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Policy Processes and Policy Advocacy

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Abstract

The development process in the present context where economic and governance reforms are emphasized tends at times to by-pass the concerns of the marginalized and the voiceless. It is precisely to bring to notice the concerns of these groups to policy makers that the tools such as advocacy are useful. Policy advocacy is an important tool to democratise the policy making process. In discussing the relation between policy process and policy advocacy this paper delineates the changing context for both. It looks at the nature of policy process, the connections between policy research and advocacy and also examines one method of policy advocacy, multi-stakeholder dialogue.

Policy Processes and Policy Advocacy*

V. Anil Kumar

Introduction

Advocacy is defined in various ways. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word advocacy as 'verbal support or argument for a cause, policy etc.' The practice of advocacy is defined by writers of a well known international organization as 'deliberate process of influencing those who make policy decisions' [Sprechmann and Pelton CARE: 2001: 2]. Some authors writing in Indian context have defined "Public Advocacy as a planned and organized set of actions to effectively influence public policies and to get them implemented in a way that would empower the marginalized" [Samuel 1989]. The same author notes another defining characteristic of public advocacy: "in a liberal democratic culture it [public advocacy] uses the instruments of democracy and adopts non-violent and constitutional means"[Samuel 1989]. While public advocacy with the above said features is said to have long historical antecedents in India, the subject has also generated new interest among scholars and social change organizations/individuals. This new interest is taking place in the new historical conjuncture where the states are restructuring, civil societies are getting re-organized and economies are globalising. With all these three processes being inter related and over lapping. There is a new emphasis on advocacy in this context.

The new emphasis on advocacy is consonant with the broader paradigm shift that is taking place in development paradigm where the multilateral economic institutions as well as scholars from developing countries have been increasingly looking for newer ways of conceptualizing the development process. Even among the critiques of dominant development discourse there has been a shift in conceptualizing the development processes. The new focus is on the state, civil society and the market. This is also called the 'tri-sector model'. In this model the state plays minimal 'facilitator' role, the civil

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society, defined largely as the ensemble of institutions and associations that fall between domestic, familial sphere and the state, are given the major development role and the private sector of unbridled market competition plays the role of economic engine. The picture is that of a minimal, but yet strong state, coordinating between the civil society and the market. In this framework the role of the state as policy maker and implementer is still quite significant. And therefore is the need for the civil society and market to influence the state as a policy maker. This act of influencing is called in the dominant development framework as the process of advocacy.

The task of advocacy, in this manner of looking at development process, is largely that of civil society; civil society is supposed to find ways and means of advocating the social causes, the necessary policies for the causes, with the state and the corporate sector; to influence their decisions, to apprise them of the pitfalls of their policies and at times the consequences of their policies. On the other hand the local communities form the constituency of the civil society. As mentioned above the ensemble of institutions and associations -formal and informal - that are generally known as the NGOs, are the ones that form-or supposed to form- the core of the civil society. Advocacy is then a tool largely of the civil society, or NGOs, to deliberately influence the decisions and policies of the state and/or the market/corporate sector.

This view of the socio- political process is quite different from the paradigm held by the critiques of the development process, broadly from a Marxist stand point, which viewed development as capitalist development and constituting the processes of class divisions, conflict and class struggles. In this view it is the class struggles that lead to policy change on the part of the state and the dominant classes. The welfare state, which emerged in Europe after the World War II, is itself seen as the product of struggles that preceded it. And within the broad analytical perspective it is the different consequences of the struggles, the different strategies of the ruling classes, such as co-optation, accommodation, and pacification and amelioration of the conditions that blunt the class contradictions, are that are which supposed to lead to the making of the policies. Therefore according to the critical paradigm it is the struggles, as well as the necessity of the state and the dominant classes to maintain the status quo, which leads to policy making, and policy change. It is not advocacy as special strategy, but class struggle, which is supposed to lead to policy formulation and policy change. In this connection it may be noted that social movements in general have played the role of advocacy and policy change to some extent. Social movements in developing countries from the time of the anti-

colonial struggle onwards till the contemporary times of anti-caste and pro-environment and women's movements and identity movements, and so on, have played crucial role in influencing the policies of the state. Though the exact changes effected in policy might have varied from one social movement to another. While some social movements have been more successful the others are less. Policy changes owing to the social movements- the realization of the intended goals of the social movements- is varied from context to context depending on many other variables. But certainly social movements continue to put pressure on the state and state elites to highlight policy changes and reforms. Though many of the leaders or the participants of the movements may or may not perceive the movement as a conscious tool of advocacy in the sense used in this paper. In this context we may note that the issue based, specifically focused movements may have more success in effecting policy shifts in the short run than movements with a broad scope of fundamental social transformation. Though societies engender and generate both. There are two more stand points from which advocacy is argued for. One is a theoretical perspective and the other is an explicitly pragmatic one; the latter also operates at larger and different level.

