# Policy Advocacy Strategies of Civil Society Organizations in Nepal

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# ABSTRACT

There has been an unmatched increase in the number CSOs in Nepal post-1990. The working areas of these CSOs vary. While some simply implement project activities, others focus on policy advocacy. Different organizations working in various sectors tend to have their own advocacy strategies developed through collaboration with organizations working in similar sectors. The understanding of advocacy among these organizations tends to be similar. The tools and techniques used by these organizations also appear to be similar. The only observable difference is the frequency and timing of use of these tools and techniques. This study suggests that CSOs in Nepal should coordinate and collaborate with each other. Collaboration among organizations working in same sector as well as among organizations working in different sectors would allow such organizations to learn from one another's mistakes and best practices. A consortium of CSOs specializing in policy advocacy therefore is necessary to deal with the challenges that CSOs are facing during a time of political transition of the nation and increasing donor dependence for funding.

# 1. Introduction

There hardly seems to be any consensus on a particular definition of policy advocacy. Scott defines policy advocacy as "a way of exerting power so as to influence the institutional rules that shape an organization's operational environment."[1] In practical terms, Larsen states that policy advocacy is "the act of influencing or supporting a policy" which is quite similar to ICIMOD's definition which terms it as an action for changing policies.[2] Broadly, it is defined as "any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest."[3]More recently, Young and Quinn have defined policy advocacy as the process of negotiating and mediating a dialogue through which decision makers accept the idea and act upon them.[4]A simplistic definition of policy advocacy can therefore be derived as any effort to influence public policy. These definitions however imply that policy advocacy involves different activities that need knowledge, organization and communication. It also gives scope for different actors such as non-governmental organizations, people's organizations, research organizations, bilateral organizations, think tanks, and academia. These bodies are involved in specialized activity. For instance, research organizations are involved in generating knowledge based on research, think tanks and academia are involved in a public discourse and non-governmental and people's organizations are involved in organizing and protesting against the undesired policies or favouring implementation of desired policies. On the other hand, international organizations may be involved in bringing global agenda to the forefront and building capacities of local and national organizations.

All the actors mentioned above have been considered civil society organizations (CSOs) for the purposes of this research. As elsewhere, in Nepal there are numerous definitions for civil society organizations. Dahal defines civil society as a multitude of autonomous human associations, identities, networks and movements forged for the sake of protecting themselves from the arbitrary and unjust decisions of the holders of power and wealth and promoting their rational self-interest.[5] 'Civil society,' however, is devoid of a clear definition that is common to all the countries. Bayart defines civil society as "society in its relation with the state … in so far as it is in confrontation with the state."[6] While this is a contested definition, Kasfir notes that the "concept of civil society has been shaped to serve the goal of better governance, particularly democratic reform, rather than a deeper understanding of the relationship between social formations, the associations that represent them and the state."[7] In general CSOs refer to the non-state actors who speak on behalf of public for their good.

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[1]Scott 1983
[2]ICIMOD 2008, Larsen 2006
[3]Jenkins 1987
[4]Young and Quinn 2012
[5]Dahal 2002
[6]Burnell and Calvart 2004
[7]Kasfir 1998

## Role of CSOs in Policy Advocacy

Policies are generally directed to affect public problems but sometimes they have unintended effects.[8] Not all policies serve their purpose. Sometimes due to vested interest during the policy formulation process, especially during agenda setting, the resulting policy does not work for the common and public good. Similarly, oftentimes policies that have the potential to yield positive results in favor of citizens do not get implemented. At other times, new policies need to be formed to address new and emerging issues of public concern. Under such circumstances, civil society organizations can influence the state in formulating, implementing or non-implementing a particular policy through policy advocacy. The role of policy advocacy could be to set up a counter dialogue or to promote policy dialogue to demonstrate to policy makers where policy change is needed. Those familiar with socio-political realities and speak for beneficial policy changes are primary actors in policy advocacy.[9]

The year 1990 marked as a historic point in Nepal. This year witnessed a democratic transition from autocratic rule to a multiparty political system with constitutional monarchy. This shift resulted in freedom of speech and expression emanating from increased democratic space leading to enhanced perception of needs and wants among people. These changes were complemented by technological innovation worldwide. There was emergence of many new reformative, 'people-friendly' policies to meet people's aspirations to compensate with the development shift and address the social agenda.[10] Though civil society existed in the form of religious and traditional organizations since ancient times, their activities were limited in scope and they were not allowed to be involved in activities of social awareness.[11] The 1990 restoration of democracy paved way for development of favorable policies. This in turn led to formal registration of civil society organizations in the form of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that would be involved in various forms of developmental activities along with policy advocacy. Furthermore, increasing funding support from donor countries complemented the formation of NGOs.

