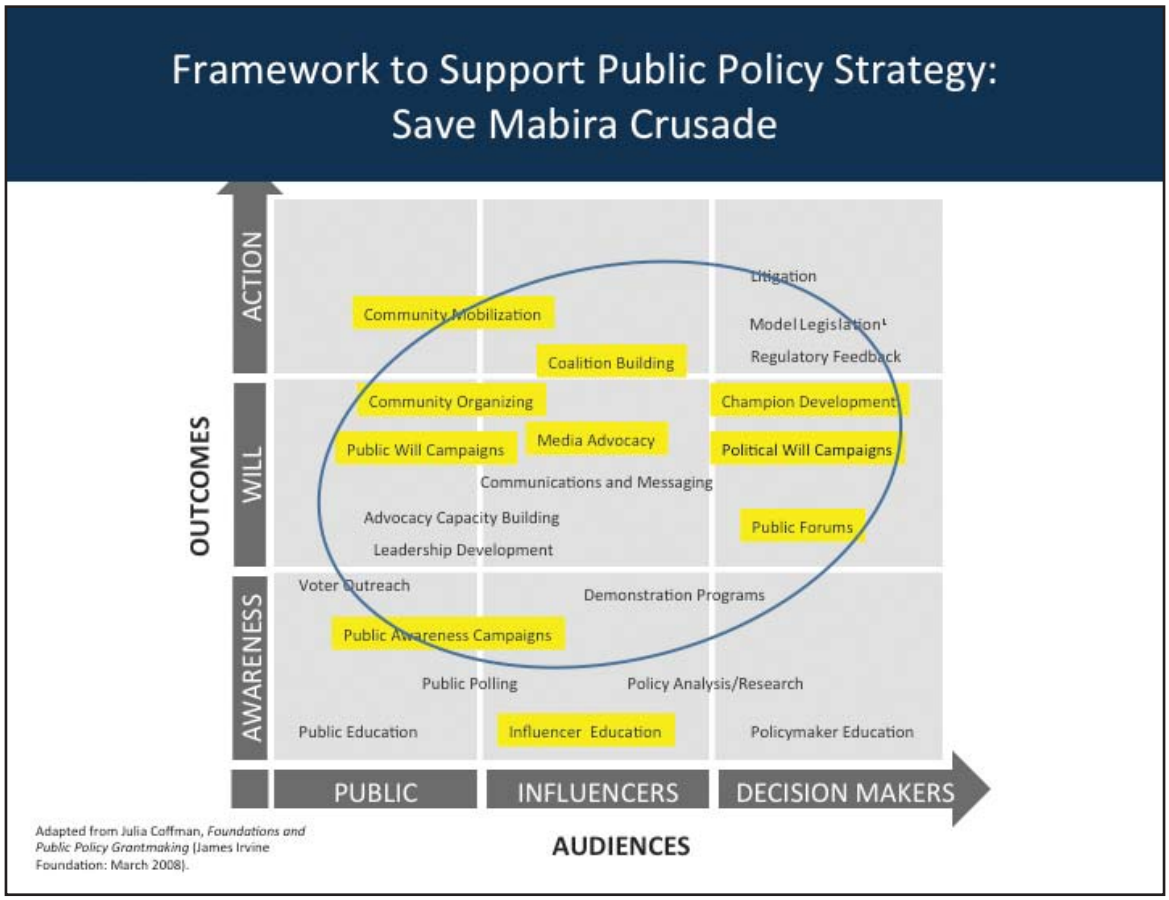
The Mabira campaign recognized that its effort risked being dismissed as partisan when some opposition politicians spoke out in support. The campaign was able

to offset this in part because it had cultivated support from "representatives of government statutory bodies such as the National Environmental Management Authority and the National Forest Authority." This tactical move may have helped reduce the political tension that could have derailed the campaign.

