

## **Policy Livelihood Relationship in South Asia**

### **Role of NGOs in Advocacy:** *Lessons Learnt from Bangladesh and South Asian Countries*

By

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## **Abstract**

This is a paper linking the issue of policy development through advocacy and the role of civil society, particularly NGOs. South Asia has emerged as an area of rapid expansion and high level of activities of NGOs. This is particularly visible in Bangladesh. The paper analyses the genesis and typology and issues and sectoral coverage of NGOs. The analysis of NGOs role is based on experience and using example of a few individual NGOs on Bangladesh and networks across South Asia. Based on experiences in natural resource management, environment development integration, sustainable livelihood in the context of sustainable development, an analysis has also been made of the lessons learnt in the use of advocacy as a tool for NGOs to influence policy, planning, programmes, awareness and mobilization of opinion as well as advocacy related activities of NGOs. A number of case studies are given in boxes to demonstrate how research –policy interface have encouraged advocacy.

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### ***South Asia: A Region of Contrast and Poor Governance***

South Asia is a region of many contrasts. It's an area of both despair and hope. It is a region that is the home of over 1.3 billion people, mostly poor. It is the major hub of concentration of poverty in the world and simultaneously faces intense environmental degradation. Yet the region as a whole has an economic growth rate of over five percent (ADB, Annual Report, 2000).

More recently two member states from South Asia joined the exclusive nuclear club with missile launching capabilities while most of the citizens are malnourished and non-literate. South Asia has a long tradition of democratic movement and vibrant political parties and yet monetization and criminalization of politics is pervasive. Extremely corrupt practices both in politics and bureaucracies are rampant despite the fact that most of the countries in South Asia have a few of the most progressive constitutions. Electoral processes excite the voters who are fully aware that the electoral consequences will hardly change their lot or address adequately the fundamental issues of poverty, access to resources, basic healthcare, education, shelter, political corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency, weak implementation of social, economic and environment justice, particularly for the poor.

### ***Emergence of NGOs***

Despite all these, and possibly because of these, South Asia has a vibrant civil society movement and large number of active Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), often with a sense of mission and commitment to justice and service to the community. But the NGO movements within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) states vary in terms of their preponderance, impact and approaches.

## **2 SOUTH ASIA: HERITAGE, TRADITIONS AND COMMUNITY SERVICE**

### ***Cradle of Civilizations: Service As a Value***

South Asia is the cradle of many ancient civilisations and has traditions, which precede the formation of nation states. It is also the birthplace of a number of key religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism and one of the bastions of Islam as an active religion, being home to the highest number of Muslims of the world. Further, Christianity has also made some inroads in the post-colonial period through European influence. All these traditions and values enshrine social and community services as essential virtues.

NGOs have developed as an integral part to societal value system. The local community, local landlord and elite have had the tradition of providing and supporting public services such as schools, colleges, religious institutions and prayer places (mosques, temples and churches), roadside inns, public water bodies such as ponds, *Ghats* on rivers and canals, bridges and culverts and common property forestry lands. Further the Buddhist tradition has that many monks depend on alms from the public for their sustenance. The Islam has a tradition of annually allocating 2.5 percent of personal disposable wealth for the poor.

### ***Emergence of Government and Non-Government services***

The practice of government providing services is the more recent history. The governments could only offer very limited recourse given the predominant and over-arching poverty situation, low literacy rates and awareness on environment development and management issues, lack of access of the poor to resources, the poor implementation of law and social justice and overriding governance crises, preponderance of natural disasters, increasing globalisation. The NGOs have emerged as a movement with their diversity, focus and nature of activities, mission and mode of operation. Further to fill in the vacuum left by the absence of adequate services, NGOs are the structured part of the civil society and brings the voice of the voiceless i.e., poor, women, children, species and ecosystem into the policy arena.

### ***The Seven South Asian Countries:***

#### ***India***

India is the world's second most populous country with over a billion people and poised to be the most populous country in a decade. The rich part of India has the economic capability similar to that of France with a thriving financial market, production capability, technological infrastructure, skilled manpower and many Indian owned multinational companies. On the other hand, there are poorer parts of India, such as Bihar, Orissa and states in the North East India, where illiteracy, malnourishment and poor governance structures feature the social system and obstruct the development process. While India provides good medical and education services for the rich and elite, poor are generally deprived of their basic services and basic rights.

NGOs are also distributed differently within the different states. Delhi the capital, is the home of a number of leading NGOs, which are think tanks and policy institutes having significant capacity, influence and role as advocacy organizations. There have been many NGOs in most states and the NGOs more concentrated in the Southern states such as Karnataka.

## ***Bangladesh***

Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries with enormous environment and development challenges. It has probably the most active NGO sector in the developing world. It has over 6000 registered NGOs out of which nearly a quarter are considered active and about 10 percent play a major role. Bangladesh has a few of the worlds largest NGOs with nationwide capacity and coverage. Many more local NGOs provide services such as micro credit, social mobilization, health, literacy and education, sanitation, water, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, advisory technical and consultancy services.

A few policy think tanks with significant analytical capability and skills have major impacts in policy and advocacy. Despite Bangladesh being a country where poverty, malnutrition and literacy are rampant and political conflict and corruption distorts decision making, its farmers have managed to achieve self sufficiency in crops productivity. Further many NGOs in collaboration with the government have succeeded in service delivery to the poor covering over 20% of population, and have enabled particularly the poor women to participate in the development activities.

There is also a greater recognition of the role and services by NGOs in Bangladesh and many developing countries are learning from the Bangladesh NGO sector. Most notably Sectors of demonstrated success include micro credit, social mobilization, non-formal education, participatory resources management, empowerment of women health and population management services and advocacy covering many areas. A more effective set of NGOs have focussed on research, awareness raising and advocacy on sustainable development and livelihood issues of addressing poverty, access, governance and integrated and participatory planning.

## ***Pakistan***

Pakistan has faced continued political and governance crises and often been dictated by military rules since its emergence as an independence in 1947. It has also demonstrated the emergence of a thriving NGO sector supporting a range of rural and urban delivery system to the poor. There are also a few policy-based institutes addressing sustainable development issues. These are mostly national organizations based in main cities whilst provincial and local level NGOs focus on local level service provision. Some are also working with religious groups and working in cooperation with the private sector. Given the instability in the government and political power shifts, NGOs have to tread carefully under political uncertainty.

## ***Sri Lanka***

Sri Lanka also has a large number of NGOs focussing on delivery of services, raising and providing solutions to environmental and legal issues. Sri Lanka has high Human Development Index particularly because of very high literacy rates, good child nutritional status and high participation of women in economic activities. But the recent civil war and ethnic conflict has torn the country apart and put enormous stress on the NGO sector also. Some NGOs have focussed towards conflict resolution. The NGO-government relationship is less confrontational and more complementary.

