

# Guide to advocacy



Sightsavers



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Two participants at the Sightsavers citizenship and political participation workshop in Makeni.

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## Cover image

Sadah, a youth disability advocate, at the Sightsavers citizenship and political participation workshop.

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# Introduction

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Influencing public policy change at Sightsavers is a global, organisational wide effort delivered by country offices and global teams, each of which focus on different aspects of influencing and work closely together. Country offices lead our national and local level influencing, alongside partner organisations. Other teams across Sightsavers contribute via policy analysis, programming, and research and evidence generation. In this handbook, we focus on the advocacy taken forward by country offices both within and outside of programmes.

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A panel of youth champions speaking about their experiences of attending school during a Global Disability Summit in Berlin.

# How do advocacy, policy and campaigns interrelate?

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Influencing is a set of activities that aim to create policy change. At Sightsavers, the advocacy team focuses on supporting country offices to achieve regional, national and local policy change. The policy team focuses on influencing the global agenda and provides technical expertise on specific policy issues. Advocacy and campaigning are closely related, with campaigns acting as a key tool within the broader framework of influencing.

Advocacy is the overall, long-term process of influencing the change to or implementation of a policy. In contrast, campaigns are focused, time-bound efforts designed to mobilise support amongst decision makers and the public to achieve a particular policy objective. Policy, advocacy and campaigns all fit within the broader framework of influencing within Sightsavers. The teams work closely together to achieve change and raise the voices of the most marginalised.

## Linking global, regional, national and local influencing

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Linking our influencing at the global, regional, national and local levels is key to Sightsavers' work to create real impact for people with disabilities. At the global level, governments agree to frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and they make commitments at key conferences such as the Global Disability Summit. These global promises are something to celebrate, but they won't translate into real impact unless these commitments are delivered at the regional, national and local levels. This is why the influencing that country offices do is so important.

Similarly, we need to make sure that the global frameworks created and the commitments made actually reflect the realities in countries and take the voices of the most marginalised people into account. When a key global conference, such as the High-level Political Forum or World Social Summit, is coming up, we have the opportunity to influence at the national level to shape the commitments of decision-makers on the global stage. Influencing at global, regional, national and local levels is crucial. Linking them together is how we work to create real change.

# What is advocacy?

Sightsavers defines advocacy as a set of strategic activities designed to influence policies and practice. Our advocacy involves empowering people to claim their rights, advocating for public policy changes at local, national and international levels, and holding decision-makers to account to ensure they deliver on the promises they make.

## 1. Empowering people to claim their rights

Sightsavers aims to work with the most marginalised communities, including people with disabilities, to strengthen their knowledge of their rights and support them to demand and defend these rights. This includes working closely with civil society, including organisations of people with

disabilities (OPDs), to build relationships with the people directly affected. We want to ensure that the most marginalised people and communities have their voices heard by local and national policymakers, along with other key decision-makers.

Michelle, a role model and mentor under the Economic Empowerment Programme in Zimbabwe. She is a mother of two, business owner and disability advocate.



## 2. Policy change

For Sightsavers, policy change has a broad definition which includes any change within a government or system. This can include:

- The passing of a new policy, law, regulation, strategy or action plan amongst others.
- The alteration of an existing policy, law, regulation, strategy or action plan amongst others. This includes a change in specific wording, a review and update to a policy based on progress so far and the development of a new implementation plan.
- An alteration to budget allocation for the delivery of change committed to within a policy.
- The ratification of an international instrument such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities or the African Disability Protocol.
- The setting up of a new directorate or focal point within a ministry or the signing of a memorandum of understanding for two ministries to work together.

## 3. Holding decision-makers to account for implementing policies and commitments

Advocacy does not end when a policy is passed or altered, or a new commitment is made. One of the key aspects of Sightsavers' advocacy work is ensuring decision-makers at all levels are held to account to deliver on the promises they have made within policies, national development plans, strategies, action plans, at regional and global conferences, and in their ratification of key global and regional instruments. This includes advocating for mechanisms and processes to track delivery and ensuring decision makers are held responsible for their commitments and policies. It also includes ensuring that communities affected by such policies are consulted during their implementation.



