

Position Paper: Advocacy from a Salesian Perspective

1. What is advocacy?

A process for supporting/enabling people to:

- Express their views/concerns
- Access information & service
- Promote and protect their rights/responsibilities
- Explore choices/options.

It seeks to ensure that people, especially those who are most vulnerable, are capable to:

- Have their voice heard on issues important to them
- Protect/safeguard their rights
- Have their views/wishes genuinely considered when decisions are made about their lives.

In conclusion, giving voice to the most vulnerable people, including children and youth and their communities by:

- Raising awareness on needed government reforms, including services & protection
- Conducting campaigns with coalitions & civil society
- Modelling solutions as a trusted governmental partner

It is important to distinguish advocacy from other similar terms, used sometimes, as synonyms, which have different connotations.

Lobby: A practice of advocacy with the goal of influencing a governing body. Therefore, in the Salesian context, as a way of good practice, we should avoid the use of this term, because we advocate for the Common Good

Campaigning: Sum of actions/activities an organisation plans/executes to influence policy and raise awareness on a specific issue

2. Why do advocacy?

We operate within a system which has adopted/consolidated some policies, therefore, there is a clear need for advocacy. These policies are not centered on the entire dimension of the human being, and do not look into the root of what is disruptive.

If we want to provide an input in line with Don Bosco's charisma and the great experience built up in years, around the world, through the Preventive System, we need to advocate what He taught us: i.e. the difference consists in changing the causes underlying the problem and not only mitigating the consequences of discriminatory policies.

3. Core Values of advocacy in action for Don Bosco organizations

To advocate effectively, it is necessary to have a clear vision. Based on our educational experience through over hundred years we have developed a series of core values listed here below:

- Children and Young people's rights are the core of Don Bosco's Mission.

- The Salesians of Don Bosco and their organizations are recognized all over the world for their engagement in sustaining the most vulnerable, for their effective work and their broad field experience deriving from the many sectors in which they are engaged and in the front line.
- This rich heritage and knowledge should be trickled down into existing strategies and policies, to contribute in transforming them to respond to structural weaknesses and deficits.
- One of Don Bosco's aims for young people was "to become Good Christians and Honest Citizens". In the 21st century this is translated into promoting active and participatory citizenship among children and young people, encouraging them to live their life in a meaningful way.
- Our educational system does not leave children and young people alone. They are comprised into an educational community that accompanies them personally, therefore, also defending the development of the local community as a key factor for young people's social inclusion.

4. The advocacy tradition of the Salesian Family

- Don Bosco has indicated us the route. Some historical reference to Don Bosco shows us clearly how he advocated for the rights of young people when children rights were not conceived and made explicit (e.g. apprenticeship contract or contacts with public bodies for the "well-being" of young people; etc.)
- Don Bosco's vision anticipated the signs of the times. He was and, is even today, the "motor" of a vision still alive and valid nowadays. This vision strongly believes in the potential good in each young person and its capacity to transform him/herself and the surrounding society.

5. Salesian Advocacy guiding principles

- As we work towards changing policies for the promotion and protection of children rights, we should bear in mind that we operate not as an activist NGO but as "partners" of local-regional-national governments in harmonization with other actors.
- Messages are based on concrete experience from the field. Don Bosco's movement invests its resources mainly into actions, grounded on the practical experience built up in direct dialogue with children and young people together with their families and communities.
- We work with the most vulnerable and marginalized youth and from this experience we draw messages based on practice and not theoretical declarations;
- Partnerships with external stakeholders (institutions and other NGOs) are crucial, based on dialogue and sharing of goals and targets;
- *A soft and effective approach to change* with institutions at all levels, to build up dialogue more than confrontation, for a positive solution of the issues at stake
- *Voice to the voiceless* is our leading concept with a bottom up approach sustaining our action putting young people at the centre, listening and accompanying them in the promotion and protection of their rights;
- A tight cooperation and involvement also of the lay groups of the Salesian Family, following the practice of Don Bosco, provides us with another view of the issues and contributes in building up together a synergy more effective and with a stronger impact on the situation at stake.

