

Educational Booklet

Grassroots Advocacy



NANO PRAYER

Loving God,

You called Nano Nagle to be a light in dark places,
to see suffering and respond with courage, to walk
with the poor, the forgotten, and the excluded.

Give us her compassion,
that we may recognise injustice and not turn away.

Give us her courage,
that we may act even when the cost is great.

Give us her hope,
that we may believe change is possible.

May we, like Nano,
carry your light into the world,
especially where dignity is denied
and voices go unheard.

We ask this in faith and trust.
Amen.



WELCOME!

This booklet introduces the concept of grassroots advocacy and the important role communities play in creating change.

It is designed to help people understand what advocacy is, why grassroots action matters, how community issues are connected to deeper systems, and how ordinary people can work together to transform injustice.

This is not a guide for experts or professional activists. It is an invitation to recognise the power that exists within communities and to discover how collective action can create a more just and dignified world



WHAT IS ADVOCACY

Before we can understand grassroots advocacy, we need to understand something more basic: advocacy.

Advocacy means speaking up and taking action to create change. Advocacy is not only about raising awareness. It focuses on creating long-term systemic change by addressing the causes of problems rather than only responding to their effects.

Advocacy asks important questions:

- Why is this happening?
- Who is being affected?
- Who has the power to create change?
- What needs to change in the long term?

Advocacy encourages us to look beyond immediate problems and towards sustainable solutions.

For example, if a community is experiencing high crime rates, advocacy does not only ask how crime can be reduced today. It also asks what social conditions may be contributing to crime, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, or lack of opportunities. Advocacy helps communities move from temporary responses to long-term change.



WHAT IS GRASSROOTS?

Before we can understand grassroots advocacy, we need to understand what the word grassroots means.

When we use the word grassroots, we are talking about ordinary people and communities coming together to create change.

Grassroots work is:

- Community-led
- Based on lived experience
- Driven by collective action

Grassroots work is not about outsiders deciding what communities need. It is about communities identifying their own challenges, sharing their own experiences, and working together towards solutions.

Grassroots movements are powerful because they are rooted in real experiences and real needs.

One important idea often used in grassroots work is:

"The people closest to the problem are often closest to the solution."



WHAT IS A GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY?

Grassroots advocacy brings together two important ideas:

Grassroots.

And advocacy.

Grassroots advocacy means communities organising together to create long-term change.

It is a form of advocacy that begins within communities and is led by the people directly affected by issues.

Rather than waiting for others to solve problems, communities work together to identify challenges, understand their causes, and advocate for solutions.

Grassroots advocacy is collective.

It is not one person acting alone.

It is communities coming together around shared concerns and shared hopes for a better future.

Grassroots advocacy can include:

- Awareness campaigns
- Petitions
- Community meetings
- Storytelling
- Peaceful protests
- Social media campaigns
- Engagement with leaders

Grassroots advocacy values local knowledge, lived experience, and community leadership.



LEVELS OF ADVOCACY

Advocacy can happen at many different levels.

While this booklet focuses on grassroots advocacy, it is important to understand that advocacy takes place in many spaces and institutions.

Grassroots Advocacy

Grassroots advocacy happens within communities.

This is where ordinary people organise around issues that directly affect their lives.

Many movements for justice begin at this level.

Provincial or State Advocacy

Advocacy at this level focuses on regional government structures, departments, and services.

Communities may engage provincial leaders to improve policies or services that affect their region.

Regional Advocacy

Regional advocacy works through organisations and structures that connect multiple countries.

Examples include the African Union and SADC.

International Advocacy

International advocacy takes place within global institutions such as the United Nations.

It helps bring local experiences and concerns into international spaces where global decisions are made.

Although advocacy happens at different levels, these levels are interconnected. Many important changes begin at the grassroots level before influencing larger systems.



UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY ISSUES

Grassroots advocacy begins with paying attention to what is happening in our communities.

Every community experiences challenges.
Some challenges are visible and immediate.
Others may be hidden beneath the surface.

When reflecting on our communities, it is important to ask:

- What issues exist in our community?
- Who is most affected?
- Which groups are often ignored or unheard?
- Which problems continue to repeat themselves?

These questions help communities identify the issues that require attention and action.



THE TREE METHOD

Community issues can be understood like a tree.