# What do we mean when we talk about policymaking?

As Sightsavers' influencing strategy sets out, public policy provides the framework in which government-led and funded action takes place. If the government provides social protection, for example, it is because it has a policy framework to do so. Similarly, if disability discrimination is addressed by the courts, it is because there are laws and funded mechanisms in place to hold people to account.

Public policy is not about one piece of legislation, policy or regulation, but about how the combination of all of these things determine how people, businesses, public bodies, etc, act - and what effect that action has on the opportunity and agency (in this case) of people with disabilities.

Participants at a workshop listen to the facilitator and share their views.





Students Nicodemus and Patrick chatting during a Cisco Networking training course held in Nairobi.

## Sub-national advocacy

We often talk about global, regional and national advocacy, but it is important to recognise that local level advocacy is also a crucial part of Sightsavers' influencing work. Whether it's the implementation of the SRHR policy in Kaduna State in Nigeria, the integration of eye health into county level budgeting in Liberia, or the development of inclusive local development plans in

Maroua in the far north of Cameroon, in each case Sightsavers' country offices were able to influence policy with decentralised government authorities. This is sometimes after years of struggling to make progress at national level.

# Long-term advocacy planning at Sightsavers

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The advocacy team works closely with country offices to develop long-term advocacy plans. These are five-year advocacy plans which set out the advocacy objectives for each Sightsavers country office across each thematic area.

We develop long-term advocacy plans so that we have a clear view of what Sightsavers and partners want to achieve over the next five years in terms of policy change. This helps country offices to plan and enables the advocacy team to provide tailored support. The long-term advocacy plans align with the advocacy objectives within existing programmes and projects and, when we develop new projects, we make sure the advocacy within these also fits in with our longer-term plans. Each programme that is developed in country should help to move towards achieving the advocacy objectives in the country office's five year advocacy plan.

The development of long-term advocacy plans is led by each country office with the support of the Policy and global advocacy (PGA) team and in collaboration with global technical leads, the campaigns team, PS2 operations and relevant partners such as OPDs. It is important that the longer-term objectives are aligned with the thematic strategies, as well as international frameworks - such as the UNCRPD, SDGs, African Disability Protocol, Marrakech Treaty, and Inclusive Data Charter - where possible.

The aim is for each country office to have its own long-term advocacy plan based on thorough policy analysis and stakeholder mapping. We work closely with different teams along the way, listening to feedback and incorporating it throughout the process.

The development of the long-term advocacy plans is not linear, but cyclical and iterative. Long term advocacy plans will inevitably become out of date as political contexts change, so are updated annually as part of the annual review process - meaning new influencing opportunities can be added, challenges considered and objectives revised.



Ashrafunessa, a disability rights activist and an Equal Bangladesh campaign partner, outside the UN Headquarters in New York.

## Long-term advocacy plans usually contain the following elements

- A context analysis of the policy environment in the country focused around each thematic area – social inclusion, inclusive education, eye health and universal health coverage, refractive error, NTDs and cross-cutting issues such as gender and the SDGs. Using guidance from the policy team, this context analysis looks for gaps in the policy environment and identifies areas in which Sightsavers can advocate for change.
- A review of existing programmes to identify current advocacy objectives.
- The development of long-term advocacy objectives for each thematic area. These should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART), and aligned with those in existing programmes.
- A stakeholder analysis which identifies the decision-makers who can take forward the policy change we are looking for, and those who can influence them.
- An activity plan that sets out our suggested approaches and methodologies for influencing decision-makers on the changes we want to see.
- A simple budget that sets out which activities are already covered through country budgets and programme funding, and which areas require further funds.
- A simple measurement framework that uses the levels of influence tool to monitor progress towards the long-term objectives.

