
13

Using the evidence and getting the messages out

The ultimate objective of conducting a medicine price survey is to contribute to making medicines more affordable so that the entire population has access to the medicines it needs. Conducting the survey and analysing and interpreting the data are important. However, they become really useful when the evidence and the analysis are used to help shape policy and improve practice.

A major point to bear in mind is that change in policy and practice rarely, if ever, happens because of a single intervention. The changes are likely to occur as a result of a longer-term process of communication, influence and persuasion. Planning for this requires as much time, attention and resources as the planning for the survey itself. It needs to happen alongside the planning for the survey activities, rather than being seen as an activity that can be added on after the survey is completed.

In planning to ensure that the evidence and analysis from your survey are used, you need to consider three inter-related areas:

- advocacy and influencing processes;
- communication processes to share findings; and
- materials to produce.

Since these are inter-related areas, they need to be linked together with a clear communication or advocacy strategy that helps to guide your thinking and planning. Without that, you might produce a wonderful report but not be clear about who needs to have it and how you can use it to influence the policy debate in a country. Equally, you might be very successful in setting up a meeting with the minister or the director of pharmaceutical procurement and not have a clear summary of your findings and a set of policy options to pursue.

13.1 ADVOCACY AND INFLUENCING PROCESSES

Advocacy is crucial in shaping policy. Advocacy – carried out in an ethical fashion – is fundamental to democratic decision-making. Effective advocates work to inform decision-makers, to persuade them, sometimes to support them and create support for their policies and, occasionally, to shame them into action.

Advocacy is about building a convincing case and getting it across to people who are in a position to influence, formulate or implement policy and affect the decision-making process. However, there is no single universally accepted definition, as Box 13.1 demonstrates.

One way to define advocacy is in terms of whether it is undertaken for, with or by those most affected by a particular situation. Advocacy may be seen as speaking on behalf of the voiceless (representation), encouraging others to speak with you (mobilization) or supporting the voiceless in speaking for themselves (empowerment). In dealing with access to medicines, it is worth asking whether the advocacy is being done by consumers or patients who lack access; by those consumers and patients along with a network of concerned NGOs, researchers or health workers; or by a group of organizations acting on behalf of those most affected.

BOX 13.1

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is the **process of using information strategically to change policies** that affect the lives of disadvantaged people. – *British Organisation of NGOs in Development (BOND)*

Advocacy is any effort to **influence policy and decision-makers**, to **fight for social change**, to **transform public perceptions** and attitudes, to **modify behaviours** or to **mobilize human and financial resources**. – *GAVI*

Advocacy is speaking up, **drawing attention to an issue** and winning the support of key constituencies in order to influence policies and spending and bring about change. – *WHO TB advocacy*

“Advocacy is an **ongoing process** aiming at change of attitudes, actions, policies and laws by **influencing people and organizations with power**, systems and structures at different levels for the betterment of people affected by the issue.” – *Adapted from an advocacy skills-building workshop, India HIV/AIDS Alliance, India, November 2002*

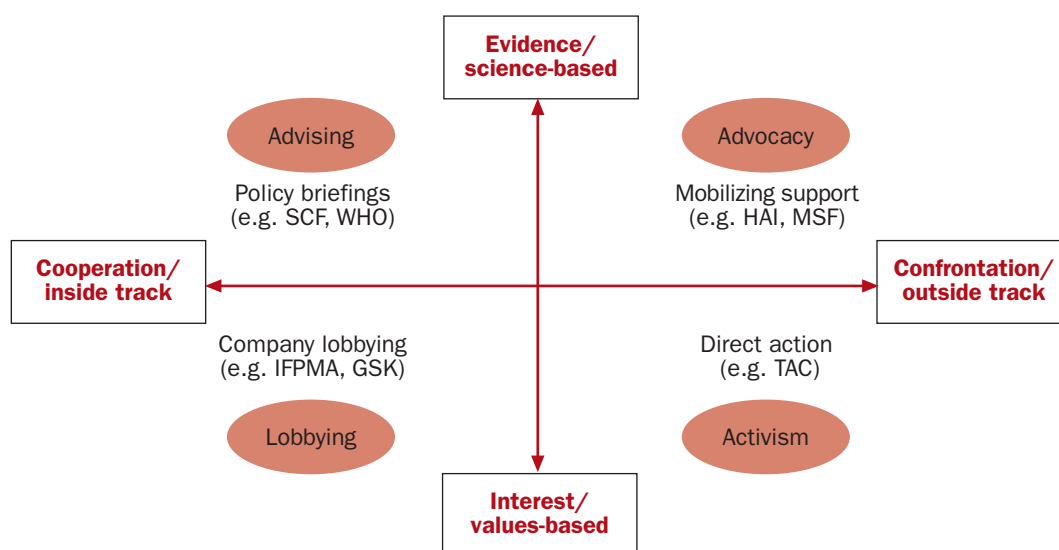
Advocacy is about influencing or **changing relationships of power**. – *World Bank*

