



“Look, Listen and Learn”

Promoting the use of civil society organisations’ evidence in policies for food security A proposed action research project in southern Africa

Inaugural Meeting
25 May 2005
Johannesburg, South Africa

Introduction

It is generally accepted that civil society agencies have an important role to play in policy formulation in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. We can also agree that there is plenty of room for improvement in civil society’s impact on policy practice and outcomes. We have heard much about the need for civil society to base its approach to the policy making process on good evidence.

The purpose of this meeting is to look at how civil society can use evidence to promote pro-poor policies. It is part of an 18-month project to use action research to promote this approach across the SADC region. The project focuses on three related factors. First the political context: we talked yesterday about civil society engaging with political context – the actors and structures and the pressures involved. Second the evidence: we talked yesterday about monitoring but we also need to look at the important issue of credibility and how to package and promote the evidence. Third, our links with policy makers have a lot to do with media, communications and linkages.

Our aim is to seek participation in the project over the 18 months, and we invite colleagues to give their reasons for engaging in project

Dr Lindiwe Sibanda (FANRPAN):

Food agriculture and natural resources are the core business of the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN). It is represented in 11 SADC countries and is presently setting up in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Policy makers in the SADC region are aware that to secure food security civil society needs to be actively engaged in the policy making process and that concrete evidence is needed to support policy making. The network operates brings together policy makers, farmers and government. Governments in the region are active participants in FANRPAN processes. Regional coordination is done through the SADC secretariat and FANRPAN participates in the annual SADC ministers of agriculture meeting. Ideally policy issues should be identified at country level and collated at regional level to look at their harmonisation. Involving civil society is a big challenge as it is not yet engaged in these processes. However, it is something that we cannot ignore as academic research will not make a difference without civil society engagement. In the past FANRPAN has partnered with regional farmers’ organisations but it is looking for ways to revitalise its network and sees this programme as being critically important for that purpose. We need to identify the actors and processes but the starting point must be the evidence if we are to be credible as a network to influence policy in the region.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is the leading independent think tank on development policy in the United Kingdom. It conducts research, disseminates information and provides practical advice and does a great deal of work with donor offices like DFID and the EU. The main way it works is to synthesise information in order to spot upcoming trends that organisations in the North and South will have to address and what the evidence implies in terms of practical policy action. Its interest in this project comes from work

with FANRPAN on a rural policy and governance group. Using information from SARPAN they coordinated a forum for food security in the region to look at longer-term food security policy issues. One of the main conclusions was that weaknesses in the policy process are a major constraint on implementing more effective policies for food security. Much of the technical issues are well understood but there are key weaknesses in the implementation of policies. Hopefully this project will provide an opportunity for civil society organisations to feed information from the ground into policy processes to ensure policies which provide better longer term development solutions.

Elizabeth Cromwell (ODI):

ODI offers rapid research and policy in development. It has done a lot of work on how to feed civil society organisation work into policy processes. Based on this it has developed the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) framework. This framework identifies a wide range of inter-related factors that determine whether research-based and other forms of evidence are likely to be adopted by policy makers and practitioners. These factors can be divided into three overlapping areas: the political context, the evidence, and the links between policy and research communities. They are located within a fourth set of factors that make up the external context. ODI can bring international comparative evidence, tools and strategies to the project.

Sue Mbaya (SARPAN):

The goal of SARPAN is to contribute to the sustainable reduction of poverty through effective pro-poor policy, strategy and practice in the SADC region. SARPAN's position asserts that a key factor in improving policy processes in the region is the deepening of policy debates. This is achieved through widening access to discussion platforms and facilitating stronger links between role players. As a result SARPAN has developed its identity as an inclusive platform for dialogue on debates of policy relevance in the area of food security. In line with its goal and objectives, SARPAN is dedicated to collaborating with and supporting the initiatives of agencies involved in poverty reduction initiatives. This includes groups involved in the monitoring of food security, and those who use the outputs of this monitoring work for humanitarian, developmental or developmental humanitarian work. SARPAN's contribution primarily revolves around identifying, compiling, disseminating and promoting the use of information relating to these initiatives. The aim of the workshop today is to strengthen civil society outputs. There are a lot of skills and capacities in the region that we want to bring to bear on regional and international processes.

