

Making your voice heard

A women's toolkit for local lobbying



www.wbg.org.uk

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Women's Budget Group

Photo above by Cath Redfern: 'Million Women Rise' protest on March 7th 2009 in London

A bit of background...

This toolkit has been produced by the Women's Budget Group to help women who want to campaign and lobby locally on issues that are important to them. It has come out of the Voices of Experience project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which consisted of a series of workshops where women living in poverty came together to express their experiences of poverty and learn more about the policy-making process.

Following these workshops the Women's Budget Group commissioned Mary-Ann Stephenson to run a follow up campaigning skills workshop with women using Platform 51 centres in Wolverhampton. This toolkit is based on this workshop, and uses the campaigning ideas generated by the women involved as examples and case studies.

The Women's Budget Group would like to thank Platform 51 and all the women who took part in both sets of workshops for their help and participation in the project.

The Women's Budget Group would like to thank the Feminist Review Trust for funding the follow up workshops and this toolkit (www.feminist-review-trust.com)

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to be used by individuals or groups who want to campaign locally. It takes the form of questions that you need to consider when campaigning – the answers you come up with will depend on the issues you want to campaign on, how you want to campaign and the people you need to influence.

Throughout the toolkit we have used examples from the Wolverhampton workshop to show the answers that one group of women came up with when planning a campaign.

If you want to use the toolkit to train other people in campaigning skills you may find it useful to read the section on running a campaigning workshop at the end.



About the Women's Budget Group

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) is an independent organisation bringing together individuals from academia, non-governmental organisations and trades unions to promote gender equality through appropriate economic policy.

In all our work, we ask the question: 'Where do resources go, and what impact does resource allocation have on gender equality?' The impact that government expenditure can have on women's everyday lives, especially women experiencing poverty, is of particular concern to us

For more information about our work see www.wbg.org.uk

About Platform 51

Platform 51 supports girls and women as they take control of their lives. For more information see www.platform51.org



Does campaigning work?

Case study from Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (CRASAC)

The short answer is ‘sometimes’. Decision makers will change their mind if shown to be wrong or out of step with public opinion. It is more common to get a partial success such as a review of local policy. And there are lots of small steps along the way.

Be clear - do you know what you want to achieve? Before we meet anybody we will work out what our key messages are (no more than 3) and what we want from them – be realistic.

At each meeting decide what you want to achieve and why your argument is compelling to the individual or group you are addressing. Use relevant national, local and your own figures to illustrate your points and summarise these in a presentation you can re-use and keep updated.

Go for the ‘elevator pitch’: imagine you have a minute stuck in a lift with your target. Can you explain what you want in that time? Keep it short and to the point.

The pitch may change depending on your audience. Know your key statistics, present your issue positively, and use case studies to show local impact

Dianne Whitfield, CRASAC
www.crasac.org.uk

What do you want to achieve? This is your goal

The first step on any campaign is to know exactly what you want to achieve. What policy or practice do you want to change? Some campaigns may seek to keep an existing service that is about to be closed; in this case you may want to keep things the same, but in order to do that you need to change the policy to close the service. It is important to be clear about your goal.

It may help you think through exactly what you are asking for to think about:

What is the problem that you want to solve?

For example, you might be worried that a local women’s centre is having its funding cut and may have to close. Or you may be concerned that young people locally have nothing to do in the evenings.

Why is it a problem?

For examples of this, you might think about what will happen if the women’s centre closes? What happens because young people have nothing to do in the evenings?

What do you think should happen?

For example you might want to keep the centre open, or provide similar services elsewhere, or close only part of the service. You might want a youth club to be opened in a certain area, or a club that is already open to be open at different hours, or offer different activities, or publicise itself better.

When should the change happen?

If there is a threat to stop funding to a women's centre, your campaign may be urgent – to stop the closure before it happens. If you are trying to get a new youth club opened this is likely to take longer, so your campaign may have to continue for several months or even years. It helps if you can reduce what you want into a few short sentences so that you can explain the campaign to people quickly and easily.

What do you want to achieve – example from the Platform 51 workshop

The group working on activities for children and young people worked through the questions and came up with the following answers:

What is the problem? Not enough affordable activities for children and young people in the Parkfields/Warstones areas

Why is this a problem? Some children and young people with nothing to do get involved with gangs, may bully or harm others, become involved in drug or alcohol use or commit crimes.

