

Part 1

ANGOC's Strategic Interventions in Sustainable Agriculture, 2004-2010



ANGOC celebrated its 25th year anniversary in 2004. It was also a time for internal reflection and a search for its relevance and effectiveness.

In its General Assembly in July 2004, ANGOC reaffirmed its vision to build vibrant and empowered rural communities that can henceforth chart their own paths of development. The mission and goals remain the same. And yet, the development context has changed. The challenges are far more complex than what they used to be. The food that we eat, normally planted in the backyard, has become a commodity of international trade. Seeds that were formerly passed on from generation to generation now come with royalties. Meanwhile, poverty and hunger continue to plague Asian rural communities.

This policy paper on sustainable agriculture is part of the process of ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of ANGOC's work. It is intended to provide recommendations on how ANGOC should position itself in the region given emerging trends and developments.

The paper starts off with an overview of poverty in Asia and the emerging development trends affecting rural communities. It goes on to discuss how ANGOC's sustainable agriculture (SA) program has responded to these developments. Finally, it outlines some strategic recommendations where ANGOC may be able to contribute to agricultural and rural development at the regional level.

POVERTY IN ASIA

Asia is home to roughly three-fourths of the total number of poor people in the world. Forty-four percent are in South Asia while 24 per cent are in East Asia. South Asia remains one of the poorest regions – with one out of three South Asians lacking access to improved sanitation; one out of four being chronically hungry; one out of five children out of primary school; and one of every 10 children dying before the age of five.

East Asia has fared better. The region's economy grew by almost six per cent a year in the 1990s. Despite the severe financial crisis that hit the region in 1997-98, poverty fell by about 15 percentage points. China has been pivotal to the region's success.

Rural in character

Poverty in Asia is basically a rural problem. In all major countries in the region, between 80 and 90 per cent of the poor live in rural areas. The head count ratio is also significantly higher for rural areas in all of these countries. This is a mirror reflection of the global situation where approximately 75 per cent of the absolute poor in developing countries live in rural areas (CIDA, 2002).

The most common feature of Asia's rural poor is landlessness or limited access to productive land. The major subgroups of rural poor are the landless marginal farmers and tenants, indigenous peoples and minority castes, and internally displaced persons. Among the rural poor, rural women and female-headed households are particularly prone to acute poverty. Rural women generally have fewer employment opportunities, fewer marketable skills and less access to training (ADB, 2002).

Rising inequality

Poverty in Asia reflects the rising inequality in the world. Though difficult to measure, such inequality is indicated by some disturbing facts. For example, "the richest five per cent of the world's people receive 114 times the income of the poorest five per cent". Similarly, "the 25 million richest Americans have as much income as almost two billion of the world's poorest people".

Addressing income inequality is essential for two reasons. First, by reducing inequality, income opportunities increase for as many

people as possible. Second, high inequality breeds social friction and violence. By reducing income inequality, peace and development would have a better chance of prospering.

GLOBAL TRENDS AFFECTING RURAL COMMUNITIES

Declining investments in agriculture

In the last decade, there has been a clear downward trend in investments in agriculture, both in Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows from bilateral and multilateral donors and in public spending by developing countries in some regions (CIDA, 2002). Investment data from the World Bank (WB) show that since the early 1980s, agriculture sector approvals have declined continuously from a little less than US\$5 billion to around US\$ 2 billion in 2000. As a percentage of Bank lending, it has declined from around 30 per cent in the early 1980s to less than 10 per cent in 2000.

Some of the reasons suggested for the overall downward investment trend in agriculture are: poor performance of the economies of developed and developing countries; structural adjustment programs that required cuts in public sector spending, including for agricultural services; the debt crisis facing developing countries which limit their ability to invest in rural infrastructure and services; and the growing demand for emergency aid. Another contributing factor might have been the perception by some donor countries that global food supplies were adequate to meet the global demand, and their decision thereby to shift resources away from the agricultural sector (CIDA, 2002).

