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How Civil Society Organisations Use Evidence to Influence Policy Processes: A literature review

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The authors are responsible for the content of the analysis, and any errors or omissions.

Acronyms

AMARC	World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters
CSO	Civil society organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development
GRSO	Grassroots support organisation
GSO	Grassroots organisation
IBP	International Budget Project
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PPA	Participatory poverty assessment
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive Summary

CSOs, evidence and pro-poor policy: the three I's

If CSOs are to use evidence to bring about pro-poor policy they have three main objectives: to

- **Inspire**: generate support for an issue or action; raise new ideas or question old ones; create new ways of framing an issue or 'policy narratives';
- **Inform**: represent the views of others; share expertise and experience; put forward new approaches;
- **Improve**: add, correct or change policy issues; hold policymakers accountable; evaluate and improve own activities, particularly regarding service provision; learn from each other.

All of this is much more easily said than done; reality is, of course, much more complex.

This paper is based on an annotated bibliography of over 100 documents on how civil society organisations use evidence to influence policy. It summarises key debates, findings and conclusions from the literature, and points both to gaps and to new directions for future work.

Background

Discussions of civil society are not new. The issues have been contested within political philosophy, sociology and social theory for hundreds of years. Classical debates around civil society had the issue of evidence and knowledge at their heart. For leading thinkers, from Aristotle, Hobbes and Locke through to Rousseau, Tocqueville and Gellner, civil society has been a core of social theory for centuries. The emphasis on knowledge has largely been lost in current discussions.

What is new is the increasing emphasis on the concept over the last decade: 'civil society' has become a buzzword within international development. This is not surprising, since the sector has seen unprecedented growth. CSOs in Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya now provide 40% of all healthcare and education; networks such as Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka provide services to 7,000 villages (Edwards, 2004). Bolivia saw the number of registered NGOs rise from 100 in 1980 to over 1,000 in 1999 (Kohl, 2002). It is said that NGOs reach 15–20% of the world's poor (Fowler, 2000). Development NGOs have an annual global budget of some US$5.5bn. Unsurprisingly, they have attracted increasing policy and research attention.

There has been a great deal of literature on civil society in international development over the last decade. However, there is remarkably little systematic work on the role and use of evidence as CSOs attempt to influence policy processes. Does evidence matter to CSO work? If so, how, when and why? Can use of evidence improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of CSOs? This paper attempts to respond to these questions by bringing literature on the use of evidence in policymaking together with that on civil society organisations in international development.

How CSOs use evidence to influence policy

Debates around the role of CSOs in international development have often focused on the nature of the organisations themselves, or have taken them as the starting point. This approach makes it difficult to assess accurately the influence CSOs have on policy processes. In contrast, this paper examines from the opposite end how CSOs influence policy processes – taking the key elements of

policy processes as the starting point for analysis. It then looks at how CSOs contribute – and how they use evidence in the policy process.

In different parts of the policy process, other things being equal, the way CSOs use evidence tends to be important in different ways:

- In influencing **agenda setting**, CSOs may use evidence to build momentum behind an idea until it reaches a 'tipping point'. They may need to crystallise a body of evidence as a policy narrative to create a window for policy change. A key factor here is the way evidence is communicated.

- In influencing the **formulation** of policy, evidence can be an important way to establish the credibility of CSOs. The quality of the evidence they use may reflect upon their own reputation, and CSOs may need to adapt the way they use it to maintain credibility with local communities and with policymakers, combining their tacit and explicit knowledge of a policy context. Here, the quantity and quality credibility of the evidence that CSOs use seems to be important to their policy influence.

- In influencing the **implementation** of policy, evidence is critical to improving the effectiveness of development initiatives. Capitalising on the practical knowledge and experience of many CSOs can require careful analytic work in order that it is possible to understand how technical skills, expert knowledge and practical experience can inform one another. The key to influencing the implementation of policy is often making such evidence relevant across different contexts.

- In influencing the **monitoring and evaluation** of policy, it is often important to manage and present evidence clearly. Whether developing evidence internally, through participatory processes or facilities for institutional memory, or garnering the interest of the media or other external groups, communicating evidence in a clear, conclusive and accessible way seems to be critical here.

However, the critical crosscutting issue that CSOs must negotiate in order to influence policy effectively is **political context**. Evidence must be relevant, appropriate and timely, in a specific social, political and economic context. Furthermore, the position that a CSO holds within a particular political system, and its relationships with other actors, affects the ways it can use evidence and the likelihood of it achieving policy influence. More broadly, however, CSO engagement will very much depend on the nature of the political context (extent of democracy) as well as the specific policy stance a government takes on a specific issue.