The gangs mean that other children and young people are either scared to go out, or their parents won't let them go out. This means they are stuck at home all the time, don't get a chance to play, get exercise or meet friends. This leads to family rows, depression and possible obesity and other health problems.

What do you want to happen?

More activities that will keep children and young people's interest that are affordable to people on low incomes

and can be reached without a car (there are activities if you can afford them, or can travel). Need activities for disabled young people that are mixed with other young people.



Setting priorities – examples from the Platform 51 workshop

The women who came together for the Platform 51 workshop did not all know each other. They were all interested in campaigning but did not have a shared goal. Some had issues that they were already interested in campaigning on; others did not have a clear campaign goal.

We started by using a mapping exercise to help the women think through the issues that were most important to them. Everyone was given a large sheet of paper and asked to draw the different things that they either wanted to change, or were worried might change. Some drew an actual map of their area, showing different things they wanted to change. Others drew themselves with arrows representing different pressures on them and things which supported them. The issues shown included:

- Heavy traffic that made it dangerous for children to play out,
- Crime and anti-social behaviour locally which made some nervous about going out or allowing their children out,
- Their children's school,
- Empty spaces showing lack of facilities for children and young people locally,
- GP surgery, representing support (or lack of it) for mental health problems,
- The job centre where many women had to sign on, this also represented the difficulty finding paid work,

- Public transport, which was often expensive and did not always go where the women wanted to go,
- The Platform 51 centres which were an important source of support for all of the women,
- Children's centres which some women used,
- Local sports facilities and leisure centres which were hard for parents of disabled children to access,
- Various local groups and projects which women or their children attended.

Some women found it hard to start the mapping exercise, but once they got going, and saw the sorts of thing that other women were putting down, they all filled their paper with ideas and issues.

Once the women had thought about their own issues, they shared their main priorities with the group. The whole group then looked at the long list of issues to find the ones that were shared by several group members. From this discussion they agreed to work on the lack of affordable activities for children and young people locally, with a particular focus on the needs of disabled young people. They felt that this issue caused a lot of other problems that affected them including crime, bullying, and family tensions as children were forced to stay in-doors all the time. Later the group decided to split into two groups, one looking at the needs of pre-schoolers, the other at teens and pre-teens.

Who is responsible for the problem you want to solve? This is your target

In order to bring about change you need to know who makes the decision you are trying to change. Some decisions go through several stages. For example if you wanted to influence a council policy, the official decision might be made by the whole council, but they will generally act on the recommendation of the responsible committee or cabinet member. That committee may rely on information from the council staff members responsible for the policy. You will have best chance of success if you can persuade all of these people to support you.

Your campaign may have several targets – the person who makes the decision, the people who influence him or her, and high profile people who may be able to help your campaign.

You can find out the name of your local council (or councils in areas where there are both County and district councils) at:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/D11/Directories/Localcouncils/index.htm

You can search on your council website to find out who is responsible for the decision you want to change. Some council websites are easier to search than others. If you cannot find the information you want on the website, you may find it quicker to telephone the Council and ask who is responsible. As well as the main Council address, the Council website should also give individual contact details for local councillors.

Who is your target? –

Examples from Platform 51

The group looked at the Wolverhampton Council Website (www.wolverhampton.gov.uk) to find out which Council cabinet member was responsible for children and young people's services. They discovered that the Council employed a Democratic Services Officer who was responsible for helping residents find out how the Council worked. Through him they discovered the name of the responsible councillor - Susan Constable.

What does your target want / care about?

In order to convince your target it helps to know what he or she cares about. You will be more likely to succeed if you can show your target how your campaign will help meet her or his priorities, rather than simply saying why it is important to you.

These will include official priorities, such as areas of policy they work on, or particular targets that the Council has set. They will also include un-official priorities, such as winning votes, getting good media coverage, avoiding bad media coverage or being associated with a popular cause.

If you can create public pressure locally through a popular campaign or stories in the media, then your target is more likely to have to listen to you.

All public bodies will be concerned about their budget and avoiding potential legal challenges.

Finding out about your target

You can search your council website and the websites of local papers to find out what local councillors have been doing.

