



CSOs, Evidence and Policy Influence: National Seminar

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Executive Summary

The UK Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Research and Policy in Development Programme (RAPID) has been working on the interface between research and policy for the last five years. It has developed a framework to help researchers and practitioners understand the policy context they are working in and make strategic choices about what they should do to maximise the impact of their work on policy and practice. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) also have an important role to play in influencing policies and practices to make them pro-poor. More and more CSOs are recognising the need to understand policy processes better and use evidence to engage with them more effectively. ODI has recently launched a new programme to help CSOs do this better.

The third national seminar of ODI's new Civil Society Partnerships Programme's (CSPP) Regional Consultation in Southern Africa was held in Lusaka on the 17th February 2005, in collaboration with the Institute of Economic and Social Research, University of Zambia. The seminar provided a forum for CSOs in Zambia to discuss the opportunities and challenges they face when they try to inform policy and share experiences about what works and doesn't work, learn about the latest worldwide research and practice in this area, and identify gaps for future work.

The Institute of Economic and Social Research, University of Zambia, presented a case study from Zambia – Evidence and Policy: Budget transparency and participation. The Budget Transparency and Participation Study brings together researchers and policy makers from 10 African Countries who have a long-term interest in budget transparency/participation research and the attendant policy making process. The study is involved in enhancing the research capacity of CSOs, in making government more transparent (identifying major weaknesses in the budget processes), and in building a credible platform for the involvement of CSOs in budgetary policy making and decisions.

This case study illustrated how it has been possible to influence policy through participatory research, information provision and the strategic use of simple policy advocacy tools. It highlighted how to: enhance the research capacity of CSOs; make the government more transparent; identify major weaknesses in the budget process; and to build a credible platform for the involvement of CSOs in budgetary policy making and decisions.

Seminar participants shared different experiences in addition to the Zambia case study. In Zambia, it is possible for CSOs to influence policy, although the policy context makes this difficult. The fact that few CSOs have well developed policy advocacy skills makes this even more difficult.

The RAPID Framework was presented as it provides both an analytical tool to help understand the political context CSOs are working in and a practical approach to decide what needs to be done to maximize impact. There are a wide range of communication and policy advocacy tools to ensure that policy makers and practitioners get the message.

Participants at the seminar made a number of suggestions for further work to help them to promote pro-poor approaches to policy makers in Zambia including practical training, information about policy options from other countries, and help to establish policy fora and networks (local and international).

Introduction Session

The seminar facilitator, Dr. M.I. Mapoma, called the seminar to order and the proceedings commenced with the singing of the National Anthem. Dr. I. Mwanawina welcomed the participants and invited the Honourable Mutale Nalumango, Minister of Information and Broadcasting to officially open the seminar.

Opening Remarks

Honourable Mutale Nalumango, Member of Parliament, Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services, welcomed all the participants, who included a Member of Parliament, students from the University of Zambia, members of CSOs and guests from ODI. She also thanked DFID for providing the financial support for hosting the national seminar. She informed the participants that the Zambian government attaches great importance to the role of civil society, not only in monitoring policy implementation, but also in policy formulation as a way of achieving good governance, sound finances and budgetary practices in support of socio-economic growth and poverty reduction. The Minister further informed the seminar that the government considers civil society to be partners in the development of the country and in poverty reduction efforts by providing inputs in the formulation of policy and providing independent monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation on the economy and the people, through several avenues such as:

- Participation in Development Coordinating Committees at all levels (central, sectoral and district).
- The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and Third National Development Plan (TNDP) were based on wide consultations with CSOs and other stakeholders, which also allows for stakeholder monitoring of the programme and plan.
- The Mid Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), on which the National budget is based, allows for stakeholder input, including CSOs and Parliament in the budget preparation process.
- The Ministry of Finance and National Planning has always invited submissions in the budget from the public.
- CSOs and the public are encouraged to work closely with their representatives in the National Assembly and Local Governments. The Minister expressed concern in that, more often than not, CSOs engagement with the government has been based on wishes which have been far in excess of what the government can finance. In a country like Zambia, where poverty levels are so high and demands far exceed resources, certain questions need to be asked:
 - How should the government prioritise the endless lists or one project against another?
 - How can government choose among the different presentations from CSOs, the public and submissions from their representatives.

The Minister recognised that in view of the above, evidence based on sound methodologies and procedures (research), provides the most objective way of making choices. The Minister then posed the following questions and challenges:

- Why are CSOs failing in evidence?
- Do they lack capacity, skills, resources or information?
- Are CSOs well focused?