The campaign did face opposition, including violent attacks on demonstrators in April of 2007 that resulted in at least three deaths. But the rising tide of support for the campaign eventually led some senior government and ruling party officials to oppose the give-away. In mid-October 2007, the then Finance Minister announced that the government was abandoning the plan. The case study notes that the Crusade has been called "the first ever successful and highly consultative stakeholder campaign" in Uganda. Judging by the breadth of the effort and the final outcome, that may well be correct.

## Discussion questions:

1. What factors helped the Save Mabira Crusade have the success it did?
2. What does this case tell us about the conditions that make it easier to coordinate an advocacy effort? What conditions can make coordination more difficult?




This chart offers a quick overview of the kinds of audiences and outcomes the advocacy campaign pursued. Campaigns whose desired outcomes are more "action-oriented" will have most of their activities concentrated in the top third of the chart. Campaigns whose activities are addressed primarily to decision-makers will have most of their highlighted activities in the right-hand third of the chart. The combination of these orientations helps shape the choice of strategies and tactics pursued by advocates. The oval shape suggests the overall emphasis of the campaign.[2]

Endnotes

1. This summary is based on *The Save Mabira Crusade Advocacy Case Study*, by Richard Ssewakiryanga and Allen Ruhangataremwa (June 2011).
2. This chart is adapted from Julia Coffman, *Foundations and Public Policy Grantmaking* (James Irvine Foundation: March 2008).

# Case Study #2:
# The Anti-Corruption Coalition in Uganda (ACCU)


People demonstrating against the corruption in the education system.

**The Anti-Corruption Coalition in Uganda (ACCU): Sporadic efforts prior to 1999 to address corruption in Ugandan society were formalized officially in 2004 through the ACCU and highlighted for the past 12 years by an annual Anti-Corruption Week.**[1]

The ACCU formed originally to increase the impact of the small and scattered anti-corruption efforts made to that point. Organizers realized that the "root causes" of corruption were not being addressed, and that an effective response required increased citizen pressure on government through a better-coordinated effort. ACCU has sought over the course of several years to shine the spotlight on various aspects of corruption in sectors like health policy and education, as well as broader efforts to track public expenditures and encourage public integrity. In its early years especially, ACCU sought to raise the salience of corruption, making it an issue open to political activism from the general population, and more politically significant to elected and appointed officials. In recent years, the ACCU's focus has shifted to specific issues. It has promoted policies or behavior changes that would reduce the incidence of corruption affecting, for example, access to water, health, education or other government services.

The ACCU case study focuses primarily on ACCU's ten-year record of holding an annual Anti-Corruption Week (ACW). The ACW offers an annual focus for a "commemorative event" as well as "a time to reflect and take stock" of the movement's progress. The focus of each week has varied from year to year, with the topic chosen collectively by ACCU's coalition members. This intense effort has given coalition members the opportunity to plan and coordinate their efforts during the critical week. But this approach also makes it harder to maintain continuity and sustain pressure during the remainder of the year.

Initially, ACCU's choice of tactics seemed to reflect its desire to raise consciousness among members of the general public about the severity and ubiquity of corruption. It appears that ACCU did not pressure specific decision-makers. But as it grew in breadth and recognition, Anti-Corruption Week seemed increasingly to address itself to senior government officials closest to the issue of choice; this narrowed the primary audience and helped advocates focus their efforts. Local affiliates took a similar approach, targeting officials and pressing for their resignations. The sharper focus may have helped increase the ACCU's impact. One campaign, for example, appears to have contributed to Presidential promises to investigate specific officials during a week in which they were singled out as particularly corrupt.

