Friends, Foes and Forces:
A SWOT Analysis

Overview: A SWOT analysis enables a group to assess the internal and external factors that may hinder or facilitate your group's advocacy strategy in order to refine your goals, objectives, and activities.

Purpose: An assessment of political forces for and against your advocacy is sometimes called a "Stakeholder Analysis", a term which can be misleading because it suggests an even playing field. In practice, the playing field is very uneven, and advocacy requires navigation of different power dynamics. So a crucial element of this analysis is weighing who has more power, who has less and what kind of power the different actors use. The following tools can assist you in sizing up the forces.

Time: 3 hours

Materials:

- Flip Chart
- Markers
- Tape
- Copies of the SWOT Analysis handout

Credit: Adapted from *Strategic Thinking: Formulating Organizational Strategy Workshop, Facilitator's Guide*, Institute for Development Research

Process:

Facilitator Note: A SWOT process builds clarity about allies, opponents and other forces affecting a clear issue and goals you are working to advance. For this reason, it is important to clearly articulate the issue on which you are focusing and why it was chosen. Make sure everyone understands the SWOT analysis in full before you start. The accompanying handout has good information to support this introduction and you can use examples to illustrate. This activity is best done in small groups with the two tasks separated with plenary discussion to make sure everyone is engaged.

In Plenary:

- Introduce the purpose of the activity and go over the SWOT tool, terminology and steps of analysis. You will begin with the External Factors: Opportunities and Threats, then move to the Internal Factors: Strengths and Weaknesses.

- Form small groups of 4-6 people each; hand out large sheets of paper on which each small group will create the chart below or have versions of it to handout. Be sure to establish a clear understanding of the issue problem and goals on which you are focusing. The following questions and grids can help you in the analysis. Give them 30 – 45 minutes for the task.

Small Groups Round 1: External Factors: Identifying Opportunities and Threats

In small groups:

- Brainstorm about the external forces that will impact your strategy. Include:

    o Groups and structures relevant to the issue that the strategy addresses;

    o Organizations that are sources of resources. Remember that resources can be financial, technical, political, etc.;

    o Trends and groups that influence the political and policy space in which you will advocate. Include cultural, ideological, and religious forces in both the public and private realms, particularly if the issue relates to women's rights. Include key events if relevant;

    o Other groups or forces that affect your strategy. Include both the positive and negative forces. Organize the forces you come up with in this grid:

External Forces Affecting:			
The Issue	**Resources**	**Political/Policy Space**	**Other**

- Mark the forces that are threats with a T and those that represent opportunities with an O. In some cases, the group may see a particular force as both a threat and an opportunity. In such a case, mark as both.

- Take a vote on the two or three most important opportunities, and the two or three most important threats. Mark these with a ++. Do a second vote on the 2–3 next most important opportunities and threats. Mark these with a +.

In plenary:

- Share and compare your results. Identify the threats and opportunities that are surfacing as most important.

- Did anything unexpected come up? If so, what significance does it have for your strategy?

Small Groups Round 2:
Internal Factors:
Assessing Organizational Strengths and Weaknesses

In plenary:

- Form small groups of 4-6 people each; you can use the same groups or mix them up. Hand out large sheets of paper on which each small group will create the chart below or have versions of it to handout. Give groups 30 – 45 minutes for the task.

In small groups:

- Using the handout to help you think through different organizational factors, fill in the grid as below, list the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. Then rate with ++ and + (as before) how important each strength and weakness is for your strategy.

Strengths	How important for the strategy?

Weaknesses	How important for the strategy?

In plenary:

- Share and compare your results. Identify the key organizational strengths and weaknesses that you have listed.

- Did anything unexpected come up? If so, what significance does it have for your strategy?

- Full Analysis - Discussion: Analyze the implications of the SWOT analysis for your advocacy strategy. The following questions should help the group think about the implications:

   o What must be included in our strategy to take full advantage of the opportunities?

   o What must we do to reduce the impact of the threats?

   o How can we build on our strengths to further our strategy?

   o What must be included in our strategy to minimize our weaknesses?

   o Is there anything we need to adjust in our strategy given the outcome of the SWOT?

   o What resources, time and preparation are necessary to incorporate this analysis?

