



## **CSOs, Evidence and Policy Influence: A Regional Workshop and National Seminar**

**Lilongwe Hotel, Lilongwe, Malawi  
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## Contents

Workshop Summary	iii
Seminar Summary	iv
Workshop Report	1
MEJN Case Study	3
Group Session I	5
Group Session II	6
Annex 1: Participants Lists	7
Annex 2: Workshop Evaluation Results	11
Annex 3: Seminar Evaluation Results	13

## Workshop Summary

The first workshop of ODI's new Civil Society Partnerships Programme's (CSPP) Regional Consultation was held in Lilongwe on the 9th and 10th February 2005, in collaboration with the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN). The workshop provided a forum for representatives from policy research institutes and non-governmental agencies to discuss the opportunities and challenges for CSOs to use evidence to inform policy, learn about the latest worldwide research and practice in this area, share experiences about ongoing activities and identify opportunities for collaborative work.

After registration, Professor Wiseman Chirwa from the University of Malawi opened the workshop. Collins Magalasi from MEJN welcomed the participants from Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique and provided an overview of MEJN's work. John Young described ODI, the Research and Policy in Development Programme (RAPID), and the purpose of the CSPP. Participants introduced themselves, their work, and their hopes for the workshop. After coffee, Collins presented a case study describing how MEJN has been responsible for the coordination of the civil society participation in the PRSP process in Malawi and is currently engaged in a range of activities including budget monitoring under the PRSP. Their work has shown how it has been possible to influence civil society participation in policy processes through lobbying and advocacy, research and budget monitoring. Then Naved Chowdhury provided some evidence of the impact CSOs can have on pro-poor policy and practice from Tanzania. After the presentations, workshop participants divided into groups to share other examples of how CSOs have influenced policy processes in Southern Africa, based on their own experience. They concluded that while the political space is opening for civil society participation in policy processes, a general lack of capacity and weak policy advocacy skills are major problems. In the afternoon, John Young provided an introduction to RAPID's Context, Evidence and Links Framework, with an example from Kenya illustrating how it can be used to understand how specific policy processes work. Naved Chowdhury then went on to show how the framework can also be used to help develop strategies to maximise the impact of research on policy and practice, and introduced some other simple tools for policy advocacy. After this, participants divided again into groups to explore the relative importance of different factors in the context, evidence and links for their own cases.

The second day started with a presentation describing how factors in the political context, evidence and links contributed to the evolution of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Approach during the late 90s, followed by group work in which participants used the context, evidence and links framework to analyse other case studies. After coffee, Robert Jamison facilitated a session to identify successful mechanisms to communicate research to policy makers, what information products ODI should produce, and what other organisations exist that can help communicate the results of research to policy makers. Participants made a number of useful suggestions. The final session of the workshop focused on what ODI's CSPP could do to improve the capacity of organisations in Southern Africa to help CSOs use research-based evidence to promote pro-poor policies and practice.

## **Seminar Summary**

Following the workshop, the first national seminar of ODI's new Civil Society Partnerships Programme's (CSPP) Regional Consultation was held in Lilongwe on the 10th February 2005, in collaboration with the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN). The seminar provided a forum for representatives from policy research institutes and non-governmental agencies to discuss the opportunities and challenges for CSOs to use evidence to inform policy, learn about the latest worldwide research and practice in this area, share experiences about ongoing activities and identify opportunities for collaborative work.

Professor Wiseman Chirwa from the University of Malawi opened the seminar and invited Collins Magalasi to introduce the Malawi Economic Justice Network and John Young to introduce the ODI, the Research and Policy in Development Programme (RAPID), and the purpose of the CSPP, and each participant to introduce themselves and their work.

Three presentations were made at the seminar:

- Collins Magalasi: Evidence: Civil Society Undoubted Tool for Effective Advocacy The case for Malawi
- Edson Musopole: Bwalo Discussions – A Tool for Civil Society Consultation on Policy Issues
- John Young and Naved Chowdhury: An Introduction to evidence-based policy and the ODI Civil Society Partnerships Programme

## Workshop Report

The UK Overseas Development Institute's Research and Policy in Development Programme (RAPID) has been working on the interface between research and policy for the last five years. It has developed a framework to help researchers and practitioners understand the policy context they are working in and make strategic choices about what they should do to maximise the impact of their work on policy and practice.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) also have an important role to play in influencing policies and practices to make them pro-poor. More and more CSOs are recognising the need to understand policy processes better and use evidence to engage with them more effectively. ODI has recently launched a new programme to help CSOs do this better. Through the new programme, ODI has been organised regional workshops aimed at providing a forum for CSOs to discuss the opportunities and challenges they face when trying to inform policy and share experiences about what works and does not work, learn about the latest worldwide research and practice in this area, and identify gaps for future work.

The Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) is a coalition of over 100 CSOs interested in economic governance in Malawi. It includes NGOs, Trade Unions, Faith Based institutions, Special Groups (e.g. Federation of People with Disabilities, Gender-specialised organisations), CBOs, and Professional Bodies (e.g. Economists Association of Malawi). It was formed in 2000 after evaluation of Jubilee 2000 Debt Cancellation Campaign in Malawi.

MEJN is committed to poverty reduction through promotion of equitable and just distribution of socio-economic opportunities through capacity building of civil society, policy research and dissemination, advocacy and monitoring for good economic development. Its vision is to ensure that Government and donors are developing and implementing responsible and fair, pro-poor economic policies, and the poor are demanding their rights to be treated fairly and justly and live at a standard commensurate with their dignity as human beings.

MEJN has been responsible for the coordination of the civil society participation in the PRSP process in Malawi. Its role has also included coordination of civil society participation in the National Budget, Pre-budget submissions, Analysis, Monitoring, Macro-economic discussions with IFIs / donors, and Budget and Economic Literacy. Currently, MEJN is engaged in Budget and Economic Literacy, PRSP/Budget Monitoring, Demystification of Policies and Documents: e.g. Translated PRSP, National Budget, Fair Trade, and Advocacy.

The case study presented by MEJN illustrated how it has been possible to influence civil society participation in policy processes through lobbying and advocacy, research and budget monitoring. Workshop participants shared a wide range of other examples based on their own experience. While the political space is opening for civil society participation in policy processes, the lack of capacity and policy advocacy skills among CSOs is the greatest drawback that requires urgent redress.

The RAPID Framework provides both an analytical tool to help understand the political context CSOs are working in and a practical approach to decide what needs to be done to maximise impact. The framework also emphasises the importance of evidence and having links in influencing policy processes. Furthermore, it is important for CSOs to also understand the role of external influences in policy processes.

Participants at the workshop from Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi made a number of suggestions for further work to help them to promote pro-poor approaches to policy makers including practical training, information about policy options from other countries, and to help to establish policy for a and networks.

## MEJN Case Study

### **Evidence: Civil Society Undoubted Tool for Effective Advocacy, The Case for Malawi, Collins Magalasi, Malawi Economic Justice Network**

Collins Magalasi used Malawi as a case study to discuss key issues of participation in policy processes by CSOs and how CSOs can promote pro-poor policy.

The Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (MPRS) is very clear; it expects CSOs to be involved. The MPRS allows and promotes independent monitoring, much as in coordination with Government and Parliament. Poverty in Malawi is endemic and the majority of Malawians live in gross poverty. The poverty situation is worsened by the huge external debt that Malawi has, currently pegged at US\$2.6 billion. The need for pro-poor policies is so great for poverty reduction.

The MPRS is thus seen as a national roadmap for poverty reduction in Malawi. Although participation in policy processes was not easy for the CSOs, the formulation of the MPRS offers an opportunity to CSOs to participate in policy processes.

The key question is: How can CSOs influence policy processes that promote the needs of the poor?

MEJN is responding in a number of ways to influence policy processes in Malawi through budget monitoring and MPRS implementation monitoring. These include:

**Political context:** the process of formulating the MPRS was not open at the beginning; CSOs had to force their way through. Using the MPRS, CSOs are now engaged in budget monitoring, focusing on the PPEs (Priority Poverty Expenditures). CSOs through MEJN began with 12 Priority Poverty Expenditures (PPEs) identified in the budget 2001/2002 and also PPEs found in PRSP Findings to Date document.

**Evidence:** CBO participated in the formulation of the MPRS; each of the Sectoral networks made a submission to Parliament on their Sectoral priority poverty expenditures; monitoring levels of citizens' satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the quality of public services they are being provided using the Service Delivery Satisfaction Survey (SDSS). During the formulation of the MPRS, information was initially difficult to get.

**Links:** MEJN mobilised civil society organisations to participate in the formulation of the MPRS; it has also mobilised the CSOs to participate in the monitoring of the Government Budget.

**External influences:** MEJN has influenced international stakeholders through campaigns such as the WSSD (Johannesburg 2002), NEPAD, AU, African Development Bank, World Bank, IMF, World Trade Organisation, Social Forums, and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

### **Challenges for influencing policy in Malawi**

- Civil society in Malawi is diverse with differing agenda and this makes it difficult to have a common voice on policy issues;

- CSOs are too busy to implement project activities based on their 'project log-frames', leaving little room for reflection on policy;
- CSOs lack adequate financial and human resources to engage in national level monitoring;
- It is difficult to manage district level networks and harmonise the evidence from the districts to influence policy;
- CSOs lack the capacity to seek and digest complex/technical information;
- SOME government quarters are still uncomfortable working with civil society;
- Previously, monitoring was a dangerous activity for CSOs;
- Currently, there is too much demand versus the need to sustain the 'Good work'.

