

Civil Society Partnership Programme

2005 was a critical year for development policy. The Africa Commission Report, G8 meeting at Gleneagles, MDG Summit in New York and WTO discussions in Hong Kong, among others, set the stage for a radical realignment of development policy, funding and programming over the next few years. It is essential that southern voices are heard during this process and that those voices are based on sound evidence.

ODI's 7 year DFID-funded Civil Society Partnerships Programme aims to do just that, by establishing a worldwide community of practice for think-tanks, policy research institutes and similar organisations working in international development. Most members will be in developing countries, but the programme will also foster collaboration between countries and across the boundary between North and South. The programme will help members to support each other through training, exchange visits, and sharing of information, and will collaborate on projects to generate and use research-based evidence to improve development policy at national, regional and global level.

The programme builds on the results of 18 months' work with policy research institutes, think tanks and NGOs worldwide. This has included background research, case studies, pilot projects at country level, international policy-research projects and over 20 consultative workshops seminars and meetings in Africa, South and South-East Asia and Latin America. Three Working Papers and four ODI and twelve external case studies have been completed and published on the web site, describing how CSOs use research-based evidence. A database of CSOs involved in using research-based evidence has been developed and work is progressing on a "CSO knowledge base". Ten country-level collaborative projects with southern partners have provided useful lessons on how they use the results of their research and on new forms of partnership. Work has started on four international collaborations on global policy issues. And Working Papers have been produced on Partnership Principles and Accountability and on Capacity Building¹.

Directors and senior staff from 17 southern policy research institutes, think tanks and NGOs in Asia, Africa and Latin America, with whom the programme has worked so far, met in London in November 2005 to discuss the next phase of the programme. They confirmed the value of the information, tools and support provided by the programme so far, shared much of their own detailed knowledge and practical experience, and were enthusiastic to continue to work with the programme².

The emphasis of the programme for the next two years (April 2006 – March 2008) will be to establish this community of practice. The initial membership of the community will include the individuals and organisations who have already been working with ODI through the regional consultations, small scale collaborative projects, and global projects³. As the work progresses, and the community takes shape, other organisations and individuals will be invited to join, so that eventually the community will include a wide range of members, including visitors who simply wish to make use of information and resources on the community website. More active

¹ All of this is available on the programme web site at <http://www.odi.org.uk/cspp>

² A full report is available at: http://www.odi.org.uk/cspp/Activities/Events/Collaborators_workshop/Index.html

³ Most of these are listed at: <http://www.odi.org.uk/cspp/Community/index.html>

members will include individuals and organisations who wish to publish relevant information, or links to relevant information on their own web sites; organisations providing relevant services, for example institutional development, or communication services; organisations which collaborate on specific time-limited projects; and organisations with broader partnerships, which collaborate on a range of projects over a longer period.

Key activities to establish the community of practice will include:

- A wide range of **capacity development** activities including: practical training (multiplied through training of trainers); staff exchanges and secondments; and institutional development support from ODI and other organisations.
- Small-scale **collaborative projects** between community members. These might include practical action-research projects aiming to generate and use research-based evidence to influence a specific policy process at national, regional and global level, or research and information activities (see below)
- Establishing a **community website** which will provide: knowledge on bridging research and policy; details of members of the partnership; a directory of training and advisory expertise; discussion fora; project areas; and a partnership brokering area.
- Other forms of **Information and knowledge exchange** through: conferences, workshops, and seminars; printed and web-based publications; and links with other networks.
- General **management and support** activities, including the procedures for membership, collaborative projects, recruitment of new members, fundraising and M&E.

Members of the community will work together on:

- **gathering and synthesising lessons** on how CSOs can use research-based evidence to influence pro-poor policy, from community member's own projects and other sources, and a limited amount of new research
- the **production of practical useful information materials**, including: a "state-of-the-art" report on Civil Society, Evidence and Policy Influence; a series of short 4-page briefing papers and information materials for the website; and a set of "how to do it" guidelines and training materials for CSOs.
- the development and establishment of a small number of **international collaborative projects** addressing regional or global development issues. These might include:
 - the international aid architecture
 - food security in Southern Africa
 - trade – access to markets and subsidies
 - debt cancellation
 - environment and climate change
 - PRSPs and the Millennium Development Goals
 - HIV/AIDS

ODI will lead these activities for the next two years. Thereafter, once the community is well established, and other members are able to take over leadership of specific roles, ODI will participate as an equal member of the community, capitalising on its location in the north and good contacts in northern development policy processes, to help southern CSOs to engage in global development policy issues. While DFID funds will support core activities in each of these Outcomes, resources from other donors will be sought for additional activities. The programme will be managed by ODI, guided by a small group of external advisers including the Heads of three Southern Think Tanks and International Experts.