

ADVOCACY AND THE ROLE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS' SOCIAL CENTERS IN TIMES OF CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this document is to help the social works of the Society of Jesus in their task to influence public policies through advocacy. We understand this goal both in relation with the public opinion and the development public policies (and the process of getting up to that point). It is not a theoretical document, but a reading on approaches, methodologies and practices of some Jesuits' Social Centers, that have already made their contribution to achieve concrete changes in public policies by deepening democracy, via the promotion of citizen participation at different levels¹.

The Latin American network of Jesuit Social Centers was born in June 2008. From then on, actions aiming to develop a joint advocacy platform with an Ignatian perspective have been set out. The Advocacy Project (AP) formally appeared in 2009 seeking to strengthen the advocacy capacity of the Jesuits' Social Centers while *“contributing to improve the quality of public life in our Latin American reality through the change of power relations amongst citizens –especially amongst excluded groups– and hoping that this is reflected in inclusive public policies.”* The AP has been functioning through digital exchange seeking to share and discuss the vision, experiences, ways of thinking and modes of advocacy from different Jesuit Social Centers in Latin America and the Caribbean region. All the materials collected have been published in three different virtual editions². The path followed during these last years has lead us to recognize advocacy as a fundamental tool in our work – at different levels and with different subjects and target groups – present in planning and action of each social center, a tool that requires a lot of discernment and participation.

The present document seeks: (1) to provide an account of some particularities of the Latin American context, (2) to address briefly the relation between advocacy and public policy, advocacy and human rights, and advocacy and citizenship, (3) to present the advances in advocacy that the Society of Jesus through its social centers has had, and (4) to set forth

¹ We thank Luz Ángela Herrera who helped us to make up this document out of the material we gathered from the Latin America Jesuits' Social Centers. The sources of this systematization are based on some interviews conducted in 2013 with Francisco J. Álvarez, S.J. - Social Justice and Ecology's General Secretary in the SJ Curia, Rome; Jorge Cela, S.J. - President of the Jesuit Provincials' Conference of Latin America and Caribe region – CPAL; Mauricio García Durán, S.J., national director of the Jesuits Refugee Service in Colombia and coordinator of the Jesuit Migrant's Network in Latin America and Caribe; Luis Guillermo Guerrero Guevara – General Director of the Center for Research and Popular Education, CINEP/PPP in Bogotá; John Jairo Montoya Rivera, S.J., at that time National Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Colombia; José Ignacio Equizábal – NGO Director working with the international cooperation sector in Loyola's Jesuit Province, Spain; Lucia Rodríguez Donate, Executive Coordinator of the Program for Public Action in Fe y Alegría's International Federation, and with Alfredo Ferro, S.J. Coordinator of the CPAL's Pan - Amazonic Project. On the other hand, this text is based on concrete collected experiences about advocacy produced by Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín - PRODH, México; Centro de Investigación y Promoción - CIPCA, Bolivia; Corporación Hogar de Cristo, Ecuador; Servicio de Jesuitas para Refugiados – SJR, Colombia/LAC; Instituto de Investigación y Desarrollo de la UCA - NITLAPA, Nicaragua; Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular – CINEP, Bogotá, and Instituto Mayor Campesino – IMCA, Buga - Colombia.

² “Lessons on advocacy 2013”, “Lessons on advocacy 2014” and “Lessons on advocacy 2015” are available in www.cpalsocial.org/docs

some of the challenges the Social sector faces in order to improve its assertiveness in advocacy action.

THE CONTEXT OF LATIN AMERICA

The instauration of a driven market economy as the main force of development, places back into the center the debates on inequality and the inequity of social and economic conditions that seem inherent to the system of the capitalist world. The dominant models of development in Latin America generate high concentrations of wealth and income, and the social struggles and debates have been revolving around equality and human dignity since the mid-twentieth century –with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In that way, equality and equity became inextricably linked to human rights and dignity; ‘justice’ is at the center of the debate.

