



## **CSOs, Evidence and Policy Influence: National Seminar**

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## Executive Summary

The seminar was organised by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Development in Nigeria (DIN). The objective of the national seminar was to provide a short open forum where policy makers, practitioners and civil society can learn more about and discuss how Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) use evidence in policy processes, and can learn about the new ODI CSP programme which seeks to address these issues.

The 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 to understand the policy context they are working in and making strategic choices about what they should do to maximise the impact of their work on policy and practices.

Development in Nigeria (DIN) is a Nigerian based NGO working on community empowerment and capacity building in forest communities. DIN has a Research, Documentation and Policy Unit (RDPU) which is responsible for carrying out research in order to process and document information on new, present and old projects. The research not only feeds into improving project implementation, but is also used as evidence to influence policy both at community and state levels.

Approximately 20 participants attended the seminar, representing NGOs, the media, Donor organisations and other CSOs. A case study by Development in Nigeria (DIN) highlighted how CSOs within Cross River State (CRS), Nigeria have been involved in evidence based policy influence. There was a chief guest address by Ako Amadi, the environmental and rural development advisor to CIDA.

There were a few key issues highlighted and discussed throughout the seminar. These were as follows:

- It was highlighted it is difficult for networks and coalitions to be established and function properly due to lack of funds. It was discussed that it is not necessarily important to have formal networks and coalitions in order to be able to influence policy. It is important that groups have a common interest and work together, no matter how small or informal, it is the relationship that counts.
- The way CSOs are perceived by communities and government in Nigeria was highlighted by many participants. This is linked with many CSOs being established within the period of military rule. They are seen to be working against the government instead of besides it. It is important for CSOs to build their relationships with the government, to gain trust and to be able to work towards the same goals. It is also important to improve the way policy influence is approached and to engage government more in the process.
- Projects and research are often donor driven, with CSOs working towards goals dictated by the donor community. It is important for CSOs to focus their work and efforts towards the countries needs, in order to be able to influence policy through evidence from what is happening on the ground.

## **Introduction**

The seminar was organised by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) based in the UK and Development in Nigeria (DIN) based in Nigeria. The objective of the national seminar was to provide a short open forum where policy makers, practitioners and civil society can learn more about and discuss how Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) use evidence in policy processes, and to learn about the new ODI Civil Society Partnership (CSP) programme. Participants were mainly drawn from CSOs, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), individual consultants, and Research Institutes (Annex 1). The programme for the day is attached (Annex 2).

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.

Development in Nigeria (DIN) is a Nigerian based NGO focusing on community capacity building in more than 20 forest communities within Cross River State, Nigeria. DIN also has a Research, Documentation and Policy Unit (RDPU) in Calabar with a special focus on research and policy influence.

## **Welcome remarks**

*John Young, ODI*

John Young welcomed participants on behalf on ODI and DIN and declared the seminar open. He thanked all the participants for attending. He stated that the workshop had been organised in conjunction with DIN and the purpose of the seminar in Nigeria was to provide a short open forum for CSOs to start the learning processes in both directions regarding evidence and policy influence. He stated that due to the delayed start; without further ado he would continue with his presentation about ODI, RAPID and the CSO programme.

## **ODI Presentation**

*John Young, ODI*

John Young presented on the role of research-based evidence and CSOs in policy processes. See Annex 3.

## **Case study on Cross River State (CRS), Nigeria**

*Mr Sylvanus Ubua, Head of Research, Documentation and Policy Unit (RDPU), DIN*

A case study by the head of DIN's RDPU illustrated the case of how environmental NGOs and CSOs have been engaged in research to influence policy at both the state and community level within CRS. The successes are due to working through networks, coalitions and through using advocacy and lobbying to instigate policy change.

It was highlighted that in a lot of cases it is difficult to measure policy or see the influence of policy change.

One of the biggest challenges in CRS and Nigeria is that CSO are seen as anti-government and working against rather than with the state and federal governments.

It was highlighted that the link between research and policy influence was cyclical and they feed into each other in a complimentary way.

For the full presentation of the Case Study see Annex 3.

## Discussion

The following is a summary of the brief discussion held after the presentation:

Issue	Response
<p>How are you reaching the people? People want development, but we don't know the impact of development. It seems that the mechanisms are very top up so how can you reach the people so that they can stand side by side?</p>	<p>All of the mechanisms are complimentary. FMN are community based and share information between themselves. DIN and RRDC provide a forum for the communities to communicate to the government. SPACE meeting – brought stakeholders from community level and government level to a forum to discuss.</p>
<p>Is it donor orientated in CRS?</p>	<p>Yes, it is very easy to set up an NGO. So there are lots.</p>

## Chief Guest address

*Ako Amadi, Advisor to CIDA and CCDI*

Mr Ako Amadi welcome the group and said that he thought that one of the reasons why he had been asked to speak was because some of the organisations present have formed a coalition, funded by CIDA. He said that one of their main objectives is to see how they can influence policy in Cross River State. This area is one of the most biodiverse areas with a great volume of timber and wildlife species present.

