

## **Summary Report on Civil Society Organisations, Evidence and Policy Influence: A Resource Persons' Workshop**

**Colombo, Sri Lanka, July 5-6, 2005**

As part of the Sri Lanka national consultations on 'Civil Society Organisations, Evidence and Policy Influence', the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) organised a resource persons' workshop from 5-6 July 2005. The workshop was held at the Taj Samudra Hotel in Colombo and 28 researchers and others representing civil society organisations, think tanks and the research community in Sri Lanka participated at this 1 ½ day event.

### **Objectives of the workshop**

The workshop was moderated by Ms. Priyanthi Fernando, Executive Director, CEPA. After welcoming the participants and thanking ODI for suggesting this important topic around which to organise a series of dialogue and exchange events in Sri Lanka, Ms. Fernando set out several objectives of this workshop, to:

- 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 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 also helped to set the context for the workshop.

### **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 policy, energy policy, agricultural policy and environment policy and the research was produced by very different types of organisations (see Boxes 1-4).

Based on the case studies, workshop participants divided into smaller groups to analyse each case study and draw out some general themes about the policy influencing process. Through the discussion that followed, several main themes could be identified about the evidence and the policy-making context and process in Sri Lanka.

- First, there has to be an entry point for the evidence to enter policy making 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 can be created by the CSO, such as through the justice system.

- Second, the legitimacy and credibility of the CSO is important, and this can be drawn from the demonstration of the CSOs' knowledge, 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 with the evidence in different ways. Particular audience groups include experts within 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 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? Second, is it easier for evidence to influence policy when addressing a gap in policy, rather than when trying to reform policy?

**Box 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. In relation to trade policy, the main objectives of IPS in attempting to influence trade policy were to improve the trade 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 South Asian 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 several 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.

**Box 2: ITDG and Energy Policy** by Mr. Namiz Musaffer, Project Manager, ITDG

The Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) Sri Lanka is a part of an international network. In relation to energy policy, its main objectives were to ensure that the demand for electricity from rural households not covered by the national grid are 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 Government, especially government 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.

**Box 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 this 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 promoted on a one-to-one basis between individual extension officers and individual farmers and the general 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 analyzed results of the study were presented as a technical report to DEA and to the Ministry of Agriculture and 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 approach to implement many activities of the six year EAC development plan commenced from 2005 and a separate budget allocation has been made to facilitate clustering, CBO formation, and associated training of both farmers and extension officers.

**Box 4: Voluntary Organisations and Environment Policy** by Mr. Jagath Goonewardena, 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 microorganisms. 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 Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and 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.

## **Day 2 Focus: Context, Evidence and Links Framework**

On Day 2 of the 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 smaller 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 PRSP I, proposed reform of the Land Development Ordinance and the Government's policy to privatise bus transport in Sri Lanka. From this practical application of the CEL Framework, participants also commented on its usefulness.

Overall, the workshop participants felt that the CEL Framework helped to clarify the policy issues, and for 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, 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.

### **Some thoughts on the way forward**

In response to the question about how the ODI can assist Sri Lankan CSOs to bridge the gap between evidence and policy influence, the workshop participants felt that several things can be done 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, one 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.
- 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 workshop was followed by a seminar for a wider audience at which some of these issues were discussed further.