## ***Nepal***

Nepal has the tradition of having local service and support organizations. Its transition from functional monarchy to more recent democratic rule with constitutional monarchy has given rise to a increasing NGO movement. Many are involved in environment, development, community forestry management and water related issues. NGOs involved in and addressing access to resources, governance and gender are also on the increase. There are some NGOs working in collaboration with international partners, others are addressing local concerns and needs.

## ***Bhutan***

Bhutan is a kingdom with a small population, still remaining more isolated and land locked. It has only a few NGOs, patronized by the Royal Government and these generally address conservation concerns. The government is attempting to address parts of Agenda 21 and is developing a National Happiness Index, where government and the only a few existing NGOs are collaborating. The national development vision broadly stated to promote and maximise the happiness of all its people through human development, sustainable economic progress and good governance, within a framework that takes into consideration the holistic well-being of Bhutanese society with due regard to the country's culture and environment and other non-material components of development aspirations and hopes (Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness).

## ***Maldives***

The Maldives has had a stable government with a small population and is composed of many atolls. The mainstay of the economy is tourism and marine fisheries. There are almost no NGO activities but many government officials formally or informally are represented in regional and global NGO forum. The threat of inundation due to sea level rise as a consequence of global climate change means that much of the research and awareness work is being undertaken by regional and global NGOs. The Maldives tends to participate in these through its scientific and technocratic representation.

## ***Differing Presence, Coverage and Impact of NGOs***

Thus the political profiles, geographical and demographic sizes, economic endowments and achievements level of skilled manpower as well as institutional and legislative capacity for social, environmental and governance, vary between the countries of South Asia. The NGO movement across of South Asia has significant difference in characteristics such as numbers of NGOs, their distribution across each country, their coverage in terms of local, national, regional and global issues, their capacity to deliver services, advocacy role and national and international impacts of their activities.

## ***Low Representation at Global Level***

The representation of South Asian NGOs is poor at the global level in many respects. The global negotiation process on environment, sustainable development, international trades human rights and multilateral environmental issues are essential elements of the sustainable development process in the countries. Though there are some key NGOs and civil society leaders participating in these processes from South Asia, the number is limited to a few NGOs and some key personalities. There has been beginning of regional or national NGO networks

such as Climate Action Network South Asia for Climate Change issues, but the voices are disproportionately small for the need of proper representation.

These negotiations are often dominated by large international NGOs such as Greenpeace, WWF, Friends of the Earth (FOE) and northern think tanks of single issue based organization. The need of developing a high level of expertise in a fast changing and rapidly growing issues, South Asia falls behind in its input. However there are some key research NGOs who are widely respected in the global community. These include BCAS, BRAC, Grameen Bank in Dhaka, Development Alternative (DA), Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) in Delhi, Cuts in Kolkata, Swaminathan Foundation in Chennai, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) and IUCN in Pakistan, Environmental Law Foundation in SriLanka, ICIMOD in Kathmundu, to mention a few.

However there is an increasing participation and influence of South Asian NGOs in the areas of climate change, biodiversity, desertification, international trade and WTO, sustainable development policies and implementation, development assistance and international debt, water issues, microcredit and finances for sustainable development, good governance, human rights etc.

### **3 THE GENESIS AND COVERAGE OF NGOS**

#### ***Inspiration: Community Service and Development***

The educated middle class of South Asia has been traditionally concerned with the overall development of their community, society and country. The government usually has been hierarchical. There are parts of bureaucracy, which often has not responded to the emerging demands of services of independent countries. They still tended to represent colonial service needs of resource extraction, opportunity and rent seeking rather than a service orientation. Most planning is still centralised and top-down. Though some efforts have been made to improve the situation, the local government institutions are mostly looking for instructions and resources allocation from the Centre. Furthermore, natural disasters, economic crisis and lack of services have often inspired social entrepreneurs to organize themselves in NGOs to address one or more of the issues.

#### ***Multiplicity of Options***

Many enlightened and dedicated people are often concerned about the need for extensive community services, research planning, social mobilization, awareness raising, harness the capacity of the poor, natural resources management, protection and conservation, advocacy, networking and completing the government efforts and challenging existing unacceptable practices and procedures. They have often organized themselves initially into small group and identified a few focussed areas to work on. Once convinced of a certain degree of success, they register as an NGO under the given government regulation. Sometime, they rise to the challenges a specific action and find registration as necessary condition for formalization later. For example, many new NGOs established in response to natural disasters (such as addressing flood and cyclone related issues) and then continued to work on well being of targeted people.

## ***Social Entrepreneurship and Opportunities***

Historically, a person, or persons, with quality of leadership and social entrepreneurship initiate NGOs in South Asia. They are often part of the power elite with a commitment to social services, a sense of purpose with a passion for championing a cause. Obviously to be a functional organization, one has to procure financial and mobilize human resources. Very often it has been found that individuals who have been professionally successful with a social consciousness and connection to the power structure has succeeded in setting up NGOs with long term views and commitment.

Once the first critical phase of formation is over, these NGOs undertake projects and activities which can provide job opportunities for dedicated individuals who are looking for alternative employment and creative service oriented lifestyle. For the young-educated of South Asian, job opportunities are limited. Government jobs offer security but are often not attractive for those who want to be creative and innovative. Academic opportunities are also decreasing and many of the best talents are tempted to go abroad in the lure of higher professionalism and remuneration. Private sector for ambitious professional is the new and emerging sector but many with a passion for a cause find NGOs as better option to express themselves. There are however many conflicting interests within the NGOs. There are also people who abuse NGOs for personal opportunism.

### ***NGO: The Wrong Name***

The concept of “Non” Government Organization is overall a wrong concept and NGO can be called a misnomer. It says what it is not but does not say what it is. It distinguishes itself from government organization but does not characterize its real purpose, or stand in the society. Many of the NGOs would prefer to be called Private Voluntary Organization (PVO), Private Development Organization (PDO), Civil Society Organization (CDO), Community Based Organization (CBO), Environment and Development Organization (EDO) etc. Most of them are registered as non-profit making organization.

### ***Multiplicity of Purpose***

It is difficult to categorise NGOs into groups either sectorally or in their coverage as they can cover several areas and also change their priorities, extend their coverage and rise to new challenges. The various types of NGOs that have emerged can be categorized based on their approaches, functions, deliveries, and sectoral and spatial coverages. However many encompass more than one area. NGOs could be grouped into the following broad categories:

- ?? NGOs with social mobilisation
- ?? NGOs offering micro-credit
- ?? NGOs offering sectoral deliveries (such as health and sanitation, education, Natural resources management and awareness raising)
- ?? Science based policy research NGOs, and
- ?? Networking and advocacy organization.