6. Main fields of advocacy

Human Rights as universal, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated with focus on:

- a) Children rights (children and youth)
- b) Education: including TVET, Formal, Non-Formal and Informal



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- c) Fight against Poverty and promotion of Social Inclusion
- d) Community Development
- e) Equal opportunities between men and women, girls and boys
- f) Youth as agents of peace

The UN Agenda 2030 with its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) today represents an important background to any intervention with its detailed program and the breakdown of the SDGs. In this direction many other topics for advocacy can be included covering issues such as migration, human-trafficking, development cooperation, etc.

In addition, the promotion and protection of the human rights paradigm, in which all human rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, helps us in recognizing the tight connection among the above six macro-categories and guides us to clearly understand the interlinkage existing between children rights/migration, children in street situation/poverty, unaccompanied children, etc.

7. Means

As the engagement of all the don Bosco organizations is extremely vast and rich, there is a need for a coordination. To convey some common messages in line with what has been exposed before we have developed certain means of coordination.

7.1 Advocacy Expert Group meetings

Salesian international networks active in the field of advocacy have initiated several expert groups. The main purpose of these groups is to gather practitioners in several topics, reflect with them from a Salesian perspective and elaborate different policy proposal: statements, policy papers, etc.

In addition, these groups have a cascade effect, bringing the main policy guidelines from the international fora to the Salesian national and local realities, where they are working with those affected by these policies. Examples of these groups are the Don Bosco Network group in Cooperation and Development, or Don Bosco International groups on EU2020: Participation, Poverty and Migration, Don Bosco Network and Don Bosco International joint group on Advocacy, etc.

7.2 Position Papers

A set of position papers are being prepared to support the advocacy actions of the members of the Salesian movement. In line with the above indicated concepts and topics, the following position papers have been produced and distributed

- 1) Education: A Salesian Response to the 2030 Agenda (in September 2016)
- 2) Migration: The Salesian Approach to Unaccompanied Minor Refugees (in December 2016)
- 3) Poverty: Position Paper on Poverty and Social Exclusion (in October 2017)

7.3 Awareness Campaigns

To disseminate our message among different stakeholders, such as public authorities, private donors, third sector organizations and the public in general, many Salesian organizations are developing raising awareness campaigns covering several topics.

These campaigns are centered on two main aspects:



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- It is crucial to share the situation of the right holders whose rights are not being respected and try to promote legal change on behalf of the duty bearers, and
- It is important to reach the public to engage them in supporting the projects that empower the vulnerable and in need young people.

8. Salesian Structures that are already engaged in advocacy at international Fora:

As of June 2018, Salesians of Don Bosco and their related organizations are present in the following international fora at global and regional level:

a) Global level

United Nations

- ECOSOC status of Salesian Missions, at UN in New York
- ECOSOC status of VIS, at UN in Geneva and in New York

b) Regional level

Europe

- DBI advocacy at European level
 - European Fundamental Rights Agency
 - European Alliance for Apprenticeships (organized by the European Commission)
 - Communities of practice by CEDEFOP (EU Agency for T-VET)
 - European Commission Strategic Dialogues and Fora (DG EMPL, DG EAC, DG JUST)
 - Council of Europe
- DBYN advocacy at European level (youth, social inclusion and non-formal education)
 - European Youth Forum
 - European Youth Foundation (Council of Europe)
 - The European Union –Council of Europe Youth Partnership
 - European Commission Strategic Dialogues and Fora – DG EAC
- VIS advocacy at European level
 - European Fundamental Rights Agency
 - European Civil Society Platform against trafficking in Human Beings
 - Council of Europe

In Asia, Africa and America, there are several Provinces and organizations involved in advocacy at national level, yet no presence in the regional fora.