

## **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, EVIDENCE AND POLICY INFLUENCE**

Sri Lanka National Consultations  
Final Report



29, Gregory's Road  
Colombo 7, Sri Lanka  
E-mail: [info@cepa.lk](mailto:info@cepa.lk)  
Tel: +94 (0) 11 2676955-8, Fax: +94 (0) 11 2676959  
Web: [www.cepa.lk](http://www.cepa.lk)

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.

Civil Society Organisations, Evidence and Policy Influence

A policy maker's perspective

Lalith Weeratunga

1

**What is public administration?**

- It can denote:
  1. The activity of public servants;
  2. The structure of government: that is institutions and relationships through which the activity of public servants is carried on;
  3. The study of 1 and 2.

Fletcher (1967)

2

**The policy/administration dichotomy**

- Sometimes a distinction is made between:
  - Policy and politics – work of elected politicians
  - Administration – the work of officials or administrators
- However, the above distinction is problematic, because the term ‘administration’ is not straight forward.
- Politicians rely heavily on officials when formulating policy!

3

**The changing context of pub. admin.**

- Public bodies do not exist in a vacuum.
- They are closely related to the environment which they inhabit, and they influence, and are influenced by that environment.
- A number of external influences assist and constrain public administrators.
  - Political environment
  - Social and cultural environment
  - Globalisation
  - Information and communication technologies

4

**Features of the public service**

- Permanence
- Unity
- Anonymity
- Neutrality

5

**The public policy making system**

- **A sub-system of society**
- **Interacts constantly with**
  - culture
  - public opinion
  - social groups
  - economic, religious and educational institutions
  - All other components of society

6

- Autonomy of the public policy making system is increased by:
  - Growing complexity of the issues
  - Strength of the national leaders who can use mass-communication media
- Yet, influence of the environment on public-policymaking is tremendous.
- Improving policymaking depends on the change in the environment.

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### Policy Cycle – a basic presentation

- Formulation
- Implementation
- Evaluation
- Reformulation

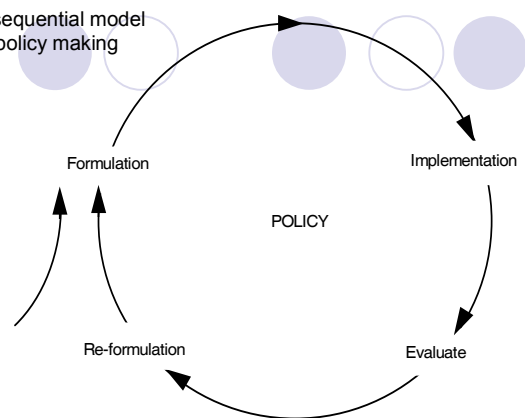
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### Policy cycle – a more elaborate presentation

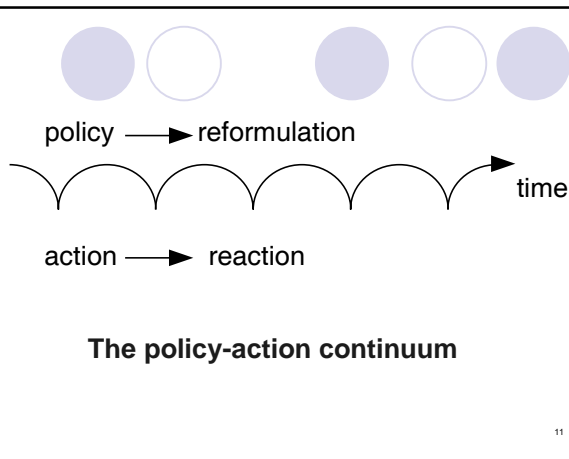
- Policy initiation/agenda setting
- Appraisal
- Formulation
- Implementation
- Evaluation
- Policy continuation / termination / reformulation/ succession / learning

9

A sequential model of policy making



10



11

### Policy Defined

- Defines an area for decision making with a degree of discretion
- States objectives to be achieved
- States criteria for factual and value judgement
- Enables decisions to be consistent with the stated objectives
- Enables decisions on issues before they become problems/crises
- Enables delegation of authority
- Enables maintenance of central controls
- Coordinates backward/forward/horizontal area plans and policies

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## Annex 4 Seminar Keynote 1 Presentation

### How are policies made

- Most are formulated after crisis/crises (eg. Policy on salaries)
- Some are formulated to satisfy a need of a group or groups of people
- Some policies are made purely to please those who make a din
- Some policies are made purely to enhance one's political image/stature
- Occasionally policies are made on gut feelings
- Policies are also made for political gain/advantage
- Policies are also made to benefit oneself

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### Why the gap between research and public policy making?