The United Kingdom Overseas Development Institute’s Research about Development in Practice (RAPID) programme has developed a useful way to think about the various aspects of advocacy and influencing policy processes. RAPID explores how advocacy, advising or influencing, lobbying and activism relate to one another. It examines them in the light of both the extent to which they are based on evidence or driven by values and whether they are externally or internally located regarding the relationship with those who are the target of influence. Fig. 13.1 shows how this might play out in the area of access to medicines.

13.2 DEVELOPING AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY

Advocacy is a long-term process. It involves a series of connected activities or actions, often happening at different levels and according to different time frames. One or two isolated activities do not represent an advocacy campaign. You should not expect to bring about real sustainable change unless you engage in a number of strategically planned actions that build on each other over a long period of time. For this reason, advocacy should be thought of in terms of *strategies* and *campaigns* rather than individual activities.

It is important that you have a clear strategy which helps to guide you.

Fig. 13.1 Tools and organizations on the medicines cooperation/evidence axes

Source: Adapted from: Start D, Hovland I. *Tools for policy impact: a handbook for researchers* [monograph on the Internet]. London, Overseas Development Institute, October 2004 [cited 2007 Dec 05] (http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/Publications/Documents/Tools_handbook_final_web.pdf)

The first – and most important – challenge that you have to resolve is to decide on what change you are trying to achieve with your advocacy. This is sometimes described as the objective or goal of any advocacy campaign. Is it a new law to regulate prices? Is it an awareness campaign about the high quality of generics in a country to encourage greater use of lower-priced generics? Is it a call for greater transparency about procurement prices? Is it an attempt to get the government to rescind a tax on medicines? Advocacy can be aimed at:

- creating policies where they are needed but none exist (which may require creating awareness about an issue);
- reforming harmful or ineffective policies; and
- ensuring good policies are implemented and enforced.

However the advocacy is done and whoever is involved, there are some key actions that are almost always essential to its successful outcome, whether you are involved in a local campaign or in international policy advocacy. These actions will help you develop your advocacy strategy. They include the following:

- analyse the problem and define your objectives;
- identify and understand those actors you want to influence;
- get to know the people you want to influence;
- build a strong case;
- identify allies who share your views;
- identify and understand potential opponents;
- develop a long-term plan; and
- take advantage of strategic opportunities.

13.2.1 Analyse the problem and define your objectives

You need to be able to explain the problem and what you think needs to be done to tackle it. You should also set goals that will help you to monitor progress and measure the success of your activities. This may well require an initial period of background research, data gathering, consultation and preparation. It is time well spent.

For example, the international relief NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) launched its Access to Essential Medicines Campaign around three clear pillars:

- using public health needs to override trade agreements;
- overcoming access barriers; and
- stimulating research and development for neglected diseases.

Similarly, the WHO/HAI Project on Medicine Prices and Availability has an overarching goal and three specific objectives:

Goal:

- improve the availability and affordability of essential medicines.

Specific objectives:

- develop a reliable methodology for collecting and analysing price and availability data across health-care sectors in a country;
- price transparency: put survey data on a freely accessible web site, allowing international comparisons;
- advocate for appropriate pricing policies and monitor their impact.

