

IDEAS AND INSIGHTS

USING VIDEO ADVOCACY TO ENGAGE VULNERABLE YOUTH POPULATIONS

Technology-driven advocacy can give young people a voice to seek change in their communities.



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Change makers around the world increasingly use new technologies and communication tools to advocate, engage communities, and drive action—especially among young people. Blogs, social media campaigns, community video screenings, and flash mob demonstrations have exploded in popularity over the past several years, often serving to elevate grassroots voices and spur marginalized groups to action. By understanding and supporting such efforts, funders can capitalize on advocacy’s potential to achieve significant returns on investment.

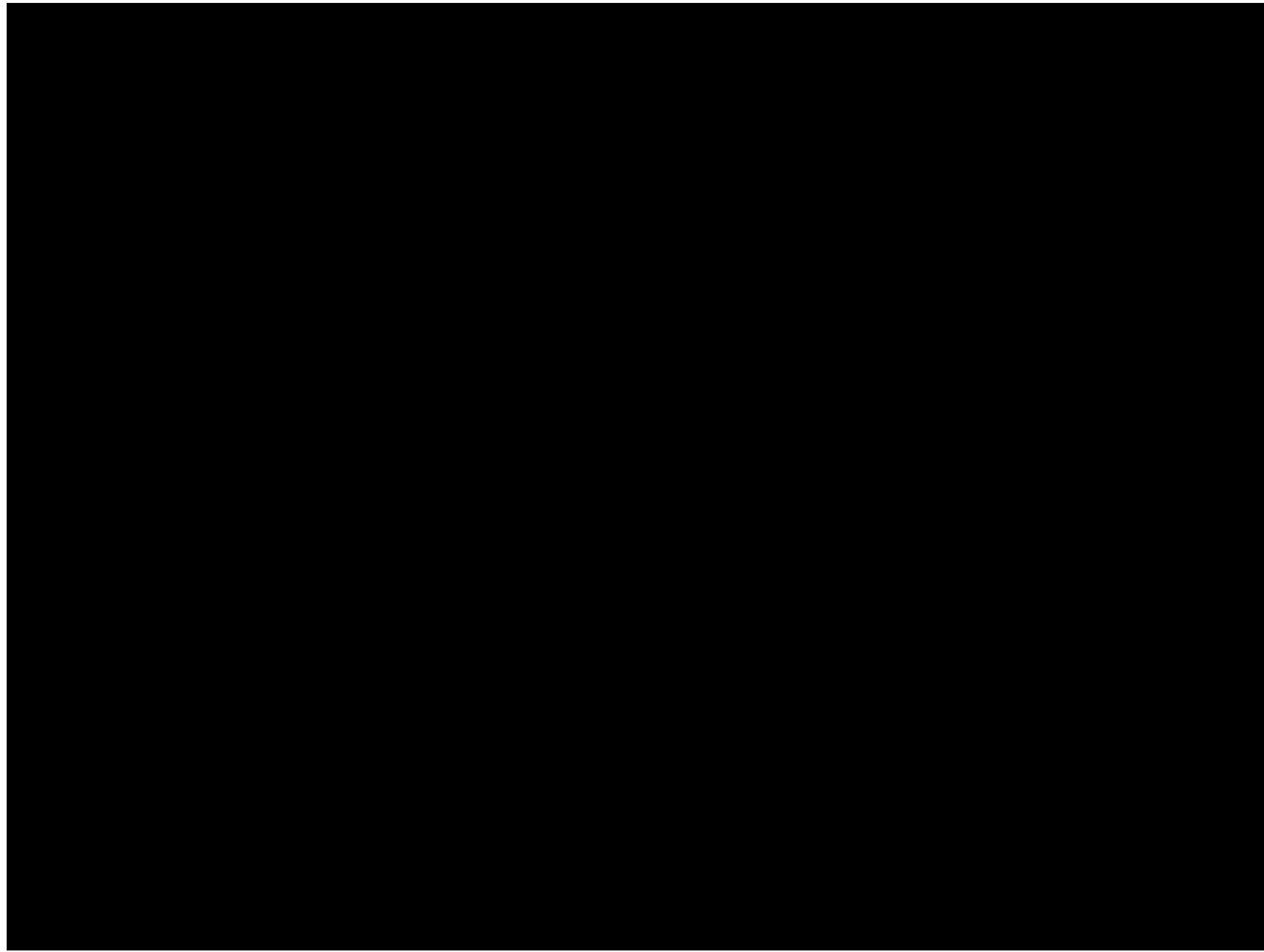
Last month, Arabella facilitated a plenary panel at the Africa Grantmakers’ Affinity Group’s annual conference on the topic of advocacy for social change. We discussed how funders can use advocacy grant making to defend human and environmental rights, educate change makers, and transform unjust laws and policies. We explored a handful of case studies that demonstrate how funders can support organizations working to build the capacity of local activists and give communities the tools to share their own stories on a global stage. Below are two examples from that discussion that other funders may find instructive.

International Policy Change

Accountability Counsel, a nonprofit focused on addressing human rights, labor, and environmental abuses perpetrated by multinational companies and international institutions, worked with youth and adults in a community in Liberia to create a video describing the violations that occurred when a company funded by the US government launched a biomass project. As a result of this video and related advocacy efforts, the US government conducted its own investigation and found multiple allegations to be credible. Congress then called for the government agency that funded the project to report on how it was addressing the reports of abuse. By supporting the filming of the video as part of a multi-pronged advocacy strategy, funders were able to inspire long-term, systemic change and prevent abuses in the future. Other funders considering advocacy strategies should consider the power of video to introduce and connect viewers, especially those with the power to institute change, to an issue.



To curb the enlistment of child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, WITNESS, a nonprofit that specializes in video advocacy, worked with a local organization to create videos featuring stories of current and former child soldiers. The organizations then screened these videos in the communities where many of these young boys and girls were recruited and where families in some cases willingly agreed to send their children to join the armed forces. The videos aimed to educate communities about the atrocities that the children experienced as soldiers and to facilitate dialogue among peers and parents. Funders of this project ultimately contributed to a significant decrease in the rate of child-soldier recruitment as the result of screening the film in more than 50 communities.



While advocacy can be an effective tool for change, it is important to note that engaging young people in advocacy is not without challenges and risks, especially in restrictive environments. Young people who participate may risk re-traumatization, retaliation, or rejection from their community. Therefore, funders must ensure the organizations they support take special precautions in training advocates to protect the subjects of their videos and other campaigns while still ensuring their stories are told. Common practices for video include muffling voices, obscuring faces, and keeping names confidential. With digital media, organizations must take care to encrypt metadata so that activists' identities or locations are protected.

Despite the unique challenges and risks of advocacy work, such efforts can yield remarkable results. And, because advocacy is by definition a very public endeavor, it can also inspire other funders and activists to get involved in the same issue or to use similar strategies to tackle a different issue. How have you used advocacy to improve the well-being of vulnerable populations? What tools and approaches were most effective, and why?

To learn more about how to design an effective advocacy campaign using video and other digital tools, tune in to our upcoming webinar: [Advancing Advocacy Through Communications Grant Making](#), on June 1.

Rachel Reichenbach is a director at Arabella, where she oversees projects and advises clients on a range of issues. As part of the global philanthropy team, she focuses on conceptualizing, designing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives to achieve bold and lasting change. Rachel has lived and worked in East and Central Africa and is interested in how philanthropists can play a catalytic role in a variety of issues facing the continent, including market access, human rights, and global accountability.

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