UNIT 3 ADVOCACY, POLICY RESEARCH 
AND ANTHROPOLOGY

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Learning Objectives
After covering this unit, you should be able to understand:

- the concept and meaning of advocacy;
- the relationship between anthropology and advocacy;
- how anthropologists act as advocates for the people;
- the meaning of policy research and its relevance in anthropology; and
- the role of anthropologists in policy making.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Advocacy may be defined as a political process by an individual or a large group, which exerts influence on the public policy and resource allocation decisions within the socio-political and economic systems and its associated institutions. It may be inspired from moral, ethical or faith principles or may simply focus on the protection of assets of interest.

However, there may be several definitions of advocacy. Action for Advocacy Development uses the following definition, which is based on the work of Dr Wolf Wolfensberger. Advocacy groups in Australia discussed this definition during a National Advocacy Workshop in Sydney in June 1994. Most of these elements were agreed upon:

Advocacy is speaking, acting, writing with minimal conflict of interest on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of a disadvantaged person or group to promote, protect and defend their welfare and justice by:

- Being on their side and no one else's;
- Being primarily concerned with their fundamental needs; and
- Remaining loyal and accountable to them in a way which is emphatic and vigorous and which is, or likely to be, costly to the advocate or advocacy group.
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The National Lead for Advocacy, Valuing People Team, 2009 defines advocacy as ‘taking action to help people say what they want, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain services they need. Advocates and advocacy schemes work in partnership with the people they support and take their sides. Advocacy promotes social inclusion, equality and social justice’.

In society, decision making process holds considerable importance for its members but due to some reason or the other, people feel marginalised or excluded from the political system. They are devoid of personal freedom and there are a number of barriers which prevent people from actively taking part in decision making process, which affects their lives and individual’s ability to speak for them.

Advocacy has the ability to cater to the needs of the marginalised and disadvantaged sections of the community, where formal services and systems fail; where people have lost faith and confidence in the system and feel excluded, advocacy reestablishes them. Advocacy as a process has developed to recognise differences both in people themselves and in their needs for support which may change during their life.

There are several forms of advocacy depending upon the peoples need, and depending on the context, in which they are to be used, each has a different approach in the way change is brought in society and the way goal is accomplished. One of the most popular forms of advocacy is Social Justice Advocacy. For them, advocacy represents the series of actions taken and issues highlighted to change the “what is” into a “what should be”, considering that this “what should be” is a more decent and a more just society (Cohen, de la Vega and Watson. 2001). Those actions, which vary with political, economic and social environments in which they are conducted, have several points in common (ibid, 2001) which are:

- Questions the way policy is administered;
- Participate in the agenda setting as they raise significant issues;
- Target political systems “because those systems are not responding to people’s needs”;
- Are inclusive and engaging;
- Propose policy solutions and
- Open up space for public argumentation.

The four most common forms of advocacy are self, peer, citizen and professional advocacy. Valuing People Now has simplified their definitions:

- Self–advocacy as people coming together to speak up for themselves
- Citizen advocacy as volunteers developing long term relationships with people and speaking up for them
- Professional or representational advocacy as people being paid to advocate with and for, individuals on a short or long term basis
- Peer advocacy as people who have the same or similar experience of discrimination as the person they are acting as an advocate for.
Although there are several types of advocacy, there is no best form according to *Action for Advocacy*, 2009. Some advocacy organisations combine different approaches, and some approaches may be more common or suited to specific local need or groups of people. Some organisations may undertake advocacy work as part of a wider remit which may include self-help groups, independent living support services or general support services. Other organisations and agencies, such as advice centres, welfare rights teams, befriending and counseling services may deliver a service similar to advocacy but are not normally recognised as part of the independent advocacy sector.

### 3.2 ADVOCACY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

“Those who have the good fortune to be able to devote their lives to the study of the social world cannot stand aside, neutral and indifferent, form the struggles in which the future of that world is at stake.” Bourdieu (Cited in Hillier and Rooksby, 2005:7)

The relationship between anthropology and advocacy can be traced back to colonial times when anthropologists were engaged directly or indirectly, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and complicity, in the colonial project or its legacy (Asad, 1973; Kuper, 1996; Ervin, 2000; Sillitoe, 2007). Anthropologists have always found themselves involved at micro-level with individuals and local communities. The question arises here about the role of anthropologists when they study any society. Should anthropologists act to improve the conditions of people or act as intermediary or active agents of change?

To quote Karl Marx [1969 (1845)], “The philosophers have interpreted the world in many ways; the pain however is to change it.” When we analyse this statement in the context of anthropology, it raises one question that can anthropologists act as advocates for the rights of people they study, or does this compromise their objectivity?