One theoretical perspective is that power is not concentrated in the large social and political power structures any more. Power is seen as more diffused and all pervasive and is to be seen as pervading in all the aspects of every day life [Wapner 1989]. Therefore the struggles against power are no more the economic class struggles. But they are around gender, ethnicity, and techno-managerial practices in the organizations, in the prisons, in the psychiatric asylums and against people of varied sexual orientation. The sites of these struggles against the practices of power are no more the state, class and international arena nor are these struggles waged by labour alone. Different micro or small-scale struggles on diffused issues and processes can form the repertoire of these struggles. This broadly is what is understood as the post- modern notion of the description of power and the struggles against power. Here too the advocacy component no more emphasizes the economic or political class struggles and issues related with them but, say, ethnic domination or the domination on gay or lesbian communities. These can also become the causes of advocacy. This way of looking at things can more easily explain, to give two examples, the advocacy against the policy towards gays in the US or for the policy towards Muslim women or Sikh men wearing scarves and turbans in educational institutions in France; the countries where the socio- political processes are seen as having gone beyond development and modernity.

The last and quite important argument is made at a different level by the international institutions for pragmatic purposes. These are the arguments and modes of advocacy developed by the organizations such as the UN on issues such as environmentally sustainable development. Here advocacy of a particular policy on an issue or problem requires the consent of parties that are different and variegated, to say the least. For example the international policy on climate change could require the consent of both advanced countries as well as the developing countries. In addition to that it is not only the representatives of the nation-states but different other actors within the nation-states and trans-national actors that are required to endorse, leave alone put to practice, the policies. The effort particularly on the part of the UN to evolve such mutually agreed consent has led to the development of different methods. In this case the concerned international organization has to advocate a policy to each constituent and bring them all to a commonly agreed policy that can potentially be implemented globally. The concept, for example, of multi-stake holder dialogue has emerged from such contexts.

To be sure often the advocacy processes that go on in the developing countries, including India, consist of elements of all these above said theoretical and practical contexts and these theoretical models and frame works are not mutually exclusive. For examples there are NGOs that champion the causes of labour, and though not explicitly endorsing, may follow the paradigm shift mentioned in the beginning. Likewise there are organizations that champion the issues of Dalits and women that borrow arguments from both political economy/class struggle perspective and post-modern/identity perspective. The real world of advocacy and efforts to influence policy is complex and can contain elements of all the models of arguments sketched above. But certain pattern can be visible. Not all organizations from civil society follow the same methods of advocacy. The broader worldview subscribed to by an organization shapes its efforts of advocacy. Certain civil society organizations in India that see the larger development process as inimical to the grass roots groups such as workers, tribals and other marginalized sections take a stance against the globalization, privatization and liberalization perspective and take to confrontational stances with the state. On the other hand we can find organizations that fully endorse the dominant paradigm of globalization, privatization and liberalization and therewith subscribe to the 'tri-sector' perspective sketched above, and may see the state, civil society and market as sectors independently existing and where civil society has to, on behalf of local communities, take the role of advocacy while fully accepting the legitimacy of the processes going on in the other two sectors. While the former sees no room for advocacy, the latter sees advocacy as the

only means left for the civil society to promote the cause of the communities with an accepting and responding state and corporate sector. Between these two far ends of the 'advocacy spectrum', one viewing that there is no space for advocacy at all, and the other seeing fully negotiated settlement of all possible social issues by means of advocacy, fall different positions which view the policy space available for advocacy varying from context to context and may take a nuanced and carefully balanced view of the spaces available for advocacy. And while being critical, positively appreciate the room for maneuver and be ready to take advantage of it. This is particularly so with regard to influence policy change and policy process.