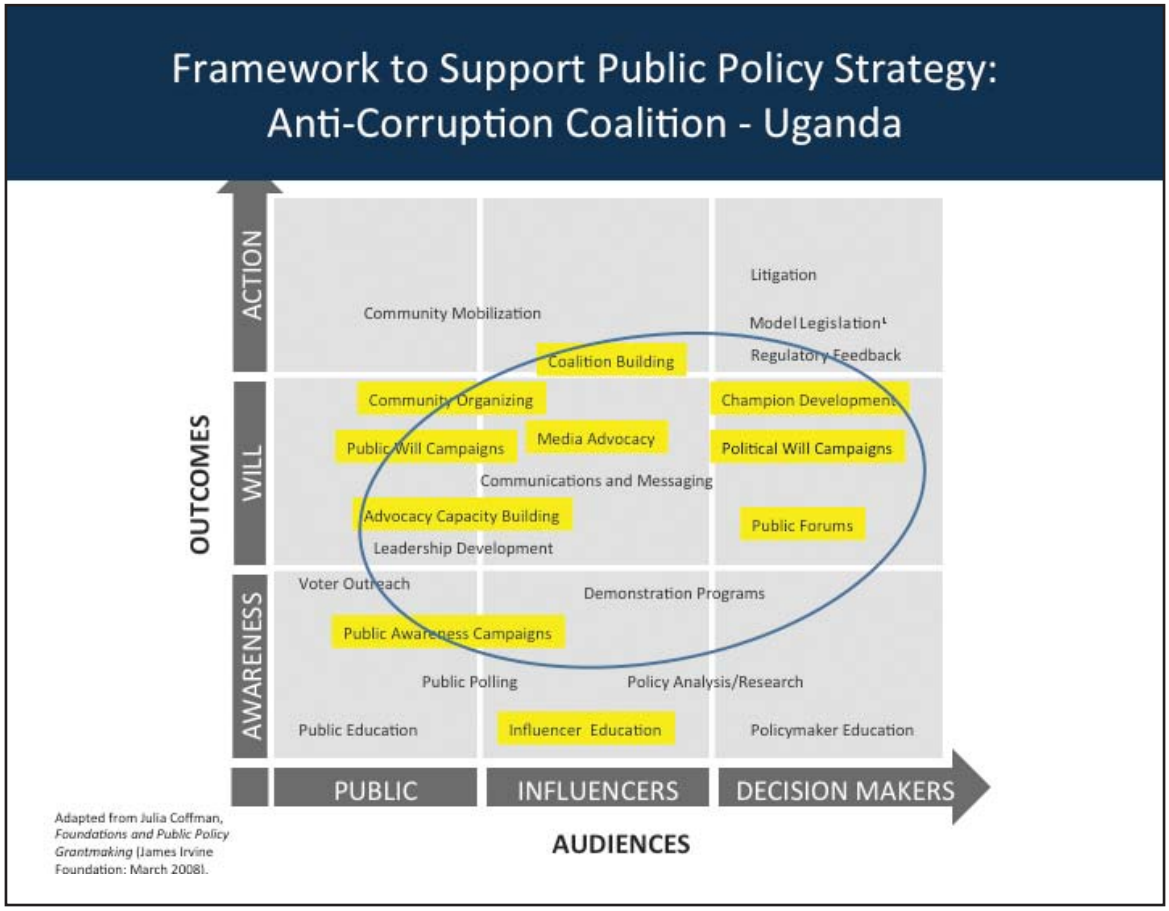
ACCU members appear to have taken stock annually of what issues offered the best opportunity to gain public support, gauging the political pressures and the salience of questions including access to water, health services, primary education, public procurement, and fighting the culture of impunity among high officials. The ACCU has used a diverse array of tactics across its many members and over the years. These have included radio and print advertisements, mass demonstrations, op-eds, murals, radio skits and popular drama, and song contests.

It is less clear from the case study how the ACCU assessed its impact or used that assessment to adjust its strategy or tactics; instead, each campaign seems to have used variations on the same set of activities, with occasional added innovations. But ACCU has apparently made the strategic decision to campaign on the same topic for two years at a time to give its network of advocates time to gain expertise, reach out to appropriate audiences, and sustain its advocacy.