Presentation: Key Food Security Policy-Process Issues in Southern Africa

Florence Nazare and Scott Drimie

Food security has four key components:

- availability
- access
- utilisation
- sustainability

Two key questions immediately arise: how to integrate civil society organisations (CSOs) into food security policy processes, and how to effectively use institutional linkages, involving CSOs, in addressing food security policy? We can look at the food security policy process as a policy subsystem that brings together the state, society and the international system involving the way that they are organised internally and in relation to each other.

Most civil society organisations in the region play a critical role as intermediary or boundary organisations that are not purely involved in policy or research but are positioned between processes, mediating the interface between the two sectors. Their aim is to see long-term food security policy in place. Meaningful policy processes require more coordination across sectors and levels in order to produce policy options based on well-researched evidence to support decision making.

To play the role of intermediaries or boundary organisations effectively, CSOs need to recognise the importance of organising around boundary objects or issues that occupy the interface between research and practise. This requires them to engage in the whole policy cycle including the conceptual and methodological states and not just in advocacy. They need to play a role in influencing the types of information being sought and to participate in translating evidence into forms that can be used to support decision making. Evidence produced from such integrated networks becomes readily useable, relevant to local needs, flows naturally as part of the policy cycle and supports innovation and experimentation.

The challenge for CSOs is to see themselves as full participants in a process and to build long-term interactions with other actors in the food security policy subsystem. They need to move towards concrete conceptualisation and location and benefit from the synergy of working together in different political and governance systems.

Three case studies are presented: the SADC rolling assessments; the Swaziland Demographic Survey and the institutional coordination through the Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition (SETSAN) of the Ministry of Agriculture in Mozambique. These case studies:

- show the importance of integrated networks of research and assessment
- while illustrating the point that reforms take place when actors take advantage of opportunities for change as they emerge
- they also prove that institutional collaboration is possible using existing human and institutional capital within the region
- while capitalising on informal/formal linkages.

Discussion

- *The presentation did not really address the issues of constituency and legitimacy. When CSOs meet government the first thing they ask is whom do you represent. They claim to represent the entire society. This weakens our position.*
- *Another challenge is CSOs' tendency towards insularity. The tendency to want individual recognition as opposed to collaborative success. This leads to competitiveness in joint ventures and tends to create problems for policy impact.*
- *The definition of food security used in the presentation does not refer to influences such as corporate sector interest. These forces are sometimes so big and powerful that it is very difficult to tackle their influence. How do we deal with this?*

The issues of constituency and legitimacy are crucial in working with government, especially when it is trying to challenge the right of civil society to participate. We need to find creative ways for civil society to engage. We saw some examples yesterday in the presentation from Zimbabwe. There are also examples in South Africa where the state is setting discourse but groups like the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) are able to mobilise civil society to challenge the state. In smaller local settings it may be better to develop a relationship with state officials. Different situations need different responses.

We need to innovate and look for different avenues. It is difficult to get government recognition and engaging with state actors takes time and effort but over time it will become a norm and civil society organisations will have a niche in the policy process.

Malawi provides an example. We have a joint food security task force. This originated in a forum set up by civil society during the food security crisis. Government called on civil society to discuss seed availability, civil society responded that the need was to look at the food security crisis more widely. This led to a multi-stakeholder forum to look at the issues and at who was doing what. Civil society had to press hard to get the stakeholder forum. It began as a first task force – then grew into a discussion with donors – and finally became a government-donor-civil society forum. We need to take advantage of such opportunities to enter into policy processes.

The problem between the Malawi government and civil society organisations is that government develops policy and only then invites civil society organisations to come forward. But it only cooperates with civil society in times of crisis. We should meet under normal circumstances and not only in times of crisis.