Before moving on to the discussion of some methods of advocacy it appears that it is a necessary premise for advocacy, defined as the attempt to deliberately influence the policy makers, that the agents of advocacy must believe in the space within the policy process that needs to be addressed. This requires that the agents of advocacy believe in both the willingness on the policy makers to listen to advocacy and the willingness on the part of the constituency to have faith in the advocates. Therefore the agents of advocacy need both to have faith in the spaces available in the polity, policy processes and must enjoy the support of the communities on behalf of who they are advocating a certain policy or policy change. This is all the more important in the context of globalization, privatization and liberalization where different communities as well as advocates view the effects of these policies differently. The reforms that these processes bring about lead to variegated response from different quarters and therefore the question of advocacy in the context of reform is complex. This is not to say that advocacy is only a matter of faith, but only to say that the socio-political analysis underlying advocacy efforts is quite important. And perhaps it is not all too incorrect to say that certain amount of faith in the liberal democratic processes and spaces within them too is important in generating the requisite conviction for advocacy.

II

Public advocacy is about power and using spaces within political power. In this respect policy advocacy depends crucially on policy analysis. And policy analysis is political analysis of the spaces available in the polity. Policy analysis has to precede policy advocacy. Here we deal with three aspects and levels of political analysis that are required for policy advocacy. Theses are a) the political analysis of the nature of the state; b) the empirical institutional analysis; and c) analysis at the pragmatic every day level.

The theoretical analysis of the nature of the state is at a higher level of abstraction and deals with the balance of political forces that shape the nature of the state. The key question here is what is the space available in the balance of political forces? Different theoretical perspectives that inform this level analysis are: instrumentalist theories of state, Bonapartist theory of the state and the pluralist view of the state. Instrumentalist view of the state views the state as an instrument in the hands of the dominant class or a coalition of the dominant classes. Bonapartist view of the state views the state as relatively autonomous state vis-a-vis the dominant class forces; whereas the pluralist view of the state sees the state as being influenced by the pressure groups that are horizontally located within the society and try to influence the state through different means of lobbying. The latter view of the state is seen as more useful explanatory tool in advanced countries rather than in developing countries. The instrumentalist view of state is also seen as too reductionist a tool to analyse the state and the political forces that shape the state. The one theory of the state that found more favour with the theorists of the state in developing countries is the notion of the relatively autonomous state, particularly within the third world countries. This view sees the state as a *terrain* of struggles for different classes. An analysis of the state in these terms is much useful for policy analysis. This analysis can also show to what extent the state can be influenced to formulate policies that are favourable to marginalized sections. This view of the state appears to be more useful than both the instrumentalist view of the state and the pluralist view of the state. Analysis at this level of abstraction provides the initial basis on which closer analysis of the political spaces can be undertaken.

The second level of analysis required for policy advocacy is the analysis at the level of political institutions and political processes. This is where the actual policies are formed and decisions taken. The institutions refer to the legislative, judicial and executive institutions, which operate in a given constitutional framework. The key question at this level would be what is the policy space available in institutional political processes? In liberal democracies this level of analysis focuses on policy spaces available in legislature, judiciary and bureaucracy. The analysis also includes analysis of the party system, the political parties and the government. This level of analysis is most crucial and central for policy advocacy. Whether in a particular instance the parties are interested to take forward the agenda of advocacy on a specific policy or whether judiciary would take an activist stance or the bureaucracy would be helpful in carrying out the policy advocacy would be crucial question to pose. And the analysis would be extremely useful. Advocacy methods as to whether one should go for multi-stakeholder dialogue or public interest

litigation in a court of law can be decided basing on the policy analysis at this level. Analysis of party politics can explain which party is sympathetic to policy advocacy or which coalition is more sympathetic to particular cause of advocacy. Factions and groups within political parties can also be analysed and help sought. In India for example the institutional spaces have been widely used for policy advocacy. Judicial activism was major tool used in many instances of public advocacy. Another important point that can be noted in Indian context is that the decline of the one party system and rise of coalition politics bodes well for public policy advocacy. The coalitions provide more space to policy advocacy than the single dominant parties, or groups/factions within them, ever provided hitherto. Analysis and exploration of political space at this level of abstraction for policy advocacy is useful. Coalition politics bodes well and one has reason to be much optimistic for policy advocacy at this level.

