



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

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## **Executive Summary**

Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has engaged in research and policy analysis for the past 40 years and is now in the process of launching a new programme designed to strengthen the capacity of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in using research-based and other forms of evidence to promote pro-poor national and international development policies and practice. Active functional capacity of this programme is set to benefit from experiences drawn from 25 countries worldwide by tapping into the ability of CSOs in influencing policy through facilitation and engagement of a series of workshops worldwide.

The eastern Africa workshop of ODI's new Civil Society Partnerships Programme's (CSPP) Regional Consultation was held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on the 21st and 22nd February 2005, in collaboration with the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) – Tanzania. ESRF is a research and policy analysis institution and carries out research, conducts policy dialogues, and prepares position papers and policy briefs; all as inputs into the policy process in Tanzania.

This two day event included a regional workshop session followed by a national seminar. The regional workshop involved 22 participants from CSOs within Tanzania and from Uganda and focused mainly on the issues of CSOs and policy influence cutting across both countries. The national seminar generally focused on issues pertinent to the Tanzanian CSO environment and involved participants from various CSOs in the country and representatives from donor communities.

The objectives of the sessions were to provide a forum for representatives from policy research institutes and non-governmental agencies to discuss the opportunities and challenges for CSOs to use evidence to inform policy, learn about the latest worldwide research and practice in this area, share experiences about ongoing activities and identify opportunities for collaborative work.

## **Seminar Opening Session**

The seminar was brought to order at 14 00hrs. Mr. A. Mchomvu, the facilitator, gave an overview of the activities to be undertaken during the seminar.

Julius Court introduced the work of ODI and the Civil Society Partnerships Programme. He mentioned two main objectives of the gathering as first, a joint learning experience through which the participants and ODI would capture CSOs experiences on policy and share them accordingly. Second, a joint learning experience for the future, where continuity should be emphasised, as ODI has six more years working on the project and with exchange of experiences, ODI adds value to the work of local CSOs. He continued by explaining ODI role as a think tank whose mission is to inspire and inform policy.

The facilitator welcomed the guest of honour to officiate the seminar. Dr Oswald Mashindano from ESRF, on behalf of the executive director of ESRF, welcomed the participants of the national seminar. He stressed that the national seminar was very important because it will draw directly from the local CSOs. He assured ODI that the profiled participants representative of their CSOs were rich in experiences. On that word, he declared the seminar official.

## **ESRF Presentation**

### **Research-Based Evidence and the Policy Process: The Case of Tanzania – *Dennis Rweyemamu (ESRF)***

Dennis Rweyemamu's presentation focused on policy making practice, policy research and dissemination, and the challenges of bridging research and policy in Tanzania. In his introduction, he emphasised the need for viable and appropriate policies for growth and poverty reduction in Tanzania. He continued by explaining the two reasons why the policy process in Tanzania is not research-based: due to the intrinsic character of the research and policy process; and differences in researchers and policy makers and the worlds in which they operate.

He noted how the policy process in Tanzania has varied over the years and how it was dependent on the nature of the policy and the specific period in history. Mr. Rweyemamu also gave insight to the policy formulation that has evolved over the years. Major observations in policy formulation were:

- The major influence behind policy formulation has been external forces in terms of policy initiation;
- Internal forces, including systematic research, have not played a major role in influencing policy;
- There have been problems in bridging research and policy, and also generating the capacity to do so,

In his discussion of policy, research and dissemination, he noted that often the government contracts out research work, as a result allowing external researchers to have direct policy impact. In terms of dissemination of results to policy makers, it was

noted that a variety of techniques have been used, some to a greater extent than others, but the impact remaining minimal. To a greater extent, policy makers have been engaged in policy debates, seminars and workshops, and to the lesser extent the media/press exposure, distribution of pamphlets, brochures and other written means. The latter has shown to be used but does not allow room for interaction.

Dennis identified challenges to bridging research and policy. The challenges he presented to the participants were:

- Acceptability of research results;
- Ignorance on the part of policy makers;
- Timeliness;
- Accessibility and quality of data and information;
- Societal disconnection;
- Donor interests.

He concluded by emphasising that research and policy must continue to co-exist. However he cautioned that the relationship has a diffuse mechanism and as such the process has complicated aggregation of measurable / non-measurable, immediate / long-term, definite / indefinite and desirable / undesirable inputs and outcomes. He urged researchers to work with policy makers to create a contextual understanding of issues and that internal incentives structures are needed.

## **Discussions**

The presentation on the policy making process in Tanzania and its challenges was discussed with the participants providing their contributions to the floor. These contributions included experiences of evidence influence on policy, concerns of the current situation, observations, propositions and suggestions.

The main issues discussed by the participants were:

- There are other forms of evidence that can be gathered to influence policy besides research. CSOs can also influence policy though most of them if they are not in a position to carry out timely and costly research.
- The findings of most researches are incomprehensible and complicate issues, hence are little use to policy makers. Researches should opt for simpler representation of findings so that policy makers can easily adopt the implications of their studies.
- The accuracy and correctness of research methodology enables one to make findings generalisable and acceptable at a wide range. Products of research are to be consumable by everybody.
- Appropriate interaction channels should be used in reducing rates of pre-judgements by policy makers. This would decrease the rate of missed opportunities when one party remains rigid.
- Other forms of evidence that could be used by CSOs include verbal and visual documentaries, case studies and observation.

