

Collaborators Workshop

16th-18th November 2005

Introduction

ODI's seven year Civil Society Partnership Programme (CSPP) which is funded through a Partnership Programme Agreement with the UK Department for International Development (DFID), aims to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) to use research-based evidence to promote pro-poor development policy. Full details of the programme, as originally conceived are described in the original Partnership Programme Agreement¹.

The emphasis of the work over the first 18 months was to learn more about how CSOs use research-based evidence, explore the niche and demand for this sort of programme, identify potential collaborators in the South, initiate a small number of pilot projects, and improve ODI's internal knowledge management and communication systems. More information about the programme and progress over the first 18 months is available in the Annual Report² and on the website³.

Work so far has identified a clear niche and demand for the programme from southern CSOs, for help to improve the use of research-based evidence in policy processes. The CSPP has already produced a range of training and information material, and has run a number of training courses for staff in CSOs in Africa, Asia. Lessons from the work so far highlight a number of issues and options for the next phase of work. These are described in detail in the paper: The Civil Society Partnership Programme: Issues and Options for the Second Phase⁴. A list of the key questions is attached as Appendix 1.

This workshop was one of a series of meetings seminars and workshops with programme stakeholders to review progress and develop plans for the next phase (April 06 to March 08). The workshop brought together 17 participants from Think Tanks (TTs), Policy Research Institutes (PRIs) and Non Government Organisations (NGOs) in Asia, Africa and Latin America with whom the programme has worked during the first phase to explore these questions. Their names and information about their organisations is provided in Appendix 2.

After a general introduction to ODI and the CSPP, a Challenge Session provided an opportunity for participants to explore the basic assumptions underpinning the programme as a whole. Four participants then presented brief Case Studies of their own work. This was followed by sessions on the Lessons So Far and Proposals for Phase 2. In the final session participants divided into groups to discuss specific Regional Issues and Options. The workshop programme is attached as Appendix 3, a full record of participants feedback and discussions during each session is provided in Appendix 4, and the presentation slides in Appendix 5.

¹ http://www.odi.org.uk/cspp/docs/ODI_PPA_final.pdf (Adobe Pdf 73kb).

² http://www.odi.org.uk/cspp/docs/CSPP_AR_01_2004_5.pdf (Adobe Pdf 330kb)

³ <http://www.odi.org.uk/cspp>

⁴ <http://www.odi.org.uk/cspp/docs/Issues&Options.pdf> (Adobe Pdf 124kb).

Programme logic and niche

The key conclusions of the challenge session confirmed the assumptions underpinning the programme:

- There is a growing demand for research-based-evidence to inform development policy processes, but this varies in different contexts and the credibility of local CSOs is often questioned.
- Understanding the political context is crucial, but impact can be enhanced through better engagement with policy makers and communities, strategic alliances with international actors, better communication and networking, an emphasis on providing solutions rather than just presenting problems, and long-term capacity building.
- TTs, PRIs, NGOs and other CSOs have some capacity, skills and products to use research-based evidence to influence policy, but need more of all of them. Policy makers in developing countries also need help to make better use of research-based evidence.
- TTs, PRIs, NGOs and other CSOs can access some support, but could use more, especially long term, support for research and policy influence activities.

Participants were generally enthusiastic about the programme, especially about the opportunity to learn from each other's practical experience, and for long-term support with how to use research-based evidence to influence policy. There are few other programmes offering this kind of support.

Discussion of key issues

The main conclusions of discussions about programme lessons and issues were:

- General agreement with the lessons learned by the programme so far. Additional points made and issues raised included the following:
 - It often takes a long time for new TTs and PRIs to be seen as credible by policy makers.
 - There is little incentive for successful TTs to want to help emerging TTS which may then become direct competitors for scarce funding.
 - While there is a definite trend towards more involvement of CSOs in policy making in many developing countries, often promoted by donors, they still have very limited influence.
 - Political factors are often more important than evidence, and corruption undermines many policy processes.
 - There is need to better understand how to use research-based evidence to influence policy implementation rather than policy formulation (which is increasingly well known).
 - The programme also needs to work with policy makers to strengthen the demand for research-based evidence.
 - Does ODI really want to become a capacity-building organisation?
 - ODI toolkits need to be "localised". ODI's partners could help with this.
 - Paper and CDRom-based information materials remain more important and popular in many developing countries than internet-based information systems.
- ODI's conclusion that there are few suitable regional organisations may not be correct. There are many sectoral organisations and networks with a regional role, though they may not be interested in working closely with CSOs and capacity-building. There are also a number of national organisation that developing a regional role. The project

should not “write off” the “regional organisation” model just yet, although it will be less simple than envisaged.

