

Influencing policy: the experience of RAAA in Peru

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Many rural development NGOs provide support to community organizations to improve their managerial capacities in agriculture and in the conservation of agro-biodiversity. In most cases, these efforts have been localized, validating production systems which are based on specific local conditions. Most of these have strengthened local development, but they have generally not extended to larger areas, and they are seldom used as inputs for the development of regional and national policies.

Development projects which achieve a local impact are very important, but not sufficient to generate wider changes in policies for sustainable rural development. Many project evaluators have reported that rural development projects have difficulties in contributing to national processes, or in having their results taken into account within the political agenda. This is one of the reasons why the *Red de Acción en Alternativas al Uso de Agroquímicos*, Peru's Action Network for Alternatives to the Use of Agrochemicals (RAAA), in collaboration with its 35 member organizations, created a campaign unit right from its start in 1990. This unit, known as the Unit for Political Pressure (UIP), makes every effort to put the problems dealing with the development of sustainable agriculture and the use of agrochemicals on the political debate agenda. The main challenge of the unit has been to initiate participatory change processes in the three levels of politics: local, regional and national.

The use of pesticides and agro-chemicals is one of Peru's key environmental problems. Excessive use affects the soil and water resources, and also causes contamination of food. In addition, the most traded and used pesticides in Peru belong to the "extremely dangerous chemicals" category (such as Taron or Furadan), and the use of many forbidden products (DDT, Aldrin) is frequently reported. Over the years, RAAA has therefore focused on the development of national policies that will regulate the use of these products and the promotion of ecological agriculture. Some results have been achieved.

Intervention strategy

RAAA's strategy has focused on influencing public opinion, the authorities, opinion leaders and government officials, on the environmental problems which result from the use of agrochemicals. High-priority issues for the political agenda were identified with the participation of different stakeholders, being chosen according to their degree of environmental importance. Taking advantage of its organizational structure and

of its relation to members and many other organizations, RAAA plays the role of facilitator, promoting interactions between all those involved in the development of sustainable agriculture and, together, defining the strategies and priorities for political lobbying activities.

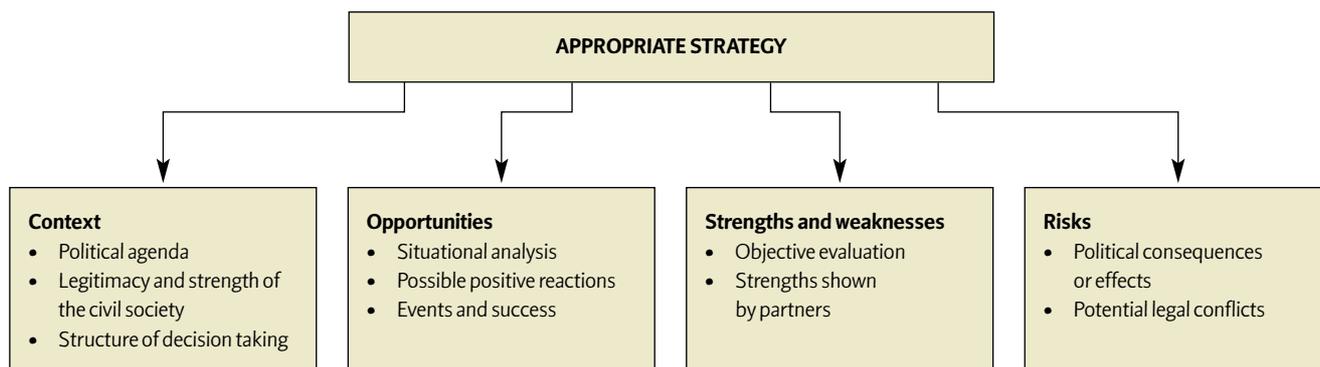


Photo: RAAA

Demonstrators demanding justice in the Taucamarca pesticide poisoning case.

One of the basic tasks of RAAA is to establish methods for permanent dialogue between the authorities and the civil society. One of the challenges when working in political pressure is to get the issue onto the agenda of the political debate. This is not easy: it requires the organization of conferences and the constant provision of press releases to the media. Furthermore, awareness campaigns and mobilization are also needed to get the attention of the mass media and the general public. The constant dissemination of information through the media, coupled with constant institutional lobbying, is how RAAA gets to political leaders or decision makers, and through them sustains the policy proposals for their approval and implementation in the country.

To successfully influence politics, it is essential to understand the context of the problem in detail and to recognize all actors involved. Similarly, it is important to look for the most appropriate moment to start a campaign, and to make an objective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and of those participating in the campaign. It helps



to establish strong links and to work together with other organizations, in particular with the media and with persons in key positions. Potential risks should also be considered at all times (see Figure).