There are a number of arguments in support of advocacy. These range from pragmatism and effectiveness to more fundamental issues around morality and ethics. It can also be argued that from an epistemological perspective all anthropologists are in some ways acting as advocates through documenting and communicating their informants’ perspective to others: “Advocacy derives naturally form the practice of anthropology…it is an integral part of the process of representing other people’s views”(Layton 1996:40).

Singer adds: “From this perspective all of anthropology is advocacy, because all activity is goal oriented and has consequences in social life” (Singer 1990: 548).

Layton (1996) also said that the promotion of advocacy lies in its ability to bring change in people’s lives and it also helps the anthropologists to get closer to people and hence collect rich ethnographies but the debate questions the ethics and morality of interventions by the anthropologists as an outsider in promoting a particular cause or voicing on behalf of other people they study.

Wade (1996) has also raised concern about the issue of the ‘inherent reflexivity of anthropological practice’. With reference to Colombia, he said that local anthropologists are directly involved in social problems and political struggles. The central point of argument is that production, control and communication of
knowledge is highly controlled and unequally distributed. He argues for enhanced reflexivity through methods which ‘subvert’ normal communication channels ‘to try to create an arena in which anthropologists can engage politically and speed up, so to speak, the cycle of reflexivity’ (Wade, 1996:4).

He strongly supported direct advocacy and denied that if such action means engagement at ‘the sharp end’ of these problems, this is not a good enough reason for not engaging. He defines advocacy as ‘a particular mode of engagement or reflexive academic practice’ and in common with other forms of political engagement is inevitably problematic: Who and how to represent? Whose interest to privilege? How to deal with divided communities?

### 3.2.1 Advocacy Debate: Moral Engagement in Anthropology

Scheper-Hughes is critical of anthropologists as a ‘neutral, dispassionate, cool and rational, objective observer of the human’ (1995: 410) and she has advocated a radical approach, which is politically committed and morally engaged. She believes that anthropology must have an ethical grounding and she equates cultural relativism with moral relativism, which is no longer appropriate.

#### Cultural Relativism

*Cultural Relativism is an approach, a principle in anthropology advocated by Franz Boas in early 20th century. For Boas, this approach posited that all cultures are to be given equal worth and to be comprehended from the point of the people’s own cultures.*

The personal story of her own transformation ‘form “objective” anthropologist to politically and morally engaged companheira’ is illuminating. She went to a poor *favela* (a shanty town) in Brazil as a Peace Corps Volunteer and worked as a ‘politically committed community organiser’. She returned to the same place after twenty years, but this time as an anthropologist (and mother) to study infant mortality and chronic hunger (Scheper-Hughes, 1992). Instead of participating in community action she tried to focus on her research, but was challenged by the women in *favela*: “Why had I refused to work with them [as before]? Didn’t I care about them personally any more, their lives, their sufferings, their struggle? Why was I so passive, so indifferent?” (1992:17-18). She replied: “my work is different now. I cannot be an anthropologist and a companheira at the same time.” But this argument was rejected by the women who insisted that “the next time I came back it would be on their terms, i.e. as a companheira, ‘accompanying’ them as I had before in the struggle and not just sitting idly by taking field notes. ‘What is this anthropology to us any way?”’ (1995: 411). She accepted and in her next visits, she spared equal time and loyalties between both anthropology and political work in support of her friends and informants. At the end she realised that the more she engaged with the public world beyond the *favela* ‘the more my understandings of the community were enriched and my theoretical horizons were expanded’ (ibid: 410). Here, she suggests that politically engaged advocacy is not only morally correct, but theoretically valid and practically advantageous.

She had been constantly involved with extremes of violence, poverty and social exclusion which led her to realise that “there was little virtue to false neutrality in the face of broad political and moral dramas of life and death, good and evil, which were being played out in the everyday lives of people. …What makes
anthropology and anthropologists exempt from the human responsibility to take an ethical (and political) stand on events we are privileged to witness?” (1995: 411).

She believes that ‘those of us who make our living observing and recording the misery of the world have a particular obligation to reflect critically’ (ibid:416), and to produce “politically complicated and morally demanding texts and images capable of sinking through the layers of acceptance, complicity and bad faith that allow the suffering and deaths to continue” (ibid: 417).

She advocates for an approach of accountability, commitment, engagement, responsibility, solidarity, empathy, compassion and interestingly suggests that such an approach would be ‘more womanly’. She even said that a change is needed which would turn the anthropologists form ‘spectator to witness’, and explains why ‘neutrality’ is not an option – as non-involvement is also an ethical and moral position.

