

THE ADVOCACY INITIATIVE:
***THEORY OF CHANGE* BASELINE NARRATIVE.**
FINAL VERSION.

This comprises the Advocacy Initiative's *Baseline Theory of Change Narrative*. It represents the initiative **at the time of its launch in August 2011**. The intention is to return to this periodically as the initiative proceeds, and in particular in the preparation of the Interim Evaluation in 2013 and the Final Evaluation Report.

Its production was facilitated by NEXUS Research in association with ActKnowledge, based on several stages of consultations and discussions with, and within, the Advocacy Initiative.

- An initial Workshop was held on February 14th with members of the AI Management and Steering Committees, facilitated by ActKnowledge and supported by NEXUS as AI evaluators.
- The results of this, combined with AI documentation, generated the material for the AI Project Director, NEXUS and ActKnowledge to produce a first draft *AI Theory of Change* map, input into the *Theory of Change Online* (TOCO) Website (see <http://toco.actknowledge.org/>).
- The core narrative of this AI Theory of Change map was then extracted, and presented back to the AI Management Committee for further consideration. The current version incorporates the feedback provided.
- Further feedback was also obtained from the evaluation team and AI Project Director, to produce this final version.

This narrative is to be read in conjunction with the accompanying TOCO map, offline (page 6 below) or online (access details can be provided). A couple of points should be noted:

- In the Theory of Change, a *precondition* of an outcome is usually *also itself an outcome*. Thus the terms 'precondition' and 'outcome' are interchanged, depending on the context;
- Numbers in square brackets below refer to the outcomes/preconditions;
- Current and planned AI actions and interventions mentioned, including their numbering, refer to those contained in the *AI Implementation Plan* of October 2011, and on the TOCO Map are represented in yellow;
- Only the most significant aspects of the rationale for these outcomes and preconditions are outlined below, and numerous additional interdependencies and influences could be identified;
- The set of AI interventions in the *Implementation Plan* are likely to be revised – some already have been - and new ones added as the initiative proceeds.

The narrative below begins with AI's long-term objective and outcome, depicted at the top of the Theory of Change map on page 6. It then proceeds downwards through what have been identified as the three most important preconditions of that outcome, considering in turn their preconditions, and making reference to the interventions that may lead to these outcomes. The need to sustain outcomes achieved is briefly considered at the end.

ADVOCACY INITIATIVE LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

The **ultimate objective [Outcome 11]** of the Advocacy Initiative is to influence policy, law and practice in manner that brings about improved social justice outcomes. This is above the ‘accountability line’, meaning the AI can at best contribute only modestly: achieving this objective is subject to several additional factors.

However, the AI feels that a *necessary precondition* to this long-term objective is the **reframing of the relationship between the SJA sector and state actors [Outcome 10]**, requiring both sides to think differently. It is envisaged that this will:

- be grounded in social solidarity;
- enhance the prospects for influencing law and policy in positive directions;
- involve and enable more effective advocacy strategies.

Furthermore, the AI believes that it can *discernibly influence* this outcome i.e. that it can contribute to a reframing of the relationship between the SJA sector and state actors.

There are, in turn, three main preconditions to this.

First, that there exists **an engaged group of relevant policy makers and influencers [Outcome 6]**, broadly defined, with sufficient knowledge, understanding and motivation to support the legitimacy and potential benefit of SJ advocacy, to keep abreast with issues arising and to consult with other stakeholders as required. This group must also be capable of exerting a distinct influence.

Second, that **expectations regarding their mutual relationship are significantly reframed [Outcome 7]** on the part of both the SJA sector and state actors. In the absence of this, it is unlikely that the relationship can be improved in a constructive direction.

Third, that the **SJA sector produces more effective and constructive advocacy strategies, ideas and options [Outcome 8]** while engaging with policy makers and stakeholders, that can lead to better results. The sector must implement these in a manner that sympathetic policy makers can use within their political and policy environments. (It might be noted that improved advocacy strategies can also lead to better social justice outcomes *without* enhancing the relationship with policy makers, as attested by the experience of SJ advocates appealing directly to the European Court of Human Rights and European Union Directives and other instruments.)

Major factors that influence these three outcomes are explored below in turn.

OUTCOME 6: ACHIEVING AN ENGAGED GROUP OF POLICY MAKERS

Several factors can contribute to the achievement of Outcome 6, but mainly Outcome 4 and Outcome 1.