The political party that your target represents may also have a local website that will contain information about local campaigns and activities.

If you use a search engine to look up the name of your town/city and the name of the local party, you should be able to find these fairly quickly.

Your target may also have a page on Facebook (www.facebook.com) or a Twitter account (www.twitter.com). This can be a good way to find out what issues they are concerned about.

The Women's Resource Centre has produced a guide for women's organisations using social media such as Facebook or Twitter. You can find it at: www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2010/u/useful_links_for_lobbying_using_social_media.pdf

Finding out about your target – examples from Platform 51

The group spent an hour online finding out as much as they could about their main target on the council. They used the local council website and found information about the committees she was on.

Continued overleaf

The screenshot shows the Wolverhampton City Council website. The header includes the council logo and the text "Decision making". A navigation menu contains links for Home, Meetings, Decisions, Outside Bodies, Calendar, People (highlighted), Public Documents, Search, and Help. Below the navigation, it says "You are here: People" and "Register | Log out". The main content area is titled "Councillor Susan Constable" and has several tabs: General, Election History, Job Details, Party History, Members Interests, Ward History, Committees, and Outside Bodies. The "General" tab is active, displaying the following information:

Elected:	10 June 2004
First Elected:	10 June 2004
Party:	Labour
Ward:	Bilston North Ward
Address:	63 Cumberland Road Bilston Wolverhampton WV14 6LT
Email:	susan.constable@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Website:	http://www.wolverhamptonlabour.com/
Telephone No.:	01902 498826
Work Telephone No.:	07775 007996
Mobile No.:	07929 738477
Fax No.:	01902 555006
Biography:	Cabinet Member for Children & Families

At the bottom of the profile, there is a link for "Councillor Constable's surgery details". To the right of the text is a portrait photograph of Councillor Susan Constable, a woman with short blonde hair wearing a pink jacket.

They also searched the website of their local paper, the Wolverhampton Express and Star:

www.expressandstar.com/tag/wolverhampton/

They looked at local party websites:

www.wolverhamptonlabour.com/cgi-bin/cm.cgi?cmrid=1&cmpid=2 and

<http://wolverhamptonlibdems.org.uk/en/>

(There did not appear to be a website for the Conservative Party in Wolverhampton)

They looked for their own local councillors on www.writetothem.com and did similar searches on them.

Several of the women set up Twitter accounts and searched for local councillors on Twitter. They did not find any of their targets, but did find local MPs (see below).

What are the best arguments to persuade your target?

The thing that persuades your target might not be the reason you care about the campaign. For example, you might want to keep a service open because it is the right thing to do and people need it. Your target might be persuaded if he or she thinks it will cost more money in the long run if the service closes, or because there is a huge amount of public opposition and the decision might cost votes.

Who does your target listen to?

You will be most effective when your target is under pressure from a number of directions. Think about who your target listens to, and how you might reach them. Try to bring those influential people into your campaign.

Your local councillor may be able to help you reach the person in the Council who is actually responsible for the thing you want to change. You can search for the name of your local councillor (as well as your MP and MEP) at www.writetothem.com

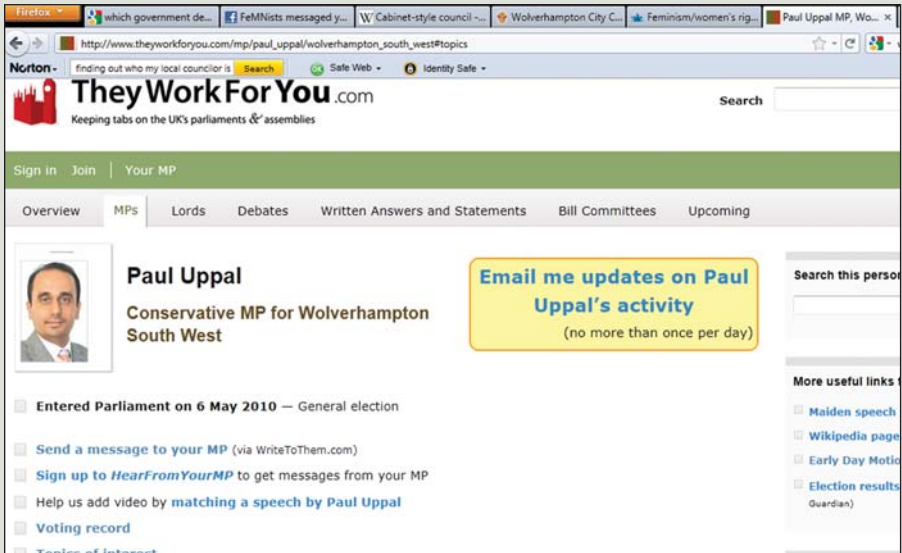
Your Member of Parliament may also be able to help with your campaign. If the issue you want to change is a national issue, you can ask your MP to vote in a certain way if there is a Bill going through parliament, write to the Minister responsible, raise questions in Parliament, take part in debates and put down or sign an Early Day Motion (a sort of MPs petition).