Her position resembles Bourdieu’s criticism of a synoptic view of activity- in which the viewer attempts to stand apart from the action, as opposed to a participatory view which regards the world from a participant’s standpoint (Hiller and Rooksby, 2005:21). We are all actors within a social reality and cannot be neutral, disengaged spectators. Therefore, according to Scheper-Hughes (1995:417, 418), we have a responsibility to be involved: we cannot flee ‘from local commitments, local engagements, and local accountability’, but must use our ethnography as ‘a tool for critical reflection and for human liberation.’

There is a study of an isolated indigenous group (Arhuacos) of northern Colombia by Hastrup and Elsass (1990), which put forth a contrasting opposite argument, where they were requested by some Arhuacos to help promote a ‘development’ project to increase their autonomy within Colombian society. Their limited traditional land had a threat from encroaching peasant farmers and the proposed irrigation project was meant to increase yield. The aim of the project was to revitalise the traditional cultural patterns through its combined ‘ecological and cosmological overtones’ and the main beneficiaries would be women. Elsass and Hastrup thought that the proposal was sound and decided not to act as advocates.

They felt that at first they were not needed, that some of the educated Arhuacos could do what was required; secondly, they were concerned about their relationship with the Bureau of Indigenous Affairs; thirdly, they questioned why they should privilege the Indians over the peasants; and at last, they felt that their participation would be patronizing and an extension of romantic notions attached to the European vision of the Indians as the ultimate ‘other’. They ask: “in what sense could we ‘speak for’ them without possibly inflicting romantic post-colonial views up on them to the exclusion of a thorough understanding of the complex Colombian context?” (Hastrup and Elsass, 1990: 304).

They attempted to justify their position by citing literature which argues that the advocacy discourse is “over-emotional, oversimplified, rhetorical, over-dramatic, exaggerated, single-minded, without footnotes: in short the exact opposite of our academic writing”. This is an unhelpful generalisation as advocacy can equally well be ‘dispassionate, empirical, substantiated, careful in the way it is framed and based on very substantial information and research’ (Ervin, 2000: 129).
Hastrup and Elsass argue that the rationale for advocacy is never ethnographic and that advocacy is incompatible with anthropology as scholarship: ‘what is required of the anthropologists as a scholar… is to raise the context awareness of the people themselves so that they may eventually become better equipped to plead their own cause’. Neither do they believe that any ‘cause’ can be legitimated in anthropological terms as: ‘advocacy has its own discourse because it is directed towards specific goals. The pursuit of these goals cannot be legitimated in terms of anthropology, though it can be informed by it’. They also emphasise that difference in terms of knowledge by claiming that ‘ethnography is legitimated by established canons of scholarship and the creation of knowledge, while advocacy rests on moral commitment and the use of knowledge’, they conclude that to become advocates, anthropologists have to ‘step outside’ their profession.

Grillo (1990: 308) points out that Hastrup and Elsass propose an ‘amoral relativism’ and ‘an austere, persuasive definition of anthropology and a rather narrow view of the principles on which the subject and its practices are based and of what they can and should compromise.’ In contrast, Scheper-Hughes insists on the central importance of morality: ‘if we cannot begin to think about social institutions and practices in moral or ethical terms, then anthropology strikes me as quite weak and useless” (ibid: 410).

### 3.3 POLICY RESEARCH IN ANTHROPOLOGY

There can be many definitions of research, but if we put in the simplest term, it is the systematic collection and presentation of information. Policy research is a special type of research that can provide communities and decision-makers with useful recommendations and possible actions for resolving fundamental problems. Such research provides policy-makers with pragmatic, action-oriented recommendations for addressing an issue, question, or problem. The primary focus of policy research is linked to the public policy agenda and results are useful to the development of public policies (Majchrzak, 1984). A policy research effort begins with a social issue or question, evolves through a research process whereby alternative policy actions for dealing with the problem are developed, and communicates these alternatives to policy-makers. Policy research is unique in focusing on action-oriented recommendations to social problems.

<table>
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<th>Who Uses Policy Research?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Policy-makers, Government, Special Interest Groups, Community Organisations, Policy Organisations, Policy Analysts and Advisors, Voluntary Sector, Lobbying Groups, Universities, Individuals, Private Sector, Anyone Else Wanting to Impact Policy.</td>
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Policy research finds its place in applied and practicing anthropology. John van Willigen (2006) used “applied anthropology” in a generic and inclusive sense, as the knowledge and practices of anthropologists that involve action directed at some practical goal other than gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Applied anthropology exists in many forms, including advocacy anthropology, action anthropology, research and development anthropology, action research, and cultural brokerage, as well as various kinds of policy research such as evaluation, social impact assessment, needs assessment and cultural appraisal.
Kirk L. Gray (1978) argues that unlike traditional ethnography where the anthropologists can work with few encumbrances other than those imposed by the community being studied; the anthropologists in a policy research endeavour such as the Experimental Housing Allowance Program must develop what is termed a sense of client. To whom is research responsible and for what purpose will the data be used? What are the policy makers’ specific objectives in conducting research? How can the anthropologists use his special skills to become a viable part of the policymaking process? Although the accumulation of general knowledge about a given subject customary in traditional ethnography is interesting, if it does not meaningfully relate to specific questions, one is not fulfilling one’s contractual obligations.