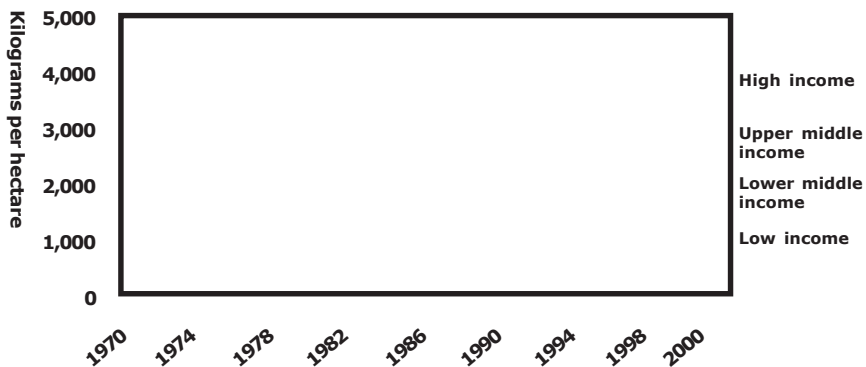
These are understandable if the world is broke but if governments can spend US\$ 25 billion on the war on Iraq in a few weeks, then one begins to question the sense of priority of governments.

Failure of the Green Revolution to reach the rural poor

The increase of productivity from the Green Revolution has benefited developed countries and favorable regions of developing countries. Unfortunately, these yield increases have not reached the rural poor. Data from the WB show that the productivity of poor farmers has not substantially increased in the last 30 years.

Sustainable Agriculture in Asia:

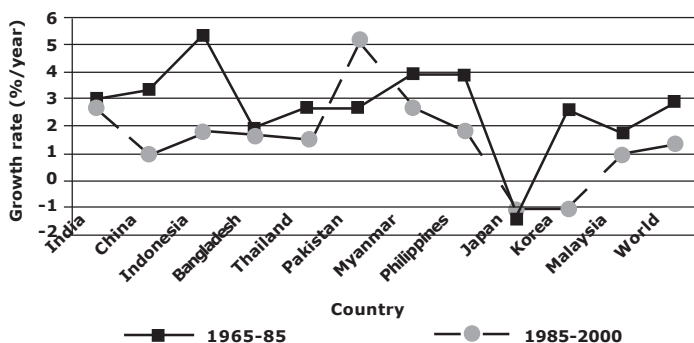
Prospects for Marketing and Promotion of Organic Products



Source: World Bank, 2002

Figure 1: Different yield increases on various income groups (1970-2000)

The Green Revolution requires substantial external inputs, such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Unfortunately, many governments lacked the capacity to provide the needed support services, such as credit and technical assistance, that are critical to pursuing such an approach. Furthermore, while the technology provided yield increases at the start, these proved to be unsustainable in the long term. NGOs criticized the narrow approach of relying mainly on Green Revolution technologies, which have been shown to be environmentally unsustainable and discriminatory to resource-poor farmers.



Source: FAO, FAOSTAT database, Dec. 2000

Figure 2. Rice production growth rates in selected Asian countries, 1965-2000

Inclusion of agriculture in international trade

The Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) under the World Trade Organization (WTO) aimed to facilitate the process of promoting the freer flow of agricultural products among countries. Governments committed to remove quotas, subsidies and tariffs over a period of time. It is envisioned that with the free flow of agricultural products, greater efficiency will be achieved in the agriculture sector that would eventually benefit farmers and rural communities.