- What can we all do to enhance the role of CSOs in using evidence?
- How feasible and practical are our suggestions?

The Minister further indicated that the government is conscious of the importance of timely, relevant and reliable information in policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, both within and outside government. Further, the Minister observed that the ultimate objective of CSOs is to influence policy design and the implementation by the government, in the best possible way so as to achieve higher levels of socio-economic development, which increases wealth and reduces poverty for the Zambian people, which is also the aspiration of government. In order for the CSOs to best influence policy, there is need not only to base the policy on evidence, but also to have a good understanding of the underlying political dynamics. She also that it is important to get the timing right, as well as to take on board the concerns of the various players involved. She further stated that in order for CSOs to be competitive or complimentary, it is important to establish networks among the players and bridges which cut across different political divides. The Minister further challenged the CSOs to be transparent, accountable and to have well articulated objectives and strategies (i.e. improve their credibility in order to be taken seriously). In conclusion, the Minister indicated that government would not resist nor shun inputs from CSOs if their submissions are based on research based evidence as opposed to information only based on causing alarm about certain situations in the country.

ODI and the Civil Society Partnership Programme

Naved Chowdhury provided some background information about the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the CSO partnership programme. ODI is Britain's leading development Think Tank, with 60 researchers and an annual budget of £8 million. It provides services such as research, advice and public debate on several topics, including Rural, Humanitarian, Poverty and Aid, Economics (HIV, Human Rights, Water) sectors. ODI works with DFID, UK Parliament, World Bank, European Community and Civil Society.

This is one of a series of workshops and seminars being held around the world, in 20 different countries, by the Research and Policy in Development Programme (RAPID), to help develop ODI's new Civil Society Partnerships Programme (CSPP). The new programme aims to strengthen the capacity of southern civil society organisations to promote evidence – based pro-poor development policy. The programme will use a learning approach, first through these workshops, then through small collaborative projects with CSOs around the world. Then through longer term strategic partnerships with organisations interested to work more in this area, and to help CSOs in their region.

The expected outcomes are:

- Understanding how CSOs use research;
- Regional capacity to support CSOs, which will look at issues such as:
 - Ethical principles of partnership etc;
 - Mapping of CSOs 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;
- Improved information from ODI, on issues such as:
 - Improved internal knowledge management and learning;
 - Internet and website redesign;
 - ODI information user (and potential new user) survey;
 - A range of new information and communication products.

Role of Research-Based Evidence and CSOs in Policy Processes

Elizabeth Cromwell provided a brief overview on the role of research-based evidence and CSOs in policy processes. There is good evidence that the poor benefit when CSOs are engaged in shaping policy, particularly when engagement is well-informed and leads to evidence-based policy, for example, the adoption of Ethical Principles in Humanitarian Aid, post Rwanda and the PRSP Initiative: Research in Multilateral Policy Change. CSOs increasingly recognise the need to use evidence and engage with policy processes more effectively. All too often, however, it seems that researchers, civil society actors, and policy makers live in parallel universes, and relations between government and civil society are strained. Researchers cannot understand why there is resistance to policy change despite clear and convincing evidence. Policy makers question the legitimacy of NGOs and bemoan the inability of many researchers to make their findings accessible, digestible and in time for policy discussions. Often, CSOs engagement in policy processes fails to do justice to the diversity of the issues and quality of the evidence.

In order to reduce these misunderstandings, there is need for the research evidence to be relevant and credible. The key factor is whether the research provides a solution to a problem. In terms of relevance, it is important to ensure topical relevance (what to do) and operational usefulness (how to do it). As regards credibility, this refers to the research approach and that of the researcher (of evidence itself). In addition, to be effective, strenuous advocacy efforts are often needed, just as much as good communication. It is also important to remember that feedback processes are often prominent in successful policy formulation / implementation cases, as is trust and legitimacy. Networks (epistemic communities, policy networks and advocacy coalitions) are also paramount in successful cases. The role of individuals (connectors, champions, mavens and salesmen) should also not be ignored if policy formulation / implementation is going to be successful.

External influence can also have impact on policy formulation / implementation as follows:

- Big 'incentives' can spur evidence-based policy – e.g. EU accession, PRSP processes;
- There are some interesting examples of donors trying new things (e.g. supporting research);
- But, we really don't know whether and how donors can best promote use of evidence in policy making (as regards credibility and backlash).