- ODI’s approach to developing the global projects has over-emphasised ODI’s northern agenda. While ODI’s engagement with northern policy processes is an important asset for the global projects, more dialogue with southern partners is needed to identify mutually interesting topics.
- General support for the proposed outcome areas and activities for Phase 2. Specific comments and recommendations under each outcome included the following:
- Outcome 1: CSOs understand how to use research-based evidence to influence policy:
 - The initial emphasis should be on making existing knowledge accessible and practically useful through a synthesis of the work so far;
 - There is a need to develop “how to” guidelines in key areas;
 - new research should focus on understanding how to better link research to policy implementation (via action research) and why policymakers do not find CSO evidence credible;
 - There should also be a focus on horizontal learning and learning more from the south.
- Outcome 2: CSOs can access support:
 - The programme should provide long term support through eg funds, exposure visits (south-south), exchange visits North-south), fundraising support, and electronic networking etc.
 - Should ODI do the training/capacity-building directly, or find other organisations to collaborate with?
 - While donors are keen to support southern TTs etc, much of the money is for specific bits of work. There are few donors providing institutional support, without which it is difficult to establish long term programmes. A little core funding from ODI could help organisations find additional funding.
 - Need to balance need to provide regional support with the reality that there are far more national-level organisations. A “network” of national-level organisations could support other in the region.
 - Should focus on developing trust through partnerships rather than “accreditation” schemes.
 - Could scale up impact through eg organising a ToT WS in one country with participants from neighbouring countries who then run training WS in their own country.
- Outcome 3: Global Projects:
 - Participants identified an ideal process to develop these projects: a group of organisations get together to identify a topic of mutual interest, identify who will do what (and how each organisation’s work will contribute to the project), who will lead, look for funds and then do the work (see Figure 2).
 - Global projects should focus on issues that people are already working on a lead
- Outcome 4: Improved information:
 - Participants identified a number of additional mechanisms the programme could use to improve information availability including partnerships with local media, attending global events, and working with universities etc (see Figure 3).
 - Ideally the programme would make information available in English, French and Spanish. Partners in Latin America and Francophone Africa could help with that.
 - ODI’s role in the programme should be to facilitate access to information rather than as the main provider of information.

Specific opportunities for Phase 2

Regional groups identified a number of specific activities for Phase 2. A summary of these is provided below (see Appendix 4 for more detail):

Latin America

1. A regional workshop for senior researchers and policy makers on chronic poverty, inequality and social exclusion to set a research agenda and create a community of practice
2. A regional training programme on linking research and policy including a regional training of trainers workshop who will then organise follow-up national workshops
3. Promotion of South-South collaboration through 1) and 2), and sharing and dissemination of materials and databases, institutional exchange and support with fundraising
4. Identification and development of regional projects on eg debt, trade and internal migration etc.

South and South East Asia

1. Regional work to develop the analytical framework, and develop a regional policy influencing training program
2. Capacity-building through 1) and South-South, South-North and North-South exchanges.
3. Involvement in regional/global projects on Trade and Development and Reform of Aid system and the economics of emergencies (focusing on key national, regional and global events and training/working with journalists/media)
4. Improved information sharing through networking and alliance building (APPRN), clustering of issue-wise research material and linkages of websites
5. Improved access to information materials through free or subsidized access to journals
6. Financial support for program based research funding and help to develop a donor consortium (resources and feedback).

West Africa

1. A mapping process to identify CSOs for networking and partnerships.
2. A programme to develop stronger linkages among CSOs across West Africa through networks and partnerships, engaging with regional bodies on policy issues, south-south partnerships, networking and training of trainers courses on policy research and advocacy
3. Research on improving policy engagements with regional institutions, e.g. ECOWAS, African Commission on Human Rights, Banjul, etc
4. Regional research on budget analysis and monitoring initiatives and involvement in global projects on Trade, Access to Markets, & Debt cancellation.
5. Exchange visits to SA region: food security issues in Sahelian areas.
6. Help to access in-country challenge funds by donors, e.g. DFID, DANIDA, CIDA, the Ford Foundation etc
7. Improved information availability through CDROMs, policy briefs, policy meetings and an easily accessible website

Eastern Africa

1. Agenda setting workshop for civil society in policy in East Africa -linked to the establishment of an East Africa civil society policy forum.
2. Research on what prevents policy makers from taking on board CSO research findings.
3. Regional training of trainers and capacity building programme on policy analysis and engagement.
4. Breakfast meetings for top policy makers.
5. Engagement with the East Africa Community Civil Society Programme on policy issues.

6. In country meetings to bring CSO issues in policy engagement.
7. Case studies on policy related activities and south-south visits etc.
8. Involvement in global projects on eg trade, debt, aid, environment and climate change, PRSPs and MDGs and HIV/AIDS
9. Improved information through basic information products on eg Aid, Trade and Poverty (simple and straight forward), Policy briefs, CDs and E-discussions

Southern Africa

1. Overall principle should be 'partnership' rather than 'funder' ie MOU vs contract
2. Poverty policy training linked to SARPN's training on poverty
3. Intense training of trainers in the policy cycle and civic engagement (about 15 people)
4. Research on:
 - o policy makers' expectations of civil society evidence;
 - o the level of commitment to SADC agreement on 10% budgets for agriculture followed by policy dialogue, a common position and advocacy
 - o second generation PRSPs - their emergence, and principals
5. Strengthen the capacity of civil society to identify and access important materials
6. Series of dialogue on the impact of food aid on traditional long term development
7. Involvement in global projects on eg trade, debt, aid, environment and climate change, PRSPs and MDGs and HIV/AIDS
8. Improved information through basic information products on eg Aid, Trade and Poverty (simple and straight forward), Policy briefs, CDs and E-discussions

Next Steps

Further steps in the preparation of plans for Phase 2 will include meetings and seminars with DFD and other UK-based organisations involved in similar work, electronic discussions with other organisations involved in similar work in other parts of the world, and a final electronic discussion with people who have been involved in the project so far, including the participants of this workshop. The aim is to have the final programme prepared by the end of March 2006.