

## **The need for advocacy in PCI and PGRE**

### *What is advocacy?*

*Advocacy* is public action directed towards wider social change. It is about changing the policies, practices, attitudes, positions, or programs of governing institutions within the public and private sectors that have a negative impact. The co-director of the Advocacy Institute says, "To be meaningful, advocacy must be value based. It must be social, economic and political justice oriented." In most cases, government is still resisting the advocacy role being assumed by civil society.

### *Why advocacy?*

Advocacy is not just another fad of development discourse; it is, rather, important to the sustainability of development work as well as policies. For the basic reason that for development organizations to have an effect, there needs to be a better understanding of the policies and practices of powerful development actors and how these can be changed in ways that benefit the large groups of poor farmers in their working areas. It is very important to recognize the importance of challenging deep-rooted and sustained inequality and injustice. In the age of globalization, policies are increasingly influenced by multinational and transnational corporations (MNCs/TNCs), which are not bound by rights-related laws and regulations. To have an influence at the policy level, linkages between operational work and advocacy should be developed, strengthening civil groups and alliances; lobbying decision makers directly; campaigning, promoting, and facilitating participation in research; building coalitions; and engaging the media.

Society is the common element that supports advocacy, with advocacy holding governing institutions to account on the behalf of citizens. There must be mechanisms to support nonrestrictive and robust debate on policy issues, procedures to resist harassment from authorities, and transparency in government. Civil organizations are increasingly expanding their activities beyond the provision of traditional services to include advocacy. Clear objectives, targets, methods or tactics, and allies are very basic elements of advocacy.

In the context of participatory plant breeding (PPB) and PGRE, advocacy can support communities in demanding their rights in germplasm conservation, in having an input when government is formulating policies, in making the voice of the powerless heard when plant-breeding programs/plans are developed, and in bringing the promises to the ground.

## **Advocacy in ActionAid Nepal**

ActionAid Nepal's definition of advocacy is

*a process, a deliberate, systematic and organised way of influencing public policy, public attitudes and policy practice in order to either change, maintain, implement or formulate new or alternative policies in favour of the poorest and most disadvantaged people.*

It is a set of coherent actions designed to introduce, influence, and change policies, practices, attitudes, and decisions for a just and equitable world. With this basic principle, ActionAid launched the International Food Rights Campaign to safeguard the right of poor people to food. The campaign aims to ensure that international agricultural trade benefits the poor and protects farmer's rights to seed and plant resources.

As biodiversity is owned by the community, there is an urgent need to include farmers in crop improvement and genetic resource enhancement. The issue of biodiversity conservation is rooted at the grass-roots level, which needs program linkage to be developed between operational work and advocacy. Therefore, ActionAid Nepal believes in strengthening the capacity of local organizations working at the grass roots to develop macro-micro linkages and, hence, to tackle the root causes of poverty, and it works to achieve this end.

## **Threat of the trade related intellectual property rights (TRIPs) agreement to the crop-improvement process and PGRE**

The TRIPs agreement provides comprehensive rules and standards for the protection of intellectual property. Under this agreement, Article 27.3 (b) Patenting on Life Forms is a major threat for participatory plant breeding. It allows MNCs/TNCs to extend their control over the resources required to produce food in the South, as well as providing means to gain rights over many traditional plants growing in the South. This completely ignores rights of indigenous farmers to control and maintain the germplasm that fits in their lifestyles. There is a belief that TRIPs will have severe consequences for farmers in the South, that they will no longer be able to research, use, or exchange seeds and may lose ownership over traditional varieties of plants as well. Therefore, there is an urgent need to work on advocacy for participatory plant breeding, which preserves the rights of the indigenous farming community.

## **Where does the word *participation* fit in growing genetic engineering technology?**

In the global trend of technology development, genetic engineering plays a crucial role in crop and or variety development. This kind of sophisticated technology is promoted by profit-oriented MNCs/TNCs and is limited to the laboratory. Therefore, the participation of farmers in this process is only a dream, and will remain so. If we are advocating participatory plant breeding, we must consider how we can play our role.

## **Case studies**

The general Kiranti (Tibeto-Burman group) myth about the paddy crop invention in Khotang is that the ancestor, Khokchilipu, enjoyed a pot of rice cooked by his elder sisters, Nana Toma and Nana Khema, the cotton weavers, and he unfortunately trod on the fire-stick while dancing in the jolly mood and overturned the pot of rice. Another myth from Dhumi Rai is the story of an irritable king who had the habit of eating one *pathi* (approximately 4 kg) of rice, which had to be dehusked by nails. If this was not done properly, the cook was severely punished. These myths clearly show that the people of Khotang have grown a paddy crop since time immemorial.

In the case of Jajarkot, it is known that rice has been grown for about 110 years, and was brought from neighboring districts by the people of Jajarkot when they migrated. *Patle*, *mehel*, *kaumaro*, and *dotelo* are the main local varieties grown in the area.

Rice is grown as major crop in both Jajarkot and Khotang, especially in the less steep irrigated lowlands. It is strongly related to the eating habits of the local people.

### **Gender dimension**

**Seed choice.** Seed is the basis for the next harvest. Farmers generally use seeds they have saved themselves. Family members discuss on selection of crop, seed, and land to grow it on, but the ultimate decision goes to the father or male head of the household. Women have a suggestive voice rather than an influencing one.