The branches represent symptoms.

These are the visible problems that people see every day.

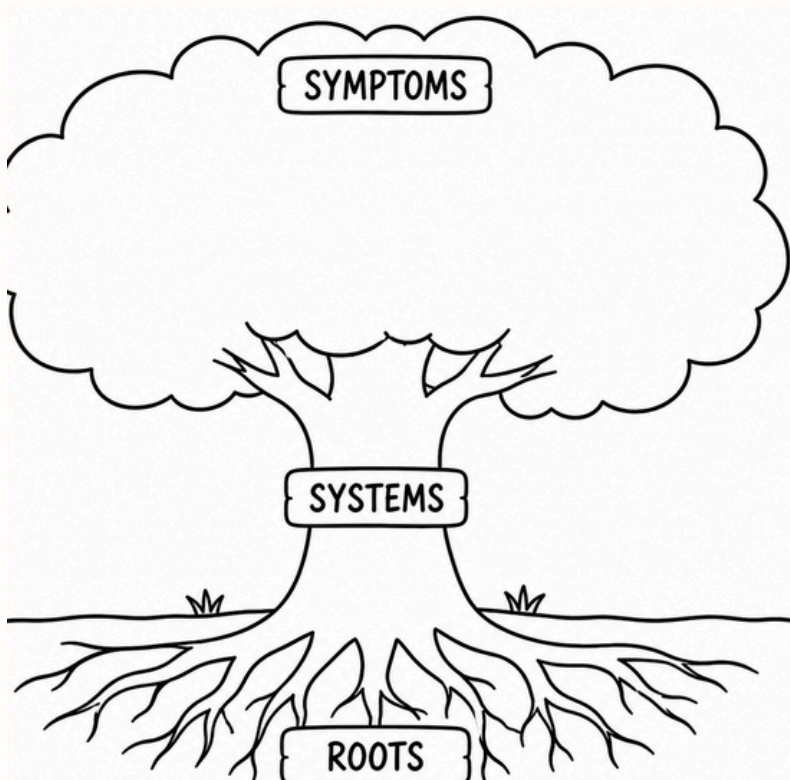
The trunk represents systems.

These are the structures and institutions that keep problems in place.

The roots represent root causes.

These are the deeper beliefs, histories, inequalities, and power structures that exist beneath the surface.

Just as a tree depends on its roots, many social problems are sustained by deeper causes that are not immediately visible.



WHY THE ROOTS MATTER

A key principle of grassroots advocacy is understanding root causes.

Symptoms show the problem.

Roots explain why it exists.

Many responses focus only on visible problems.

Grassroots advocacy encourages communities to ask deeper questions.

For example:

If unemployment is the symptom,

then weak education systems or limited opportunities may be part of the system.

Historical inequality or exclusion may be part of the root cause.

If the roots remain unchanged, problems often continue to repeat themselves.

Understanding root causes helps communities work towards lasting change rather than temporary solutions.



GROUP ACTIVITY

Understanding Community Issues

Now that we have explored symptoms, systems, and root causes, it is time to put this learning into practice.

Working in a group, choose one of the community scenarios provided by your facilitator. Together, discuss the issue using the Tree Method.

Ask yourselves:

- What are the Symptoms?
- What visible problems can you see?
- What are the Systems?
- What structures, institutions, or practices contribute to these problems?
- What are the Root Causes?
- What deeper beliefs, inequalities, or power structures may be keeping these systems in place?