In 1990, there were around 200 CSOs registered under the Social Welfare Council. This figure rose to around 11,000 in 2000 AD and by 2010 AD, there were around 35,000 CSOs registered. There was virtually an explosion of CSOs in Nepal post-1990. The annual growth chart of NGOs affiliated with Social Welfare Council is shown in figure 1.

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[8] Anderson 2011
[9] ICIMOD 2008
[10] Dahal 2002
[11] Nepali 1997

**Annual Growth Chart of NGOs affiliated with SWC**
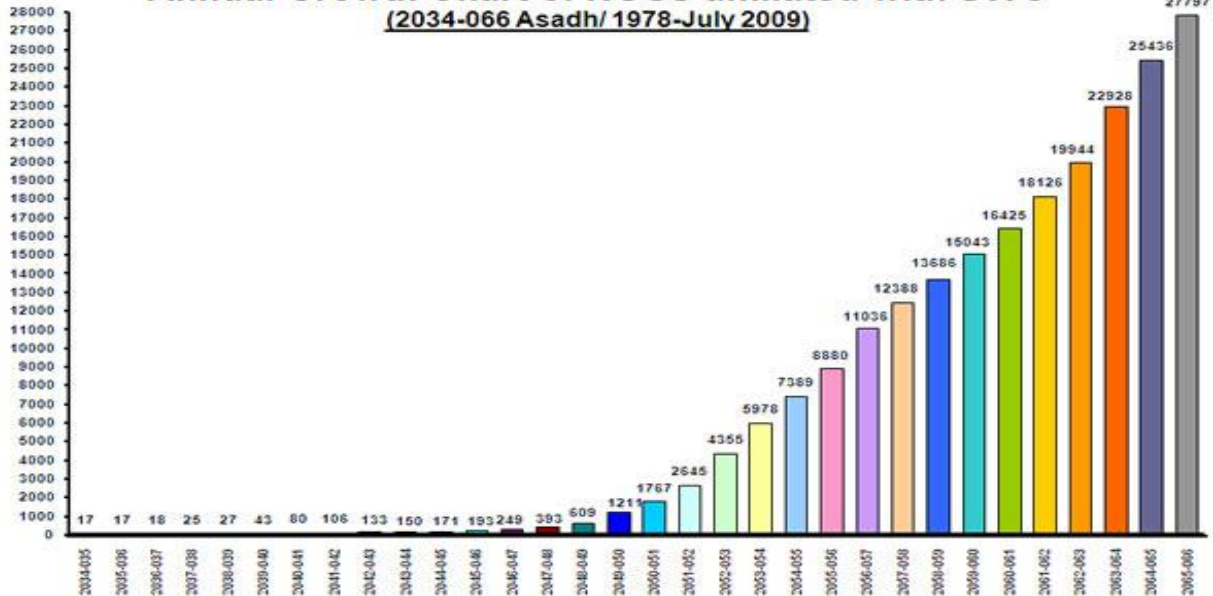(2034-066 Asadh/ 1978-July 2009)

Fig 1[12]

According to Poudel and Luintel, NGO sector adopted advocacy as a means to affect institutional policies and create long-lasting social change.[13] They further state that around 1980, NGOs from both the North and the South intensified advocacy work in local, national, regional and global levels. Bilateral and multilateral donor agencies were eager to fund NGOs and grassroots organizations due to their economic efficiency and contribution to "good governance"[14]. Upon the restoration of multiparty democracy in Nepal in 1990, the country entered into a modern era where peoples' rights were assured and freedom of speech prevailed. Government formulated a number of reformative policies and civil society groups and organizations flourished. The three indigenous peoples' organizations stated above combined to form a "Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities" in mid-1990 and likewise, other networks, groups and forums advocating for their respective rights started to form.

