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Advocacy: An Introduction

This chapter presents the 'meaning of advocacy' as collected from the relevant literature and realities of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan countries. The focus of this manual is on the practical understanding of advocacy at the grass roots. This chapter relates the meaning of advocacy to its rationale, i.e., why advocacy initiatives have to be taken up at different levels.

The Concept of Advocacy

This section reviews different definitions of advocacy and relates all definitions to the realities of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan (HKH) region. Past experience indicates that theoretical definitions do not make sense until they are connected to the practical realities of different communities. Based on this assumption, available theoretical definitions are reviewed and connections made with the real-life situation of the HKH region.

Advocacy is the process of raising voices in an effective manner in order to influence others. It is a process rather than a product. When it is done to support or empower the marginalised it is a means of gaining a better policy environment with implications for implementation of policies, rather than an end in itself. The product of advocacy could be better policies or practices in communities. 'Policy' does not mean only those policies which emanate from the government, but also refers to those unwritten practices which have been taking place in communities for some length of time. The empowerment of affected people is the ultimate destination of the kind of advocacy work that NGOs, CBOs, and POs (people's organisations) engage in, in the hope that it would help the affected people to claim their rights in a sustainable manner.

There are various definitions of advocacy. Some selected definitions are presented below.

“Giving of public support to an idea, a course of action, or a belief”

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary

The literal meaning of advocacy reflects a way of working that involves the public, engaging them to support a particular approach. This definition accepts the idea of a planned action rather than ad hoc efforts.

Considering the diversity of advocacy experiences and perspectives in different contexts, the Advocacy Institute (AI), Washington, USA, recognises that there is no single ‘right’ definition or approach to advocacy. The methodology that promoters use in their own context must be respected and shared among advocacy practitioners. Keeping this in mind and yet appreciating the need for a working definition, AI has proposed the following working definition:

“Advocacy is the pursuit of influencing outcomes – including policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions – that directly affect people’s lives”

The Advocacy Institute

The National Centre for Advocacy Studies (NCAS), Pune, India, felt the urgent need to stress that advocacy is not only for, but also through and with the people who are affected, and so stresses the people-centred nature of advocacy:

“Public Advocacy is a planned and organised set of actions to effectively influence public policies and to have them implemented in a way that would empower the marginalised. In a liberal democratic culture, it uses the instruments of democracy and adopts non-violent and constitutional means.”

National Centre for Advocacy Studies

This definition indicates that NCAS has identified a clear linkage between advocacy and a political system’s democratic process. In its literature, NCAS argues that an advocacy initiative must be in the centre of bridging, resisting, engaging, and strategising. Finally, the initiative must be able to create a force that will promote poor-friendly policies using the spaces within the system.

CARE, a US-based organisation that works in close collaboration with the US government and other national governments, has offered a definition that coincides with the kind of work it is involved in:

“Advocacy is the deliberate process of influencing those who make policy decisions”

CARE

It further defined the key terminologies used in the definition, as follows.

- a) **Advocacy is a deliberate process:** It must be clear who you are trying to influence and what policies you wish to change.
- b) **Advocacy influences those who make policy decisions:** It is not the same as “being confrontational” or “shouting” at the government.
- c) **Advocacy influences those who make policy decisions:** Advocacy is not restricted to policy makers who work for the government. Actors from the private sector or from civil society organisations also make policy decisions at their own levels.

What do these definitions mean from a mountain perspective?

- Planned, organised and logical actions based on the contextual reality.
- A process seeking to highlight critical issues that negatively affects sections of the populace and have been ignored by some individuals or institutions.
- A set of actions with a determined vision of ‘what should be’ based on human rights and a constitutional framework.
- A process of amplifying the voice of the poor and marginalised to attain a fair and just society.
- A process of forwarding logical arguments aiming to influence the attitude of public position holders to enact and implement laws and public policies so that today’s vision can be translated into a future reality.
- A political process, although it remains above party politics and political polarisation.
- Action focusing primarily on public and social policies to have these policies implemented in good faith.
- A process that aims to promote social justice and human rights within communities.
- A collective effort to make governance accountable and transparent.