Below are examples of what you may identify in a SWOT Analysis:

Internal:

- *Strengths: staff skills, links with the community, funding base, commitment, common purpose, political credibility.*

- *Weaknesses: lack of staff skills, uncertain funding, internal squabbling, low morale, limited community support, no common vision of advocacy and organization's purpose.*

External:

- *Opportunities: elections, a reform process, new policy initiatives, international conferences, important visitors, incidents that have caught public attention.*

- *Threats: lack of coordination among NGOs, religious or political forces which go against social change, limited political freedom, lack of transparency in the political process, cultural views about roles, policy opportunities that derail and coopt your organization without creating any real chance for influence.*

Support Material

The SWOT Analysis: Assessing Internal and External Forces

The SWOT analysis is a tool from strategic planning methodology. It provides a simple way to assess the internal forces that determine your organization's potential to carry out a strategy, and the external forces that will help or hinder you. The SWOT analysis uses a grid that separates the internal, organizational assessment of strengths and weaknesses from external opportunities and threats:

INSIDE	OUTSIDE
STRENGTHS	OPPORTUNITIES
WEAKNESESS	THREATS

1. Internal Capacities: Strengths and Weaknesses

At times organizations set out to achieve something that they do not have the technical resources, skills or time to pull off. In advocacy, being realistic is key. An internal assessment helps you figure out who you will need as allies to expand your forces and complement your strengths and weaknesses.

The following questions will help you assess internal capacity. The questions may need to be adapted slightly for membership, grassroots, and nonprofessional groups:

- What does your organization do best? What programs are effective and strong? In what areas do the staff excel?
- What are the key capacities of your leaders, members, staff, and allies?
- What do staff and members see as problems? What programs need improving?
- What's missing?

In measuring your organization's capacity, think about each of the areas below. Consider gender, age, ethnicity, and other differences. For example, do both men and women have opportunities to take on leadership roles? Are there hidden obstacles? Are younger people taken seriously?

Leadership

Do the leaders coordinate work well? Do they communicate openly? Are decision-making mechanisms clear and transparent? Do leaders respond to staff and program problems? Do they encourage initiative? Do they have the support of the board, staff, and members? Are they representative of the diversity in the staff, members or communities in which they work?

Technical Skills

What is the technical capacity of staff or members and is it sufficient to meet the needs? Are staff trained to do their jobs? Does the organization seek outside help when it needs it?

Funds and Other Material Resources

Does the organization have enough funding, equipment, and other resources to achieve its plans? Does it use its resources efficiently? What percentage of the organization's time is spent on raising money? Is there a perception that money is the only important resource? Are the programs driven more by donors and the availability of funds than by opportunities and concrete needs?

Clarity of Purpose and Programs

Are the aims and activities of the organization clear to all the staff? Are the vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the organization written down? Who developed them? Are there mechanisms to monitor program implementation and adjust to new developments?

Commitment and Participation

Does the staff care about the work they are doing? Do the members or beneficiaries feel part of the organization? Are plans developed jointly or delivered top-down?

Organization and Operations

Is there adequate planning, evaluation, and program design? Are tasks fairly distributed? Does everyone know their responsibilities? Does the structure of the organization facilitate its work? Does the organization have good relationships with other organizations?

Interpersonal Relations

Do the members and staff get along with each other? How are conflicts handled? Is there agreement about decision-making procedures? Are there hidden obstacles for personal advancement? Does everyone feel free to express their concerns? Do they feel confident they will be taken seriously? Are differences of opinion respected?

Relationship with Members or Beneficiaries

Does the organization have members or clearly defined beneficiaries? Are the staff, leaders, and board accountable to members? Do members or beneficiaries have some say in what is provided to them? Are there sufficient members? How many members have left the organization and for what reasons?

After identifying your organization's strengths and weaknesses, think about how much they hinder or help you to pursue your advocacy goals.

2. External Environment: Opportunities and Threats

Opportunities and threats may relate to:

- The issue you are addressing.
- The availability of resources for your work.
- The political/policy space you operate in.
- Your allies and opposition.

The Issue You Are Addressing

Are other organizations addressing this issue? Are there similarities in how you are addressing it? Differences? Are there forces that will prevent your group from ever solving this problem? These may include forces that you did not know existed when you first developed your strategy. How controversial is your issue?

The Availability of Resources

Is there support from donors for this type of activity? Are there technical services available to help you do what you want to do? Are other organizations competing for the same resources?

The Political and Policy Space

Does government see your advocacy as a threat? Do they seek your involvement to legitimize a set agenda? Will any of your planned actions provoke strong opposition or backlash? Is there any risk of repressive action in response to what you are planning? If your group has been invited to be part of the policy process, what will you need to do to be taken seriously? How will you assess the potential for impact? How will you retain independence and a critical perspective while collaborating? Are there trends or other social, political, economic or cultural forces that may affect your potential for success?

Allies and Opposition

Are there other groups or individuals who might threaten or support what you are doing? How powerful are your allies? How powerful are opposition forces? What might they do to prevent your success? What can you do in response?

Social change work generates conflict. For example, working with women may provoke hostility from men or fundamentalist religious groups. Working with labor may provoke antagonism by powerful business interests, etc. At the same time, work with these groups may suddenly generate an outpouring of support from churches, civic groups, and other potential allies. Managing the tensions and dynamics produced by change is a perpetual balancing act.