## Discussion Questions:

1. ACCU aims to educate the public about corruption and about their rights as citizens. How can advocacy groups measure the effectiveness of such public education efforts?

2. Challenging the financial interests of powerful officials is part of ACCU's work. This can be risky. As organizers plan advocacy actions, how should they weigh the risks and benefits for their members?




This chart offers a quick overview of the kinds of audiences and outcomes the advocacy campaign pursued. Campaigns whose desired outcomes are more "action-oriented" will have most of their activities concentrated in the top third of the chart. Campaigns whose activities are addressed primarily to decision-makers will have most of their highlighted activities in the right-hand third of the chart. The combination of these orientations helps shape the choice of strategies and tactics pursued by advocates. The oval shape suggests the overall emphasis of the campaign.[2]

Endnotes

1. This summary is based on *The Anti- Corruption Coalition in Uganda and the Development of the Anti- Corruption Week* by Richard Ssewakiryanga and Edmond Owor (July 2011).
2. This chart is adapted from Julia Coffman, *Foundations and Public Policy Grantmaking* (James Irvine Foundation: March 2008).

# Case Study #3: The Domestic Relations Bill (DRB)

**The Domestic Relations Bill (DRB) advocacy campaign 1940-2011: A very long-term and so far unsuccessful effort has sought to develop and pass a sweeping domestic relations bill to address persistent gender inequalities in property, marriage and divorce law.**[1]

The DRB campaign – in fact a series of sporadic but impassioned efforts over the course of 72 years and counting – has sought to promote adoption of policies in support of women's property rights and other basic protections. The Domestic Relations Bill was initially tabled in 1949 and has been considered frequently, in revised forms, in subsequent Ugandan Parliaments. The case study details the twists and turns that these efforts have taken over the decades. The DRB story highlights the role that prominent women Members of Parliament have played, as well as the contributions of the participants in more than 40 organizations joined in the DRB Coalition since 1999.

DRB's early champions – female members of Ugandan legislatures during the colonial era – were deeply committed, but easily isolated. Over its several decades of activity, the DRB effort has sought to engage traditional leaders, jurists, parliamentarians, and members of the general public in support of expanded rights for women. The campaign focused – perhaps unsurprisingly – on engaging women as advocates. But it may have erred by failing to seek male supporters and especially male champions in influential positions; at key moments the Bill lacked powerful allies to help it overcome entrenched opposition.

From the beginning, the DRB challenged practices grounded in religious beliefs and deeply-rooted cultural values. DRB advocates opposed polygamy, eliciting opposition from many Muslims and from followers of customary laws and practices. The study notes that President Museveni openly opposed the bill at times on the grounds that it was "anti-African and elitist." At the same time, the DRB advocated regularizing procedures for divorce, a position opposed by some Christian leaders.


Demonstrators march in support of the Domestic Relations Bill.

In recent years, campaign leaders made specific overtures to religious leaders in an effort to resolve deep differences between Uganda's Christian and Muslim citizens regarding laws governing marriage, divorce, and property. A parallel effort addressed specific Members of Parliament, sometimes via their peers, at critical moments in the process of Parliamentary review.

Advocates sought first to reconcile different beliefs to create a common standard in national law. But in recent years, the DRB campaign was forced to accept a parliamentary decision to divide the Bill "into three: one for Muslims, another for Christians and another for the general public." The case study suggests that this split both reflected and contributed to underlying divisions in Ugandan society. As a practical matter for advocates, it meant that common, rights-based messages intended for the general public were less relevant. Distinct approaches for distinct audiences were required. But this diluted the DRB campaigners' ability to unite the general public, down to the grassroots, in support of the law.