The third level of analysis needed for policy advocacy is the analysis at the everyday life. This is at a pragmatic level. The day-to-day situations or what is called 'routine politics' and the role of key individuals matter. The nature, credibility and legitimacy of individuals who are carrying out advocacy also matter. And also who are aimed at advocacy or aimed at influencing matters. The identities of institutions that individuals represent, their strategic positioning and reputations of both individuals and institutions matter a great deal in this connection. At this level the key question is: Who are the *dramatis personae?* The advocacy methods used also matter a great deal and it is difficult to generalize much on this level as it is greatly context dependent and varies from case to case.

The policy analysis conducted at all three above said levels covers nearly all the aspects, for example, of what John Samuel mentions i.e., "resisting unequal power relations, engaging institutions of governance, creating and using spaces within the system, strategizing the use of knowledge and bridging the micro -level activism and macro level policy initiatives" [Samuel: 2004]. Particular methods of advocacy depend on the specific analysis in each instance. 'Policy environment' and who shapes policy-- what is the balance of socio-political forces shaping the policy? What are the institutions shaping the policy? And who are the individuals shaping policy? --are determined at all three levels. And advocacy methods depend on policy analysis at all the three levels of the policy process.

III

Before going into the empirical aspects of advocacy it is necessary to deal with two models of policy processes, which disable or enable policy activism and policy advocacy. Anna Yeatman while dealing with policy activism differentiates policy process into two distinct models [Yeatman: 1998]. These are the executive model of policy process and partnership model of policy process. According to this division the 'executive model' of policy making is linear, decisionistic, executive, elitist and top down model of policy making. In this, it is policy elite who set agenda and takes policy decisions and formulates policy; all else is seen as following from this. In fact in executive model of policy making, there is no policy process at all; it is only the matter of decision-making by the policy elite or the epistemic community. The second model is what she calls 'partnership model'. In the latter model policy making is participative, partnership oriented, democratic and bottom up. Yeatman also calls this the 'co-productivist' model of policy making. This model of policy making is what that enables policy activism and advocacy. In Yeatman's words

> Policy activism is more or less legitimate and more or less developed, depending on whether the government of the day favors an executive approach to policy or a participative approach to policy which turns it into a policy process [Yeatman: 1998, pp.16-17].

The crucial difference between the two is that while the 'executive model' of policymaking renders policy activism and advocacy illegitimate and insignificant, the 'partnership model' allows advocacy and activism and makes policy activism legitimate and possible. Advocacy can develop and influence policy in only participative approach to policy making, whereas with regard to governments that take to executive approach, neither is possible.

> When the executive model is the one adopted by the government of the day, policy activism is less legitimate and developed even though policy activists of various kinds may resist the executive model. When participative approach is favored by government of the day, policy activism becomes both more legitimate and developed [Yeatman: 1998: 16-17].

It may appear rather commonplace to make the above distinctions. But an interesting situation may be that the same government of the day can pursue an executive model in some and more or less participative model in others. In other words the two models that Yeatman talks of are not and need not be exclusive. Political regimes can pursue a mixed approach of being executive decision making bodies in some contexts and participative in another. And some domains in democratic polities, though not all, might move from domains of executive decision making to domains of participative decision making and vice-versa; following internal and external pressures. According to Yeatman more interesting point is that 'policy process' genuinely occurs only when the process is participative, that is, only when all the stakeholders in the process--primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders-- are taken into account and considered. Otherwise it is no policy *process* at all. Yeatman says

> … Policymaking encompasses all that occurs from the point of policy formulation to the point of delivery. When the delivery of policy is seen to be contingent on the culture and practice of the providers and service deliverers, it is possible to see them as central to ensuring that policy gets delivered in ways which make sense to those who use it [Yeatman: 1998: 28-29].

Policy making in order to become a policy process has to take into account the views of all the participants in the life processes of a policy. This also means democratisation of policy regimes. Yeatman says this emphatically when she says that

> Policy, thus, is reconceived as the policy processes when the distinctive contributions to policy of public officials, direct deliverers and clients are accorded visibility and valued. This is a conception which is emergent in public policy and management discourse but which still has to view with establishment models of policy which are oriented in terms of the efforts of rational decision makers to control those who do the work of carrying out those decisions……..It is also a democratic conception, one that values the participation of all those who are positioned as subjects within the work of a conceiving, implementing and evaluating policy. To see policy as a policy process emphasizes the need to develop mechanisms of using and valuing this participation so that these differently positioned subjects within the policy process enter into dialogue with one another. It is this, which constitutes the inter-subjective character of the policy process [Yeatman: 1998: 30-31].

