

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Advocacy Programme

This workshop was the first regional-level activity of the new programme, 'Capacity Building of Community-based Organisations in Advocacy Strategies in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas'. The following chapter presents background information on the programme; as well as the goals, objectives, and preparation for the workshop.

Background to ICIMOD's Advocacy Programme

The idea for a regional programme for capacity building of community-based organisations (CBOs) in advocacy strategies in the HKH was conceived following ICIMOD's Medium-Term Action Plan (MTAP) for 2003 - 2007. This plan recognised the importance of social inputs for promoting governance in natural resources management.

In all HKH countries, natural resources and their use patterns are strongly linked to policy considerations. Social scientists can therefore play an important role in promoting local governance in natural resources management to ensure that the voice of the poor reaches the individuals and institutions responsible for making and carrying out policy decisions. The ideal approach of this programme would be to build the capabilities of CBOs in advocacy strategies in order to pave the way for policy makers to hear local voices. This section of the report explains the broad regional processes that provide the context in which this programme was conceived.

Mountain communities in the HKH are not completely unaffected by changes in livelihood patterns occurring in other parts of the world. These changes can bring prosperity to the mountain poor but can also lead to new challenges to their livelihoods. Globalisation is posing crucial challenges to the concept of decentralised governance. These challenges take the form of an erosion of cultural identity, loss of indigenous knowledge, and a widening of disparities and inequities. Increased pressure on natural resources and conflict over resource use are degrading mountain people's quality of life. During the last decade many of the world's mountain areas have seen serious conflict. A broad overview of mountain society indicates that CBOs

emerging in the mountains must be able to raise their voice on behalf of the poor in a professional manner.

Over the last ten years, ICIMOD has facilitated the process of institution building in the HKH region through various programmes. As a result, several new CBOs and non-government organisations (NGOs) are functioning in the region. The ultimate goal of these institutions is to address strategic issues of good governance in order to contribute to the poverty alleviation mission of the various national governments. To achieve this broad goal, a common focus of these institutions is on empowering their constituencies to undertake lawful advocacy to safeguard mountain people's basic rights.

To date, some of these institutions have already demonstrated their ability to provide a forum for debate on policies that directly or indirectly affect mountain people's livelihoods. Past experience shows that improved governance at the local level requires moving decision-making power closer to the people to better reflect local needs and priorities. One indicator of good governance in a society is people's satisfaction with services delivered by structures put in place by the state mechanism. The assumption is that government performance improves when citizens can raise their voices and demands systematically. As a side effect of this process, corruption cannot continue at the local level. This programme visualises a virtuous correlation existing between good governance and advocacy strategies.

Other lessons indicate that NGOs and CBOs can facilitate the process of decentralisation more effectively than any other institution at the grassroots' level. Federations, networks, and alliances of these institutions can make such processes even more effective. However, NGOs and CBOs have inadequate knowledge and skills in advocacy, particularly in the HKH region. Advocacy as such is termed, interpreted, and understood differently in different contexts. Given this existing reality, the Culture, Equity, Gender and Governance (CEGG) Programme aims to contribute to building sustainable mountain societies as a foundation of sustainable mountain development by enhancing the advocacy skills of CBOs.

Evolution of the Project Proposal

ICIMOD commissioned a short baseline study on the capacity of CBOs and NGOs in the HKH region, focusing mainly on their advocacy capacity. An independent professional carried out this study during 1998, which strongly recommended that ICIMOD undertake interventions in this sector to directly focus on the capacity building of CBOs working in the mountains. The study also identified certain pre-requisites for initiating capacity building processes in relation to advocacy. Considering those pre-requisites, four countries; Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan; were selected for the initial phase of this programme.

The programme already recognises that the capacity building of CBOs is a long process, and that this programme alone, with a duration of only three years, cannot