Policy makers, in addition to engaging with the SJA sector itself, require reassurance that positions they take in relation to SJ advocacy are relevant and useful, and are of interest to and supported by a significant portion of public opinion, as voters and citizens. Thus the emergence of such a group of policy makers would depend on *the existence of a wider active and critically supportive cohort among several groups* in society. The existence of such a group, seen as a precondition of Outcome 6, is **Outcome 4**.

Three factors or groups (apart from the SJA sector itself) are relevant preconditions to this.

1. The presence of a number of *prominent academics, media commentators etc., familiar with relevant issues and supportive* of the SJ agenda, and willing to be consulted and to support a SJ agenda. [4.5]

And this supportive group is in turn enabled and to some extent empowered if academics, intellectuals and others across the spectrum *engage in wider debate*, framing and posing questions around different approaches to social and economic change in Ireland, including advocacy for social justice but also other even conflicting approaches. This informed and lively debate can lead to greater understanding and support. [4.1]

2. The *support and understanding of a community voluntary sector and the engaged public*, that are *not* to the fore among SJ advocacy. [4.4] Such a group can reassure policy makers that wider public support for an SJ approach can be called upon.

Reinforcing this also has a broader precondition i.e. *greater awareness among civil society and the public* in general regarding the legitimacy and potential impact of advocacy. [4.2] At present, the public and many community and voluntary sector organisations have little or no concept of the role of social justice advocacy, or indeed the value of such an approach in a democratic society. Greater awareness of the positive contribution that SJA can make to decisions that affect their lives might lead to rising demand from community level volunteers and activists and from the general public looking for a new way of working and a new way of doing business. (AI Action 8, a grass-roots information campaign, aims at directly achieving this.)

3. Ongoing dialogue *between the AI and high-level policy-makers and influencers* by means of different channels. [4.3] Such dialogue can instigate an interest among identified individuals, feed relevant material from different AI activities, arrange meetings and events, and generally support policy-makers already engaged and encourage others to become interested in the question of SJ advocacy .

Yet neither the wider public nor media and academic commentators can engage with the issue in the absence of *some significant evidence and knowledge about the social justice approach* and why it is relevant today, how the SJA sector works, and the issues facing it. Thus a precondition is the existence of such a body of evidence and knowledge: This is **Outcome 1**. It is supported by a number of AI interventions designed to generate this evidence and knowledge by:

- Exploring and presenting the main features and characteristics of SJA in practice, and the legitimacy and benefits to be derived from this approach [1.1], to be undertaken by AI Action 2 that maps the practice of SJA;
- Considering the issues that confront the sector, including its current relationship with policy makers and threat to funding [1.2], to be examined by AI Activity 4 on funding vulnerability resulting from SJA;
- Examining how the public feels about the SJA sector, including the level and nature of support it offers [1.3], through AI Action 5 which is a public opinion poll; and
- Understanding how policy-makers perceive SJA [1.4], to be determined by AI Action 3, an investigation of policy makers perceptions.

As appropriate, the AI Communications Strategy is intended to disseminate ongoing results emerging from the research, in various different formats and contexts, to commentators and the public in general.

OUTCOME 7: REFRAMED EXPECTATIONS OF SJA – STATE RELATIONSHIP

A second major precondition of a reframed relationship between social justice advocates and the state is that both sides revise/reframe their *expectations* of their relationship with each other. This outcome [Outcome 7] would at the same time support the emergence of an engaged group of policy makers [Outcome 6] and the production of more effective SJA strategies and options [Outcome 8]. But it may require considerable rethinking of many of tenets and beliefs held up to now. Several processes might support this outcome.

One is that the SJA sector as a whole *reflects internally* on its relationship with the state and how it might evolve, part of a wider process of building a new sense of solidarity and sector redefinition [5.5] (see below).

But sustained high-level dialogue between AI and policy makers [4.3] is a precondition to Outcome 7, by exploring and encouraging ways in which this reframing might come about. Building on this might help reduce misapprehension, enhance understanding and encourage trust and mutual recognition of needs. Evidence generated regarding the SJA and policy making environment [Outcome 1] will also feed into the ongoing dialogue; and the ongoing process of SJA sector knowledge exchange [Outcome 2] also offers opportunities to reinforce and broaden this dialogue.