Moreover the process of making the voices of all those involved in the policy process audible and heard itself depends on the struggles to transform the policy process into a democratic one. These struggles vary with the varying socio-political contexts, as discussed above, but nevertheless are fundamental to democratizing the policy processes. To put it in Yeatman's words

> The emergence of policy process as a complex, multi-levelled and to some degree at least, discontinuous process traversing very different spheres of agency and types of agent (politicians, public officials, service deliverers and service users) into the light of day is entirely contingent on struggles to democratize policy processes and to engage the agency of these very differently positioned players [Yeatman: 1998: 25-26].

Yeatman expressed her views in the context of Australian policymaking process. But what she says is more than useful in the context of third world countries including India, where the involvement of what she calls 'service users' is far less in policymaking process. One distinction appears to be important here. The degree to which a particular policy is given elitist or participative approach seem to depend on whether the policy belongs to the realm of 'high politics' or the realm of 'low politics' within a polity. The defence policy, for example, belongs to the realm of 'high politics' and the policy approach remains elitist. Whereas policies such as the food policy or policy on public distribution system for food grains (PDS), for example, appear to be policies where one can expect more openness on the part of the state elites to share the process of policy making and make them participative. But the problem is that even those policies are not being made participatory and open. That is the crux of the problem and requires both attention and advocacy.

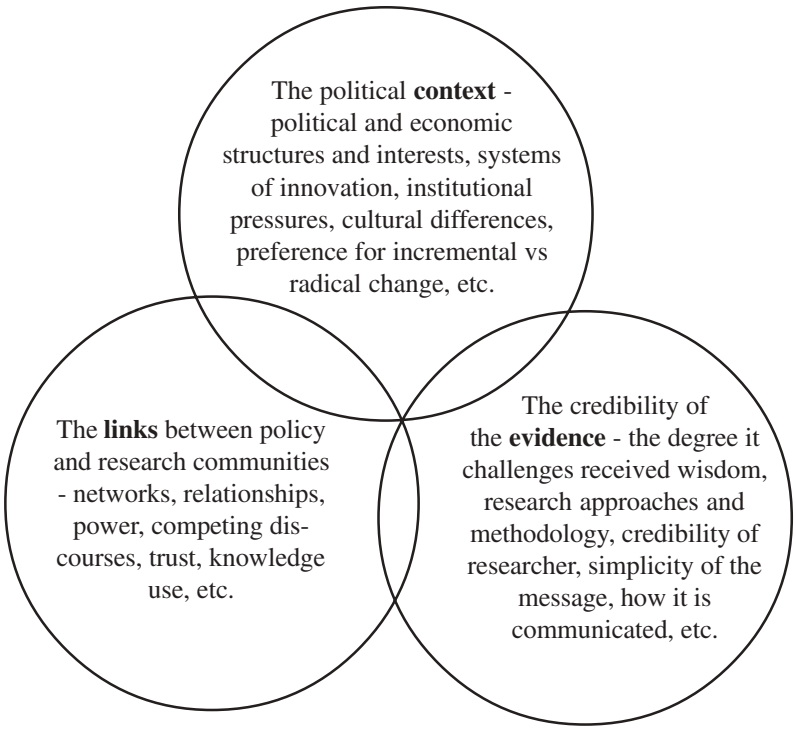
Another problem with Yeatman's view is that she includes all the agents in the policy process such as those within the state or decision-making structure-- all the rank and file bureaucracy or 'the street bureaucrats', for example. The mention of 'service users' appears only marginally in her text. In the context of developing countries, however, far more emphasis has to be laid on the voice of those who have little access to policy process either as policy elites or as policy implementers. In such contexts policy making can become more decisionistic or elitist.

A related question regarding Yeatman's view of policy process is that if policy process is seen as in 'partnership model', then which level should be aimed for advocacy? Should we start advocacy attempts at the level of the decision-making or at the level of implementation? Or at both the levels? This question would remain even when we assume that the policy process is participative and not so elitist. This relates to the details of advocacy process. Before going into a brief discussion of the details of advocacy methods it appears necessary to deal with the connection between research and policy. Does academic research affect policy? If so how does it affect policy? In the following we dwell briefly upon the linkages between policy research and policy process.

