

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, EVIDENCE AND POLICY INFLUENCE

Sri Lanka National Consultations
Final Report



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBO	Community Based Organisations
CEL	Context, Evidence and Links Framework
CEPA	Centre for Poverty Analysis
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
CSP	Civil Society Partnerships
CSPP	Civil Society Partnerships Programme
DEA	Department of Export Agriculture
GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IPS	Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka
ITDG	Intermediate Technology Development Group
LDO	Land Development Ordinance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PRSP	Poverty reductions Strategy Paper
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAPTA	South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement
TRIPs	Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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1. Introduction

The Sri Lanka National Consultations on the topic “Civil Society Organisations, Evidence and Policy Influence” were held in Colombo on July 5-7, 2005. The consultations originated as part of the Overseas Development Institute’s (ODI) “Civil Society Partnerships Programme” (CSPP). The objective of the CSPP is to help Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) influencing national policies and practices to make them pro-poor. Through the CSPP, the ODI has organised regional and national workshops in Africa and Asia to provide a forum for CSOs to discuss the opportunities and challenges they face when trying to inform policy and share experiences about what works and what does not, learn about the latest worldwide research and practice in this area, and identify gaps for future work. The national consultations in Sri Lanka were jointly organised with the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA).

This report is organised in five parts. The next two sections provide a narrative summary of the Sri Lanka national consultations. In section 4, some of the issues and ideas that arose from the consultations are discussed in greater detail, together with some thoughts about the way forward. Section 5 provides a summary evaluation of the consultations based on feedback from participants.

2. Resource Persons’ Workshop

The Sri Lanka national consultations on “Civil Society Organisations, Evidence and Policy Influence” commenced with a Resource Persons’ Workshop, which was held at the Taj Samudra Hotel, Colombo on July 5-6, 2005. About 27 researchers and others representing civil society organisations, think tanks and the research community in Sri Lanka participated in this 1½-day event (see Annex 7.1 for a list of participants).

2.1. Objectives of the Workshop

The workshop was moderated by Ms. Priyanthi Fernando, Executive Director, CEPA. She welcomed the participants and thanked the ODI for proposing the organisation of a series of dialogue and exchange events in Sri Lanka around such an important topic. Ms. Fernando set out several objectives of this workshop:

- Better understand how evidence has influenced policy in Sri Lanka
- Learn about systems and structures which may help to influence policy
- Create a forum for discussion and debate about how to move this process forward

Participants also articulated their expectations of the workshop. Mainly they expected to better understand who CSOs are; how to move from challenging to engaging with the policy process; and why evidence in policy influence is, or seems, easier in some sectors.

Mr. John Young provided an introduction to ODI, the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme, the Civil Society Partnerships Programme (CSPP), and the Context, Evidence Links (CEL) Framework, which helped to set the context for the workshop.

2.2. Day 1 Focus: The Sri Lankan Context

The working sessions began with the presentation of four case studies where research/evidence had influenced policy in the Sri Lankan context. The cases were selected because they all illustrate positive instances, on the premise that there would be more to learn from successful cases of research influencing policy than the more common phenomenon of failure. The four case studies were drawn from trade, energy, agricultural

and environment policy and the research was produced by very different types of organisations, using very different mechanisms for influencing policy (see Box 1; see also Annex 2.1 to 2.4 for full case study presentations).

Box 1: Case Studies in Summary

1.1 Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and Trade Policy by Dr. Dushni Weerakoon, Deputy Director, IPS

IPS enjoys a somewhat unique position as a think tank in Sri Lanka. It was set up by an Act of Parliament and several of its Board of Governors are ex-officio members from the Government. The main objectives of IPS in attempting to influence trade policy were to improve the negotiation process, which was largely ad hoc, as well as to influence the content of the agreements.

Since the mid 1990s, IPS has been producing a continuous stream of research reports, articles and conference papers on this issue and this output resulted in IPS being recognised by the Government as an expert on trade policy and trade agreements. In 1998, it was commissioned by the Government to provide a background report on the South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA). It was also invited to play a direct role in the Government's trade negotiations, chairing several technical committees. This led to it being invited to participate in Government committees such as the Macro and Trade Policy Steering Committee in 2002-04. Some policy recommendations made by IPS have been accepted by the Government and are reflected in policy/practice changes, such as prior assessment of trade agreements, increased internal consistency between agreements, deepened liberalisation and moves to include investment and services in scope of negotiations.