### **Participants Observations**

- The challenge is on policy conclusions: How do you draw policy conclusion? Where do you draw policy conclusions?
- CS is diverse;
- Advocacy requires financial and human resources;
- How many CSOs have the capacity to do the work of MEJN?
- How do you influence policy makers with all the information? Where are the entry points?
- What happens if policy makers do not accept you?
- There is need to cross-check information before putting forward evidence to policy makers, especially if there are two institutions conducting a survey in the same area, using the same tool and coming up with different results;
- Using local communities to collect information may create a problem of interpretation of results;
- There is need to build the capacity of the local communities to collect data;
- Policy makers would want to be kept abreast, rather than relying on outdated information. There is need for updated information to really have an impact on policy processes;
- Statistical question was only being used as a political threat;
- There is need for relationship building with policy makers. How do you build rapport with policy makers? How do we maintain such rapport?
- There is need for civil society organisations to have one voice before meeting policy makers;
- It is the comparability of the results, which matters, and how the differences are explained;
- CSOs can develop standard tools that bring comparable results;

## Group Session I

In the first group session, participants were divided into three groups to consider the following question: What are the key factors which influence policy processes in your country? Feedback provided the following points:

- Strength in networks among CSOs;
- The role of the media in shaping policy agenda;
- Research: CSOs are able to identify gaps through research;
- Donor interest;
- Crises happening in the countries also influence policy, especially during crisis period. For example, in Malawi, discussion on the food policy started during the food crisis;
- Capacity of CSOs: how CSOs package their information and make the information credible enough;
- CSOs have constraints in terms of resources to have significant bearing on influencing policy;
- Evidence collection: aspects of quality. Juvenile Justice Project in Malawi: It started with research by the Centre for Youth and Children Affairs (CEYCA) and using that information, it was possible to set up a programme resulting in the formation of the National Juvenile Forum;
- Relationship with government looking at it in a political context: lack of political will. Laws are enacted by mere group thought. CSOs must work towards changing the mindset of the MPs;
- Information from the study must be validated. Building a case from data simply means validation;
- Government bureaucracy;
- Lack of adequate information in government on what is happening in the government;
- Lack of capacity within civil society organisations;
- Lack of local ownership of policies;
- Opening up of Government to allow CSOs to participate in policy processes;
- Donor interest is raised;
- Parliament are also able to take up issues.

## Group Session II

Stay in the same groups as this morning, select a case you discussed this morning; analyse using the CEL framework, discuss (i) the relative importance of the factors in the context, evidence and links for that case; and (ii) whether it was useful.

*How useful was the framework?*

- We are able to understand the framework more and able to apply it in real life situations;
- Using the framework, we are able to understand the gaps in the whole policy process;
- Shows where the idea is coming from?
- Shows who makes the policy?

*What ODI should/can do for SA CSOs*

- Specific research
- Regional networking
- Capacity building (skills and knowledge)

## Annex 1: Participants Lists

### Workshop participants

No.	Name	Institution & Address	E-Mail	Telephone
1	Mr. Ted Nandolo Mr. C. Matonga	Council for Non Governmental Organizations of Malawi (CONGOMA)	congoma@malawi.net	
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## Seminar participants

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## Annex 2: Workshop Evaluation Results

(13 forms returned)

### 1. What two things you have heard about in this workshop will most help your organisation? (Please be as specific as possible)

- RAPID
- Use of the framework
- CEL framework and its application
- Sources of information and how to make use of that in policy processes
- Enhancement of networks among CSOs
- Possibility of collaborative work between ODI and CSOs in Southern Africa as a way of improving research capacity and policy influence
- How to use research (credible) to influence policy
- The CEL framework
- Case study from Malawi and Zambia will help me to discuss ours because we are similar in Mozambique
- Evidence
- Context
- The importance of applying credible comparable research evidence to influence policy
- The importance of forging networks (partnerships) to influence policy
- The analytical framework
- Partnership for success
- The need to question the implications of policy influence before vigorously lobbying for such
- The importance of using allies from the external and political environment in policy influence
- Introduction to the RAPID context, evidence and links framework
- Role of research-based evidence and CSOs in policy processes