Nowadays, Latin American countries are making efforts to consolidate democratic processes of participation, and struggles against exclusion as well as for building social and political alternatives. Undoubtedly, these differentiated processes depend on the particularities of each country. In this framework, social organisms, NGOs, research centers, and other key groups of civil society interested in human rights, social justice, and sustainable and equal development, face big challenges when propelling social and political alternatives. The struggles of the social movements express demands for education, health, housing and jobs, and raise a claim for political recognition as subjects, struggling to consolidate their social agendas against models of development exclusively supported on economic growth –which implies more inequality and inequity.

In this Latin American context, the Society of Jesus, through its social centers, plays a fundamental role contributing to the processes of change and transformation in groups and populations historically excluded from development.

RELATION BETWEEN ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC POLICY

The conceptual framework for the assessment of advocacy and the review of some experiences of the Society of Jesus’ social centers, is based on the combination of two approaches: one considering the liberties of economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR), and another one related to methodologies: analysis of development, democracy, and social public policies.

On Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

The main goal of the social policy within a Social and Democratic State of Rights is the protection and guarantee of universal and fundamental freedoms and human rights, particularly the economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR). The United Nations General Assembly approved the Convention on ESCR in 1966. Likewise, the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (“Protocol of San Salvador”) was adopted with the Act 389 of 1966, and came into effect on 16th November, 1999. These universal principles are reinforced, also, through decentralization (political, fiscal, and administrative), local autonomy, environmental balance, democracy, participation, social responsibility, and solidarity from all citizens.

Social Policy as Public Policy

To integrate the social policy as a public policy implies a deep change of approach entailing true democratic participation in the decision-making processes. It is the transition from *an offer of social services* to the *implementation of public policies out of the social demands*, and with the participation of social actors. It means that social services as public policies are successful if they are able to contribute in the formation of people and groups conceiving and acting themselves as subjects of rights, capable of contributing to public decision-making through their daily political experiences – at the individual or family level, or from social organizations. What kind of society is required and what are the roles and the relationships between actors, are issues to define when building social policy.

Public Policy and Citizenship

The extension of citizenship is one of the central purposes of social democratic policy. The formation of citizens –with civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights– actively participating in social and political life must be the goal of an integral and democratic social policy. While guaranteeing the universality of these rights for the entire population, it is necessary to take into account the cultural, ethnic, sexual, and age diversity of such population. This means that social policies, programs, and projects should seek to ensure both things: on the one hand, the universal access to education, health, and basic attention, and on the other the specific characteristics and demands of women, blacks, peasants, indigenous peoples, children, youth, and other diverse groups of society³. In addition, as a collective construction aimed at enhancing collective well-being, any kind of public policy is embedded in a social project that has historical determinations.

³ The invitation is to talk about citizenships (in plural) and not citizenship (in singular). Cfr. Sarmiento A., Libardo (2006). *Panorama Social de Medellín. Diagnóstico social de Medellín y evaluación del modelo de intervención de la Secretaría de Bienestar Social – 2007*. Corporación Región, Alcaldía de Medellín, Secretaría de Bienestar Social.

The Structural Complexity of Development, Democracy, and Public Policy

Being multidimensional problems by nature, social issues in general and inequality in particular, cannot be addressed through dislocated actions. Today, it is widely accepted that the simple combination of economic growth and basic social services for the poor, together with the generation of solidarity networks, are not enough to face the problems related with poverty, inequality, and exclusion. Indeed, several studies point out the limitations of social assistance approaches with a narrow sectorial character and with the perspective of segmented population groups.

The formulation of social policies within the framework of a complex understanding of development (multidimensional, equitable, and sustainable) implies recognizing the diverse perspectives of social, economic, political, and cultural organization; these knots allow a comprehensive and transversal view of public policy and its related institutions –from local to global levels. They need to be comprehensive by including sectorial, thematic and social group’s approaches, while keeping territorial, environmental, and gender aspects as key transversal elements.