If the issue is local then the decision will be made by your local Council, not your MP. However your MP can be an important ally in contacting the Council. They may be able to write to or meet with the Council on your behalf, raise issues in the local paper or encourage others to take up the campaign. You can find out who your MP is at: www.theyworkforyou.com

This website also allows you to search for information about your MP, including how they have voted, what issues they have spoken about in Parliament and what their interests are.

Finding out about local MPs – examples from Platform 51

The group discovered that there are three Wolverhampton MPs: Emma Reynolds, Pat McFadden and Paul Uppal. The Platform 51 Centre is in Paul Uppal's constituency, so they decided to concentrate on finding out about him. www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/paul_uppal/wolverhampton_south_west



The screenshot shows the profile page for Paul Uppal on the website TheyWorkForYou.com. The page includes a navigation menu with options like Overview, MPs, Lords, Debates, Written Answers and Statements, Bill Committees, and Upcoming. The profile section features a photo of Paul Uppal, his name, and his title as Conservative MP for Wolverhampton South West. A yellow box prompts users to "Email me updates on Paul Uppal's activity (no more than once per day)". Below the profile, there are several links and options: "Entered Parliament on 6 May 2010 – General election", "Send a message to your MP (via WriteToThem.com)", "Sign up to HearFromYourMP to get messages from your MP", "Help us add video by matching a speech by Paul Uppal", and "Voting record". A search bar and "More useful links" section are also visible on the right side of the page.

They also found him on Twitter:



The screenshot shows Paul Uppal's Twitter profile page. The profile includes a bio: "Conservative Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South West since May 2010. If you wish to contact me please see contact details on my website <http://www.pauluppal.co.uk>". The profile statistics show 20 Tweets, 114 Following, 116 Followers, and 9 Listed. The "Tweets" section shows two tweets from Paul Uppal: "Thrilled to be at the Sikh Council UK's launch in Parliament today." (22 Jun) and "Impressed with all the great work @ComptonHospice after my visit today" (17 Jun). A retweet from sccoalition is also visible. The right side of the page shows "About @pauluppalm" with statistics and a list of similar accounts and people followed.

Allies

If you can create a network of 'allies', particularly from different groups, this shows you have broad support for your campaign and can help create pressure on your target. Think about all your potential allies. They may include people from other organisations, local faith groups, trade unions, schools, community groups, local businesses or celebrities.

Your allies may support your campaign for different reasons. Before you approach them, try to think what might make them join your campaign and focus on that angle.

Who do you want to join your campaign? – Example from Platform 51

The group identified a number of people and groups they wanted to support the campaign including:

- MPs and councillors.
- Other parents.
- Teachers.
- Researchers at the University of Wolverhampton working on young people and issues like crime, anti-social behaviour, bullying and so on.
- They thought that the singer Beverly Knight, who was brought up in the area, might bring some celebrity support – one of the group knew people who were in contact with her.
- They also identified Danielle Target, who is on the Wolverhampton Youth Council and a Platform 51 user.
- Andrew Lynch, a teacher of sign language at Wolverhampton College.



Research

What are the facts and figures that will support your argument? Do you have case studies of people who might be affected by the change you are calling for? Case studies are particularly important if you are trying to get media coverage. Do you have all the information you need, or do you need to carry out research? What do you need to find out and how are you going to do it? Are there any facts which can be used against you? How will you deal with them?

Having researched your target, what questions do you think he/she is likely to ask? Will you be able to answer them?