As advocates associated with the DRB conceded, a campaign that reaches out to the very poorest members of society may reach them during periods when they are facing "biting poverty and numerous hardships." The attempt to broaden the audience and support in this way for the DRB may have backfired: the case study noted that the campaign became viewed as elitist and disconnected from the daily concerns of average Ugan-

dans who "couldn't relate the campaign with their lived realities." Its leaders were perceived - or could be portrayed – as relatively prosperous women who stood to benefit financially from changes in laws governing divorce, joint property and inheritance.

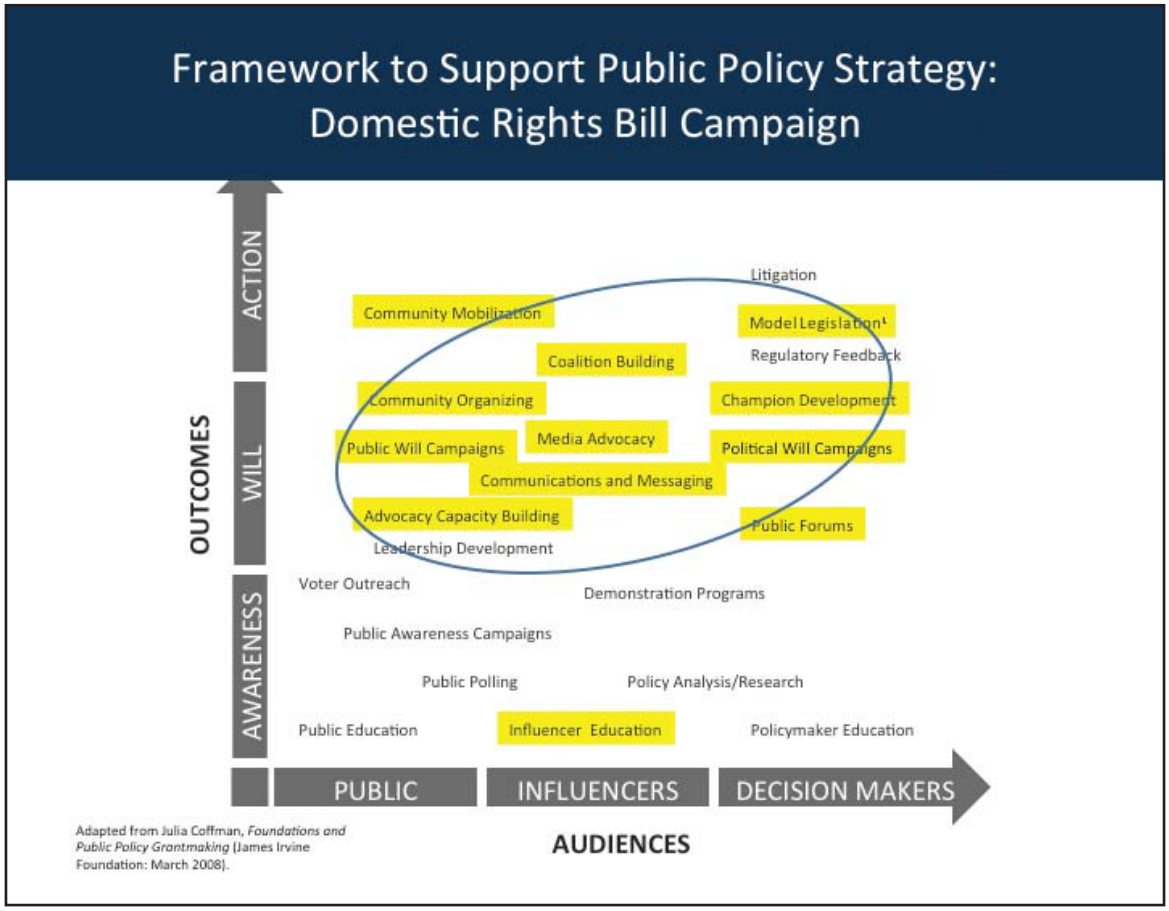
Over the campaign's very long duration, the organizations pursuing adoption of the DRB used a very broad range of activities and tactics. Indeed, the DRB case study authors note wryly: "For the last 20-25 years within the general civil society movement, the same strategies have been used, reused and overused that include: research, demonstrations, policy papers, dialogues, workshops, trainings and media work."