- *Food security cuts across many sectors, how do we ensure that various sectors get involved. We tend to identify only agriculture, but we are talking about production, access to land, employment and health. We need to embrace all of them. How do we get the other ministries outside agriculture involved? The other ministries do not seem to understand that they are involved.*
- *There are also civil society organisations in other sectors that we are not drawing in.*
- *The challenge as civil society is that we like to work in our own territories and only act on crises. How do we overcome our isolation and work together? When only one organisation with its own agenda confronts government it cannot deal with it effectively.*
- *The case study examples all come from the VAC process. Those processes were not championed by civil society organisations but by government institutions. Civil society organisations were invited to participate. Most of them are government processes even though they are not institutionalised.*
- *Civil society organisations need to organise themselves to participate effectively in these processes – as a small NGO you may not have a big voice but if you are represented by a network you can have more influence.*

The participation of civil society organisations in policy processes is a right that should be demanded but they need to bring value to the table. Civil society organisations are part of a wider group of stakeholders. They need to build consensus and work towards common goals to achieve success. Government alone does not have the ability to get everything done. Working together can lead to exciting synergies and positive results.

We have heard about a range of opportunities for getting results. When government calls for comments civil society has to respond and it also has to find other opportunities for leverage. The media has played an important role in creating space to comment on policy issues. CSOs also need to look for ways to engage with multinational organisations. An example where civil society has not taken up an opportunity effectively is the debate on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in southern Africa.

The source of legitimacy for CSO must be credible evidence and integrity because we do not have electoral legitimacy.

Multinationals are part of invisible forces that influence policy if we do not identify them we are not able to identify the source of influence.

Food security depends on food systems. We need to look at the global food economy as well as local production.

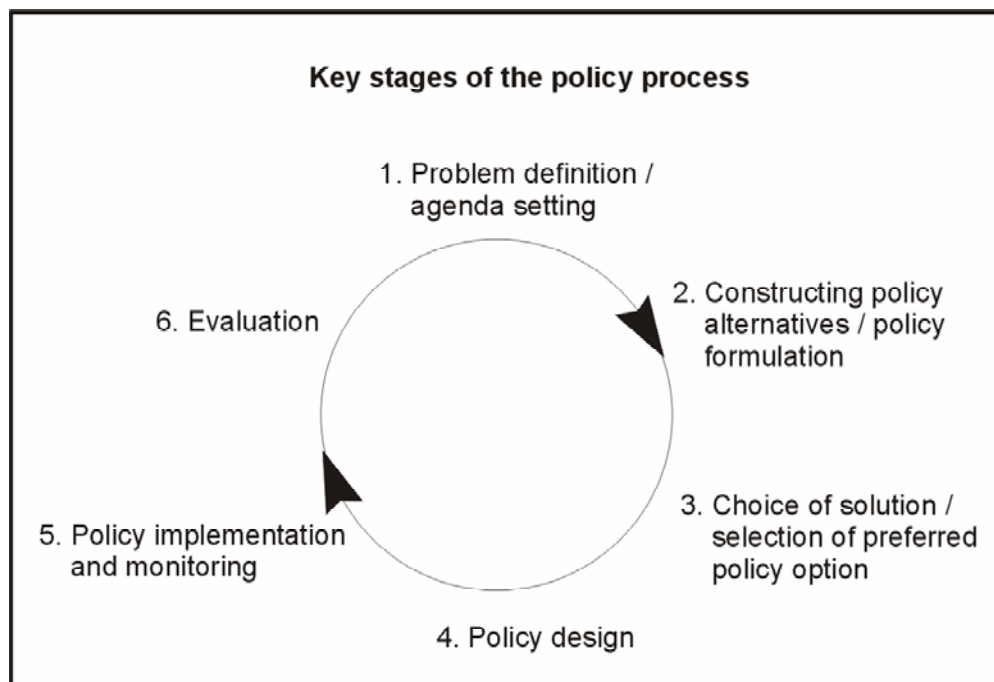
Roundtable discussion of policy process issues in food security in southern Africa

Objective: plenary identify the priority food security policy processes in southern Africa that should be addressed by the project.