There are a number of challenges:

- Need to be able to:
 - Understand the political context;
 - Do credible research;
 - Communicate effectively;

- Work with others;
- Need organisational capacity:
 - Staff;
 - Internal processes;
 - Funds;
- Limited amount of research is being undertaken in the south. This is mostly individual rather than coordinated research initiatives (with poor research capacity) and not enough to influence policy;
- The need to demystify policy processes and the need for researchers to simplify the evidence and avoid jargon while presenting research results;
- The need for researchers to always consider policy influencing as part of their activities, to ensure that the link between the researchers and policy makers is not tenuous;
- The majority of the research is influenced by donors as they are funded by them.

The objectives of the workshop were to enable participants to:

- Discuss the opportunities and challenges for CSOs 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.

Zambia Case Study

Evidence and Policy: Budget Transparency and Participation, *Inyambo Mwanawina (Institute of Economic and Social Research)*

The Transparency and Participation Comparative Study was born in October 1999 at a Seminar for Africa CSOs on public expenditure management. A loose network of CSOs interested in budget work was established with the Africa Budget Project (ABP), with the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) as the lead organisation. The study agenda was: to provide policy agenda for the participating organisations and members of the network; to build capacity for applied budget work in the organisations; and to test the methodology for further replication on the continent.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Enhance research capacity of CSOs;
- Make the government more transparent, identifying major weaknesses in the budget processes;
- Building a credible platform for the involvement of CSOs in budgetary policy making and decisions;

The first Budget Transparency and Participation Study was undertaken in 2001, and covered Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia. The second study, in 2004, covered Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia. All studies were undertaken with financial support from SIDA and DFID.

The basis for the framework was discussed and agreed upon at joint framework workshops held in Cape Town and Pretoria in 1999/2000 and 2003. This resulted in the development of survey instruments based on standards established in international codes (IMF – code on Fiscal Transparency; OECD – Guidelines); benchmark national legislation and codes (United Kingdom, New Zealand, Singapore); established research; the Cape Town and Lusaka framework papers; and public expenditure management theory. Data was gathered through a series of interviews, supplemented by a literature review and auditing of existing budgetary and other relevant country documentation. Each country set up a reference group to provide guidance to the researchers, while a group of experts was also set up to validate the findings. The draft reports were scrutinised locally, internationally and through international peer review. The detailed country reports will be published separately and shall be disseminated at a local workshop.

Key Findings

Legal Framework

The legal framework and other laws, regulations and common practice of the budget is provided for in principle. At the same time the supplementary and excess expenditure leaves the front door open to burst the original budget while making it difficult to follow up cases of budget abuse. The law is particularly weak in the area of procuring and managing domestic and external debt. Reporting financial transactions of the Republic is another problem area. In addition, record keeping requires improvement and a substantial number of transactions take place outside the established financial system, while the total resources envelope and the government expenditure is not known.

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities are clearly assigned (constitution, law, subsidiary legislations and common practice) for fiscal policy. The Ministry of Finance and National Planning (MoFNP) is responsible for fiscal framework forecast and planning, coordination of budget, tax policy, etc. The legislative arm of government is responsible for scrutinising and approving budget proposals, while the implementation of the budget is the responsibility of the entire government. The office of the Auditor General is responsible for external auditing. The Bank of Zambia (BOZ) operates under the direction of the MoFNP and participates in budget formulation. Parliamentary privileges allow the National Assembly to summon any citizen to testify before any committee of the house. It was also noted that lack of capacity utilisation, poor salaries and salary differentials also contribute to inefficiency and ineffective performance of public officials.

Systems Supporting Transparency

On the positive side, it was noted that there exists a legal and institutional system and human capacity and a fairly predictable budget drafting process. On the other hand, the macro-economic model is not used in budget preparation, while the utilisation of human resource capacity for fiscal planning is weak. It was also observed that there is no round of pre-budget consultations with Parliament and civil society and coordinating of donor support is poor. The other negatives noted are as follows:

- Parliament has no effective amendment powers over the budget;
- There is no system for release of funds;
- Tendering processes are observed only to a limited extent in practice;
- The Auditor General is limited by poor funding and lack of follow up action;
- Inadequate funding and systems support for in-house technical research support in Parliament;
- There is no public institution tasked with investigating criminal prosecution based on information from the audit reports;
- The Central Statistical Office is not independent and lacks adequate resources.

Role of Civil Society

There is no clear policy in the law, but as common practice civil society is free to monitor the implementation of the budget and to conduct independent research. However, there is limited capacity in CSOs to monitor budget implementation and conduct independent research. It was also noted that such engagement is only meaningful and effective to the extent that the quality and content of data allows.