Globally, civil society networks have the power to democratize the structure of world politics through their influence on existing international organizations that leverage change within individual nation-states.[15] In post-1990 Nepal, the fundamental roles of civil society organizations were to encourage citizens to participate in policy decisions and make government accountable.[16] In Nepal, during the decade-long Maoist armed insurgency, Nepali civil society advocated for peaceful settlement of the armed conflict. Civil society advocated for political and socioeconomic changes to resolve the conflict and provided input to media for public discourse on this matter. Such a collective action of various groups in the form of civil society forms an important force towards successful policy advocacy in a country with deliberative democracy[17].

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[12] Social Welfare Council, http://swc.org.np/swccharts/growth.jpg
[13] Poudel and Luitel 2003
[14] Edwards and Hulme 1996
[15] Mundy and Murphy 2001
[16] Casey 2011
[17] Birkland 2006

Many CSOs in Nepal since their establishment have been engaged actively in influencing policy-making and implementation. These CSOs have adopted diverse methodologies of advocacy to influence policies. Various tools and techniques are used with the purpose of incorporating the voice of the advocates. Similarly, different agents within civil society organizations have emerged including international organizations/donors, national and local NGOs and interest-based organizations. Such bodies have taken distinct roles in conducting policy advocacy. Many international organizations have developed different forms of advocacy manuals and guides in order to support national organizations on policy issues and guide them through the process of policy advocacy. For example, USAID in 1997, CARE in 2001, WaterAid in 2007, ICIMOD in 2008, The Asia Foundation in 2008, Young et al. in 2008 and many others have developed manuals and guidelines for CSOs to guide them through strategizing the advocacy process for optimal outcome. Some guidelines and manuals as discussed above are:

- Advocacy Strategies and Approaches: A Resource Manual (2008), ICIMOD
- Policy Advocacy Handbook for Improving Economic Governance (2008), The Asia Foundation
- The Advocacy Source book (2007), WaterAid
- Guidebook On Advocacy (2006), Asian Disaster Preparedness Center
- Advocacy Tools and Guidelines (2001), CARE
- Advocacy, What it's all about? (2001), WaterAid
- Advocacy Strategies for Civil Society (1997), USAID*

According to a scoping paper conducted by Action Aid in 2001, the work of civil society groups would have higher chances of being sustainable when there is greater democracy and transparency.[18] Therefore, it is increasingly becoming clear that the maintenance of democratic space is essential for the fulfillment of people's aspirations and the continuance of development work for the improvement of quality of life. As such, for greater impact through advocacy, strategizing it is essential. However, it is said that the monitoring and evaluation of advocacy is critically underdeveloped which suggests that CSOs could put more concerted effort by learning from each other's methods, tools, approaches and techniques of policy advocacy.[19]

While different advocacy strategies are used by different organizations, only some of the advocacy campaigns have been successful in effectively influencing policies. Different advocacy tools ranging from lobbying, policy dialogues, protest programs to a complete 'shutdown' have been used when the voice of the civil society is not heard by the state. However, it seems significant that when civil society opts for violence especially through a complete 'shutdown', the desired policy influence is easily addressed. In such a scenario, there lies a question among the civil society members whether to opt for violence to advocate for all the concerned issues or to follow non-radical approaches and wait for the state to respond in their favor. It is therefore necessary to understand the necessary tools and approaches and the effective strategies that can generate optimum output with desired policy influence. This study attempts to conduct an overview of the

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[18]ActionAid 2001
[19]Miller 1994

range of policy advocacy strategies followed by different CSOs and consolidate the widely spread knowledge through documentation of advocacy processes.

**Theoretical Concept**

According to Hudson, advocacy work gained popularity throughout the 1990s among Northern NGOs due to enhanced capacity of project implementation at ground level of Southern NGOs, demanding innovation in the work for the Northern NGOs.[20] NGOs increasingly realized that there was an urgent need for change in structural causes of poverty and inequality, both in terms of global relationships between North and South and the structures within any country. This realization led Southern NGOs to make increased calls to Northern NGOs to do more campaign and policy work, including expressing their solidarity with the poor and their opposition to global North-South inequality through taking issues of concern to their own governments.