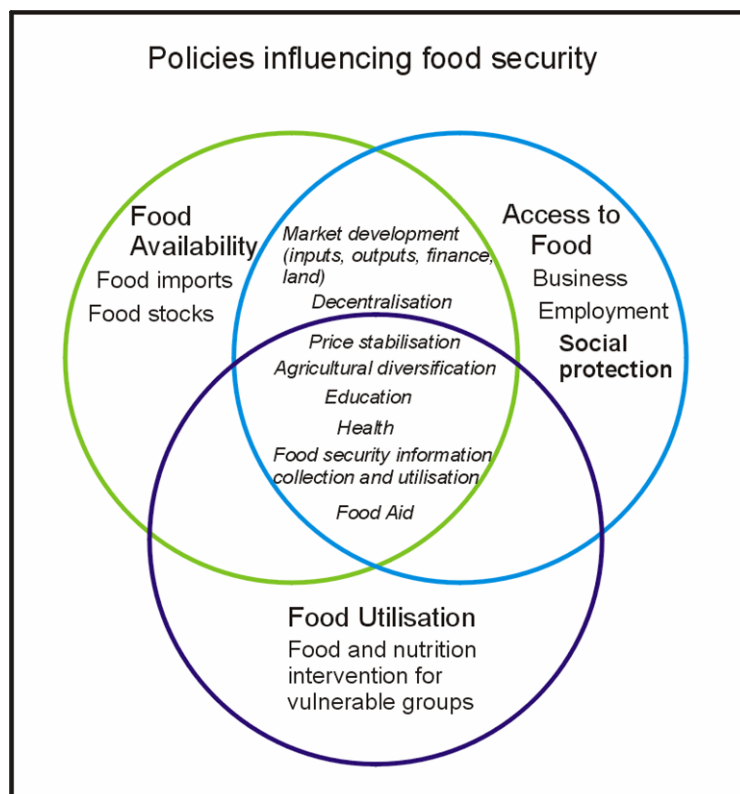
Chair: Sue Mbaya

The purpose of this session is to identify the key food security policy processes in southern Africa. We will start by looking at some definitions. One of the issues we are talking about is evidence. Evidence is much more than just scientific research. It is any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge. This can be what we call qualitative evidence from grassroots level; it can be quantitative evidence in the form of social surveys; and it can be evidence from scientific experiments. We can think quite broadly about what is the evidence that we can feed into the policy process.

We have also been talking a lot about policy and policy process. Policy is any purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors. We are not just talking about documents and legislation; we are also talking about patterns of spending and implementation processes and activities on the ground. The diagram shows key stages of the policy process.



In dealing with policy processes we are dealing with this whole cycle and looking at where we want our evidence to feed in. The figure below shows policies influencing food security indicating that it is not just about production.



Policies in all the areas shown in the diagram have an impact on food and nutrition security. In looking at key policy processes affecting food and nutrition security in the region we need to think beyond production and include any areas that have an impact in our experience. We want to identify regional policy processes that have the greatest influence on food and nutrition security policy that CSOs want to influence or change. Our aim is to develop an achievable focus for this policy influencing work by identifying three policy areas at regional level that we consider priorities for achieving effective food security and nutrition policies. Once we have identified the three priority areas we will split into groups to look at the context, the evidence and the links using the questions on the sheet in your document packs.

Regional food security is a SADC priority. Originally food security was seen as self-sufficiency from domestic production. This has expanded to include adequate nutrition and access to food, and the definition of food security given in NEPAD's Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Plan (CAADP) is now generally accepted. We need to clearly identify the key players. The broad definition of food security moves away from the role of the farmer to include roles of civil society, policy makers and traders (including informal traders).

Prioritising policy areas

Policy areas	Priority
AU-NEPAD (CAADP)-SADC	
Irrigation and land utilisation (includes water management)	15
Markets and access	15
Strategic food reserves	
Science and technology (technology adoption by small farmers)	
Information dissemination	
Farming Union	
Politics	
SADC Trade policies	
Seed trade – laws and policies	5
TRIPS – WTO patenting including biodiversity	
Phytosanitary including livestock diseases	2
Small farmer trade	8
Consumption patterns, trade and their impact on food security	2
GMOs – SADC position on biosafety	2
Land reform facility	10
Early warning systems	
Intra-regional trade	
SACU-WTO (especially maize)	
Comesa shifts in regional food trade subsidy policies including WTO preferential trade agreements (PTAs)	
Trade within countries (rural-urban trade, X-M controls, phytosanitary, export bans, state marketing oligopolies)	5
IFI policy influence / aid	
Removal of agricultural subsidies and privatisation	1
HIPC / PRSPs	
Loans v grants	8
Food aid	2
Protocols	
Global trade agreements	
AGOA (textiles, employment)	

Context, evidence and links in food security policy processes in southern Africa

Objective: Group work to identify context and evidence in selected priority food security policy processes in southern Africa.