- **Poor relationship between research bodies & bureaucracy**
- **Lack of applied research**
- **Research not oriented towards public policy making**
- **Bureaucracy lacks public policy making skills**
- **Politicians are in a haste to make policies**
- **Highest policy making bodies do not depend on research**

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## CSOs, Evidence & Policy Influence: A National Seminar



Hotel Taj Samudra, Colombo  
7<sup>th</sup> July 2005

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## Overseas Development Institute

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- £8m, 60 researchers
- Research / Advice / Public Debate
- Rural / Humanitarian / Poverty & Aid / Economics (HIV, Human rights, Water)
- DFID, Parliament, WB, EC
- Civil Society



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## RAPID Programme

- Research
  - Desk-based literature reviews
    - Bridging Research and Policy
    - Communications
    - Knowledge Management
  - GDN project:
    - 50 preliminary case studies
    - Phase II studies (25 projects)
  - ODI projects
    - 4 detailed case studies
    - HIV/AIDS
- Advisory work
- Workshops and seminars



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## Definitions

- Research: “any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge”
- Policy: a “purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors”
  - Agendas / policy horizons
  - Official statements documents
  - Patterns of spending
  - Implementation processes
  - Activities on the ground

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## The linear logical model...

```

graph TD
    A[Identify the problem] --> B[Commission research]
    B --> C[Analyse the results]
    C --> D[Choose the best option]
    D --> E[Establish the policy]
    E --> F[Implement the policy]
    F --> G[Evaluate the results]
    
```

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## ...in reality...


- “The whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents. It is not at all a matter of the rational implementation of the so-called decisions through selected strategies”<sup>1</sup>
- “Most policy research on African agriculture is irrelevant to agricultural and overall economic policy in Africa”<sup>2</sup>
- “Research is more often regarded as the opposite of action rather than a response to ignorance”<sup>3</sup>

1 - Clay & Schaffer (1984), Room for Manoeuvre, An Exploration of Public Policy in Agricultural and Rural Development, Heinemann Educational Books, London  
2 - Oramo (2003), Policy Research on African Agriculture: Trends, Gaps, and Challenges, International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) Research Report No 21  
3 - Surr (2003), DFID Research Review

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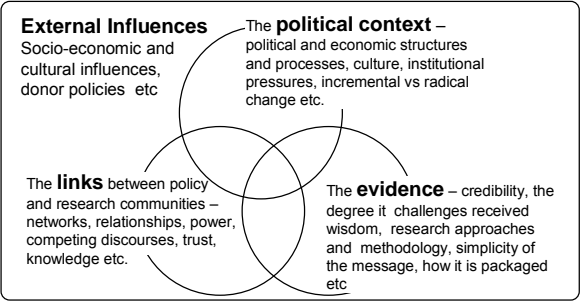
## Case Studies

- **Sustainable Livelihoods:** The Evolution of DFID Policy
- The **PRSP Initiative:** Research in Multilateral Policy Change
- The adoption of **Ethical Principles in Humanitarian Aid** post Rwanda
- **Animal Health Care in Kenya:** Evidence fails to influence Policy
- **50 GDN Case Studies:** Examples where evidence has or hasn't influenced policy



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## The Analytical Framework



**External Influences** – Socio-economic and cultural influences, donor policies etc

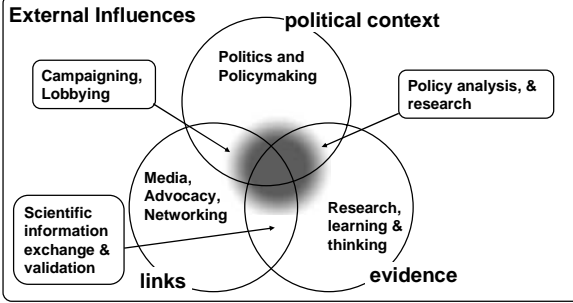
The **political context** – political and economic structures and processes, culture, institutional pressures, incremental vs radical change etc.