Unfortunately, the current agreement and how it has been implemented thus far has favored developed countries to the detriment of developing countries. Agriculture in developed countries continues to be heavily subsidized, allowing them to market their products at cheaper prices. Moreover, trade barriers are still in place restricting the flow of agricultural products, especially those coming from developing countries.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Report 2002¹, international trade rules have worked against the economic interests of developing countries. On average, developed country tariffs on imports from developing countries are four times those on imports from other developed countries. In addition, countries that belong to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) spend about \$1 billion a day in domestic agricultural subsidies — more than six times what they spend on official development assistance for developing countries.²

Area of Operation	Subsidy per farmer (US\$)	Subsidy per hectare of agricultural land (US\$)	Average tariffs on agricultural imports	Agricultural export subsidies
European Union	16,000	680	30%	Yes
USA	20,000	120	10%	Export credit
Japan	23,000	9706	50%	No

Source: Balisacan, 2003

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The Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) estimates that continuing protectionist measures by developed nations result in an annual \$700 billion income loss for the world’s poorest countries.³ This phenomenon is severely undermining the ability of many of the rural communities to feed themselves.

The last rounds of negotiations to correct the imbalance have failed. There has been talk of scrapping the AoA but at this stage this is highly improbable. Most likely, countries will continue to negotiate until a fairer trade agreement is reached.

Privatization of agricultural technologies

The new trade agreement also encompasses a far broader range of issues beyond export and import of agricultural products, such as the trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPs). With TRIPs and the development in genetic engineering, it is now easier to claim ownership of agricultural and natural resources, including traditional practices and indigenous knowledge. Even seeds that have been propagated by farmers for hundreds of years are now in danger of being privatized. As an indication of this development, the number of annual patent applications under the Patent Cooperation Treaty has increased from around 15,000 in 1990 to over 76,000 in 1999 (Figure 3).

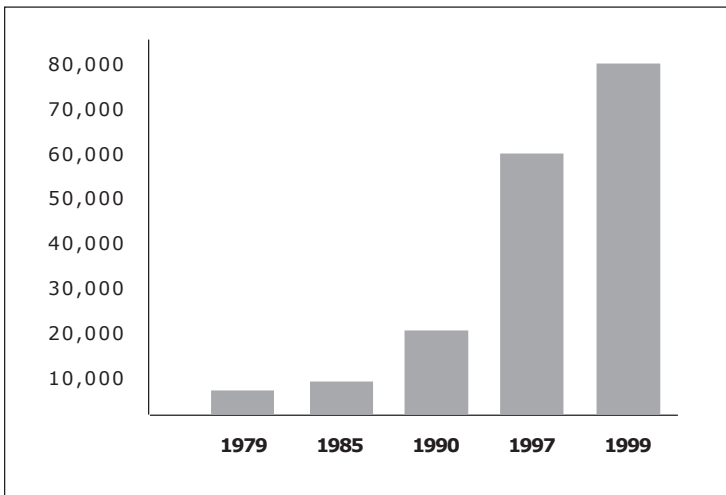


Fig. 3. Patent applications per annum under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT), HDR 1999

Most of the applications and current patent holders are private corporations. In its HRD 2000, UNDP estimates that 90 per cent of the patents related to high technologies are held by global enterprises. This is validated by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), which estimated that 90 per cent of all cross-border licensing payments and 70 per cent of all licensing fees are made between subsidiaries of the same parent transnationals⁴.

Re-prioritizing of agriculture

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted by 147 heads of State and Government on September 2000 in New York, calls for the reduction by half by the year 2015 of the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one dollar a day. It also targets to reduce by half the number of hungry people by 2015. This call comes at a time when more than one billion people suffer from the abject and dehumanizing condition of extreme poverty. The urgency and gravity of the call ring louder in Asia where around two-thirds of the world's poor resides.

In that Summit, the world leaders also committed to reduce the number of people who cannot afford the cost of safe drinking water, and to ensure that children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Since the greater number of poor people live in the rural areas and are dependent on agriculture, governments and intergovernmental organizations are forced to revisit their involvement in agriculture. The WB and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have therefore come out with new policy papers on agriculture. Some bilateral agencies, such as DFID and CIDA, are also reviving their agriculture programs. Hopefully, all these papers and discussions would result in bigger budget allotments for agriculture. The greater challenge, however, is to convince these institutions to incorporate sustainable agriculture into their programs.

