

**Civil Society Partnership Programme:
National Seminar and Workshop on
Civil Society Organisations, Evidence and Policy Influence
24-25 July, 2005, BRAC Inn, Dhaka**

The second national seminar and workshop of the CSPP South Asia Regional Consultation was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 24th and 25th July, in collaboration with Unnayan Onneshan - The Innovators, a centre for action and research for development. The two-day event included a half-day seminar followed by one and half day workshop.

The seminar began with a welcome speech by Jakir Hossain, Unnayan Onneshan, then Major General Anwarul Kabir Talukder (Retd.) M.P., Minister of State, Ministries of Finance and Planning, Government of Bangladesh presented the inaugural speech. John Young and Naved Chowdhury then gave a presentation on ODI, the Context, Evidence and Links (CEL) Framework, Tools for policy influence, and Implications for CSOs. A case study from Bangladesh was presented by Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir (Unnayan Onneshan), describing corrosion of small rice farmers in the context of price hike and the experience in policy advocacy to protect the farmers. A discussion session followed the case study presentation.

In the following workshop, Naved Chowdhury and John Young explained more comprehensively the RAPID Context, Evidence and Links Framework and Tools for Policy Influence, and the Civil Society Partnership Programme (CSPP). Jakir Hossain presented the second case study from Bangladesh focusing on Poverty and Employment in Bangladesh PRSP at the workshop. This was followed by a presentation by Naved Chowdhury showing how the CEL framework can be used to analyse the political context, evidence and links. John Young explained how to influence policy using the RAPID framework and practical tools. Following this session, participants were divided into three groups, who presented four case studies and analysed their case studies using CEL framework.

The following paragraphs presents key points of presentations, group work and subsequent discussions.

Seminar Summary

Jakir Hossain opened the seminar by briefly introducing the purpose of the meeting. In his welcome speech he also introduced the Overseas Development Institute and Unnayan Onneshan. He spoke on the role and capacity of the CSOs in influencing policy and referred to the vital role that CSOs can play in influencing and programmes which have direct bearing on development in general and poverty reduction in particular as innovators in service provision and as advocates with and for the poor and as builders of capacity. He highlighted the need for long cultivated connections with stakeholders such as public sector officials, politicians, business leaders, NGOs, trade unions, women's groups and educators to advance pro-poor agendas.

In his inaugural address Major General Anwarul Kabir Talukder (Retd.) M.P., Minister of State, Ministries of Finance and Planning, Government of Bangladesh, acknowledged the importance of participation of CSOs in the policy-making process. He mentioned how people's participation was ensured in the process of formulating a country's PRSP. He expressed the view that without relevant information, critical analysis and inputs, no-one can take part in and contribute to the policy process effectively.

Referring to the UK and other democracies, where CSOs extend support to policy makers with critical inputs, he told the participants that Bangladesh needs to develop such a mutually beneficial

culture to make Bangladesh's policy-making process more democratic and participatory. He spoke about the high value of ODI's partnership programme in facilitating the process of building capacity for the CSOs in Bangladesh, to enable them to extend support to policy-makers with critical inputs in the domain of policy-making. He regarded ODI's endeavour for partnerships as a valuable contribution to the overall process of democratisation and development in Bangladesh.

Following the inaugural addresses, John Young and Naved Chowdhury introduced ODI's Civil Society Partnership Programme (CSPP), and outlined the lessons learnt from the South East Asian and African consultations held recently under the CSPP. Naved Chowdhury began the ODI presentation by introducing the objectives of the seminar and stated that the seminar was intended to provide a forum where policy-makers, practitioners and civil society organisations can share, discuss and learn more about how civil society organisations use evidence in policy processes. John Young continued the presentation by introducing ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme, which aims to improve the use of research and evidence in development policy and practice through research, advisory work and case studies. The presentation also provided information on guiding principles for an equitable and participative partnership programme.