With increased capacity among Southern NGOs, the donors slowly were shifting to work directly with the Southern organizations by creating direct links with them and following a regionalized and decentralized approach. It was time for Northern NGOs to prove that they could add value to the ongoing development effort. This increased competence demanded by time resulted in appropriate documentation of knowledge and experience from different countries based on which NGOs of the North and South conducted advocacy work. As this continued, where policy permitted, NGOs widened their area of work from public sector to private sector, multilateral agencies resulting in increased capacities among communities to voice their opinions, which further complemented other efforts of the NGO. Hudson has described this shift from 'development as delivery' to 'development as leverage'.

## 2. Research Problem and Research Questions

Even though the post-1990 democratic shift in the Nepalese context, along with global development shift, gave way to increasing involvement of CSOs in policy advocacy work, there does not appear to be a consensus on a particular approach or a set of tools for pursuing policy advocacy. Different organizations have followed different advocacy approaches often in isolation to deal with the issues of their concern. Many of these issues, emerged from the grassroots and were picked up by CSOs for advocacy but many other advocacy issues resulted from influences of the global North. CSOs followed various approaches to influence. Many CSOs efforts of advocacy were successful while many others failed to yield optimum results. Different forms, types and models of advocacy began among the CSOs with ultimate goal to influence policies. But, it was not clear as to how the policy advocacy strategies and processes were being formed. It was not apparent which tools/techniques were being followed for a particular advocacy process and it was not identified whether advocacy processes of organizations working in different sectors would have similar advocacy processes.

Therefore, this research attempts to identify answers to the following:

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[20]Hudson 2001

1. What is the common understanding on the concepts of policy advocacy and different advocacy strategies among CSOs?
2. What are the different tools and techniques that CSOs in different sectors in Nepal adopt in advocacy?

## 3. Approach and Method

For the purposes of this research, three organizations have been chosen to draw on how these organizations address the research questions framed earlier. The three organizations purposefully selected are: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) representing international organization working in environment sector, a Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) representing a local federal identity-based organization and the third Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) representing a national human rights organization. These organizations have been selected to understand the differences or commonalities presented by these organizations in terms of policy advocacy. The scope and agenda for advocacy are different for each of these organizations. ICIMOD existed before 1990 while the other two organizations were established during early 1990s. Similarly, while ICIMOD is a regional governmental effort that addresses common problems threatening the region, the other two organizations are fund driven organizations for the opening up of democratic space post 1990.

While mostly secondary information has been reviewed in order to proceed with the current study, some face-to-face interviews have also been conducted to complement the secondary information with the first-hand information. The general research framework is as follows:

| S.N. | Research Question | Method | Source of Information | Data generation |
|------|-------------------|--------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | What is the common understanding of CSOs on the concepts of advocacy and different advocacy strategies? | Review of literature

Possible consultation | Literature on advocacy, advocacy strategies, public policy, etc.

Review of Annual Plans and strategic documents of selected CSOs

CSO representatives | Understanding on the concepts of advocacy and related terms, conceptual clarity

Knowledge on different tools and approaches used for advocacy on the issue |
| 2 | What are the different tools and techniques practiced by different CSOs in Nepal? | Identify and review advocacy guidelines and tools developed /published by various organizations

Refer to the tools being used by selected CSOs | Google search, literature review

Guidelines

Annual reports, periodic reports, project reports | Identified and documented different tools suggested and / or used in the context of Nepal |

## 4. Findings/Analysis

CSOs in Nepal have different understandings of policy advocacy approaches and theyfollow various tools and techniques as applicable to bring into effect their advocacy and influence policies. The policy advocacy approaches appear to be guided more by the organizational vision. The tools and techniques can be classified broadly as confrontational and non-confrontational. These, however, again may overlap sometimes depending on the case in question. The non-confrontational tools and techniques may again be classified into collaborative, public and private. As such, the widely seen tools and techniques seen in Nepal as practiced by various civil society organizations are as follows:

- Confrontational: Demonstration, rallies, sit-in protest, gherao (picketing), general strike, specific strike, street march, civil disobedience, etc.

- Collaborative: Joint actions, consultation, information sharing, awareness raising, campaigning, alliance building/networking, international solidarity, capacity building, research

- Private: Lobbying, meeting, delegation

- Public: Media publications, seminar, workshop, paper presentation, interactions, technical advice, litigation, media advocacy, policy briefs, policy papers, etc.