The teleology of social policy is the universalization of human rights, particularly the ESCR, and the attainment of fundamental freedoms. The ESCR go beyond “ownership” and “provisions”; they imply equality in the access to quality goods and services, empowerment of people and communities, democratic management of the inhabited territories, and the power to define life paths (future) and the development plans (converted into public policies) that can articulate and materialize social demands.⁴

ADVOCACY AT THE SOCIAL CENTERS: PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The concept of advocacy refers *to being able to influence others, individual or collectives, especially those in power or decision makers, in order to identify, recognize and transform the negative conditions affecting certain communities* – particularly people or social sectors excluded from social policies. In that sense, *advocacy* is a process of influencing social change and transformation. It seeks that power relations in society become more democratic assuring that excluded people have a voice in public decisions (public policies) as well as healthy, safe, and productive lives and environments.⁵

The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) defines advocacy as “planned efforts of organized citizens to influence public policies and programs through persuasion and

⁴ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

⁵ Definition given by the Institute for Development Research . In: *Advocacy Sourcebook 1977*, IDR, Boston.

pressure. Advocacy is the means through which individuals, groups or sectors of civil society get involved in political processes in order to assert their interests while, at the same time, making governments more responsible, transparent, and open to citizens' participation."⁶

Advocacy has to do with the development of abilities for the defense of rights, the strengthening of social and democratic organizations and the empowering of such organisms in order to participate in spaces of decision-making – through stakes and demands that seek a solution to a problem. Advocacy, as an exercise to transform power relations from civil society, is a tool for citizens' participation and a process to build democracy.

Why do we, Jesuits, worry about advocacy?

The starting point for this preoccupation comes from the Jesuit's Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (Rome), whose frame of reflection is the mission of the Society of Jesus: promotion of justice and involving with the causes of the excluded ones⁷. For the Society of Jesus, justice is not just a category but also a social challenge that refers directly to our Christian faith; we cannot call ourselves Christians without enacting justice in our personal and public - social life. The discernment of the experience working inspired by the binomial 'Faith and Justice' on the last three decades has led Jesuits to affirm that advocacy and networking in favor of the weakest (in the literal sense of the term: the poor, the excluded, the marginalized, migrants, etc.) are future key strategies in the promotion of justice. In that sense, advocacy is a task that seeks to defend and promote rights and not privileges, and implies or requires to understand in a deeper and as precisely as possible, the personal and social conditions of those who the social centers (actors) accompany: poor and excluded people.

One of the important frames to review the Catholic Church's approach on social processes, and particularly the commitment of the Society of Jesus, is the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council. Driven by a new conception of the church itself as a universal body that goes far beyond the clergy's realm, it affirms the crucial role of laity in promoting faith. This means a triple job: social engagement, critical thinking about what we do, and influence on the public realm through our areas and ways of work. For almost four decades (starting GC 32 /1972) the Society of Jesus was gaining more and more clarity in its own consideration about these three key elements, until 2008 when the 35 Jesuit's General Congregation promoted to advocacy as a Jesuit way of proceeding; since then advocacy is

⁶ Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). *La planificación participativa para la incidencia en política pública: una guía práctica*. Advocacy Training Program in Central America.

⁷ Álvarez, Patxi, S.J. Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat. "Invitados a colaborar. Dimensión de la justicia y retos Apostólicos hoy en la Compañía de Jesús, desde la perspectiva del Apostolado". In: *Promotio Iustitiae*, N° 107, 2011/3.

an orientation of the Society of Jesus, whose principal mission is to transform society through the promotion of justice as a manifestation of the Cristian faith.

Advocacy as a complex process

Key elements have being identified as a complementary strategies to succeed in this task: (1) increasing the awareness of citizens and their participation; (2) social mobilization; (3) dialogues with decision-making spheres and with politicians and consultants; (4) research on specific subjects; (5) dissemination of proposals on citizens' requests; and (6) generation of public opinion through mass media. Let us briefly develop some of these aspects.

First, it is important to have clarity on the objectives: what do we want to achieve? Where are we willing to arrive? What is the point where we are ready to go? What kind of strategies are we ready to implement? What is the best path, we consider, to follow? If this condition is not accomplished or it is not expressed clearly, it will be impossible to find allies (personal or institutional ones) and economic resources for a long term campaign. It is necessary to have clear priorities and focus on specific objectives, not only immediate results.

Both, the objectives we focus on and the way we do advocacy should come from a careful understanding of the social problems of those communities that we like to accompany. It implies on the one hand serious and systematic research and critical thinking and on the other hand the ability to learn from the advocacy practice itself. Every political and historical moment as much as every problem requires a particular analysis and methodology. It is important, then, to consider and to learn from the abilities acquired by the social centers through the formation on practices of advocacy, strengthening the voice of civil society and working with different groups: peasants, indigenous, women, youth, etc. That process is, by itself, a way of influencing or transforming social structures out of social and political actions.