Shifting focus of SA programs of Asian NGOs

Many of the programs of NGOs have emphasized the ecological dimension of sustainable agriculture. Given the influence of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, they have tried to incorporate environmental sustainability in their development

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interventions. A substantial number of these programs have addressed the negative environmental impact of the Green Revolution technologies.

At the forefront of these programs is the campaign to reduce the use of chemical pesticides which have been proven to pollute the environment and to be detrimental to human health. Soil fertility management has also become an important focus given the continuing decline in yield despite the continued application of inorganic fertilizers. Similarly, NGOs have promoted biodiversity through diversification of crops and the integration of livestock in the farming systems to reduce the external threats brought about by monoculture.

Recently, however, there has been a shift of emphasis among NGOs involved in sustainable agriculture. More than the environmental impact, NGOs are focusing on the equity dimension of sustainable agriculture. The shift can be attributed to a number of factors, including the inclusion of agriculture in international trade and the privatization of agricultural technologies.

A major contributing factor is the increasing poverty in the rural areas despite technological advances in agriculture. NGOs argue that the sustainability of farming and rural communities is equally, if not more, important than environmental sustainability.

ANGOC's SA Program

ANGOC's sustainable agriculture program was instituted in 1994 following the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The Summit provided an international mandate to pursue, among others, a more sustainable and equitable agriculture as embodied in Chapter 14 of Agenda 21. It also recognized the need to build up food security.

In 1998 ANGOC embarked on an initiative called the **200-Village Project**. The Project assessed food security at the household and community level as the basis for community-level planning and action. Key indicators include land tenure and access to food, purchasing power, sustainability of agricultural practices and community participation. The Project is now being implemented in 10 countries at varying stages, covering 5,640 households in 188 Asian villages.

The results of the Project's baseline survey in five Asian countries showed that there is a positive correlation between food security and agricultural productivity. However, shifting to high input agriculture proved insufficient in ensuring food security, especially for resource-poor farmers. The survey revealed that 37 per cent of the farming households who have shifted to high input agriculture are food insecure. This finding is alarming considering that these are the better off farmers who have the capacity to buy external inputs.

These findings confirmed ANGO's strategy in advocating for a more sustainable farming system that would ensure household food needs. ANGO's premise is that sustainable food production is best achieved by promoting a form of agriculture that raises farm productivity and diversity while keeping external inputs to a minimum and if possible, sourcing them locally (See Annex 1).

ANGO reconfirmed this mandate in its General Assembly of July 2004 and endorsed sustainable agriculture as one of the thematic areas in its goal of *promoting empowerment of Asian rural communities to attain food security and reduced poverty*.

In the last 10 years of program implementation, much has been accomplished. The first five years focused on articulating the agenda of Asian rural communities on sustainable agricultural development. The latter half emphasized the promotion of these agenda with governments and international organizations. As a program strategy, however, the interplay of these two components has always been there together with capacity building of NGOs and local partners.

Articulation of SA agenda

Three elements may be identified in the ANGO process of articulating and defining the community agenda on sustainable agriculture: broadening the SA constituency, facilitating exchanges among SA practitioners and documenting SA initiatives.

I. Broadening the SA constituency

ANGO adopts a broad definition of sustainable agriculture⁵ and emphasizes not only the ecology but also the equity dimension in its program (See also Annex 2). This emanates from the strong background of ANGO on agrarian reform and

its advocacy for equitable access to productive resources. By taking this perspective, ANGOC was able to link environmental and developmental NGOs in support of sustainable agriculture. This linkage broadened the constituency of NGOs under sustainable agriculture. It provided a common framework whereby various concerns such as technological innovations, access to productive resources and distribution of goods can be assessed and linked under a common program. It may have invited debates on the definition of sustainable agriculture but the process itself clarified many concepts and deepened the understanding of sustainable development in general.

II. Facilitating exchanges among SA practitioners



The richness of indigenous knowledge of rural communities has remained untapped and unshared. Research by formal institutions involving these communities have been extractive in nature and are intended more towards developing modern technologies. As an alternative, ANGOC initiated a number of farmer exchanges among Asian rural communities. These exchanges facilitated sharing of knowledge as well as building of confidence among the participants. These processes also clarified some of the common challenges faced by these communities brought about by external factors beyond their individual control.