### ***Coverage and Issues: The Case of Bangladesh***

Bangladesh is a case in point where the dynamics of development of a nation state was reflected in the coverage and issues to which NGOs responded and at times gave leadership. The first approach of NGOs can be traced back as relief and welfare services in the early 1970s as a response to the war of liberation and a ravaged country. This was mostly sustained by external assistance. NGOs then addressed poverty issues through direct delivery of relief and welfare services, which included donation of food and clothes, supplying medicine and developing simple infrastructure in rural areas. Such activities were often inadequate in the face of growing needs and were not sustainable.

In the second half of the seventies, many NGOs began to place greater emphasis on rural development activities through community-based approaches involving the poor and resourceless in income-generating activities. The focus was often on organizing the poorest through social mobilization process – the period marking the beginning of integrated rural development.

### ***New Institutionalisation: Relief to Development***

In the eighties and the nineties, some NGOs have concentrated their efforts for changing rural social relationships and institutions through new institution building and promoting people's access and initiatives. The significance of NGOs approach lies in their innovativeness, creativity, involvement and rich experience in micro-level planning. NGOs enjoy flexibility in operation and are in much better position to understand local realities and people's needs.

Once they are successful and formalised institutions, NGOs have emerged as tend to turn their attention to new challenges and use their flexibility to address these new challenges and create new opportunities for themselves.

For example, the NGO now known as BRAC, (previously Bangladesh Relief Assistance Committee) was formed just after Bangladesh independence and undertook relief operations in the war ravaged country. However, with time as the economy improved and stability began to develop it transformed itself into the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and took on other services such as Integrated Rural Development, social mobilisation women empowerment, health services and immunisation, and non-formal education. Over the last 25 years, it has turned into the largest independent NGO in the developing world. It has now ventured as a major national and international commercial enterprise with subsidiaries in relating to crafts, dairies, bank, university and financial institute for real estate.

*Ganashaystha Kendra* (GK) which worked originally as a war-front temporary health clinic, became a health and paramedic force creating alternative health systems and policy on medicines for the poor. They have also diversified into supporting urban hospital and university.

Grameen Bank, which started as a small university based research group and pioneered the micro-credit for the poor, has become one of the largest financial institutions working in many countries of the world. With new challenge, Grameen has also diversified into areas of cellular phone, renewable energy, fisheries and information technology sector.

Similarly, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) started as an environmental research group addressing resources management, environment and development questions,

soon moved into people's participation, access of the poor to resources and governance issues. It has now emerged as an effective advisory, technical and consultancy service provider and leader in ecosystem management with people's participation.

#### **4 ADVOCACY ROLE OF NGOS IN BANGLADESH**

Advocacy has been perceived as tool to promote issues improved performance, shift priorities and highlight areas of concern by NGOs activists, concerned citizens and experts. This enables affecting of policies, bringing peoples perspectives into government, also amongst NGOs, private sector and local level decision making. In general, advocacy activities can be classed into several groups as follows. Obviously, there can be overlap between these categories.

##### ***Advocacy as Integral Part of Programmes***

NGOs often need to address issues of their concern and integrate these concerns in their ongoing programmes. This approach involves organizations having their own activities in which specific advocacy priorities are built in and get incorporated in the planning and implementation stages. For example, gender, environment, poverty, human rights, and the rights of children are built into their own work programmes.

##### ***Focused Advocacy***

There is often need to focus on some issues and raise them as concerns for consideration of policy makers. These are often dedicated activities undertaken by some NGOs, mostly research and think tanks. They often identify and pioneer an issue or a concept and then undertake research, analysis, information dissemination, dialogues, media campaigns, seminars and consensus building in relation to a specific issue. These are then fed into general awareness, policy making and implementation. For example, the issue of climate change, biodiversity protection, hill cutting in fragile ecosystem, wetland or forestry protection, open water fisheries, poverty as a central focus of planning, structural adjustment, women and children rights, access to health services and contraception, right and access to education, immunization etc. are areas of focused advocacy and are being addressed individually or collectively by many NGOs.

##### ***Advocacy as Response to Events and Issues***

In the process of development a number of events, projects, programmes or policies emerge which are perceived as threats to common concerns such as human rights, environmental protection and access of the poor to resources. These often raise social, economic, legal and environment concerns. For example, many Bangladeshi NGOs were vocal and organized in their policy, advocacy and implementation action against the Flood Action Plan. These are often the culmination of the work by networks of NGOs supported by research and think tanks. Another example is the occupation of rivers such as Buriganga surrounding Dhaka city by illegal occupants. Other examples are: organizing both government, NGOs and public opinion against encroachment on rivers and common property lakes and parks, phase out of thin polythene bags (below 20 micron thickness, urban air pollution, particularly from transport sector, incorporation of terminator seeds by multinational companies, awareness of health hazards form arsenic contamination of ground water etc.

### **Box-1: Campaign Against Use of Polythene Bags**

*Bangladesh being mostly a very flat country, with very high monsoon rainfall, is susceptible to water logging. This is evident in urban and rural areas where the limited drainage facilities often get clogged and dysfunctional. One of the key agents is the huge number of indiscriminate use of polythene bags strewn around the city waste dumps, which clogs the drainage entrances. Further the deposition of enormous number of these non-biodegradable polythene bags have settled at the floors of the rivers making dredging extremely difficult and expensive. The deposition of polythene bags in agricultural lands has also raised alarm.*

*Major NGOs in Bangladesh have been very active in campaigning against the indiscriminate use of polythene bags. Various bad effects of polythene on soil, water and environment and human health were publicized through media, seminars, rally etc. by the NGO community in the last two decades. Recently, the government in November 2001 with a new political minister in charge of Environment identified polythene as an environmental nuisance and succeeded in mobilizing government agencies, political leadership, civil society and parts of the private sectors to ban using of polythene bags in major cities of Bangladesh. Government and NGOs have worked together and the actions have been widely supported by the general public.*

In terms of interaction and mobilization, NGOs interact closely with the local communities, government and political agencies and also in the global policy process. For example, Bangladesh highlighted the rights and vulnerability of the poor in the climate change process. Bangladesh scientists involved in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) succeeded in the incorporating indigenous and local literature in the global scientific review processes. Further they also struggled to get equity and fairness issues in climate change debate other issues include access of the poor in the biodiversity and World Trade Organization debates. The leading national NGOs often work with international NGOs in these cases to have the maximum impact. The following sections discuss few areas and examples of advocacy in Bangladesh.