Because of its extraordinary duration, the DRB story includes many changes in strategy and tactics, as well as rich commentary over how and why those adjustments occurred. The case study's concluding sections provide a subtle analysis of the changing political and economic contexts that have hindered the still-unsuccessful effort, but also a glimmer of optimism about what has been gained: "The DRB Advocacy Campaign has been a long journey of pain, struggle, celebration, learning, unlearning, relearning and strategizing…. This campaign has allowed for dispelling many myths and presumptions about women as a social group; about the public/private dichotomy as well as the major question of who holds the governance and decision making powers in Uganda."

This patient effort over decades has waxed and waned in function of larger political and social forces in Uganda, but it has never disappeared completely. The case study suggests that the campaign has at times suffered from poor political timing: "it often comes to Parliament before the elections which makes it appear like a political matter and it is rushed which was perceived as an agenda to ambush Parliamentarians to pass the bill." The DRB campaign's sustained effort, however, has built a broad and diverse coalition and significant Parliamentary support; getting the timing right seems within the campaign's tactical reach. But the history of DRB advocacy demonstrates that advocates were not always in control of events – and indeed, advocates almost never are.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What sustains advocates over the course of a long campaign?
2. Can the DRB coalition claim any meaningful successes despite its failure to bring about passage of the Bill?

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## Endnotes

1. This summary is based on *Advocacy Case Study on the Domestic Relations Advocacy Bill (1940-2011)* by Solome Nakimbugwe and Richard Ssewakiryanga (July 2011).
2. This chart is adapted from Julia Coffman, *Foundations and Public Policy Grantmaking* (James Irvine Foundation: March 2008).

# Case Study #4: Disability Advocacy in Uganda (PWD)

**Disability Advocacy in Uganda (PWD): Three efforts to improve the status of people with disabilities in Uganda, starting as early as 1970 in one case and as recently as 2005 in another, contributed to or benefited from passage of Uganda's People with Disabilities Act in 2006.[1]**

The three organizations highlighted in the PWD case sought to advance the interests of people with disabilities through distinct forms of policy change. Sense International sought to raise the salience of deaf-blind children, making their particular needs more visible to the public and to policymakers as a first step towards seeking public funds for specialized programs. The Uganda National Association of the Blind promoted policies concerning road safety for blind individuals. The National Union of Women with Disabilities in Uganda sought to promote policies that would offer additional penalties for sexual exploitation of girls and women with disabilities.

The disability rights advocates engaged in the varied PWD efforts took their messages to Parliament in pursuit of special provisions within the 2006 People With Disabilities Act. But they sought as well to engage people with disabilities as advocates for their own rights, alongside their parents and caregivers. These efforts reflected an increasing emphasis among people with disabilities on political empowerment and engagement in asserting their rights as a community.

The PWD efforts tried to overcome the stigma attached to people with disabilities. This necessitated some outreach to the general public. But this was not their primary audience. Advocates for blind Ugandans wisely echoed the advice of many advocacy communications advisors: "it is good to target people who matter when advocating rather than targeting everybody." In this instance, "people who matter" were those directly able to bring about the policy changes that advocates sought for their constituents. The 2006 People With Disabilities Act required that at least five seats in Parliament be reserved for people with disabilities. The Act makes similar provision at the regional and district level. These officials could speak with particular credibility about the needs of their fellow PWDs. And of course, they were well positioned to influence policy decisions.