It is, however, important to note that some forms of non-confrontational tools may also have elements of confrontational technique. For e.g., while in general, public techniques such as publications, seminars, policy briefs, and the likes are non-confrontational but sometimes these tools can also be used in a confrontational way directly challenging authorities responsible for a particular policy formulation or implementation. Similarly, private techniques such as lobbying or meeting can result in direct contestation and disagreement between the two parties turning it into a more radical approach.

### Insights on International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is a regional intergovernmental learning and knowledge sharing center founded in 1983, serving the eight regional member countries of the Hindu Kush Himalayas – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan – and based in Kathmandu, Nepal. The primary objectives of the Centre are to help promote the development of an economically sound mountain ecosystem and to improve the living standards of the mountain populations of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. ICIMOD plays a facilitative role in the policy process, supporting in knowledge generation/management, capacity building, training, research and publication.

## *Approach to Policy Advocacy*

The main mandate of ICIMOD is to facilitate sustainable mountain development and well-being of mountain people for which policy advocacy plays a crucial role. Policy advocacy therefore is an important part of the ICIMOD's mandate, which it attempts to fulfill by contributing to the processes, which directly or indirectly help in formulation and implementation of the policies and programmes by the relevant agencies. ICIMOD considers policy as a process and not as a final product, which consists of activities including information generation and synthesis, development of approaches and methods for public interventions, awareness generation and capacity building which equip and induce the decision makers for specific policy decisions and actions or development interventions. Therefore, ICIMOD's policy advocacy consists of mixed functions such as accumulation, synthesis, dissemination and exchange of information, applied and action research, demonstration and training, collaborative activities with national agencies and policy dialogues with policy makers and policy influencing groups. Advocacy for ICIMOD, therefore, is playing the role of a facilitator in knowledge and information generation through research and capacity building of relevant stakeholders.

## *Tools and Techniques*

ICIMOD uses various kinds of policy advocacy tools and techniques to fulfill its main agenda of sustainable mountain development and contribution to the well-being of mountain people but mostly plays a facilitative role in the policy process for which it carries out different activities related to knowledge and capacity building. It also supports CSOs through development of advocacy strategy manuals and guidelines for policy advocacy. The organization helps support local organizations by providing necessary baseline knowledge required advocacy. As such, the tools for advocacy used by this organization differ from the tools used by other advocacy organizations. The general tools used by ICIMOD to meet its policy advocacy mandate are as follows:

- Public – Information generation and synthesis, development of approaches and methods for public intervention, seminar, interaction, workshop, publications
- Collaborative – Awareness generation, capacity building, collaboration with NGOs, policy dialogues, research and training
- Private – meeting, delegation

As an international organization, ICIMOD does not directly involve itself in policy-making or policy influencing but rather supports those who can produce effects in the policy formulation process.

**Insights on Dalit NGO Federation (DNF)**

Dalit NGO Federation (DNF) Nepal, established in 1996, is an umbrella organization of all Dalit NGOs in the country. The main aim of DNF is fighting against caste-based discrimination. It is a common forum for raising collective voices of Dalit community for claiming rights, dignity and opportunity through policy influencing, networking and alliance building.

## Approach to Policy Advocacy

DNF defines policy advocacy as a process of taking forward peoples' voices to respective people through discussion, debate, lobbying, and various other means as applicable in order to implement policies and/or demand formation of new policies in case of a void or demand modification of existing policies if they are not pro-people. All the processes involved in order to take this action into effect is considered advocacy. Therefore, advocacy refers to programs, activities and/or legal actions associated to bring out pro-people policies. The views regarding policy advocacy may differ from people to people. Speaking on a certain issue in one forum alone is not considered policy advocacy as a whole. It is, however, considered a small stepping- stone. DNF believes that in order to carry out successful policy advocacy an in-depth analysis of the issue at first is necessary. It is important to understand why advocacy is needed for a particular issue. An analysis of the issue is also needed to understand the impact of successful policy advocacy. These things must be carefully scrutinized and discussed among stakeholders before taking into consideration a particular policy advocacy strategy. The desired output is also discussed beforehand and until and unless the stakeholders reach a consensus regarding the fulfillment of proposed goals and objectives, policy advocacy process is not initiated. Policy analysis needs to be done in order to check and examine where and to what degree the policy addresses the peoples' needs and o what extent it fails to do so.