IV

This section deals briefly with the work done by the Overseas Development Institute scholars. As part of this work Emma Crew and John Young [Crew and Young: 2002] developed a framework to analyze the process of relationship between policy research and policy making. This scaffolding takes into account three aspects, which help research impact on policy making. These are firstly, the context of policy research; by which they mean both political context and institutional context; secondly the evidence brought forth by policy research to have bearing upon policymaking process: this aspect depends on the quality of policy research, credibility of policy research and the communication of policy research; and thirdly, the linkages - i.e., the linkages between policy researchers, and policy makers. The linkages also mean the 'legitimacy chains' between the policy researchers and the community on behalf of whom researchers are under taking policy advocacy. The three aspects are diagrammatically presented by Julius Court and John Young [Court and Young: 2003: 8] as below:

Figure 1: Context, Evidence and Links Framework



In the above, political context basically means the ideological context in which the 'government of the day' (Anna Yeatman calls it 'God') is operating--its proclivities and propensities, socio-economic bases and support systems. The context also means whether the political-institutional context within which policies are shaped is open or closed. We have already discussed above the democratic and elitist policy environments. These form the political contexts within which policy research attempts to advocate policies and policy changes to decision makers. Julius Court and John Young while reviewing 50 case studies [Court and Young 2003] call political context as 'the most important issue' as far as policy researcher's relationship with policy making is concerned. Political context crucially defines 'policy windows,' openings, policy spaces. These 'policy windows', and spaces are the bases for policy advocacy without which advocacy cannot takes place. Aung San Su Kyi's Burmese pro-democracy advocates cannot take her cause much further because the military junta does not allow much advocacy - to give an example of a closure of policy space for advocacy. Democratic political systems on the other hand do provide much room for advocacy.

The question of evidence relates to the facts or evidence that researchers bring to bear on policy advocacy, the credibility of the research, which relates to the institutions and individuals and their 'chains of legitimacy' and also the way a research policy is communicated in the process of advocacy. How a policy advice is formatted and presented, the particular style or instrument chosen for it are important. According to the ODI researchers' these means of communication have to be 'palatable' to the policy makers. That is to say, a particular method of advocacy may go long way in policy influence vis-à-vis policy-makers.

Finally, the question of linkages as proposed by Emma Crew and John Young means linkages both upwards to the policy makers and downwards towards the community on behalf of which a particular instance of advocacy is attempted. We have noted that this aspect is important. To what extent researchers can form 'policy networks', 'advocacy coalitions' or operate strongly as an 'epistemic community' may help much in influencing policy process. Here one may suggest that the intellectual environment and the policy environment and the relationships between the two may also matter greatly. Julius Court and John Young, for example, say that policy elites often perceive policy research more as a process against implementation and practice rather than as a process against ignorance and lack of awareness. The establishment, strengthening and nurturing downward linkages with the community make a case for advocacy stronger and policy advocacy credible.

Court and Young while saying that the status of international research on the processes of linkages - between policy research and policy making - is very thin, argue that there is also a fourth aspect that can matter in this regard. That is vis-a-vis 'external influences' and 'donors'. How a policy is advocated, what is advocated and who is advocating also depend a great deal on external influences. A good example can be macro-economic policies of developing countries in the context of structural adjustment and financial stabilization.

After reviewing 50 case studies from around the globe on how policy research influences the policy making process Julius Court and John Young provide some detailed and interesting recommendations to policy makers, policy researchers and donors. Much depends on the specific contexts in which these insights are applied. These contexts also point to specific methods of advocacy that can be employed. While research provides the basis for advocacy much depends on the methods of advocacy. In the following we deal with one of the methods.

V

In this section we discuss one method of advocacy. We will consider the multi-stakeholder dialogue (MSD). We should be clear that there are many other methods of advocacy ranging from Public Interest Litigation to street protests, hunger strikes, *dharnas* (sit-ins) and *rasta roaks* (road blocks). All these modes of political action are also different methods of advocacy. We concern ourselves with the above because some systematic light is shed on MSD. Also in all democracies this is a creative field and many novel methods of advocacy can be found. Perhaps there are no 'text book methods' of advocacy. But nevertheless distinction may be made between methods of advocacy and methods of protest. The tilt in the methods of advocacy is more towards consensus building while in the protest it is towards building pressure, although whether actually consensus building or pressure building actually takes place depends on the relative strength of the advocacy.

