Handout 8: Community Participation and Empowerment

One of the most important principles in systems advocacy is that of community participation. The aim of participation is to empower the group/community with the requisite knowledge and skills. The practice of empowerment involves the development of opportunities and the support of groups and communities to participate in a process in which they have a powerful role.

The Benefits of Public Participation:

- Decisions can be more effective if the needs and experiences of the clients are sought
- Threats to the campaign can be revealed
- Creates incentives to produce safe and effective products (services) and ensure safe work practices
- Can reveal poor work practices, and ensure there is no gain for shoddy work.

Empowerment is about:

- Power over resources, e.g. finances & human
- Power of information
- Power in the decision making process.

“Empowerment is a process of increasing personal, interpersonal and political power so that individuals can take action to improve their lives” (Lorraine Gutierrez, 1991).

“Empowerment is a process through which people and their communities gain mastery over their lives” (Christopher Brown, 1988).

People Can Participate in Advocacy Processes by:

- Lobbying parliamentarians and relevant (regulatory) bodies
- Making complaints about defective products (services)
- Participating in consultation opportunities
- Participate in public meetings, rallies, signing petitions, providing case studies
- Asking questions in parliament during question time
- Attending delegations to key people, e.g. members of parliament.