



“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

Summary report of proceedings

Johannesburg, South Africa, 25 May 2005

The purpose of the meeting is to look at how civil society can use evidence to promote pro-poor policies across the SADC region. It is part of an 18-month project that focuses on three related factors. First the political context – the actors and structures and the pressures involved. Second the evidence, including availability, credibility, packaging and promotion. Third the links between policy makers and CSOs which has a lot to do with media, communications and linkages. The joint hosts are the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) which brings together policy makers, farmers and governments in the SADC region; the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), a UK based think tank on development policy and the Southern African Regional Poverty Network (SARPN) which widens access to information and discussion platforms to improve pro-poor policy, strategy and action in the region.

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 are:

- How to integrate civil society organisations (CSOs) into food security policy processes?
- 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 engage in the whole policy cycle including the conceptual and methodological states and not just in advocacy.

Discussion

- *How can CSOs establish their legitimacy and overcome their tendency to work alone and compete with one another. The definition of food security did not refer to powerful interest such as the corporate sector that can influence food security.*

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. The source of legitimacy for CSOs must be credible evidence and integrity because we do not have electoral legitimacy. There are examples in South Africa where 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. Multinationals are part of invisible forces that influence policy. If we do not identify them we will not be 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.

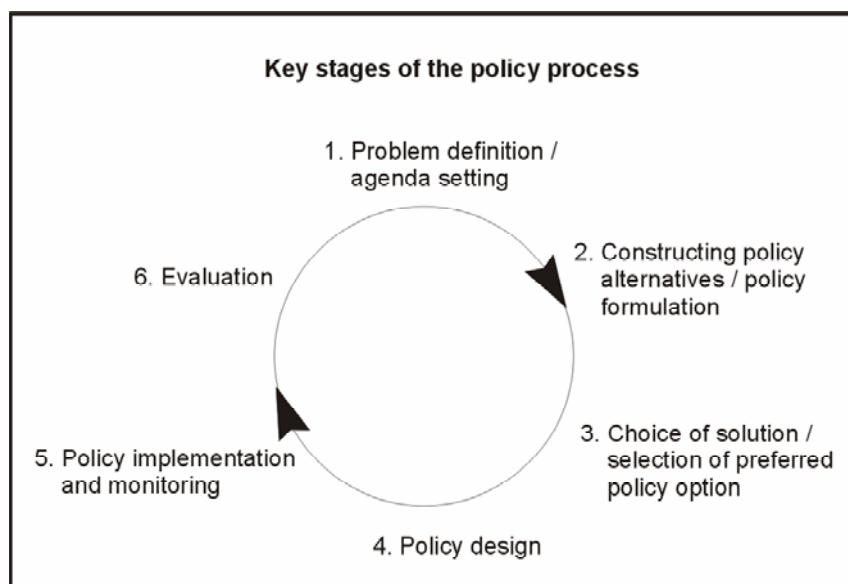
- *Food security cuts across many sectors, how do we get other sectors involved? The examples in the presentation come from the VACs, which are government, not civil society initiatives. Civil society organisations need to overcome divisions and work together.*

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. When government calls for comments civil society has to respond and it also has to find other opportunities for leverage. They need to build consensus and work towards common goals to achieve success.

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.

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.



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. A brainstorm and prioritisation exercise identified the following three areas:

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

Participants then split into three groups to analyse the three priority policy areas using ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) framework. This looks at four areas: the external environment, the political context, the evidence and the links between them. Participants used the following questions as a guide for their group discussions:

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?

It became clear in the course of the group discussions that although participants had a good understanding of policy processes and actors in their particular countries they were not well informed on these matters at regional level. A SWOT exercise on the three priority policy areas confirmed this. Reasons for the lack of information on policy processes at regional level included:

- Lack of information.
- Most NGOs are engaged in programmes at a 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.

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.

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

Dr Lindiwe Sibanda

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 try to fit into existing programmes such as the SADC council of NGOs. We need stronger national systems to have legitimacy at 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 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.

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. ODI, SARPN and FANRPAN will drive the process and use their links to establish how government, the private sector and civil society, including the SADC NGO Council, will feed into the process. Using the information from the national consultations they will develop a concept note that outlines the first steps. 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

- * Participants will consult with other civil society organisations in their countries
- * FANRPAN will set up consultations in the six countries where it has nodes and will assist with fund raising.
- * SARPN will find funds to hold another meeting and set up a regional directory.