The **evidence** – credibility, the degree it challenges received wisdom, research approaches and methodology, simplicity of the message, how it is packaged etc

The **links** between policy and research communities – networks, relationships, power, competing discourses, trust, knowledge etc.

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## A Practical Framework



**External Influences**

**political context**

**evidence**

**links**

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## What CSOs need to do

What CSOs need to know	What CSOs need to do	How to do it
<b>Political Context:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the policymakers?</li> <li>• Is there demand for ideas?</li> <li>• What is the policy process?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get to know the policymakers</li> <li>• Identify friends and foes.</li> <li>• Prepare for policy opportunities.</li> <li>• Look out for policy windows.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with them – seek commissions</li> <li>• Strategic opportunism – prepare for known events + resources for others</li> </ul>
<b>Evidence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the current theory?</li> <li>• What are the narratives?</li> <li>• How divergent is it?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish credibility</li> <li>• Provide practical solutions</li> <li>• Establish legitimacy.</li> <li>• Present clear options</li> <li>• Use familiar narratives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a reputation</li> <li>• Action-research</li> <li>• Pilot projects to generate legitimacy</li> <li>• Good communication</li> </ul>
<b>Links</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the stakeholders?</li> <li>• What networks exist?</li> <li>• Who are the connectors, mavens and salesmen?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get to know the others</li> <li>• Work through existing networks.</li> <li>• Build coalitions.</li> <li>• Build new policy networks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build partnerships.</li> <li>• Identify key networkers, mavens and salesmen.</li> <li>• Use informal contacts</li> </ul>

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## Using the framework

- **The external environment:** Who are the key actors? What is their agenda? How do they influence the political context?
- **The political context:** Is there political interest in change? Is there room for manoeuvre? How do they perceive the problem?
- **The evidence:** Is it there? Is it relevant? Is it practically useful? Are the concepts familiar or new? Does it need re-packaging?
- **Links:** Who are the key individuals? Are there existing networks to use? How best to transfer the information? The media? Campaigns?

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## Policy Entrepreneur Skills



Storyteller

Networker

Engineer

Fixer

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## Practical Tools

**Overarching Tools**

- The RAPID Framework
- Using the Framework
- The Entrepreneurship Questionnaire

**Communication Tools**

- Communications Strategy
- SWOT analysis
- Message Design
- Making use of the media

**Policy Influence Tools**

- Influence Mapping & Power Mapping
- Lobbying and Advocacy
- Campaigning: A Simple Guide
- Competency self-assessment

Tools for Policy Impact: A Handbook for Researchers

David Start and Inga Heuback

**odi** Research and Policy & Knowledge Programme

Government Analysis  
- Focus Group Discussion

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## CSOs and Policy Processes

- CSOs increasingly being involved in policy processes (from service delivery).
- Move from challenging state / overall governance to policy engagement.
- But, engagement often doesn't do justice to the breadth of evidence.
- Southern research capacity has been denuded.
- The credibility and legitimacy of CSO involvement is questioned.
- CSOs, researchers and policymakers seem to live in parallel universes.

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## CSOs: Definitions and Functions

- Definition: ““organizations that work in an arena between the household, the private sector and the state to negotiate matters of public concern”.
- Functions:
  - representation
  - technical inputs and advocacy
  - capacity-building
  - service-delivery
  - social functions
  - Policy engagement

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## ODI's CSPP

**Aim:**  
Strengthened role of southern civil society organisations in development policy processes

**Through:**

- Improved understanding how CSOs use research-based evidence
- Strengthened regional capacity to support CSOs
- Improved information from ODI
- Global collaboration

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## Current Activities

- Mapping of CSO's and organisations that support them
- Small-scale collaborations (internal)
- Regional Workshops
- Small-scale collaborations (external)
- Identification of long-term partners
- Support (and capacity-building)
- Collaboration on global projects

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## Africa Consultation

- Workshops held in Southern, Eastern and West Africa
- Organized in partnership with local CSOs
- Case studies on various issues: Budget Monitoring( Zambia), Community Participation in Waste Management ( Ghana), etc.
- Strong diversity in engagement
- Policies strongly driven by internal and external politics

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### Key Lessons

- Legitimacy and credibility of CSOs are challenged by the government
- Proposals by CSOs should be feasible and practical
- Lack of trust between CSOs and government
- CSOs need to understand policy process/context of policy making
- Authentic and up to date information is crucial

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### Suggestions for the CSPP

- Training on research methodology, policy analysis, communication and advocacy.
- Staff exchanges or secondments, collaboration, networking.
- Institutional support: HR, financial management, partnership, negotiation skills and fundraising.
- Support to southern networks to share information and analysis
- Funds for collaborative projects and programmes in evidence based policy.