### **Box-2: Southern Perspectives in Climate Change Discourse**

*UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its subsequent negotiations and the following Kyoto Protocol are a few of the key follow up on UNCED. The NGO community participating in Climate Change related research, policy analysis, activism and advocacy have become one of the most successful efforts under the banner of the Climate Action Network (CAN) and Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSAs). A few of the key institutions providing the southern perspectives on this debate are from South Asia.*

*The global civil society community in the first intergovernmental negotiations nominated a representative from South Asia and the issues of equal rights to the global commons such as atmosphere and oceans were highlighted. The issues of equity, fairness, historical responsibility, right to development, technology innovation and transfer, participation in the negotiating process, adaptation and vulnerability, GHG emission – past, present and future, roles of the government, private sector and civil society were amongst issues highlighted by CANSAs and its members. The key NGOs include BCAS (Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies), CSE (Centre for Science and Environment) and TERI (Tata Energy Research Institute).*

*CANSAs, despite many difficulties continued to produce its newsletter “Climate Asia” which gave the southern perspectives and analyses widely used by Group of 77 and many Southern Governments and NGOs from North and South to help in developing their positions. The requirement for being an opinion leader in climate discourse and advocacy pre-supposes significant scientific, analytical, multi-disciplinary and communication capabilities and a deep understanding of North-South politics. CANSAs is one of the more successful networks working with its partners across all the regions in the world and pursuing the issues for lowering the risks of global climate change.*

### **Advocacy on Policy, Planning and Participation**

In past decades, development projects programme were generally conceived and planned by the few national bureaucrats and their donors at high policy level. They often did not have direct linkage with the people and ground realities. This has been the general practice in Bangladesh with few exceptions. People were excluded from need assessment and planning exercises.

NGOs realised the need for people’s participation both as a moral and fundamental issue to improve the effectiveness of projects. Many NGOs, committed to people’s participation, began to challenge the old paradigm of top-down planning approach and introduced people’s centre participatory - “bottom up planning process” at the micro level. In time this has become generally accepted to be a requirement for successful project implementation and has increasingly influenced public policy decisions at macro level over the last decade. Further the donors have also started to integrate these in their planning process.

The large national NGOs in Bangladesh such as BRAC, Proshika and Grameen Bank, have developed policy advocacy programmes as integral components of their core work as well as providing systematic advocacy interventions for the creation of a macro policy environment to

eradicate poverty, promote sustainable development, improve resources management, sectoral growth, enhancing health, sanitation and education programmes etc.

### ***Research and Analysis***

Research and policy think-tanks such as BCAS, *Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad* (BUP), Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Institute for Development Policy Analysis and Advocacy of Proshika have advocacy programme as their mainstream activities to stimulate informed debate, generate knowledge and influence policy making through a multi-stakeholder participatory process. In this process, they try to bridge the gap between government and communities. NGOs sensitise policy planners and projects to local needs and priorities. However, there is an ongoing debate in Bangladesh as to whether projects often owned by the government and funded by donors simply use NGOs as contractors. NGOs highlight that what needs to occur is for NGOs to be true partners in all phases including project formulation and implementation. Only through such an approach are the interests of the poor and the wider environment properly protected and project proponent can impact optionally.

### ***Knowledge Generation and Outreach***

The activities in policy related areas are operationalised by various means including knowledge generation through research and analysis, creation of data and information bases; policy awareness raising through seminar, symposium, dialogue, networking, information dissemination and mobilizing support of the civil society; and policy influencing at local, national, regional and international levels by involving policy-makers in the dialogue process and by contributing to preparation of national and global policy documents. BCAS and other think tanks interacts closely with the policy planners, government agencies, donors and the NGOs so that the results of research could be used at both policy and implementation levels.

### **Box-3: Key Role of NGOs and Civil Society in Formulation of NEMAP**

*National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP), as a massive and far-reaching environmental planning exercise was initiated by the joint effort of NGOs and the government of Bangladesh following the commitments made under Agenda 21 at UNCED in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. Integrated environment management and sound development planning have emerged as the greatest challenge in the development domain in the early 1990s for the country. People's participation in identification of environmental issues and concerns and finding solution of the problems with people's prioritization was strongly felt as cost effective and sustainable. From this point of view, the government of Bangladesh decided to undertake National Environment Action Plan in early 1990s NGO community and through this process a large sections of people not only identified problems but also suggested doable solutions. NGOs and civil society groups played a very active role in seeking people's true concerns and putting them in the national environmental plan.*

*The exercise has been carried out in different phases. In the first phase, a team of national consultants, identified a number of areas and Eco-systems undergoing rapid environmental degradation, and prepared projects to stop environmental degradation. In the second phase, a team of both national and international consultants had detailed discussions with different government agencies and ministries to prioritize the sectoral issues and develop a list of sectoral projects for the government agencies.*

*The final phase of NEMAP process consisted of an elaborate public consultation facilitated mainly by national and local NGOs to include people's own concerns and priorities, so that these could be reflected in the action plan. A total of 23 grassroots workshops were held around the country in all the important agro-ecological zones. Each workshop had 60-80 participants from all walks of life including farmers, fishermen, agri-labour, women, teachers, local government officials, elected representatives and CEN representatives. A detailed methodology was further developed to solicit thousand s of grass-root people's opinions.*

*The government of Bangladesh, the international development partners, NGOs and civil society considered NEMAP as a major success and this is one of the few plans that has been accepted and crossed all political boundaries and recognized as a commendable exercise in environmental planning and people's participation. "NEMAP spirit" has become an acceptable expression for peoples participation in planning and decision making.*

### **Advocacy on Natural Resources Management, Environment and Sustainable Development**

One of the key roles facilitated by NGOs is providing models for better natural resource management and enhancement of sustainable livelihood with multi-faceted approaches backed by scientific understanding of ecosystems functioning and social institutions. NGOs in Bangladesh, initially starting with social mobilization and micro-credit for the targeted poor - soon realized that maximization of productivity requires sound environmental management and that all the service sectors were closely inter linked.

The emergence of sustainable development concept emanating from Rio found a home in the socially sensitive NGOs in Bangladesh. A number of advocacy groups on environment emerged and some had significant scientific capability. Further, there were network and apex-groups such as Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB) for development, Coalition of Environmental NGOs of Bangladesh (CEN) for environment, NGO Forum for water supply and sanitation, BARRA for sustainable agriculture, Biodiversity network, BELA for environmental legal action FEJB for environmental journalism, BCAS for scientific research on sustainable development etc. Many of the research orientated organizations and networks were very active. This had culminated during the people, NGOs and academic movement of FAP, which significantly changed national and global policies on water resource planning.