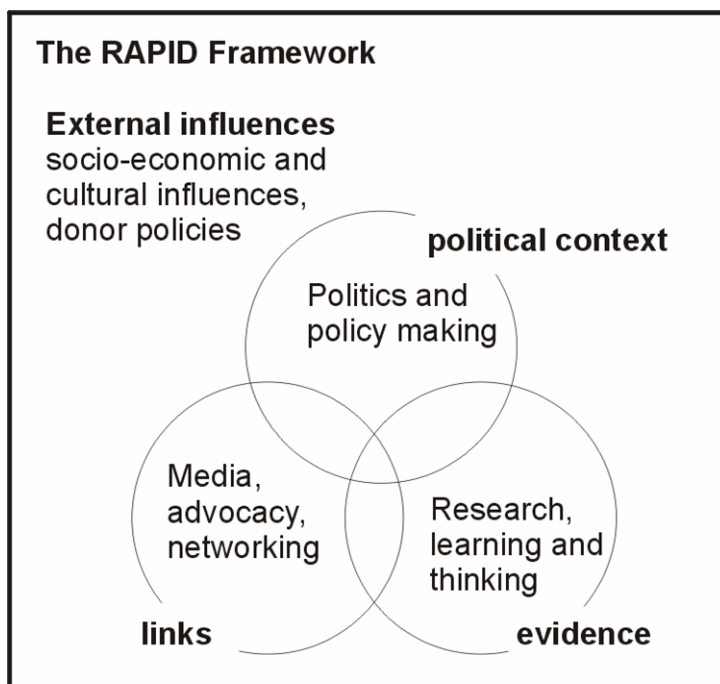
Facilitated by Elizabeth Cromwell

Based on the exercise in the previous session the priority areas for providing evidence to influence policy processes are:

- CAADP irrigation and land use
- CAADP markets and access
- SADC land reform facility.

Other areas that got attention include seed retention, small farmers and trade and IFI policy related to loans and grants. Participants will split into three groups to apply ODI's RAPID analytical framework to the priority areas. This looks at the context, evidence, links and external influences associated with specific policy areas.

These four areas are based on the understanding developed in the ODI's RAPID programme of how policy influencing works. CSOs in Southern Africa are very good at doing policy-influencing work particularly at national level in individual countries. We have heard a number of examples (both today and yesterday) of organisations influencing policy in positive directions. ODI has looked at experiences around the world to try and understand how you can get maximum impact from using evidence to influence policy. We need to think about the evidence-policy interface in terms of four interconnected areas. There is the political context; by definition policies are all about politics. Links between policy and research communities are also critically important in getting maximum impact from the evidence we have. Whether the evidence itself is credible, convincing and appropriately packaged is also important. A fourth area in the evidence policy interface is the external influences. These include the socio-political context, the nature of the society in which we live and also the influence of donor policy. This is critically important in influencing the political context, the kind of evidence being collected and increasingly in the kind of links established as donors increasingly become involved in supporting linking activities by CSOs. This raises the question of what credibility and legitimacy donors have to engage in these activities.



The diagram presents an idealised picture of the policy development process - in the real world you may find that the three circles are not all linked. Here are two examples. In the ivory tower model academic research is isolated and not linked to the real world context. In the daisy chain model, which we often see in the UK, there is a lack of political will and it is up to the linking organisations to pull together the evidence

and push it into the political context. For example there was no political interest in having a debate about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the UK and it was only after CSOs put together evidence and mobilised support that politicians took any notice of the issue.