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### Partnership Principles

- A shared vision of the value of the partnership.
- Recognising each other's needs and the needs of their beneficiaries.
- Transparency by sharing information in an open and timely fashion.
- Sharing outputs fairly, recognising each other's contribution.
- Adapting to changing circumstances.
- Retaining independent character of each organisation

## Evidence and Policy in Sri Lanka: Lessons, Opportunities and Constraints

## Annex 7.2 List of Participants (National Seminar)

### ODI-CEPA, “Civil Society Organisations, Evidence and Policy Influence”, Colombo, July 7, 2005

#### National Seminar: List of Participants

	NAME	DESIGNATION	ORGANISATION	E-mail
1	Ms. Dushinka Abayasekera	Programme Officer	CHA (Consortium for Humanitarian Agencies)	<a href="mailto:marc@cha.lk">marc@cha.lk</a>
2	Dr. Patricia Alailima	Consultant Coordinator	CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis)	<a href="mailto:info@cepa.lk">info@cepa.lk</a>
3	Mr. Ranatunga R. M. Amaratunga	Additional Secretary	Ministry of Medium & Small Scale Plantation Industries and Rural Human Resources Development	<a href="mailto:mpdyc@slt.net.lk">mpdyc@slt.net.lk</a>
4	Mr. Naved Chowdhury	Research Fellow	ODI (Overseas Development Institute)	<a href="mailto:n.chowdhury@odi.org">n.chowdhury@odi.org</a>
5	Ms. Sharmini De Alwis	Deputy Director	Economic Research Department – Central Bank of Sri Lanka	<a href="mailto:sharmini@cbsl.lk">sharmini@cbsl.lk</a>
6	Mr. Ranjith De Silva	Asia Region Coordinator	IFRTD (International Forum for Rural Transport and Development)	<a href="mailto:ranjith@ifrtd.org">ranjith@ifrtd.org</a>
7	Ms. Nilakshi De Silva	Senior Professional	CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis)	<a href="mailto:info@cepa.lk">info@cepa.lk</a>
8	Prof. Hiran Dias	Rural Development & Information Specialist	NGDO Management Consultant	<a href="mailto:hideva@slt.net.lk">hideva@slt.net.lk</a>
9	Dr. Anila Dias Bandaranaike	Director, Statistics Dept	Central Bank of Sri Lanka	<a href="mailto:aniladb@cbsl.lk">aniladb@cbsl.lk</a>
10	Ms. Dilkie Fernando	Deputy Director	CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis)	<a href="mailto:dilkie@cepa.lk">dilkie@cepa.lk</a>
11	Dr. Joel Fernando	Professor	University of Colombo	<a href="mailto:suneraf@slt.net.lk">suneraf@slt.net.lk</a>
12	Ms. Priyanthi Fernando	Executive Director	CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis)	<a href="mailto:info@cepa.lk">info@cepa.lk</a>
13	Mr. Susrutha Goonasekera	Professional	CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis)	<a href="mailto:info@cepa.lk">info@cepa.lk</a>
14	Prof. Savitri Goonesekere	Emeritus Professor of Law	University of Colombo	<a href="mailto:cenwor@slt.net.lk">cenwor@slt.net.lk</a>
15	Ms. Karolina Hedström	Attaché, Development Cooperation	Delegation of the European Commission to Sri Lanka	<a href="mailto:Karolina.hedstrom@ce.eu.int">Karolina.hedstrom@ce.eu.int</a>