- There is need for balance, proper quantification and proper articulation of the problem in order to influence policy makers. The magnitude of the problem hinders the ability to appreciate the impact of the problem.
- There is a need for creation of forums for discussion on matters pertaining to policy, minimising the constraint of communication between grassroots and bureaucrats.
- There is need for linkages and networking with governments, policy makers, researchers and CSOs.

## **ODI Presentation 1**

### **Research-based Evidence, CSOs and Policy Processes: Parallel Universes? – Julius Court (ODI)**

Julius Court began by giving a background to the Civil Society Partnerships Programme (CSPP). He mentioned that there has been increasing involvement of CSOs in the policy process, a difference from the service delivery functions in which they have always been engaged. However, the credibility and legitimacy of CSOs involvement is questioned.

He discussed key factors that oppose the CSO influence on policy as: lack of capacity; lack of local ownership; poor ability in translating data into evidence; lack of data; donor influence; crises and political factors. However, he also mentioned factors that support CSOs: the growing interest of governments in CSOs; CSOs gaining confidence; the strength of networks between CSOs; the media; and evidence of the value of CSO involvement.

Julius talked about the number of theories available in guiding CSOs in influencing policy. He led the participants through an analytical framework that could be used in the policy process. The analytical framework suggested four major areas of convergence: external influences; political context; evidence; and links. The aim of the analytical framework is to simplify the complexity of how evidence contributes to the policy process so that policy makers and researchers can make decisions about how they do their work to maximise the chance that policies are evidence-based, and that research does have a positive impact on policy and practice.

He also emphasised that CSOs need to be able to understand the political context, do credible research, communicate effectively and work with other CSOs. He added that importance should be attached to organisational capacity as well, in terms of staff, internal processes and funding.

## **ODI Presentation 2**

### **Civil Society Partnerships Programme – Naved Chowdhury (ODI)**

Naved Chowdhury, the CSPP programme officer from ODI, informed the participants that the workshop is the fifth in a series being held worldwide with the main objective

of sharing information and learning from experiences on CSOs and the policy process worldwide.

He provided an introduction of ODI activities, especially those associated with the CSPP. He mentioned that the aim of the CSPP is to strengthen the role of southern CSOs in development policy processes, with expected outcomes of understanding how CSOs use research, improved information from ODI on how research findings can be communicated effectively and creation of a global collaboration.

He explained that the workshop objectives were to provide a forum to:

- Discuss the opportunities and challenges for CSOs to use evidence to inform policy;
- Learn about the latest worldwide research and practice in this area;
- Share experiences about ongoing activities and what works;
- Identify gaps for future work.

## **Discussions**

The discussions that followed the presentations made by the ODI staff raised the following issues and observations:

- The participants cautioned on the challenges in terms of levels of literacy and deficit in society, in terms of skills in achieving appropriate mechanisms in coming up with a policy;
- There was general concern on the means of maintaining and sustaining relationships, and the coordination in terms of private and public partnerships;
- The costs of research impede CSOs in their attempts to be heard and the need to provide evidence for agenda setting;
- A request was put to ODI in assisting in the capacity of CSOs in carrying out research to influence policy;
- CSOs should form a network so as to strengthen their voice; efforts should be directed in collection of case studies and modes of dissemination to policy makers. Creation of partnerships in regional areas help in confidence building and open talking of issues;
- CSOs should work at training more indigenous researchers, creating windows of opportunity to sensitise policy makers and developing advocacy skills.

## **Closing**

The national seminar ended with Julius Court from ODI thanking the participants for their active participation in the discussions that followed the presentations. He made specific observations of the seminar:

- The participants had identified core issues and focus should be made on how to capture the voice of the grassroots and send it to the top;
- Issues should be contextualised so that policy makers are able to understand, especially when the donor element is added to it;

- How can ODI add value to the needs of CSOs?
- How can partnerships be made?
- The ultimate aim is impact. Demonstration of impact is very important in pushing policy in the right direction.

Julius ended by informing the participants on the next stage of the CSPP:

- The CSPP is scheduled to be launched on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 and that it will run for a period of six years;
- There is a call for case studies and he encouraged participants to submit studies and take advantage of the opportunity;
- There will be a report on the workshop posted on the internet;
- He urged participants to communicate with the ODI CSPP.

He thanked ESRF for their cooperation

## **Vote of Thanks**

One of the participants was chosen to give a vote of thanks. She thanked ODI/ESRF for organising the very informative seminar and having the honour of inviting the participants. She mentioned that the seminar has enhanced their bargaining power with policy makers for fruitful results in the future.

