

Discussion on Policy Issues Working in Smaller Groups

Group discussions

During the post lunch period, it was decided that the participants would be split into four groups. Each of the groups would deliberate on a given topic, and the four groups would hold their discussions simultaneously. Following this, all the groups would meet in a plenary session to present their conclusions for mutual review and discussion.

Given below is the summary of the presentations by each of the four groups.

Group I - University teaching and research

The members of the group were Dr. Veena Ganeshaiyah, Dr. M. N. B. Nair, Dr. P. R. Kanani, Mr. Coen Reijntjes, Prof. T. T. Ranganathan, Mr. Aruna Kumara, Prof. Nimal De Silva, Prof. Sarat Bhandara, Mr. Darshan Shankar, Ms. R. Sridevi, Mr. Viswanath and Mr. Lokesh.

Summary

1. What can we do about this?

1. Create awareness of IK among faculty staff
2. Initiate development of curricula to strengthen and protect the principles of IK
3. Influence policy makers of secondary education to introduce “heritage studies” to school curricula.
4. Motivate and give incentives for research as fellowships etc.
5. Promote postgraduate research that is directly applicable to the farming community

2. How to do it?

1. Revitalize (or decolonize) IK by preparing material in local language
2. Carry out comparative studies between the concepts of modern agriculture and those of IK
3. Improve interaction with local people

3. Pitfalls and prospects

1. We might end up distorting the sciences rather than strengthening them.
2. Overcome constraints by integrated technology

4. Problems of meeting expected standards

1. We need a correct management regime.
2. We need to prioritize rapid access to technology.

Group II - Generation and validation of traditional knowledge

The members of the group were Dr. Harish Naraindas, Mr. K. A. J. Kahandawa, Mr. Bertus Haverkort, Mr. Anand Kumar, Dr. P. M. Unnikrishnan, Mr. Deepak and Ms. Malkanthi.

This committee had great difficulty in coming to any kind of consensus about a future course of action. It began by acknowledging that all traditional knowledge (TK) currently seemed to be in the doldrums. It then posed the question: “For whom was it in the doldrums”? Was it for its producers and everyday users or was it for people like us who were not its producers and could perhaps be its users or could want to be its users. The “us” included the committee itself and people of the same social class, and by social class, it could be meant those who had been trained in a university with “universal” premises about the world and ostensibly universal principles and laws!

In the light of these universal principles/laws etc., TK was local, alternative, non-rational, spiritual etc. Hence, these local, non-universal traditions had to be reinvented by validation, validation by universal science. In this act of validation, it was presumed that there were the following kinds of stakeholders.

1. Universal scientists
2. Local knowledge producers
3. Universal users
4. Local users
5. The state
6. The market
7. NGOs

The debate then turned to their possible conflicting interests, and whether TK could be generated, tested, validated and transmitted on its own terms and by its own institutions. It was also acknowledged that TK was currently in a marginal position vis-à-vis universal knowledge (UK) and that Compas and the current gathering was a symptom of this marginality and the increasing involvement of Compas-like organizations worldwide to engage with them. The debate then moved to how TK could be “revived”, “preserved” and perhaps “resituated”. Was the university based on universal principles a good or a bad thing should and could shamanism, for example, be taught in universities? Should and could we move from a university to the pluriversity? Was this to be a strictly secular or non-secular institution? Who would benefit from the pluriversity, with its new forms of knowledge? Was TK only to be the object of study in a pluriversity as it is in universities or also a subject of study with its faculty and students?

Meanwhile, it was pointed out that TK “mediated” and “revived”, by NGOs for example, could be of use to its own producers and users. A very nice example of this was the Sri Lankan story of the coming together of snakebite healers with their respective textual sources. It was seen as a moment of mutual reckoning, comparing of practices with the theory in the texts and, at times, of correcting a word or verse in some of these texts in the light of the other texts.

This group ran out of time and could not conclusively say anything about how TK was indeed generated and validated, nor could it make any concrete suggestions

about the future endogenous development of TK, either aided or unaided by exogenous factors, except for generally agreeing that endogenous development was indeed desirable without knowing what it was exactly, how it was to be achieved, facilitated or institutionalized. Nor was the group entirely sure who would benefit although it was quite sure that it ought primarily to benefit its producers.

Group III – Upscaling and translating endogenous development (ED) into action

The members of the group were Mr. Hari, Mr. Nimal Hewanila, Mr. Jayasinghe, Mr. Gowtham Shankar and Ms. Arthanayaki.

Upscaling and Translating Endogenous Development into Action

S. NO	ASPECTS	WHY	WHAT	WHO	WHEN	WHERE	HOW
	Upscaling / Enriching / Expanding	Societal Impact on a Scale, To Empower, Deepen, Quality, Quantity, In Order To Advocate Policy Changes	Outcomes of Action Research Pilot Experiments Of E.D Under Various Themes	Stake –Holders, CBOs, Facilitators, Research Institutions, NGOs	Post Project	Across Regions In A Viable Extent, I.E., Block, Taluk, District	Participatory- Implemented By Stakeholders, Facilitated by CBOs, NGOs, Supported By Res. Instns., With Resources From GOs, NGOs.
1	Upscaling / Enriching / Expanding	Societal Impact on a Scale, To Empower, Deepen, Quality, Quantity, In Order To Advocate Policy Changes	Outcomes of Action Research Pilot Experiments Of E.D Under Various Themes	Stake –Holders, CBOs, Facilitators, Research Institutions, NGOs	Post Project	Across Regions In A Viable Extent, I.E., Block, Taluk, District	Newsletters, Forum, Meetings, Workshops , Etc.
2	Upscaling / Enriching / Expanding	Societal Impact on a Scale, To Empower, Deepen, Quality, Quantity, In Order To Advocate Policy Changes	Outcomes of Action Research Pilot Experiments Of E.D Under Various Themes	Stake –Holders, CBOs, Facilitators, Research Institutions, NGOs	Post Project	Across Regions In A Viable Extent, I.E., Block, Taluk, District	Field Visits, Meetings.

Group IV – Advocacy forum

The members of the group were Dr. Rama Jayasundar, Vaidya Smita Bajpai and Mr. A. V. Balasubramanian.

The major objective of the advocacy forum would be to carry out its advocacy efforts to target people from a wide cross-section of society including policy makers, media, scientists, bureaucrats, elected representatives of the people, professionals in the modern stream such as allopathic physicians and national as well as international donor agencies. The objective of this advocacy forum would be to influence the manner in which policies are made or implemented.

Outputs

The following are the kind of outputs that will be produced by the advocacy group: –

- Policy papers and notes
- Production of fact sheets and critiques of existing policies and their implementation
- Sending delegations and teams for visits to institutions and forums of policy makers
- Legal steps and interventions where required

Organizing advocacy

The group identified the following as some of the important steps in organizing advocacy:

- Listing of critical issues that need to be targeted for advocacy work. In this exercise, this group would rely upon members of the other three groups for their inputs.
- Identifying persons who and institutions and forces that are for the advocacy efforts, against it or are neutral.
- Initiating and targeting action both at the national as well as the international level.

Getting started

The following are identified as some of the immediate steps to be taken:

1. Circulation of a note identifying the need for advocacy. Setting an agenda identifying the objectives in terms of what needs to be done.
2. Defining membership of the advocacy forum, a method for co-ordination and a mechanism for extension of membership
3. Convening a larger meeting with the objective of evolving a work plan for identifying issues, constituting committees around specific issues (such as education, research etc.) and constituting groups around particular sectors (agriculture, health etc.).