Finally, advocacy is a strategy to address the policy causes of poverty and discrimination. Advocacy therefore should aim to influence the decisions of policy makers through clear and compelling messages. There are four focus areas targeted by advocacy strategies: (a) creating policies, (b) reforming policies, (c) ensuring that policies are implemented properly, and (d) people's empowerment. The assumption is that addressing the policy causes of poverty and discrimination by influencing the decisions of policy makers increases livelihood opportunities and increases the ability of people to claim their own legitimate rights. As a result, advocacy strategies can make sustainable impacts on large populations.

When the concept of good governance came in as an influential idea in the development arena, advocacy became a means of promoting good governance at all levels. However, the concept of good governance is very vague, and is very often 'slanted' depending on the user of the term (e.g., the WTO, compared to a grassroots NGO etc). Therefore finding a definite application of good governance is difficult. Advocacy, too, has also become a concept with a wide range of connotations. Professionals facilitating the promotion of good governance through advocacy initiatives have begun to interpret advocacy differently. Some tend to include everything related to good governance as an aspect of advocacy. Therefore, it is urgently necessary to differentiate between what **is** and what is **not** not advocacy, as follows below.

Extension work: Extension works target different aspects of the lives of marginalised communities. The main objective of extension in general is to provide people with certain information/skills etc. related to different aspects of their livelihood. Extension work is therefore planned mainly to influence individual or specific community decisions/ways of functioning, but not the decisions of policy makers that affect many people at once.

Information, education and communication (IEC): IEC is carried out to change people's mind-sets and consequently people's practices at the individual level. For example, IEC could be used to promote toilets, the use of condoms, and so on if it is within the health sector. However, advocacy works to create more far-reaching effects than these kind of IEC campaigns could hope to achieve. For example, an advocacy initiative could campaign to allocate more money to the health sector.

Information exchange with the government: The simple exchange of information among different institutions without a definite objective is not advocacy. If analysed information is given to a certain government agency with the objective of influencing specific policy decisions, this could be part of an advocacy initiative. However, cordial relation-building with decision makers by any means is a foundation for advocacy.

Raising public awareness about certain programmes: Information dissemination to raise public awareness about certain institutions and their programmes is often carried out using different types of media. At present, websites are commonly used for this purpose. This kind of information flow does not necessarily help promote an opinion on a certain issue. Advocacy initiatives also use such media to influence policy makers, with this difference that here the information flow focuses on a certain issue and helps promote a definite public opinion.

Fundraising: The primary purpose of advocacy is not fundraising for a specific agency. Sometimes, advocacy is necessary to influence decisions that are related to fund allocations. Advocacy of this type may lead to certain agencies receiving more funds than before. However, this added funding of a particular organisation/group is merely an unintended consequence, not the primary purpose of the advocacy effort.

Watchdog role of different institutions: The role of watchdog is taken up by some groups to safeguard the interests of certain members/groups of the public in order to prevent negative impacts. However, advocacy is generally carried out after something adverse has occurred. Therefore the watchdog role is primarily a preventive measure while an advocacy initiative is generally a curative action. However, after a policy has been created the advocacy group may function to keep track of its implementation. This would of course be necessary but may not necessarily be called advocacy.

Purpose and Objectives of Advocacy

This section highlights some of the reasons for introducing the concept of advocacy to the development of the HKH region. The deprivation of mountain people in terms of access to decisions and policy considerations is considered the prime reason and is therefore the major focus for advocacy in mountain development.

Poverty alleviation is presently the prime agenda of most development agencies, particularly in the HKH region. Despite this being on the top of their agenda and despite receiving massive monetary investments, poverty continues to increase in the rural areas of these regions/countries. Needs-based approaches to development have certainly brought positive changes to some extent, but lasting change has become a challenge for all. Development practitioners are now realising that innovative solutions are necessary to meet this challenge. Influencing policy decisions in favour of the poor could be an aspect of the multifarious efforts required to achieve lasting change.

