

Three communities in Kapchorwa District give their views on the Paralegals' work

By Sarah Okwaare Otto

The main focus of the action research for the Uganda Land Alliance (ULA) is their work with paralegals. During a workshop in January it was decided to undertake a community review of the paralegals' work.

In April 2003, ActionAid Uganda (AAU) in partnership with ULA began a process to assess community views on paralegal work being carried out in the Kapchorwa District. But hold a bit! The whole exercise was actually initiated by the paralegals themselves during an orientation workshop in January this year. The paralegals suggested that AAU and ULA should contact the community and assess the quality of work being offered and identify areas for improvement and better service.

Six paralegals were involved in the exercise, each supported the review in a sub-county other than where she/he normally serves in order to facilitate free interaction and discussions.

¹ Local council 1 are the smallest local government administrative unit at village level.

The involvement of the paralegals enabled ownership of the process and provided an opportunity to develop skills for carrying out similar assessments in future.

What did the community say?

The community showed appreciation of the roles played by paralegals, especially their skills and manner of handling cases. They reported that on the whole paralegals investigate land cases objectively and use the law fairly to resolve most of them. The poor women in the community specifically said they prefer the support of the paralegals to that of the Local Council 1¹ courts and clan leaders because the paralegals handle cases with a due regard to their rights as women. The Local Council 1 and the clan leaders also appreciate the work of the paralegals as they serve the poor who cannot afford court fees and reduce the number of cases handled by them instead of the council.

'The paralegals are our saviour especially for us who cannot afford the Local Council 1 court fees of shs 50,000 (\$25)' a middle-aged man remarked.

The review also highlighted the need for a closer working relationship between paralegals, Local Council officials and clan leaders. The community agreed that there is need for all the actors to be involved in the process. In acknowledgement of the good service the paralegals are offering, the community clearly expressed their desire for more paralegals to promote the rights of the poor to land. In turn, the paralegals that were involved requested a forum where they can meet to share experiences and forge a way forward in recognition of the assessment findings.

'My children and I were helpless upon the death of my dear husband. My in-laws sold off our land without our knowledge and we only realised this when the buyer came to evict us. However, with paralegal support, we were able to get back our land and are now more confident and sure of how to defend our property,' a widow emphasised.



A paralegal opens up the community review of their services

The next Phase of the Work for the Team

By Jennifer Chapman

The advocacy action research team met for a week in London in May to reflect back on the initial stages of the work and to discuss the next phase of the work.

The action research is happening on a number of levels the main ones being:

- At the local level an action learning process with participating organisations in order to strengthen their critical reflection capacity and hence make their advocacy more effective
- At the national level in Nepal and Ghana a group action learning process with the three participating organisations in order to promote cross learning and improved strategies
- At the international level an action learning process with the team and the capturing of lessons from work at all levels to share more widely.

These processes all overlap with learning at each level intended to support the learning at other levels. However at each level there are different needs and different drivers which at times makes conceptualising the work quite complex.

The other articles in this update address work at the first two of these levels. This article is looking at the third level: the project as a whole across all four countries.

The work at the international level

Action learning process for the team

Each of our team meetings aims to provide a safe space for us all to reflect critically on our own practice. We discuss and share what we have done, how we have done it, any problems or challenges that have arisen, new materials that might be useful and what we intend to do next. The aim is to make this research more effective and to develop our own skills.

Capturing lessons

It is also the responsibility of the team to capture lessons in three areas to share more broadly:

reflection skills and supporting this in others

- What we have learnt about what makes effective advocacy in different contexts
- What we have learnt about how to usefully reflect on and learn from advocacy, along with any processes, tools or frameworks that we think are worth sharing.

Potential tensions

There are potential tensions between the capturing of lessons and the work with partners. Action learning in its pure form does not attempt to extract lessons for wider sharing or to meet any needs other than those of the direct participants. There is a danger that too early an emphasis on extracting lessons can detract from the learning process for the organisations involved. This has been managed till now by protecting the space for the in-country learning and by concentrating at the international level on the team's action learning around its own practice. It is now time for this balance to start to shift.