In sharing Bangladesh experience, Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir gave a presentation on an issue of importance for day-to-day lives in Bangladesh – small farmers and their vulnerability. Making a presentation on Undercutting Small Farmers: A Grassroots Insights of Rice Trade, Titumir said that the farmers lose at least Tk. 9166 crore every year in the domestic trading networks, which amounts to one fifth of the share of agriculture in the gross domestic product. He showed that a trader appropriates Tk. 5000 for the produce of one acre of Boro rice, while a farmer receives only Tk. 4500. He stated that the study showed 'for producing Boro rice in one acre of land, a farmer has to spend Tk. 10500, but by selling it on the local market he gets Tk. 15000, making a profit of Tk. 4500. But the consumer has to pay Tk. 15000 for the said quantity of rice, providing the middlemen a profit of Tk 5000'.

The case study showed that the middlemen played a key role in this price setup. In this regard, the government could take appropriate measures to maintain the stability of the market price of essentials, he said, and declare a fixed rate. In order to bring changes in the policy arena based on the evidence of price hikes and farmers share, the Unnayan Onneshan is advocating for a Rice Agreement which can offer rice farmers the opportunity to sell their whole crop of rice to licensed mills at a fixed price.

Following the presentations, a lively discussion took place which highlighted a number of issues. While some participants expressed that the quality of research and information was important for policy-making, a good number were of the view that whether evidence will be used or not by policy-makers depends on a number of interrelated factors such as credibility of research, settings of policy-making and internal and external influences. Some participants talked about the unavailability of reliable information to be used for policy making and policy change. Several participants were of the view that in many instances the government mistrusts the CSOs and sometimes treat them as subcontractors instead of equal partners in shaping the country's policies; as such they are not very willing to use researchers and information provided by the CSOs. The Government has also questioned the legitimacy of the CSOs in providing critical analysis and information. It was also mentioned that while there is a lack of capacity of CSOs to undertake credible research and provide practical solutions, the political context makes evidence-based policy influencing more difficult.

Many participants talked about the political context under which policies are shaped and modified. It was stressed that in spite of some demand for research and information from different government departments, the information provided by the CSOs is not being used as the culture of collaboration and cooperation has yet to be developed. Participants voiced their concern about the PRS process where Government, in the name of participation and country ownership, had only used induced participation through thinly spread consultation with select stakeholders.

The issue of external influences was also raised, in particular, the role of international financial institutions and the WTO in shaping not only the macro-economic policy but also the sectoral policies in Bangladesh. Many of the participants felt that the linkages for policy uptake were much more dependent on a variety of factors including interests groups and connections with policymakers through other means, including business connections.

Workshop Summary

The Workshop on 'Civil Society Organisations, Evidence and Policy Influence' began on the later half of the day following the seminar and was attended by participants from different Government organisations, NGOs and research organisations. After the participants self introductions, John Young and Naved Chowdhury introduced the RAPID Context, Evidence and Links (CEL) Framework, Tools for Policy Influence and implications for CSOs.

Following a brief discussion on the CEL framework, a case study entitled 'Bangladesh: Poverty and Employment, Lost in the Queue' was presented by Jakir Hossain. While the Bangladesh economy has been exposed in a good many positive characterisations, the case study showed that the indicators of economic and social progress were falling short of the verdicts of the enthusiastic commentators. While there had been a modest decline in poverty, there had been increments in inequality. The rate of unemployment has increased due to insufficient job creation; formal sector employment has hardly shown any increase. The study showed that the poor lag behind in employment in both farm and non-farm sectors, and at the same time, the right to work, the right to just and favourable conditions of work and the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living are missing in current policy.

