

TOOL

TEN GOLDEN RULES FOR DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE MESSAGES³²

- 1. Know your audience:** Find out what they know, their concerns, their values and priorities and what kind of language they use.
- 2. Know your political environment and moment:** What are the big controversies, the big issues and fears in your context? How might they affect your messaging? What is considered left, right and centre?
- 3. Keep your messages simple and brief:** Make sure someone who does not know the subject can easily understand the information. Avoid jargon. This is particularly important when advocating on some of the more technical issues relating to CSO development effectiveness.
- 4. Use real life stories and quotes:** The human element makes a problem, or issue, real. Quotes and personal stories bring to life the challenges faced by those directly affected. They also help to make the message locally relevant by presenting information relating to the local context and therefore more easily understood by your audience.
- 5. Use precise, powerful language and active verbs:** For instance, *"Women's rights are human rights"*, *"We don't need more empty words on a sheet of paper"* *"Free the Morong 43!"*.
- 6. Use facts and numbers accurately and creatively:** The facts you choose and the way in which you present them to make your case is very important. Saying *"1 in 3 women....."*, rather than *"over 30% of women....."* conveys the same fact more clearly. Comparing figures without actually quoting numbers may also convey your message effectively, for example: *"More is spent on buying chocolate in our country every year than what we contribute to fight global poverty"*. Consider the following statement used by a CSO coalition in Austria to oppose the slashing of their international development budget: *"3000 lives of children are at risk. The foreseen deep budget cuts will affect the lives of many people, especially children, in developing countries in a very negative way. In some cases the cuts will make a difference between life and death"*.
- 7. Adapt the message to the medium:** Each medium has its own possibilities and limitations. For example, sounds and different voices and background noises will be very important when conveying your message on the radio, whereas making full use of the visual element of your message will be crucial on television and more frequently on the internet.
- 8. Allow the audience to reach their own understanding:** Provide basic details as too much information may appear dogmatic and may cause you to lose your audience's attention.
- 9. Encourage the audience to take action:** You must be clear about what action your audience – whether it's your key targets or the general public – can take to support your cause. Offer straightforward suggestions like *"support the CSO bill in Parliament"*, *"sign our online petition"*
- 10. Present a possible solution:** Always tell your audience what you propose in order to advance a better policy for CSOs and keep it simple. For instance: *"The government needs to show its commitment to civil society as an important development actor by providing new policy and appropriate funding regulations for CSOs"*.

32 Adapted from L. VeneKlasen with V. Miller "A New Weave of Power, People and Politics", 2002.