

The ODI Civil Society Partnerships Programme

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in poverty eradication by empowering the poor so their voices are heard when decisions that affect their lives are made. Working in between the household, the private sector and the state, CSOs include a very wide range of institutions, including non-governmental organisations, faith-based institutions, professional associations, trade unions, research institutes and think tanks.

CSOs increasingly recognise the need to use evidence and engage with policy processes more effectively, but many southern university research departments have collapsed, and the development research institutes and think tanks that have replaced them are often financially insecure, have poor capacity to provide policy advice and connections between them are weak.

ODI has been working with government, non-government and private sector organisations in the north and south for the past 40 years is launching a new programme designed to promote improved contribution by CSOs to pro-poor national and international development policies. The programme will focus on four outcomes:

1. CSOs understand better how evidence can contribute to pro-poor policy processes;
2. Regional capacity to support Southern CSOs is established;
3. Useful information on current development policy issues, and how this knowledge can contribute to pro-poor policy, is easily accessible to CSOs;
4. CSOs participate actively in Southern and Northern policy networks to promote pro-poor policies.

The programme will develop partnerships with southern organisation which share its commitment to the MDGs; to the importance of evidence-based policy-making; and to the value of civil society participation in the policy process. The partnership programme will build on and develop the research findings, and techniques of knowledge management, policy advocacy, capacity-building and training materials already developed by ODI. It will enable the lessons to be disseminated more widely. It will provide funding for Southern CSOs to develop their own independent capacity in this area, and it will strengthen existing relationships between CSOs engaged in the policy process.

Specific activities to achieve each outcome are outlined below:

Outcome 1: CSOs understand better how evidence can contribute to pro-poor policy processes.

- Collaboration with southern CSOs to identify topics for, and undertake further collaborative research on how CSOs use evidence to promote pro-poor policy;
- Collaboration with Government and CSOs in the UK to identify lessons from evidence-based policy-making in the UK which may be valuable to CSOs from developing countries;
- Synthesis of the results into demand-driven, user-tested information and training materials.

Outcome 2: Regional capacity to support Southern CSOs established.

- A survey of national and regional policy-research institutes or think tanks and other organizations that support southern CSOs;
- Small-scale collaborative projects to investigate the role of CSOs in southern development policy processes, and identify partners for a longer term, capacity-building role;

- Technical assistance and capital grants to partners in each of the main regions in the developing world to strengthen organisational, research, knowledge management, communications, public affairs and policy advisory capacity to help them to:
 - develop closer links with CSOs through public affairs programmes, including public debates and seminars, and events with elected and appointed members of government;
 - develop information, training and capacity building programmes for other CSOs in the region.

Outcome 3: Useful information on current development policy issues, and how this knowledge can contribute to pro-poor policy, is easily accessible.

- A user survey to identify the principal existing user groups of ODI literature and publications, and how they think the materials could be improved;
- A survey of Northern and Southern CSOs involved in pro-poor policy influence, development and implementation, to assess the demand for information on policy issues, what information is needed and how and in what format it could most usefully be delivered;
- Based on these two surveys, an additional new range of information and publication materials will be developed specifically with a CSO audience in mind, to supplement and enrich the ODI resources currently in use;
- Improved knowledge management within ODI through improved teamwork and better project processes; better knowledge capture and learning during research projects; staff training to improve popular writing skills; and a dedicated team to coordinate summaries of closely-related ODI work;
- Re-designing the ODI core website, better integration of ODI project and network sites, and enhanced capacity to stimulate interaction through e-groups, discussion fora and web-based communities of practice;
- Active marketing of ODI's information materials to Northern and Southern CSOs, through provision of material for other organisations' websites; collaboration with existing networks, e-mail and printed newsletters;
- An enhanced programme of public meetings and seminars, focusing on development research and policy needs of NGOs and other CSOs;
- Training courses for staff from NGOs and CSOs on appropriate research for development, the role of evidence in policy processes, effective communication to policy-makers, and monitoring and evaluation of policy impact.

Outcome 4: CSOs participate actively in Southern and Northern policy networks to promote pro-poor policies.

- A collaborative study to identify CSOs and CSO networks in the North and South interested in improving their use of research-based evidence in pro-poor policy work;
- A series of virtual and real meetings through ODI's own and other policy-research networks to identify and discuss common policy issues;
- A joint programme of analysis and action on selected policy issues to build capacity and learn how local and international CSOs can work together effectively in networks;
- Publishing high-quality Southern research in the North, to be disseminated proactively through ODI contacts and networks;
- Information, training and capacity building programmes to strengthen networking capacity for Southern development policy institutes.

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