

# Module 1: Advocacy and media

## This module will help you understand:

- How citizen journalism can influence decision makers and create change
- How to write strong stories that support an advocacy campaign strategy
- How to identify and communicate with your audiences
- How to develop compelling messages and write relevant stories
- How to pitch stories to a media outlet



Sex workers' rights protest at the Cambodian Embassy in New York City (2008)

## Can citizen journalism change the world?

**The opportunities for citizens to bear witness to injustice, document issues and report them to local, national and international audiences is unparalleled in today's digital world. But the act of citizen journalism is not something that has come into existence with the invention of the internet.**

In 1890, a police officer named Jacob Riis started photographing the squalor and poverty he witnessed as he worked the beat in New York City slums. He published the photos alongside his writing in a book called *How The Other Half Lives*, and this led to a decade-long effort to improve housing, schools and public services in the city's slums.

Today, with the internet it is even easier for people to advocate for social change by self-publishing what they are documenting. In 2007, a young woman in Egypt set up a blog to document torture at the hands of the police. Noha Atef's blog *Torture in Egypt* brought to light atrocities that were otherwise hidden from public view. Her posts gained the attention of the media and were also used as evidence in a court of law to prosecute police officers.

## The role of mainstream media in change

Citizen journalists are playing an increasingly important role using blogs and social media to report on issues and give a local perspective, particularly in countries where free speech and media access is limited.

Yet no matter how persuasive your stories are, if they are only being read by your friends and family they will have little impact on the matters at stake. Module nine on social media will look at how to build your own audience, but in the meantime it's important to remember that mainstream media still plays a strong role in educating, informing and swaying public opinion. Decision makers pay attention to mainstream media and its coverage and this often directly influences policy. So it's important to learn to pitch your stories to editors, as getting stories published in mainstream press is a great way to communicate with and influence a wider audience.

Getting effective media coverage can be challenging. But don't forget that citizen journalists have an advantage when it comes to getting the local scoop and mainstream media has woken up to this fact. Most media



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outlets now see citizen journalists as a welcome source of information, providing photos, videos, and eyewitness accounts.

To engage mainstream media, you need to understand:

- which media outlets are important to the people you are trying to reach
- how to effectively convey your advocacy message through your writing
- how to pitch your writing to editors and reporters so that they will see relevance to their priorities.

### Exercise one

Using the example table below map out what you know about your local and national media outlets. Then do further research, brainstorm with friends, network with other activists and correspondents to build your knowledge and contacts.

Claudia Spellmant of REDLACTRANS on a march through the streets of Guatemala to demand an end to transphobia in Latin America

### Media mapping example for the UK

Media outlet	Platform	Contact	Political leaning	Audience	Attitude to/coverage of HIV
The Guardian	Daily newspaper (except Sundays) and website	Add names and numbers of your contacts here. You will need different contacts depending on what kind of content is being pitched, ie: photo story to picture editor; news story with UK angle to UK news desk; news story with Africa angle to foreign editor or in-country correspondent; development story to editor of Guardian's Global Development website etc.	Left-leaning, with a readership largely split between Labour and Liberal Democrat voters.	Readership figures around 935,000. Largely middle class, well-educated professionals, with marginally more men than women, the vast majority over 35. Predominantly UK audience for newspaper but website is an internationally respected source of news.	Well-informed, tends to focus on HIV from a UK angle rather than international or within the context of broader development issues.
Al Jazeera	Broadcast (TV) and website	Al Jazeera has over 20 channels. Main UK contact for example would be with the head of planning or the head of news at Al Jazeera English.	Channel is owned by the Emir of Qatar but is editorially independent and aims for a non-western news agenda.	Broadcasts across 130 countries seven days a week.	Tends to cover HIV from an international perspective, usually from a developing world angle, ie: access to treatment. Can be more in-depth than other channels.



Activist groups like ACT UP were instrumental in calling for the release of effective AIDS related drugs

## What is the change that you and others are trying to make happen?

Advocacy plays an important role in the development of services provided to the public around health. In particular, activism has significantly impacted HIV and AIDS treatment, improving access to medicines in marginalised communities.

In 2013, sex worker activist groups helped overturn the 'anti-prostitution pledge' in the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) that prevented recipients of PEPFAR grants from doing anything that could be perceived as supporting sex work.

