

Excerpt from:

# PARALEGAL MANUAL 2012



**A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE TO PROVIDING BASIC JUSTICE SERVICES  
IN SIERRA LEONE**



## **Advocacy**

Advocacy is a broad term. In fact, advocacy plays a role in all other tools and methods employed by paralegals. Advocacy can take the form of talking with Ministry of Agriculture officials about problems farmers are facing within a particular program. Advocacy is also involved in explaining a human rights concept to a party and urging at party to accept a fair mediation agreement. When a paralegal assists a client in pursuing police prosecution, that paralegal is advocating with the police. Even a presentation at a community meeting entails advocacy. Generally, advocacy is about sustaining a dialogue with people in support of a particular point of view or action. It is about making a single party, a powerful institution, or a village aware of an issue and urging action. A paralegal may advocate in writing – by sending a letter to a foreign mining company, for example. Or a paralegal may advocate in person – by meeting with that company’s official.

### **Effective Advocacy**

To be effective, a paralegal must be knowledgeable about an issue and persuasive in his or her advocacy, while possessing creativity and the ability to utilize different courses of action. Some elements of these skills include:

#### **Knowledge**

- Paralegals should know all of the relevant facts of a case.
- Paralegals should thoroughly understand the desires of their clients and the root cause of the problem.
- Paralegals should research the laws and procedures relevant to the particular case.
- Paralegals should learn which people, institutions and organizations are the most relevant to a case so that they can effectively target their efforts.

#### **Persuasiveness**

- Paralegals should be articulate in advocating for a particular point or action.
- They should be able to clearly state the objectives of their advocacy and what their clients/constituents are seeking.
- Paralegals should be ready to call on their knowledge of an issue to support their position.
- Paralegals must balance firmness with respect. While a paralegal should be firm in his or her position, it is also important – and often effective – to keep emotions under control and demonstrate to a party that the paralegal’s position should be listened to.

#### **Creativity**

- Paralegals should brainstorm multiple courses of action.
- Paralegals should carefully consider their approach. Is it best to write a letter first? To meet privately with an accused party? Should a journalist be contacted? Should the Directors or Lead Paralegals be involved?

## Developing a Paralegal Program: Paralegal Training

- Having multiple courses of action gives a paralegal flexibility and alternatives when a particular approach does not work. It also demonstrates to a stubborn party that the paralegal can employ other options if the party will not cooperate with a particular approach.

### Team Effort

Paralegals should always remember that the Directors and Lead Paralegals are available to assist in their advocacy efforts. Directors and Lead Paralegals can recommend courses of action and, importantly, can access high levels of government and other institutions when necessary.

### Example of Paralegals at Work: Advocacy with the Roads Authority to Repair a Bridge

Three villages in Bumpeh Ngao chiefdom in southern Sierra Leone reported to Timap that, because of a broken bridge on the Bumpeh-Mattru Jong Road, cars and trucks were driving through the stream on which all three villages depended for drinking water. Villagers had, on their own initiative, undertaken a community effort to continually repair the bridge in a makeshift manner with the trunks of palm trees. But the villagers complained that *poda poda* drivers would rain curses on the community volunteers for obstructing the road. Interestingly, when the villagers approached Timap, they did not ask the organization to convince the government to repair the bridge. This, perhaps, was beyond their hopes. Rather, they asked Timap to lobby the Sierra Leone Drivers Union to ask its drivers to stop the curses, which the villagers found humiliating and demoralizing.

Timap did speak to the Drivers Union, but Timap also succeeded in lobbying the Sierra Leone Roads Authority to repair the bridge. Timap directors started with the chief engineer in Freetown and then, once he agreed to a repair in principle and issued corresponding orders, Timap paralegals followed up with the roads authority staff in Bo District. The bridge was remade just before the rainy season in 2006. The villagers were astonished.

Timap's thesis is that victories like these—though small in relation to the massive scope of injustice in rural Sierra Leone—expand the horizons of what people feel they can demand from their government.

For more information, see the full manual: [Timap for Justice Community Paralegal Manual](#)