Multi-stakeholder dialogue (MSD) is a method increasingly used by the international organizations such as the UN and other organisations basically for purposes of consensus building among stakeholders. It is a method of consensus building for the purposes of policy formulation. It is also used for generating debate and discussion on policy matters. MSD as a concept depends heavily on the term 'stakeholder'. The term 'stakeholder' is derived from Kantian philosophy first in business studies. The term stakeholder was developed in contrast to the word 'shareholder' to mean that different groups of individuals that have vested interest in a business should not just be seen as means to the end of profit making but as ends in themselves. The term has gradually entered the discourse of consensus building and advocacy studies and writings and also by the UN. Presently along with the UN many other international and national NGOs also make use of the term and practice of MSD. A look at how the UN has utilized the concept of MSD and put it to practice will be useful.

The UN introduced MSD into practice in 1998.This was done by the UN organization Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) with the aim to generate ideas and debates about sustainable development so that the ideas and debates could feed into the subsequent inter governmental conferences on sustainable development. While this was done the UN has also introduced the concept for debating the democratic processes in the developing countries through UNDP.

Yin Shao Loong and Chee Yoke Ling [Loong and Ling] in an article titled 'Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue: A Trend to Watch while analyzing the MSD held in 1998 by UN's Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in its preparation towards the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) say that the MSD was conducted after identifying nine 'major groups' for the purpose of dialogue. The major groups were: women, youth, indigenous peoples, NGOs, local authorities, trade unions, business and industry, scientific and technological community and farmers. The representatives of these nine groups participated in three planned MSD sessions. In the analysis of the above said authors there is great deal of usefulness of the MSD. Commenting on the UN's CSD conducted MSD they say that the MSDs could galvanize unanimity of voice and opinion among Major Groups in about seven areas while there were major differences and the dialogue failed in one area. The difference was with the Major Group from business and industry the authors say,

> The least complementarity relationship (in the MSD process) was with business and industry due to the fundamental disputes over the latter's paradigm and claims to be practicing sustainable development (through 'sustainable mining' and 'sustainable tourism'). Mining was particularly highlighted by industry and this evoked strong reactions especially from the representatives of indigenous people who are directly confronted by huge mining corporations on their ancestral lands [Loong and Ling:5]

While discussing MSD as a advocacy method these authors say that there were quite strong messages which were delivered as a product of the MSD and the method was considerably successful. This paragraph is worth quoting:

> For particular issues it (MSD) served a highly useful complementary function clearly indicating to governments and the UN that many major groups could be united (and moving ahead having already strategized amongst each other) on key sustainable development issues. The sustainable agriculture and food security issue was one, which had drawn NGOs, farmers, trade unions and indigenous peoples into considerable agreement. The maturity of the issue enabled it to have a successful 'showing' at the MSD and sent a strong message that further action and commitments from government and UN agencies were needed to turn rhetoric into reality (pp. 7)

Even regarding the issue of corporate accountability Loong and Ling say:

> In the case of the proposed framework convention on corporate accountability, the MSD provided a highly visible platform for this critical issue to be raised in front of other major groups and government (p. 7)

The authors say that MSD however is not a cure-all method for advocacy. About the shortcomings of the MSD as process and commenting specifically on the heavy emphasis on producing partnerships through MSD process, they say that such partnerships were difficult to build:

> The MSD.. . leaves little space for raising these important issues (such as negative trends within the WTO or the structural problems in international financial flows) if there is a demand for an immediate product that must necessarily take the form of a partnership (p. 8)

The Third World Network (TWN) which hosted the above article in its website commented that