If you are writing for change it is important to have clear goals in mind. Aim for goals that are achievable and time-limited. So don't aim to 'end hunger', but aim to establish a food bank in a community or get the government to set aside funds for a school lunch programme to feed students.

### Key things to understand:

- What is the problem?
- Is there a solution? If so, what?
- Who can make the solution possible?
- How can you influence those that can make the solution possible?

As a citizen journalist you may be setting your own agenda, deciding what the problems are you want to address and defining your own goals for the things you want to change. Or you may be working with others on more complex campaigns, in which case you will need to coordinate your writing with the other campaigners and journalists in your network.

Whatever the context you need to understand how the piece you are writing supports the overall goal and how it fits into the advocacy strategy. This means thinking carefully about the timing and the messaging in your piece.

For instance, if there is a campaign to fight for greater funding at your local health clinic that would improve services, don't just write about how bad the service is. Instead, write about the solutions and how the existing poor services could be improved with greater funding. Also try to highlight what the wider

benefits of an improved health service would bring – maybe a healthier workforce and increased economic prosperity.

You also need to think about when will be the best time to write this piece – can it coincide with a visit from a health minister or an announcement about a new policy on funding for health services? What is going to make it really newsworthy and increase the chance of your story being picked up in the mainstream media?

Your story is a building block towards the overall goal – so how will it help? Is it a call to action? Do you want people to do a specific task, such as writing to a government official or participate in an organised protest? Are you advocating for a change in law or policy? Or are you trying to raise awareness on a specific issue to change people's behaviour? For example, does your story expose the injustice of discriminating against people living with HIV, does it engage people's emotions and can it help change people's attitudes and combat stigma?

## Your audience

One of the most important questions you can ask about the piece you are preparing to write is; who do you want to read this? The most effective writing will establish a connection to the audience and compel them to take some form of action. How will your piece influence the reader?

Your writing should relate to your audience as stakeholders in the change you are trying to achieve. Think about who is involved or impacted by the issue, as well as who has the influence or power to make the change happen. You should understand where the key stakeholders stand:

- Are they opponents to your goal? This will be your toughest audience to write for as you will need to have a deep understanding of their values to counter their position. If they are opposed because of moralistic values, providing strong evidence and data is critical to get opponents to reconsider their stance. It is also important to realise that in order to get opponents to move, they will need much more than a single written piece to compel them and working within a coordinated and sustained advocacy campaign is important.
- Are they neutral parties? If so, you need to educate them. You need to compel them to become allies. Often personal stories are a great way to get people to understand and engage in an issue. But you will also need to lead them to places where data and evidence is provided so that they can get more facts and the bigger picture after reading about a personal story.
- Are they allies? If so then you don't need to convince them, but you do need to encourage them to take action. Signpost them to things they should do and perhaps tell them something about the issue they don't know to motivate them. If you want to get them to engage neutral parties or opponents, provide them with talking points and evidence. Present specific ways that they can take action.

If your writing will appear in an existing newspaper or magazine, that will largely dictate where the reader lies in the above three categories. Each media outlet will be targeting a certain demographic and it will be important to know the social group, political slant, geographical location, and age of their readers.



Sex worker activist groups helped overturn the 'anti-prostitution pledge' in the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) that prevented recipients of PEPFAR grants from doing anything that could be perceived as supporting sex work



## Developing key messages

After you have an understanding of who you are trying to reach in your campaign and what it is you want them to do, you are ready to develop your messaging. An advocacy campaign may have a number of different messages based on the different stakeholders you are trying to reach.

An effective message will be:

- honest and in no way misleading
- something new, maybe even shocking
- connected to the core values of the audience
- highlighting the critical importance of the cause
- simple and concise, easy to understand and remember
- timely and relevant to the current discussion around a particular topic
- emphasising the need to take action and how audience participation can lead to a solution.

## Identifying relevant stories

Writing for change can take a number of different forms (see module five on blogging) but its most important outcome is to connect people to the issue. You may use your writing as a way of organising your community and getting people connected, or you may be supporting an existing campaign, or you might simply be using your writing to voice your concerns about an existing problem.

If you are writing a piece that is presenting data and evidence you will need to find the narrative thread in the data to create a compelling story from it. If you are focusing on an individual's story, think about how this person's experience relates to the wider issue and highlights the message you are trying to convey.