## **Annex 1: Tanzania National Seminar Programme**

14.00 - 14.30	<i>Registration</i>
14.30 - 14.45	Welcome Address by Host Institution and Introduction to the Seminar
14.45 - 14.30	Address by the Chief Guest: The Role of Research in formulating development policy
14.30 - 15.00	Evidence and Policy: Case Study from Tanzania - Dennis Rweyemamu, ESRF
15.00 - 15.30	Discussion
15.30 - 16.00	<i>Tea/Coffee</i>
16.00 - 16.30	Introduction to role of research-based evidence and CSOs in policy processes - Julius Court, ODI
16.30 - 17.00	An Introduction to ODI's Civil Society Organization Partnership Programme - Naved Chowdhury, ODI
17.00 - 17.30	Discussion
17.30 - 18.00	Vote of Thanks and Close

# Annex 2: Evaluation Results

18 forms returned

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

- Evidence based research
- How to come up with evidence in lobbying work
- Building coalitions and networking on policy issues
- The presentations and discussions
- The range of tools that can be used in assessing policy impact and evidence based policy influencing
- Re-affirming that ‘together we can positively influence policy’
- Using evidence to influence policy processes
- Using the appropriate approach to be able to influence policy
- Policy processes, the role of research based evidence in policy processes
- Practical framework – research and policy development
- Approaches, tools, tricks – policy development
- Successful mechanism in communicating research findings
- Using the analysis frame in our research
- Networking on research institutions
- No one CSO is expert in everything
- Evidence informs policymakers
- The RAPID approach
- Policy influence tools
- Analytical framework
- Tools for policy impact
- That policy influencing is beyond a technical matter and is very political in nature and that calls for appropriate strategies
- Evidence, facts and figures are extremely important in the policy influencing business
- Tools
- Experiences from others
- CSO contributions to policy change

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

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Objectives defined and achieved	8	9			
Concepts explained clearly	8	9			
Time allocated for the seminar	2	8	7		
Relevance to my work	9	7	1		
Well-organized	10	7			
Overall quality of the Workshop/seminar	8	8	1		

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

- It was very nice
- It was excellently organised, well articulated learning opportunity
- Good
- Participants were well-informed, full of soul and energy

- It has been kept too small to ensure everyone's participation
- It was well organised and relevant to my duties
- Good quality and value, especially when seen in the light of the current capacity challenge in policy analysis in this 'policy influencing era'.
- It has been good and well organised
- Excellent
- Good quality with excellent pre-workshop preparations; appreciated the handouts
- Good quality handouts, facilitation and content was relevant
- It will be good if the way forward will be implementation
- Of considerable quality and value
- It is very educative, informative and has contributed a lot to our understanding of the evidence-policy links
- The workshop / seminar was very interesting and gave me a lot of new information and ways to strengthen our NGO
- Facilitators were good and materials presented were simple to understand
- I really think the workshop had some value, but the cases presented seemed to be a little abstract; new areas that I couldn't easily deduce to my daily work
- Tremendous value as many experiences come together and are shared
- Good quality and valuable workshop overall; the interactive component of participants has contributed to good quality work

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

- More time should be allocated for participation, especially in groups in order to create more interaction
- Put concepts into practice
- Yes, we need to know more on evaluation techniques and writing of good proposals as well
- More attention should be paid to national-level workshops first and, funds permitting, regional workshops should be held at the next level - not the other way round
- Earlier notification
- More need for Tanzanian NGOs
- Should be less condensed
- Include more stakeholders, especially policy makers
- Yes I do like to be invited so I can learn more for the benefit of our NGO
- More time should be allocated
- Deductions should be made from more recent and practical experience; having a case presented by someone who was actually involved would be great
- Selection of participants – looks like this is based on personal contacts rather than looking for the real stakeholders
- Such workshops / seminars should be continued

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

- Through email communication and capacity building tracking to review and share experiences of policy engagement
- Initiate - put some concepts into practice
- Continued networking with my organisation
- In my organisation, most of our duty is to make / improve life status of the community where as a result policies are changed so we need to learn more from ODI.
- Collaborative work in policy analysis training
- More pointers to methodology materials given
- Since access to information is still a problem, ODI can help us develop the library / resource centre that we have in place

- Capacity building
- Feedback from organisers on the evaluation
- Policy development research strategies
- Sending a questionnaire regularly (yearly) to check on info usage and research needs
- Organise through a recognised network an annual conference on country basis on research evidence and policy processes
- Networking; resources
- Should not be end of the road for participants
- Continued inclusion in ODI platforms as well as regular information sharing electronically
- I hope you will send all the book to our address
- Policy analysis
- Writing skills
- Support to document our experiences and have these shared in the region and internationally as well
- Funding to support our planned policy analysis and capacity enhancement training in lobbying and advocacy
- Within Uganda, we have to organise this with technical backing from ODI
- Workshop proceedings should be sent to all participants to enable follow up

**6. In your country, to what extent do:**

(Score between 0 = none and 5 = always)

a) Policymakers use research-based evidence to be important in policy making?	0	5	1	2	3	0	3	2	2	2	1	3	4	2.5	0
b) CSOs contribute to policy making?	5	5	2	5	2	5	2	3	3	1	2	4	4	2.5	5
c) CSO's use research-based evidence to inform their work?	5	5	2	5	3	5	2	3	4	1	5	3	4	2	5