

**South Asia Training of Trainers Workshop on
Bridging Research and Policy**
17-21 September 2007, Shimla, India

Introduction:

CUTS International and Overseas Development Institute (ODI), UK jointly organised a Training of Trainers Workshop on “Bridging Research and Policy” between 17th to 21st September 2007 in Shimla, India. The workshop was organised under the auspices of the Civil Society Partnership Programme (CSPP), being coordinated by ODI. This training workshop was targeted at senior/middle level representatives from select Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) of South Asia. Leading civil society organisation with experience and understanding on evidence-based research for policy advocacy from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal participated in this workshop.

Abstract:

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in South Asia have been engaged quite actively in influencing development policy-making and implementation. The methodologies adapted by CSOs in influencing policies in the region have been divergent. This emerged from the discussions on participants’ perceptions of the role played by civil society in evidence-based research for influencing developmental policy processes in their respective countries. Examples were provided how CSOs employed various methodologies and approaches for influencing policy decisions.

Participants were familiarised with certain tools and techniques for bridging the gap between research (evidence gathering) and policy (process influencing) – and sensitised on how such tools would be applicable in specific cases (examples) that were cited by the participants. Broadly, the tools that were discussed, included – context assessment tools, strategy devising tools, advocacy tools and communication tools. There was consensus that these tools would be quite useful in the region and that some of them were already being used *ad hoc*. So, there is a need for a more systematic approach to using such tools. It was resolved that the tools elucidated in the workshop would be contextualised (with appropriate illustrations) and collated into a ‘Training Manual’ – to be used for furthering the agenda in each of the counties more extensively. The manual would be a joint publication of the civil society representatives who were present in the workshop and finalised following a participatory process. A ‘South Asia’ network would also be constituted as a part of the ‘Evidence Based Policy for Development Network’ (www.ebpdn.org), which would spearhead the dissemination and outreach of the approach of evidence based policy advocacy using the tools and methodologies discussed in the workshop.

Day One

Introduction and Overview

The training workshop started with a brief introductory session, in which Rijit Sengupta representing Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS) welcomed all the participants and gave them a brief introduction to the workshop. This was followed by an introduction to the Civil Society Partnership Programme (CSPP) by Naved Chowdhury representing the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), UK. In his delivery Naved also indicated that the purpose of this workshop was to develop a cadre of professionals adept with the skills of evidence based policy advocacy, which they could disseminate through their own organisations/contacts in their respective countries. An outcome of this training workshop would be a ‘Training Manual’ customised to suit the needs of the region. This manual would be used extensively by the participants, who would assume the role of trainers then.

Before beginning of training sessions, the expectations of the participant were collected with brief introduction of them and their organizations. Everyone expressed his/her views on policy advocacy, research and capacity building and talked about the major projects of their respective organizations that touch on this aspect. On collation of the expectations, it emerged that most of them were interested to learn something new, gain insights, learn from the experience of other countries/organisations on how civil society can assume a big role in policy advocacy, get connected through a network, learn how to justify research to people, etc.

Each participant was then asked to present in brief her/his perception on the ‘Role of CSOs in Policy-making processes’ through some case examples. The following issues emerged from the first round of deliberations that included presentations from Forest Action (Nepal), SDPI (Pakistan), Unnayan Shamannay (Bangladesh), CPA and CEPA (Sri Lanka):

- The approach for engaging with the policymakers needs to be a balance of being ‘collaborative’ and ‘confrontationist’ depending on the situation;
- Understanding policy processes and strategising requires a proper understanding of politics and policy processes;
- Both spatial and temporal approaches to policy advocacy needs to be integrated;
- The credibility of a CSO is often determined by its relationship with top bureaucrats, government representatives, etc.;
- It is observed that due to the divergent opinions among different CSOs, it is difficult to arrive at a consensual civil society stand;
- Civil society needs to develop a proper communication strategy that should highlight ways in which the media could be engaged in the process;
- Depending on their capability organisations need to choose between adapting a ‘pro-active’ or a ‘reactive’ advocacy approach;
- Governance issues have also become extremely important in case of NGOs in South Asia;

- Civil society is often looked upon as doing advocacy for the sake of it without much attention to collecting evidence/ undertaking research to back such advocacy efforts;
- Resolving the ‘dilemma’ – whether and to what extent to associate with the government and still be able to raise voice against the government’s policy failures;
- Appreciating the fact that ‘functional issues’ within the policy matrix are relatively easier to influence than ‘structural aspects’, which are far rigid;
- Generally, there is a lack of concerted movements nationally (coordinated by civil society) in the region.

