

Engaging researchers in HIV prevention early-stage research & development (R&D) advocacy and policy

This factsheet is a synthesis of presentations and discussions from the UPTAKE advocacy-policy workshop held on Wednesday, 23 October 2024

What is policy?

Policy(ies) are **clear plans** about how a **social, political, or economic vision will be achieved**. This may include a *law*, *rule*, *regulation*, or set of *guidelines*, *procedures*, or *norms* from a higher-level authority to guide a course of action.

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is a process of **strategically managing and sharing knowledge** to **change and/or influence policies and practices** that affect people's lives. This may include *fighting* for social change and *mobilizing* resources.

Why is advocacy important for researchers?

Researchers are in a **strategic position** to engage with diverse stakeholders. What happens with one product, in one trial, in one region **affects all biomedical HIV prevention stakeholders** – trial participants, research teams, funders, sponsors, community stakeholders, product developers, and regulators.

...in early stage R&D

Researchers can advocate to:

- Mobilize resources for R&D and product roll out
- Cultivate political good will for the introduction of effective products
- Develop policy framework(s) for the adoption of the research products (at all levels)



Engage communities and civil society

It's critical to engage people living with HIV as experts by experience as well as civil society organizations (CSOs) in advocacy and policy efforts.

Doing so will help:

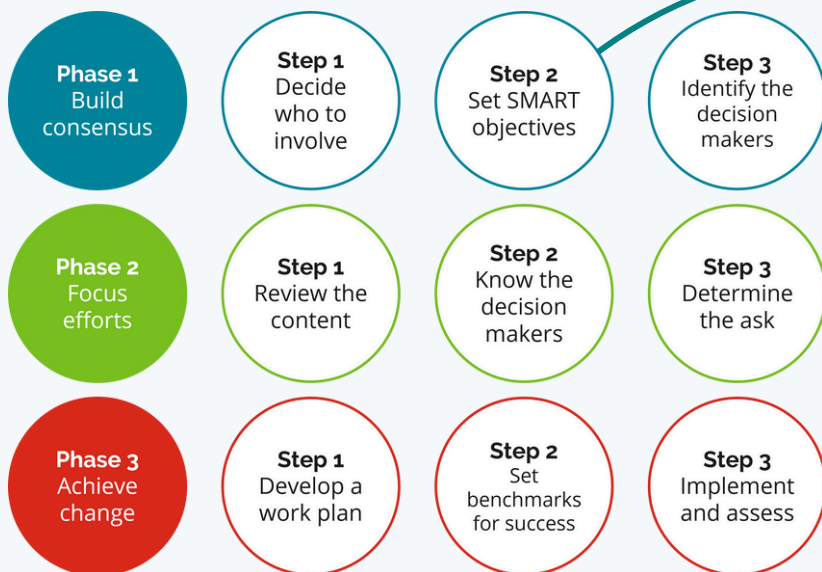
- Create demand | Link with beneficiaries
- Link with political leadership | Reach funders

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are they meaningfully involved in the process?
- What are their research literacy needs?
- Are they part of decisions making processes in research
- Do they have the necessary capacities? If not, how can you support them?



Advocacy step-by-step



Think SMART

Specific

- What is your call to action and who is it for?
- What are your organizational/research priorities?

Measurable

- How will you measure the impact?

Achievable

- What can you do with available resources and skills?

Realistic

- Is your idea reasonable considering the timeframe and resources available?

Timebound

- What is the date and length of the campaign?

What is UPTAKE?



Running from 2020 to 2024, UPTAKE is a unique multidisciplinary collaboration of five leading research institutions in Africa and Europe.



UPTAKE seeks to **accelerate access** and **facilitate adherence** to effective and innovative **long-acting (LA) technologies** to prevent HIV and unintended pregnancy in **adolescent girls and young women** and **women engaged in sex work** in **sub-Saharan Africa** through **behavioural science**.

Advocacy approaches

(A non-exhaustive list)



Advocacy resources

Develop materials and campaigns to raise awareness of your call to action and generate support



Lobbying

Direct engagement with decision makers who have control or significant influence (consider donor restrictions)



Bilateral engagement

Meet with decision makers (e.g., government representatives, parliamentarians, funders)



Use your research

Translate and disseminate key outputs of your research to inform advocacy and policy priorities (e.g., via policy briefs)



Influence events

Take advantage of key global events (e.g., World AIDS Day, HIV Vaccine Awareness Day)



Consensus building

Contribute to public and group decision making building (e.g., funder consultations, UN High-Level Meetings)



Cultivate champions

Engage and increase the capacity of key supporters from diverse stakeholder groups



Engage the media

Connect with local, regional, and global media to share breaking results and opinion pieces from thought leaders

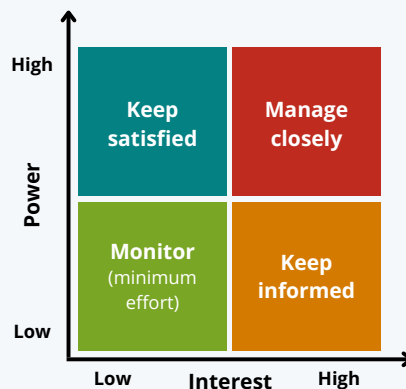
Identifying your audience

Know your audience

Be intentional in aligning your advocacy and policy approaches and outputs to actively engage and cultivate the support of your audience.

Consider the following questions:

- What are their demographics? (e.g., age, gender, language)
- How does your audience prefer to be engaged?
- What are your audience members passionate about?
- Who are your key target groups?
 - E.g., government, media, communities, CSOs



The following section is a synthesis of discussions from the workshop

Advocacy and policy needs and priorities

- Fund community-led advocacy initiatives to raise awareness of products in development
- Collaborate with communities in a meaningful and genuine way to capture their voices and perspectives and address concerns and fears
- Protect and promote the rights of affected communities at all stages of product development
- Develop communication and advocacy strategies with tailored messaging to meet the needs and contexts of different partners and beneficiaries
- Ensure country-level participation in product development to generate country-level data and evidence, including to demonstrate the market to influence national budgets
- Facilitate open science and data sharing and harmonization
- Integrate HIV prevention research with research on other comorbidities (e.g., TB, mental health, malaria, etc.)

Platforms for engagement

- National community groups and CSOs
- National, regional, and global community and CSO coalitions
- Global advocacy networks and movements
- Private sector coalitions
- National, regional, and global conferences
- National advocacy days (e.g., World AIDS Day, HIV Vaccine Awareness Day)



This project is part of the EDCTP2 programme supported by the European Union (grant number CSA2018HS-2525).



MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit



UPTAKE partners

With special thanks to Stacy Hannah and Daisy Ouya from AVAC, Evaline Kibuchi from Stop TB Partnership Kenya, and Ntando Yola from the Desmond Tutu Health Foundation (DTHF) for contributing to the workshop.