#### **Box-4: NGOs and Civil Society Movement Against Flood Action Plan (FAP)**

*Bangladesh is criss-crossed by more than 200 rivers, which are the lifeblood of its fertile delta and rich culture. Monsoon-season floods normally cover a third of the country in water, bringing invaluable benefits for agriculture, fishing and navigation. But in abnormal years, floods bring disaster. The World Bank-coordinated Flood Action Plan (FAP) was launched by 15 donor countries and agencies after unusually severe floods in 1987 and 1988. Supporters insisted the scheme will tame the country's volatile rivers, saving lives and dramatically boosting food production. Critics warned that the proposed river embankments and other engineering works could cause irreparable damage to the environment, displace millions of the country's poorest people and actually increase the danger of catastrophic flooding (Haggart K and others, 1994).*

*NGOs and civil society groups were very critical against the structural interventions to control rivers and floodplains envisaged in FAP activities. They were very active to influence policy and decision making process to remove anti-people and anti-environment nature of FAP through conducting study, consultation, advocacy and awareness raising among general mass. Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) played a leading role in this respect. BCAS and other think-tanks felt that the views of the farmers, fishermen, women and landless poor who have the best first-hand knowledge of floods were missing in the FAP process and documents. To help fill this gap, the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies and Panos asked a group of Bangladeshi journalists to take an independent look at existing flood-control projects and the potential impact of new ones, which came with a good book on FAP entitled "Rivers of Life". This and subsequent publications managed to influence public opinion and policy dialogues significantly against structural approaches to flood control.*

*The Coalition of Environmental NGOs (CEN) and the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) organized a huge gathering in Dhaka called "People's Conference on FAP" on 27 November in 1995. The objectives of the conference were to hold open discussions about FAP by the ordinary people from the villages and towns, experts, journalists, donors of FAP projects, international NGOs, FAP consultants and national NGOs. The Conference was attended by FPCO representatives, donors to FAP. The World Bank, UNDP, CPP consultants, University teachers, water experts, journalists, representatives of NGOs from Dhaka and many other regions, people from FAP projects affected areas including women organizations, farmers, fishermen, landless people, labourers and rickshaw pullers. The Conference openly discussed the three areas: (i) FAP process, (ii) Management of Flood Waters and (iii) Water Resource Management and Peoples' Participation (Bangladesh Environmental Newsletter, Vol.6 No.4, 1995). The "People's Conference on FAP" could be considered as a major success for CEN and ADAB in their advocacy campaign on FAP. The conference was able to bring the issue to the attention of policy makers and international donor agencies who were present at the Fourth FAP Conference organized by the government.*

BCAS, being committed to natural resources management, eco-system regeneration and sustainable development of the country and the region, it initiated an advocacy programme at *Chanda Beel*, to involve people in the sustainable management of wetland resources. The central objective of the project is to build environmental awareness and to encourage pro-active solutions to problems by local NGOs, local government and resource users with a view to developing mechanisms by which these groups might better communicate. A people's participatory wetland management plan (PPWMP) has been developed by BCAS in conjunction with local stakeholders input over the course of the project. The exercise helped to achieve twin goals of raising awareness at the community level as well as taking local initiatives for conservation of wetland resources by the local people.

### **Box-5: Advocacy on Participatory Wetland Management in Chanda Beel**

Once two thirds of the country was wetland, mostly floodplains, which had been very rich in flora and fauna. But increasing pressure of a growing population on natural resources and other associated human interventions have greatly depleted the resources bases, particularly fisheries of many of the floodplains and the ecosystems of Bangladesh. Chanda Beel is one of the large wetlands located in the south central part of Bangladesh facing tremendous pressure. Sustainable management of wetland resources is largely dependent upon building social capital to create greater cohesiveness, trust and common purpose among the key stakeholders. These changes are most likely to occur with facilitated consensual management of the resource through awareness and advocacy at the community levels.

The Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) is committed to natural resources management, ecosystem regeneration and sustainable development of the country and the region. BCAS initiated an advocacy programme at Chanda Beel, to involve people in the sustainable management of wetland resources. The central objective of the project is to build environmental awareness and to encourage proactive solutions to problems by local NGOs, local government and resource users with a view to developing mechanisms by which these groups might better communicate. A people's participatory wetland management plan (PPWMP) has been developed by BCAS in conjunction with local stakeholder input over the course of the project. Project major activities can be summarised;

- ?? training of NGOs, local government, elite, fishers and farmers in natural resource management,
- ?? development of effective communication between local government, NGOs and local people with respect to environmental issues,
- ?? habitat restoration activities and,
- ?? motivation and awareness building.

Preliminary stages involved the identification of target stakeholders by BCAS personnel. This was followed by group-wise consultation to discuss primary concerns before the joint preparation of action plans with each group. Local NGOs provided further information regarding stakeholder profiles, together with details of their own project activities and project management.

An extensive training programme was conducted to train BCAS and other NGO staff in facilitation and skill development. The programme involved shared experiences and field trips to other locally-based natural resource management project sites. The training of male and female BCAS staff was central to the Advocacy Project (in particular, training in "lobbying and liaison maintaining strategies") and was conducted by BCAS and external expertise in Dhaka. In addition, local NGO staff attended four programmes at the BCAS Training and Research Centre at Gopalganj to outline project objectives and approaches and to develop participatory skills. Again, the emphasis was on building skills to maintain liaison with NGOs, locally elected representatives and government officials, and to develop ways in which local stakeholders could take a greater responsibility to solve problems and disseminate solutions.

In order to prepare participatory wetland management action plan, the project has undertaken several activities. It formulated a Participatory Wetland Management Action Plan (PWMAP) and identified a number of key environmental problems and specific actions within the action regime such as policy, advocacy, project etc. in response to environment and natural resources management in Chanda Beel.

In order to ensure sustainable management of natural resources of Chanda Beel, one central committee and ten sub-committees have been formed involving representatives from all stakeholders and professionals. The committees have been organizing meetings frequently to discuss development and natural resources conservation issues.

It is evident from a participatory assessment of the programme that people of the surrounding villages of the beel have greater understanding about the causes and trend of the degradation of natural resources (fish, snails, birds, aquatic vegetable etc.) of the beel. They are well aware of their environment and usefulness of the resources base for both natural system and human existence.

### ***Advocacy on Population Management and Reproductive Health***

The NGOs and civil society groups in Bangladesh realised early on that population management through effective family planning, providing basic health services to women and educating them would be the primary measures for achieving sustainable development for the community as well as for the nation. All the large NGOs such as BRAC, Proshika, Voluntary Health Services Society (VHSS) and other local NGOs initiated campaigns for population management and supported the poor with reproductive health services and birth control materials with assistance from relevant government departments and international development partners.. The work of NGOs and community people during the last two decades have shown positive results in Bangladesh in terms of population control, reducing child and maternal morbidity and mortality. The annual population growth rate in Bangladesh has come down to 1.6%, which was about 3% in the early 1970s (BBS, 2000).