1.2 ITDG and Energy Policy by Mr. Namiz Musaffer, Project Manager, ITDG

The Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) South Asia is part of an international network. In relation to energy policy, its main objectives were to ensure that the demands for electricity from rural households not covered by the national grid were met and to promote the use of micro-hydro schemes as a low-cost alternative source of energy.

ITDG created its evidence by implementing several village level micro-hydro schemes and improving capacity at the local level to manage these schemes. The demonstration effect of these successful schemes led to the concept of micro-hydro schemes being incorporated into the World Bank Energy Services Development project, which had initially sought to promote solar energy in Sri Lanka. The larger spread of micro-hydro schemes that resulted from this development had further demonstration effects and the Government, especially at the provincial levels has bought into these schemes, allocating resources through both the central and provincial budgets to develop renewable energy sources, in particular micro-hydro schemes.

1.3 DEA and Agriculture Policy by Mr. Anura Herath, Head of the Economics Research Unit, DEA

The Department of Export Agriculture (DEA) is a government department coming within the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Land and Irrigation. The Economics Research Unit, which is part of the DEA, carried out the research in response to the observation that extension services - which is an important government intervention in the export agriculture crop sector - were not adequately promoting the use of technologies in the field. Extension services were being provided on a one-to-one basis between individual extension officers and individual farmers. The observations of extension officers and the feedback obtained through farmer clinics revealed that this system was not functioning adequately. The Economics Research Unit carried out a large socio-economic survey covering 1,161 households in 9 districts. Descriptive and statistically analysed results of the study were presented as a technical report to DEA and to the Ministry of Agriculture. A change in the strategy of extension, from one-to-one to CBO based, was proposed to improve the situation.

The Ministry has since accepted the concept of cluster village to implement many activities of the six-year Export Agricultural Crop development plan that commenced in 2005. A separate budget allocation has been made to facilitate clustering, CBO formation, and associated training of both farmers and extension officers.

1.4 Voluntary Organisations and Environment Policy by Mr. Jagath Gunawardene, Attorney-at-Law

This case study relates to a voluntary organisation, which is interested in environmental policy. It sought to bring evidence to bear on the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) negotiations, particularly section 27 of the TRIPs Agreement regarding patenting of indigenous plants and micro organisms. First, evidence regarding the potential impact of section 27 was studied in relation to indigenous plants, several of which had already been patented by companies in the West. This evidence was analysed and presented to the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Trade, which were all engaged in representing Sri Lanka at the TRIPs negotiations. The Ministry of Environment was the most receptive so special efforts were made to provide all available information to them. In the end, the Sri Lankan position at the TRIPs was that section 27 should be removed altogether from the TRIPs agreement.

In the next session, workshop participants divided into four groups to analyse each case study and draw out some general themes about the policy influencing process (see Box 2).

Box 2: From Specifics to General Themes

2.1 IPS and Trade Policy

Legitimacy through 'formal' institutional location

The formalisation of the Institute through an Act of Parliament as well as the proximity to the Government, without being associated to a specific political party, gave IPS sufficient legitimacy to be the only representative that 'survived' several Government changes in different committees. Legitimacy also comes from financial independence; only 15% of the Institute's funds come directly from the GOSL, with the rest coming from funded research and interest earned from an endowment fund.

Disciplinary credibility

The research credibility of a 'serious' subject like economics (only those who hold a minimum of an upper second class degree in economics or related subject, are employed) together with the academic authority provided by PhD-holders (both the Executive Director, the Deputy Director and others in their research team) backed up convincingly all research undertaken by the Institute.

Personal links

The two persons mainly involved in trade research were at the same time the two longest-serving members of staff. This provided a sound foundation for networking at high levels and the establishment of more personal relationships through the years.

Timing

The research interest of IPS in trade coincided perfectly in timing with the GOSL's requirement for support in conducting trade negotiations, because of external pressures (such as WTO and SAPTA).

Appropriate communication strategies

As opposed to a very vocal and populist approach, IPS used a more subtle and 'serious' communication approach with decision makers¹. Recommendations and hence policy influence were exerted not necessarily through the major research publications but through short reports (executive summaries), closed door meetings, representation in committees, seminars, lobbying and networking.

Supporting policy implementation

Policy implementation was supported by reports based on credible academic research.

2.2 ITDG and Energy Policy

Responding to a clear, recognised demand – need for rural electrification

At the national level, this was evident in terms of statistics relating to lack of access to grid electricity and projected demands for power. In the villages, local communities articulated the need and demands were made on local political institutions.

