

Southern Africa Trust (SAT) and Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Workshop

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Introduction

This is a brief report of a workshop on *Exploring Practical Approaches to Enhancing CSOs policy analysis, engagement and Advocacy Skills in Southern Africa*, held between Southern Africa Trust, its partners and Overseas Development Institute (ODI) UK at the Blue Valley Golf Estate in Midrand, South Africa on 3rd April, 2007. The main objective of the Workshop was to explore a working relationship between the Southern Africa Trust, its partners and ODI that can enhance sharing of strategies and tools for advocacy and policy influencing for supporting CSOs in Southern Africa.

This Workshop provided a very useful platform for sharing experiences about the CSO policy context in Southern Africa, and how they have used different approaches to policy influence. It also contributed to a deeper understanding of how to bridge the gap between policy and research. The ODI facilitated this workshop by using some of their long standing approaches and techniques to enhancing CSOs policy analysis, engagement and advocacy skills.

Summary of the outcomes of the Workshop:

I. Understanding the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) framework

The RAPID framework was discussed as one of the basic tools that can be used to bridge the gap between Research and policy in development. The main assumption is that the link between research and policy or evidence and practice is normally viewed as a linear process, whereby a set of research findings or lessons shift from "research sphere" over to the "policy sphere" and then has some impact on policy makers' decisions and practical programmes. This is normally not the case in reality. The RAPID Framework reviews that to be able to respond to the 'big' question of how research-based and other forms of evidence are adopted by policy makers and practioners; there are four main aspects which the RAPID Framework emphasises for consideration. These include:

1. Understanding the Political context: Politics and Institutions

The issue here is that Policies are normally driven by Politics and thus it is important to understand the context in order for you to be able to maximise your chances of influence. In addition you will need to understand:

- the extent of civil and political freedoms in a country
- policy implementation and practice (looking out if there are any windows of opportunity to influence),
- how policy makers think (attitudes, narratives and policy streams)
- identify decisive moments in policy processes

It should also be understood that the political strategies and power relations are obvious in any political system and are tied to specific institutional pressures – so these will have to be explored.

2. Evidence: Credibility and communication

The issue here is that your policy makers will not take up your policy recommendations if your evidence does not provide a solution/s to a problem, have no topical relevance, and lacks operational usefulness. The evidence has to be credible in terms of approach, the researcher who did the research and the conveyors of this evidence including the way the messages are packaged. If the messages are couched in familiar terms and targeted; this can make a big difference.

3. Links: Influence and Legitimacy

The issue here is that making the right kinds of links of communities, networks and intermediaries (e.g. the media and campaigning groups) does affect policy change. These groups have to have legitimacy and authority to speak on keep policy issues. There is often an under-appreciation of the extent and ways that intermediary organisations and networks impact on formal policy guidance documents, which in turn influence officials.

4. Understating the External Influences

The issue here is that policy change is also likely to be affected by external forces such as international politics and processes as well as donor policies and specific research funding instruments. E.g. Broad incentives like Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) can have substantial impact on the demand for research by policy makers; trends towards democratisation and liberalisation and donor support for CSOs can also have an impact on policy action. The gap at the moment is that there is no clarity on how donors themselves promote use of evidence in policy making.

In the meeting, the RAPID framework was applied to explain the PRSP story. It was argued that although the PRSPs have been largely criticised as being a wrong policy framework, it has had huge policy impact. Using the RAPID framework, it is clear that the political context and external influences were well examined, right links cultivated and the right evidence applied.

Selected examples from the meeting using the RAPID Framework:

The following selected examples of activities/processes and projects used the RAPID Framework to identify possible policy action and change:

1. Khanya - acid: Improving DSD Approaches to service delivery
Objective needing policy change: Government to adopt effective methodologies for programme design and implementation
2. Economic Justice Network
Objective needing policy change: Role of faith-based organisations in influencing SADC enhanced
3. Southern Africa Trust: Influencing the SADC Conference on Poverty and Development
Objective needing policy change: CSO engagement in Poverty conference in influencing SADC towards a Regional Poverty Strategy
4. Mtente:
Objective needing policy change: To convince funders to fund SMEs in a segmented manner – i.e. to distinguish between those businesses with huge growth potential and those SMEs that are unlikely to grow in a sustainable manner through interventions.