III. Documenting SA initiatives

Study tours and farmer exchanges have been very effective but quite expensive. To complement this initiative, ANGOC conducted a documentation of community experiences. These case studies were processed and analyzed. Some of them were published. Some became part of bigger studies while others were disseminated in ANGOC's magazine *Lok Niti*.

In 1996, ANGOC published the Resource Book Series on Sustainable Agriculture in Asia. It came in three volumes: Assessment of Community Initiatives in Alternative Agriculture Systems (Volume 1); Directory of Organizations in Asia (Volume 2); and Manual on Field Documentation (Volume 3). Furthermore, on the occasion of its 20th Anniversary, ANGOC

published in 1999 the Monograph Series on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security. These documentations serve also as major inputs for ANGOC to formulate position papers and statements in its advocacy work.

Promoting SA with governments and international organizations

One of the major contributions of ANGOC to its members and local partners is its engagement with governments and international organizations. This allowed ANGOC to access information on regional and international developments and to pass these on to its members and partners. It also opened up opportunities for engagement in policy discussions.

Over the years, ANGOC has engaged UN institutions particularly the FAO, UNDP and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on agriculture and rural development issues. It also participated in campaigns with international finance institutions, such as the ADB and the WB. Regular mechanisms for policy dialogue have been established. Recently, it also engaged international research institutions under the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) and the Asia Pacific Association of Agriculture Research Institutions (APAARI).

Promoting sustainable agriculture took on a three-step process for ANGOC: (1) formulation of position papers, statements and other policy documents; (2) consultation with NGOs at the national and regional levels; and (3) policy dialogue with government and international organizations.

I. Drafting policy recommendations

Based on consultations with local partners and field documentations, major policy constraints are identified and policy options are forwarded. Normally opportunities for discussions with policy makers are not solely focused on sustainable agriculture and therefore would have to be incorporated with other themes. In a way, this process improved the policy recommendations as these are integrated into broader agenda.

ANGOC learned the skill of translating community experiences into policy recommendations. Writing policy recommendations requires an understanding of the language of policy makers as

well as imbibing the concerns of rural communities. It has become necessary for ANGO C to regularly renew its acquaintance with the communities to capture the essence of on the ground realities. It is partly because of this that ANGO C adopted the strategy it calls "macro-micro linkage".

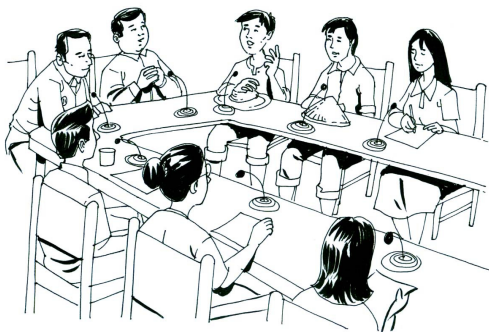
II. Consensus building among NGOs

In its attempt to build consensus among NGOs, ANGO C has convened numerous regional consultations. The first Asia-wide forum of agriculture experts from academe, governments and NGOs/POs to share and discuss issues, problems and the future of sustainable agriculture was convened in 1993. The forum yielded recommendations (based on experiences from 10 Asian countries) that substantially contributed to the regional statement of Asia-Pacific NGOs/POs to the World Food Summit in 1996, where the Right to Food of the marginalized was emphasized.

Recently, ANGO C has taken on a multi-stakeholder approach to involve not only NGOs but other stakeholders as well. Such form of consultations emphasizes consultative processes and dialogue and downplays confrontations and protest actions. This shift, however, requires a new set of capacities for the ANGO C network.

III. Dialogue with policy makers

Mechanisms for dialogue with policy makers are important, as issues are not resolved in single meetings. Such mechanisms, however, need to be agreed upon by both parties. One of the achievements of ANGO C is facilitating the establishment of these mechanisms with UN and international finance institutions.