If managed properly this shift should make no difference to the partners' learning process. The research leaders' role in supporting and facilitating the partner does not change. They are still there to support partners in developing the confidence and skills to do their own analysis and to capture their own data and histories in a way that is useful to them. But at the international level we are looking for material that is useful to others also. Any lessons learnt will undoubtedly be of value to the partner, and any further ideas that come out of work at the international level will be shared and discussed with partners. However the effort required to capture the lessons in a form to be shared more widely should not fall to partners, but is an additional task for the research leaders who will obviously need to ensure permission from partners for any mention made of specific organisations.

Next steps

So far our team learnings and reflections have been largely around developing our own critical reflection skills and what we have learned about how to support the development of

important areas and we will be putting effort into documenting and sharing what we have found.

There is now beginning to be pressure to share what we are learning around effective advocacy and the monitoring and evaluation of advocacy. We discussed this at the recent team meeting and came to the conclusion that we are not yet ready to hold workshops and discussions as it takes time to develop our ideas. But at our next team meeting in November we intend to concentrate on capturing some of our initial learning in these two areas. In order to do this each research leader will be developing a number of case studies focusing on particular issues that have arisen from the work in country. Discussion and reflection on this case material followed by rewriting will form the core activity for the meeting. From this we will draw out material that we can start to share on these topics. This should put us in a position to be able to facilitate and support partners' action learning in parallel with dissemination, sharing and mutual learning activities throughout 2004. This will allow us time to test, modify and rewrite any materials coming out of our work before the project comes to a close in early 2005.

A participant's views, lessons and reflections from the Partners' pre-field Meeting in Ghana in May

By Florence Manamzor

"Why are we here trying to learn and share, why are we doing what we do in our various organisations?"

This was one question asked at the partners pre-field workshop, designed to encourage critical thinking and produce a field guide for data and information collection, that struck me hard. For a moment the room was stone silent, and then some one broke the silence, "because we want to work better to develop ourselves and the communities we work in". For me, that was the best answer given, but it also set me thinking and asking myself:

Ghana Cont...

“Why have we over the years worked without critically examining why we are working?”

Why have we linked advocacy to laws written in languages that can never be comprehended by poor people instead of linking it to the real needs of the poor? It struck me that so many organizations have been working as purely “developmental organizations” or as purely “advocacy organizations” when it seems clear from our reflections in the workshop that the two actually work together?

Fortunately, however, it was not only questions that came to me after the workshop but also some solutions to some nagging problems.

Firstly, I have a clearer understanding of Advocacy and Development and why the two should be connected. I believe advocacy needs to involve the actions of “beneficiaries” as well as the “facilitators”. In fact, after critically examining the role of advocacy, I can see that it is better for the poor to speak and work for themselves than for others to “be the voice of the voiceless”. To have a real impact on the social, cultural, political and economic lives of individuals, communities and the poor we need to involve people in every element of the developmental process. It seems ridiculous to say we are working for the poor whilst the poor do not know what we are doing and what we want to achieve.

Secondly, I gained an understanding of the root causes of problems that we are working on. Two areas of

CENSUDI's work are girl child education and violence against women. Research and work with the communities allows us to understand the root causes of the problems faced by women in Ghana. For example, in girls' access to education, the low status of education, discriminatory practices of traditional culture and heavy domestic burden are all contributing factors; in the problem of violence against women, inadequate law enforcement around issues of gender violence and divorce similarly contribute. Understanding of these root causes and contributing factors makes the search for a solution more manageable. Once these factors are understood advocacy work can be undertaken to combat the situation.

Florence Manamzor joined the CENSUDI team working on the Action Research in April this year.

What “monitoring” means for a southern organization? UNAS’ perspective

By Almir Pereira Junior

Is it not an easy task for a grassroots movement to define and to put into practice its understanding of what “monitoring” means. During the first semester of 2003, UNAS has been developing an interesting process of reflection about the *meaning* and the *value* of monitoring its own advocacy work.