Although the real world may not fit the ideal model it is quite a practical approach because it maps what we are trying to do. The political context is all about policy making and decision making, the evidence is all about research, learning and thinking, the links are about the space occupied by networks, advocacy organisations and the media. In the interface areas we can identify practical activities that happen in the real world. The interface between evidence and policymaking is where policy analysts and researchers sit. The interface between evidence and links is where information is being exchanged and validated between researchers and networking and influencing organisations. The interface between links and policymaking is where campaigners and lobbyists sit and try to present their evidence to influence the policy making process. Most of us would like to sit right in the middle drawing on the best of policy analysis and validating and exchanging information and lobbying.

When we break into groups the idea is to work systematically through the four areas using the questions in the handout as a guide. In relation to the evidence we need to bear in mind that we are trying to introduce new ideas in that we are asking people to think beyond the traditional production focus. Therefore we need to ask how we need to package our evidence to achieve this. When we come to look at the links we need to ask who are the key players in the CAADP programme and in SADC's land reform facility. Are they already linked into any of the networks that we belong to or else how best can we get our information to them. We can think of using the media, lobbying campaigns or are different approaches likely to be more successful?

Participants received handouts with questions on each of the four areas to help their reflections.

The external environment: Who are the key actors? What is their agenda? How do they influence the political context?

The political context: Is there political interest in change? Is there room for manoeuvre? How do they perceive the problem?

The evidence: Is it there? Is it relevant? Is it practically useful? Are the concepts familiar or new? Does it need re-packaging?

Links: Who are the key individuals? Are there existing networks to use? How best to transfer the information? The media? Campaigns?

CAADP Irrigation and land use

Political context

Key actors: SARIA, FANR, SADC irrigation, SACU, COMESA, AU/SARO, Lesotho Land Movement.

Support: There is support for the CAADP but the level of commitment differs from country to country. There are issues around water rights and privatisation. The level of integration with NEPAD is questionable and it is doubtful whether the SADC has an integrated programme around the CAADP.

Perceptions: There is some recognition of problems related to water and land rights. The level of commitment to addressing them is questionable. There are differing perceptions on issue such as the cost of irrigation and on the ownership issue. Both government and communities tend to see these as issues for government to deal with.

Existing activity: There are some schemes underway. We need an audit / review of what is going on.

Links

Key actors. SADC, MISA, SARPN, FANRPAN, SARIA

Existing networks. Yes

Information transfer. Yes

Campaigns. No!!

There are networks that can be used but it is unclear how much power they have. They may need strengthening.

Evidence

Existing evidence. Not sure whether there is enough evidence. There are a lot of things happening but we do not know about them all. There is a need for more information. The FAO, IFPRI and national agencies have done research but there is an issue of information dissemination and of the adoption of programmes applying the information.

Usefulness. Information dissemination and its adoption are the main issues.

New evidence. Do we need new evidence? Yes, but we also need an audit of what is already there. We also need to know what is happening at the grassroots and how they are applying the technology. We need evaluations that look at HIV, gender, labour, costs and the suitability of technology. NGOs and line ministries can assist in gathering this information.

Presentation. on the issue of presentation we need reports, websites, policy briefings, and lobbying from the grassroots.

External

Key actors: include FAO, IFAD, AU, ADB, World Bank, IFPRI, WFP and IMF.

Agendas. Their interest is in food security but there are some questions about their agendas.

Influence on political context. Not all of them have supported food security.

Discussion

Another key player is the International Water Management Institute, which will be implementing a big programme in southern Africa through NEPAD. It involves a US\$ 15m feasibility study funded by African Development Bank.