Day Two

Understanding the Context and Mapping Policy Processes

The second day continued with presentations on the ‘Role of CSOs in Policy-making processes’ with deliberations by SAWTEE (Nepal), RDRS and Unnayan Onneshan (Bangladesh), PRAXIS, TERI and CUTS (India). The following issues were further highlighted:

- An approach to influencing policy processes that many civil society organisations are practising in the region is ‘parliamentary outreach and sensitisation’;
- Challenges before a ‘local organisation’¹ when it comes to policy influencing are quite steep;
- Need to motivate peoples’ perspectives by engagement through a participatory process;
- Critical issue of representation (does the CSO really represent the people it is vouching for?), which could be addressed by rigorous and comprehensive groundwork and constituency-building at the grassroots/among the constituencies;
- It often becomes difficult to attribute ‘policy change’ directly to the efforts made through a solitary initiative of a single organisation.

In the session that followed, Naved provided an overview of the definitions of key workshop terms like: evidence, policy, policy-making process, research, knowledge, civil society, advocacy, capacity building, etc.

He reiterated that in order to understand the process of policy-making and the policy process itself it is critical to have a conceptual clarity on the definition of a ‘Policy’, especially in the context of South Asia. It emerged that it would be essential to develop a ‘working definition’ over the course of the workshop of ‘Policy’ – as according to some participants, factors such wide as administrative changes and cultural ethos also constituted part of the policy matrix of the region.

¹ Local organisation in this context refers to an organisation that has been doing work at the local/provincial level without having its presence in the capital – which is the seat for policy advocacy.

Naved further elucidated that factors affecting policy could be segregated into four categories:

- i. Situational – change of leadership, discovery of new evidence, etc.
- ii. Structural – allocation of sufficient resources to specific interventions, etc.
- iii. Cultural – prevailing attitudes and behaviour, cultural ethos, etc.
- iv. International – impact of ‘milestone’ events at the international front, etc.

He opined that such a classification was necessary in order to understand the context of the policymaking process better and to help civil society to strategise better for influencing policy changes.

All the participants were asked to do an exercise termed ‘Policy Entrepreneurship Matrix’ which points out the strength/weaknesses of policy entrepreneurs/development practitioners in terms of their skills in four specific areas of – ‘advocacy’, ‘networking’, ‘research’ and ‘political science’. The exercise was liked by all, though there was some discussion on the usefulness of this exercise and some participants thought that it needed to be refined further. It was resolved that this Matrix (specifically the questions that comprised it) would be refined, in order to suit the appetite of the participants.

Moving on, Naved provided an idea of specific Context Analysis and Policy Mapping Tools – Problem Tree Analysis; Stakeholder Analysis and the RAPID Framework.

The RAPID Framework was explained in great details, especially how it helps in developing a ‘holistic understanding’ of the prevailing policy environment by taking stock of the policy context, evidence, links and external environment, and then subsequently devising an intervention strategy to influence policy.

Participants were divided into (country-wise) groups and each group was asked to apply the RAPID framework to the case they had presented (choosing any one from among the cases that were presented by the members of the group). The outcome of this exercise would be a structured policy-influencing strategy taking into consideration the elements of the policy environment. Participants were asked to prepare themselves for presentations (in groups) to be made the next day.