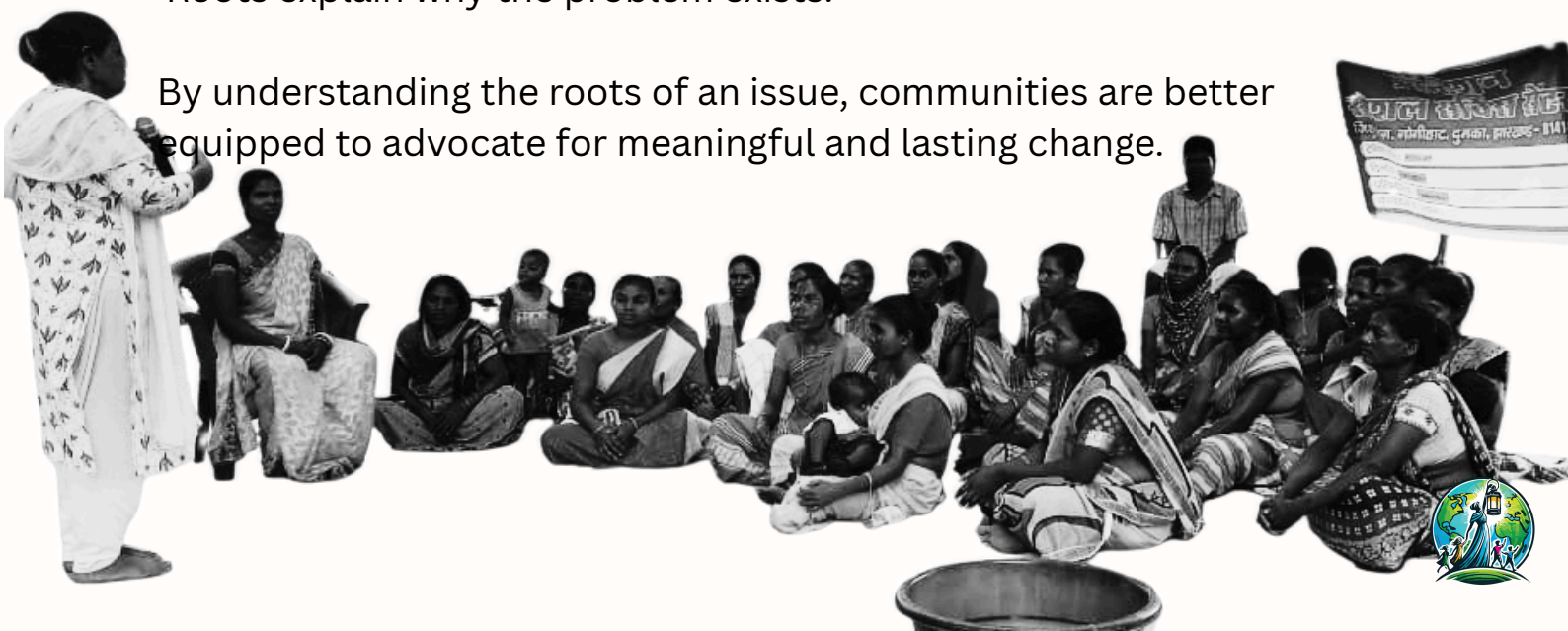
As you discuss, remember that there may be more than one answer. The goal is not to find the "correct" response, but to think critically about the issues and explore what may be happening beneath the surface.

Symptoms show the problem.

Systems maintain the problem.

Roots explain why the problem exists.

By understanding the roots of an issue, communities are better equipped to advocate for meaningful and lasting change.



LET'S DO THIS!



Grassroots advocacy does not live on pages. It lives in communities. In conversations. In people coming together to identify problems, ask questions, and work towards change.

Grassroots advocacy is not only found in campaigns, petitions, or meetings with leaders. It happens in neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces, faith communities, and community halls. It happens whenever people refuse to accept injustice as inevitable and choose to work together for something better.

You do not need a position of power, a special title, or permission to be an advocate. You already are one when you listen to the experiences of others, speak up about issues that matter, and believe that communities have the power to create change.

Carry what you have learned here into your community. Pay attention. Listen deeply. Ask questions. Work together. And remember: meaningful change does not begin in distant offices or institutions. It often begins with ordinary people deciding to take action together.

The world does not need perfect advocates. It needs informed, courageous, and committed people who are willing to organise, participate, and act. Go forward. Stand together. Create change from the ground up - every day, everywhere, with everyone.





INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATION
ASSOCIATION

THANK YOU!

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. By engaging with these stories and ideas, you are already taking a step towards building a more just, compassionate, and human-centred world.

You can follow us on social media for stories, reflections, and updates from across our global community, or explore more resources like this on our website:

www.ipango.org

The International Presentation Association (IPA) is a global network of Presentation people and partners working together for justice, peace, and the dignity of all. Rooted in the vision of Nano Nagle, IPA connects grassroots voices to global spaces, including the United Nations, and supports education, advocacy, and action for human rights around the world.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we can continue to listen, learn, and stand for the rights and dignity of every person.