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Attendees at a Sightsavers workshop.

The process for the development of a long-term plan is iterative and can look different for each country office. However, the key steps include:

Step	Work on long-term plan
1	The advocacy team works with the country office to collect relevant documents - policies, strategies, action plans and budgets.
2	The advocacy team and country office work together to carry out an initial document review to better understand the policy environment for each thematic area.
3	The relevant Senior Global Advocacy Adviser and Global Advocacy Officer work closely with the country office to review advocacy within existing programmes, previous advocacy work around key global, regional and national processes, and to discuss where the biggest challenges lie in creating policy change.
4	Initial conversations take place with Global Technical Leads and relevant members of the policy team for each thematic area to advise on potential priorities and challenges.
5	Country office staff talk to their partners (both within government and civil society) to learn more about potential priorities and to find out more about policy development and review processes – enabling them to identify any influencing opportunities.
6	The relevant Senior Global Advocacy Adviser and Global Advocacy Officer (and Head of Advocacy/Global Advocacy Manager) work with the country office to develop a draft plan, including key objectives and potential activities for each thematic area.
7	The relevant Senior Global Advocacy Adviser, Global Advocacy Officer and Global Advocacy Monitoring Advisor work with the country office to develop the monitoring framework for the long-term advocacy plan using the Levels of Influence.
8	The draft plan is shared with Global Technical Leads, the policy and campaigns teams and PS2 operations for input and feedback. Country offices share the draft plan with any relevant partners.
9	The longer-term plan is updated and shared for final feedback.
10	A simple budget is developed for the delivery of the plan.

# Advocacy in programme and project development

Embedding advocacy in programmes is key to ensuring their sustainability beyond the life of a project. During the project design process (PDP), advocacy objectives and/or simple advocacy plans are developed focusing on the local or national level,

or both. Advocacy objectives should be based on the long-term plans and, where necessary, the long-term advocacy plan can be reviewed to reflect the new objectives agreed.

Stage of project development	Focus	How the advocacy team can help
Initial conception	Does advocacy fit into this project? If so, how does the project align with our long-term advocacy plans and thematic strategies? What could the influencing focus be?	The relevant Senior Global Advocacy Advisor and Global Advocacy Officer can support with the development of thematic objectives that align with the long-term advocacy plans and the overall project's objectives.
Proposal development	<p>The development of advocacy objectives and related activities. This should be based on a policy analysis and aligned with the long-term advocacy plans.</p> <p>Development of levels of influence and specific indicators for monitoring.</p>	The advocacy and policy teams can support with policy analysis, stakeholder mapping and the development of SMART objectives. Global policy messages for each thematic area provide useful guidance for taking forward this analysis. The Senior Global Advocacy Advisor, Global Advocacy Officer and Monitoring Advisor can support with the development of the levels of influence.

Stage of project development	Focus	How the advocacy team can help
Project delivery	<p>The delivery of the advocacy activities within the project. These may include the development of an advocacy plan in partnership with OPDs, a training component to raise awareness of rights and how to conduct advocacy, meetings with decision-makers, round table events, development of policy briefs and the use of media. There are a wide range of possible advocacy activities.</p>	<p>The advocacy team will support you to deliver the advocacy activities. We do not generally organise and implement the activities directly, but we can provide advice and resources throughout.</p>
Project monitoring	<p>Ensuring that progress towards advocacy objectives is tracked carefully using the levels of influence tool. Advocacy should be included throughout project reports.</p>	<p>The advocacy team can support with tracking progress and identifying where has been reached in the levels of influence framework. We can also work with you to ensure all outcomes are reported in the Advocacy Data Hub.</p>
Project end	<p>What changes did we influence?</p> <p>What was our role in the change process?</p> <p>What can we learn from the project?</p> <p>The progress from the project can be continued through the long-term advocacy plan.</p>	<p>The advocacy team can support with final reporting and with ensuring progress continues through the long-term advocacy plan.</p>

The advocacy team are involved throughout the PDP for all projects but please do get in touch if you need support or advice related to project design, delivery or monitoring.