Day Three

Strategising for Policy Advocacy

The third day started with the presentation of each group, which was as follows:

Country	Cases
Bangladesh	<i>Char</i> ² Development initiatives
India	Alternative plan on development and Governance in the state of <i>Bihar</i> ³
Nepal	<i>Terai</i> ⁴ Forestry project
Pakistan	Case of Afghan Refugees
Sri Lanka	Highway Resettlement project

The application of the RAPID framework helped the groups in developing a holistic understanding of the prevailing environment, and to arrive at a best possible strategy keeping it in view.

On summarising the following commonalities were found:

- There is a lack of evidence (grounded on solid research) on specific developmental issues which impairs developmental policy advocacy;
- Big programmes funded by bilateral/multilateral donors often lack the element of ‘national level advocacy’;
- Lack of coordination between the Ministries retard the process of policy reforms;
- Cultural aspects are sometimes/often ignored while devising advocacy strategies;
- It is crucial to identify and prioritise ‘core’ issues that need to be covered by an advocacy effort (RAPID Framework is very helpful in this regards);
- Often the deadline for achieving programme objectives (particularly if that includes policy changes) needs to be flexible;

The above discussions provided a sound platform and background for the following session, which focused specifically on ‘Advocacy’. The following elements of advocacy that a policy advocate needs to bear in mind were discussed:

- Who are you advocating to?
- Who are you working with?
- Identify the ‘niche’ areas, strengths and weaknesses (SWOT⁵ Analysis)
- Understand the benefits and pitfalls of collaboration
- Clear and concise ‘Advocacy Statement’

² *Char*: ‘Char’ as they are called in Bengali are river islands and extended river beds, which is inhabited by the poorest of the poor, landless people.

³ *Bihar* is a state in eastern India.

⁴ *Terai* refers to the flood plains at the foot of the Himalayas that constitute a large part of Nepal.

⁵ SWOT – A tool to analyse **S**trength **W**eakness **O**pportunity and **T**hreats

In this session, a couple of presentations were made by Ruchika Singh representing TERI (India) and Akand Faisaluddin from Unnayan Onneshan (Bangladesh) - which tried to point out the way in which ‘advocacy needs’ determine ‘research strategies’.

Ruchika’s presentation delved on the aspect of how to frame a research initiative so that its output could be out to use for a specific advocacy effort, and it emerged from the discussions that followed her presentation that the ‘concept’ of advocacy also needs clarification, as often, civil society associates advocacy with the usual ‘dancing and singing’. However, there are various other subtle forms of advocacy that needs to be appreciated. This was further underscored in the presentation by Akand where he demonstrated how Unnayan Onneshan has embarked on an advocacy initiative that combines a subtle approach (parliamentary outreach, output dissemination among opinion leaders and personal interviews with key stakeholders) with a more intense approach (stakeholder engagement and awareness generation)

In the next session there was discussion on how to streamline a ‘Strategy’ to link research/evidence with policy. Presentations were made by Sarah Siddiq of SDPI (Pakistan) and Taifur Rahman of Unnayan Shamannay (Bangladesh). Some critical issues that surfaced were –

- Need to have a link between local level advocacy and national level advocacy strategies;
- Involvement of the media as a partner, rather than as a publicising platform;

In order to help the participants with a ‘tool’ to develop strategies to link research/evidence with policy, Naved elucidated ‘Force-Field Analysis (FFA)’. A technique that assists in planning and implementing social changes programmes.

Again, the country groups were asked to apply FFA to their cases, and to present the outcomes before the group. The groups were segregated as usual; the only change was that Sarah Siddiq who was the lone Pakistani grouped up with the Sri Lankan team for undertaking the exercise. The outcomes from the FFA were:

- Develops a very good understanding of the forces acting in favour of and against achieving a specific (programme) objective;
- Provides an opportunity for the organisation (planning to embark on an advocacy initiative to achieve the specific programme objective) to assess whether to try and minimise a particular negative force or consolidate a particular positive force, depending on their own strength/weaknesses;

Day Four

Communicating Outputs and Merits of Networking

The fourth day of the workshop was divided into two sessions – one on communication and the other on networking.