Relatively simple and direct entry point

The original impact on the provincial councils came through ITDG's ability to facilitate peoples' voices, so the elected bodies were pressured to respond to local demand. ITDG ability to influence the provincial councils to support renewable energy programmes, and to develop renewable energy policies, was reinforced by the fact that once convinced, the provincial councils were able to carry the policies through, in visible and practical terms.

Credibility through technical experience

The evidence for change was demonstrated practically. In addition, ITDG was recognised as a credible development organisation, working with and for poor people and having technical expertise. Staff members at ITDG had strong social networks that reached into the decentralised administration and ITDG's long engagement at the community level enhanced its reputation.

Absence of articulated policies – low level of contestation of the issues

There was no energy policy at the provincial level; so, ITDG was able to fill in a gap in the policy framework. There was a degree of publicity for the success stories, through word of mouth, and through the print media, both at the regional and national levels. This facilitated the creation of a constituency for micro-hydro village electrification.

¹ An interesting side discussion arose at this point. The approach adopted by IPS may be seen as 'elitist' by some as it excluded the controversies that trade policy can give rise to. It also presupposes that the evidence is neutral and value-free because it is based on the 'science' of economics. This gave rise to the question; in as much as there is 'right' kind of evidence, is there also a 'right' way of getting involved in the policy making process?

2.3 DEA and Agriculture Policy

Evidence fitted with Government policy

The evidence promoted the idea of state involvement in providing extension services through collective organisations, rather than individuals. This policy recommendation fit well into the ideology of the socialist/marxist Government in power, which made the policy adoption process easier.

Low cost of policy change

The Government was also more receptive because the policy change would not result in high costs to the State.

Used existing links between research and policy

Sri Lanka has a long tradition of applied research in the agricultural sector and the DEA has existing links with policymakers, which made getting the evidence to the right audience much easier.

Recognise entry points

There were no systematic entry points to enter the policymaking process and there are protocols for the DEA to access the highest levels within the Ministry of Agriculture. The researchers recognised entry points, such as the farmer clinics (meetings between farmers and extension officers) where these problems were articulated. Donor-funded projects can also provide entry points.

Evidence needs to convince the experts

The experts within the DEA needed to be convinced by the evidence and they need to be presented the full statistical analysis in order to be convinced. Politicians may not need to see the full evidence in this manner.

2.4 Voluntary Organisation and Environment Policy

Quality of the evidence

The need for comprehensive collection of evidence to enable a sustained campaign of influence.

Timing

Having access to evidence when a strategic time for influencing policy arises.

Different evidence for different audiences

Evidence of different type is needed to influence different interest groups and stakeholders.

Understand other policy influencers

The need to identify the objectives and orientation of other policy influencers, their strengths, weakness and resources.

Networks must be strategic

The counter productive impact of entering into partnerships with stakeholders with varying agendas. Numbers do not always mean greater power. Objectives have to be complementary if networks and partnerships in policy influencing are to succeed.

Credibility

The credibility of the evidence provider is dependent on knowledge base, good faith and past record of positive impacts.

The participants noted that the four case studies presented a wide spectrum of ways in which evidence has been brought to influence policy in Sri Lanka. These cases underscored the fact that there is not just one appropriate or right way to influence policy, but that there are many. During the discussion that followed, several main themes that were common across all or most of the case studies could be identified about the evidence and the policymaking context and process in Sri Lanka.

- First, **there has to be an entry point** for the evidence to enter the policymaking process, which was usually a need or demand recognised by the Government or some part of the Government. However, the environment case study showed that this need could be *created* by the CSO, such as by obtaining a directive to the Government through the justice system.
- Second, **the legitimacy and credibility of the CSO** is important, but this can be attained through several means. For example, demonstration of the CSO's knowledge, demonstration of positive impacts of the recommended policy and/or by the reputation and good relations established between the policymakers and the CSO. Legitimacy can also be drawn by the consistency and long-term involvement of CSOs and their staff involved in engaging with the policymakers on an issue.
- Third, the **manner in which the evidence is presented** is very important, and different audiences should be addressed/approached in different ways. Particular

audience groups include experts within the Government and potential “champions” such as donors.

- Finally, policymakers are available at different levels, and because some may be more accessible to CSOs than others, CSOs should **target several of these policy-making levels**, such as Government officials, donors, local politicians and national politicians, rather than focus only on, for example, national level politicians.