**Nursery and plantation.** For seed sowing, it is common practice in Jajarkot to soak the seeds in water for about four days and then to keep them in a bamboo basket before sowing in the nursery. In the process of preparing the nursery bed, men do the initial plowing but the rest of the job is mainly done by women.

**Harvesting.** Men and women are equally involve in harvesting, collecting, and carrying the paddy from field to threshing floor. Threshing is mainly the job of men with some assistance from women. After threshing, the job of mass cleaning is done by men but fine cleaning is done by women.

**Seed selection.** There are two main methods of seed selection.

In most cases, the paddy is harvested after it is fully ripe. Then the bunch of paddy will be threshed in the threshing floor once. The first harvest is then collected and kept for seed. The general reason is that the first harvest will have bold and healthy grains, which is good for seed. The farmers believe that “*jasto biuko ustai jiu*” (meaning, healthy seeds give healthy plants). Men perform this process, which requires more physical work. Then afterwards, the women collect the rest and finish the job.

The other method is where, after three or four years of harvest, the farmers choose the spikes in the field from healthy plants. The main reason is to get pure seeds. This method is used when the farmers realize the seed is not pure and the crops are not giving good harvests. This job is more or less done exclusively by women, who are very skillful and expert and have the patience for the tedious nature of the job. This clearly shows the relationship of power and skill with the division of labor.

The reason seed is selected by women is related to skill. There is a common saying that if the selected seed is not good enough, it means the women of that house are lazy and *allachhini* (meaning, women who have the greatest misfortune).

There is another method of seed conservation, which is very much tied up with the local culture. The farmers collect spikes that have ripened early and make a bunch, which is offered to the departed ancestors (*pitri*). This offering is not allowed for home consumption. When there is a famine and no seeds are available, the offerings can be used as seed to get the next harvest.

**Postharvest storage.** In most cases, all postharvest work is the exclusive job of women. They are responsible for cleaning and storing the harvest. During storage, the bold, ripe seeds are kept in local bins with *titepati* and cow urine.

### **Marketing**

In the case of Khotang, the farmers generally keep whatever seed they need for the next season and use the seed accordingly. If there is any problem regarding the stored seed, they can exchange or barter seed with relatives or neighbors. The farmers sell paddy in the form of grain, not seed, in the market. Therefore, there is no influence from hybrid seed in the area.

In Jajarkot also, farmers are mostly dependent on internal sources of seed within the village. The Jajarkot Permaculture Program (JPP) has introduced some of rice varieties such as *machhapuchhre*

3, *chhomrong* and *badagaunle*. In addition, some of the new varieties such as the *radha* series and *mansuli*, have been introduced from district agriculture development. The JPP is working on advocacy in the promotion of indigenous seeds and technologies, and as a result, some of groups boycott the introduction of hybrid seed; they are more curious and alert about the value of local seeds and germplasm.

### **Cultural significance**

In the Rai culture, rice must be offered to the departed ancestors. The local faith healers offer rice to chicks before sacrificing them as part of healing ceremonies. This shows the relationship between the culture and rice growing in the area.

In Jajarkot, the farmers celebrate *Harelo* on the third and fourth Sundays of Shrawan (August). During this festival, they spray cow urine by the twigs of *titepati* (*Artemisia vulgaris*) and worship the *Harelo* god with *bhojpatra* and pieces of red and white cloth.

Another interesting activity is a visit to a *Jhan* temple by pilgrims every five years during night of the full moon of *Paush* (Jan/Feb). There is a big trench below the ground where the pilgrims keep the rice grains they offered to the god. The grains replaced every five years to coincide with this celebration, so every five years there are new ones. When there is a famine and all the seeds stored in the house have been used for consumption, this store is opened and the stored grain is used for seed.

The first harvest is generally taken when there is *sait* (a good moment). The day of first consumption is considered a special day, when relatives gather and eat delicious foods. At the start of that occasion, the harvest is first offered to the god, and this offering is later used for seed if needed.

### **The role of intervening organizations**

JPP has introduced a permaculture philosophy: making the earth live and grow on its own, with all bio-organisms surviving their full cycle. JPP has also encouraged farmers to use indigenous methods of farming and caring for nature. They have provided information on using green manure, on the use of skin-fermented water to control blast, and on patterns of crop rotation. JPP organized a farmers' level workshop on "Impact of Genetic Engineering on Indigenous Knowledge and Seeds" to raise awareness about the issues of biodiversity conservation. Now some of the women farmers' groups have dropped out of the commercial vegetable production group, which advocates the use of external inputs for agricultural production. The farmers have also boycotted the introduction of hybrid seeds in two of the village development committees. This means that farmers are able to make well-informed decisions if they have access to the right information. This will create a self-sustaining process among the farmers themselves, as well as helping to promote local biodiversity, in which they have the expertise of generations. Now Jana Sewa Samaj, a nongovernmental organization working in the Khotang district is trying to replicate the JPP model in the eastern hills of Nepal.

### **Conclusions**

The case studies reveal that the indigenous community continues to manage plant breeding and that PGRE is most common in both case-study areas. Neither distinct formal-led nor farmer-led plant-breeding practices are common. Now such community-managed plant-breeding processes