Naved provided a brief background on the need for communication and the framework of a communication strategy. He explained the usefulness of the RAPID framework in developing a succinct ‘Communication Strategy’. In this regards he introduced the participants to the ‘Message-Messenger tool’ that helps developing a customised communication package depending on the target of such communication and the message that needs to be communicated to them.

The elements that require careful consideration while developing a ‘communication strategy’ are:

- Overall understanding of the subject and the need for communication;
- Careful combination of ‘persuasion’ and ‘lobbying’ approaches;
- Adoption of proper knowledge management and learning mechanisms;
- Tailoring messages keeping in view political processes;
- Why would the audience ‘buy’ the message?
- Due diligence while communicating with the politicians.

The impact of effective communication strategies could be assessed on a careful analysis of the following:

- Behavioural changes;
- Reference of communicated material;
- Contributions to change;
- Hints and signs.

Naved emphasized on the need to keep the target audience in mind, while preparing messages, and use peer assist and peer balance relationship to get the right feedback and ideas of peers to help streamline messages. Pre-testing of a message was equally important in assessing the strength of a message.

Subsequently, the participants were asked to prepare a message using the ‘Message-Messenger tool’ for communicating in brief the overall objective of the cases (development initiatives) that they had presented. This exercise developed the understanding on target audiences, preparing messages for each type of audience and then the way to promote it among them. The discussion on the exercise raised a question of monitoring the effectiveness of the messages. Mirak Raheem of CEPA (Sri Lanka) and Mani Ram Banjade representing Forest Action (Nepal) made presentation on the ‘Role of communication in policy making’.

The second half of the day was dedicated to Networking and its merits. Networking has become an extremely important tool for capacity building, learning and sharing among South Asian civil society organisations. Although the number of regional networks in South Asia is low (as compared to sub-Saharan Africa or E&S Africa), but there has been a recent tendency of developing and sustaining such networks.

Six major types of networks were explained as follows:

- Build Communities (e.g. – cultural associations, etc.)
- Filter Information (e.g. – Global Development Network, GDN)
- Amplifier (e.g. – *Wada Na Toro* in India; Campaign for mass and primary education in Bangladesh, Human Rights Alliance in Nepal)
- Facilitator (e.g. International Network of Civil Society Organisations on Competition, INCSOC)
- Investors (e.g. Evidence Based Policy in Development Network, EBPDN)
- Convenors (e.g. Asian Corporate Governance Association, ACGA)

He added that in order to form and sustain an effective network, the following attributes are important:

- Dynamic leadership;
- Goodwill among members;
- Guard the possibility of the network starting to compete with the work of its members (or vice versa)
- Consensus among members with respect to expectations;

The idea of having regional network of CSOs in South Asia to promote the approach of ‘Evidence Based Research for Policy’ was also discussed, and was welcomed by the participants. There was consensus that instead of floating a totally new network, it would be useful to host it under the EBPDN. All the participants were asked to immediately become members of the EBPDN in order to enable ODI to develop the ‘South Asia’ Chapter under it. It was also suggested to expand the network gradually from a ‘South Asian’ to an ‘Asian’ network by slowly involving other Asian countries within its purview.

At the last, participants were asked to do an assignment of answering the three following questions in order to judge their overall understanding from the workshop:

- 1) *What are the impediments in bridging research and policy in South Asia?***
- 2) *Which Communication tools would be effective in South Asia? and***
- 3) *What other tools could be useful?***

The answers to these questions would help in the process of drafting the Manual.

Day Five

Designing the Training Manual

Next day, i.e. fifth and last day was reserved to discuss the responsibilities of participants in order to provide inputs to the process of developing the training manual as the outcome of the workshop. It was decided to publish this manual by end February 2008 and responsibilities and work agenda was decided so forth (refer Annexure-2). The meeting also led to the discussion over the content of the training manual (a draft of which is presented in Annexure 3).

At the end, formally closing address was delivered by Naved followed by thanks giving address by Rijit on behalf of CUTS. Everyone was optimistic on future bonding among participatory organizations and it was pledged that *this is just the beginning*.