Purpose of advocacy initiatives: Advocacy initiatives generally aim to promote the public good and attempt to bring about social justice in deprived

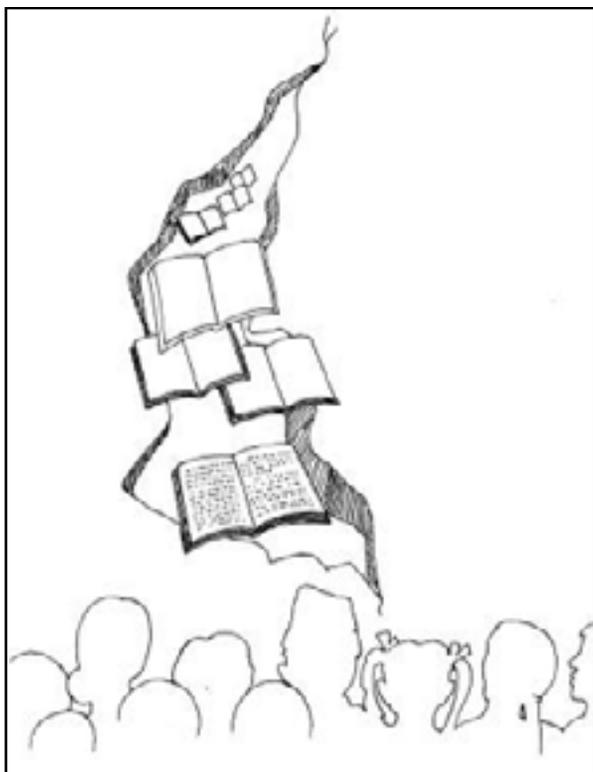
communities. Advocacy seeks to use all available media, fora, and methods to bring issues of public concern into the conscious agenda of those who make decisions in this regard. The prime goal of advocacy is to reorient public policy towards enhancing the capacity of those who have a weaker voice in the existing political system. Therefore, the necessity of advocacy initiatives can be summarised by the following facts.

- The causes of poverty and discrimination stem both from decisions made at the household (micro) level and at other macro levels.
- It is not only the government but also various actors in the public and private arenas who contribute to livelihood insecurity and the violation of human rights.
- Only a wide range of programme strategies targeted at multiple causes, including policy causes, will lead to the desired impact.
- It should be assumed that policies are human-made and can be changed. Policies should not be taken as immutable, given by some super human power. Advocacy is an effective tool to bring about policy change.

Objectives of advocacy initiatives: From a holistic viewpoint, various relatively powerful actors in private and public life contribute to livelihood insecurity and violations of human rights. A significant impact can be achieved by changing the practices of these powerful stakeholders. The ultimate goal of an advocacy initiative is to improve the livelihood and human rights of significant numbers

of people. Advocacy targets policy makers and implementers at levels above the household. In particular, advocacy initiatives are carried out to meet the following objectives:

- facilitating social justice – gaining access and a voice for deprived groups in the decision making of relevant institutions;
- changing the power relations between these institutions and the people affected by their decisions – thereby changing the institutions themselves; and
- bringing a compelling and lasting improvement in people's lives.



Prerequisites for Advocacy

By definition, advocacy is a process of raising the voice of voiceless people. The voiceless can raise their voice when there is an open or transparent system of governance that is run on democratic principles. This section highlights the conditions of communities that demonstrate why advocacy initiatives are needed at all levels.

Advocacy is perceived as an effective means of achieving good governance at all levels. The concept of power decentralisation has identified certain ideal conditions that can be applied as indicators for assessing the status of good governance in a society. These conditions explain the parameters that public and private institutions should keep in mind. Ordinary people as citizens of a country deserve the right to review whether or not institutions and individuals are following these parameters. To respect this right is a major emphasis of a rights-based approach to development. If people determine that public and private institutions are not functioning in line with the ideal parameters that they are supposed to follow, they can raise their voice in a manner that is allowed within their own constitutions. In other words, they can begin an advocacy initiative.