The first stage was to figure out if “*evaluation*” and “*monitoring*” are synonymous or not, since both are processes of reflection and learning. The easiest way UNAS found to mark the difference was that “*evaluation* is related to seeing the impact assessment of things already done, while *monitoring* is a continuous process of reflection about what we are still doing”.

And why monitor advocacy? “*Because*”, they said, “*we want to do better work and political action is an ongoing and complex process, and we must be able not only to perceive the*

(and most important) to know when/where/how to change our strategies”.

So, “monitoring” is seen as a learning process of reflection to enable us to make decisions and changes. But is this all it is? During this period another important dimension of the monitoring process become clear: to reflect and to make changes we need to have substantial information about the issue/topic on which we focus. Access to key information about the (political) work is fundamental when making decisions about what needs to be changed. To get data sounds simple but for an organization like UNAS it is really the most difficult dimension of the whole process.

For UNAS, monitoring means:
 1) *having access to key data/information about the work done, 2) reflecting on the limits and potential; and 3) taking strategic decisions.*

The leaderships in Heliópolis have a strong political background. Debates and decision-making processes are part of their day-to-day work. But, perhaps due to their “oral culture” (most of them have low levels of formal

written language), they don't record and systematize their work. The result is that it is very hard for them to find and then to share the information needed to develop a more reflexive look at their own work.

A simple but revealing example of this problem came early on in this the project: one of our first tasks in the action research was the organization and analysis of the main materials and information on the advocacy work done by UNAS around their fight for the right to “housing”. Members of UNAS did not feel confident enough to organize the material by themselves due to two main reasons: a) a lot of important materials (letters received from the government, reports, photos, etc) are spread around, and sometimes forgotten, in different places inside and outside UNAS' office; b) they thought that there must be some kind of special technique or framework to be used in doing this properly.

The first challenge of the action research in Brazil has been to deal with this dimension of the monitoring work, to try to find the best and easiest way to record, to store, to systematize and to share the most key and basic information around “housing rights”, making it accessible (easy to find and

**Drawing of a Timeline for
Critical Reflection: An
Experience**

By Laya Prasad Uprety

The Nepali Advocacy Action Research Team and the Community Self-reliance centre (CSRC) organized two-day workshop in June with a view to reviewing the action research's work and activities on the land tenancy issue with local activists. At the workshop the teams experimented with the use of the timeline as a monitoring and evaluation tool for the campaign.

CSRC had previously used the timeline tool for plotting events chronologically. During this workshop the addition of other variables was examined, these included the reason or trigger of the event, its consequence, what was learned from this and the use of these learnings in the subsequent advocacy activities. These new dimensions were introduced to encourage learning and critical reflection to improve the effectiveness of the land tenancy rights advocacy campaign.

Some of the lessons that this exercise generated were:

- A good rapport with local activists is essential to open discussion and a deeper understanding of the problems faced by poor people
- The need to educate tenant farmers on the importance of obtaining a receipt when handing over the landlord's share of the crop as the receipt is a strong piece of legal evidence in the claim to rights as a tenant
- The need for local activists to have legal knowledge on the issues
- The importance of the role of media advocacy for the sensitization of larger audiences on the issue
- The alliance between the local government and the local NGOs/CBOs has the potential of yielding the effective results.

The exercise proved to be successful as Jagat Deuja, the focal person of the advocacy action research from CSRC, remarked,

"The timeline previously drawn by us is no longer useful for us primarily because it was not prepared for the learning purpose. It was the mere listing of events in chronological order. Neither was the focus on reason and result. And therefore, the timeline drawn during the process of the advocacy action research looks more useful because it contains the chronology, events, factors triggering the events, results, learnings and use of the learnings. We had to sweat a lot to draw the present timeline—a function of the critical reflection. We have learned something new for monitoring and evaluating the land tenancy rights movement using the timeline. But the presently drawn one should still be refined".

The review workshop with CSRC. Mr. Som Prasad Bhandary (right), the leader of the local tenant farmers' organization in the Sindhupalchok district of Nepal. Mr. Tika Madhav Gajurel (left), a local activist with other participants contributing to the critical reflection on land tenancy advocacy.



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