Maximising impact

We have identified seven main objectives towards which CSOs could use evidence to improve their chances of policy influence:

i) **Legitimacy**: Legitimacy matters for policy influence. Evidence can be used in particular to enhance the technical sources of CSO legitimacy, but also representative, moral or legal legitimacy. Making legitimacy explicit can help others make decisions as to whether they wish to endorse CSO work. A more general point linked in with this is that CSOs are more likely to have an impact if they work together.

ii) **Effectiveness**: Evidence can be used to make CSO work more effective. Gathering evidence can be a tool for CSOs to evaluate and improve the impact of their work, share lessons with others, and capture the institutional memory and knowledge held within organisations.

iii) **Integration**: There is often a disconnection between CSO work on implementation or service delivery and the rest of the policy process. CSOs can have greater influence if they find better

ways to turn their practical knowledge and expertise into evidence that can be used to inform other parts of the policy process (agenda setting, formulation and evaluation). This could also help improve the learning which occurs across CSOs.

iv) **Translation**: Expert evidence should not be used to 'trump' the perspectives and experience of ordinary people. CSOs should find ways to turn people's understanding into legitimate evidence, and of combining community wisdom with expert evidence.

v) **Access**: Access to policymaking processes is vital for CSOs. Examples in this paper indicate that the question of CSO influence is often one of whether they are included in policy processes and can respond accordingly. Evidence can help CSOs gain better access to policy arenas. Using high-quality and uncontested evidence can allow even politically radical CSOs be included fully in policy debate.

vi) **Credibility**: Evidence must be valid, reliable and convincing to its audience. CSOs may need to adapt for different groups the kind of evidence they use – the same evidence may be credible to some but not to others. Credibility can depend on factors such as the reputation of the source and whether there is other accepted evidence which substantiates it.

vii) **Communication**: Evidence must be presented in an accessible and meaningful way. The most effective communication is often two-way, interactive and ongoing.

Gaps for further study

The study of the ways in which CSOs use evidence to influence policy is an emerging field. There remains no systematic, global study on the subject. This paper attempts to synthesise thinking from the (rather patchy) general literature on CSOs. However, a number of questions seem so far to have received little attention.

- How does the nature of a CSO (think tank, service delivery NGO, faith-based group) affect the way that evidence is used in its work? What methods can (different types of) CSOs use to create convincing evidence?

- Do different kinds of policy field (emergent, entrenched) require CSOs to use evidence in different ways? How can CSOs respond appropriately?

- How does the political context (democracy, centrally planned republic, authoritarian regime) affect the way CSOs can use evidence? What approaches work best in different contexts?

- How can evidence be used to improve the accountability and legitimacy of CSOs?

- What intermediaries can help CSOs use evidence to influence policy? How do they use networks and the media? What works best in different contexts?

In sum, there remain a number of important analytical and practical research issues for the ODI Civil Society Partnerships Programme – and others interested in this topic – to analyse.

1. Introduction

The concept of civil society is not new. It has been contested within political philosophy, sociology and social theory for hundreds of years. What is new is the increasing emphasis on the concept over the last decade: 'civil society' has become a buzzword within international development. All manner of claims have been made or implied about the potential of 'civil society' and, specifically, 'civil society organisations' (CSOs) to act as a force to reduce poverty, promote democracy and achieve sustainable development. But how exactly do they do this? Are CSOs always a force for good? What is the proper role of CSOs in international development? How do they influence policy? A number of studies have responded to these questions, identifying a number of issues around the accountability, legitimacy and effectiveness of the sector. (See, for example, Salamon, 1993; Howell and Pearce, 2002; Lewis, 2001; Edwards, 2004; and Van Rooy, 1999.)

Meanwhile, literature on bridging research and policy in international development has started to explore these very same issues from a different perspective (Court, Hovland and Young, 2005). So far, these streams of thinking have existed in relative isolation. There is remarkably little systematic work on the role of evidence as CSOs attempt to influence policy processes. Does evidence matter to CSO work? If so, how, when and why? Can evidence improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of CSOs? This paper will attempt to respond to these questions by bringing literature on the use of evidence in policymaking together with that on civil society organisations in international development.

We hope that bridging these streams of thinking may help to answer some of the questions that have emerged from the civil society literature as it has grown in prominence. Some consider that the claims made for civil society have reduced the notion to an 'analytic hatstand' (Van Rooy, 1999) on which to hang any number of ideas about politics, organisation and citizenship. Others consider that the diversity of thinking around this single subject invigorates civil society itself, as an 'intellectual space for critical thought and action' (Howell and Pearce, 2002). Debates around the role of CSOs in international development have often focused on the nature of the organisations themselves. This approach often makes it difficult to pinpoint the influence CSOs have in policy processes – a definition of CSOs as organisations which work towards democracy and development makes it hard to identify exactly *how* they achieve these ends. This paper will examine from the opposite end how CSOs influence policy processes – taking policy processes as the starting point for analysis.

This paper aims to map some of the issues around how civil society organisations use evidence in different ways to influence policy processes in international development. It seeks to understand the role that evidence plays in the range of CSO activities, including advocacy, campaigning, building partnerships and practical projects, in order to explore how improving the use of evidence may improve the work of CSOs. Our hypothesis is that improving the use of evidence may be a useful way to address critical questions and challenges facing CSOs today around legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness.

Following this introduction, the paper is comprised of five sections. Section 2 gives a general background to issues around CSOs, evidence and policy influence. Section 3 provides a summary of thinking on civil society in international development. Section 4 maps how CSOs have used evidence to influence policy in different parts of the policy cycle. Section 5 outlines the RAPID framework in this area. Section 6 summarises conclusions from this literature.