From this perspective, good governance, the rights-based approach, and advocacy initiatives are related to each other. Only a democratic system of government can really open the space for promoting good governance and a rights-based approach to development. Therefore, a democratic system moving towards attaining good governance at all levels of public life is the prime requisite for advocacy initiatives. In this context, the organisations that are willing to take part in advocacy initiatives must pay attention to some ground rules.

Advocacy is not a separate programme and/or an additional activity. You have to be able to embed advocacy into on-going programmes. If you think that your vision and mission are linked to the policy considerations of your state or country, then attempting to influence changes in these policies needs to become part of your organisational vision. To take up advocacy as a working approach, certain elements would help, as indicated below.

Gathering information about the policy that you want to change: Before beginning any advocacy initiative, it is very important to understand the existing policies, practices, and mechanisms for policy enforcement and the key institutions responsible for policy change. Who are the persons responsible for making decisions? You have to carry out research applying various methods. Such research could use formal or informal methods, depending upon what issue you are taking up.

Assessing risks: Remember no advocacy initiative is risk free. However, you should be able to assess the degree of risk. The most important aspect is the political environment in which you are working. If you analyse the risk properly, there will be less likelihood that you will make a mistake which will cause hardship to you, your partners, and the communities that you are working with.

Building strategic relations: Remember that there are many organisations like yours in society. Policy change is normally not possible through the efforts of a single institution. A collective voice is stronger than a solitary one. Therefore, you must be able to build strategic relationships with other organisations.

Establishing your credibility as an advocate: This aspect is very much related to internal good governance. The organisation willing to take up advocacy must itself be following all the norms and conditions of good governance at the organisational level, and the people around the organisation must believe in you. Otherwise your credibility to represent the population that you would be advocating on behalf of will be severely compromised.

Credibility Checklist

- Can you legitimately speak on behalf of the people affected by the issue?
- Are you politically neutral – have you gained the image of neutrality in the eyes of the community as far as political parties are concerned?
- Do you have enough information and expertise relevant to the issue?
- Do you have people who can effectively lead the movement that you are going to create on behalf of the community?
- Are you properly known and respected by the policy makers involved in the issue?

Linking advocacy with organisational vision and mission: It has already been mentioned that advocacy cannot be carried out in isolation as a separate programme or activity. It has to be merged into the working strategy of the organisation.

Maintaining focus: Advocacy is not an easy job that can be performed in a short time span. It may take much time to get policy change on some issues. Therefore, you have to be able to maintain your focus on the specific issues over a lengthy period of time.

All the above parameters suggest elements of the foundation necessary to start an advocacy initiative on selected issues. These parameters will also give an indication of whether your ideas fit in with community priorities.

Relation to the Rights-based Approach

The rights-based approach (RBA) to development has opened up a new avenue of perception of the causes of poverty and deprivation. It is a human rights dimension that has sensitised those working within the development paradigm. Sensitisation is very close to the heart of any advocacy effort. This section highlights some of the commonalities of these two relatively new imperatives in the development discourse.



Rights-based approaches to development encourage us to pay more attention to the root causes of poverty rather than to the symptoms. Many people in the world are poor and various development agencies exist with different mandates and agendas for poverty alleviation. All of these agencies are offering their services in one way or another to minimise the suffering that poverty creates. However, the root causes of the suffering are often not minimised. Development efforts are therefore somehow focused on the resulting symptoms of poverty. The rights-based approach is a step that contributes to the elimination of the root causes of poverty. The basic thrusts of the rights-based approach are as follows below.

- Understanding that human beings have inherent rights assured by international standards of human rights and country-level laws.
- Developing a programme focus on those individuals or groups that are disadvantaged due to discrimination and exploitation.
- Shifting the focus to issues that would previously have been considered as beyond them, and closely linked to power and politics.
- Empowering rights-holders to realise their rights and encourage duty-bearers to be part of the solution.
- Encouraging development agencies to be accountable to the people they work with.

- Refocusing development interventions at a variety of levels, not only at the household level.