# Developing an advocacy plan

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When developing an advocacy plan, there are **six key steps** that should be followed. The advocacy team can support with each of these. The key steps are as follows:

## 1. Identify the problem

This is likely to be the issue that the specific project is trying to address – for example, insufficient access to education, lack of access to SRHR services and information for people with disabilities, employment discrimination and lack of

accessible workplaces, or another area of our thematic strategies. For whichever thematic area a new project is focusing on, hopefully your long-term plan will already cover it and provide guidance around potential objectives.

## 2. Policy analysis

Consider the legal and political context for our thematic area to try to identify where the policy gaps and bottlenecks are. This involves considering:

- **Key global and regional frameworks and commitments**  
Which ones has your government signed on to, do they have a plan to achieve these and are they reporting on progress?
- **Relevant laws and policies**  
Are there provisions missing or do you disagree with some of the existing provisions?
- **National and local strategies and plans, including the National Development Plan**  
How do these approach your issue and are they aligned with relevant laws and policies?

- **Implementation frameworks for policies and plans**  
Are these in place and do they have clear roles and responsibilities, with accompanying budgets?
- **Budget**  
Including the allocation, release and spending of funds.
- **Policy reviews due or new policies and legislation being developed**  
The policy team has developed thematic guidance for current policy analysis, including key questions to ask and things to look for along the way.

### 3. Develop SMART objectives

From your policy analysis, with PGA's support, you should be able to identify one or two changes to laws, policies, budgets or departments that you want to see. When setting these out as objectives, it is useful to try to include an actor (the person who

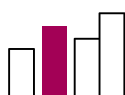
makes something happen), an action (what you want them to do) and a timeframe (when you aim to complete this by).

It is important to try to make sure your objectives are **'SMART'**:



#### Specific

What exactly do you want to happen? For example, an X per cent increase in budget allocation to inclusive education, the development of a new policy around inclusive employment which contains key provisions, or the implementation of a specific commitment made at the Global Disability Summit.



#### Measurable

Can you measure the expected change? You should be able to quantify and measure the change that has occurred. The advocacy team can support you to develop a Levels of Influence framework as described below.



#### Achievable

Is it possible to achieve your objectives given your resources and time? It is worth thinking about whether there are any opportunities for influencing coming up, such as the mid-term review of a policy or a consultation around a key strategy. If a five-year strategy has just been passed, it is unlikely it would be possible to change the content immediately.



#### Relevant

A relevant objective would be aligned with the project proposal, the thematic strategies and the long-term advocacy plans as much as possible.



#### Time-bound

By when do you want this to happen? Include a specific target date for the change to take place, to help track progress and maintain momentum.

## 4. Stakeholder mapping

Once you have understood the impact you want to create, it is important to understand the stakeholders involved, particularly those you want to influence.