2. Background

2.1   Definitions

In this paper, CSOs are considered to be any 'organizations that work in an arena between the household, the private sector and the state to negotiate matters of public concern'.[1] CSOs include a very wide range of institutions, including non-governmental organisations, faith-based institutions, community groups, professional associations, trade unions, media organisations, research institutes and think tanks. CSOs operate at many different levels: global, regional, national, local, etc.

Given our overall objectives, we are particularly interested in a categorisation of CSO functions; we draw on the World Bank (www.worldbank.org) to differentiate CSOs according to the following:

- **Representation** (organisations which aggregate citizen voice).
- **Advocacy and technical inputs** (organisations which provide information and advice, and lobby on particular issues).
- **Capacity building** (organisations which provide support to other CSOs, including funding).
- **Service delivery** (organisations which implement development projects or provide services).
- **Social functions** (organisations which foster collective recreational activities).

We realise that there are significant debates in the literature stemming from the theoretical approach of Giddens (1976). We do think it helps to refer to external 'structure' as well as CSO 'agency' and to see them as a mutually interacting duality. However, for reasons of time and space, this paper will focus more on issues of CSO agency.

Policy

We suggest that policy is defined as a 'purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors' (Anderson, 1975). This goes beyond documents or legislation to include activities on the ground. Policies are not restricted to those of government, but could include those of IOs, bilateral agencies or NGOs.

There are extensive literatures about the policy process (Hill, 1997; Sabatier, 1999; Sutton; 1999). It is our intention not to repeat them here. Rather, we focus on the fundamental components of the policy processes outlined in the literature on public administration. The policy process is usually considered to include the following components:

- **Agenda setting**: Awareness of and priority given to an issue or problem.
- **Policy formulation**: How (analytical and political) options and strategies are constructed.
- **Decision making**: The ways decisions are made about alternatives.
- **Policy implementation**: The forms and nature of policy administration and activities on the ground.
- **Policy evaluation**: The nature of monitoring and evaluation of policy need, design, implementation and impact.

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1 This is taken from the DFID Information and Civil Society Division website. Identifying clear lines of separation between CSOs and households, the private sector and the state can be problematic. Many CSOs have complex and multifaceted relationships within these other sectors, and may be dependent on them for financial backing, political status and other kinds of resources. Our definition focuses on the nature of the work undertaken by CSOs ('to negotiate matters of public concern') rather than the nature of those organisations and issues of accountability and CSO dependencies.

We stress that policymaking is not linear and does not in reality work through these stages logically. There is a full discussion of policy processes in Section 4.

Research, evidence and knowledge

We use a general definition of research as 'any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge' (OECD, 1981). This may include any systematic process of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, data collection, analysis and codification related to development policy and practice. It also includes action research, i.e. self-reflection by practitioners oriented towards the enhancement of direct practice.

Research can often be used as evidence, which we term to be an indication of the basis for knowledge or belief.[2] Knowledge can be used as evidence when it is held in an explicit form and is used to substantiate a view. Evidence is often contested, interpreted and applied by different individuals in different ways, and may persuade some actors that a knowledge or belief is valid while leaving others unconvinced. Research can be the basis of evidence, and can take a variety of forms, including documents, testimonies, books, reports, interviews or articles.

In terms of the nature of evidence and policy influence (Court, Hovland and Young, 2005 and Shaxson, 2005), key issues are:

- **Availability**: The existence of (good) evidence.
- **Credibility**: The quality of the approach taken to generate evidence and the objectiveness of the source as well as the extent of contestation regarding evidence.
- **Generalisability**: Is there extensive information or are there just selective cases or pilots?
- **Rootedness**: Is evidence grounded in reality?
- **Relevance**: Whether evidence reflects issues of topical and operational relevance to policymakers.
- **Accessibility**: Whether policymakers have access to it in a useful form.

If research is an effort to create knowledge, knowledge is often categorised in three ways:

- **Tacit knowledge** is unconscious and intuitive; it allows experts to make decisions without referring to rules or principles, e.g. knowing how to facilitate a workshop.
- **Explicit knowledge** is clearly articulated and accessible to anyone who reads, hears or looks at it, e.g. a training guide, book or speech.
- **Implicit knowledge** helps individuals know what is socially and culturally appropriate in a given circumstance; it is knowledge of shared beliefs, values and expectations, e.g. knowing that it is inappropriate to undermine colleagues in public.

2.2   Approach

This background paper is based on a review of over 100 documents, drawn from key streams of literature on how civil society organisations use evidence to influence policy. It summarises key conclusions, findings and debates from the literature, pointing to gaps and new directions for future work.

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2 This is based on: http://www.answers.com/topic/evidence

The complexity of the civil society sector makes it challenging to write a comprehensive account of CSO influence on policy. Organisations form and falter very rapidly, and many organisations, particularly those in the South, may not record or publish their activities publicly, attend conferences, or have a presence on the internet. The term CSO itself is highly contested and the sector is in a constant state of flux; as such, there is no comprehensive global database of CSOs from which a 'representative' sample could be drawn. In these circumstances, the literature on which this paper is based has been gathered somewhat opportunistically. While we have endeavoured to ensure that the major groups of CSOs mentioned above are made visible, and that the paper gives examples from across different geographical areas of the developing world, the sources come from material written in – or translated into – English.