Developing a clear statement of your objectives will help you to plan your strategy and prioritize key activities. It will also make it much easier for people to understand your campaign and its focus.

13.2.2 Identify and understand those actors you want to influence

When planning your advocacy work, ask yourself the following questions:

- what is the policy environment?
- who are the key actors?
- who makes the decisions?
- whom do they rely on for advice?
- what process is used to make decisions?
- are there key moments or times in the decision-making process?

For example, if you wanted to influence a bill going through parliament in your country, you should try to find out who is responsible for drafting the law and who is advising him or her. You should try to get a clear idea of which committees, departments and outside bodies will be consulted. You need to know how many stages there are to the legislation; for example, first and second reading. You also need to know the timetable for these stages. Often a well-reasoned case presented at an early stage can achieve as much or more than an intensive advocacy campaign, which is started after the basic decisions have been made.

Remember that not everyone needs to be convinced. You do not have to persuade everyone to take up your position or work for the change you are proposing. It helps to do a very simple stakeholder analysis to categorize those you want to reach. Each group then needs a different approach. Some groups may need to be persuaded to take a position, some may need to be encouraged to change a position, some may simply need to be encouraged to stay supportive, while some are best left alone, since it would be a waste of effort.

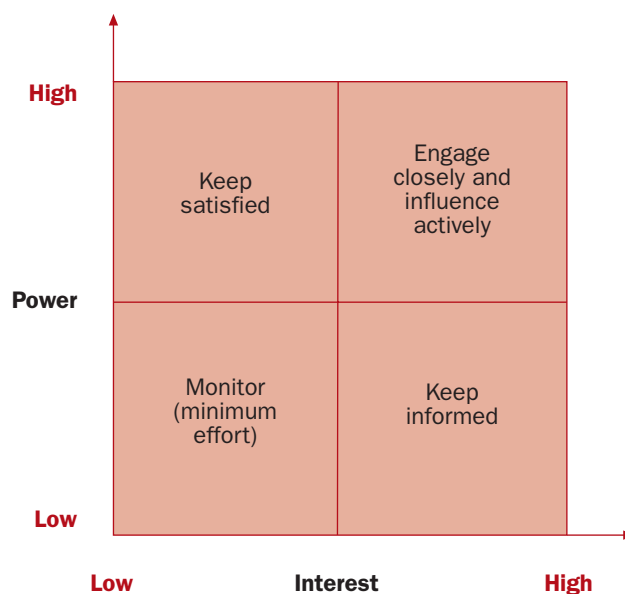
Neutralize or convert	Activate (move from neutral)	Reinforce	No effort required
Opponents	Uncommitted and involved	Allies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unmovable opponent ● Uncommitted and uninvolved ● Hard-core allies

Making use of a stakeholder analysis process is a way to identify whom to target (Fig. 13.2) (2). A stakeholder is a person who has something to gain or lose through the outcomes of any intervention or policy change.

Stakeholders can be organizations, groups, departments, structures, networks or individuals, but the list needs to be fairly exhaustive to ensure that no one is left out. Organize the stakeholders according to their interests and power. ‘Interest’ measures to what degree they are likely to be affected by the research project or policy change and what degree of interest or concern they have in or about it. ‘Power’ measures the influence they have over the project or policy and to what degree they can help achieve or block the desired change.

Powerful stakeholders with interests aligned with your goals are those people or organizations it is important to fully engage and bring on board. If you are trying to create policy change, these people are the targets of your campaign. At the top of the power list will be the decision-makers, usually members of the government. Below them are those people whose opinion matters – the opinion leaders.

Fig. 13.2 Stakeholder analysis grid



Source: Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful communication: a toolkit for researchers and civil society organisations*. RAPID Toolkit. London, Overseas Development Institute, 2005 (http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Publications/Documents/Comms_tools_web.pdf)

Stakeholders with a high level of interest but little power need to be kept informed. However, if they are organized, they may form the basis of an interest group or coalition that can lobby for change. Those stakeholders with a lot of power but little interest should be kept satisfied and, ideally, brought around as patrons or supporters for the proposed policy change.