Jakir explained the ideology and policies underpinned the PRSP as external influence to current policy regime. He mentioned that from mid-1980s Bangladesh's economy had taken a different route following the dictates of the Bank and the Fund that includes liberalisation, deregulation, public expenditure cuts aiming at boosting up the economy and integrating into the global economic circuit. Explaining the reflection and continuation of those in the PRSP, he was of the view that PRSP did not discuss investment clearly because of the belief that the open market strategy would be followed. So he argued that if anyone would like to define her/his role in influencing policy and forwarding pro-poor agenda, s/he has to comprehend the reality from the perspective of existing policies and strategies propagated and imposed by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

The case study showed that existing government policies are not adequate to address the issues, and some alternative directions were proposed including an employment guarantee act for evidence led poverty reduction strategy. Jakir mentioned that the Unnayan Onneshan was engaged in influencing for policy uptake in favour of an employment guarantee act for establishing workers rights and ensuring their economic security through: (a) constituency building with women organisations and trade union movements; (b) input to specialised agencies in the form of advisories and research output; (c) networking with the international organisations for changes in the meta narratives; and (d) working with the media through dissemination of information and monthly sharing meetings.

The second day of the workshop began with a review of day 1 by John Young. This was followed by a presentation by Naved Chowdhury showing how the CEL framework can be used to analyse the political context, evidence and links that contributed to the evaluation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Approach during the late 1990s. Participants were then asked to select case studies from the Bangladesh context and to use the framework to analyse them in a group work session. John Young explained how to use the RAPID framework and other practical tools including force field analysis, stakeholder analysis and SWOT analysis. The participants then divided into three groups and presented four case studies, and then the groups were asked to analyse their case study using the CEL framework, to identify key factors that enabled the CSOs to influence policy, and to

feedback and provide input to the CEL framework. Four case studies were: 1) Bilkuralia Case: Establishing Rights over Khas land for landless; 2) Ensuring 50 competency in primary education after grade V; 3) Plan of Action for children: Incorporate children voice; 4) PRSP: Disaster Risk Management.

The main points from the group discussion are summarised below:

- In a partnership programme with government, NGOs are always treated in a subcontracting manner rather than that of a partnership due to the prevailing mistrust between NGOs and government. Steps need to be taken to build up trust between NGOs and government through long term collaboration and the sharing of ideas.
- Research reports should be available for the general public, and published in easier language and reader friendly formats. There is a need for a systematic exercise to identify potential supporters and opponents for any particular policy change being sought. The packaging of information and effective communication are important for bridging between the grassroots, researchers and policy makers.
- Evidence originating from CSOs is often challenged or not taken seriously due to its qualitative focus. While there is a need to find innovative qualitative research methodology for the robustness of information, there is a lack of analytical capacity, particularly in quantitative research methodology. The CSOs also lack the capacity to provide practical solutions to a problem. Capacity building of CSOs in terms of research and information gathering, methodology and communication are required.
- Policy literacy is important for CSOs; at the same time the capacity enhancement of the government to grasp the information provided by the CSOs in order to translate it into policy is also required.
- CSOs need to be more transparent and accountable to people, not to donors. The shifting of the focus of their work in line with the donor agendas jeopardises their credibility. CSO's participation in any work should be prioritised according to the country context and people's concerns, rather than the donor's concerns, otherwise it is not possible to raise peoples' voice to influence public policy.
- Attitudes and approaches need to be changed to influence the government. The CSOs and government tend to think as opponents.
- The continuous link between people-researcher and policy makers is essential for any policy uptake. For any evidence to be considered for changes in policy, all stakeholders' participation needs to be ensured.

At the end of the workshop, the participants provided some recommendations on how ODI can support CSOs:

- Providing financial and technical support for research initiatives by CSOs in the long term on a basis of equal partnership;
- Organising training for building capacity of various stakeholders involved with policy and advocacy. ODI can initiate capacity building through long term collaboration with local CSOs for in-depth training programmes and workshop on policy analysis and tools, research methodologies and communication strategy;
- There is a need for exchange of information and knowledge through not only electronic media but also in other forms of communication. ODI can organise more similar workshops in different regions in Bangladesh;
- There is a need to strengthen existing networks among institutions working to influence policy, ODI can facilitate such processes;
- Organising staff exchange programmes with CSOs in Bangladesh;
- Conducting research in collaboration with the CSOs in Bangladesh.

List of Seminar Participants

Name	Designation and Organisation
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List of Workshop Participants

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