2.3   Bridging research and policy

Throughout public policy discussions, there is a growing consensus that policies formed on the basis of sound evidence are likely to be more successful. However, it is not always the best research, evidence and theory which is the most influential; often high-quality research never reaches its potential to solve problems and improve people's livelihoods, whether in international development or any other case. 'Researchers' and 'policymakers' are often said to inhabit parallel universes – debating the same issues but never fully engaging with each others work (Court, Hovland and Young, 2005). Much work has been done on this area already, and a wealth of literature now exists on policy processes, policy influence, and bridging research and policy,[3] which the RAPID programme at ODI has been documenting since 1999 (De Vibe and Hovland, 2003).

Bridging research and policy in civil society

Although many CSOs do not have an explicit focus on changing policy, they are important reservoirs of research expertise. A great number of researchers work within NGOs, INGOs, universities and think tanks, trade unions or religious groups. Important analysis also takes place as part of the action research of community-based organisations, as they reflect on their own practice and find ways to improve it. Historically, influencing policy has been an important part of the development and rationale of CSO movements. It has been a central part of work to mediate between 'public' and 'private' interests: CSOs have engaged with political processes through lobbying for reform within states (Court, Hovland and Young, 2005).

For many CSOs aiming to influence policy, a critical part of the work must be to bridge research and policy. This is the key challenge for those who, by virtue of their work within CSOs, have developed knowledge which could be applied to solve problems in development.

Many of those working within civil society organisations could also be termed 'policymakers'. CSOs are often the leaders of practical development projects, and must plan, implement and monitor activities that have a great impact on the lives of poor people. Whereas their advocacy and mediation work often aims to change the policy of governments and donors, both the practical activities and the ethical guidelines, working plans and opinions expressed by CSOs can constitute policy in itself. As CSOs try to improve their organisations and their work, they must be receptive to the knowledge and ideas that research can bring.

Improving the links between research and policy, therefore, would seem key to raising CSO effectiveness – both in ability to influence other development actors and in capacity to deliver services and become better organisations themselves.

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3 Much of these texts is summarised on the RAPID website at ODI (www.odi.org.uk/rapid/).

3. Civil society, knowledge and development

3.1   Theoretical background

In various guises, the notion of 'civil society' has been an important and contested concept within Western social theory for centuries. While their interpretation and terminology has varied as much as the historical context in which they were writing, for writers such as Aristotle, Hobbes and Locke, through Rousseau, Tocqueville and Gellner, civil society has been a core in the development of thinking on the modern state (Ehrenberg, 1999). Many of these writers underpinned their thinking on the nature and role of civil society with notions of how citizens may develop and use knowledge. There are many excellent précis of debates around civil society available (Ehrenberg, 1999; Edwards, 2004; Howell and Pearce, 2002; Van Rooy, 1999); it is not our intention to repeat this work here. We will instead offer a selected overview on how theories of civil society have been connected to theories of knowledge; how civil society may develop and share ideas. This will act as a preface to understanding how civil society organisations may use evidence in policy processes.

Writing in ancient Greece, Aristotle put forward his notion of *polis* as an 'association of associations' which enabled the few individuals who qualified as 'citizens' to share in the task of ruling and being ruled. In this model, members of the *polis* were friends, who shared a leisurely aristocratic benevolence towards the public at large. They discovered and articulated the public good through their distinctive intellectual standpoint on the world, known as *phronesis.* Contrasting with *episteme* (scientific knowledge based on analytic rationality) and *teche* (the pragmatic knowledge developed from a craft), *phronesis* was value-led knowledge based on a combination of ethical deliberation and experience (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Ehrenberg, 1999). As we will see later, combining ethics and experience underpins the way many CSOs use knowledge today.

Marx fundamentally challenged the notion that ethical reflection and experience could be combined for the public good, arguing that civil society was simply another arena for the exercise of economic power within capitalism. In this 'theatre of all history' (Marx and Engels, 1970: 57), capitalist modes of production create an arena where public action is simply an echo of bourgeois social and economic power. False consciousness prevents a dialogue between experience and ethics, preventing civil society from developing knowledge of its 'true' status.

Against this rather hopeless view of public life, Gramsci later gained popularity among the left; he argued that while civil society was indeed a forum for the construction of cultural and ideological hegemony, it was also a site for rebellion against the orthodox. Focusing on cultural rather than structural flows of power, Gramsci suggested that civil society was a seedbed where critical organic intellectuals could develop. Their intellectual freedom was secured by their independence from political parties and private companies, a positioning that is echoed by many contemporary NGOs.

For Gramsci, the ability to generate reflective understanding of their situation enabled individuals within civil society to act as agents for change. For others, thinking and acting as individuals has made civil society less free, not more. Tocqueville, one of the most famous enthusiasts for civil society, analysed 19th century America in the midst of what he termed individualism. While America had avoided the class division prevalent in England, and the political instability of post-revolution France, it had gained equality and polity at the price of real freedom. Separation from their fellow citizens was encouraging Americans to expect nothing from each other, 'confining him in the solitude of his own heart'. Tocqueville emphasised the importance of associational life and exchanging views, interests and ideas to help individuals find some context in which they might be fulfilled. For him, it is less important to make civil society a means of generating knowledge than it is to make it meaningful as it passes among people.