Annexure 1

List of Participants

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Annexure 2

Developing Training Manual: Responsibility Chart

S. No.	Activity	Deadline	Person Responsible
1	2-3 page summary of the workshop	28 th September 2007	Rijit Sengupta
2	Draft Format of the Manual	30 th September 2007	Rijit Sengupta and Naved Chowdhury
3	Circulate the format among participants and receiving their comment	7 th October 2007	
4	Submission of case studies and any other examples presented in workshop or any other relevant material	15 th October 2007	All the participants for their respective cases
5	First draft of the workshop proceedings	30 th October 2007	
6	First draft of the Manual	20 th December 2007	Tbc*
7	Comment on draft manual	10 th January 2008	All the participants
8	Pre-finalised document for editing and proofreading	1 st February 2008	Tbc*
9	Editing and Proofreading and final document to go for publication	15 th February 2008	Fiona Remnant
10	Publication of 200 copies in India		

Annexure 3

Bridging the gap between research and policy: Some useful tools for South Asia

FOREWORD

1. Introduction

- Why do we need this guide?
- How can it be used?
- Who is it for?
- Process of development, how it came into being (which countries took part, definition of S. Asia for this guide)
- Limitations and opportunities for feedback – EBPDN

2. Context of policymaking in South Asia

- Introduction - relevance to S. Asia
- Role of CSOs in the policymaking process (Use the responses to the first question in the assignment)
 - Strengths and limitations of CSOs
 - Different types of CSOs, how they work together
 - Literature review on the role CSOs play in policymaking
- Impediments to bridging research and policy (country examples)

3. Key terms (contextualised)

- Policy & policymakers
 - Evidence (including research and others; oral, visual, qualitative and quantitative)
 - Advocacy
 - Knowledge
 - Knowledge Management
 - Information
 - Impact assessment
 - Monitoring & Evaluation
 - CSOs
- (Include box-outs relevant to countries in this section)

4. Understanding the policy context and process

- Introduction – what do we mean by this?
 - Policy process
 - Politics of policymaking
 - Recurring trends, challenges, types based on different country contexts?
(Introduce tools, insert case studies where appropriate)
- Problem Tree Analysis
- SWOT Analysis (SWOC / SLOT)

- RAPID Framework
- Social Analysis System

5. Identifying your targets

- Introduction
- Force-field Analysis
- Stakeholder Analysis
- Stakeholder Influence Mapping

6. Successful policy advocacy/ Essentials of policy advocacy

- Introduction – importance of having an advocacy strategy (linking to case study/ies in force-field analysis and stakeholder analysis done previously)

6.1 Components of an advocacy strategy:

- How to be a successful policy advocate;
 - Policy Entrepreneurship (including questionnaire)
 - Facilitating multi-stakeholder processes
 - Engaging at different levels
 - Developing participatory action research
- Networking (use networking case studies)
- Community/public participation

6.2 Challenges of advocacy

- Examples of challenges, some tools to deal with them:
 - Conflict resolution, co-operation vs. confrontation
 - Mediation and reconciliation

7. Determining a strategy for influencing policy

- Evidence-based policy influence strategy

7.1 Communication tools

- Introduction (bridging researcher and policymaker communication gap, informal lobbying etc.)
- Message/Messenger/Audience tool
- Pre-testing message
- Writeshops
- Writing policy position papers/briefing papers
- Lobbying
- Campaigns, social mobilisation
- Media (radio, TV, video, print, electronic, animations)
- PRA tools
- Street theatre
- Country specific answers to assignment on useful communications tools

8. Monitoring and evaluating impact on policy

- Introduction; why important, challenges, sustainability issues
- Outcome Mapping
- Appreciative Enquiry

- After-action review
- Other tools

8.1 Knowledge management

- Definition
- How organisational learning can be better facilitated by having a Knowledge Management Strategy
- Other Tools

Bibliography

Further sources

Annexes

Participants' names and short profile on organizations