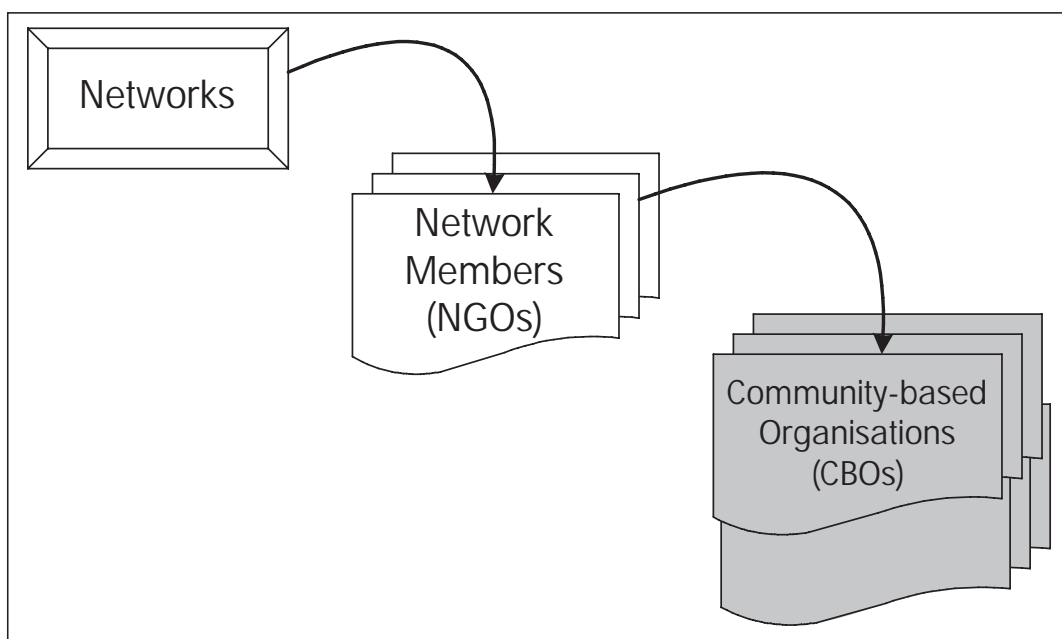
build the capacity of all CBOs and NGOs working in the mountains. Differentiating between NGOs and CBOs is also difficult since all NGOs in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal are registered under the Institution Registration Act, despite that fact that some NGOs are working as CBOs. Therefore, ICIMOD decided that it would be worthwhile to work closely with federations of these organisations in order to transfer the effects of the programme close to the grassroots' level, where small organisations are actually working with the poor. Whether they are NGOs or CBOs from legal point of view will remain a secondary consideration.

Strategies for Implementation

This is the first time that ICIMOD has implemented such a programme in the HKH. This programme could become the foundation on which future programme development processes can be built. Some of the strategies developed for this programme implementation are set out below.

Enhancing the Advocacy Capacity of Community-based Organisations

The capacity building of CBOs depends upon the contextual need. The aim of this programme is to enhance the capacity of CBOs to understand and develop advocacy skills so that they can raise their voice on behalf of the poor. The working context of CBOs determines the capacities they require most. Therefore, this programme is implemented through local partners and considers local contexts. Because of the region's social, cultural, and political diversity, each partner will need to develop its own specific tools and skills to work in a logical and professional manner. This programme has visualised an approach that begins from the general and narrows down to more specific and contextual skills and tools for advocacy.



Participatory Process of Framing Capacity Building Strategies

The participatory process is the main implementation strategy for guiding capacity building. The processes required to meet the programmes goal and objectives have been formulated in close consultation with a diversity of stakeholders who are working at the grassroots. These include representatives of networks, federations, NGOs, CBOs, and activists from the four programme countries who have been identified as potential partners for this programme. Future interaction programmes, case studies, and documentation will also be carried out, involving some of these potential institutions at different levels to encourage ownership of the programme.

Sharing Relevant Experiences among Community-based Organisations

The ultimate outcomes of this programme will contribute to improving people's lives through the sustainable management of common property resources. One programme strategy is to involve those who are most seriously affected by social, economic, and cultural discrimination in advocacy initiatives. Case studies from different contexts that bring to the fore relevant experiences of this type will be merged into training packages designed for different levels of advocacy training. The programme plans such 'cross-fertilisation' on a wide scale.