Main results

Through its Unit for Political Pressure, RAAA has run long-lasting campaigns which have resulted in the discussion and approval of rulings that favour sustainable agriculture and a reduction in the use of pesticides. Very interesting synergies between the development organizations that work in the field have been generated during this process. This is seen as a positive and necessary development for the construction of policies aimed at a healthy and sustainable agriculture.

Lobbying actions aimed at congressmen have also been successful, resulting in regular meetings with politicians from different parties, the organization of forums and seminars, and further dissemination of information through the media. Over the years, RAAA's member organizations have similarly intensified their involvement in various campaigns, be it by sending open letters or giving declarations to the media, or by carrying out public demonstrations demanding an end to the marketing of extremely toxic pesticides. The selection of the 3rd of December as "International Day of No Pesticides", established worldwide to commemorate the Bhopal disaster, facilitated the organization of a synchronized campaign in many different cities, demanding immediate action against the widespread use of pesticides. It also helped to focus on the accidents that have occurred in Peru (see Box).

Solidarity campaign for Taucamarca

In one of Peru's worst cases, 24 children died after drinking a milk substitute contaminated with an organophosphate pesticide known as ethyl parathion. This took place in the small peasant community of Taucamarca, Cusco, on October 22nd, 1999, and has until now not been resolved. Since then, RAAA has been actively trying to get those responsible sanctioned, expressing solidarity with the families of the victims.

Thanks to the support of several organizations, it was possible to file lawsuits demanding that justice be done. Sadly, no ruling has been issued until today, and it has not been easy to keep this case on the national political agenda. One of the results of the work of RAAA and its partners has been the formation of a sub-commission in Congress, with the responsibility to investigate the case. Although its report was approved by all members, the case has not been discussed in Congress yet.

The aim of RAAA's work in this case, in addition to working towards an acceptable solution, is to come to jurisprudence so that cases of mass intoxication, in the future, will be considered as a serious violation of human and environmental rights.

These efforts have led to the approval of several national laws and many local regulations:

Law No. 26744, on the promotion of Integrated Pest Management

This law was one of the first political achievements in the fight for the reduction in the use of pesticides. Different politicians became interested in the demands presented by the various campaigns, and a political framework was approved so that non chemical alternatives could be promoted, developed and adopted. As a direct consequence of this law, the Ministry of Agriculture now runs the National Programme for Biological

Control, which produces and makes available natural enemies of agricultural pests.

Law No. 28217, on the use of extremely and highly hazardous pesticides

Since 2000, one of the most successful actions has been the complete banning of all pesticides in categories Ia and Ib (those defined as extremely or highly hazardous to human health). The national campaign also aimed at control mechanisms regarding environmental contamination and public health. Approved in May 2004, this law deals with the management of residues and containers, food contamination control and epidemiological surveillance if intoxication cases occur. Although not forceful in its prohibition of imports or use, this law provides participatory mechanisms that enable stakeholders to request the prohibition of a certain product.

Law for the Promotion of Organic Agriculture

Another result of the campaigns against pesticide use are the different legislative initiatives recently brought up, promoting alternative agriculture models, biological control of pests and weeds, the use of *guano*, or organic farming in general, among others. The most complete was the one presented by congresswoman Paulina Arpasi in September 2004, drafted with the cooperation of RAAA and many of its members. Because of some of its technical and economic implications, this law has not yet been approved by the government, and is still being discussed by stakeholders and politicians alike.

RAAA aims to continue campaigning, while at the same time monitoring the implementation of new regulations by the authorities and by companies that deal with agro-chemicals. This involves developing and validating mechanisms for public participation, so that all those interested not only participate, but are also heard.

Lessons learnt

Experience has shown that it is only possible to achieve the broader objectives of development organizations with good interaction between activities at the local level and policy initiatives. This is facilitated by working in networks, action groups, consortiums, or similar organizations. Coordination and concerted actions contribute to the inclusion of a given theme in the political agenda. The main difficulty lies in maintaining the level of active participation of all those involved. It is thus necessary to be very creative as far as the implementation of activities is concerned. A good dose of motivation is required to mobilize grassroots organizations.

High standards of leadership at the institutional level as well as sufficient human resources are also required in order to achieve change processes in (public) policies regarding sustainable agriculture. These actions need to be constant and ongoing. Furthermore, political lobbying should go step-by-step, be easily understood and taken on by those involved, and be able to show concrete results. Because it was possible to show positive results with the approval of a series of initiatives, RAAA's activities have received recognition, making the other necessary actions easier.

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