Role of Donors

The roles and responsibilities among arms of government to engage with donors are moderately clear in principle, but not in practice. While the advice of donors is partly published, their conditionalities are not, and donor funds are only partly included in the budget. This has resulted in a situation where the country is not free to pursue its own development programme due to inadequate funding and the conditionalities tied with such assistance. While project completion rates under donor funding is not known, project implementation is murky and there are no official impact studies on the effect of donor funds.

Advocacy Strategy

The advocacy strategy included publication of a detailed country report, in addition to launching the book to key stakeholders, the press, Minister of Finance etc. at a workshop. At the same workshop, CSOs undertook to mount public discussions. Another advocacy strategy used is the distribution of the book to key stakeholders, including donors and multilateral institutions.

Policy Impact

DFID provided support to CSOs through the RIZES Project, as a result of this research. In addition, there has also been an improvement in institutional framework and human capacity utilisation (introduction to tax unit at MoFNP), as a result of this study. The study is also expected to have impact on the following:

- Parliamentary Reforms Programme (PRP), which seeks to improve the role, processes and accountability to Parliament whereby the new Budget Bill tries to cure some of the highlighted pitfalls;
- Increased participation of Parliament and CSOs in the budget formulation through the introduction of MTEF;
- Improvement in accounting and information system;
- Improvements in timeliness of reports;
- Improvement in donor coordination (GRZ/Donor coordination and harmonisation of memorandum of understanding;
- Effective Parliament amendment powers over the budget;
- Development of Aid Policy.

Participants Observations

The main observations expressed at the seminar on CSOs, evidence and policy influence were as follows:

- The Constitution Review Process and the PRSP are good examples of processes in which CSOs have been effectively involved in Zambia. CSOs need to campaign on processes and issues, and form international and local networks;
- Validation of research is very important, for example by involving government officials as Peers Reviewers;
- Need to use qualitative and quantitative methods to validate research;
- Need for transparency and accountability now that the government wants to introduce direct budget support. There is need for CSOs to be involved especially at budget implementation;
- CSOs have reservations about the decision by DFID to give block grants to government, more so that evidence has shown lack of transparency and accountability in the budget process;
- CSOs capacity in evidence research is lacking and the activity is costly. There is therefore the need to build capacity of CSOs. It was observed that capacity building takes time;
- In Zambia evidence research influences structural change, but actual implementation of policy tends to lag;
- Because of lack of transparency and accountability total budget envelope is not known by people outside the system;
- Need for CSOs and government to be pro-active on issues i.e. CSOs and government should work hand in hand;
- Need for Auditor Generals Office to be autonomous;
- There is need to package research evidence in a manner that is effective;
- Need to harmonise official statistics from different government departments, which tend to differ;
- There is limited access to information and statistics in some government departments.

Annex 1: Seminar Programme

CSOs, Evidence and Policy Influence: A National Seminar Christian Centre, University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia 17 February 2005, 09.00 – 13.00

Background and Objectives

There is widespread agreement on the vital role that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) can play in influencing policies and practices to make them pro-poor. More and more CSOs are recognising the need to understand policy processes better and use evidence to engage with them more effectively. Sometimes, however, it seems that CSOs, policy makers and researchers live in parallel universes. This seminar focuses on how CSOs can use evidence to promote pro-poor policies. Active participation will be the cornerstone of the approach in the seminar, with emphasis placed on participants' own knowledge and experience.

The seminar will provide a forum for participants to:

- discuss the opportunities and challenges for CSOs 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.

Audience

The seminar is designed for the senior staff of CSOs that are engaged with the use of evidence to influence policy in Zambia as well as other key stakeholders in the policy process (governments, donors, professional associations, students, etc.).

Seminar Programme

09.00 - 09.15	Welcome Address – Dr. I. Mwanawina, INESOR
09.15 - 09.30	Opening Address – Hon. .M. Nalumango, Minister of Information and Broadcasting
09.30 - 10.00	<i>Tea/Coffee</i>
10.00 - 10.45	An introduction to ODI and the CSO Partnership Programme – Naved Chowdhury, ODI Introduction to role of research-based evidence and CSOs in policy processes – Elizabeth Cromwell, ODI
10.45 - 11.30	Discussion
11.30 - 12.00	Evidence and Policy: A case study from Zambia – Inyambo Mwanawina, INESOR
12.00 - 12.45	Discussion
12.45 - 13.00	Vote of Thanks, Mr. J.J. Zulu, JCTR
13.00	<i>Buffet Lunch</i>

Annex 2: List of Participants

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42.	Besinati Mpepo	Coordinator, CSPR	PW 302, PBE891, Lusaka	290154

Annex 3: Evaluation Results

(22 forms returned)