The NGO Campaign on the Asian Development Bank, which ANGO C pioneered in 1989, was able to institute regular consultations with Bank staff as well as a 20-minute meeting with the Bank President during its annual meetings. Sustainable agriculture had been one of the major topics at these meetings.

With FAO, the bi-annual conferences of agriculture ministers for Asia and the Pacific provide an opportunity for ANGOC, together with other regional networks, to convene a parallel NGO meeting. At these meetings, NGOs discuss relevant issues, build consensus and formulate common statements. These statements serve as the official submission of NGOs to various government representatives and are read in the ministers' conference.

Similar mechanisms also exist with the WB and other UN agencies where ANGOC is invited regularly.

RECOMMENDED ANGOC INTERVENTIONS ON SA

After 10 years of implementing the sustainable agriculture program, ANGOC is in a position to institutionalize some of the gains to further the promotion of sustainable agriculture in the region.

The first critical area of intervention is the systematic management of information on sustainable agriculture with a particular focus on conserving indigenous knowledge related to agriculture. This would be a valuable contribution to the global community in its search for viable options to address the needs of the rural poor.

The second recommendation deals with institutionalizing the training in sustainable agriculture. While existing training programs have been effective in promoting sustainable agriculture among farmers, there is a need to mainstream these programs to reach young professionals, agriculture technicians and bureaucrats in agriculture agencies.

With the inclusion of agriculture in international trade, farmers are forced to engage the market. One area where sustainable agriculture practitioners have an advantage is in the marketing of organic products. The third recommendation encourages ANGOC to intervene in facilitating the formulation of regional standards and hopefully making inroads toward enhancing regional trade.

The fourth recommendation is for ANGOC to continue its policy advocacy work, building on the gains that it has achieved in the last 10 years. Given the renewed emphasis of governments and intergovernmental organizations on agriculture, it should aggressively promote sustainable agriculture as the way to address poverty in the region.

Action Agenda 1:

Building on ANGOC's information system on SA

The indigenous knowledge system serves as a major source of information in the development of sustainable agriculture technologies and practices. It brings with it the characteristics of sustainability, adaptability and applicability. Combined with modern science, it can provide valuable contributions in pursuing agricultural development.

Many NGO innovations reflect these indigenous practices. Some NGOs have taken on initiatives to document and share this knowledge through study tours, workshops and publications. But much of the information has been left with individual NGOs, either undocumented or unavailable to other interested organizations. There is a need to enhance the documentation processes and to improve the flow of information among NGOs and other organizations.

ANGOC can contribute to this process given its broad reach among local NGOs and its expertise in documentation. In strengthening its information system, ANGOC may invest in the development of tools for documentation, innovate collection and compiling systems and explore various media in the dissemination of knowledge, including translation in local languages to reach the rural communities.

The parameters for this initiative should be clarified with participating organizations at the start, including identification of priority agenda, data ownership and shared responsibilities.

Action agenda 2:

Institutionalizing SA through formal courses in universities

NGO initiatives to promote SA have had successes on the ground particularly in terms of reducing use of pesticides and inorganic fertilizers. Government and research institutions, whether encouraged by these initiatives or are doing them on their own, have adopted and incorporated these goals in their programs. Many government programs now include integrated pest management and integrated nutrient management. Some use different terminologies but are essentially working on the same goals.

A number of other technological innovations are also being initiated on the ground and have the potential to have significant impact on agricultural development. But most of these initiatives are small, isolated and remain at the local level. These initiatives may be upscaled and mainstreamed. The mainstreaming can be done at the district or national or even at the regional level.

At the regional level, a strategic intervention would be in building a resource pool of sustainable agriculture experts placed in critical positions within development agencies, local government units and academic institutions. Offering masters degree and diploma courses through which young professionals can build on their careers may facilitate this objective.

