

Advocacy Policy		
Document Number: HR - 5	Department: Mercy Ships Australia	Type: Policy
Date Approved: 22/04/2020	Approved Revision: 1	Approved by: Board
Revision date: 22/06/2023		

Policy Statement

Mercy Ships Australia (MSA) is an international development organisation that deploys hospital ships and volunteers to developing nations – improving the quality of life for people living with the diseases of poverty, disfigurement, and disability, through direct medical services, in-country projects, and building the capacities of healthcare systems to meet the needs of the future.

MSA recognises advocacy as a core component of rights-based humanitarian, development, and protection programming and as essential to the achievement of sustainable, transformative change.

MSA is committed to the use of advocacy as a critical tool for the realisation of our vision, mission, purpose, and goals, and as a requirement for the fulfilment of our purpose.

MSA regards strategic, evidence-based advocacy as integral to our efforts to:

- Contribute to the reform of the systems, structures, policies, practices, and attitudes.
- Hold those with responsibilities (duty bearers) to account.
- Mobilise constituencies for change.
- Stand with those experiencing oppression and injustice.
- Strengthen the capacity of communities, and other at risk and affected groups, to engage in their own advocacy, and local partner organisations seeking to help them.
- Provide moral and practical leadership.

MSA understands that advocacy activities may entail significant risks and undertakes to continuously assess and manage any such risks with care and in consultation with key stakeholders. We commit to upholding the principle of ‘do no harm’, we seek ways to manage risk, rather than refrain from taking action.

For MSA, advocacy is the work we do to influence the policies, practices and attitudes of governments, intergovernmental organisations, multilateral structures and processes, other powerful actors (and those who influence them), and public behaviour and attitudes, in order to bring about the change required to improve the quality of life in developing nations. It may include building community and partner capacity for advocacy, joint-advocacy with partners and other agencies, public campaigns and awareness raising, solutions-orientated dialogues with government and key stakeholders, stand-alone advocacy programs on specific issues, and engagement in humanitarian, development, and protection practice dialogues.

Our advocacy positions are informed by research and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, particularly discussions with local partners and in-country organisations, and by insights derived from the programmatic and advocacy work conducted by those partners.

It is driven by our understanding that we can only sustain the positive impact of our projects and programs, and take that impact to scale, by persuading and/or challenging governments and other institutions with power and resources to change the systems they control, which includes changing their policies, practices, and attitudes.

This involves creating an enabling environment for reform, which can be supported through changes in public attitudes and understanding. While our advocacy may have short-term objectives, these are always contextualised within a broader positive change goal.

We understand advocacy to mean a set of strategic, coordinated activities which may include research, policy engagement and lobbying, public awareness-raising, and campaigning to mobilise support for collective purpose. Policy engagement and lobbying involve working with decision makers who have the power to change policy and practice and/or with those who influence them. This area of advocacy is often done with little or no public visibility and seeks to bring about change by offering analysis, insights, technical expertise, and evidence-based recommendations and/or policy alternatives. It may be long-term, deal with great complexity, involve quiet diplomacy and require relationship building, personal contacts, and flexibility. Other forms of advocacy are likely to be more public, and may include publication of research, public awareness raising, media engagement and campaigns. Policy engagement and lobbying may be complemented and buttressed by public-facing advocacy activities.

MSA understands the three modes of advocacy as follows:

1. 'Persuasion', which when successful, encourages authorities and/or perpetrators to change their behaviour through private negotiations or dialogue.
2. 'Denunciation', which aims to halt or deter abuses by bringing public attention and influence to bear on authorities or perpetrators of abuses (for example, by naming and shaming a state in a public forum). While denunciation does alter the cost-benefit calculations of an actor, it is usually employed as a 'last resort' after persuasion fails, as it aims to force compliance, which can make future cooperation far more difficult.
3. 'Mobilisation', which can take on many forms and may be used in conjunction with advocacy campaigns that focus on persuasion or denunciation or changing behaviours and attitudes, by building supportive community networks and humanitarian alliances, among others.

Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to affirm the centrality of advocacy to the work of MSA, to highlight our obligations in this regard and to provide guidance for staff on applicable standards when engaging in or supporting advocacy initiatives. The policy aims to ensure that MSA leads and supports strategic, evidence-based advocacy, routinely, as appropriate

and in compliance with mandatory standards, as a fully integrated aspect of our work and as a critical means of achieving sustainable, positive change resulting in strengthened healthcare systems in developing nations to meet the needs of the future.

Principles and Standards

This policy complies with the ACT Alliance Advocacy Policy (2011) and further incorporates all applicable standards and requirements contained within our Code of Good Practice and Code of Conduct, the ACFID Code of Conduct, the ACT Alliance Humanitarian Protection Policy (2010), the Core Humanitarian Standard (2014). It is also informed by global good practice as set out in toolkits, reports, policies, and guidelines developed by leading humanitarian and development actors. Our key obligations under this policy are:

- To ensure that our advocacy work complies with the principle of ‘do no harm’, including undertaking a risk-benefit analysis and, if needed, developing a risk management strategy informed [as closely as possible] by the perspectives of affected communities prior to commencement of any advocacy activities and, where advocacy proceeds, taking all reasonable steps to protect the safety, dignity and rights of affected local people and MSA partners and personnel both during and following an advocacy initiative.
- To ensure that our advocacy is evidence-based, transparent in its foundations (provided it does not jeopardise the protection of and privacy of affected individuals) and informed by the perspectives of those affected.
- To only use personal information for advocacy with the informed consent of affected persons who have been made aware of the purpose of collection of the information and, to the extent possible, to keep them informed of the actions taken on their behalf and the ensuing results.
- To claim that our advocacy is representative only when that authority has been established.
- To aim to empower those most affected in local communities to advocate for themselves.
- To work collaboratively with organisations representing people most affected by the issue, where possible and appropriate.
- To disclose any conflicts of interest arising in our advocacy.
- To leverage the knowledge, experience and relationships of the alliances, networks, and consortia we are a part of, and engage in continuous mutual learning, policy development and advocacy.
- To strengthen the quality, accountability, and impact of our advocacy work, both individually and collectively, by ensuring we regularly review and learn from our work, identify gaps in competencies and areas for organisational capacity development and promote learning and adaptation.
- To ensure that the Australian Government is not expressly or by implication associated with any adverse comment made about other governments within the scope of our advocacy work, and to appraise the Australian Government of any express or implied criticism to be made publicly of the Australian Government within

the scope of our advocacy work, wherever such advocacy is subject to our current DFAT Head Agreement.

MSA Approach

This policy sets out principles which guide our advocacy work. These principles are as follows:

- Advocacy is a critical and fully integrated aspect of MSA's work. Advocacy is a 'whole of agency' endeavour, which is integrated within our program cycle management and requires both inter- and intra-departmental coordination and collaboration.
- Advocacy is understood as an inclusive and participatory process, in which the perspectives and agency of affected persons and communities are considered central; and in which such community concerns and perspectives may beneficially be amplified and projected into new arenas subject to strategic considerations including risk to affected parties.
- MSA's advocacy is rights-based and solutions-oriented.
- Advocacy establishes and strengthens links between experiences and occurrences at the local level and policy decisions and dialogues at the national, regional, and global levels; and MSA's input into these policy arenas always to be informed by insights derived from our field operations and the experiences of our partners and networks.
- MSA may advocate in reaction to particular events and circumstances, yet understands that advocacy is generally proactive in nature, complex and focussed upon the achievement of sustainable, systemic positive change, requiring persistence, astute timing and targeting, strategic planning, ongoing review, strong partnerships, a long-term perspective and commitment.
- MSA recognises the three internationally accepted modes of action for humanitarian advocacy, namely, persuasion, denunciation, and mobilisation, and is conscious of risks and benefits associated with each.
- At times, MSA will undertake advocacy outside of the public domain, in recognition that on occasion this may be required for 'persuasion' to be effective. At other times, our advocacy work will be public facing. Such decisions are made and reviewed strategically with regard to the specific circumstances of each initiative.
- MSA has built a reputation as a credible advocate in domestic, regional, and global arenas and will pursue its ongoing advocacy. This requires an unfaltering commitment to truthfulness, integrity, inclusivity, and continual learning in our work as well as a honed advocacy agenda and investment in the establishment and maintenance of sound, strategic relationships.

Advocacy can entail serious risks, including jeopardising humanitarian access, relations with authorities, life-saving assistance programmes and the security of affected communities and personnel. As such, MSA undertakes to assess and manage any such risks carefully and inclusively, in keeping with standard procedures. We recognise that this may result in a decision not to proceed with an advocacy strategy. However, we do not regard the existence of risks per se as a justification for inaction or 'silent witnessing', recognising that

this inadvertently allows for the perpetuation of abuses. Accordingly, the risks of inaction should also be carefully considered.

Scope

This policy applies to all advocacy work with which MSA is engaged and is to be adhered to by all MSA staff involved in the design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, risk management, supervision, or other support of projects and programs that support advocacy initiatives, including. It is further offered as guidance to MSA’s ecumenical partners.

This policy applies to all MSA-led and supported Projects and programs undertaken at the field level, in the Australian context, and in regional and global arenas, including joint initiatives with which MSA is involved.

Definitions

Advocacy – understood by MSA to mean a set of strategic, coordinated activities which may include research, policy engagement and lobbying, public awareness-raising, and campaigning to mobilise support for collective purpose. Policy engagement and lobbying involve working with decision makers who have the power to change policy and practice and/or with those who influence them. This area of advocacy is often done with little or no public visibility and seeks to bring about change by offering analysis, insights, technical expertise, and evidence-based recommendations and/or policy alternatives. It may be long-term, deal with great complexity, involve quiet diplomacy and require relationship building, personal contacts, and flexibility. Other forms of advocacy are likely to be more public, and may include publication of research, public awareness raising, media engagement and campaigns.

Annex 1. MSA Objectives and Indicator table

Objectives	Indicators
MSA leads and supports strategic, evidence based advocacy, routinely, as appropriate and in compliance with mandatory standards, as a fully integrated aspect of our work and as a critical means of achieving sustainable, positive change resulting in strengthened safety, justice and dignity for communities threatened by conflict and disaster.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive risk assessment and risk management strategy are in place for all advocacy initiatives, complying with ‘do no harm’ principles. • Advocacy initiatives are evidence-based. • Advocacy initiatives endeavour to be participatory and empower communities to advocate on their own behalf. • Advocacy initiatives are fully integrated into program cycle management.

Annex 2. Resource and Reference List

- ACFID Code of Conduct (2019)
- ACT Alliance Advocacy Policy and Procedures (2011)
- ACT Alliance Humanitarian Protection Policy (2010)
- ALNAP, Protection: an ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies (2005)
- ACNC, Charity Advocacy (2023)
- Australian Red Cross Policy Statement on Advocacy (2011)
- Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (2014)

- ICCO Guidelines on Lobby and Advocacy (2010)
- ODI Working paper 395: Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Influence and Advocacy (2014)
- Save the Children Toolkits: A Practical Guide to Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Impact Assessment (2003), Tool 13: Frameworks to help analyse the advocacy process
- UNICEF Advocacy Toolkit: A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives (2010)
- UNICEF Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: Companion to the Advocacy Toolkit