Lessons Learned From Rights-Based Approaches in the Asia-Pacific Region

Documentation of Case Studies

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PREFACE

Worldwide, there has been a proliferation of literature on the “architecture” of rights-based approaches and how the use of such approaches can help bring value in terms of assisting poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups of people realize their basic human rights. However, as mentioned above, a large volume of such literature has been dedicated to the “theory” and “usage” of rights-based approaches, viz. the classification of the principles of rights-based approaches and, how the application of such principles can be translated into developmental programming tools to help achieve outputs that can assist such groups realize their rights. Literature centered around how developmental agencies, civil society groups and citizens worldwide have actually used such approaches to demand and claim rights are few and far between.

This compendium of case studies is an attempt towards filling this space – through a documentation of experiences from select countries in the Asia-Pacific region, these case studies endeavors to demonstrate how various rights-based approaches/strategies have been used by developmental agencies and civil society groups, including by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) and citizens to successfully demand and claim rights for, and in participation with such poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups groups, often in conditions that can at best be termed challenging or at times, even inhospitable. From landless people in Bangladesh fighting for their right to land and a livelihood to poor farmers uniting to advocate for pro-poor farmers’ policies in Indonesia to starving people realizing their right to food in India to island communities accessing the legal and policy systems in the Pacific Islands, the cases documented culls together experiences that demonstrates that by using approaches that are not only rooted in the principles of participation, empowerment, accountability and transparency but that also looks at good governance, a receptive policy framework and access to justice as “non-negotiable” conditions that must exist in any country, marginalized and vulnerable groups can realize their rights.

And the above resonates in other cases studies documented - like the one where marginalized groups of children in India have started accessing education due to a receptive Government that implemented a very rights-based policy strategy to demanding and accessing education; similar is another case in India where groups of HIV positive women have successfully lobbied to demand and claim pro-HIV positive peoples’ policies and whose efforts have been particularly enhanced due to responsive policy makers and public institutions responding to demands on the supply/duty-bearer side. And in Laos, the Government actively worked with other stakeholders to make the right to water and sanitation a reality for interior rural mountainous communities – what is commendable is that these illiterate communities have worked with the Government stakeholders from inception in designing a water and sanitation system that is not only based on indigenous knowledge (and hence, viable and sustainable) but also hinged on Government (and other stakeholders’) accountability as a requisite; the strategies used have thus enabled the approach to be replicated on scale in other provinces in the country.
By capturing some such experiences in this compendium, it is hoped that a foundation will be made for the start of a serious engagement wherein all stakeholders will realize the added value that the use of rights-based approaches have in capacitating those who have often been left out of the larger social system or those who have not been able to access the benefits of developmental programmes and policies. At a more basic level, such approaches have assisted groups in realizing those rights that they are entitled to in the first place as have been stated under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And specifically for this reason, it is hoped that these experiences documented will start a conversation amongst all on how to further the use of such approaches for a more just and humane society.

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