He also argues that policy research is undertaken with the idea that its results will help a decision maker choose between alternative courses of action to accomplish planned social change. Such a goal differs from that of traditional or basic social science, which seeks only to explain a phenomenon with little foresight as to its application to public policy.

3.4 INVOLVEMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGISTS AS POLICY ADVISERS

Anthropologists have always been involved in different domains of policy research and suggesting the policy making agency by their academic and research insights. It may be either developmental studies or research in the area of displacement due to formulation of one or the other projects. Anthropologists are hired by government agencies for preparing resettlement action plan for the project affected population which involves the social impact assessment studies.

Social Impact Assessment includes:
- Identification of the project’s adverse impacts, i.e. loss of agricultural land, trees, standing crops, loss of dwellings, farm buildings and other structures (wells, irrigation works, fencing), break up of communities, disintegration of social support networks, restricted access/loss to community resources including water resources, pasture, forest and wood land, medicinal plants, game animals or fisheries, loss of business, loss of access to public infrastructure or services, loss of reduced income due to above losses;
- Land acquisition survey;
- Census;
- Socioeconomic survey and studies; and
- Consultation with project area people.

A resettlement action plan is required where projects cause displacement (physical or economic) and it is necessary to reestablish social and economic bases of displaced communities. It is a document that specifies procedures and action to be followed to mitigate adverse project impacts, to compensate losses and to provide developmental benefits.

A report on a workshop held by the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) on March 27, 1999 at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London have put forth the following:
Applications of anthropology for policy makers:

- The anthropological model of economics as being embedded in social relationships is essential for policy makers;

- Methods from anthropology and sociology can be applied to enhance the social factor in development projects – focus group interviews, household census surveys, participatory appraisal etc;

- Social factors are often marginalised in project planning and management. They should be prioritised;

- Anthropological approaches have had an extensive impact in the world of policy and economics: the fields of participatory development and reflexivity in the world of aid have benefited from anthropology; and

- Policy makers should draw upon data from both national statistics and local anthropological case studies.

They have also recommended the following for anthropologists involved in public policy and economics:

- While local studies are the strengths of anthropology, these should be related to broader levels through the use of theories, models or hypotheses to make them relevant to policy and the work of economists;

- Anthropologists are encouraged to join policy organisations and change them from inside; they are equally encouraged to undertake informed ethnography and constructive critique of policy organisations and documents;

- If anthropologists are in positions of power in project design and management, social factors can be given the emphasis they require for project success;

- Anthropologists are encouraged to develop a range of country studies and social profiles presented in a user friendly way, by region and by theme, giving an outline from the point of view of sociology and anthropology of what the country is like, and on portfolios on particular themes and development issues. This would be very useful for policy makers;

- Anthropology courses should include training on applied research and consultancy skills;

- When anthropologists are communicating with experts from other disciplines, they must make comments of relevance and interest, even if they are subversive and provocative. Clear expression is of paramount importance; and

- Policy messages which might be simple in anthropological terms, such as ‘economics are embedded in social relations’, need to be communicated clearly in policy circles, as they have still not been taken on board fully. They must be backed up with convincing analysis which links the case study with policy implications.
Therefore, we can say that there are multiple ways of ‘doing’ anthropology and given the complexity of most situations the call by Paine (1990) for “a professional statement about the kind of things we do, or should do as anthropologists’ would seem unnecessary”. However it is relevant to be reminded that “the people who find themselves being researched are rarely content with academic studies of their communities. They want information that can improve their lives rather than furthering someone’s career” (Ervin, 2000: 129). They can also legitimately expect some form of reciprocity, and as Kirsch (2002) points out : “activism is a logical extension of the commitment to reciprocity that underlies the practice of anthropology.”

References


**Website sources**


http://quotes.gaia.com/Karl%20Marx

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**Suggested Reading**


**Sample Questions**

1) What do you understand by advocacy?

2) Where does advocacy lies in the discipline of anthropology?

3) What is the meaning of policy research?

4) How anthropologists contribute to the policy making?

5) How can you correlate advocacy anthropology and an anthropologist who is engaged in policy research?