When writing for the Key Correspondents network it is important that all stories have an HIV angle. For example, you could consider writing stories on the following topics:



Above left: Members of a youth group in Dakar, Senegal, discuss sexual and reproductive health and rights (2007)

Above: Youth protest at the 9th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in Bali, Indonesia (2009)



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A member of the Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK) making his point

- **HIV and the human rights of vulnerable groups:** Stories relating to those most at risk of HIV, such as men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers, injecting drug users, prisoners, women and children. Consider how their human rights are abused through criminalisation, discriminatory legislation, violations and hate crimes (including gender-based violence), stigma from state/law enforcement agencies and healthcare providers.
- **HIV prevention and treatment:** Condoms, community sensitisation, public health education, harm reduction, access to services, financing, counselling and testing, antiretroviral therapy, scientific advances, medical training for health workers.
- **HIV and care:** Community-based care, wider socio-economic impact on carers, access to services, financing.
- **HIV and sexual and reproductive health, including maternal newborn and child health:** Family planning, sero-discordant couples, parent to child transmission, breastfeeding, male participation.
- **HIV and its links with other health issues:** Tuberculosis, non-communicable diseases, neglected tropical diseases, healthcare resourcing and health systems, universal health coverage.
- **HIV, children and youth:** Children living with HIV, children impacted by HIV, families impacted by HIV, orphans, education.
- **HIV and links with wider development issues:** Livelihoods, food security, emergencies, fragile states, poverty, governance, water and sanitation.
- **HIV and the key players:** National and international donors, humanitarian and development organisations, the private sector including pharmaceuticals and health insurers, public-private partnerships, civil society, community engagement, post Millennium Development Goals, corporate social responsibility, health strengthening systems.

## How to pitch to the media

Firstly, make sure you've done your media mapping and research. You need to consider:

- Is this a national, regional or local outlet? What stories will be relevant to them? If your story only has a local angle, it's unlikely to be of interest to a national outlet.
- What can you find out about the person to whom you are pitching? Research the stories they have been involved with. Learn what interests them and what are their editorial priorities. Establishing a professional relationship with an editor will be a huge benefit.

*Dear Caroline,*

*I hope this finds you well. Your newspaper provides excellent coverage on the topic of HIV treatment so I wondered whether the following story might be of interest.*

*Story idea: exposing how the costs of qualifying for free medicines means that those who most need them can't afford them.*

*Angle: As you know, antiretroviral medicine is free to all in this country. However the newly introduced pre-requisite that individuals pay \$25 for a blood test means many are not able to access medicines. I have access to families who have been impacted by this requirement. I also have access to doctors at our local clinic, who are willing to be interviewed about how they see this affecting their clinics and practice.*

*Execution: I would like to write a feature story focusing on April, a single mother living with HIV who is faced with the choice of paying for the test or providing food for her children.*

*I write regularly about HIV and its impact on our community, and you can see samples of my writing at: [KeyCorrespondents.org/Angie-Mbarra](http://KeyCorrespondents.org/Angie-Mbarra)*

*I hope you don't mind if I phone you in the next day or two to discuss this idea. Or, you can contact me by email or on my mobile: 212-787-6985.*

*Many thanks for your time.*

*Angie Mbarra*

When crafting your email pitch it is vital to include the following information:

- Subject: A two sentence summary of your story idea
- Angle: Why is it newsworthy? Why write this story now? Why are you the person to write it?
- Execution: What format will the story take; news, feature, picture story etc
- Contact and bio details: Include relevant links, for example to your blog or profile on Key Correspondents

Here's an example of an email pitch:



### Top tips:

- Make sure you've done your research before you pitch.
- Be concise, to the point and clear in your pitch.
- If you have no response to your email after 2-3 days, pick up the phone.
- Get to the point quickly – you will probably have 30 seconds or less.
- Be honest – if you don't know the answer to a question, tell them you will find the answer and get back to them.
- Remember you can be quoted while you are talking to a reporter, so think carefully about what you say.
- No means no – respect a negative response but remember that doesn't mean you can't approach them in the future. If they won't run with your pitch, learn about what they will run with, so your next pitch can be more focused on what interests them.
- Don't ask about pay until they commit to commissioning you.
- Once commissioned be prepared to deliver quickly, to the correct word count, and always make your deadline.
- If you want a guarantee of future work, deliver before your deadline!



