UNIT 4:

UNDERSTANDING YOUR ISSUE AND CONTEXT

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HelpAge International (Bolivia)

This unit will help participants to understand that they have valuable knowledge and experience to contribute to campaign issues. It will give them a deeper understanding of the wider context around different issues, and of the key elements that make up the wider campaigning context.

INVESTIGATING YOUR CAMPAIGN ISSUE

To elicit the depth of knowledge and experience participants' have about their own communities, conduct the following exercise.

Exercise 1a – Life experience

15 mins

Set a line across the room, running from point A to point B. Use masking tape on the floor, or two chairs set at each end of an imaginary line. Explain that point A represents the shortest period of time a person might have lived in an area, while point B represents the longest period of time a person might have lived in an area. Invite participants to line themselves up. They will need to talk to each other to find out how long each has lived in one area and arrange themselves in order. Invite observations.

Challenge the group to work out how many collective years' experience of living in the same area are represented in the room.

In plenary, celebrate and emphasise the depth of experience and knowledge present among participants. Even if people have lived in many different locations, their combined experience of community and relationships will be immense.

Exercise 1b – What is your issue?

10 mins

Split the group into pairs to hold quick buzz conversations. Ask pairs to share one priority issue facing older people in their area.

In plenary, invite participants to give examples of the issues they raised in the buzz conversations. Ask them how easy it was to come up with those issues. Point out that because these are issues that participants have experienced directly, they can name them straight away.

Note: Participants in this group have considerable knowledge and experience of their communities and of the issues facing older people. This means they are uniquely placed to campaign on those issues.

Exercise 2 – But why?

To help themselves and others to understand their issues, set up this "But why" exercise:

Prime a participant to ask you "But why?" after every statement you make.

Choose an issue with which to demonstrate the exercise. For example:

You: My grandmother is ill.

Participant: But why?

You: Because she has broken her leg and is stuck at home.

Participant: But why?

You: Because…

Participant asks "But why?" five times.

Invite participants to choose an issue affecting older people in their community and get them to work in pairs. Pairs take it in turn to name their issue and be asked "But why?" five times.

In plenary, discuss what happened. What did the "But why?" questions reveal? Was it easy or hard to dig deeper into the root cause of the issue? What would have been different if participants had been asked "But why?" only twice?

Use another example to deepen participants' understanding of this, either one of your own choosing or the example below:

Issue: a lack of access to safe drinking water

Possible causes: ask participants to give suggestions, which could include:

Checklist

- The community let the well get into a poor condition.
- The local government said it would dig a new well last year but it hasn't.
- Central government has not released the funds they promised.
- Donors haven't released the funds they promised.

In your example, be sure to demonstrate that by asking "But why?" you can often reveal root causes of problems or issues.
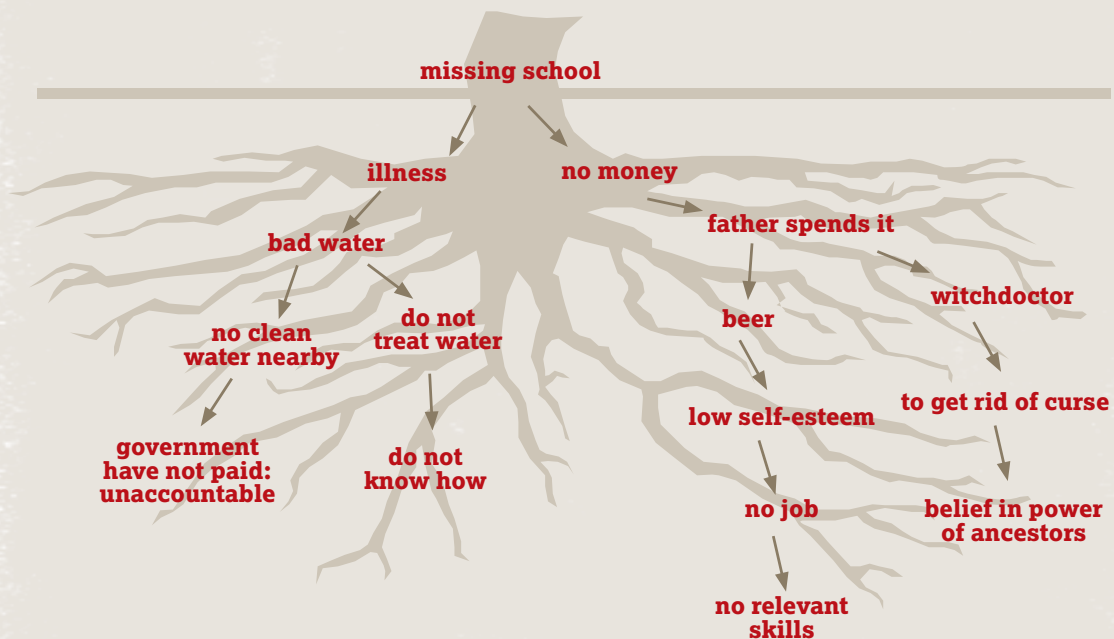
25 mins