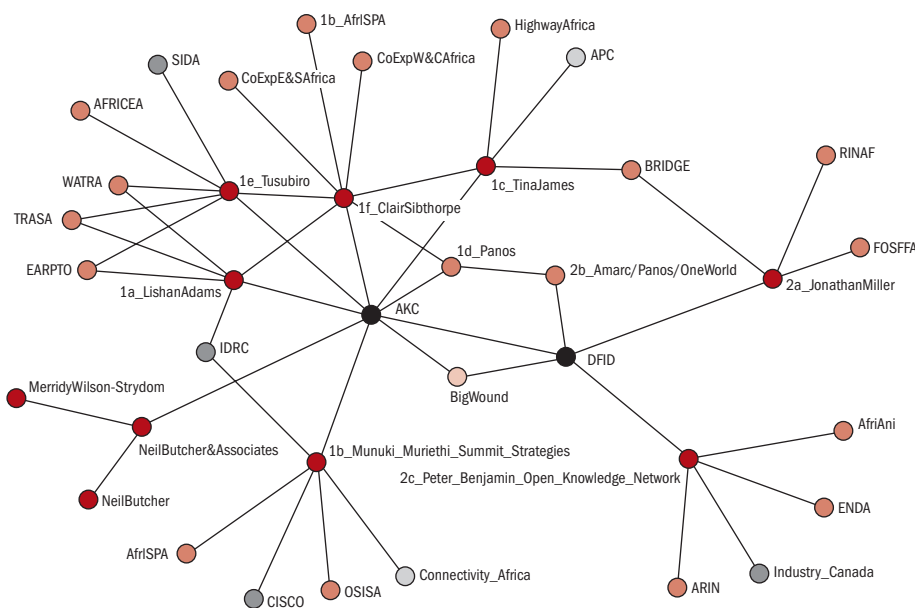
A further refinement to the analysis is to consider what a particular stakeholder's attitude to the change is likely to be. This is assessed as either being positive, neutral or negative to the change. For example, if the policy change is calling for a limitation on the mark-up levels of medicines at the retail level, the group of stakeholders involved in retail pharmacy is likely to be negative, and it will work against the change.

Do you have contact with the people you want to influence? If not, it is important to do some homework and to invest time in developing a list of key people and how to reach them. Analyse whether you need to concentrate on convincing technical experts (e.g. those involved in evaluating applications for registration) or policy-oriented people (e.g. those who design drug registration legislation). Using processes such as social network analysis can help to identify the links between different stakeholders in the process and those who might be particularly influential. The defining feature of social network analysis is the focus on the structure of relationships (3).

Fig. 13.3 presents a picture of some of the key connections of stakeholders in an ICT programme in Africa. Analysis such as this helps to identify the key players. In the diagram, it is clear that several individuals (Fig. 13.3, shown in red) played a major role as connectors, with each of them linking between three and five organizations. If this was a picture of the medicine procurement or supply system in a country, the people who are the connectors, or the major facilitating organizations (Fig. 13.3, shown in black) would be important people for you to reach.

Do stakeholders know who you are and what your purpose is? You may need to spend time making appointments as well as developing and presenting simple

Fig. 13.3 Stakeholder linkages in an African ICT programme (existing and potential)



Source: Biggs and Matsaert (1998) in Rick Davies (2003), (see reference 3).

materials such as a position paper or a short briefing note that explains your objectives. Invite stakeholders to address you and let them know that you think they are important.

Do stakeholders hear from you regularly? Once you have established contact, keep it up. You should not pester people but you should let them know that you are serious about the issue and want to work with them over a long period of time.

What can you do for them? You can often establish your own credibility by advising or by being a good, balanced informant on issues. You may also be able to help arrange good press coverage for positive action. The relationships that effective advocates build up are often based on their expertise and their reliability.