Two questions arose from this discussion; there is a gap between policy and implementation in Sri Lanka and policy change does not necessarily mean change on the ground. Is it easier to effect change on the ground when implementers are convinced by the evidence? Secondly, is it easier for evidence to influence policy when addressing a gap in policy, rather than when trying to reform policy?

2.3. Day 2 Focus: Context, Evidence and Links Framework

On Day 2 of the Resource Persons’ Workshop, the sessions began with the presentation of the CEL Framework by Mr. John Young and Mr. Naved Chowdhury, ODI. The participants then again divided into groups to use and analyse the CEL Framework by applying it to three policy questions in Sri Lanka (two retrospective, and one prospective), namely, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the proposed reform of the Land Development Ordinance (LDO) and the Government’s policy to privatise bus transport in Sri Lanka (see Annex 3 for visualisation of group work).

Overall, the workshop participants felt that the CEL Framework helped to clarify the policy issues, and helped researchers interested in influencing policy to be strategic. It was felt that it was more useful when the policy issue in question was very specific. All three groups found it difficult to differentiate between external influences and the linked spheres of context, links, evidence in the Sri Lankan context, as donor policy (an external influence) for instance relates to political context issues, evidence creation as well as links. However, participants felt that as with other tools, the CEL Framework is only a means and should not be seen as an end in itself.

Finally participants were asked two questions: first how can this dialogue about evidence and policy influence be taken forward and second, how can the ODI assist Sri Lankan CSOs to bridge the gap between evidence and policy influence. Several thoughts were expressed about how to move this process forward among CSOs in Sri Lanka:

- Many felt the need to create a forum for further discussion of the ideas and issues discussed at the workshop and to take these issues to a wider audience.
- Another possibility was to promote networks of CSOs on common sectors/policy issues, to increase the visibility and influence of CSOs on these sector/policy issues.
- Stemming from the case study presentations regarding the Sri Lankan context, another suggestion was to promote a greater use of existing State capacities for research/evidence creation, which may also help to bridge the gap between evidence and policy.
- Finally, it was also felt that there is a need for CSOs to lobby for disclosure of Government policies as insufficient knowledge of policies further widen the gap between evidence and policy.

The Resource Persons' Workshop was followed by a National Seminar for a wider audience at which some of these issues were discussed further.

3. National Seminar

The National Seminar, also on the topic "Civil Society Organisations, Evidence and Policy Influence" was held at the Taj Samudra Hotel, Colombo on July 7, 2005. About 40 civil society organisations, policymakers, Government officials and donors participated in this ½ day event (see Annex 7.2 for list of participants).

The National Seminar began with Ms. Priyanthi Fernando, Executive Director of CEPA welcoming the participants and setting out the objectives of the seminar, as follows:

- Share the ideas and themes which came out of the workshop with a larger group of stakeholders
- Share international experience relating to CSOs, evidence and policy influence
- Provide a forum for discussion about issues relating to bridging the gap between evidence and policy influence in Sri Lanka.

3.1. Keynote Addresses

Two keynote addresses were delivered, by Mr. Lalith Weeratunga, Secretary to the Prime Minister and by Prof. Savitri Goonesekere, Emeritus Professor of Law and former Chancellor, University of Colombo.

Mr. Weeratunga, a veteran public servant with over 39 years of service in the public sector, spoke from the perspective of someone close to the policymaking process in Sri Lanka (see Annex 4 for full presentation). While policymaking is the core business of the Government, there is currently a gap between evidence and policymaking in Sri Lanka. Therefore, Mr. Weeratunga was of the view that the important question now is how to narrow, and if possible eliminate, this gap? He felt that it is necessary to understand how public policies are made because only then we can make the policymaking process more rational.

Mr. Weeratunga began his address by providing an overview of the policymaking process in Sri Lanka. Sometimes a distinction is made between policy and administration, with the former seen as the exclusive work of elected officials while the latter is seen as the domain of administrators. However, this distinction is problematic because the term administration is not straightforward and because politicians rely heavily on the public service and administration when formulating policy. Mr. Weeratunga pointed out the features of the public administration, such as permanency, unity, anonymity and neutrality, which are in stark contrast to the politicians, as reasons for focusing on the public administration service.

Policymaking happens in a cycle, involving policy initiation/agenda setting, appraisal, formulation, implementation, evaluation and continuation/reformulation/termination. This policy cycle provides a number of places in which CSOs can interact and intervene to improve policy but these opportunities are not generally used. In Sri Lanka, policies are usually triggered by a crisis, and one reason for the poor relationship between evidence and policymaking is that in this crisis environment, there is no time to look at empirical evidence. Furthermore, the highest policymaking bodies in Sri Lanka, such as the Cabinet and the Parliament, do not rely on research to make decisions.