4.1

Exercise 3 – The problem tree

Using Handout Unit 4.1, divide participants into groups of three or four, and ask them to suggest reasons why getting to the root cause of a problem is beneficial in campaigning work.

At each "But why?" there are a variety of answers that can be given and if the exercise is repeated for the same problem a number of times, you will be able to identify many of the roots of the problem. A simple example is given below, although problem trees can sometimes become much larger!

missing school

illness   no money

bad water   father spends it

no clean water nearby   do not treat water   beer   witchdoctor

government have not paid: unaccountable   do not know how   low self-esteem   to get rid of curse

no job   belief in power of ancestors

no relevant skills

4.2

Using Handout Unit 4.2, in plenary, invite each group to give one of their suggestions until you have a list. Cross-check this against the checklist below.

Checklist

The benefits of exploring root causes of a problem

- It will uncover multiple solutions for a certain problem and allow you to see alternatives that you might not have seen before. It increases the chances of choosing the right solution, because many aspects of the problem are explored during the "But why?" exercise.

- Many causes and solutions may apply to your problem, so it is up to you to find the ones that seem most important and that you have the capacity to work on.

- The "But why?" analysis by itself does not automatically lead to the area you should focus your campaign activities on, but it does highlight the different causes of the problem and the different paths you might take to solve it.

- Identifying genuine solutions to a problem means knowing what the real causes of the problem are.

- Taking action without identifying what factors contribute to the problem can result in misdirected efforts. This wastes time and resources.

- Identifying real causes of the problem, not just support for a "solution". For example, if there's hunger in a community, rather than simply distributing free food, asking why can overcome ignorance or denial as to why this problem exists.

- It is a quick and inexpensive technique that can be used by anyone, at any time, anywhere.

Note: Interpretation of causes depends on your own perspective. Remember, you can choose how to position your campaign, as you know your context and your issue well.

HelpAge International (Democratic Republic of Congo)

BEING AWARE OF THE WIDER CONTEXT AROUND YOUR CAMPAIGN ISSUE

In plenary, underline that not only is it important to explore the root causes of a problem or issue, it is also important to understand the context which surrounds that issue. For instance, older people in Cambodia tell us that a key part of their campaigning depends on knowing how the commune structure works: for example, finding out about the commune investment plans and funds. Ask participants to name elements in their context which are important to understand when campaigning on different issues.

Ensure that the discussion covers the topics in the checklist.

Checklist

- Decision-making space
- Political parties
- Administrative structures
- External opportunities
- Policy

Exercise 4 – Understanding key elements that make up the wider context

Set up a few stations around the room with pens and flip chart paper. At each station, have a coloured paper marked with a key element, using Handout Unit 4.3, with the accompanying descriptions ("decision-making space" at one station, "policy", "political parties", "administrative structures", and "external opportunities" at other stations).

