

**Civil Society Leadership and Policy
Engagement Process Training:
Improving the Nile Basin
Discourse Policy
Engagement**

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1. Executive Summary

This report is on the second part¹ of a six-day training workshop held for Nile Discourse Forums' (NDFs) representatives of the ten riparian countries that share the Nile basin. It was facilitated by a team from Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and was structured in three thematic areas.

That is:

- a) Basis of policy influence: CSOs, evidence and policy processes
- b) Tools for policy impact
- c) How to develop a policy influencing strategy

2. Introductions

Alan Nicol gave introductory remarks as well as a presentation in which he highlighted the increasing importance of the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD) with regard to policy engagement even at the international level. He posited that the work relationship of the desk and National Discourse Forums (NDFs) is vital to the realisation of the objectives of the NBD - which prompt/inform policy debates on the Nile basin, and for which a strategic approach is required in order to facilitate interaction with and influence governments (of the riparian countries). He further outlined two key objectives that underscored these issues. These are:

- Strengthen understanding of the policy environment surrounding the Nile basin and the Nile Basin Initiative.
- Need to develop policy tools to map the engagement of policy. For this, there is further need to:
 - Draw strategy on how to do so
 - Focus on broader areas of policy mapping
 - Identify the particular policy issues/needs and develop specific action plans

To achieve the objectives, Alan outlined a pragmatic approach that examines the policy environment along the regional and local axis along with the crosscutting sector specific (national and sub-national water policies) and non-sector specific (PRSPs, national processes) issues.

3. Workshop Expectations

Following the opening presentation, participants had an opportunity to express what they hoped to get out of this second part of the workshop. The popular expectations were on policymaking and policy engagement strategies with policy makers and NBD. Other expectations included strategies for engaging in trans-boundary water management initiatives.

¹ 25th – 27th April

4. The thematic area sessions

a) Basis of policy influence: CSOs, evidence and policy processes

Presentations: 'Background on ODI' and on the 'Civil Society Partnership Programme' – Naved Chowdhury and Nicola Jones

Group activity - 1

The presentations drew the following discussion points from the participants:

- The relationship between ODI and NDF. This was with regard to what most perceived as ODI's absence at the grassroots level and hence its inability to fully relate to the needs of local communities. To mitigate the situation, Naved pointed out that ODI brings on board its staff, members of developing countries who help ODI to ground its policies to the realities of these countries. In addition, Alan stressed that ODI does not seek to set up physical offices in developing countries, but rather base its researchers in these countries as they work on development-based initiatives amongst beneficiary communities.
- Concern was raised on the possibilities of influencing civil society participation without raising confrontation. Having effective communication skills², it was posited would address the issue. Further, it was added that an effective communication strategy is currently being developed.
- Possibility of inviting select Members of Parliament and/or senior government officials to attend similar subsequent workshops. It was generally felt and agreed that this possibility should be taken into consideration at the initial planning stages for the workshops.
- The staff exchange and visiting fellows (from ODI) programme whose main objective is capacity building generated interest among participants. Naved and Nicola asked those interested to get in touch with them for more information.
- ODI and RAPID - it was clarified that the latter is a part of the former – which is itself a think tank.

The first group activity was structured on the subsidiary action programmes basis – 1 ENSAP and 2 NELSAP³. The exercise entailed identification of challenges and opportunities to influence water resource policies in Nile basin countries. The feedback generated demonstrated the participants' knowledge and understanding of the issue influencing water resource policies in Nile basin countries. However, the understanding of the exercise's requirements was not uniform and hence more time was spent during the presentations trying to draw out from the reports, the key issues that the exercise aimed to highlight.

Presentations: Policy Making and Influencing and Stakeholder Position Mapping

Group activity - 2

The second group activity, which entailed development of a stakeholder analysis matrix, came after brief presentations by Naved Chowdhury and Nicola Jones on the first of three parts on policy mapping tools. Focus of these presentations was on the Merilee Grindle Approach of policymaking and development of a stakeholder analysis matrix. The exercise addressed three questions: Who are your stakeholders? What is their level of influence? What type of engagement

² Addressed in the final day of the workshop

³ ENSAP – Eastern Nile Subsidiary Action Programme, NELSAP – Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Programme

do you have with them at each level of policy making? The participants' understanding of the exercise's requirements in this case was evident in the feedback generated, which was consistent with the feedback expected.

