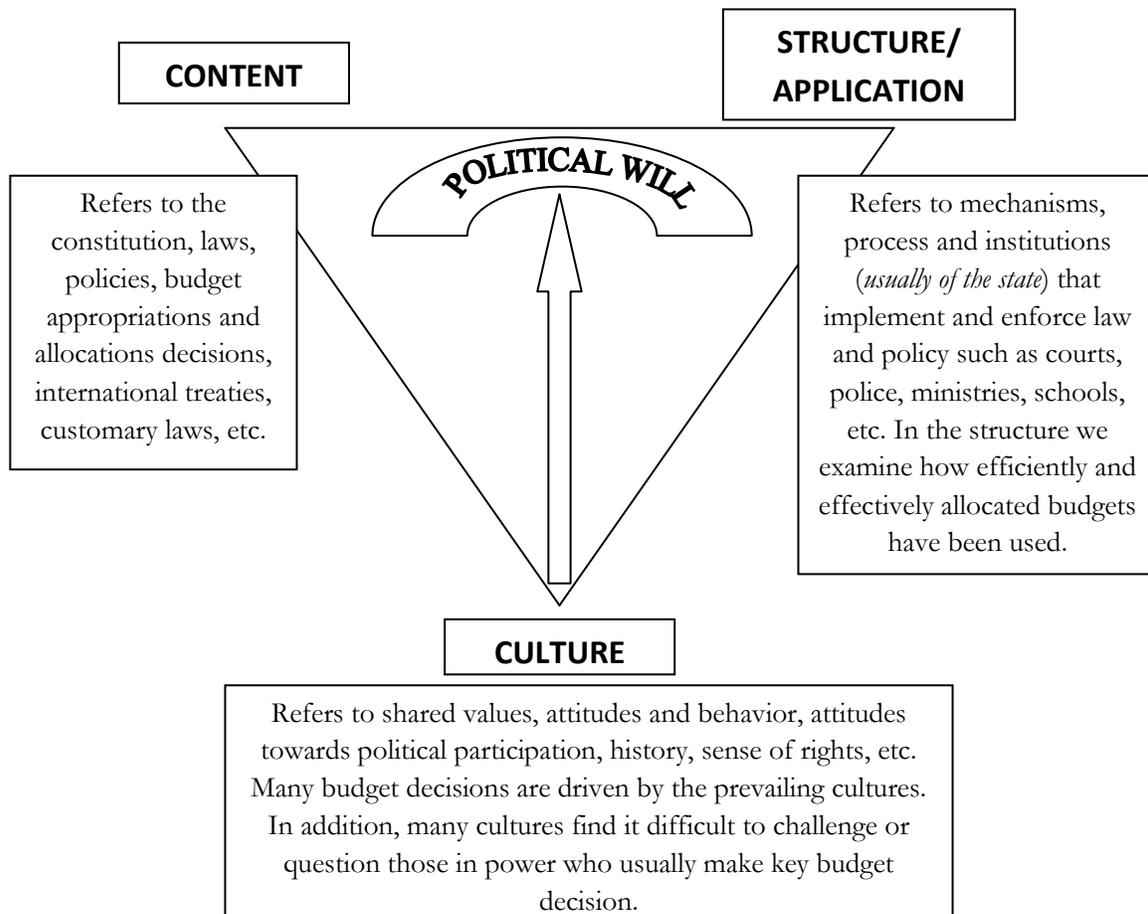


## PROBLEM/ISSUE STRATEGIC ANALYSIS TOOLS<sup>1</sup>

### TRIANGULAR ANALYSIS: AN ADVOCACY STRATEGIC ANALYSIS TOOL<sup>2</sup>

The Triangular Analysis is a tool that Margaret Schuler (1986) developed to help people working in advocacy in performing a strategic analysis of the issues they are working on (VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). We consider the Triangle Analysis one of the most important strategic analysis tools to use throughout our advocacy campaigns.

The Triangle Analysis looks at three different aspects of the issue we are advocating for: *content, structure, and culture*.



