

Linking research to policy: What should CSOs focus attention on? How can they be effective?

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Why should CSOs be interested in research?

- One way of getting grass roots realities to the policy table
 - Need to judge when research is the right tool
- Policy makers may need to be convinced
 - If ideas supported by evidence can convince, research may be the right tool
- CSOs' own work should be informed by up-to date knowledge and information
- CSOs can use research to build the 'agency' of poor people...(their ability to act politically)

Some definitions

- Policy: a deliberate course of action, including actions 'on the ground'
 - 'Policy is what policy does'
 - Policy is also what does not happen
- Research: ideas backed with evidence
 - Quantitative but also qualitative (CSO territory?)
 - Systematic attempt to increase the body of knowledge

Why is research-policy link difficult to achieve and sustain?

(x=CSO roles)

- Supply-side constraints
 - Not enough, right sort, quality, reliability (x)
 - Credibility of the messenger
 - Quality, timeliness of communication and packaging (x)
- Demand-side constraints
 - Policy makers lack information (x), resistant (makes policy more complex), stressed by problems of today (x), anti-intellectual (or selective)
- Politics
 - Dominant ideologies, nature of regime
 - Prevailing institutional arrangements (x), culture of public debate (x)
 - Exclusion of poor from public/political debate

Sustained long term engagement

- Generates common understanding and consensus
- Achieved through two way dialogue
- Researchers need to get close to practice

CSOs can:

- Generate the research
- Communicate the research
- Provide space with researchers to engage with practice
- Encourage poor people to speak to research and vice-versa

Importance of non-state actors in policy change

- Many new policy issues now brought to the policy table by non-state actors, based on research e.g:
 - Debt (cf UDN)
- Policy communities include private sector as well as CSOs
 - Consensual knowledge (x), agreed action (x), monitoring: monitoring of service delivery (x)
 - Network to 'own' the process

Key strategies

- Choice of hot topic
 - Security
 - Household incomes
- Sequence outsider/insider strategies
- Research to open a door (outsider strategies):
 - e.g costs of conflict for economic growth
- Research keeps the door open by offering alternatives (insider strategies)
 - Coordination of the private sector to maximise smallholder participation
- From international experience
 - e.g cash transfers
- From action-research/monitored pilots small scale practice

Key strategies: context

- Understand where power lies, and how to address it? (collaborate as insider, confront e.g via media)
- Focus on fundamental or emerging policy change (not routine, incremental – closed doors?)
- Where is the demand for new ideas?
- Can debates be converged to a consensus?
- Is there a likely 'tipping point' (event, widely perceived problem, change of minister...)

Key strategies: evidence

- Use existing research which makes it apparent that change is needed
 - Often needs long term work with researchers
- Simple analysis, good data, neat presentation, good communication
 - What language do policy makers use?
- Remember:
 - Quality, credibility, timeliness, operational utility

A lot of which can be achieved through links

- Engineer convergence of debates
- Interactive approach to communication
- Identify and sustain links into power structures
- Institutionalize links among stakeholders (networks, policy fora, regular stakeholder meetings, briefing for parliament): for example, the **Batwa Stakeholders' Workshop** which takes place twice a year

Gearing up to use research

- Link to researchers
 - but small capacity of research organisations in Uganda suggests wider search may be needed
- Use international networks of researchers
 - African
 - South-south
 - North-south e.g CPRC
- Recruit researchers
 - E.g economists? conflict specialists

THANK YOU
FOR
LISTENING TO ME !