



RESEARCH BRIEF:

Best Practices and Lessons on Women's Health Advocacy: Synthesis of Literature

Authors: Emmanuel Nwala, Samawina Nwegbu, Michael Kunnuji, Osasuyi Dirisu

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The Context

Nigeria's Health Sector Renewal Strategy (2023 – 2026)¹ stipulates a sector-wide approach which includes multi-stakeholder, multilevel platforms for dialogue, resource mobilization, allocation and accountability for results, as well as strengthened citizen and civil society engagement. This strategy may provide a window of opportunity for collaboration with relevant stakeholders, advocacy for policy change, allocation of resources, and establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at all levels.¹ A major tool employed by coalitions to influence policymaking is advocacy. This study synthesized evidence on best practices and lessons in Nigeria and around the world.

Why was this important?

Although past health advocacy efforts have yielded some results in the improvement of funding and adoption of policies, there are limitations for impact and scale. With the national interest and emphasis on the sector-wide approach (SWAp) to health programming, it is important to synthesize evidence on best practices and lessons on women's health joint advocacy in Nigeria and around the world. This is intended to inform future investment and programming in women's health advocacy.

What are the best practices?

- **Focus on a specific thematic area:** Advocacy efforts that yielded effective outcomes focused mainly on a specific area, rather than using "one cap fits all" approach, trying to address multiple women's health priorities. This is important to eliminate competing priorities and neglecting a particular area.
- **Use of evidence:** Effective advocacy efforts used programmatic data, research evidence and tailored handouts in advocating women's health stakeholders. Also, effective women's health advocacy programs and coalitions institutionalize monitoring and evaluation principles and ensured its application at all phases of the program implementation.
- **Multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary design:** Although advocacy coalitions require multidisciplinary and multisectoral teams to succeed, there must be a shared understanding of the vision and potential impact. This ensures that resources (human, skills, structures, finance, linkages/networks) are efficiently utilized.
- **Multiple strategies:** A combination of approaches/strategies yield more wins. However, it is important to map the audience and target them with a specific strategy that is best suited.
- **Leveraging policy window:** Effective coalitions leverage policy windows such as SWAp to advance women's priorities. Alignment of an advocacy initiative with political agendas helps to ensure long term sustainability and engagement of powerful committed champions to facilitate alliance for advocacy.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Evidence from literature showed that designing and implementing advocacy initiatives that are culturally responsive help to gain public trust, win stakeholders and advance women's health agendas.
- **Ensuring gender and social inclusion:** Mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in advocacy strategies and the membership of coalitions is critical to ensuring that gender inequities are addressed and the voices of beneficiaries are amplified.
- **Adopting hybrid coalition model:** Coalition models that are constituted to include civil society organizations, private sector and government in its leadership structure tend to be more transparent and accountable with a stronger convening power. The leadership

maybe co-chaired by CSO and government representatives; the coalitions are more effective when leadership is tied to the office and not a person.

- **Coalition size is important:** Although, there are no evidence about definite sizes of a coalition. However, the smaller the size, the more manageable the coalition.



What lessons did we learn from literature?

Coalition formation	Coalitions formed from validated and proven partnerships such as technical working groups and collaborations exhibit a heightened level of resilience and effectiveness. These organic coalitions possess an inherent strength that makes them exceptionally well-suited for the nuanced landscape of effective women's health advocacy.
Conflicting interests	Advocacy actors need to downplay the need for recognition and visibility in the interest of the common cause to avoid friction among coalition members which restricts the long-term growth. Efforts targeted at coordinating advocacy coalitions should prioritize building coalitions where advocacy interests and values are aligned and all members consider overall success above individual recognition. Recognition also needs to be carefully managed to avoid counter-productivity.
Funding for advocacy	Financial frameworks lacking consideration for the post-project phase often lead to premature project termination. Prioritizing adequacy, sustainability, coverage, and flexibility in funding for women's health advocacy becomes imperative to accommodate adaptability and innovation, particularly in environments marked by high unpredictability. In dynamic socio-political landscapes, the absence of flexible funding worsens these challenges, hindering advocates' ability to navigate and respond swiftly to evolving circumstances. Therefore, the incorporation of flexibility in funding structures proves crucial, as it facilitates seamless adaptation and empowers advocates to effectively address the ever-changing complexities inherent in their pursuit of advancing women's health.