The PWD study also acknowledged that some of their outreach targeted others in the disability movement itself in order to overcome "strong rivalries" between categories of disabilities. The PWD advocates are all members of the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU). NUDIPU is credited with coordinating efforts to advance disability rights, but the study offers little detail about how NUDIPU did this. Instead, the PWD study highlights the specific contributions of member organizations pursuing their specific interests: recognition of the need for special services for deaf-blind individuals; better driver education to promote road safety for blind Ugandans; and more awareness of the need to protect girls and women with disabilities from sexual abuse. The efforts appear to have proceeded without coordination. But all served to some extent to advance a rights-based perspective on the needs of people with disabilities.

Accounts of the PWD efforts suggest subtle changes in direction, perhaps in response to ongoing internal discussions about what advocacy approaches worked better. The case study also suggests that advocates could make opportunistic strategic and tactical adjustments. For example, advocacy for better road safety efforts built on a single tragic incident in 2007 when a blind individual was struck and severely injured by a motorcycle. A long-time effort to promote road safety was energized by the event, which happened also to occur shortly before national celebration for World Sight Day, "providing a platform to push high the agenda." The Uganda National Association for the Blind could seize this opportunity because it had built the capacity to do so over the years.

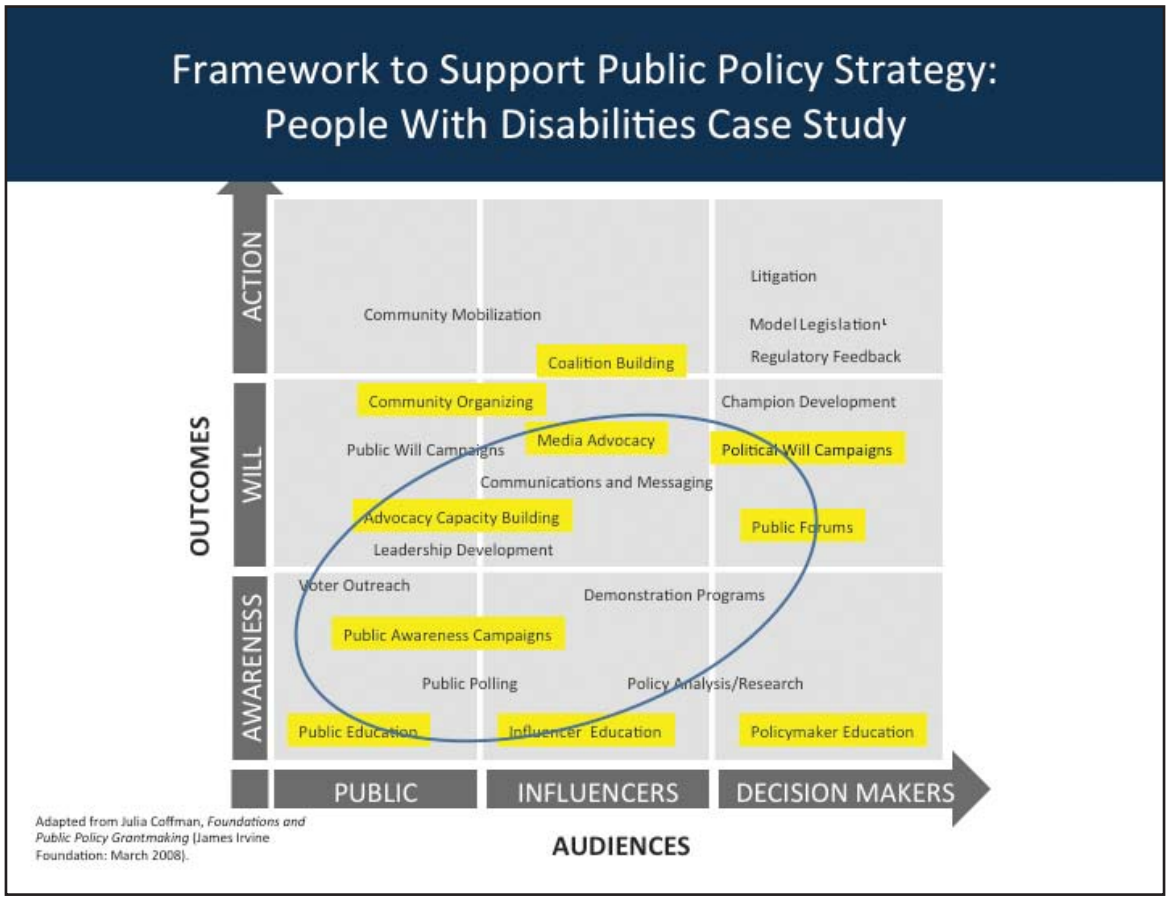
The efforts of Sense International's Uganda office were particularly motivated by a commitment to engaging the deaf-blind themselves, and their family members, in advocacy for the community. As a relatively new organization, Sense International could not draw on a well-established network of advocates, champions, or data. (Indeed, the precise number of Ugandans suffering from this particular disability was unknown.) Efforts to change policies – or even gain recognition of the issues faced by deaf-blind individuals - were hampered by this