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

- Need to value evidence
- Need to link political context, external influences, etc
- Consideration of political context in decision making
- Issues of evidence in advocacy work
- Linkages between politics and evidence in influencing policy
- Validation of your research work
- To improve linkages between researchers and policy makers
- How to make our research work more credible
- Disregard of the law in as far as budgetary allocation as presented by Dr Mwanawina
- The ideal policy as highlighted by EC
- Poverty eradication
- Accountability and transparency
- CSOs role in policy formulation
- Evidence and policy
- Need for CSO to engage with government on the pre budget
- Need for doner funds to be clearly stated in the budget
- Need to undertake credible research and appreciating the political context
- Need for organisational capacity
- The analytical and practical framework (especially)
- The country case study on budget transparency and participation
- It is extremely important to use credible evidence in our advocacy work
- It is important to understand the political arena in which we operate
- IDRC framework for tracking policy change
- Some theoretical frameworks were interesting
- Outcome tracking, setting methodologies with government
- RAPID framework
- Evidence (its importance and role)
- Implementation of policies
- Role of evidence / research in influencing policy
- Requirements for CSOs to enable them to influence policy
- General concern on fiscal discipline
- Non participation in the budget process
- RAPID framework and legal framework

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

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Objectives defined and achieved	7	13	2		
Concepts explained clearly	11	7	2	1	
Time allocated for the seminar	2	12	6	2	
Relevance to my work	10	7	4	1	
Well-organized	6	11	5		
Overall quality of the Workshop/seminar	7	11	4		

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

- Important and has been missing for some time in Zambia
- Good
- It was quite informative, except to do with setup used - use of a classroom arrangement
- The seminar was good but there should have been more people if it was advertised nicely
- The workshop in all was well organised and issues were well articulated. I can't wait to see them implemented
- The quality and value of the workshop is excellent with good ideas
- Quite valuable information was provided
- The seminar had a lot of value especially to me as a student
- It was very good quality and of high value
- All the presentations were quite educative and well prepared and presented. Although the presenters seemed to be rushing against time
- The workshop as good quality and high value
- It was very rich in content and has enhanced my work
- The presentations were very good; the tea was not so great; the participation would have been better
- Good
- Quality was very good and value was very valuable
- Good
- Kindly provide more on strengthening strategies for lobbying and advocacy
- Relevant issues were brought out. A lot of information made available and the important point such as the role of evidence have been ably stressed
- I am generally happy
- It was a good workshop thought it was delayed at the beginning. It went on smoothly but because of the delay at the beginning most material had to be cut short

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

- More active participation from local bureaucrats to be encouraged
- Need to go beyond 'discussion' but to be a bit more detailed in capacity building of CSOs, eg training on this topic
- Should be held regularly and include relevant government officials to answer pertinent questions
- It could be helpful to give/provide reading materials before the seminar for such things as books / reports on which papers are based
- Please advertise to a lot of people who could have benefited from this workshop
- In your future workshops, try and lobby for more participation from the people from governments so as to deprive the nation of your well intended strategies
- Yes, it is time, one needs enough for such a seminar
- Improve concept definitions
- Need to have more of them
- I expected a lot more CSOs than came. Was this workshop widely advertised?
- More time needs to be allocated to the workshop.
- Wider participation should be sort (ie from members of civil society, CSOs and the government)
- The need for more linkages
- Let this not be a one-off event
- Better organisation, venue, follow up on invited participants to gain commitment
- More time on theoretical part
- To provide workshop materials in advance
- To do more publicity to key players / civil society organisations
- More time should be allocated for local case studies

- Make sure that all stakeholders, ie people who will make quality and relevant contributions are in attendance so that the purpose of the workshop is achieved to the fullest
- For purposes of dialogue, more time needed in future
- They should start on time and more time if possible should be allocated to each speaker

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

- Training on capacity building of CSOs
- Send any latest materials through email
- Issues of capacity building and networking
- Research work carried out and their impact on the nation
- I'd like to see the actual involvement of ODI and CSO directly in the society
- To find out how the seminar has been utilised
- On how we can get support to carry out research and where we can get it
- As a researcher and practitioner, I would love to have constant touch with current research findings by ODI network
- More workshops should be conducted in other parts of the country (ie the provinces and districts)
- Need for follow up workshops
- More information to flow to us
- Development of more case studies
- Joined work around capacity building
- Linkages to other partners and networks
- More literature
- More literature on strengthening the lobbying and advocacy process at institutional and individual levels
- Provision of information
- Another seminar involving senior government officials especially from finance ministry
- Updates on latest developments in issues relevant to research, economic, development and other social issues via email or in the post, as well as ODI publications / case studies

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