### ***Advocacy in Mass Literacy and Education***

The major large NGOs in Bangladesh such as BRAC, Proshika, ASA and many local NGOs initiated non-formal education for the children of the poor and the disadvantaged population. BRAC established several thousands of primary schools and rural libraries for children, adolescent girls and adults. Proshika through its adult literacy centres and non-formal schools has brought benefits of functional literacy to more than a million of children and adults women. All the implementing NGOs have advocacy and communication activities on mass literacy and education. Under the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), a coalition of more than hundred NGOs developed literacy and education programme as well as strong policy and advocacy programmes. The NGOs cooperate and network among the partners and stakeholders though organising seminars, workshops, and conferences, at which they debate and develop policy dialogue on mass literacy and education. The process involves policy planners, public functionaries, partner NGOs, civil society groups and other actors. They also undertake media campaigns for information dissemination through news bulletins, newsletters and articles.

### ***Advocacy in Safe Water Uses and Sanitation***

All the large NGOs and their local partners work to promote supplying of safe drinking water and sanitation facilities to reduce morbidity and mortality through positive changes of hygienic behaviour of common people. Advocacy being very important component to ensure any sort of community based development initiative. Most of the implementing agencies in safe water supply and sanitation sector including BRAC, Proshika, Grameen Bank, ADAB have policy advocacy and information services. The NGO Forum for Water Supply and Sanitation, a national apex agency has strong advocacy campaign and networking activities at the national, regional and local levels with multiple stakeholders ranging from government departments, NGOs, civil society groups, common people to donor organizations. They advance the advocacy programme through seminar, workshop, meeting, WatSan fair and wider dissemination of WatSan related information through news and electronic media. The discovery of arsenic contamination of groundwater and affecting millions of Bangladeshis has prompted these NGOs in specific actions.

### **Box-6: Advocacy of Safe Water Use and Hygienic Sanitation Practices**

*NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation, an apex networking and co-ordinating service delivery agency of NGOs and community based organisation (CBO), committed to implement safe water supply and sanitation programme (WatSan) at the community levels. It provides supports services in terms of software (awareness, training, advocacy etc.) and hardware to partner NGOs and CBOs. The advocacy services facilitate collaboration and networking activities with partners at the community levels. The aims of the services is to ensure a uniform strategy and policy in WatSan sector in line with the national WatSan policy. The activities include: collaboration with sectoral and transectoral stakeholders, collaboration with mass media, collaboration with opinion leaders, organising WatSan fair and developing and dissemination of information package.*

*The impact of advocacy has been very encouraging achieved through information dissemination, seminar, workshop, WatSan fair, policy lobbying. WatSan fair has greater success with the participation of community people, women, students, teachers, media etc. and thus improved the situation of accessing and using safe water and hygienic sanitation for the poor and marginal people.*

### **Advocacy in Women, Children and Human Rights Issues**

Many NGOs in Bangladesh have been actively working to protect and uphold human rights, particularly the rights of women and children for several years. They are very active in creating awareness among the policy-makers and actors working among the general masses. They are trying to reform laws to eliminate social, legal and political discrimination on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, race and religion. They carry out advocacy at different levels i.e., local, national and international through awareness building, lobbying and mass communication. The key organizations involved in Human rights issues are Bangladesh Human Right Commission (BHRC), Bangladesh Manobadhikar Forum, Bangladesh Institute of Human Rights, Ain O Salish Kendro (ASK), Bangladesh Environmental Lawyer's Association (BELA), Bangladesh Naree Progati Sangshata, Bangladesh Mohila Parishad etc. Few NGOs also provide legal aids to the poor and victims, particularly to women, workers and children in the forms of counselling, mediation and litigation. Since awareness about rights and responsibility is the key means to protect rights and establish justice, many NGOs have awareness campaign on issues like human rights and constitutional laws, family laws, women rights and violence against women and children.

### **Advocacy on Democracy, Good Governance, Corruption and Local Government Strengthening**

There have been a number of NGOs, research institute and advocacy groups working on electoral reform, democracy in the country and in political parties, transparency and corruption in government, private sector and public life. There are these and some other groups who also address and attempt to strengthen local level governance structure. These have implication on earlier groups. Recently, NGOs were very active in election monitoring, voters training and campaign to mobilize voters and corruption assessment before the general election of the National Parliament of Bangladesh in 2001.

## 5 LESSONS LEARNT

Over the two decades of activities in area of advocacy, accountability and access of the poor, a number of lessons have been learnt. These are as follows, not necessarily in order of any priority.

### ***Getting the Science Right***

It is of utmost importance to analyse the issues rigorously and seriously and identify critical areas of concern. These have to be evaluated dispassionately, though the follow up action may be passionate. The analysis must demonstrate that the concerns are based in accurate scientific understanding, though precautionary principle may operate.

Very often the initiation of an advocacy campaign on a problem that is based on the best scientific knowledge and resolution of some of the issues and uncertainty so that the key messages can be communicated to the experts, policy makers and the common public in a form which is easily understandable and acceptable.

For example, the global climate change issue needed a vast and extended exercise such as the work of the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) to resolve and help develop; the scientific consensus, as far as possible. But it caught the imagination of Bangladesh policy makers when acceptable and peer-reviewed scientific assessment was produced by studies of impacts on Bangladesh population, ecosystems, food security and livelihoods of coastal communities. One had to make sure that credible government agencies, research NGOs and academics put their efforts together so that the best scientific manpower and institutions worked together. Further research output had to be of the highest scientific quality and widely communicated.

Similarly, though the initial mobilization against FAP was slow, once the scientific aspects were made clearer, the mobilization and advocacy became easier. Though there were vested interests and huge financial rewards for many in pursuing the FAP, the strength of science brought in and propagated by the civil society organized by the NGO, at the early stages over turned the structural plan of donor interests supported by many in the country. It is the scientific and rigorous research that enabled the subsequent Bangladesh National Water Policy to incorporate that experiences of FAP and built on the success of the advocacy campaigns of NGOs.

Thus before launching into an advocacy campaign one must undertake the best scientific research possible. There is, of course a compromise between obtaining the best scientific knowledge, which is a slow and tedious process and the urgency and the need to act.

### ***Accepting Mistakes when corrected***

Once an advocacy program is initiated there is often a time lag between the point of analysis to the acceptance by the populace and policy planners. During this intervening period, new knowledge and research output may demonstrate some limitation of the initial analysis. The advocacy groups should be courageous enough to accept and incorporate these corrections. The rigorous scientific analysis has to continue during the whole period of advocacy.

