

ACTIVITY 9:

To engage or not?

Materials: Handout: *When and how to engage visible power*

Plenary: Begin with an open discussion by asking:

- How do you determine whether or how to engage in policy or use legal strategies to advance your agenda?

Point out that many women's groups, for example, engage with the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York each year in March. Some have an explicit strategy to lobby governments on the content of resolutions and agendas, while the majority come to network with each other and donors.

- Is this a policy space that merits the costs of travel, hotels, and time?
- Can we claim and reshape existing political spaces to serve our goals? Or do we need to create our own political spaces that enable us to set the agenda, speak out, and focus on the most important questions for ourselves?

Invite people to name examples of lobbying and policy advocacy work they have been involved in or political spaces they have created. Select three or four examples to be examined in small groups. Introduce the framework Policy spaces: to engage or not? from the handout as a tool for assessing whether and how to engage in policy work.

Small groups: Each group addresses the questions in relation to a different example of policy advocacy. Alternatively, the group discusses their own experience.

- Assess the policy spaces you've engaged in: what was your purpose?
- Which of the spaces in the framework describes the space(s) you engaged in, and why?
- What were you able to accomplish in the space(s)?
- What kinds of strategies might each space require to be strategic?

Plenary: Groups present their analysis for discussion.

Go on to explore what lessons or insights can be applied to other policy engagement opportunities. Distil the key considerations for deciding how and whether to engage, using this checklist:

- What are the opportunities to shape the agenda in the space?
- If engaging, what difference will this make for advancement of your strategy?

- If there isn't much opportunity to shape the space or policy,
- How will the space enable relationship-building among activists, donors and/or with decisionmakers?
- Will there be an opportunity for activists and leaders to learn new skills and gather new information?
- Is this an opportunity to gain legitimacy and visibility for your agenda, organisations and leaders?
- What is the opportunity cost of not engaging? What could you do instead given the resources?
- What is the cost-benefit analysis?
- If you decide to engage, who are the most important power-holders in the space, and how can you build or utilise your connection with them?
- What do you want to achieve and what would be success in terms of the visibility + legitimacy of your agenda and demands, of your alliances and relationships, or your positioning for future advocacy?
- Who should represent your initiative and what will it take to ensure that whomever leads is fully briefed, equipped and supported to ensure learning and confidence?
- What kinds of materials will you need to draw attention to your agenda in the space?
- How do you ensure that there is adequate preparation and follow up?