Remember that your target will think of the issue in terms of their interests, not yours, so may ask for information that you might not think is relevant. Where will you get your information?

Research – example from Platform 51

The workshop was split over two days. Between the first and second day, several members of the workshop group carried out research among local parents to find out what they thought about facilities for young people locally. They discovered that many people thought there were not enough facilities for young people. Some did not use the facilities that did exist for a number of reasons including:

- People don't know about them
- People couldn't afford the charges
- Not advertised much
- Scared to meet new people
- Bullying
- Disabled people scared in case they are picked on
- Not local – too far
- Location
- It takes place in a church or other religious building
- No transport
- Other commitments, such as work when the group is on

Through this exercise the group realised that research can take time. One member handed out over 80 surveys and got nine responses back. A higher response rate can be achieved by getting several people to stop people in the street and asking them to go through the survey then and there.

The group decided that they would need to carry out further research into what facilities were available and how widely they were used.

They also thought they would try to find other groups campaigning on the same issue in other parts of the country to see if they had any national research about the impact of lack of facilities for young people on them and the wider community.

Threats

What will work against you?
This might include: a cause which is controversial or unpopular with the public; powerful opponents; lack of media interest, or negative media coverage.

What will you do to deal with these threats?

Tactics – what are you going to do?

These are the actions you take as part of your campaign. They might include writing letters, asking for meetings, producing a report of your evidence, media stunts, collecting signatures on a petition either online or in person, speaking to other groups.

Generally the first step in a local campaign will be to write to the person responsible, explain the problem and your solution, and ask them for their response. Depending on the response you get, you can decide what your next step might be. For example, if your target says that s/he doesn't see any evidence of a problem you might carry out a local survey, or collect signatures for a petition. This will show how many people support the campaign. You can press release the results of the survey to the local media.

Threats – example from Platform 51

The group thought that the main two threats or arguments that might be used against them were that there were enough facilities locally, or that when new facilities were built they were vandalised so it was not worth building more.

They agreed that in order to counter the first point they needed to show that many young people couldn't use the facilities locally because:

- They were too far away for people without a car,
- They cost money to attend,
- They were not accessible for disabled young people,
- They were meeting places for gangs, which put other young people off attending.

One solution that was proposed for the second point was to set up a 'friends of' community group that would work to improve the local park (collecting litter and so on). This would show the council that the community was serious and willing to take action themselves. It would also be a way to gain media coverage.

Following this you might want to organise a protest or other public activity such as a march, vigil, or demonstration. This can show public support and provide good pictures for the media. However there is a danger that if only a few people turn up it may give the impression that not many people care.

Dealing with the local media

Find out about them

Look in your local newspaper for the names of local journalists who write about the issues you are campaigning on. Many papers also publish journalists' email addresses, or you can ring the paper to ask. Listen to local radio to find the programmes that are most likely to cover your campaign and phone up to find the name and email address of the producer.

Many journalists use Twitter. As well as emailing them, you can send them a message on Twitter about your news release. Local journalists who use Twitter will follow local campaigners they think are interesting, so this can be a good way of keeping them in touch with the campaign.

Think about what they want

Journalists like stories which:

- Are topical - they are happening now, or are linked to something which is happening now
- Involve conflict or controversy
- Have a human interest

Local journalists will look for a local angle - either a specifically local story, or a local response to a national story.



You are even more likely to get media coverage if you can offer a strong news "hook" - hold a meeting, vigil or lobby, launch a campaign, publish a report, present a petition, involve a local celebrity, organise a stunt or direct action, and so on.

Use the letters page

The letters page is one of the most widely read pages of any newspaper. You can use the letters page to respond to a news story, comment piece or another letter.

Letters should be short and make one or two main points. If your letter is too long you may find that your most important point is edited out.

No matter how angry an issue makes you feel, a calm and reasoned letter is more effective.

Keep an eye out for any responses to your letter and respond to them. This may give you the chance to cover points not covered in your original letter.

Press releases

In order to make sure your story is covered, your press releases should be short and snappy, and grab the reader's attention. Also remember to:

- date your press release so that people know when the story was sent.
- Start with a clear title.
- Make sure the first paragraph contains the main facts of the story – think about the five Ws: who, where, what, when and why.