When policy makers do not fulfil their responsibilities to others, advocacy initiatives can be instrumental in holding them accountable. Therefore, the RBA suggests to development professionals that the starting point of development interventions must be the recognition of people's inherent rights. This approach does not want to break down long-running welfare distribution programmes, but proposes that everyone must think about people's rights. Finally, development efforts should be able to empower people so they can claim welfare programmes in future, as this is within their inherent rights as citizens.

At the present stage of development, many professionals embrace everything as advocacy, but this confuses the issue by making the term ambiguous. The main issue is that a strongly felt need exists to evolve a culture of human rights within civil society rather than to rely exclusively on political rhetoric and judicial proclamations. A meaningful dissemination of human rights ideas at all levels of education and ongoing training programmes for public officials is related to advocacy. We also need to acknowledge the limitations and constraints of government in implementing human rights in practical situations. Moreover, it is not realistic to believe that the state never violates human rights or that all actions taken by the state are justifiable.

The crucial task therefore is to orient all stakeholders towards people's basic human rights, especially for the disadvantaged and disempowered sections of society. Politicians, who are primary stakeholders, must be made aware that no real development, no real sovereignty, and no real freedom will occur without a strong foundation of basic human rights. This requires re-prioritising the government's agenda and the political will to involve all sections of civil society in rigorous action to this end.

When members of a community see their needs perceived as rights, they can claim these rights themselves. The problems of the community become secondary while paying attention to rights. The needs-based approach and the rights-based approach perceive development differently, as shown in Figures 1.1 and 1.2.

Thrust of the rights-based approach: The rights-based approach to development is a conceptual framework for the process of human development based on an international standard. The main elements of this approach are linkages to rights, accountability, empowerment, participation, and non-discrimination (see <www.unhchr.ch> for details).