13.2.3 Build a strong case

Get your facts straight and organize your information. Exaggerated analyses or inaccurate figures will be bad for your credibility and for your case. You will not be trusted if you give people inaccurate information. In addition, be sure to:

- Anticipate counter-arguments and help to answer them.
- Present useful facts and examples that are relevant and easy to remember.
- Formulate goals that are reasonable and realistic.
- Respond to criticism with positive suggestions for improvements.

MSF often refers to a few key facts to illustrate why it launched its access campaign (Box 13.2). Note that each of the facts is related to a situation that *people* face and that there is an emotional component that comes through in the way the information is set out. This helps to motivate people to see the urgency of the situation and the need to act.

In terms of the medicine prices surveys, the issue of affordability and its relation to people's earnings is likely to be the most graphic and emotive aspect of your research. If poor people in your country have to use the equivalent of one week's income to pay for a one-month course of treatment for a chronic illness, it becomes clear that something needs to be changed.

BOX 13.2

MSF Access campaign – key facts

- Nearly a quarter of patients under treatment for tuberculosis (TB) in Siberian prisons are dying because they do not have access to expensive, second-line TB treatments.
- People with AIDS-related meningitis in an MSF-supported Nairobi hospital are being told to go home and die because the price of the only effective treatment is beyond their means. Patent protection keeps the price high (one day's treatment costs US\$ 20 per day in Kenya compared to US\$ 0.70 per day in Thailand, where it is not patent-protected).
- In Sudan and Uganda, MSF volunteers are outraged at the lack of access to the life-saving medication DFMO. The drug is prescribed for sleeping sickness, a fatal, neurological disease endemic in Africa. However, DFMO's manufacturer has stopped producing the medication because it has not been profitable.

Source: MSF 1999

13.2.4 Identify allies and experts who share your views

You need to show that others share your views. Try to identify allies from different fields and areas of influence. For example, institutions and organizations working on broad trade agreements may find the medicine prices issue makes a useful case study or an example for the changes they are trying to achieve. Women's organizations may be concerned about access to health care and could see this issue as one that illustrates particular problems for women. Disabled people's organizations working on mental health issues may be strong allies around the price of medicines essential for their members. You may be able to collect signatures, to get other organizations to pass resolutions supporting you or to quote from positions adopted by recognized authorities, such as by quoting WHO publications or resolutions.

You should try to identify experts and opinion leaders who will make a statement in support of your views. Doctors and medical experts are very influential when decisions about health policies are considered. Try to make the point that consumer and patient views are very important but also make use of supportive, medical experts where possible.

13.2.5 Identify and understand potential opponents

No matter what your position is on an issue, there is certain to be someone who does not agree with it. To help make your arguments as strong as possible, you need to consider the arguments that will be advanced by those with opposing views. You should brainstorm with the members of your own organization and with campaign partners about possible opponents. Who will they be? What are their interests? How will they operate on this issue? What is their goal? What or how much do they stand to lose if a change occurs? What do you know about their views and positions? It is important to consider what their strategy might be. You might want to include the use of role-play in helping advocates to understand the opposition's arguments. This will help you to anticipate their actions and be ready with a quick and effective response. Campaigns can lose a great deal of momentum or be completely destroyed by opposing arguments and actions that catch them unprepared. Take time before you launch your advocacy work to consider how those with different views might approach the issue. This will pay off once the campaign is under way. Make sure you collect any information available from the opposition. This can be found in many forms, including leaflets, newspaper advertisements or articles, press releases, speeches and web site information. Become familiar with their line of reasoning. You should understand their arguments and look for flaws in them. Also, check to see if they are saying anything about your campaign's key messages. It is only by understanding their viewpoint and being able to counter it with a better argument that you will succeed against them.