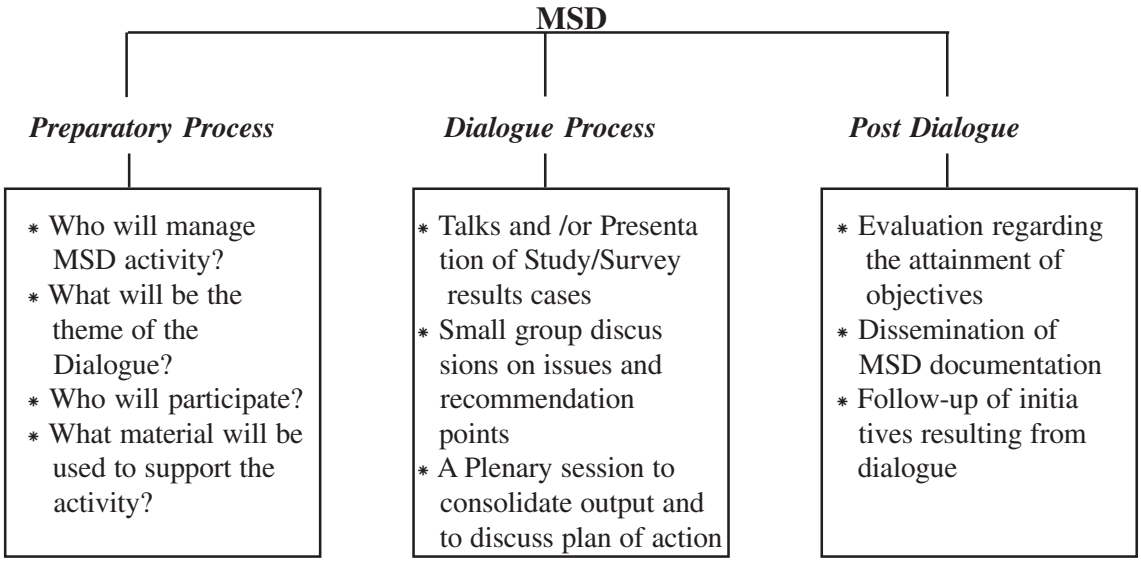
> Thus, while the CSD and other international processes have increased civil society participation to some extent, there is a false assumption that society, compartmentalized into Major Groups and stakeholders, can sit at roundtables to reach consensus. Often, the interests of industry and communities (and their organizations) are diametrically opposed. Mechanisms are needed to deal with such conflicts, not diffuse or sideline them. Accordingly, governments have their due role to play [Loong and Ling: 12]

While the above is the experience of using MSD at global level, the method is used by many international and national NGOs as well. These NGOs have generated many insights into the process of conducting MSD not only for advocacy but also for capacity building in the sector and for consensus building in the broad sense of the term. MSD as a method is used by International NGOs such as the International Forum on Capacity Building (IFCB) to promote dialogue between the Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs for the purposes of capacity building [IFCB: 2001]. In the context of such efforts, in the IFCB literature dwells into technical aspects of the MSD as well and these aspects are widely followed in the sector. The IFCB Bulletin on MSD for example defines MSD as "both a dynamic process and forum aimed at building common platform and shared understanding". After defining the process goes in to the details of conducting MSD. The details are

much useful in conducting the MSD process. The IFCB bulletin for example identifies three important stages of MSD process as: Preparation; dialogue process, and post dialogue.

Each of these in turn has different aspects (diagrammatically presented in Figure 2).:

Figure 2: Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue Process



From its experience of conducting MSD the IFCB also draws some key lessons. They are as follow:

1. The credibility of the convener is a major factor for getting the right stake holders;
2. clarity of theme and dialogue design results in coherent criteria for choosing stake holders;
3. quality of engagement depends not so much on the number of participants as in their capacity to contribute positively to the theme;
4. consultative meetings within the (representing) sectors (prior to the MSD) are effective for actual dialogue;
5. facilitation involves skills to consolidate, synthesize and provide additional perspectives to participants' out put, and
6. reflection on the evaluation of stakeholders is key to improving the quality of MSD.

Finally the follow up of MSD can be in terms of cycles of dialogues [IFCB: 2001]

VI

In the foregoing we have discussed the context in which advocacy as a method is emphasized, some of the theoretical lenses through which it can be seen, the political analysis that is necessary for the advocacy process and discussed notions of elitist and democratic policy processes; we have also discussed one particular method of policy advocacy i.e., multi stake holder dialogue. We have attempted to shed light on how advocacy is increasingly seen as a necessary tool to impact policy decisions in favour of the marginalized. The development process in the present context where economic and governance reforms are emphasized tends at times to by pass the concerns of the marginalized and voiceless. It is precisely to highlight and to bring to notice the concerns of the marginalized and voiceless to the policy makers that the tools such as advocacy are useful. Policy advocacy is just one among the many instruments to make policy processes more democratic. As such its importance cannot be overemphasized.

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