OUTCOME 8: MORE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES, OPTIONS AND IDEAS FOR SJA

A reframed relationship between social justice advocates and the state has a third precondition, that the SJA sector itself improves its capacity to develop effective advocacy strategies, and generate options and ideas that relate more effectively to the policy environment – effectively amounting to a renewal of the SJA sector. [Outcome 5]

This implies significant changes and developments in at least two areas:

1. Considerably strengthened skills and capacity in the SJA sector [5.4]
2. A culture of solidarity and cooperation within the SJA sector, broadly defined, that would (as mentioned above) involve critical self-reflection, greater transparency, improved communication and possibly a redefinition of what solidarity means in the current context. [5.5]

Sector skills and capacity needs reinforcing in two domains: First is that SJA develop stronger capacity for self-reflection and strategic analysis. [5.2] Second is through the creation and use of a suite of resources and tools dedicated to SJ advocacy. [5.3]

This capacity building is also linked to the wider process of building a culture of reflexive solidarity. [5.5] A core aspect of that culture is the ability of each organisation to reflect on its own activities and approach, to consider other actors in the sector that may have different approaches to and understanding of social justice, and to engage in communication and constructive dialogue aimed at mutual understanding, better cooperation and fewer potentially destructive differences. Through this process unspoken assumptions – often hindering understanding and cooperation - can surface, and be explored and engaged in a constructive manner. [5.1]

The emergence of such a culture must be underpinned by more than a new skill-set.

The SJA sector can be facilitated in exploring difficult, sometimes conflictual, issues in an open but safe context, not always to arrive at resolution but to fully examine the potential for and means of agreement. Past assumptions and practices, internally in the sector and in relation to the policy sector, must be open to question and review. This requires enhanced capacities and tools, but also that SJ advocates choose to initiate and engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection, individually and/or in partnerships and networks. [Outcome 2]

The AI can help create a positive environment for the renewal of the SJA sector, through a number of interventions that facilitate both the capacity building and the self-reflection processes. Most of the work, however, must be done by and within the sector itself.

The existence and promotion of a **capacity building framework and tools [Outcome 3]** would support the process in a number of ways:

- The existence of a set of tools and resources to facilitate evaluation [3.3] would help the SJA sector to identify its achievements and failings, a specific area of weakness already identified and to be addressed by AI Action 12;
- The creation of other tools and resources to fill additional capacity gaps [3.4], the subject of AI Action 13 – though a precondition to this is that such gaps be identified and a coherent framework for all resources be developed [3.2], which is the purpose of AI Action 11;
- A precondition to that framework is a map of what already exists and is available [3.1], which is to be adapted under AI Action 10 from ongoing research elsewhere.

All these will be consolidated into a capacity building framework for the SJA sector. The sector itself should be extensively involved in its design and implementation, ensuring that outputs are widely disseminated and used, and providing targeted support to ensure their take up within the sector.

The other precondition to a renewal of the SJA sector is the process of **SJA sector knowledge exchange and self-reflection [Outcome 2]**, a process that may yield a new sense of solidarity. The main components would be:

- A process of self-reflection in the sector, at a national level [2.3], the creation of which is the goal of AI Action 7;
- A forum for the exchange of knowledge within the sector [2.2], the goal of AI Action (and already underway); and
- A shared working definition of SJA [2.1], produced under AI Action 1.

OUTCOME 9: SUSTAINING OUTCOMES

Deserving of separate consideration is the need to ensure that outcomes achieved during the course of the AI Initiative, and to which the initiative contributes, are sustained after its completion. Little can be said at this stage since it will depend on the successful identification by the AI of new and renewed dynamics and loci of interaction among and between stakeholders that have the potential to carry progress into the future. At least three processes would have to be considered:

- The capacity building framework and tools, which will require some form of ongoing support and/or locus of existence;
- The process of knowledge exchange and of self-reflection will also require a forum and facilitation; and
- Sustaining the process of evidence generation, debate and community support.

It is likely that these must be addressed primarily by the SJA sector itself. Existing networks and fora of the community and voluntary sector more widely will have a role, and possibly the creation of new ones, along with contributions from other stakeholders.

The Advocacy Initiative: Baseline ToC 2012

| Color Legend | |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Long-term Outcomes | (Purple box) |
| Indirect outcomes/precondition | (Light blue box) |
| Project direct outcomes/out | (Yellow box) |
| Key Outcomes/precondition | (Light grey box) |
| Exploratory Phase Outcomes | (Orange box) |

Definitions Used:
 * AI = The Advocacy Initiative
 * SJA = Social Justice Advocacy
 * CV Sector = Community voluntary sector
 * Policy maker = Ministers, members of government & oireachtas, senior civil servants, political parties.
 * (n) = A number in round brackets at the end of box title (yellow boxes only) Indicates that these outcomes follow directly from Interventions/ Actions contained in the AI Implementation Plan.
 * [n] = A number in square brackets at the beginning of a box title are Outcome sub-section numbers.

