



SARPN Regional Conference:

Enhancing Civil Society Participation in SADC Food security Processes

Activity Concept

September 2005

Introduction

Strengthening the food security of poor and vulnerable communities in the SADC region is an issue attracting increasing regional and international attention. Progress towards this goal has been impeded by the humanitarian crisis which has affected the region since 2001. Better and implementation of policies that increase food availability, strengthen effective access to food and improve food utilisation is recognised as a priority need in the SADC region and fundamental to the achievement of the Millennium goals. Accordingly a number of countries (for example, Lesotho, Malawi and Mozambique) are conducting comprehensive reviews of national food and nutrition security policies. However there is considerable evidence that in the SADC region, poor progress with strengthening food security over the last decades has been as much the result of weaknesses in policy processes and their implementation as failures in food production and utilisation technologies (for instance, negative outcomes relating to issues surrounding distribution and strategic reserves in Malawi; also the negative consequences of Zimbabwe's land reform policy implementation). As a result, a number of donors (for example DfID, USAID and UN-WFP) are putting in place long-term funding to support policies and processes contributing to food security at the national and regional levels.

A contributing factor to the weakness of policy processes has been the marginal participation of members of civil society in the development and implementation of policies relating to food security. This is largely because civil society organisations work in the arena between the household, the private sector and the state to negotiate matters of public concern. Hence strengthening the participation of civil society actors in policy processes in the region is an important component.

The Look Listen and Learn Project Overview

The Look, Listen and Learn project recognises that civil society organizations are in a unique position to represent and promote the needs of poor and vulnerable people in policy process. The project workshops done at the regional and national level have established that CSOs have evidence which has been used in engaging with national food security policies. However limitations were observed in civil society's influence and participation at SADC regional level policy processes. This was largely observed to be arising from limited awareness of the political context at SADC and the opportunities, structures and processes that are offered at this level. For effective engagement and use of CSO evidence at the regional level a sound awareness of the regional political context was seen as a precondition for establishing links in policy processes.

The activities of the project will build the capacity of civil society with an interest in regional food security policy to be able to understand and answer questions on:

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

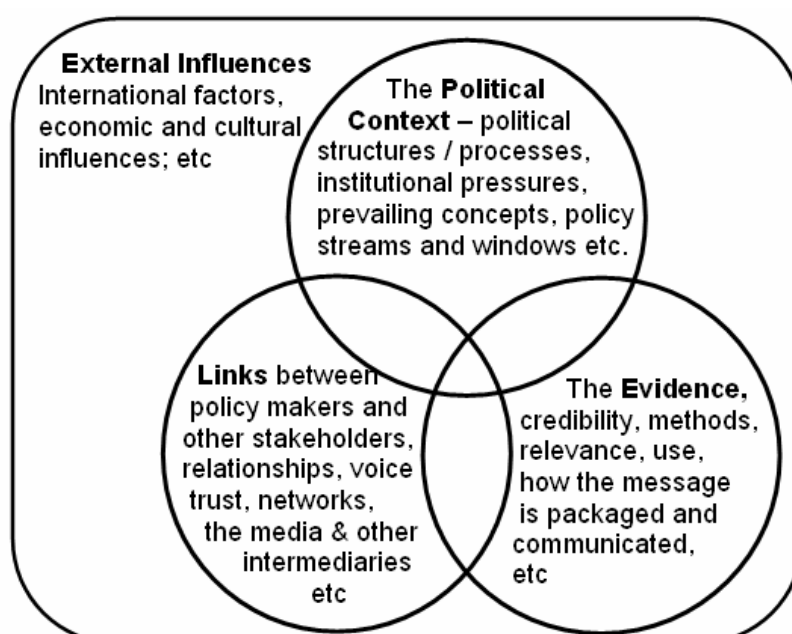
The political context: Is there political interest in change? Who are the key actors and how can they be engaged?

The evidence: What evidence has or is being produced by civil society? Is it relevant? Is it practically useful? Does it need repackaging?

Links: Who are the key individuals involved in the process? Are there existing networks to use? How best to transfer the information from civil society? E.g. media and campaigns.

(See Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: The RAPID framework: evidence-policy links



Source: ODI Research and Policy in Development project (www.odi.org.uk/rapid)

Project objectives

The Look, Listen and Learn Project's objectives are to:

- promote the contribution of civil society organisations and their evidence to debate and dialogue at the SADC level food security policy;
- promote the voice of Southern Africa civil society organisations in the international debate on food security policy;
- Build knowledge and publicise within the region and internationally the policy and practice lessons learnt;
- disseminate within the region relevant evidence and policy lessons from civil society organisations elsewhere in the world.

The Regional Conference

SARPN, FANRPAN and ODI jointly propose a SADC wide conference which aims to highlight food security policies being promoted by SADC. The conference will provide a forum for actors to discuss ways in which civil society agencies can link up and use their evidence to contribute and influence these policy processes. The participants

comprising civil society organisations, donors, regional and international agencies, will be drawn from the SARPN, FANRPAN and ODI networks. The workshop will be largely supported by Australian Aid (AusAID).

Earlier activities related to the Look, Listen and Learn Project, involving civil society actors from across the region, identified several key policies and processes thought to be important for addressing food security. On the basis of this work and after consultation with the SADC secretariat, the project partners have proposed that the regional conference should focus on SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) as a framework for identifying and engaging key policies relating to the promotion of food security in the region.

Conference objectives

In view of the importance of the role of civil society in promoting food security, the conference seeks to:

- Identify the relevant policies and programmes in the region and their status.
- Establish the nature and extent of existing civil society evidence in relation to these policy areas.
- Establish the opportunities for civil society to participate in regional food security processes.

Conference outputs

The expected outputs from the workshop include the following:

- Civil society actors know the food policy processes and structures at the SADC level.
- Civil society actors identify priority areas at the SADC level where they can use their evidence more effectively in regional food policy processes
- Civil society actors develop a strategic framework of collaboration across countries on engaging with regional food policy processes
- Civil society identify possible (pilot) activities for influencing regional policies as part of the Look, Listen and Learn Project, and agree on approaches/methodologies for implementing these.
- Civil society actors identify evidence and links offered by partners from donor, international and regional agencies for possible collaboration.

Expected Impact:

The conference, its deliberations and anticipated follow-ups are expected to contribute to effective policy formulation and implementation for a food secure SADC region.

The Look, Listen and Learn initiative is a collaborative initiative between Southern African Regional Poverty Network (SARPN) Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Food and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN).

SARPN (<http://www.sarpn.org.za>) supplies research based evidence to help development partners in Southern Africa to promote pro-poor development policy and practise. Food security is one of SARPN's areas of strategic focus under its Social Dimensions Programme. SARPN provides an information clearing house through its website and meetings and action oriented research.

Food and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (www.fanrpan.org) is a Southern African stakeholder-driven policy research and advocacy network. The network is active in 11 SADC countries (i.e. except Angola and the DRC) and works in-country through an inter-sectoral platform comprising representatives from government, private sectors, farming unions, policy research institutions and non-governmental organisations. The

main objectives of FANRPAN are to promote appropriate agricultural policies in order to reduce poverty, increase food security and promote sustainable agricultural development in SADC region.

Overseas Development Institute (www.odi.org.uk) is Britain's leading independent think-tank on development policy issues, with over forty years experience for interlocking high quality policy analysis on a wide range of development policy issues with effective dissemination through meetings, print media and the web. Focus areas are rural policy and governance, public policy and poverty, international trade and humanitarian policy.