CAADP markets and access

Critical issues identified

Markets

- Low prices of commodities
- Privatisation policies
- Seed marketing
- Cross border trade
- Market Information
- Export policies
- Dumping of cheap food products
- Trade monopolies

Access

- Low access to inputs
- High input prices
- Poor infrastructure
- Seed laws
- Consumption choices
- Trade barriers
- Tariff barriers
- HH access
- Low purchasing power

Key actors

- NEPAD

- AU
- SADC
- COMESA
- PTA
- National Governments
- SACU

Policy processes

- The SADC framework provides for most of these issues
- The NEPAD framework also provides for these issues
- Seed marketing
- Cross border markets
- Market information

The group was not very familiar with most of these processes but pointed to a few ongoing processes on seed and market information including the

- SADC Seed Security Network
- FEWS Network
- SADC trade protocol

Evidence

- Evidence on seed issues is available from existing research and statistics. The researched evidence on seed is not contestable.
- Food insecurity in the region has also been acknowledged. Food insecurity studies are not contestable but it is the extent of food insecurity that is contestable.
- Cross border trade information also available.

Further research is required to provide new evidence on the extent of seed and food insecurity and the research methodology used. In addition we need better dissemination of the results of research already done. New information needs to be presented through regular policy briefs to policy makers and regular round table dialogues.

Links

Existing networks include FANRPAN, FEWSNET and SARPN.

Discussion

We know that situation at national level but not at regional level. We need time to get background information on the policy areas selected before we can engage.

SADC land reform facility

Context

Key actors

National governments, political parties, social movements, farmers' organisations, donors, agribusinesses, researchers, WB, UN agencies, IMF, regional (SADC), NEPAD, AU, farmers' union.

Agendas

There are different views, approaches and perceptions.

- SADC plays a facilitating role

- SADC land reform facility and NEPAD
- Current processes need to be strengthened, they don't create space for civil society
- Use land based CSOs to network
- Effective peer review of member states land reform policies

SADC land reform facility

- Links member states with international organisations dealing with land reform
- Share experiences on land reform
 - Distribution
 - Tenure
 - Rights (inheritance, gender issues, nutrition, HIV/AIDS)
 - Utilisation
- Secretariat coordinates issues (fund / facility for land reform issues)
- Zimbabwe land reform controversy stimulated this process
- Population growth inevitably leads to the need for land reform
- Supports land policies and legislation
- Land tax – SADC provides technical advice
- Land reform versus productivity
- Land administration.

Evidence

- Land redistribution versus food security – evidence of a relationship between tenure and productivity
- Land tenure and food security
- Evidence exists but is not widely used – access issues
- Evidence is highly contested – political and sensitive.

Links

- SADC land reform facility question of legitimacy, element of neutrality, however role is limited
- International organisations

External environment

- World Bank (economic growth, stability?)
- Multi-national companies (profit driven, food markets)
- Donors (some – poverty reduction and food security)

Discussion

We all took different approaches but we are not well informed on what is happening in the region. The reason is that there is no space for participation. This needs a lot of work – this is partly the purpose of this project.

Given the need for more knowledge on the key actors and policy processes involved we need to change our approach and look at what we can do this afternoon. The proposal is to move on to a SWOT analysis to help us to identify our strengths and weaknesses in engaging in the policy process. Civil society is diverse and we should not all be trying to do one type of activity. Working with evidence or doing communication work requires specific skills.

However, doing credible work in all these areas requires organisational capacity, staffing, internal processes and funding.

Food security policy processes in southern Africa: SWOT analysis

Objective: group work to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to using CSO evidence to influence priority food security policy processes in southern Africa. This will include discussion of the kinds of evidence and tools CSOs already use, which work best, what others could be tried and comparative advantages of different CSOs.

Irrigation and land use	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Grassroots level information Popular issue Lots of players Extensive documentation available	Lack of technical expertise Loss of institutional memory Poor extension environment Lack of sharing information Under use of information
Opportunities	Threats
Government now on side Lesson learning Collaboration Structures exist Resources available	Donor dependent Talk shop Costs, ailing economies Politicisation Lack of information sharing Poor coordination Duplication of efforts Lack of commitment to regional agenda

Market access SWOT	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local level knowledge/grassroots existence of national level networks already engaging governments in policy ■ Existence of regional CSO networks ■ Generally apolitical / non-aligned ■ Capacity to mobilise social movement ■ Appreciation of food security issues ■ Ability to set own agendas ■ Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Donor dependent/resource constraint ■ Individual agendas ■ Inadequate capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Technical, financial etc ■ Uncoordinated / non-existent regional networks ■ Lack of information on regional networks ■ Lack of a holistic approach to FS issues ■ Poor accountability by some CSOs ■ Donor Driven
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Still in business to fill in gaps ■ Recognised by government as partners in policy development programmes ■ Existence of regional structures, for example NEPAD/CAADP, SADC ■ Donor interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Donor dependence/driven ■ Lack of government trust ■ Threat to some governments ■ Can be manipulated