Notable Gaps in the RAPID Framework

The meeting identified some gaps in using the RAPID framework. These include the following:

- There is not much room for examining the internal influences to policy change
- The researcher is not enable to easily identify the problem statement
- There is potential overlap/confusion between Links and External influences if not clearly defined – some would think links refers to main targets/key stakeholders while at the same time these may mean key links influencing policy decisions, which may be the same as external factors.
- The framework seems to be targeted at those groups doing campaign and advocacy work and does not clearly show at what stage of researchers should apply them in their analysis – before the project starts in the middle of project or at the end of it.

II. Building Capacity of CSOs to influence Policy: Key Lessons to be considered

Lesson # 1

- Understanding policy processes means understanding the politics
- There is lack of Trust between CSOs and Government
- Determine whether the research is demand led or supply driven
- Capacity to use and package research for policy influence is limited

- Donor influence is huge
- Gradual erosion of research capacity among CSOs
- Proposals by CSOs should be feasible and practical

Lesson # 2

- Engagement with policy makers varies – capacity of government officials also in question

Lesson #3

- Effective communication: develop different materials for different audiences
- Choose roles and responsibilities
- Financial and human resources
- Using media
- Engaging donors
- Inviting policy makers from the outset

III. Practical Methods and Tools for Policy Influence

The meeting was informed of practical tools which can be used for policy influence. These included the following:

1. The RAPID Framework
2. Problem Situational Analysis (Also known as the Tree Analysis – helps you identify the real problem/s at hand)
3. Stakeholder Analysis (helps you to identify all key players/actors according to level of power and influence)
4. Social Network Analysis (focuses on structure of relationships, nodes and links between nodes and social processes)
5. Force Filed Analysis (helps you map the level of influence and power)
6. SWOT (Strengthens, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis)
7. Communication Tools – message design and packaging, use of media, audience identification, messenger/promotion, persuasion, writing policy briefs and targeting

The general rule is that no method or set of tools is more effective than the other. It is important to use them interchangeably. E.g. it might be useful to use the Force field analysis with the stakeholder analysis or the RAPID Framework with the Force filed analysis or the Tree Analysis.

IV. Way forward

1. Southern Africa Trust and its partners to explore further in its work how to apply most the methods and tools shared
2. ODI to develop further the relationship between Southern Africa Trust and its partners

Annex 1: Workshop Agenda

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| Day 1 | ODI Meeting with Southern Africa Trust |
| 14.00 – 15.00 | An overview of the Southern Africa Trust: Purpose, Objective – Exploring Strategic relationships with ODI |
| Day 2 | Basics of Policy Influence & Tools for Policy Impact: CSOs, Evidence and Policy processes |
| 9.00 – 9.15 | Introduction to workshop: Expectations and Introductions |
| 9.15 – 10.15 | The RAPID Framework: Theory and Practice Case studies using the RAPID Framework Discussion |
| 10.15 – 10.30 | Lessons from the Civil Society Partnerships Programme |
| 10.30 – 11.00 | Understanding the context: The RAPID 28 Questions and other methods |
| 11.00 – 12.00 | Group work: Use the RAPID framework to analyse the Policy Context in Southern Africa |
| | Tea |
| 12.00 – 13.00 | Presentation |
| 13.00 – 14.00 | Lunch |
| 14.00 – 14.30 | Tools for Policy Influence Developing the strategy: Force Field Analysis |
| 14.30 – 15.30 | Group work and Presentations What opportunities are there for SAT partners to influence development policies in Southern Africa? |
| 15.30 – 15.45 | Tea |
| 15.45 – 16.45 | Planning communications: Audience, Message and Messenger Advocacy Rules Some practical tools for Monitoring and Learning Knowledge Management Tools |
| 16.45 – 17.00 | Closing and Way Forward |