<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from Nader Tadros, *Advocacy: People's Power & Participation*. People's Advocacy – All Right Reserved – 2010 ©.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from "Advocacy: People's Power and Participation" by Nader Tadros, PEOPLE'S ADVOCACY, 2010; Virginia, USA. All rights reserved.

Budgets do not exist in a vacuum. They are influenced by the dynamics between several factors. In the Triangle Analysis, we look at the budget process from three angles:

### Content – Regulations

When your community or group is challenged with a problem, you first need to examine the regulations (or what is referred to here as *Content*) around this problem/issue. This content may include existing laws, policies, decisions, court sentences, international law, constitution, etc. Budget laws and allocation decisions come under this angle.

Careful study of all of these elements is wise before making a hasty judgment on them. Sometimes you will find contradictions between two or more of these elements. In addition, many laws, or decisions that exist actually address the issue, but they may have serious loopholes through which the law becomes ineffective or favoring the powerful over the powerless. A close examination of the budget law might reveal that the budget scheme might be favoring a small influential minority, or do not reflect what politicians have promised the people. Question if you can live with these loopholes or exceptions, or whether they are unjustly used against the poor and disadvantaged, or not. Sometimes, the law or decision is so much out of context, or so unrealistically tough that it is almost impossible to apply. Studying this part of the triangle will likely give you one of three choices for your strategy:

- The content is adequate and you ought to make sure that it is not touched in your campaign. You will also need to examine the other two angles as described below.
- The content is serious flawed and you need to have it overhauled or amended.
- The content is good in general, but has one or two serious elements that are critically necessary to address the problem/issue. Your efforts should include something about introducing this new content without affecting the other good parts of the existing law.

*A word of warning* should be mentioned here. There is almost an instinctive, yet faulty, assumption that the content analysis is exclusively done by lawyers, and budget analysis is done by economists. This assumption is faulty because it undermines lay people's ability to analyze and criticize legislative, legal, and budget processes and documents that affect their livelihood. In real life, we are always almost surprised at the ability of the ordinary citizens to analyze such processes and documents with fresh and important perspectives especially when their lives are directly affected by these laws and legislations. Some of the consequences that might happen if we go with the assumption that it is exclusively a lawyers' and economists' job include the following:

- Further excluding people from participating in the process, and consequently, diminishing their power further;
- Emphasizing the image that disadvantaged and marginalized people cannot understand and criticize legal, and legislative, and budget processes;
- Continuing the same old message that the legislators, economists, and lawyers do not need to involve citizens in the legislative, and budget making matters; and
- Depriving the process from valuable insights that those people can bring to the advocacy and empowering process.

### Structure/Application

We can always think of content (laws, decision, or policies) that was never applied, or has been idle for so many years. A simple example could be the parents who made a rule that the children can only watch one hour of television a day. Whether this rule (content) is applied or not is another thing. In addition, laws, decisions, or policies – including budget ones – may not be applied for many reasons. For instance, effective application of these laws (etc.) needs trained personnel or funds that are not available; or maybe those who are responsible for applying the law are not really interested in doing so, and no one holds them accountable. You need to examine if the laws (etc.) are not applied, and the reason(s) why they are not.

### Political Will

Political will is needed both to create or amend a good content, as well as to implement this content. Obviously, much of the political is created by pressure from elites and powerholders. The *Advocacy for People's Power* model seeks to have ordinary citizens create the pressure for the needed political will at the expense of the pressure created by elites and power holders.

As noted in the Selective Political Will case study, political will existed to amend the legislation, but not to really apply the new legislation. Surprisingly there was common agreement that these laws are *not for actual application*.