### 2. Please rate the following aspects of the workshop/seminar

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Objectives defined and achieved	5	7			
Concepts explained clearly	3	8	1		
Time allocated for the workshop/seminar	1	7	3	1	
Relevance to my work	9	3			
Well-organized	4	5	3		
Overall quality of the Workshop/seminar	4	7	1		

### 3. Please comment on the overall workshop/seminar quality and value:

- It was excellent
- I have found it very valuable
- The workshop was useful in the work I want to do on advocacy for your work
- The workshop was very informative but need to improve on some aspects eg group work, most of the times it was not clear what people were supposed to do. As a result groups presented different findings.
- Vindicated (as an individual and as an organisation) for so many systems and methods that we thought we were using in isolation
- Workshop organised well but there is need to improve on logistical arrangements
- It was fine
- The seminar was well organised, everything was there
- Very helpful
- Too much information squeezed into so little time
- Nevertheless it was very good, relevant, interactive and very informative.

- Thank you very much.
- Significant value to CSO work
- The quality was impressive but could be better
- Valuable and useful to my work
- It was good and precise, both in quality and value

**4. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions for future workshops like this?**

- More time should be given and a little more time and room for participants to get versed into issues
- There is need to give it more time
- Allocate more time
- Use of case studies was helpful which needs to be encouraged
- Try to involve more people or organisations to participate in these workshops
- Logistics of the workshop need to be clarified in advance eg allowance issues \$10 isn't enough for dinner in a hotel.
- Keep the format, the good people and communicators. More time? Field visit?
- Improve logistical arrangements, particularly food – to allow participants to buy food either outside or inside the hotel and improve out of pocket allowance
- In future workshops presenters should have time to explain some concepts which seem to be new to the participants
- You did a good job, thank you!
- We need more skills on how to do research
- More time allocated for important sections eg time set aside for research tools was too short.
- Provide for adequate sharing of experiences
- Advance information on purpose of seminar would help preparatory aspects of workshop
- To always include people with disabilities wherever you will be conducting the workshops

**5. What follow-up support would be most useful for your work?**

- Setting up the list serve and keeping a constant update with respect to policy briefs and documentation summaries
- Report sent to me
- Skills building in research and advocacy
- Networking
- You need to interface with other networks because we have different focus areas.
- Try to find other strategic networks on various issues so that they can also benefit
- Receiving list and learn in advance about any ODI visit to Mozambique
- Collaborative research work and enhancing research capacity of southern African CSOs, including networking
- Sending of ODI materials to my organisation for use
- To be connected by email to get more material (actualised)
- Research skills
- Receiving up to date information from ODI
- Training in research
- Provision of publications and other information on capacity building initiatives
- Technical assistance in the design of a specific policy research exercise we intend to carry out

**6. In your country, to what extent do:** (Score between 0 = none and 5 = always)

a) Policymakers use research-based evidence to be important in policy making?	3	3	3	2	3	1	2	4	2	3
b) CSOs contribute to policy making?	4	3	3	2	3	1	2	4	4	3
c) CSO's use research-based evidence to inform their work?	4	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3

## Annex 3: Seminar Evaluation Results

(6 forms returned)

### 1. What two things you have heard about in this workshop will most help your organisation?

- Rapid framework
- Research-based evidence
- Research and web use
- Use of facts to influence policy change
- Advocacy based on evidence#
- RAPID
- Bwalo method
- ODI website

### 2. Please rate the following aspects of the workshop/seminar

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Objectives defined and achieved	1	4			
Concepts explained clearly		5			
Time allocated for the workshop / seminar	1	1	1	2	
Relevance to my work	2	3			
Well-organized		4	1		
Overall quality of the Workshop/seminar	1	4			

### 3. Please comment on the overall workshop/seminar quality and value:

- The quality and value has been good
- Very valuable in terms of the information disseminated on context, evidence and links
- Interesting / encouraging
- Very good and participatory
- Well organised with informative discussions
- A valuable experience – want to forge closer links with ODI

### 4. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions for future workshops?

- No additional comments
- More time for discussion
- Need to involve more people and stimulate more debates
- No
- Display counters with ODI papers / research publications

### 5. What follow-up support would be most useful for your work?

- I would like to receive more information from ODI
- Support in research-based analysis
- Newsletters and future training in policy analysis and research
- Reports on the presentations and the seminar
- Funding to experience sharing follow up workshop
- Capacity building to decipher, collate and utilise research methods / data

### 6. In your country, to what extent do: (Score between 0 = none and 5 = always)

a) Policymakers use research-based evidence to be important in policy making?	3	4	3	3	3	2
b) CSOs contribute to policy making?	4	1	5	5	4	2
c) CSO's use research-based evidence to inform their work?	4	1	5	4	3	3