

# Exchanging ideas, developing skills

Last year the first three Communicating for Advocacy (CFA) workshops were held in South and South East Asia, paving the way for further workshops and the production of a learning guide. The aim was to develop the capacity of community groups to influence health policy and practice through advocacy work (with the longer-term goal of improving the health and quality of life of marginalised and vulnerable people).

The workshops were designed to develop capacity for information exchange, and to facilitate south-south and south-north learning and skills transference. In the workshop this is achieved using participatory methodology and by stimulating ongoing training, networking and organisational development.

Central to the CFA project is the belief that people have the right to achieve an adequate standard of living, health and wellbeing, and the right to access information to help them achieve this.

## What is involved?

Because participants come to the workshop with different skills, experience and ways of working, the sessions are designed to be flexible. The active, participatory approach encourages and emphasises information-sharing.

The first workshop guide, on which future workshops are

being based, was developed and adapted by all of the key partners (see box). Each workshop developed differently, reflecting the varied skills and experience of each key partner, but the core content on advocacy remained the same. The format includes short presentations, ice-breaker activities, brainstorming, group discussions, role play, practical group tasks, site visits, and assignments.

The workshop covers the following topics:

- What is meant by advocacy and communication
- Context of advocacy for people's health
- Developing an advocacy strategy
- Working with the media
- Use of project management tools



Role-playing exercise, Philippines

- Practical research skills
- Group fieldwork and analysis
- Developing messages for communication materials
- Producing communication materials

Monitoring of the workshops is ongoing and each is evaluated through reflection on a daily basis, as well as in more detail at the end. Evaluations are being collated and fed back into the advocacy guide, now available to all CFA partners.

## Leading the way in South and South East Asia...

The CFA project's key partners held the first three workshops, which were co-facilitated by Healthlink Worldwide:

- Social Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable (SARPV), Bangladesh



- Cambodia Health Education Media Service (CHEMS), Cambodia

- Health Action Information Network (HAIN), Philippines

## Moving forward

The scope and range of the CFA network in Asia is growing: in total 17 partner organisations are adapting their own versions of the workshop format, mostly in local languages, with support from the key partners. CHED, in Cambodia, was the first core partner to facilitate its own workshop and adapt materials and resources from English into a local language (Khmer).

Currently, the timetable for 2004 includes workshops in:

- **Cambodia:** Cambodian Health Education Development (CHED); Indradevi Association (IDA)
- **Lao:** Lao Youth Union; Health Unlimited
- **Philippines:** Council for Health and Development (CHD); Remedios AIDS Foundation; Kaugmaon
- **Bangladesh:** Srizony; Centre for Disables Concern; ChangeMakers; Toitumboor
- **India:** Association of Women with Disabilities (AWWD)
- **Nepal:** Britain Nepal Medical Trust
- **Sri Lanka:** Sarvodaya
- **Indonesia:** World Vision
- **Mongolia:** National AIDS Foundation
- **Thailand:** Foundation for Disabled Children in Thailand

*Right: Using drama for awareness, Bangladesh*

*Below: Making a video-spot, Cambodia*



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For materials on advocacy, visit  
**Source, [www.asksource.info](http://www.asksource.info)**



## Lessons learned

As mentioned, the learning from the workshops is being incorporated into the generic guide being developed for the next series of workshops and project development. Some key issues that have emerged so far include:

**The need for facilitators to develop a team approach.** Flexibility, willingness to adapt, and the ability to give and receive critical feedback are all necessary. This partly depends on facilitators' and participants' attitude to learning. Organisational culture and management are also influences.

**An issue such as advocacy benefits from being framed within the individual's working context.** A macro approach is unsuitable – it is essential to give people space to discuss their own working situation and from this develop analytical skills for critique and development of common points. Rather than delivering definitions and guidelines, this should then be the starting point for more meaningful discussion about concepts such as communication and advocacy.

**The promotion of the workshops** was performed using international networks. Each organisation found that the **partnership aspect**

of the workshops added interest, range and credibility and also raised their profile within the region.

**Language and culture:** it should be remembered that facilitators and participants originate from diverse backgrounds and may communicate and interpret concepts and terms differently.

When working in advocacy there are **risks**. These include **practical legal concerns**. Sensitive issues in the areas of empowerment, gender, rights and sexuality face serious barriers in some settings. Also, there are problems associated with **raising expectations**.

The workshops can benefit from the **diverse background of the organisations attending**. For example, an organisation from Japan contributed to the Philippines workshop. Differences between the countries' health status were explored and their health policies critiqued. This politicised the analysis, showing up the links between poverty and health, and proved a powerful approach for self-learning in advocacy.

The project also has benefited from representation of a **wide cross-section of community groups** from diverse sectors, who were willing and able to share experience.