In conclusion, Mr. Weeratunga identified several reasons for the gap between research and policymaking in Sri Lanka. These include the poor relationship between research organisations and the bureaucracy, the lack of applied research and research which is not

oriented towards policy influence, bureaucracy which lacks policymaking skills, politicians who are in a haste to make policies and finally, a policymaking system in which the highest policymaking bodies do not rely on research. He felt that research organisations must find a line into the policymaking process before crisis situations are reached, in order to bridge the gap between evidence and policy influence.

Prof. Savitri Goonesekere, who has many years of experience in working in research and civil society organisations, delivered the second keynote address. In contrast to Mr. Weeratunga, her perspective was that of an outsider to the policymaking process. Interestingly, Prof. Goonesekere argued that contrary to popular view, CSOs have been successful in many instances of linking evidence with policy influence in Sri Lanka. Two policies, which are important in the Sri Lankan context as well as being extremely successful in implementation -the family planning policy and micro credit policy-, have been influenced by evidence.

Tracing the development of CSOs in Sri Lanka, Prof Goonesekere said that there is a long tradition of civil society organisations in Sri Lanka, but CSOs tended to be mainly involved in service provision. Only recently, has there been a proliferation of research CSOs.

Prof. Goonesekere pointed out that we tend to distinguish between law and policy as different things, but law is the ultimate culmination of policy. For example, access to health in Sri Lanka is dealt with through policies rather than law/rights but increasingly it is being seen as an enforceable right. One of the most fundamental aspects of being Sri Lankan is our free education system, yet there is no law that says education should be free and compulsory, only policies.

So why is it difficult for research to influence policy? Prof. Goonesekere felt that researchers are guided by certain perspectives but the context is always shifting, which makes relying on evidence rather difficult. The quality of research is an issue here as sometimes getting the research out is more about utilising donor money or “instant” research. Another constraint is the attitude of the bureaucracy. Few are willing to listen and instead take their cue from politicians, resulting in the politicisation of the bureaucracy.

Speaking of success stories where CSOs have used evidence to influence policy, Prof. Goonesekere listed policies relating to mental health policies for migrant workers, agrarian reforms, reforms to the penal code. A significant failure cited was that of gender discrimination under the LDO land policies. Despite more than 20 years of research and push to change policy, when a decision was finally taken by the Cabinet on this issue, the entire body of research was ignored.

In order to bridge the gap between research and policy, several things are needed. Firstly, CSOs need to get involved in task forces and panels set up by the Government. This approach is particularly influential when the individuals who have done the research sit in these task forces and panels. This would also allow CSOs to find out what issues are being considered within the policy circles. Secondly, publications need to be disseminated at the political/policy level. There are avenues to access; for example, Ministers can be catalysts for change but only if they are given the information. The litigation path is another strategy, though the Government may see this approach as an obstacle to their agenda. Parliamentary Select Committees and the media present other opportunities. Prof. Goonesekere noted that one of the advantages of publicising research through media is that politicians and bureaucrats get more interested when there is publicity.

While pointing out that the problem in Sri Lanka is that policies are too much dictated by politics, Prof. Goonesekere concluded her remarks by reiterating that there are, in fact, spaces for CSOs to link research with policy influence as clearly shown by past experiences in Sri Lanka.

3.2. Discussion

Following the keynote addresses, Mr. John Young and Mr. Naved Chowdhury from ODI presented an overview of ODI, the CSP Programme and the CEL Framework. Thereafter, Nilakshi De Silva, CEPA, provided a summary of the case studies as well as the issues and ideas that arose from the Resource Persons' Workshop.

Some of the main points that arose from the discussion that followed these presentations are summarised below:

- One problem is that the discussion about linking research with policy influence is carried on among those who already believe that policies should be based on evidence. These people are not the obstacles and there is no advantage in preaching to the converted, as it were. What is needed is a strategy to involve policymakers, bureaucrats and the media in this dialogue.
- The issue of language was also discussed at length. There is a need to go beyond an elite discussion conducted exclusively in English and to reach decentralised administration structures. Research CSOs need to consider incorporating translation and dissemination costs at the project proposal, contract negotiation stage.
- In this regard, the importance of creating a responsible media was noted, through for example, training good journalists, supporting journalism courses etc.
- While directing research evidence at the bureaucracy and other stakeholders is an option, it is not possible to completely ignore politicians, when attempting to influence policy. One option is to “create a din” through the media, especially in rural areas by creating awareness of issues among the public.
- Policies in Sri Lanka are often made due to the pressure from the international community. How can we use this pressure to our advantage without being co-opted by it? International and regional agendas are shifting – so there is a need to be selective.
- A substantial amount of research evidence is generated by the State sector, for example by institutions such as the Central Bank, the Department of Census and Statistics, the DEA, to name a few. When policymakers often ignore the evidence generated by the state sector, how can we get them to listen to CSOs?