Habermas combined this thinking on the process of sharing knowledge among autonomous individuals with a Gramscian inspired notion of finding a space in civil society to articulate social conflict. In his theory of **communicative action**, Habermas suggests that civil society could form a kind of **procedural rationality**. In this, equal participants take part in a cooperative search for truth; the strength of an argument (the effectiveness with which evidence is used) is the only factor influencing the course of a discussion. Habermas puts forward that 'new social movements' should be seen as agents of communicative rationality, embodying a process that can bring about change in the public sphere. He draws a link directly between the ability of civil society organisations to bring about change, and their ability to follow the proper procedure for generating rational knowledge (Flyvberg, 2001 and Habermas, 1984). Habermas argues that both validity and truth are ensured when the participants in a discourse respect five key requirements of discourse ethics: generality, autonomy, ideal role taking, power neutrality and transparency.

This emphasis on procedure was later criticised for placing too much emphasis on the conditions for rational discourse within civil society, and not enough on the process of discourse itself. In arguing that 'power is exercised rather than possessed', Foucault suggested that understanding the influence of civil society was not to track the effect of each individual or organisation, but to understand its place in a complex strategic situation. Understanding how power works is a prerequisite for action and influence, and many within civil society are specially positioned to build this understanding, which is most readily accessible in local situations 'on the ground'. Foucault warns us against viewing knowledge and power as constitutive of each other: knowledge works on the self as much as it may enable a shift in power with others, and having knowledge will not necessarily make a person or an organisation influential.

So, Foucault provides a valuable caveat for a study such as this: 'to respect rationalism as an ideal should never constitute a blackmail to prevent the analysis of the rationalities really at work' (Flyvberg, 2001). Underpinning this paper is the idea that improving the use of evidence by CSOs will improve their ability to influence policy and, in turn, the success of development policy itself. However, it is necessary constantly to address the question of what constitutes evidence, as formed within a particular social, political and economic context. Across the developed and developing world, opinions of what 'counts' as evidence vary hugely, as do the ways evidence is expressed and manner of access to the means to 'prove your point'. The diversities and inequalities within international development remind us that issues of representation, power and voice will exist alongside 'rational' debates on the quality and use of evidence. Bearing this in mind, we turn now from the social theory of civil society to the ways in which the idea has been brought to life in the context of international development.

3.2   Civil society in international development

In recent years, the notion of 'civil society' has gathered huge momentum in international development, becoming a focal point for a wealth of literature, conferences, funding and policy initiatives. Writers such as Edwards, Lewis, Fowler, Van Rooy, Keane, O'Brien, Salamon and Kaldor, to name but a few, have joined a growing literature on the subject. Whereas earlier social theory, as we have seen, tended to situate civil society in opposition to the modern nation state, debates over civil society in development have built on this thinking to ask how civil society relates to the state in a global context, converging with streams of thinking around social capital, modernity and globalisation (See, for example, work by Florini, John, Kasfir and Khargram).

A central question has been whether the notion of civil society, originally coined in the West, has relevance any analytic value in developing countries. Some question the applicability of the concept in the South. For example, the Comaroffs (1999) suggest that the concept of civil society should be

widened to include involuntary membership and kinship relations in a Southern context (Lewis, 2001). Some have suggested that the term 'non-governmental public action' denotes a less Western-centric idea, with greater scope for bringing into view action which takes place outside formal organisational structures – in networks, associations and partnerships.[4] Questions have been raised as to how constructive changes in terminology have been, with Van Rooy suggesting that civil society has become an 'analytic hatstand' on which donors can opportunistically place any number of ideas around politics, organisation and citizenship (Van Rooy, 1999).

With the increase of donor-funded programmes for civil society, so speculation has grown on how civil society may be 'useful to act with' as well as 'useful to think with' (Lewis, 2001; Howell and Pearce, 2002). Some have suggested that donor support has undermined the independence of CSOs, encouraging them to court funding by allowing their programmes to be patronised.[5] These concerns have coincided with growing pressure on the NGO community to justify its role, improve accountability and inspect any claims to 'represent' poor people. There has been a tendency for the shift in terminology, from NGO to CSO, to invest organisations with a greater power to promote democracy, as well as greater connectedness with 'global flows' of power and information (Gaventa, 1999; Appadurai, 1996). Discussions of social capital have begun to emphasise the intrinsic value (as well as the instrumental impact) of CSOs, arguing that civil society organisations create connections among actors which increase the stock of trust and exchange of information, facilitating cooperation in society (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). A substantial literature has emerged tracing this phenomenon in a myriad of development contexts.[6] With the emergence of 'transnational' CSO networks forging these connections at a global level, Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor (2001) have argued that *global civil society* is now an empirical, as well as a discursive and conceptual reality.