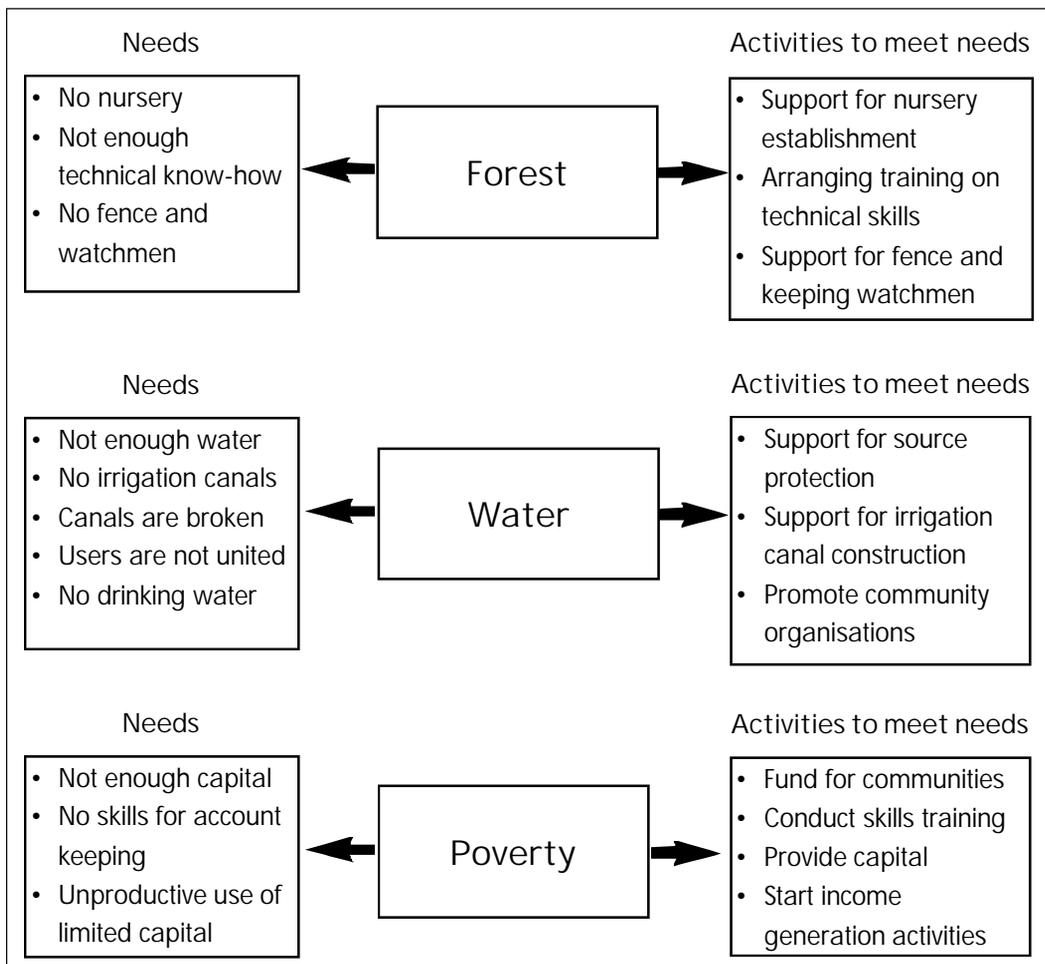


Figure 1.1: An example of the needs-based approach

A rights-based approach believes that:

- People are made poor and marginalised by certain societal factors. These could be on the surface or could be invisibly rooted below the ground.
- The basic needs of communities have to be established as their basic human rights. This is the primary job of community-based organisations.
- Ordinary people suffering from different problems are the prime source of power for changing their destiny. Collective action is the most important instrument to help them claim their own inherent power.
- Communities themselves can find better ways of organising their lives. Outside support should be used to encourage their own suppressed capacity.
- If something is good for their livelihood, the community will do it regardless of outside support. For example, if there are oranges in the garden, people will not wait to learn how to eat. They will start eating anyway (Figure 1.2).