lack of some essential components of advocacy capacity. The study suggests, not surprisingly, that Sense International has made relatively slow progress in achieving its policy objectives. It has, however, encouraged more awareness and acceptance of the condition, and the creation of some literature on the subject in Uganda.

Girls and women with disabilities are especially vulnerable to sexual assault and domestic violence. Efforts to assist them lie at the intersection of several well-established advocacy networks. This allowed advocates to partner with organizations promoting access to reproductive health care and family planning as well as disability rights and women's rights. However, these movements are each engaged in difficult struggles of their own, and progress has been slow.

## Discussion Questions:

1. A "rights-based" approach values the engagement of affected populations in claiming and pursuing their rights. But these populations may not be well positioned to influence policymakers. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this strategic choice?
2. Organizations that belong to the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda may each advance the interests of a distinct sub-group within the broader population of people with disabilities. What features of coalition management and governance can reduce harmful competition among members of the same broad movement?

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2. This chart is adapted from Julia Coffman, *Foundations and Public Policy Grantmaking* (James Irvine Foundation: March 2008).

# Afterword

These case studies provide glimpses of the diverse strengths of civil society advocacy in Uganda. Each case offers a portrait as well of the challenges that advocates must meet and overcome.

Our two organizations collaborated to produce these case studies in hopes that they will prove useful to other NGOs and evaluators in Uganda, and indeed elsewhere in the global South. The Uganda NGO Forum, the Aspen Institute, and the case study authors hope that the individual cases and discussion questions can serve as a resource for training and technical assistance. We believe that building evaluation capacity within civil society organizations will strengthen their advocacy as well. And better advocacy can help NGOs change their societies for the better. May it be so.

**Richard Ssewakiryanga**
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**Uganda National NGO Forum**

**David Devlin-Foltz**
**Director, Advocacy Planning and Evaluation Program**
**The Aspen Institute**

# Notes

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The Uganda National NGO Forum (UNNGOF) is an independent and inclusive national platform for NGOs in Uganda. Its primary constituency and owners are NGOs in their diversity and configurations. UNNGOF is however open to other interest groups within a broadly defined civil society. UNNGOF's operational scope is at national level, with focus on issues and processes that concern NGOs across the board. We recognise the independent existence of national thematic NGO networks and district networks and fora, as important NGO coordinating mechanisms with complementary comparative advantages.

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
Advocacy Planning & Evaluation Program

The Aspen Institute's Advocacy Planning and Evaluation Program (APEP) helps our clients plan, assess, and refine their policy advocacy efforts. We also offer a range of free advocacy planning and evaluation tools and provide practical advice on techniques and best practices. In particular, we help foundations, individual funders and nonprofit organizations:

- plan for advocacy success by thinking through where they want to go and how to know they are getting there;
- distinguish between outputs and outcomes – the things they do and the results that matter;
- recognize what is working; and
- do more of what works.

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