This empirical reality is not to be underestimated. Although figures vary, there is no question that the last 40 years has seen an explosion in NGO activity, which has been widely extrapolated to the civil society sector as a whole. At a national level, for example, Bolivia saw the number of registered NGOs rise from 100 in 1980 to over 1,000 in 1999 (Kohl, 2002). The non-profit sector now provides 40% of all healthcare and education services in Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya. Major INGOs, such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Oxfam and Christian Aid, have seen their membership grow exponentially over the last 10 years. Worldwide, 90% of currently registered NGOs have formed since 1970 (Edwards, 2004).

Recent development policy initiatives have sought to harness this groundswell of NGO activity, capitalising on the detailed understanding of local relationships and institutional practices held by many CSO groups. The Drivers of Change initiative (ODI), for example, has focused on the complex relations of CSOs with other state and private organisations, in order better to identify the mechanics of development change within a political economy. Sector Investment Programmes have, along with PRSPs, emphasised the role of CSOs in securing broad-based country ownership of investment programmes.

As this tide of non-profit activity becomes ever more diverse, active and widespread, the literature has made efforts to chart its significance. A number of authors have started to map the progress and impact of civil society organisations. We shall turn to their work in the next section.

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4 The ESRC is currently running a new research programme on Non-Governmental Public Action.
5 Diane Stone, personal communication.
6 A great number of texts on this subject are available, with abstracts, from the World Bank: http://www.worldbank.org/poverty /scapital/index.htm.

3.3   Explanations of CSO policy influence

The complex and fluid nature of the civil society sector has made tracking its influence a challenging task. Current thinking has essentially moved from models of influence derived from debates on categorising CSOs, to models oriented around the activities that CSOs undertake and strategies that they use.

CSO influence explained by the 'level' at which they work

In the mid-1990s, many writers based their explanations of how CSOs created influence around the typologies they used to divide the sector. CSOs were often categorised by 'level' – authors sorted them according to whether they worked locally, nationally or globally, and argued that this structured their influence on policy processes. Macdonald (1997), for instance, suggests that INGOs, NGOs and popular organisations work in distinct, if overlapping, arenas, which confer each group with particular roles, capacities and responsibilities. INGOs, for example, often run the risk of dominating Southern partners with whom they work at local level, as a result of their superior resources. Local organisations may have a detailed tacit understanding of the communities in which they work, but national groups may have greater success in synthesising their interests and representing them to others. Fisher (1998) makes a similar distinction, dividing CSOs into 'grassroots organisations' (GSOs), 'grassroots support organisations' (GRSOs) and networks between these groups (GSO networks and GRSO networks). The level at which they work affects the way groups must balance three factors affecting their policy influence: i) financial autonomy; ii) mediating between a mass base and policymakers; and iii) capacity building led by the grassroots.

Although a distinction among local, national and global groups may be a neat schematic division, it may have relatively little explanatory power. It is not true that INGOs are always better resourced or more dominating than local groups. National groups do not always succeed in gathering the views of diverse groups within a population. It may be that differences in the level at which CSOs work is more of a symptom than a cause of differences in policy influence. Gaventa (1999) argues that convenient divisions between these parts of the sector actually inhibit the learning that can take place across them. He suggests that NGOs and community-based organisations in fact face very similar problems, and would increase their ability to influence policy processes if they drew lessons from between organisations in the North and South. Lewis (1999) makes a similar point, arguing that NGOs and non-profit organisations have existed in parallel universes of literature and learning whose problems will not be fully tackled until they converge. To put it another way, creating false divisions within a sector which is inherently interconnected risks undermining our understanding of how these organisations operate as part of civil society itself.

CSO influence explained by political context

If a focus on level was too simplistic, other writers moved to explain CSO influence through the building block of many debates on the nature of civil society and its relationship to the state. Grugel (1999), for example, argues that the political context in which CSOs operate at local, regional or international levels will condition the extent to which organisations can influence policy. Comparing examples from Europe, Africa and Asia, she suggests that the influence of CSOs will grow in inverse proportion to the influence of the state, directly corresponding to the relationship they hold with state actors. Writers such as Rojas (1999) have argued that CSOs' position in opposition to the state has led them to embody particular social political values, suggesting that the notion of 'sustainable development' was the 'legitimate and true expression' of the sector. Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor (2001) suggest that global civil society has an intrinsic moral position, as 'its

strength lies in its ability to call power-holders to account, thus inching the world towards greater parity, openness and humility'. They posit civil society not against the state, but against the complex flows of power emerging in a globalised world. They do acknowledge that civil society can also be 'uncivil' – responsible for violence, conflict and inequality, which is far from their ideal model (see Hyden, Court and Mease, 2004).

However, their notion of how an 'uncivil' civil society exists seems to be somewhat at odds with their central notion of what civil society does. They suggest that 'uncivil' actions emerge when groups become estranged and disconnected from their political contexts – when they are no longer part of society in the round. Writers such as Keane (2003) have suggested that civil society may encompass intrinsically critical elements which advance their own interests at the expense of 'the public good', and which yet remain very much part of global society at large. Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor place social cohesion at the heart of their definition of the sector, which might be said to emphasise more 'cooperative' CSOs at the expense of more 'self-interested' ones.