- Stick to the facts in the main body of the press release - use a quote to give opinions.
- Include your contact details so that journalists can follow up the story.

The Women's Resource Centre has produced a guide to using the media for women's organisations. You can find it at:

www.wrc.org.uk/resources/tools_to_engage_and_influence/using_the_media/social_media/default.aspx

One tactic – using the Equality Act

The Equality Act became law in 2010. It updates previous equality legislation and protects people against discrimination on grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Under the Act, public bodies (like your local council, school or hospital) have to take account of how what they do affects equality, discrimination and good relations between groups. This is called the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Public bodies must 'have due regard to the need to':

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- Foster good relations between different groups

This does not mean that public bodies have to treat everyone the same. For example, it is lawful for a public body to fund women only domestic violence services.

The Equality Duty can be used by local campaigners if they think a public body is not taking account of the equality impact of their policies. For example, if a local council cuts funding for childcare services that will make it harder for women to work and could lead to greater inequality.

Most public bodies have a policy of carrying out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to help them meet their duties under equalities legislation.

If you think the policy of a public body will have a negative impact on equality you can write asking whether it has carried out an Equality Impact Assessment, and if you can see a copy.

If you are writing to a public body about your campaign and you think the issue you are campaigning on may be covered by the Public Sector Equality Duty, then say so and give evidence. Although a public body is not obliged to put equality before all other issues, they do have to show that they have given it 'due regard'. The Government has said that this will include: 'looking at evidence, engaging with people, staff, service users and others and considering the effect of what they do on the whole community'.

Birmingham City Council was recently found to have breached the Disability Discrimination Act because it failed to consult properly (see www.thebirminghampress.com/2011/04/20/budget-ruling-birmingham-city-council-responds/ for more information). As a result of this case, public bodies may be nervous about what might happen if they are found to be in breach of the Equality Act.

The Women's Resource Centre has produced briefings on the Equality Act that are available here: www.wrc.org.uk/resources/briefings_and_consultations/past_briefings_and_consultations/equalities/equality_act.aspx

Using the Equality Act – example from Platform 51

As well as the general issue of facilities for children and young people, several members of the group were concerned that the facilities that were available were not accessible to disabled children and young people.

They were concerned that disabled young people were being discriminated against and that not enough was being done to promote equality for disabled young people. They also thought that if there were more opportunities for disabled and non-disabled young people to mix this would help foster good relations. All of these issues are part of Wolverhampton Council's duties under the Equality Act.

Some members of the group started to look for Equality Impact Assessments carried out by Wolverhampton Council at: www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/community_living/equalities_and_diversity/impact_assessments.htm

As part of the campaign, they discussed writing to the Council and asking if they had carried out an Equality Impact Assessment of facilities for young people, and in particular what action they were taking to meet their duties under the Act to disabled young people.

Running a campaigning workshop

If you are planning to run a campaigning workshop using this toolkit you may find the following pointers useful:

Get off to a good start

Give everyone a chance to get to know one another, find out what the plan is for the day and agree ground rules. A simple ice-breaker is to ask each person to talk to their neighbour for five minutes before introducing them to the group. Ask the group what ground rules they would like for the day.

Make the day interactive

If you try to lecture people for too long they will probably switch off. People learn more when they are engaged and work things out for themselves. Discuss a few of the questions with the whole group, and then ask people to split into smaller groups to come up with answers for their own campaign. Then get the groups back to share their thoughts before going on to the next set of questions.

Use small group work, work in pairs and individual reflection, as well as full group discussion

Some people are not confident speaking in larger groups but may take part in smaller groups. Some people like the chance to think about what they want to say before being thrown into a discussion.

Give people a chance to get hands on

There are lots of online sites where you can research MPs, councillors and local journalists. If possible, allow people to go online and use these sites themselves to do their own local research

End with next steps

Ask everyone what they plan to do next. If possible, provide an opportunity for people to get together again to see if they can turn the plan they developed into a real campaign.

Acknowledgements

This booklet was researched and written by **Mary-Ann Stephenson** who is a freelance consultant and campaigner specialising in gender, participation in decision making and human rights. She has worked in over twenty countries world-wide with women politicians, business leaders, civil society activists, youth activists and journalists. Email: maryann@maryannstephenson.co.uk
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