In order to develop a common understanding on advocacy, organizational or community leaders first need to be trained and made aware on the issues, their pros and cons. It is important that advocates undertake detailed planning on to how to raise a particular issue and carry it forward to respective parties, what to do after the voice is heard by respective parties, how to begin consolidating people to support. Advocates, especially those at leadership positions must be provided with the necessary orientation regarding this cycle and their potential impact in such a way that they can transfer this knowledge to other members within the community.

## Tools and Techniques
A review of advocacy process regarding joint movement for political rights of Dalits conducted for about a year around 2006-07 resulted in securing seats for about 18 Dalits in the parliament. The tools and techniques used by DNF in order to see this outcome were both confrontational as well as non-confrontational.

The tool and techniques used during this advocacy process are as follows:
- Confrontational – demonstration, rallies, gherao (picketing), general strike (*chakkajaam*)
- Collaborative – nationwide awareness raising, alliance building, international solidarity

- Private – lobbying, meeting, delegation
- Public – media support / advocacy

The tools used during this policy advocacy process were mostly confrontational involving demonstration, rallies, gherao (picketing), and even general strike. The use of such confrontational tools was attributed to the need to create visibility of the issue among concerned those affected by it as well as to make the Dalits themselves aware of their rights and consequently fight the age-old system of discrimination. These methods helped to empower Dalit communities to speak for their own rights. The disempowerment that Dalit communities were led to feel through oppression and discrimination was deeply ingrained and in order to bring an end to such, a non-confrontational measure was opted to demonstrate to Dalits that they have strength, and to policy makers that there is unity and solidarity among the huge affected population. Other methods however were also followed along with this confrontational technique.

### Insights on Informal Service Sector (INSEC)

Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) has been working in the human rights sector for more than two decades with credible records. It has achieved remarkable recognition as one of the leading human rights organizations in Nepal. It first started with literacy / awareness classes to peoples from informal sector, which now has grown to become a national level organization with the activities covering different aspects of human rights.

## *Approach to Policy Advocacy*

For strengthening policy advocacy INSEC, supports knowledge building and awareness creation through education and uses different tools, techniques and approaches for promotion and protection of fundamental rights of people. INSEC influences policies from a human rights perspective. It advocates for the consideration of human rights within policies to enable participation and empowerment of the marginalized. INSEC conducts systematic monitoring of policies related to human rights and democracy. INSEC strengthens advocacy through networking and coalition and alliance building at local, national, and international levels among concurring individuals and organizations. Lobbying, campaigning, public education, and dialogues across differing perspectives and players are some of the major tools it uses in advocacy.

## *Tools and Techniques*

INSEC conducted a yearlong campaign for Ratifying Rome Statute of the ICC to end the culture of impunity around 2006-07. In order to gain desired outcome, it used different tools and techniques. Being a human rights organization, the tools INSEC used were mostly non-confrontational with only a few confrontational methods used. The tools are listed as follows:

- Collaborative – Joint actions, information sharing, awareness raising, campaigning, alliance building/networking, international solidarity, capacity building, research
- Private – Lobbying, meeting, delegation

- Public – Seminar, interaction, workshop, publication, media, letters
- Confrontational – sit-in protest, public demonstration

## Linkage to Policy Issues

The general trend of policy advocacy tools/techniques followed by the three organizations studied for this purpose concurs with the understandings of policy advocacy posited by these organizations. It appears that the organizations are guided by organizational the visions and aims. The policy advocacy processes however seem to be successful for each of these organizations.

The policy goals of ICIMOD encompass garnering support from relevant stakeholders including the state as well as general public. As such, it is noted that the policy advocacy tools and techniques used are more public focused and collaborative. ICIMOD achieves the best results by convincing others of the importance of sustainable mountain development for which it informs people about not only the need to conserve and protect mountains but also to advocate for its protection which it does through capacity development and joint collaboration with local organizations.

The tools and techniques followed by DNF address the oppression and discrimination that excluded people face. As this organization represents those who are structurally oppressed and discriminated against, it exercises less leverage and visibility in the public sphere. Hence, this organization is focused on using confrontational tools/techniques through which their influence was more easily observed. Moreover, the members of the organization for their own self-esteem needed demonstration of power which led to the confrontational choice of policy advocacy technique.