Other authors have emphasised the role of civil society sector as an independent, autonomous entity. Edwards (2004), for example, argues that the mandate of many CSOs to build social cohesion at the community level places limits on their role as a political player. Suggesting that 'while trust may be the lubricant of civil society, hypocrisy is the Vaseline of political influence', Edwards proposes that, as part of their role in opposition to structures of power, CSOs are often also in opposition to politics. He argues that many CSOs choose not to engage with politics (or indeed policymaking) because this would compromise their independent status and ability to provide an alternative to state-led resources. This kind of contribution to society may conflict with a vision of CSOs as contributing to social cohesion. Edwards suggests that their separation from society may make some CSOs 'uncivil', and yet may allow them to make a very valuable contribution to public life, as they develop alternative approaches to issues and alternative ways of living.

The problem of how to engage with politics has become a key challenge for many NGOs as they strive to clarify and legitimate their role in development. While some NGO groups have lost popularity when they have become too partisan, steering a course through the pitfalls of party politics and the intrinsically political nature of some NGO work has become a feature of NGO efforts to negotiate their relationship with government.

Coston (1998) has proposed a typology of NGO relationships with government, in order to help establish how the political relationships of CSOs affect the influence they can have on policy processes. She identifies eight types of relationship, from those with the maximum 'distance' from government to those where organisations are able to 'link' philosophically in order to accomplish shared goals. Each different type: i) repression; ii) rivalry; iii) competition; iv) contracting; v) third-party government; vi) cooperation; vii) complementarity; and viii) collaboration, is associated with specific forms of NGO policy influence. These range from NGOs being wholly alienated from formal policy processes and concentrating on what they can achieve on their own terms, to NGOs whose arguments are so closely aligned with those of government that they are simply pushing at an open door.

The specific political relationships of CSOs undoubtedly lead organisations to act, and exert influence, in very different ways. Whether responding to the agenda of others or creating their own impetus for action, having an instrumental or expressive focus, or acting on the margins or in the mainstream, the significance of CSOs is often bound up with the specific activities they undertake. Several theorists have attempted to explain the influence of CSOs in terms of the roles they take up and the tactics they employ.

CSO influence explained by their activities

Lewis (2001) describes how explaining CSO influence through CSO activity avoids the problems earlier writers have had after taking Western models of civil society as their starting point. This focus avoids assuming that CSOs must be volunteeristic, be made up of free associations, or take specific political positions. Analysis based on CSO activities has also been successful in translating an understanding of policy influence into practical steps that CSOs can take to increase it.

Najam (1999), for example, identifies five roles which a CSO can take up, defined by its activities, as:

- **Monitor**, with the function of keeping policy 'honest'.
- **Advocate**, lobbying directly for the policy options they prefer or against those they oppose.
- **Innovator**, developing and demonstrating ways of doing things differently and highlighting the policy value of being missed by options that are not adopted or considered.
- **Service provider**, directly acting to fulfil a service need, especially to the marginalised and underserved.
- **Capacity builder**, providing support to communities or other CSOs.

These can operate during four different components of the policy process: in the agenda setting, policy development, implementation, or monitoring and evaluation phase. The roles that CSOs take up, and the parts of the policy process in which they play them, can form a matrix onto which it is possible to map specific CSOs (ibid). This allows for direct comparison of the influence of organisations working in very different arenas on very different issues.

Keck and Sikkick (1998) also provide two axes on which to compare CSOs (tactics and motivations), in their case focusing on transnational advocacy networks. First, they identify four different tactics which groups can use to illicit political influence:

i) **Information politics**: The ability quickly and credibly to generate politically usable information and move it to where it will have most impact.

ii) **Symbolic politics**: The ability to call up on symbols, actions or stories that make sense of a situation for an audience that is frequently far away.

iii) **Leverage politics**: The ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence.

iv) **Accountability politics**: The effort to hold powerful actors to their previously stated policies or principles.

Secondly, they separate groups by their motivations:

i) Those with **instrumental goals**.

ii) Those motivated primarily by **shared causal ideas**.

iii) Those motivated primarily by **shared principled ideas or values**.

Whereas Najam examines the function provided in the policy process against the part of the policy process in which this works, Keck and Sikkick examine political tactics in the policy process against their motivations. These two schemas have clear similarities. They both reduce the influence of CSOs to how to apply a set of tools (functions or tactics in the policy process) to a particular problem (how to influence a part of the policy process or to fulfil a motivation). We could say that Najam defines the tools and the problem from the point of view of policymakers, whereas Keck and Sikkick define them from the perspective of CSOs. In both instances, the key ideas are very similar.

CSO influence explained by sources of legitimacy

These models also bear a close resemblance to Brown's schema of CSO legitimacy (2001). Brown suggests that CSOs can develop legitimacy of four kinds:

- **Moral**: A CSO can ground its claim to legitimacy in transcendent moral values that have overwhelming force in the circumstance.

- **Technical or performance**: A second basis for legitimacy of CSOs is a claim to expertise, knowledge, information or competence that justifies its actions and its influence on authoritative decisions.

- **Political**: Other civil society actors claim legitimacy on political grounds, such as democratic representativeness, participation, transparency, and accountability to constituencies for which they speak or act.