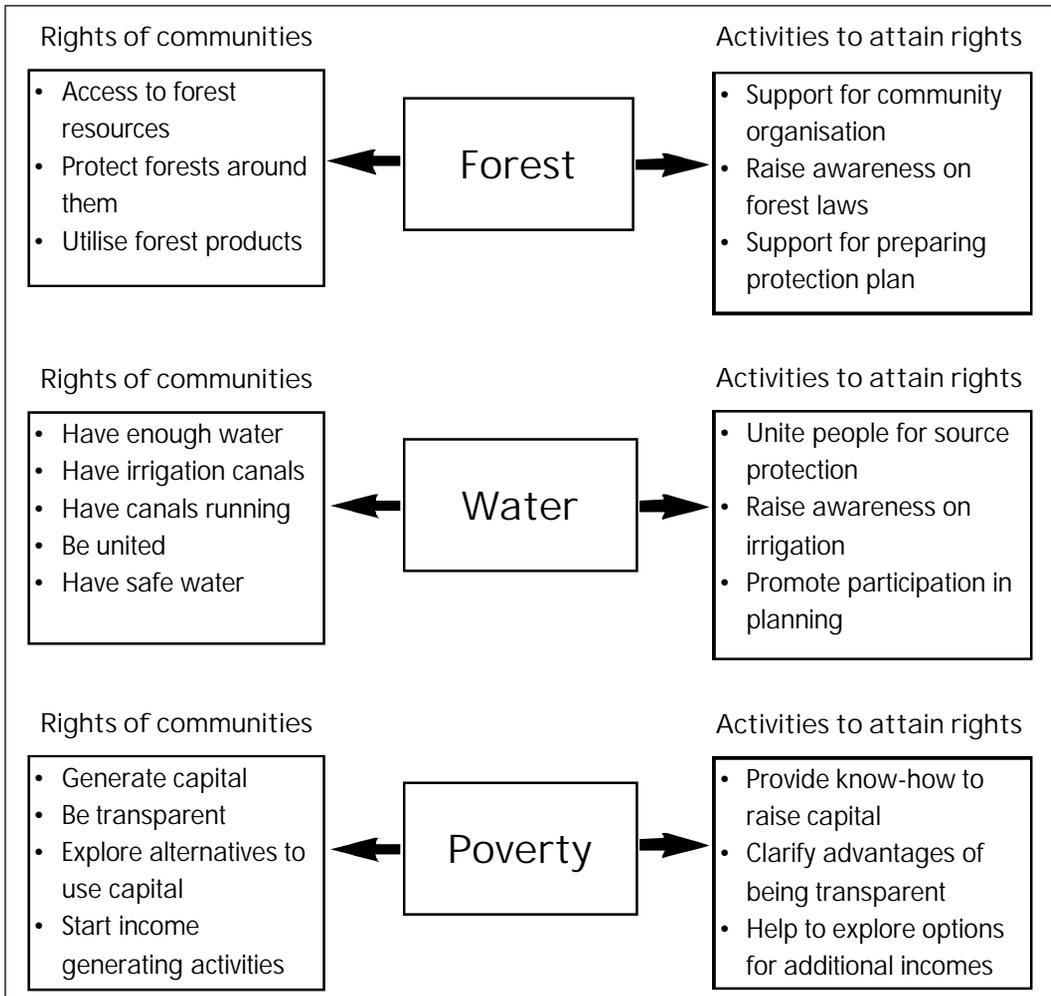


Figure 1.2: An example of the rights-based approach

- Development must be geared towards the marginalised claiming their rights, but this does not mean that there is no need to work towards immediate help in fulfilling basic needs.
- “Human beings are at the centre of concern for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.” (Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration)
- The Human Rights Council of Australia has given extensive thought to the relationship between human rights and development, and particularly to the work of inter-governmental aid agencies. The main concept is that “...human rights and development are not distinct or separate spheres and, therefore, the question is not how to identify points of actual or potential intersection but to accept that development should be seen as a subset of human rights. The realisation of the importance of economic and social rights in the development process and the tendency of governments to

ignore steps to their full realisation have led us to look closely at the precise actions needed to realise these rights. An essential aspect of the Right to Development is its emphasis on the centrality of the human person as a subject of the development process.”

This approach does not believe that

- outside support can change the life of people in a sustainable way;
- the solution of every problem is outside support; or that
- exploiters at any level will easily loosen their grip on power.

Figure 1.3 shows the gradual changes in development paradigms over the past half a century. Some use the term ‘evolution of development approaches’. The reality is that if development approaches are viewed in a broad way from the Marshall Plan approach onwards, various changes can be noticed. The main message is that we need to look back at the activities that have been carried out in the past in the name of development.

The diagram presented here is one example of how to explain the paradigm shifts in development approaches. Other such diagrams can be made. However the **rights-based approach** must always be included in any model or diagram used. Moreover, it will be very helpful to explain Figure 1.3 (or a similar model) by analysing a real-life situation or particular context familiar to the participants. The list of characteristics under each approach can be made more extensive. It can also be clarified that there is no claim that the rights-based approach is the only valid approach for all situations, and that the other two approaches are worthless. Welfare and reform programmes are still active and required.

The objective of preparing the summary worksheet (see p.15) is to give this chapter in a nutshell. In addition, this matrix can be used for assessing the understanding of participants in different learning programmes. The matrix gives a summary of the content and associated questions included in this chapter.