To have a good strategic orientation is invaluable in order to find support and to build alliances; collaborative work is a requirement. An isolated social center has little strength and therefore, few possibilities to influence public policy and participate in decision-making spaces. Every advocacy action should start with a strategic plan in order to be able to build an efficient and sufficient frame (body) of alliances; it demonstrates the political character of the advocacy that requires the articulation of personal and/or institutional priorities.

Alliances are, also, fundamental in order to consolidate trends and to transform the values of society. Advocating also implies recognizing the challenges posed by globalization and the current crises; it is necessary to promote real transformations that seek the common good. This means going beyond the social centers (the institutional frame and interests) and

entering into the public domain, generating spaces of encounter, and propelling alliances to achieve the expected transformations. In that sense, it is important to take advantage of the international character of the Society of Jesus. If we would like to truly advance in advocacy it is necessary to find convergence in a wide range of efforts trying to reach specific social, cultural, and political goals, in a collective work with different institutions at the international level. This would mean a qualitative and quantitative leap forward of great impact.

One of the greatest strengths of the Jesuits' works relies in the daily contact with young people in Latin America. Young people are looking for new forms of participation, new channels to express their interests and demands different to the traditional mechanisms of participation. One of the big challenges for the Social Centers is to accompany the mobilization of young people demanding other forms of political, social, and cultural action – in their eagerness to find recognition as political actors.

Lessons and limitations for Advocacy

The defining feature of advocacy is *negotiation and the celebration of alliances*; this idea is not common in society. The history of Latin American countries shows that these are societies moved by force, concentration of power, and with little capacity to promote dialogue, even if there is a “formal” picture of democracy. This limitation has to do not only with society as in the broad political realm, but also within the Jesuit's institutional framework.

A second limitation found is the ability and the capacities to go from action to advocacy, through contextualization and critical thinking. It has also has to do with the lack of funds; this is a big limitation: advocating requires specialization; this, in turn, involves high economic costs.

Another limitation of the Social Centers is the lack of vision – that would allow them to go further. It is important to understand that the processes that come along with the works require pertinent research and a common vision or horizon.

Addressing mass media is central for advocacy; there are certain fears when media strategies are launched. Advocacy requires a clearly directed collective work that orients advocacy while giving it a resolute character; it is fundamental to define a strategic plan based on themes, social and institutional actors, and places. In this planning, it is necessary to have concrete protocols for decision-making, institutional representation, alliances fit for these ends, and a public debate.

Here lies a very important lesson: advocacy is a task of patience and permanent work, often with obstacles and failures. Transparency and clarity are highly relevant since the same

position must be kept towards different actors (government, political parties, social and institutional organizations, etc.); that way, the messages will be coherent and uniform in every scenario. The difficulty of convincing many actors makes evident the importance of counting on strategic alliances – achieved after many dialogues, joint work, sharing of thoughts and opinions, and minimum agreements.

The work of the Society of Jesus through the Social Centers, among other institutions, in the different countries and places is well recognized, credible, and legitimate. The experiences of these Centers however appear as isolated cases that exist in their own contexts. It would be worth analyzing and beneficial for advocacy at the national and international level to recognize what are the stakes of this apostolic tool in each country, to share them and learn from different experiences. In this way, actions will be strengthened, and goals will be achieved not for the glory of the institution but for the benefit of the mission: social justice for all.

The role of laity is becoming more and more important. Many are the men and women committed to the Society of Jesus' mission. This aspect needs to be taken into account as we are in a historical moment marked by social responsibility and in an even greater need to face the problems of inequality, human rights, and justice – derived from the wrong models of development.

The global world and Latin America, in particular, is passing through a moment of crisis in the social, political, economic, and environmental spheres. It is worth encouraging an apostolic dialogue that will help to analyze the situation of the region, revise priorities, review objectives, and set out ways in which we can influence the transformation of the conditions of those excluded from development.

Lima - November 2015