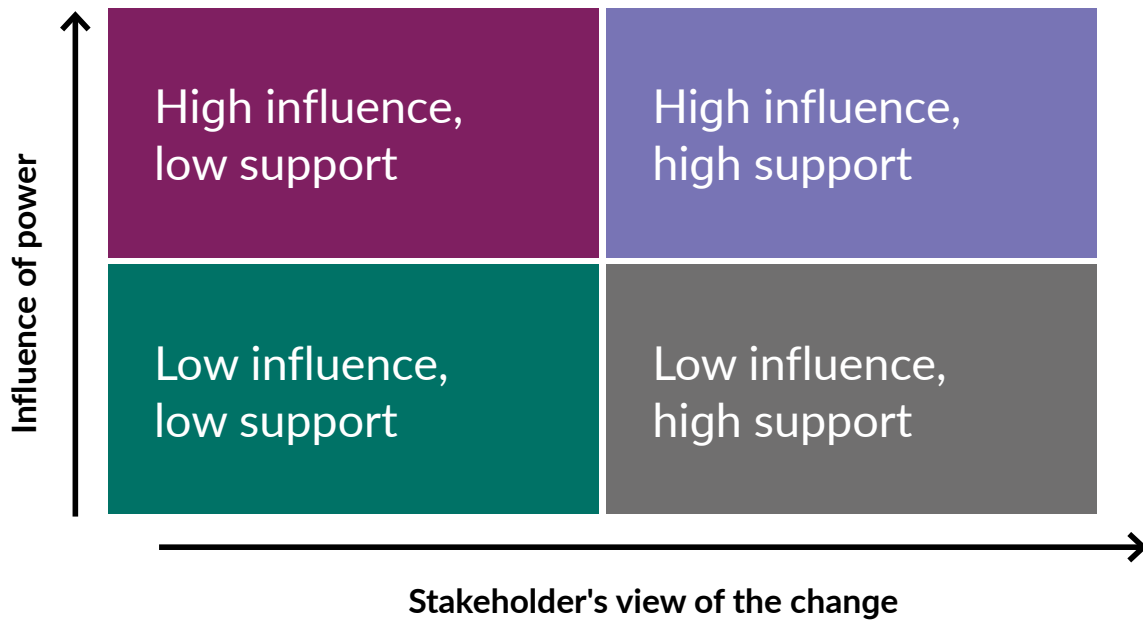
Key questions to ask include:

- Who will make the change? That is, who needs to be influenced? For example, a focal point within a Ministry, a key civil servant, a representative from the Prime Minister's Office or a District Development Officer?
- Who is likely to oppose the change and why? Is it because they disagree with what you're asking for? Is it because they don't have sufficient funds or they think something else is more important? Is it worth trying to change their mind?

- Who might support what you are doing and how could you work with them?
  - At what level are the decisions being made? (Parliaments, President, Ministries, State officials, District Officers, etc.)
  - Who are the decision-makers and institutions that can make the policy/strategy/budget/implementation changes that need to happen?
  - What is the decision-making process, who is consulted and who is listened to?
  - Who has the power to make the decision/have the final say (primary target) and who is consulted/listened to/has influence in the process (secondary targets)?



One way to plan your stakeholder mapping is by using a table like this:



This can help you to work out who already supports you and who you still need to convince, including how important they are to the change you want to see.



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Attendees listening to a presentation at the UN Summit of the Future in New York.

## 5. Choose impactful activities

Once you have a clear objective for the change you want to achieve, it is useful to plan backwards from the impact. This will help you to stay focused on your goal and what is needed to achieve it, rather than making decisions based on the resources you have and/or your usual activities.

The levels of influence framework can help you see the key steps towards your final objective and to think through what

is needed to reach each level. It helps to find a logical link between what you want to achieve and what needs to happen in order to get there. Think about it as 'We'll do X, so that Y can happen, so that we can achieve Z'. This helps to ensure your activities will lead towards the impact you are focusing on and to identify linkages between activities and real change.

## 6. Monitor and evaluate

Monitoring is all about regularly measuring and assessing your advocacy progress, enabling you to adapt your activities as you go along and try different ways of reaching decision-makers if needed. Evaluation looks back at the end of a project or advocacy

initiative to draw out learning that can be used in future influencing work. The following section explains in more detail how Sightsavers approaches monitoring and evaluating advocacy.

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Participant Idrissa at the Sightsavers citizenship and political participation workshop in Makeni.

# Monitoring and evaluating advocacy work

Progress towards policy and advocacy objectives is monitored on a monthly and annual basis. Every month, country offices submit reports to their Senior Global Advocacy Advisors and Global Advocacy Officers, outlining the key achievements, activities delivered, challenges encountered and new influencing opportunities. These reports feed into Sightsavers' internal management reporting process. Annual and monthly updates on policy and advocacy work feed into a dashboard in PowerBI ([bit.ly/4lkW76Z](https://bit.ly/4lkW76Z)), allowing all of Sightsavers' teams and country offices to view the progress made, and to filter the content by country, month and thematic area.