Set up a carousel exercise. Divide participants into small groups. Invite each group to visit each station and share their understanding of the element written down there. Invite them to list questions and key points on flip charts at each station. At each notation, groups build on the key points and questions they find.
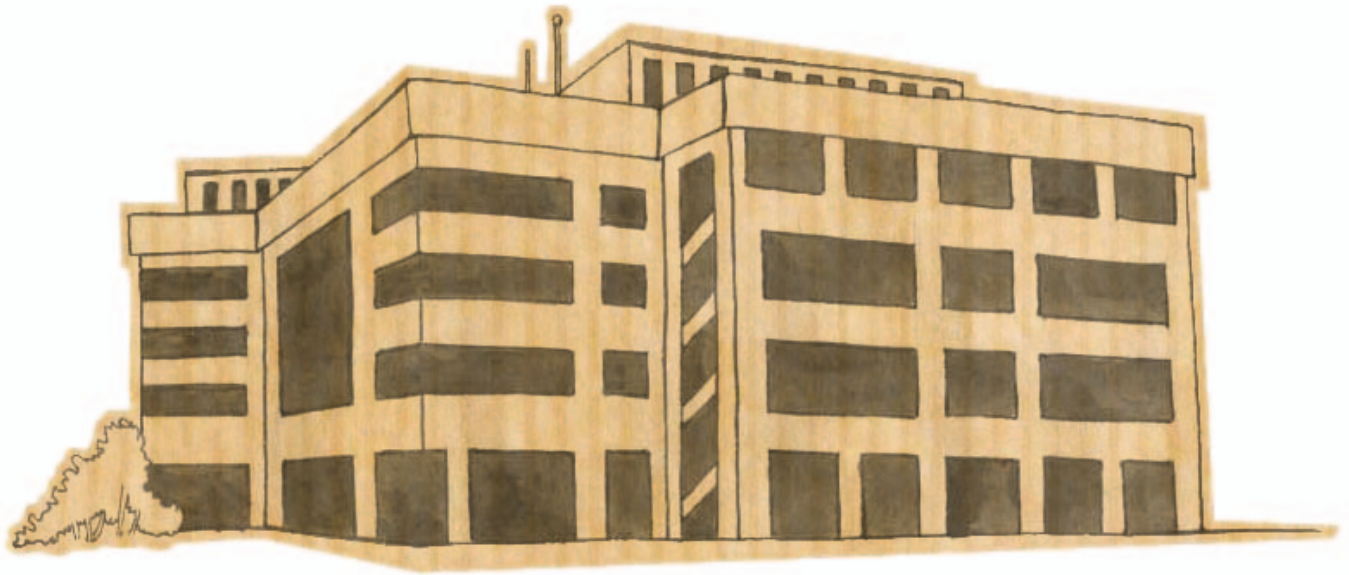
Note: Remember to mix participants with different levels of literacy in this exercise. Apportion less time for each rotation.

In plenary, discuss participants' pooled ideas and questions from each station in turn. Allow the group to learn from each other's knowledge, building their understanding of each element within the wider context.

RENPERMAE (Ecuador)

The wider context around your campaign issue

Decision-making space – institutions are the bodies that make decisions on a wide range of issues, so it is vital to understand how they operate. Which institutions can you name that are relevant in your context?

Political parties – are you acquainted with the relevant political parties who might have an interest (positive or negative) in your issue(s)?

Administrative structures – what are the relevant administrative structures that have a bearing on your issue and context?

External opportunities – opportunities exist that can influence your issue(s). Examples include planned regional, national and international events; and unplanned external events. Can you list some current external opportunities?

Policy (national and international) – policy constitutes a plan, course of action or set of regulations adopted by government, businesses or other institutions designed to influence and determine decisions or procedures. Consider how issues get onto the policy-making agenda. Can you describe the stages involved? Do you know at what point you might make an effective intervention through your campaign work?

Checklist

Examples of the process of policy-making:

- draft regulation based on law
- publish in federal or state register
- public comment/public hearing
- respond to comments
- make revision
- enactment
- implementation by relevant bodies or agencies
- legislation.

Wrap up: Please refer to the facilitators' notes in Appendix A for guidance on monitoring progress and embedding learning.

UCAM (Chile)