Such path correction and acceptance of the new realities may sometimes affect egos of individuals and organizations, but it is always the best policy. It is also often the most cost-effective way to accept the implications of new knowledge and findings, and stand corrected as new knowledge dictates. For example, the huge investment in hydrological dams across the world has been challenged over a long period. The World Commission on Dams have re-evaluated and now dams are largely out of favour. Even World Bank, its greatest proponent has changed its position on investing in large Dams. This has saved the proponents being accused of continued arrogance and mal-investment. It also has saved many lives and large ecosystems being accused of long term negative impacts.

### ***Getting the Constituency Rights***

Efforts have to be made to identify the constituency, which support and own the advocacy idea. The grassroots people, farmers and fisher communities, NGOs, government agencies and political opinions leaders – many such groups would need to support the idea and issues therein.

One of the key elements of successful advocacy programme is to gather the highest support possible from all the actors, particularly the affected population on the one hand and the most powerful on the other.

Advocacy programmes are normally initially hard to mobilize. It must garner the support of those on whose behest the action is being undertaken. It is also to be remembered that the opposing party or the proponent whether it is a government agency or an international organization such as World Bank or WTO are not monolithic institutions. There are many rational and conscious individuals whose views and support may be most helpful.

Further it is most important that the affected people clearly understands the issues and the risks they may be facing. This awareness may be a slow process. But this is an essential step in ensuring successful and sustainable advocacy programme. Often this is best achieved by an extended mobilization process and continuous networking.

### ***Mobilization and Coalition Building***

Coalition building is essential for a advocacy campaign to succeed and having a life of its own. It must have a broad base of support. Often these are best achieved through coalition of organized groups with popular support.

Many interest groups may look at the same advocacy programme differently and from their own perspective.

For example, in the FAP process, at first the vast majority of professional engineers perceived the anti Flood Action movement as the threat to their professional careers. At the science was emerging and issues were being debated, many of them changed their position. A coalition between environmental NGOs and part of the engineering community made a dramatic change in the dynamics of the debate. Similarly as it was evident that most major decisions were being made at the capitals of donor countries, it was critical to build coalition between scientists and activists in Bangladesh and those in the donor countries. Once these sets of coalition started to emerge, many of the proponents found the challenge located in their own quarters and not in a

distant land with poor governance practices. Once the opinion started to shift in donor capitals the movement gathered new momentum.

Hence it is vital to build broad ranging coalitions and offer space for many opinions within the main intellectual space of the advocacy movement.

### ***Need for a Core Group***

Though many people and organizations can support an advocacy campaign, it is vitally important that there is a core group, which maintains the focus and the continuity of the campaign. Often campaigns go through ups and downs support fluctuates and the intensity of opposition against the campaign increases. The core group must maintain the focus and act as the "glue" to an advocacy programme and the disparate group of supporters.

It is often said that "good campaigns are as good as its champions". It is important to have a good core group which provides leadership, coherence and continuity to an advocacy initiative. It has to be a group of leaders. As demands of an advocacy campaign increase the core group must be in a position to provide the intellectual and process leadership. A good campaign also requires significant human and financial resource. A good and effective core group must demonstrate transparent and accountable decision making process to draw a wide ranging support and opinions. Hence a credible core group is of vital importance which should have management acumen, flexibility in approaches and capable to taking strategic and tactical decisions. The core group should be able to gradually hand over responsibility and decision making to other groups in the periphery. Simultaneously the core group should get the support of the activists at the periphery and thus extend the process and network.

### ***Single Point Advocacy Works Best***

Most policy issues are complex, having differential impacts on different constituency groups. It has been observed that the complexity of issues confuse many support groups and there is need for a central focus or a slogan. The analysts are often aware of the complexities but focus on a central theme. But as the process evolves and disparate groups join in. They tend to cling to single central focus. It is of great importance that advocacy leaders do not undermined the complexities for the sake of having a simple focus. There has to be a balance between need for a single focus and being scientifically correct about the complexities.

### ***Be Prepared for the Long Haul***

In the initial stages of any advocacy, the cause may look very just, unquestionable and quick to win. The experience has shown that every advocacy campaign detrimentally affects some interest groups who are often powerful, or part of the status quo. It is thus important to be prepared that the each interest groups will organize themselves and provide counter advocacy programmes. Most advocacy programme takes time to mobilise support, to win wide-ranging acceptance and ultimately to win the battle.

The emergence of a good coalition, infusion of the advocacy movement with new and enthusiastic people is essential for keeping the energy level required to run a long advocacy campaign.

As stated, need for a core group is vital but new ideas, approaches and members must find ways to enthuse a good advocacy campaign. In the long run, mobilization of significant resource become often important. There must be transparency and accountability in managing funds and human resources. The dynamics of arguments also shift with time. The need for extensive and long term support is best offered by people who believe in the cause. They are often the most affected and the most convinced partners. Hence the leadership and the activists should have a realistic understanding of the time-commitment and intensity of their involvement.

### ***Need for Resources and Technical Capability***

Advocacy campaigns are often long extended and need skilled manpower. This may require significant financial resources. Often it has been found that these resources can be pooled from participating members or raised dedicated fund for the purpose. Any dedicated fund raising can only happen later on, when the campaign has become, somewhat effective. Hence, there is always a need to self-financing the initial phase.

Once an advocacy programme become extended in its geographical coverage, involvement of wide ranging stakeholders and extended over long period, there can be need for significant fund mobilization. One should also be cautious as to the sources of funds. For example, if the campaign is against a multinational company, an international agency or a government action, one must be conscious that there is no clear and discernible conflict of interest between the source of fund and the advocacy action. It is also an essential practice to be transparent on financial resource mobilization and expenditures. Statement of clearly audited accounts to all funding sources is essential to maintain credibility of the advocacy campaign.

As stated, best campaigns are based on best science. Skills in discerning scientific facts, their validity, technical interpretation and capacity to communicate to different stakeholder with different analytical and communication tools are essential. The skill of negotiation and consensus building are also essential to reduce the level of tension and conflict. It is also essential to have a sense of realistic assessment of where the power base lies whose decision would have to change to make an advocacy a success. These analyses need skills with a rational analytical capability. Thus multiple skills are essential. This can often be provided by a large multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder group and a pool of experts.

### ***Not to be Complacent: Recharge is needed***

As a campaign tends to succeed, rather than being complacent, the core group must be alert that the opposing forces cannot overthrow the central tenets of the campaigns. There is a need to keep the focus, continue the analysis, bring in new facts and supporting evidence and assess the strength and tactics of the opponents. Recharging the campaign is as essential as the initiations. The gains achieved in the short term may be overturned if the advocates are not watchful and cautious.