He said that when people attend events, people are always saying they do not understand that 'policy thing' – how can you impact policy? How do you influence from an individual organisation? How will they use the policy?

Mr Amadi stated that around the 1980s there was surge of indigenous CSOs, ethnic and faith based organisations that were based on organisations formed during the colonial period of the 1890s. He said that indigenous CSOs influenced policy even at this time by ensuring they were formed in the first place. He highlighted that CSOs, even today, are not being accepted by local people and by the government. He said this is due to the majority of CSOs being established during the time of military rule in Nigeria. There are so many bills that conflict with CSOs through bills being brought in against CSOs, it was believed that CSOs were a group of people with foreign friends that were bringing out Nigeria's 'dirty linen'. People are still not used to living in a democratic country.

He stated that this is the time for 'wind of change' to influence policy; a time of democracy and international pressure. Africa in general is beginning to be accepted by governments. CSOs are becoming groups that can influence and work together to influence policy. We have to use all the education we have and if we put all our education together then we would be able to beat the House of Assemblies.

He reminded us that we have a very fertile ground to work on. CSOs have never been able to come together because they are donor driven, however, this means that coming together is always driven from the outside world. He gave an example of a meeting held in Abuja, where the question was asked at the end, 'why don't we form a coalition?' He said some organisations were funded to go to South Africa but when they came back, the idea of a coalition 'fizzled out'. He said we should be able to do it ourselves without donor driven initiatives, but we do not see it happening. He said that organisations are proactive on the ground but umbrella organisations are not found in Nigeria.

His final closing remarks were that if we don't come together, we won't be able to effectively influence policy, and that donor organisations are looking for a way to use CSOs to influence policy effectively.

He closed by thanking the participants for attending and ODI for bringing all the participants together to discuss these issues in such a forum.

## **Discussion**

The following is a summary of the discussion held after the welcoming address by Ako Amadi:

### **CASSAD**

How do you think we could have a network that would be sustainable and would be CSO driven? As a CSO we are struggling to survive – without any project we don't get any money. There is no guaranteed income. So how do you think we can have a CSO network / coalition with this case?

### **Response by Ako Amadi**

I belong to the Pan Africa Network (PAN) of land use and resource rights. If you have a common subject that brings you together, different groups can be brought in: biologist, lawyer, journalist etc. At present we are working out a way to attract donors to come and see what is going on. It is important that agriculture and finance should be factored into governance. Have to do something together and then let that start from there. Start in a small way. The research environment is a difficult environment to work in as people like to keep their work to themselves and often hide their papers. This is something that is preventing CSOs coming together. Government were forming their own CSOs to govern oil. In CRS there are so many things that you can do together without announcing yourself as a group. You don't need money to get friends. If you are really interested in civil society work, there are people who are doing other work that are members of CSOs. One thing that brings people together is similar views. Are people in a CSO to make money? I thought that most people were in it to make a difference in the world. Have you ever written a common proposal? You could meet and write a proposal together.

**Question by Odey Oyama, RRDC**

There have been some positive signs from Cross River State. We can't expect too much. Things have been difficult in Nigeria due to military rule. It is difficult to establish a group and we cannot do it on our own. We do not have our own strategy and goals. We are making positive steps and we will succeed. Have you been making any positive steps?

**Ako Amadi Response**

He replied yes and mentioned the success of CCDI's sanitation programme.

**Kofo Adeleke, CCDI**

We have found it difficult to engage in labour state government, as they weren't taking us seriously. So we said to them 'Why don't we come together and talk about the problems etc.' Over the last two years they have given us more respect and invited and asked us to make contributions and to attend the UNDP country programme meeting. I think you made a good point that organisations haven't been able to get themselves together, but if you wait for ever you will never move. I think it's important to address things as they come up. CCDI had to act quickly regarding the issue of pure water bags as they were going to be banned. Networks and groups should not be too formal because if you wait for a formal setup, nothing will happen.

**Cecilia Luttrell, ODI**

In order to be less confrontational have you had to compromise?

**Kofo Adeleke**

It is important to first gather as much information as possible before fronting the situation.

**Bola Fajemirokun, Development Initiative Network**

In our case we spent considerable amount of time to develop objects and goals, then a strategy, then presented to the government to improve their strategy – we gave examples to them.

**Kofo Adeleke**

If you come together in informal groups, you do get results faster. As a network you can set up meetings.