Collaborative Relationships for Capacity Building in Advocacy

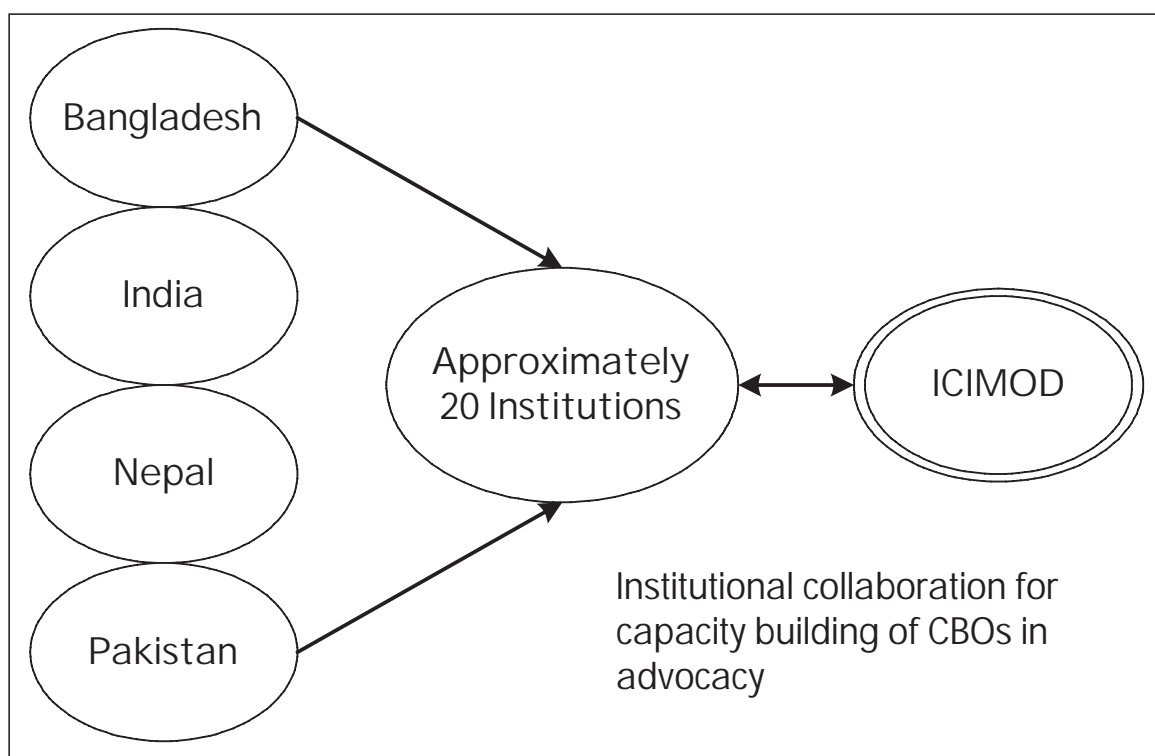
Advocacy in isolation does not produce useful results. The programme believes that networking and alliance building of like-minded organisations is part of the capacity building process. Therefore, a network of institutions and professionals committed to continuing collaboration is being established at the regional level. The assumption is that this kind of forum can work to enhance the advocacy skills needed to speak on behalf of the poor. Professionals from diverse backgrounds representing various networks and federations will be brought together to share and learn through discussion, case studies, and exchange programmes. Discussions with potential partner organisations have already begun in the region. Many of the institutions consulted during the preparatory phase of the programme are keen to incorporate this idea into their practical work situations. Support mechanisms to maintain this collaborative process beyond the life of the programme will also be developed by the time the programme concludes.

Preparatory Phase of the Project

The programme approach is divided into three broad phases: (1) Preparatory and Conceptual Phase; (2) Operational Phase; and (3) Review and Advocacy Phase. Each phase incorporates various activities, and implementation of each phase is to be carried out on the basis of achievements made during the preceding phase. Activities carried out during the preparatory phase are listed below.

- Visits and consultations with leading institutions in the four programme countries of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan

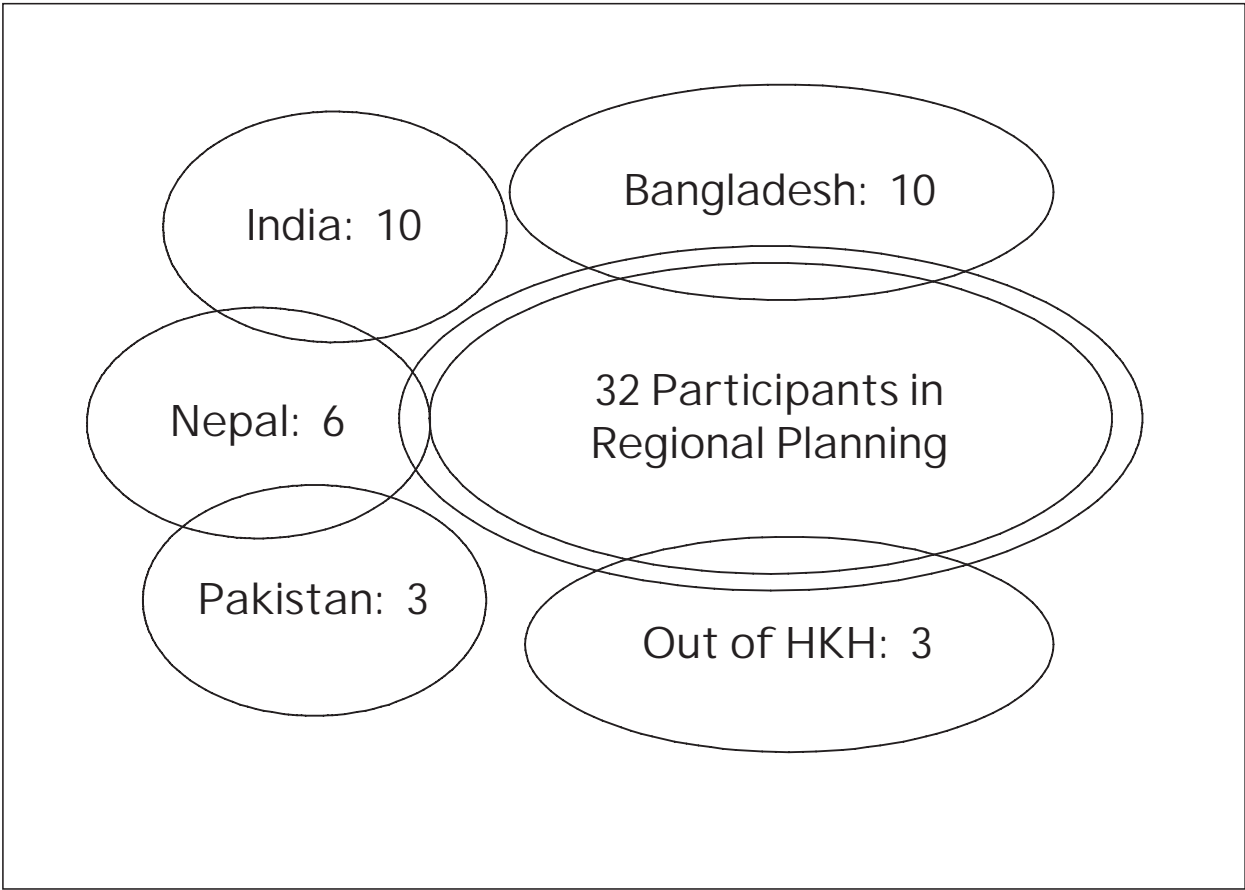
- An initial literature survey from different resource centres in India and Nepal
- Beginning the working draft of an annotated bibliography of available literature
- Identification of potential partner institutions in the four countries
- Holding a regional planning workshop with the participation of 35 potential partner organisations from the programme countries



The regional planning workshop was the final item of the programme's preparatory phase. Following interaction with potential partner institutions and resources persons, this workshop was designed to achieve two broad objectives: (a) to give participants the opportunity for intensive sharing of successful advocacy cases; and (b) to finalise up-coming programme activities. Detailed objectives of the planning workshop were:

- to discuss key advocacy concepts and definitions;
- to share tools and guidelines for planning advocacy initiatives;
- to discuss skills and tactics for implementing advocacy initiatives;
- to present and discuss advocacy cases from different countries and to learn from past experience;
- to identify possible advocacy issues; and
- to draft an action plan for FY 2004 and 2005 that would provide momentum to advocacy capacity building programmes.

Individuals invited to this workshop were primarily members of potential partner organisations from the HKH region, with some resource persons being invited from outside the region. The selection of workshop participants was based on their interest in working on advocacy initiatives. Another parameter of selection was the credibility



Participation in the workshop

they had established among their local constituencies. Approximately 40 institutions were invited to the workshop.

Initially, the planning workshop was scheduled to be held in Kathmandu from 2 to 5 September 2003. An unexpected security situation in Nepal just three days before the workshop required changing the venue to Bangladesh and postponing it until November. However, the workshop was successfully held in Chittagong, Bangladesh from 3 to 6 November 2003. Although the workshop achieved all of its objectives, four participants from India were unable to obtain visas for Bangladesh.