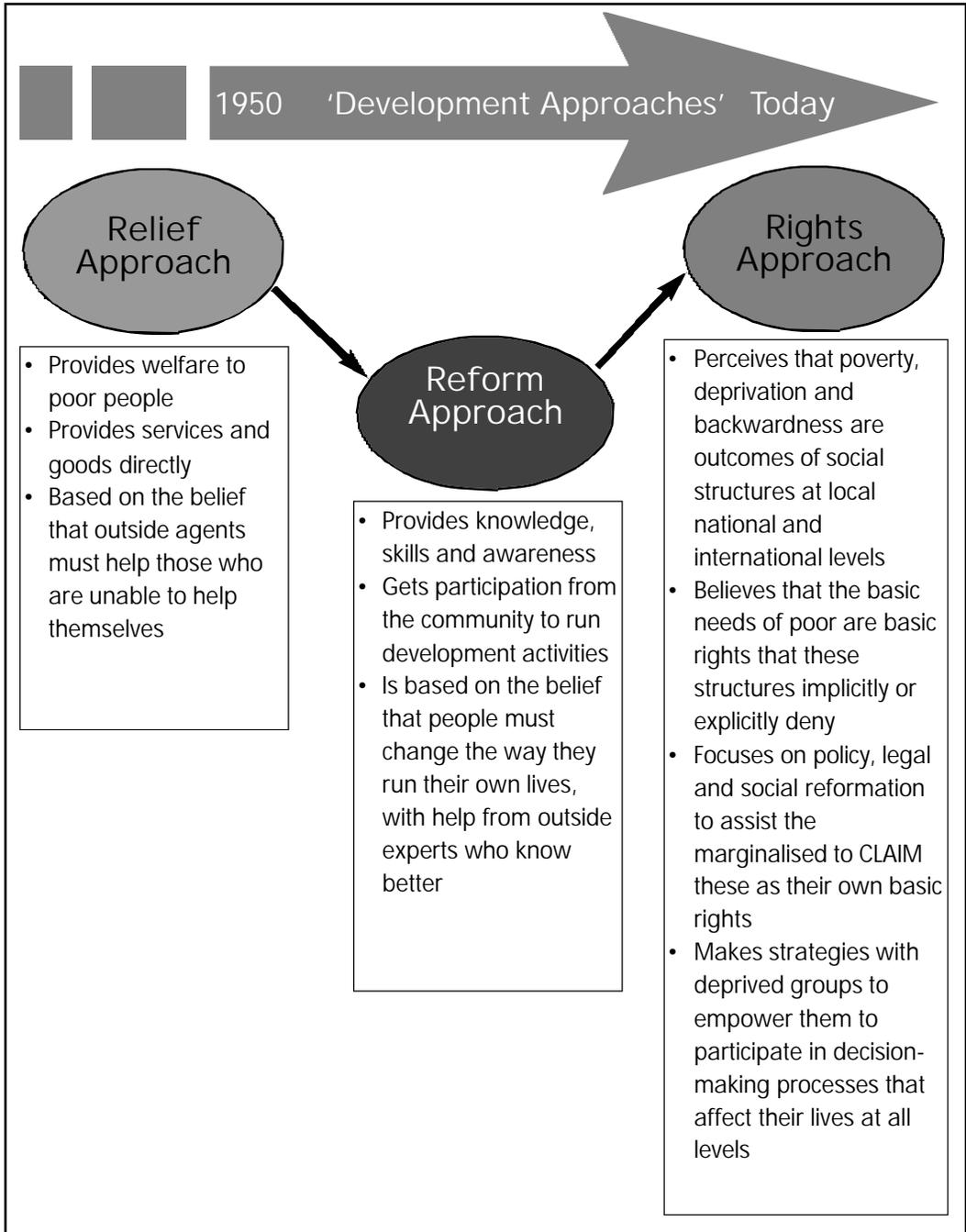


Figure 1.3: RBA and the development paradigm

Summary worksheet for introduction

Steps	Questions to explore	Your note
1. Concept of advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is advocacy in general? What are the definitions framed by different institutions? What are the core concepts of advocacy in the context of the mountains? • What are the myths of advocacy? Where do the demarcations lie between advocacy and other normal activities? 	
2. Purpose and objectives of advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the basic purpose of advocacy? What is the basic purpose of advocacy in the mountains? • What are the objectives of advocacy? • What are the connections between objectives in our own organisational context? 	
3. Prerequisites for advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are internal preparations needed before starting advocacy? What is the credibility an institution should have? Where is our own organisation in regard to the credibility checklist? • What could be the elaborated form of the checklist in its contextual basis? • What are the processes of assessing external environments? 	
4. Relation to the rights-based approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is rights-based approach? What are the differences between the needs-based and the rights-based approach? • What are the core thrusts of the rights-based approach? • Where are the connections of the rights-based approach in advocacy capacity building? • What are the features of the contemporary shifting of development approaches? What are the connections between the rights-based approach and advocacy in the changing paradigm? • What are the areas of advocacy in the changing paradigm of development approaches? 	