<p>Political commitment</p>	<p>Critical stakeholders, including government officials, may exhibit apathy or resistance to women's health advocacy coalitions. In navigating this landscape, fostering partnerships with state governments can prove instrumental, as they wield considerable influence and can emerge as powerful allies in furthering the objectives of the coalition. Acknowledging the significance of country ownership is also paramount, as it ensures that program efforts are not only effectively implemented but also more readily sustained over time, reinforcing the importance of a collaborative and inclusive approach in advancing women's health initiatives.</p>
<p>Opposition coalitions</p>	<p>Advocacy coalitions dedicated to women's health may face formidable challenges in the form of opposition coalitions, thereby constraining the success of their advocacy endeavours. The presence of adversarial coalitions introduces complexities that necessitate proactive measures for sustained impact. Understanding the dynamics of such opposition becomes imperative for effective advocacy. In response, fostering open dialogue, promoting evidence-based discussions, and cultivating partnerships across diverse sectors can fortify the resilience of women's health advocacy coalitions, enabling them to overcome opposition challenges and advance their shared objectives.</p>
<p>Gender and cultural norms</p>	<p>Aligning women's health programs with gender norms, cultural values, and larger development goals is key to success. Major stakeholders in government, the private sector, and the media are better inclined towards interventions when they consider them worthwhile or profitable, creating a win-win situation for all.</p>
<p>Evidence-based advocacy</p>	<p>Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a pivotal role in aiding governments in the identification of healthcare bottlenecks and proposing innovative solutions. Similarly, the significance of medical, research, and academic institutions cannot be overstated in developing solutions to healthcare challenges. Their evidence-based insights serve as the cornerstone for shaping policy change, prioritizing planning initiatives, and informing advocacy campaigns.</p>
<p>Advocacy capacity building</p>	<p>Strategic capacity building proves invaluable in empowering local advocates to adeptly tailor and implement creative, evidence-based interventions leveraging their available resources. Vital tools include legal analysis and technical assistance, which play a pivotal role in safeguarding fundamental rights such as the right to health and free expression.</p>
<p>Communications and public awareness</p>	<p>Communication plays an important role in raising public awareness and demand for programs, highlighting the need for public support in scaling and sustainability. A combination of evidence-based and storytelling approaches can help convince leaders to commit to long-term investments in joint advocacy programs and strategic communications plans, including on-the-ground media outreach, are essential components of legal strategies.</p>

Policy Innovation Centre

The Policy Innovation Centre (PIC) is the first national institutionalized behavioral initiative in Africa supporting government and stakeholders to make behaviorally informed decisions and generate evidence for impact driven interventions in critical thematic areas (Governance, Health, Gender & Social Inclusion, Education, Digital & Financial Inclusion). The PIC is positioned to support the delivery of better policies and innovative solutions for high impact interventions across Africa. The PIC is an initiative of the Nigeria Economic Summit Group (NESG), a leading think tank in Africa redefining evidence based policy advocacy and its set up was supported with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

Our goal is to improve the design and implementation of policies and programs using gender transformative and behavioural approaches to drive positive social change. Our Behavioural Innovation Lab (BIL) utilizes lessons from behavioural and social sciences to design, test and scale solutions for social impact. BIL utilises behavioural insights and adopts a data-driven, human-centred approach to testing and delivering contextually relevant, cost effective solutions. The PIC Gender Foyer is an innovative multidisciplinary hub that serves as a platform for capacity development, networking, research, and partnerships to advance gender responsive policies, programs, and practices in Africa. The Gender Foyer's focus areas include Policy and Governance, Gender System Strengthening, and Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) Programming.



References

1. Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Nigeria's Health Sector Renewal 2023. <https://medicalworldnigeria.com/post/Federal-Ministry-of-Health-and-Social-Welfare-Communique-Issued-at-the-End-of-the-64th-National-Council-of-Health-NCH-Meeting-Held-at-AB-Foundation-Civil-Centre-Ado-Ekiti-from-13th-17th-November-2023?pid=67684>



ABUJA OFFICE

3rd Floor, Unity Bank Tower,
beside Reinsurance Building,
Plot 785, Herbert Macaulay Way,
Central Business District, Abuja

🌐 www.policyinnovationcentre.org

✉ pic@nesgroup.org

☎ +234 (0) 7047897958

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