b) Tools for Policy Impact

Presentation: RAPID Framework for Influencing Policy and Practice

Group activity - 3

This presentation, done by Nicola Jones, constituted the second part of the policy mapping tools, after which participants broke into their third group activity. The structure of the groups however shifted from the subsidiary action programmes (ENSAP and NELSAP) setting to country specific teams. The activity was for each country team to identify possible strategies for influencing policy and practice. Like in the previous group activities, the reporting revealed the participants' understanding of both the issue at hand and the expected feedback of the exercise. The Ugandan team's presentation was lauded as being the best and recommended as a model that could be used by the other country teams to generate policy and practice strategy matrices. It was noted that participants could strengthen the evidence⁴ needed to influence the policy makers by establishing/enriching their information databases, for example, by documenting evidence gathered at the grassroots level through the various development-based initiatives and interventions. The suggestion was made for undertakings of action research projects to distil lessons learnt and share them with beneficiary communities.

Discussion points that drew from this group activity included:

- Issue of competition and/or antagonism with other NGOs - which could arise when activities undertaken by an NDF are within the mandates of organisations. To mitigate this, the approaches suggested would be for the respective NDF to target the areas within other NGOs mandate that they do not perform/deliver well and build their capacity on them.
- Change of NDF focus in terms of programme areas for the sake of sustainability. Concern was raised on the large amount of time spent in training workshops that could be spent in developing new programme areas instead.
- Engagement with the government – for CSOs to take on some of the projects currently under the government, for which it has plenty of funds for but not adequate capacity to implement or manage.
- Need for fundraising for NDFs to help diversify their programme areas as well as sustain the impact of the programmes on the ground after the funding is over. It was further explained that NDFs' involvement in the NGO networks requires additional human resources (programme officers), which would be feasible if NDFs have their own financial capacity to support additional staff.

Presentation: Integrated Water Resources Management and Civil Society Participation in Nile Basin Countries

In this presentation, Alan Nicol highlighted the potential and opportunities for NDFs to take on more programme areas. The area of integrated water resources management (IWRM) he posited

⁴ Evidence is part of the RAPID framework

has cross-sectional learning that builds on the ecological, institutional and economic principles. From these principles he drew the strengths and weaknesses of IWRM.

The strengths included:

- Co-ordination,
- Information resources,
- Ecosystems and catchments, and
- Process – it is here that NDFs come in on the paradigm of improving dialogue between policy makers and stakeholders.

The weaknesses on the other hand are:

- Inadequate resource allocation,
- The issue of equity is sidelined by the focus on efficient use of water,
- Governance – in terms of integration and policy dialogue on the use of resources. This in particular underscored the importance of civil society engagement especially in the policy decision-making processes. Further, the role of civil society engagement would be to mainstream the various concerns through lobbying, questioning decisions made, developing and disseminating knowledge in better ways and linking IWRM policy with NBD projects and processes from the bottom-up.

As indicators of impact, monitoring and evaluation would determine the success of the interventions. Issue was raised on whether to develop a clear IWRM policy and/or mainstream the one developed by the respective governments. On this, it was noted that lobbying for IWRM in many countries is not strong especially the role of the Global Water Partnerships.

With regard to undertaking programmes at the ground level, capacity is minimal and there is both the need the interest for members to take on the projects an own them.

c) How to develop a policy influencing strategy

Presentation: Communication: Why and How to

Group activity - 4

The presentation, done by Naved Chowdhury, focused on several aspects of communication.

Thereafter participants broke into the final group activity in which they designed country specific strategies for engaging key decision making stakeholders. From the group presentations, several lessons were drawn:

- I. The perfect communicator gives a message that remains with the audience for a long time.
- II. It is important to study the audience so that one packages the right message that will adequately address the issue at hand.
- III. The message should be simple.
- IV. Important to use what is available and suitable for the audience.
- V. Effective evidence based advocacy is driven by both information and the aforementioned lessons.

5. Closing Remarks

Dr. Melaku gave a vote of thanks to all participants, the ODI team and the support staff for their contributions to making the workshop a success. He felt that the training would help the respective NDFs in adopting various advocacy strategies. Participants too were grateful for the workshop, which generated interest on possible trans-boundary networking opportunities, in addition to the take away points on the globalisation theme, undertaking of research and sharing of expertise. They also identified various issues to advocate for, i.e. gender and water management, energy alternatives (with focus on stemming deforestation), integration of other disciplines into water resources management, role of the state in engaging civil society (in areas of corruption, non-accountability, creating space for civil society, poverty), water and health, HIV/AIDS, population and biodiversity conservation.

Presentation of certificates of participation to the participants marked the end and official closure of the workshop.