4. Some Thoughts on the Way Forward

A large majority of those who were present during the Sri Lanka consultations felt that the ODI/CEPA workshop and seminar began an interesting dialogue, which needs to be taken forward. Participants expressed many thoughts about the way forward, and they are summarised below as three main suggestions:

- ***Need to put the importance of linking research/evidence with policy on the agenda***
The popular view in Sri Lanka is that politicians make public policy in an ad-hoc manner, without reference to any evidence or research. While on the one hand this gives rise to a sense of pessimism among research CSOs, on the other hand it perpetuates the idea and lessens the likelihood that this status quo will change. That public policies should be linked to evidence is not as yet a widely accepted idea in Sri Lanka and it needs to be put on the public discourse agenda, as a first step to changing the status quo in Sri Lanka. A

programme to put evidence-based policy making on the map needs to be developed, which addresses this issue at the national level as well as at the level of donors.

- ***Need to convince other stakeholders of the importance of this link***

Research CSOs are already convinced of the need to link evidence with policy and talking among ourselves only results in limited progress. Those who are not convinced are the ones who can make a change, such as policymakers, bureaucrats and the media. There is a need to involve these stakeholders in this dialogue about bridging the gap between evidence and policy.

- ***Need to provide a forum to continue this discussion***

While the national consultations gave rise to an interesting discussion on linking evidence with policy, the discussions also highlighted many other issues that were not dealt with in depth. For example, what kind of research should influence policy, is there a right kind of evidence, is evidence in fact value-free and neutral, is there a right way to influence policy such as being inclusive, how does one “make a din” in order to be noticed by policymakers etc. In addition, the consultations made it very clear that there are many more case studies, which show how evidence can be successfully linked to policy influence in the Sri Lankan context, which may provide more lessons for research CSOs. There is a need to continue the dialogue that began with the Sri Lanka national consultations and a forum needs to be created for this purpose. This may give rise to a network of organisations which debates and discusses these issues on a regular basis.

5. Evaluation

The following section provides a summary of the feedback received from participants at the Resource Persons’ Workshop and the National Seminar.

Overall, the participants at both the Resource Persons’ Workshop and the National Seminar appreciated that the consultations were firmly rooted in the Sri Lankan context. The four case studies as well as the key note addresses provided much useful material about the policy context and policy influencing processes in Sri Lanka, which can be of practical use to the participating CSOs. It would have been appreciated if the policy influencing tools were also similarly contextualised for the country context.

In addition to the informal feedback received from participants, formal, written feedback was also sought. Five workshop participants provided written feedback, which was on the whole very positive. A majority of responses (87%) were either “good” or “excellent”, no responses indicated “poor” or “very poor”. All respondents felt that the objectives of the workshop had been defined and achieved and that the concepts had been explained clearly. One respondent raised the lack of time spent dealing with the complexities of research and evidence but in general, respondents felt that time allocation had been either good or fair. One respondent identified the working through Sri Lankan case material, the tools provided by ODI as well as the overall discussion to be very valuable. Regarding follow-up options, the possibility of facilitating the formation of a working group discussing policy issues and identifying joint areas of work was brought up. In addition, the involvement of the corporate sector for policy lobbying was suggested.

Five evaluation forms were received from participants at the seminar. The feedback received was generally positive with a majority of responses being either “good” or “excellent”. In particular, all those who provided feedback saw the seminar topic as well as the conference arrangements as good or excellent. Respondents who had not thought of these issues before and saw the seminar as an eye-opener, and those who had always considered the

relationship between research and evidence an intriguing topic, found the seminar useful for their work. Three out of the five respondents felt that the seminar discussion was excellent while four out of the five respondents felt that all seminar speakers were good or excellent. The one dissenting participant was unhappy that the ODI presentations were not adequately linked to the Sri Lankan context, or more specifically, the keynote addresses, which preceded the presentation. Finally, one participant felt that the venue was not appropriate.