The key organizers must be able to distinguish between battles won and wars to be endured and fought. Most advocacy movements undergo phases of development. If the cause is right, leadership and support is good the process of advocacy campaign is likely to sustain.

Any early success must be put into the perspective in a long journey. Sometimes undue attention, too much of funds or an isolated success may make leadership or a portion of the movement complacent. It is most essential to keep the whole movement into respective.

Sometime the end of a good campaign may seem near, but the reality may be more complex. Hence good analysis of events, arguments and potential for success is essential. There must be a space for new and fresh opinions and opportunity for recharging the campaign with skills, individuals, resources and stakeholder participation. The dynamism and flexibility, without compromising the essential elements of advocacy, is helpful in ensuring the re-invigoration process.

### ***Find Friends in High Place***

For any advocacy campaign to succeed, it must affect government policies or procedures. In many agencies of the government there are always good individuals, who may be supportive of a campaign but not be able to do so in his/her present position. It is always helpful to seek their advice and guidance to know what may work and what may not. Factoring these into appropriate strategy is very helpful. Building up a constituency within the system you want to affect is very crucial.

As stated, bureaucracies or large institutions are heterogeneous. It may not be difficult to find sympathizers to the cause of advocacy. But sometimes these key and powerful people may seek to express their opinions in public. Slow, steady and continuous building of these important links are helpful in lowering the conflict level as well as helps in obtaining good advice.

### ***Highest Consensus Building and Confrontation as last Resort***

Most advocacy campaigns need wide-ranging support to succeed. Hence, all efforts to be made to maximise consensus building. During this process there will inevitably be confrontation with other vested groups. Efforts should be made to lower the level of tension, but there may be times when direct confrontation is unavoidable.

The conflict resolution mechanism should be built-in as early as possible. In most advocacy movements there are enthusiastic individuals who would like to pursue confrontational approaches. It is better to take their arguments and use them strongly. Confrontation should only be used as the last resort. To keep the highest number of individuals and stakeholder group in a consensus building mode, regular discourse, debate and open discussions is essential.

If confrontation becomes essential, the scientific basis, arguments, legal positions and support of the stakeholders must be kept into consideration. Confrontational decision should be made on as broad a base as possible.

### ***Pooled Resources and Maximization of Complementarities: Network, Network, Network***

In many advocacy campaigns it is found that the central focus of the campaign is the thrust of some of the supporting NGOs. The campaign is also supported by other NGOs to whom it is peripheral. In these cases, it makes a lot of sense to pull together all who have minimum commitment to the central focus. This also eliminates the possibility of the challenges of vested interest to find support amongst the NGO community.

Any large advocacy campaigns bring in many actors with different perspectives. Essential discussion and negotiation spaces and processes should be created to accommodate many shades of opinions. The experiences of other movements and stakeholders can strengthen the

campaign and also will generate further support and may bring in new influential groups and individuals.

An opportunity for others to buy-in into the process extends the sphere of support and can strengthen the movement. One has to be cautious never to lose the sight of the central focus. Accommodation must not be confused with dilution of the central message of the advocacy campaign.

Networking with other organizations, movements and networks is essential in building strength, obtaining support and extending the sphere of influence. Networking offers synergies where lessons can be learnt and cost-effective methods can be found without compromising the focus of the specific advocacy campaign.

### ***“Indigenisation” of the Issues***

Some campaigns are initially moved researched and mobilized by external event or agencies. It takes a while for such an issue to be internalised in the matrix of local and national level NGO discourse. Such advocacy can only be secured when this has been internalised and indigenized by the local and national level of NGOs.

Advocacy campaign is essentially a political process. Often it is science or issue based policy formulation. It is worth remembering that most politics are local. Hence in any successful campaign local support is a must.

The NGOs should develop local sensitivity and garner local support. Once local support is strong, formal governance structures become cautious and the movement is likely to get a boost,. Local power elite is also an important player. The local communities can provide significant useful knowledge and information, logistical support and very necessary local skills and access.

### ***Effective Utilisation of the Media***

The print and electronic media are often the best partners in any good advocacy campaign. The thinkers and the leaders of the campaign must provide good analysis and arguments, case studies and human stories to the media for effective follow up and dissemination.

Efforts should be made to follow up and utilize radio and TV to get the message across. Good materials, posters, stories, anecdotes, case studies should be gathered to be made available to print and electronic media.

Street drama and sketches have been found to be very effective tools for raising awareness and involvement. Experiences have shown that peoples opinion is affected if they can identify with characters in such street plays.

### ***Information Tools and Outputs***

Communication tools including newsletters, books, videos, websites and workshop proceedings, as well as participatory meetings and posters are all important tools in advancing the course of advocacy. Quality and reliable information is the life-blood of advocacy campaigns. These must be reliably and repeatedly distributed and disseminated.

The layout and outreach materials should be catered to different groups and audiences. The recording of the history of the movement is a very useful exercise both for the moral and also as learning exercises for future movements.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

For natural resource protection and sustainable development policy to succeed it is very important that NGOs, research institutes, the private sector and government agencies work together. As market forces and globalisation become more prominent, the role of the private sector is likely to assume ever-greater importance. Hence, NGOs will have to learn to work with them along with the government and communities.

Use of knowledge and communication tools such as internet and websites have expanded rapidly and this trend is set to continue. Already a number of campaigns have been driven by the internet. International NGOs have much experience and knowledge in advocacy on sustainable development, natural resources management, livelihood, people's participation etc. Any new campaign should build on their existing knowledge, maximize networking and adopt previous experience and output.

The way ahead for the participatory approaches to natural resource management, social mobilisation and sustainable development involving communities is to formalise the rights and partnership and to promote best practices of successful projects and programmes. The strengthening of resource or area based networks of NGOs will also complement sustainable development and resource management efforts. The synergy between an emerging local government, people's knowledge, private sector and the dedication that NGOs offer is the best hope for improved resource management and sustainable development in the future.

For advocacy campaigns to succeed people's participation combined with accurate analysis, the right cause in terms of the importance to society and a well-constructed communication strategy are key elements of a successful campaign. A few centres of excellence and knowledge based NGOs have emerged in Bangladesh with significant sustainable development policy analysis experience and are well connected to international institutes. These could be used to continue to influence policy processes and to develop integrated resource management plans for sustainable development.

Advocacy campaigns take place with varying degrees of success. However, there have been very few evaluations undertaken to try to pull together the lessons learnt. This report attempts to begin this process based on experience of actual activism and deep involvement in sectors of sustainable development, natural resource management, environmental justice and social mobilisation.

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