#### **Selective Political Will**

##### **A Case of a Country Applying to Join the European Union**

*In one of the European countries seeking to join the European Union, an expatriate advocacy consultant noticed that, in discussing the existing legal framework to address specific issues, community members would sometimes use phrases like “This is an EU legislation, and we should not pay much attention to it!” in a dismissive manner. At that time, extensive efforts to join the European Union were underway in this country with much support from the public. When said more than once by different community groups, the consultant asked for further elaboration on what such phrases actually meant. To the consultant’s surprise, he learnt that such legislations were required by the EU as prerequisites to accept the country’s application to join the EU. Apparently, communities – and possibly the government – understood that these legislations are not for application but rather for getting the EU to accept their application. The consultant inferred that there was political will to change the content (laws), but not necessarily to apply this content (laws). Almost everyone was in a tacit agreement about that.*

*One possible negative effect that such a selective political will is that the culture would be more open to accept the idea that some laws are really not for application, which poses a series of other challenges to the culture and how it deals with legislations.*

## Culture

This is a critical piece of the analysis that is often forgotten or undermined. The culture is where most of the people are. You are actually affecting the public opinion and perspectives when you deal with the culture. This is why the Culture dimension adds much depth to the advocacy process rather than only limiting the changes to the content and structure. In fact, working on the cultural part, where you are dealing with the beliefs and traditions of people is often harder than changing laws and policies, but definitely more lasting. This is why governments and power holders pay much attention to the socialization process that takes place through regular education and the media.

### ***Taking the Bigger Challenge of Going Beyond Legislation***

#### ***India's Growing Dowry and Dowry Abuse in India Even with a Half Century of Rigorous Anti-Dowry Legislation***

India passed a series of rigorous anti-dowry and dowry abuse legislations almost since 1961. Even with such rigorous legislations, the practice of dowry<sup>1</sup> and dowry abuse has been on the increase as reported by many groups in India ([http://www.indianchild.com/dowry\\_in\\_india.htm](http://www.indianchild.com/dowry_in_india.htm), Retrieved April 09, 2010). Some research indicated that it is at 80% among Indian marriages. Clearly the problem is mainly a cultural, and not a legislative one. Although legislations is important and necessary, but the main advocacy work should address the culture in such a problem!

In examining the *culture* angle, you will need to answer difficult questions such as, “*What is in the culture that helps perpetuate the problem?*” “*What belief systems support the status quo?*” “*Where in the culture can we find support for the change we need to achieve?*” “*In a traditional society, how much can ordinary citizens question the decisions of those in power, including their budget decisions?*” Examining these questions should help us link this analysis to the Invisible Power discussed in the Third Chapter.



**Figure 1: Examine the Content, Structure & Culture in This Cartoon!**  
*Technical Idea: Iman Mandour & Nader Tadros; Artistic Idea: Golo.*

The Triangle Analysis is very useful for our advocacy work for many reasons including:

- It helps us sharpen our advocacy strategy to identify where you need to work most. For instance, if we have good content (policies and laws), we do not need to spend our efforts calling for having a law that already exists but is seldom applied. We would rather spend our efforts in advocating for the authorities to apply this good content. Using the same logic, the more the issue is organically related to prevailing beliefs, the more our advocacy interventions will be directed towards public opinion leaders more than legislatures (content) and executives (structure).
- It shows us that advocacy is not always done towards the official decision-makers. Very often the thrust of your advocacy work will be directed at some strong public opinion leaders or cultural leaders who can change people's attitudes towards your issues.
- It reminds us of the importance of involving the people (culture) in your advocacy work to ensure an effective application of legislations and policies.
- It broadens our horizons by liberating us from thinking of advocacy as only addressing the official decision makers, or public executives.

### **Exercise**

*In your circle of advocacy colleagues, do the following:*

- *Take the issue you have identified in the previous exercise and apply the Triangular Analysis to it.*
  
- *No one angle should all be either negative or positive. Think of both good and bad points in each angle, and mark them as (+) or (-). If applicable, identify the pros and cons with individual points and mark each of them as (+) or (-).*
  
- *Do this exercise in two rounds: the first should not include any solutions to the problem, but rather a snapshot of the current situation; and the second round includes possible interventions you would like to do with each of the angles.*
  
- *Some of the points that the team might mention cannot fit nicely in one of the angles. In this case, just take note of them as you will use them in other analytical tools.*