UNIT 4:
HANDOUTS

Handout Unit 4.1

The problem tree

At each "But why?" there are a variety of answers that can be given and if the exercise is repeated for the same problem a number of times, you will be able to identify many of the roots of the problem. A simple example is given below, although problem trees can sometimes become much larger!
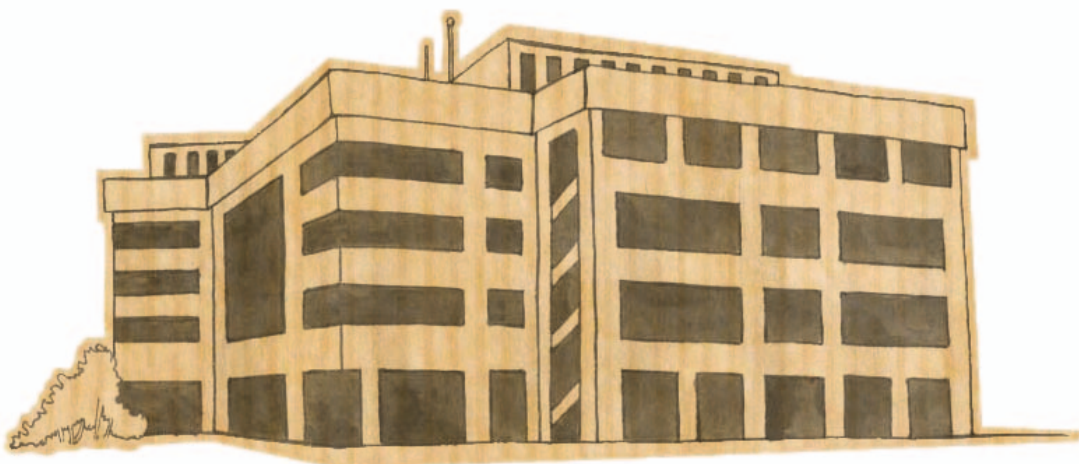
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Handout Unit 4.2

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Handout Unit 4.3

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Examples of the process of policy-making: draft regulation based on law; publish in federal or state register; public comment/public hearing; respond to comments; make revision; enactment; implementation by relevant bodies or agencies; legislation.

Handout Unit 4.4

Older people are at the heart of campaigns work. Through this training and the ongoing engagement of older people, we are growing a global movement of campaigners who will portray the characteristics listed below.

PROFILE OF AN OLDER PERSON CAMPAIGNER

YOU

...CAN DIALOGUE AND DEBATE AND PERSUADE AND YOU CAN WIN!

...ARE SURE TO MAINTAIN AND ATTEND TO YOUR GROUP

...HAVE A UNIQUE PLACE TO SPEAK CREDIBLY ABOUT ISSUES — BECAUSE YOU EXPERIENCE THEM

...ARE KEEN TO INFORM OTHERS ABOUT OLDER PEOPLE AND THEIR REALITIES

...ARE A VALUABLE SPOKESPERSON FOR THE MEDIA

...HAVE A HEART TO DEVELOP YOUR GROUP

...ALLOW PEOPLE TO SELF-IMPROVE TOGETHER

...ARE STRONG WHEN YOU CONSIDER YOUR OWN VALUES, CULTURE AND HISTORY

...ARE READY TO PARTICIPATE

...ARE A GOOD ANCHOR FOR YOUR GROUP

...UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT, ESPECIALLY THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

...CAN SPEAK ABOUT YOUR LIFE AND THE CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN AN ENGAGING WAY

...SHOW EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE GROUP OR MOVEMENT

...DEPEND ON THE SOURCE OF POWER WITHIN YOURSELF

PROFILE OF AN OLDER PERSON CAMPAIGNER
RHODA NGIMA, 77, KENYA

HelpAge Kenya

"We have been removed from a very dark pit and brought to the surface where there is light. ADA has made me an ambassador to spread news about older people. I have learnt that even in older age I am able to do something worthwhile and constructive for my country."

Rhoda Ngima

Rhoda has long been a pivotal figure in her church and community, where she brings people together, inspiring them to stay strong and keep going through life's challenges. She's now bringing her leadership experience and social commitment to ADA, where she's already made a big impact.

In 2009, she led an ADA delegation to meet the Prime Minister. And the following year, she met the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Development to explain the benefits of increasing pensions. After the meeting, the Government agreed to raise pension payments for all older people in Kenya.

In 2012, Rhoda travelled to Brussels where she met several Members of the European Parliament. In her speech, she spoke about her life in Kenya and the challenges older people face in developing countries, urging the European Union not to forget her generation. She passionately believes that the world's older people should unite as one voice.

HelpAge Kenya

This is one unit from a set that makes up the ADA Campaign Training Manual. You can download single units, or the full manual from:

www.agedemandsaction.org

ADA
Age Demands Action

HelpAge
International
global network

Age Demands Action is a HelpAge global network campaign