INSEC's techniques and tools were more collaborative as the organization rooted itself in issue of human rights and advocated for inclusion of human rights component in policies. The collaborative tools/techniques enhanced INSEC's vision of universal human rights through the transfer of ideas on rightsto collaborating organizations.

The summary of findings of policy advocacy approaches and tools/techniques adopted by the organizations of study are presented as follows:

## Understanding of Policy Advocacy and Tools/Techniques

| Organization | Approach | Tools and Techniques | Linkage to Policy Issues |
|---|---|---|---|
| **ICIMOD** | A process, not an end in itself | Public | Broader coordination and support |
| **DNF** | Putting peoples' voices to implement or form new policies that are pro-people. | Confrontational | Letting hear voice of the voiceless |
| **INSEC** | Consideration of human rights in all policies | Collaborative | Inform universalism of human rights through partnership |

# 5. Overall Findings

Civil society organizations appear to have a common understanding on what policy advocacy means. From the definitions reviewed and the practice seen by taking case examples of three organizations, policy advocacy can be understood as a long and continuous process that needs concerted effort, resources and time. The understanding on the approach to policy advocacy however is guided by the visions and aims of the organization. The policy advocacy definition appears takes shape according to organizational goals. This in turn reflects the choice of policy advocacy tools/techniques adopted by these organizations.

The tools and techniques adopted by CSOs for advocacy seem to differ according to the type of organization. It was evident that more the people are involved and more the organization is governed by marginalized section of society, more confrontational tools are used. This was also complemented by the fact that the marginalized people (who earlier had little voice in society) first needed to be empowered in order to undertake any long-term advocacy efforts. The organizations involved in advocacy for marginal groups believed that empowerment could be achieved only through confrontational means such as the exercise of power on the streets. Being marginalized with very little voice in the society, the Dalits, needed to be empowered so that they could partake in the process of advocacy. As the example of the Dalit NGO Federation made evident, in such a case, the confrontational approach was more suitable as it was able to demonstrate to the otherwise disempowered Dalits their own collective power. In other cases, as in the example of INSEC, confrontational approach specifically demonstration, rallies and/or general strikes were opted more as a measure when other tools had failed to demonstrate results. Being a human rights organization, the application of legal instruments was more suitable and appropriate for the advocacy process before any radical method. As for a regional organization like ICIMOD, its secondary role in policy advocacy was so far appropriate in terms of the image and status of the organization. As an organization that supports the policy advocacy work of relevant stakeholders it has also been able to rid itself from the blame of influencing the internal affairs of different stakeholders.

Different actors involved in framing the policy issue for advocacy also influence tools/techniques adopted by the different organizations. While issues for advocacy emanate from the grassroots level, decisions to pursue these issues are based on many factors on which different actors play major roles. The primary of these actors are donors who fund these advocacy efforts. Without donor's interest in the particular issue, it is generally not possible to undertake any process of advocacy. As already discussed above, as advocacy is a long-term continuous process, any single event or effort carried out as advocacy results in an unsuccessful attempt, failing to yield the desired outcome. It is therefore necessary to first convince the donors about the need of advocacy for an issue. Funds are made available for advocacy on the issue based on the interest of the donor. Another important actor affecting framing of an issue is the media. The advancement in information technology has made media an important part of society with abilities to affect the outcome of any advocacy process. The support of media therefore is also necessary in order to bring the issue forward for advocacy. Similarly, oftentimes other actors such as civil society leaders, political party

leaders, and business leaders also tend to show interest in framing issues for advocacy which, however, may not always be based on grassroots concerns. Governments also sometimes play an important role in framing issues in order to meet their underlying motives.

Policy advocacy is not possible without continuous funding support, either nationally or internationally. It appears that civil society organizations in Nepal depend highly on the external funding even for the most pressing advocacy issues affecting the public. In the absence of financial resources, the advocacy process would not start or last long even after it has been started. Local organizations have very little ways of generating their own funds. Due to this dependency, CSOs in Nepal have not been able to work on policy advocacy issues independently devoid of any external influence/support.