Every year, each country office completes an annual report, providing an account of the progress made towards the policy and advocacy objectives in each thematic area. The reports are reviewed by the relevant Senior Global Advocacy Advisors and Global Advocacy Officers, and an annual review call is held with each country office and relevant members of other teams to discuss the progress made and any questions arising. Project advocacy plans and long-term advocacy plans are updated following the annual review calls, ensuring that advocacy objectives are revised where needed to reflect changes in the political context or emerging policy influencing opportunities.

## LAMP indicators

Following the refresh of the thematic strategies in 2021, the Learning, Accountability and Monitoring Progress (LAMP) framework was developed, with indicators to measure progress towards the strategic level objectives. LAMP indicators relating to policy and advocacy have been developed and integrated into the annual reporting template, to ensure country offices are only required to submit one annual report.



# Monitoring through the Levels of Influence framework

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The Levels of Influence framework is Sightsavers' monitoring approach to set out the advocacy and policy objectives in our projects, and to measure and report progress towards them. This approach is based on the idea that progress towards our policy and objectives, although context specific, will loosely follow the same six stages:

- 1 Planning**  
Identification and presentation of clear policy and advocacy objectives through the development of an advocacy plan.
- 2 Understanding**  
Stakeholders understand our policy and advocacy objectives - for example, through developing and sharing policy and advocacy briefs, recommendations papers and other information resources.
- 3 Engagement and acceptance**  
Stakeholders demonstrate a willingness to engage with us and with the issues in which we are advocating change, take ownership of the issue, accept that the issue needs to be addressed and look into options for taking action - for example, a Ministry of Health agreeing to review recommendations on their health policy which Sightsavers has submitted.
- 4 Commitment**  
Stakeholders commit to implementing the changes which we have been advocating for - for example, a government committing to become a champion of the Inclusive Data Charter.
- 5 Delivery**  
Stakeholders deliver the policies and make the changes they have committed to - for example, a Ministry of Health integrating new indicators on disability in its Health Management Information System.
- 6 Reflection**  
Assessment of the successes, challenges encountered, and relevant lessons learned for future projects through a review.

# Evaluation of Sightsavers' work on policy and advocacy

Evaluations of Sightsavers' projects will typically contain components on policy and advocacy, assessing the extent to which the objectives were met. These evaluations provide a useful overview and are often required by donors and conducted by external consultants. However, due to the fluidity of political contexts, policy and advocacy objectives will often need to be changed during a project. As a result, standard evaluation methodologies for projects on thematic areas such as eye health and education are not well suited to policy and advocacy.

Therefore, to complement evaluations on policy and advocacy, Sightsavers has trialled an approach known as contribution analysis. Contribution analysis is an approach to evaluating the significance of different stakeholders in delivering the successes of a programme intervention. Instead of starting with the original project plans, contribution analysis begins at the end of a project, looks at the key achievements, and the role that was played in reaching them. Evidence is collected from multiple stakeholders, to demonstrate the extent to which they played a role in delivering the result. The end product is a performance story, articulating how each actor contributed to the key achievements.

Contribution analysis has a number of advantages which makes it more suited to the dynamics of policy and advocacy, including:

- A more flexible approach, in which any achievements can be evaluated, not only those relating to original objectives.
- Giving a broader assessment of attribution involving all key actors involved in delivering change, beyond the role of Sightsavers and the project under review.
- Acknowledgement that many factors influence a given outcome. It is not trying to prove attribution or claim that Sightsavers was the sole driver of change.

Contribution analysis has been piloted for the Irish Aid PGII programme and the aim is to apply it in evaluations of other projects in future.



