Networking: Taking Advocacy to the Next Level*

Your campaign strategy may involve linking up with other organizations that carry a similar advocacy. Building critical mass for your campaign can spell the difference between success and failure.

Why Form Networks?

Networks are formed for the following objectives:

⇨ To address social change;
⇨ To promote institutional sustainability;
⇨ To promote sharing of resources;
⇨ To gain higher profile for programs of research, advocacy and action;
⇨ To achieve greater administrative efficiency; and
⇨ To mobilize public interest on issues.

What Makes Good Networks?

Networks have the following characteristics:

⇨ Provide venues for social interaction;
⇨ Flexible, not rigid institutions, not hierarchical/ bureaucratic;
⇨ Based on interpersonal commitment, shared goals;
⇨ Build on diversity and respects independence of members;
⇨ Have many "leaders"; networks move according to shared values and agreed strategies, rather than by specific decisions.

Successful networks are characterized by:

⇨ Flexible internal management;
⇨ A sense of "ownership" – a sense of members working *within* a network, and not *for* it;
⇨ Diversity;
⇨ Shared agreement, clear goals and focus;
⇨ Ability to manage change; and
⇨ Continuity of membership, networking tools (negotiation, management).

Why Do Networks Fail?

Networks fail when they:

⇨ Become donor-driven;
⇨ Impose too much control over members;
⇨ Undergo frequent changes in members and staff; and
⇨ Are burdened by complicated, and multiple products and processes.

The Cost of Joining Networks

Organizations that become part of networks take the following risks:

⇨ Additional costs;
⇨ Donor expectations of clear, immediate impact;
⇨ High labor requirements;
⇨ Exclusivity: members wanting to corner resources;
⇨ Taking too broad a focus in order to accommodate members;
⇨ Formation of cliques;
⇨ Center-to-member orientation, rather than the other way around;
⇨ Perception of networks chasing too few people, organizations;
⇨ Setting of standards, which stunts innovation; and
⇨ Distortion of local agendas.

Lessons in Networking

The following lessons have been culled from various experiences of networking:

⇨ Beyond institutional, it is important not to forget person-to-person interaction;
⇨ Always share credit, praise and achievements;
⇨ Build networks around common goals, tasks
⇨ Recognize the central role of information and communication;
⇨ Have strong secretariats;
⇨ Keep a direct "window to the ground";
⇨ Keep linkages non-exclusive;
⇨ Build network values and a culture of working together; and
⇨ When structuring networks, build upon natural groupings. ∎

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* Excerpted from a presentation by ANTONIO B. QUIZON, former ANGOC executive director and current ANGOC boardmember

CARRD's INTER-AGENCY DIALOGUE
Promoting Collective Responsibility and Transparency

In 2005, when the Center for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (CARRD) decided to expand its Land Tenure Improvement (LTI) program in the Visayas, Philippines, it meant intensifying its tripartism strategy to promote partnership among major CARP implementers: NGOs, people's organizations (POs), and the government.

CARRD then decided to institutionalize the Inter-Agency Dialogues (IAD). This tool brings together the regional/provincial/municipal offices of Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Environment and Natural Resources - City Environment and Natural Resources (DENR-CENRO), Land Bank of the Philippines – Agrarian Operations Chief (LBP-AOC), Local Chief Executive, Municipal Assessor/Treasurer, the concerned landowner and the agrarian reform beneficiaries in a formal but non-intimidating venue to thresh out LTI-related issues. A Memorandum of Agreement among these stakeholders was executed to formalize the action.

The IAD has become an effective tool in facilitating CARRD's LTI program. The reason for this is that among others, it INFORMS.

In - Informative dialogue. CARP implementing agencies report to Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) on-site regarding problems encountered and matters arising during the IAD process. Appropriate measures and concrete actions are decided and immediately undertaken, such as conducting the final survey for the issuance of individual titles by DAR and an ocular inspection by the Municipal Assessor's office to validate actual land use or conduct land tax survey.

F - Fosters transparency and accountability among CARP implementing agencies and LGUs.

O - One-stop shop. The IAD provides ARBs, land owners and the concerned agencies a venue to provide updates, voice out grievances and other related matters.

R - A Relationship that is more harmonious is developed among the different stakeholders.

M - Monitoring and evaluation of the status of the LTI process from land acquisition to distribution are undertaken. The agreed upon measures or actions are followed up through meetings and/or lobbying for the subsequent IAD.

S - Synchronizes the plans and operations of the various implementing agencies especially DAR and Land Bank in land distribution information schedule.

- By Edwin Nerva, Executive Director, Center for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (CARRD)

ALRD's International Advocacy Campaign

Sometimes, pressure from within a country is not enough. International pressure can help the advocacy campaign influence policy makers in establishing land rights for the poor, implying the need to build effective international linkages.

The Bangladesh government signed the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord in 1997 to end two decades of insurgency and establish permanent peace in the region. Indigenous peoples in the CHT were promised, among others: land rights; the revival of their cultural identities; rehabilitation of internally displaced people and repatriated refugees; withdrawal of the military from the CHT, excluding permanent military establishments; self-government through regional and district councils; and the establishment of a Land Commission to arbitrate on land ownership issues.

Though the CHT Peace Accord showed great promise, implementation has stalled, without meaningful steps taken on key peace and confidence building initiatives. Human rights violations –arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, torture, rape, killings, attacks, harassment, religious persecution, and lack of access to socio-economic rights and freedom of expression – have persisted.

Aware of the critical need to bring the CHT issues to international attention by exposing ongoing human rights violations, including land alienation, the Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD) re-established the CHT Commission (CHTC) of 1990-2001. The CHTC was originally set up by the Amsterdam-based Organising Committee CHT Campaign (OCCHTC) and the Copenhagen-based International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA). The reconstituted CHTC is an independent human rights watchdog that aims to put pressure on the government to implement the Peace Accord with international support and help build confidence with IPs in the CHT, and comprises eleven members from Bangladesh and other countries like Denmark, Japan, Philippines, Sweden, the UK, and the USA. ALRD hosts the national secretariat of CHTC. These members represent prominent institutions such as the British House of Lords and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Since then, the CHTC has organized missions to Bangladesh, holding meetings with the new government led by the Awami League, the Prime Minister, Attorney General, Army Chief, MPs, political parties, civil society representatives, and other important stakeholders. Moreover, the CHTC has facilitated peace building initiatives through mediation dialogues on pertinent issues between the government and CHT peoples. ALRD and the CHTC, networking with national and international actors and donors, seek to step up the pressure on the Bangladesh government towards full-scale implementation of the Peace Accord once and for all.

- By Rowshan Jahan Moni, Deputy Director, ALRD