Depending on each advocacy issue, different organizations may support, be neutral or be negative. Thus, do not alienate or demonize organizations that oppose you on one issue, since they may support you on another. For example, local and international manufacturers will support a campaign against taxes on medicines. International manufacturers will support and local manufacturers will oppose a campaign against import tariffs on medicines. Manufacturers will support and retail pharmacies will oppose a campaign to regulate mark-ups. Retailers may support price controls at the end-user level. Ministries of finance may support transparency in pricing but oppose removal of taxes and duties. Ministries of health may support removal of local preference requirements while ministries of industry or commerce may support such requirements. For any advocacy issue, different supporters and opponents are likely to exist, but they will vary from issue to issue.

Be prepared for personal attacks. Remember, if someone does not like the message they will often attack the messenger!

Experience shows that the findings of medicine price surveys are invariably questioned and sometimes criticized. Be prepared for such situations. The Frequently Asked Questions included on the CD-ROM that accompanies this manual will assist in responding to questions on the survey methodology and findings. You may want to develop your own local version of responses, which includes the frequently asked questions that occur in your country.

13.2.6 Develop a long-term plan

You can launch a campaign with a great splash of publicity, for example, around the publication of your prices survey findings. However, if you do not develop follow-up activities and strategies to keep your issue on the agenda, you may find that the launch is soon forgotten and interest in your issue fades. Develop a timeline that takes into account the need for continuity and follow-up but which also plans some events or high points. And make sure that you have access to the resources – both human and financial – to sustain the advocacy work over a period of time.

13.2.7 Take advantage of strategic opportunities

Sometimes unexpected events can work in your favour. These may take the form of political developments in your country (an election or change of government); they may be related to macroeconomic factors or they may be related to local events.

13.3 COMMUNICATION

Your advocacy strategy should form the basis of your communication strategy. It will have helped to identify with whom you need to communicate and about what. This is more than simply identifying messages to be disseminated. You need to be clear about the change you are trying to achieve. For example, do you want an official in a health ministry to set up a review of existing policies? Do you want the parliament to pass a new law? Do you want greater enforcement of existing policies? Do you want improved education about the impact of prices for a group of health workers?

When you are clear about the change you want and the audience you are trying to reach, then you need to determine the best way to reach that audience. The most powerful communication methods are those that involve interaction and engagement of the audience with the content of the message. Putting your report on a web site and hoping that people will find it is the least interactive method. You should be trying to stimulate debate and dialogue around the findings of your prices survey.

A meeting of key national managers and policy-makers should be held after the report has been prepared to brief them on the findings of the survey and initiate a process of improving current medicine policies and programmes. You should outline:

- the survey's purpose and the data collection process;
- a summary of the results and comparison with data from previous national or international price surveys;

- medicine prices, with comparisons by sector, product type and region;
- medicine availability, with comparisons by sector, product type and region;
- affordability of standard treatments for both acute and chronic conditions;
- components of medicine prices for different products, regions;
- the overall findings and possible causal factors (e.g. links to current policies); and
- issues that need to be addressed and recommended policy and programme interventions.

13.3.1 Media

The national media are always interested in good stories and may be willing to report on the survey findings, particularly if they receive a press release or article presenting the information in a reader-friendly form. The media can also help by putting a human face on the issue through telling the story of how high medicine prices affect a particular family, as happened recently in the Philippines (Box 13.3). Encouraging debate in the media starts to generate an enabling environment for change (4). Public opinion around an issue helps to put and keep an issue on the political agenda, which encourages action.

BOX 13.3

Giving a human face to the issue in the Philippines

A 2005 survey in the Philippines showed the availability of medicines in the public sector was only about 15% and the prices were excessive – anywhere from 6 to 15 times the cost of international reference prices. In response to the findings, the groups that took part in the survey worked with the media and local community members to produce a short video that described the situation for an elderly couple, dependent on medication to prevent high blood pressure. The news coverage and the video, together with social mobilization and careful briefing of policy-makers, were influential in bringing about the passage of a bill to lower prices in the Philippine Congress.¹

13.3.2 Networking with civil society organizations

Other key stakeholders with which to engage are the civil society organizations, which may have an interest in the issue. Arrange a workshop or a series of meetings with key organizations to discuss your findings and encourage other groups to take up the issue and become involved in the overall advocacy campaign.