## 6. Conclusion

The drastic increase in formation of civil society organizations in Nepal post-1990 from just few hundreds to now more than 40,000 does not only signal the mere increase in numbers. The thriving organizations have gained a lot of experience in their respective field and those involved in advocacy have similarly matured institutionally. There can be no denial that the advocacy processes that these organizations are following are based on issues of public concern. The policy issues are initiated at grassroots level most of the time but policy advocacy process only begins when there is sufficient funding for which effort is needed to gain approval of relevant actors. Regardless of the level of penetration of an issue in society, advocacy process cannot start without sufficient financial resources. This is because CSOs concur on the fact that advocacy is not just a one-time event but a continuous process of concerted effort that expends time, money and resources, and that needs patience and perseverance in order to achieve the desired outcome. An individual effort or voice may not be termed advocacy but it would only be a step complementing the overall process of advocacy, if that is continued for long-term until the desired result is achieved.

The policy advocacy approach and tools/techniques used by civil society organizations in Nepal seem to be similar if observed broadly and in general terms. However, if it is observed closely and studied rigorously, the major tools/techniques differ between organizations. This study found that policy advocacy strategies are determined by the overall vision and goal of the organization as well as the relative strength of the organization in the within state-society relations. Similarly, the frequency and the primary type of tools for advocacy differ between organizations. It can be said that more the organizations appear vulnerable; more is the possibility that they will adopt confrontational approach for advocacy. This could be true for most of the peoples' organizations such as federations and the likes where common people come together through a group approach. Other organizations that play facilitating role fairly seem to opt less for the radical approach of policy advocacy. Facilitating organizations like ICIMOD seem to play a very little part in the policy advocacy directly but they do support advocacy tremendously as secondary actors and also influence stakeholders to abide by the international agreements and treaties. In terms of direct

support, they provide capacity building opportunities for advocating organizations and may also provide financial support.

The CSOs in general face a number of challenges in their advocacy process. The foremost of them is the acquisition of funds for advocacy work. While CSOs understand that internal fund generation is important for long-term sustainability and viability of organization, very little is currently being done to tackle this issue. As such, reliance on donors for advocacy work is still persistent which leads to the question as to whether advocacy is done solely based on donor's interests. Donor's interests, however, may not always be apparent and therefore, deeper understanding would be needed to understand their latent interests. Another challenge is that while advocacy in general should be for the larger public good it oftentimes becomes apparent that the particular issue benefits only certain group of people such as donors, politicians, and businessmen. Similarly, CSOs are also face the challenge of not having sufficient knowledge based on research while undertaking advocacy work. While advocating for peoples' agenda, if advocacy is not backed by enough background information, there is a high chance that the end result may not be the desired one. Hence, enough research and background work is needed before pursuing the issue for advocacy. CSOs also need to understand the long-term impact of their advocacy work. It is a challenge for the organizations to deal with the aftermath of the advocacy work, which is generally not thought of by the CSOs advocating on particular issue. The involvement in the advocacy work results in change among those involved in the process. Similarly, even when desired change happens, CSOs need to prepare the advocates for the resulting scenario after change. Thinking ahead about issues is a challenge for the CSOs. Lastly, there is politicization of issues, which hinders actual work on the issue. The popularity of issue sometimes limits it from being worked on and remains only in political speeches devoid of any action.

A challenge for both civil society and government is to facilitate communication at the district and national levels. Many civil society organizations work in relative isolation, occasionally raising issues to the national level. Civil society must make an effort to participate in the planning process and commit to on-going two-way communication between government and civil society. At the local level, this means that civil society organizations should strive to make positive contributions to planning. At the central level, federations must work constructively to create links with the government. The appropriate policy advocacy strategy that a CSO uses should determine how to bridge the communication gap between the people and the policy makers.

Considering the challenges that CSOs in Nepal are facing, CSOs should reflect on their policy advocacy strategies in order to gain optimal output from the process. CSOs should collaborate with each other while developing strategies and should learn from each other's mistakes and best practices. While CSOs working in same sector are found to collaborate with each other, in order to further strengthen the policy advocacy strategy process, organizations working in different sectors involved in policy advocacy should form a consortium to discuss on the existing challenges of policy advocacy. This would not only benefit the organization in strengthening their advocacy process but also benefit the people who they are serving by enhanced ability of influencing the policies.

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