## Annex 7.2 List of Participants (National Seminar)

16	Dr. Vishaka Hidellege	Country Director	ITDG – South Asia	<a href="mailto:vishakah@itdg.slt.lk">vishakah@itdg.slt.lk</a>
17	Mr. Basil Illangakoon	Executive Vice Chairman	Marga Institute – Sri Lanka Centre for Development Studies	<a href="mailto:egmarga@sltnet.lk">egmarga@sltnet.lk</a>
18	Ms. Azra Jafferjee	Programme Coordinator	CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis)	<a href="mailto:info@cepa.lk">info@cepa.lk</a>
19	Ms. Sharni Jayawardena		IWMI (International Water Management Institute)	<a href="mailto:s.jayawardena@cgiar.org">s.jayawardena@cgiar.org</a>
20	Mr. Hasitha Karunathilaka		EMACE Sri Lanka	<a href="mailto:emace@slt.lk">emace@slt.lk</a>
21	Mr. Jose Lopez	Livelihoods Adviser	Save the Children in Sri Lanka	<a href="mailto:jose@savethechildren.org">jose@savethechildren.org</a>
22	Ms. Diana Montero Melis	Professional	CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis)	<a href="mailto:info@cepa.lk">info@cepa.lk</a>
23	Mr. Cezar Neaga	Professional	CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis)	<a href="mailto:info@cepa.lk">info@cepa.lk</a>
24	Dr. Anita Nesiah		Centre for Research and Community Development	<a href="mailto:anita@crcdlk.org">anita@crcdlk.org</a>
25	Ms. Kristen Ormston	Deputy Programme Manager	Department for International Development	<a href="mailto:k-ormston@dfid.gov.uk">k-ormston@dfid.gov.uk</a>
26	Mr. Dilena Pathragoda	Program Coordinator	Centre for Environmental Justice	<a href="mailto:info@ejustice.lk">info@ejustice.lk</a>
27	Ms. Myrtle Perera	Senior Research Fellow	Marga Institute	<a href="mailto:marga@sri.lanka.net">marga@sri.lanka.net</a>
28	Ms. Judy Pietersz	NGO Co-ordinator	International Organisation for Migration	<a href="mailto:judyp@iomsrilanka.org">judyp@iomsrilanka.org</a>
29	Ms. Saraswathie Poulraj	Junior Professional	CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis)	<a href="mailto:info@cepa.lk">info@cepa.lk</a>
30	Dr. Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake		Oxfam America	<a href="mailto:dr214@slt.lk">dr214@slt.lk</a>
31	Mr. Charitha Ratwatte	Managing Director	Sri Lanka Business Development Centre	<a href="mailto:jcratwat@sri.lanka.net">jcratwat@sri.lanka.net</a>
32	Ms. Mandrie J. Sahabandu	Transport Consultant	LFRTD (Lanka Forum for Rural Transport and Development)	<a href="mailto:sasi@sltnet.lk">sasi@sltnet.lk</a>
33	Mr. David Salter	Senior Coordinator – ILO labour based Infrastructure Programme	ILO – Colombo	<a href="mailto:davidsaltersri@ilo.org">davidsaltersri@ilo.org</a>
34	Ms. Nimanthi Samaratinga	Project assistant	EMACE Sri Lanka	<a href="mailto:emace@slt.lk">emace@slt.lk</a>

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35	Ms. Dharshini Seneviratne	Head, Advocacy and Research	Save the Children Sri Lanka	<a href="mailto:dharshini@savethechildren.lk">dharshini@savethechildren.lk</a>
36	Mr. Tom Slaymaker	Research Fellow	ODI (Overseas Development Institute)	<a href="mailto:t.slaymaker@odi.org.uk">t.slaymaker@odi.org.uk</a>
37	Mr. Paul Steele		Institute of Policy Studies	<a href="mailto:paul@ips.lk">paul@ips.lk</a>
38	Mr. Sumanasekera		Central Bank of Sri Lanka	<a href="mailto:sum@cbsl.lk">sum@cbsl.lk</a>
39	Dr. Indra Tudawe	President	Sri Lanka Evaluation Association	<a href="mailto:itudawe@unicef.org">itudawe@unicef.org</a>
40	Mr. Lalith Weeratunga	Secretary to the Prime Minister	Prime Minister's Office	<a href="mailto:secpm@sltnet.lk">secpm@sltnet.lk</a>
41	Dr. Nireka Weeratunge	Consultant	Independent consultant / CEPA Associate	<a href="mailto:nireka@eureka.lk">nireka@eureka.lk</a>
42	Dr. Ponna Wignaraja	Chairman	SAPNA (South Asian Perspectives Network Association)	<a href="mailto:S_apna@sri.lanka.net">S_apna@sri.lanka.net</a>
43	Mr. John Young	Head of Partnerships and Communications, RAPID Programme Manager	ODI (Overseas Development Institute)	<a href="mailto:j.young@odi.org.uk">j.young@odi.org.uk</a>