13.3.3 Communicating internationally

Many surveys have been conducted around the globe using the WHO/HAI price measurement methodology, indicating a high level of interest in this issue. Just as you will be interested to learn about the evidence and advocacy work conducted in other countries, so will others be interested in your work. It is easy to communicate your survey findings and advocacy messages internationally through health listservs, such as E-drug and IP-Health. Subscribing to these listservs not only keeps you up-to-date with issues on access to medicines and their rational use; the

¹ (To view the video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTVjZjGmyoQ>, accessed 7 February 2007)

support you can receive may help your campaign. When The Network for Consumer Protection in Pakistan advocated for essential medicines not to be taxed, they regularly posted campaign updates on E-drug. The network reported that they received support for their campaign from unexpected international sources that learnt of their efforts through the listserv.¹

Contact HAI to get on the mailing list for the project's bulletin *Medicine Pricing Matters*.²

This bulletin, published quarterly, highlights pricing news (survey data, advocacy, policy changes, etc.) from around the world. Remember to send an e-mail to HAI about your advocacy work so it can be publicized in the bulletin.

13.4 MATERIALS – WHAT NEEDS TO BE PRODUCED

The findings of the survey can be presented and reported in a number of formats. Indeed, in order to achieve the maximum coverage and impact, it is advisable to present them in the most appropriate form for the different target audiences.

13.4.1 Survey report

The report generated using the standard report template will include results in both descriptive and tabular form. This form of technical report would be particularly useful for ministries of health, researchers and academics. An executive summary at the beginning of the report, highlighting key findings and recommendations, is essential for decision-makers who may not have time to read the full report. Reports from a number of surveys conducted to date can be found on the HAI web site.³

13.4.2 Summary report

A short (4–5 page) summary report highlighting the survey's key findings and recommendations in an easy-to-read format, has been developed by a number of countries following the publication of the full survey report. This has proven useful for those people who do not have time to read the full report and may be more appealing to audiences such as the media and NGOs. Examples of summary reports can be found on the HAI web site.³

13.4.3 Policy briefing paper

The survey findings and recommendations can be reported as bullet points on a one-page policy brief for busy government ministers, cabinet members and members of parliament. Accompany the briefing paper with the full report for those who want detailed information and as evidence of the strength of your findings.

Adding simple graphics will help to convey the impact of your findings. See the graph in Fig. 13.4, for example, which shows the number of days' wages it would take for a low-paid government worker in a number of countries to be able to pay for a 30-day treatment.

¹ To subscribe to E-drug e-mail e-drug-join@healthnet.org; for IP-Health email ip-health@lists.essential.org

² You can also download a copy from HAI's web site: <http://www.haiweb.org/medicineprices>.

³ (<http://www.haiweb.org/medicineprices>)

Fig. 13.4 Using graphs to illustrate the impact of high medicine prices on the poor

13.4.4 Journal articles

The survey report will provide the basis for an article for publication in the specialist press, such as a medical journal. If the survey has been conducted by a consumer organization or a health-related NGO, consumer magazines or newspapers may be willing to publish an article.

13.5 MONITOR AND EVALUATE YOUR ACTIVITIES

It is important to monitor and evaluate your advocacy activities. You need to know what works and what does not. Feedback and monitoring is especially important in advocacy campaigns. Be prepared to look critically at your activities. Are they working? Is change happening? Is it the change you expected? What else could be done? Are there new questions emerging? Do new people or organizations need to be influenced to achieve change? What have you achieved so far? Sometimes you may find that your activities are having unforeseen effects. For example, it was reported that a campaign in Pakistan to reduce the use of irrational antidiarrhoeals led to an increase in the inappropriate prescription of antibiotics in treating diarrhoea.

Sometimes you will achieve your initial objective. For example, you might be advocating for a national drug policy, which the government agrees to and draws up. You then may have to change your strategy or your objectives to focus more on issues of implementing the policy.

Evaluation helps to demonstrate accountability to members or funders and will not only help you to decide on whether your approach was appropriate but will also help to increase your credibility and enable you to publicize your results.

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