**Odigha Odigha, NGO Coalition for the environment (NGOCE)**

Change is a process and you have to look back to see the change. My experience back in Cross River State is much better now than it used to be. We are to call government to our meetings. When you have to think about your own experience, in my case, working towards environmental protection with lots of stakeholders: if the political muster doesn't happen, when there is an opportunity to work together, you should grab it. The coalition, of five NGOs in CRS, is working together to get funding from CIDA and will go ahead and work together even if we don't we will get funding from there or elsewhere.

**Ako Amadi**

The coalition is a very good coalition. The indication from inside CIDA is that they will probably go ahead and fund. A good beginning has been made. I encourage you to take it one step forward. The time is good now but it's also a little bit dangerous. NGOs have been invited by government workers to stay in their houses. Sometimes it's good to stay out of that situation and get on with their work. If CSOs try to be involved in government monitoring a problem is created. You don't need confrontation: you need to beat them with

intelligence. You can do that. If you have a study, you have information, you can present it to them. You do not have to compromise on this.

**Tarry Asoka, DFID**

Donors can't fund small groups – you fund organisations for your interests. People who are competing in the same industry are also cooperating. A coalition formed from three Christian groups was successful because of their joint goals. Unless you get central structures within each organisation, the coalition or network will collapse. If there is no benefit then it will collapse. If there is no benefit there is no incentive to join.

**Kofo Adeleke**

You can get benefits from just information sharing.

**Tarry Asoka**

Yes, but somebody has to start the discussion. Who will put the time in?

**Cecilia Luttrell**

How do you decide how much time you invest into the network?

**Odigha Odigha**

I think it's due to interest and common understanding of what you want to achieve together. There must be something that you will benefit from, from example, shared resources through workshop training or resource centres. Therefore people can buy in.

**Ronke Adekunle, Alliances for Africa**

Our organisation belongs to a coalition on human rights. We have a central body – African central court. We have a central goal. There are 66 members from around Africa. There is a central body and an advocacy body in SA. We write joint proposals together. This is a very effective coalition, however, the success is due to the fact we have funding for the maintenance of the website and a focal person to work on this.

**Ms Ayo F Attah, Development Initiative Network**

In a meeting I attended when the World Bank came around, I was asked if I had a network formed. It indicates that people are willing to work with you. If you have that passion to form a coalition it will work. You will realise that you will benefit.

**Odey Oyama**

It was easier to work with collective groups. One action would be to establish a NGO round table consultation. Try and make it transparent as possible to encourage participation. Through telling people, that funding is from here, and this is the plan. In my case, participants agreed and said yes, but we need follow ups, both as individuals as well as groups. But it does take time. It was difficult to write to government and expect a reply. Now it's much easier than it used to be. It is important to note, that it's good to stay out of the government. It's good to work with them but not as them. It's interesting to see how you can work outside government but to maintain a relationship with them. In one case when government took land, RRDC undertook research and realised that they were going against the laws. The only way we could get them to respond was to involve the press. Government was compelled to react. Relationships need time to grow.

**Ako Amadi**

Very little credit is given to the role of CSOs in driving processes. All the main actions have been driven by CSOs. It is CSOs that have made the world aware of what is happening in

Nigeria. We have always been involved in policy but not given enough credit. Donors are always changing the goal posts. Need to highlight your strategy to fit with them. A lot of confusion is created by donor agencies. What is their agenda? You have to make decisions in what is best for the country, not what is best for the donor. Double standards are developing. Don't be afraid of losing funding.

**Tarry Asoka**

Stick to your agenda. Don't follow the money.

**John Young**

This brings us back to the fact that development policy should be based on evidence, therefore, CSOs are best placed to influence through networks and advocacy. We need to work out how you get the information from the ground into policy.

**Closing Remarks**

*John Young, ODI*

John thanked the organisations for attending and travelling from great distances to attend. He thanked all the facilitators, presenters and organisers for the meeting and for the interesting discussion at the end.

## Annex 1: List of Participants

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## Annex 2: Seminar Programme

14.00 – 14.15	Welcome Address, <i>John Young, Overseas Development Institute, UK</i>
14.15 – 14.30	Introduction to role of research-based evidence and CSOs in policy processes An introduction to ODI's CSO Partnership Programme <i>John Young, Overseas Development Institute, UK</i>
14.30 – 15.00	Evidence and Policy: A case study from Nigeria, <i>Sylvanus Abua, RDPU, Development in Nigeria (DIN)</i>
15.00 – 15.30	<i>Tea/Coffee and snacks</i>
15.30 – 16.00	Address by Chief Guest, <i>Ako Amadi, Adviser to Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)</i>
16.00 – 17.00	Discussion
17.00 – 17.15	Vote of thanks
17.15 – 18.00	<i>Refreshments at the bar</i>