Opposite page: A member of a youth group in the Malnicherra tea plantation in Sylhet, Bangladesh, discussing sexual health and rights

Left: Ruth Lucy Mtonga Chatama is a member of the Positive Women's Network in Abuwe, Zambia, a support group specifically for HIV positive nurses (2007)

## Case study of writing for change:

### Context:

Blessing lives in a rural community in eastern Uganda and she's noticed HIV and unwanted pregnancies are an increasing issue with the teen population.

### The problem:

After talking to a number of young people she realises that many of them feel too embarrassed and scared to go to the local health clinic. There are a number of issues at play, including fear of being told off for having sex and embarrassment around talking about condoms, as well as stigma around HIV and homosexuality.

### The solution:

Blessing decides she wants to change the way her community deals with these issues and encourage young people to know their rights and look after their sexual and reproductive health.

Blessing identifies three objectives she wants to achieve by communicating about this issue:

1. Raise the profile of a new clinic delivering integrated sexual and reproductive health and HIV services tailored for young people.
2. Promote the health and economic benefits of integrating sexual and reproductive health services and rights with HIV programmes, funders and policy makers.
3. Raise young people's awareness of their sexual and reproductive rights, and combat stigma around HIV.



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## Action plan to achieve the solution:

### 1. Identifying stakeholders

Blessing identifies the following key decision makers and influential people in her community who have the power to change public opinion and help achieve her objectives:

- Local pastor
- Village chief
- Education body
- Public health authority

Since the pastor is an opponent to any projects that involve sex education or discussion of homosexuality, Blessing knows that she needs to provide strong evidence to counter his moralistic arguments.

The village chief doesn't want to tackle this controversial issue for fear of upsetting the other elders on the village council, but he is largely neutral in his own stance – however, his wife is a former charity worker and she strongly supports HIV issues.

The education body is neutral and the public health authority is an ally but has had difficulty in getting the innovative programme funded and implemented.

Teenagers are largely fearful of speaking out. Blessing knows it will be important to raise their voices but will have to do so without revealing identities.

Parents of teenagers who are either living with HIV or pregnant or both are largely supportive of Blessing's endeavours and she knows she can rely on many of them to be supportive.

### 2. Developing the key message

Blessing boils it down to the following statement:

Tailoring sexual and reproductive healthcare for young people, and integrating it with HIV services can reduce unintended pregnancies, new HIV infection and HIV-related maternal mortality.

### 3. Developing campaign activity

Blessing decides to:

- write an op-ed piece with a parent to give their point of view
- set up a blog to gather stories about local teen's experiences
- form a support group for parents who have teenagers who are pregnant and/or are living with HIV.

Above left: Denis Nzokia, religious relations assistant at the Gay and Lesbians Coalition of Kenya

Above: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender activists protest for their rights in Argentina

Opposite page: APN+ protest for free drugs at the 9th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific in Bali, Indonesia (2009)



So it might not always be quite this simple! But Blessing's story provides a basic example of some of the steps involved in writing for change and the potential impact you can make.

What ideas would you have contributed to Blessing's action plan? What other things could she have considered?

### The result:

The local paper runs the op-ed piece along with the URL of the blog.

After reading the article, the village chief's wife asks if she and her husband can meet with the parent group.

Ahead of the meeting, Blessing prepares print outs of her research about sexual and reproductive health and rights programmes, their costs and effectiveness and gives them to the parents to use as talking points in their meeting.

The village chief is inspired and motivated by the meeting and subsequently takes the issues up with the local pastor.

The pastor begins to soften in his views towards sexual health education, and more conversations on the subject begin taking place within the community.

Gradually more young people start using the new clinic and the rate of HIV and teenage pregnancy decreases.

### Further reading

Raising your voice about politically-charged issues or asking tough questions can put you at risk for intimidation, surveillance or physical violence.

We highly recommend you read this World Pulse online safety and security toolkit:

[worldpulse.com/pulsewire/solutions/48368](http://worldpulse.com/pulsewire/solutions/48368)

## Exercise two

Use the following checklist and develop your own advocacy plan.

- Identify the problem
- Identify the change you want to make
- Map your stakeholders as opponents, neutral parties or allies
- Develop key messages
- Identify key topics and stories
- Map out potential media outlets
- Write a media pitch for your story