# Budgets (advocacy budgeting through ORGOM and in projects)

Programmes with a policy influencing objective will need to have sufficient budget to deliver their outputs. To identify the amount, consider:

- Who will lead the work and what capacity do they need?
  - It is recommended to estimate the proportion of time a project officer, programme manager and country director will need to deliver the work in the project.
  - Could you combine the FTE allocation in a number of projects to hire an advocacy officer to support project (and wider) advocacy?
- Will there be meetings, events and workshops in the project? What is the approach being taken in the project to influence? If it is a technical piece of work using existing relationships and networks, it may not be necessary to budget much for meetings, workshops and events; however, if there is a need to develop new networks and build a consultative approach, this may require resources for convening to be included in the budget.

- Will the project use a set methodology (such as the DASA) and can budgets be set based on experience of using those methodologies?
- Who will provide the policy support for the analysis? If this is not the PGA team, is there a need for a short-term consultant?
- Is there potential for a research element in the project? If so, is this being discussed with the PGA team and EvRI team, and the budget allocated in the project?

Consider these, and other relevant questions, before the budget is finalised to ensure sufficient resources are available to influence the policies identified in the project.

In addition to this, the continued inclusion of advocacy budget in the ORGOM is vital to ensure Sightsavers' leadership in important sectoral policy opportunities. These include the SDGs, CRPD, inclusive health and national eye health coordination. These should be considered as part of the infrastructure of Sightsavers' influencing.

# Role of OPDs in our advocacy work

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## Sightsavers' Locally Led Development Statement 2023 states the following:

“As outlined in our programme strategy, in all our programmes we strive to make our own role either redundant (by strengthening partners, services and systems to be able to continue without us) or adaptable (by ensuring that any role we play in supporting or monitoring change is enabling rather than competing with existing structures). Simply put, we implement programmes with partners who are rooted in the systems and communities where we work.

“While in some circumstances we undertake research, implementation and influencing activities directly ourselves, our principal route to encouraging communities' participation in the development process is via partnerships, which help to enable and strengthen local organisations and to build sustainable accountability mechanisms.”

It is crucial for Sightsavers to work with OPDs and ensure people with disabilities are front and centre in our influencing. This enables us to better understand the needs and priorities of people with disabilities, to support people with disabilities to share their experiences and advocate for their rights, and to ensure they are part of decision-making processes which affect their lives. It also helps positive results from a project to be more likely to be sustained in the longer term. Even when our projects have come to an end, OPD partners will continue to work with national and local government authorities to ensure progress is sustained and built on.

Many of the influencing objectives will focus on the need for people with disabilities to be included in decisions which affect them. As noted above, this might include objectives like the development of technical working groups or parliamentary committees. Ensuring this is a priority for the national OPDs before developing the project advocacy objectives is crucial. It is obvious that the work needs to be led by OPDs, with Sightsavers support.

# How can PGA support country offices?

There are many ways in which PGA can support country offices with advocacy work when needed. The advocacy team also has staff who specialise in supporting advocacy within regions.

Some of the ways we can support include:

- Supporting the development or review of a country office's Long-term Advocacy Plan.
- Supporting with policy analysis and the development of objectives within PDP processes.
- Development of programmatic advocacy strategies.
- Advising on SMART objectives and the levels of influence framework.
- Drafting policy briefs or feeding into existing ones.
- Inputting into policy consultations.
- Helping with monthly and annual advocacy reporting.

- Delivering capacity-building training around advocacy.
- Providing information around global and regional policy processes and how you can engage in the lead-up to these.
- Delivering PGA podcasts and webinars around key areas of our advocacy work.

If the support you require is not on the list, please reach out and we will either be able to help you or point you in the direction of someone who can!





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Josephine, a student and youth disability advocate.

We work with partners in low  
and middle income countries  
to eliminate avoidable blindness  
and promote equal opportunities  
for people with disabilities

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