ANGOC is well placed to initiate these courses. It has direct links with grassroots initiatives, members providing training in sustainable agriculture with their own institutes, and a strategic link with international research organizations and agricultural universities. ANGOC will identify academic institutions where these courses may be lodged as part of their degree offerings. Universities in Asia as well as those in the other regions can jointly sponsor these courses to harness various expertise. Through this arrangement, the courses will also take on an international perspective that is important in understanding different regional and global contexts.

The courses and degree may be taken and earned via correspondence school or distance education, thus allowing young professionals to enroll without necessarily giving up their jobs. This will be complemented by practicum or field practice that will be conducted in the nearest identified farms or communities. NGOs with sustainable agriculture projects can also serve as extension schools for practicum or apprenticeships.

Action agenda 3: Strengthening ANGOC's advocacy role and agenda

The renewed interest of governments and international organizations in agriculture as a result of increasing poverty in the region provides an opportunity for ANGOC to promote sustainable agriculture. In the consultations that are being conducted, ANGOC and its partners should aggressively lobby for the institutionalization of SA in government programs with corresponding budget allocations.

The UN Millennium Development Goals can provide the framework for dialogue between NGOs and government representatives. NGOs can demand accountability from these institutions on their commitments while recommending sustainable agriculture as the better option for rural poor communities towards poverty reduction.

While holding dialogue with Asian governments, ANGOC should also participate in campaigns for fair trade and greater access to agricultural technologies. The uneven trade in agriculture and increasing privatization of natural resources continue to be a major constraint to the development of rural communities.

The complexities of the debates at the international level, however, have excluded local NGOs and rural communities. ANGOC should strive to educate its members and partners for them to better inform rural communities of current global issues and trends. This will allow rural communities to prepare to deal with the consequences. The mechanisms for dialogue that have worked well for ANGOC in the past can still be used in its development education.

Action agenda 4:

Formulating regional standards for organic products

The uneven flow of agricultural products between developed and developing countries may take decades to be corrected. Some NGOs have recommended regional trade among Asian countries as one option to address this imbalance. Trade among Asian countries will help stabilize supply and demand problems in the medium-term and strengthen the regional trading block in the long-term.

One commodity where NGOs can take the lead in facilitating regional trade is organic products. Both the land area and the number of farms devoted to organic agriculture are increasing. Moreover, the markets for organic products are growing rapidly not only in developed but in developing countries as well. In 2001, the total world retail sale was estimated at US\$ 19 billion, up from US\$ 16 billion in 2000 (IFOAM, 2003).

Given the high demand for organic products and the premium price they command, it is expected that many producers, including agribusiness corporations, would want to market their produce as organic. Setting up organic standards and product certification are therefore key interventions in ensuring product quality. In many Asian countries, standardization and certification have only

just started and may take a while to be formalized. Fortunately, many governments are taking an interest in the organic industry and this could hasten the process.

For now, sustainable agriculture practitioners enjoy some lead-time in farm conversion. Organic processes are labor intensive and thus favor rural communities given the substantial number of unemployed therein. ANGO can assist in ensuring the competitiveness of small farmers and rural communities by taking a lead in the formulation of organic standards at the regional level. In some of the countries that have started to set up organic standards, NGOs play some critical roles. ANGO would be in a position to bring these groups together as many of them are ANGO partners.

Footnotes

- ¹ UNDP Human Development Report of 2002.
- ² UNDP HDR 2002.
- ³ CCIC
- ⁴ UNDP and WIPO as cited by Pat Mooney in the Development Dialogue, 1999 1-2.
- ⁵ *Sustainable agriculture in Asia presupposes a holistic, systems-approach to agriculture and adopts indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) that store enormous information of biological cycles and demonstrate cultural sensitivity. It is not limited to alternative regenerative agricultural techniques, but is equally concerned with social justice, and recognizes the need for economic and political restructuring. SA should form part of efforts to build a people-centered economy and recognizes the crucial role of women in agricultural production. SA relies greatly on local, site-specific research and on trained farmers who are able to tailor the appropriate SA techniques to particular farm conditions and to propagate the practice to other farmers.*

Annexes

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