Land reform SWOT	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Grassroots based ■ Large numbers ■ Knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Resources ■ Limited regional network ■ Knowledge of regional processes / protocol
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SADC NEPAD processes ■ Links with international organisation ■ Private sector ■ Media Directions ■ Create dialogue with government ■ Link with research institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Politics – national ■ International pressure

It is clear that we are not comfortable at the regional level. Some of the reasons:

- Lack of information
- Most NGOs are engaged in programmes at practical level and do not operate at a policy level
- Regional processes have not been inclusive enough and there is no clear focal point for civil society organisations at regional or NEPAD level
- Civil society organisations that attend regional meetings have no mandate but are taken as speaking for everyone.

However, if we do not make ourselves heard others will speak for us. There is no registration for NGOs at regional level. At national level participation is based on registration.

To have an effective regional voice we need legitimate representation at regional level. This is difficult given the diversity of CSOs. By coming together along thematic lines such as food security we can deal with the issue of diversity. The UN has a parallel NGO forum funded by the FAO. There could be a similar arrangement for the SADC. We will have to fight for this space; it was only created in the UN after NGOs made a noise. There could be a regional platform for all NGOs arranged around themes.

Summary of conclusions from the group work and identification of next steps

Dr Lindiwe Sibanda

Practically we should start with a regional platform for food security with the understanding that we are working towards a regional space for all NGOs. We should maintain the focus on food security with the understanding that this includes broader livelihood and poverty issues.

We should also try to fit into existing programmes – for example A SADC Council of NGOs exists. Existing regional structures need to be strengthened through stronger national linkages. We need stronger national systems to have legitimacy at the regional level. This will ensure that the regional platform really represents the national. It is better to have a hybrid structure rather than use one structure as we have existing links with one or other body. Collaboration should not eliminate individual agendas.

We will take this agenda to individual countries to discuss and put it on the national agenda. Otherwise will have to face issue of accountability when we claim to have a regional platform. This is important. Experience with the VACs shows that you need to get the grassroots to agree before you can say that you represent them. That is why the VAC structure had to go through the three-step consultation process to repair the mistakes that were made.

ODI, SARPAN and FANRPAN will drive the process and use their links to establish how government, the private sector and civil society will feed into the process. We need to legitimise the process and make it inclusive. We will hold in-country consultations to establish:

- What is happening in each country
- Who the key actors are for a particular issue, and
- How CSOs can interact with those actors.

Then we can come up with a clear idea of what we want to set up and how we will go about it. This information should be fed into a concept note that outlines the first steps.

We have to accept that the process will not be complete in the first round given the difficulty of finding out about all the organisations engaged in food security work. However, the NGO sector is becoming more clearly defined and there is a national NGO structure in every country and also national food security networks. This means that although the project has fairly tight deadlines it should be possible to conduct consultative processes without getting stuck in internal processes.

ODI, SARPAN and FANRPAN are mandated to find out about the activities of the SADC NGO Council. They could also help to document other processes that could feed into this process. They need to look at the actors, what they are doing, and what information they have that we can call on.

The immediate next step is to pull together a set of activities. ODI, SARPAN and FANRPAN will look at the implications of what has been decided and will start gathering more information about regional actors and processes. FANRPAN nodes in different countries will hold meetings to talk about ways that civil society in those countries feels it can engage. They will write this up and share it.

It may be possible to hold another regional meeting at the end of the process if we can find the funds. This will provide an opportunity to reflect on what we have learnt and share it with others. The RHVP programme offers opportunities to take this focus forward.

Inspirations

- * SARPAN will find funds to hold another meeting and set up a regional directory.
- * FANRPAN will set up consultations in six countries and will assist with fund raising.