- **Legal**: Another base for legitimacy is in compliance with legal expectations, requirements, and mandates set up by duly constituted authorities.

Brown argues that CSOs can build each of these forms of legitimacy as they improve the quality of their various activities. Other things being equal, greater moral, technical, political or legal legitimacies confer on CSOs the tools to develop policy influence. They create a space for CSOs to relate with other actors. In Brown's work, the factors underpinning CSO legitimacy and CSO influence seem very similar.

Another interesting implication arising from Brown's work is that the use of evidence is one way to demonstrate – and in some cases enhance – legitimacy. Although he discusses how the different kinds of legitimacy must be 'proved' to various groups in different ways, it is unclear exactly what kinds of evidence must be used in what kind of ways to achieve this. This is an issue taken up recently by Van Rooy (2004). She outlines the 'game' of legitimacy into which CSOs must enter to participate in processes of global governance. While playing a small role in terms of moral, political and legal legitimacy, the key area for evidence (and particularly research-based evidence) seems to concern technical or performance legitimacy.

In the next section, we hope to elucidate these links among CSO legitimacy, use of evidence and policy influence.

4. How CSOs use evidence to influence policy processes

4.1 The policy cycle

Following Lasswell (1977), the most common approach to the study of public policy disaggregates the process into a number of functional components. These can be mapped onto an idealised model of the policy cycle (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 The policy cycle
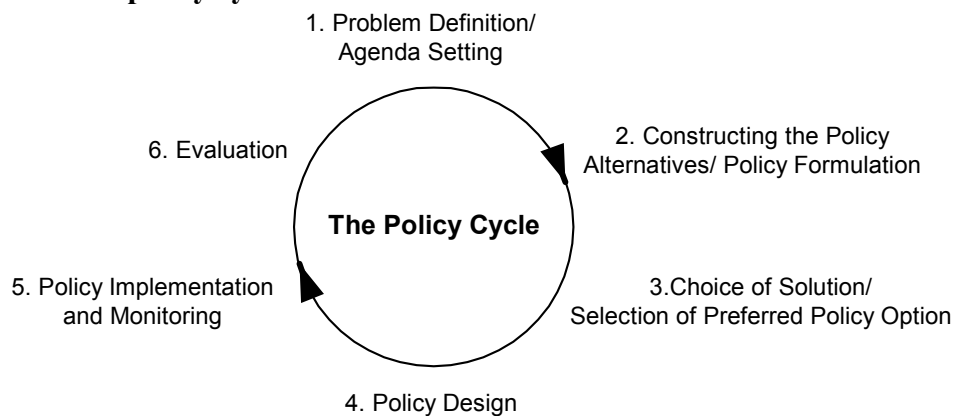
Source: Young and Quinn (2002).

While policymaking may not in reality work logically through these stages, this model does provide a useful entry point for thinking about how CSOs may influence different parts of the process.[7] If policy processes tend to have similar functional elements, it is likely that CSOs will impact upon their various aspects in different ways. It may well be that success in influencing an agenda, for example, often requires a different kind of approach than influencing the implementation of policy does.

For the purposes of this paper, the functions of the policy processes are simplified into four categories:

- Problem identification and agenda setting
- Formulation and adoption
- Implementation
- Monitoring and evaluation (and reformulation)

These four functions will be used to organise the literature in this section. In each part, we will map the specific issues that arise as CSOs use evidence to influence different parts of the policy process. We hope through this to identify how CSOs might maximise their chances of policy impact.

4.2 Identifying problems and setting the agenda

In order to introduce a problem to the policy agenda – or 'turn the problem into an issue' (Young and Quinn, 2002: 13) – it is necessary to convince the relevant policy actors that the problem is important. For many CSOs, being part of setting the policy agenda allows them to play to their strengths. CSOs with practical experience are often in an excellent position to crystallise and

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7 For a fuller discussion of the policy cycle, see www.odi.org.uk/rapid.

articulate the problems facing the ordinary people with whom they work. The key issues often deal with how to 'package up' CSO understanding of development problems and how to communicate effectively in order to gather momentum.

Building awareness

CSOs have played a critical role in fostering individuals and knowledge, which can eventually lead to incremental policy changes or create policy windows. Whether they instigate opportunities directly, respond to them, or simply lay their foundations, to create policy windows CSOs must be adept at understanding and negotiating the contexts in which they work. In the long term, the role that many CSOs play in education may develop a well informed community, with the capacity to pinpoint and articulate development problems in the future (Arko-Cobbah, 2004). For example, Arko-Cobbah argues that libraries in South Africa have been important repositories for information on good governance, maintaining the possibility for policy shift as enthusiasm on the subject waxes and wanes.

CSOs can also be much more proactive in creating policy opportunities. Falobi (2000) documents the contribution of Journalists Against Aids, working in Nigeria to highlight the urgent need to address issues around the disease. The work was successful in identifying the problem to both policymakers and the general public, because of the way the group combined personal testimonies with macro-level analysis – emphasising both the gravity of the situation and the opportunity for action. Combining personal and wider social analysis was also effective for the Addis Ababa Muslim Women's Council, working to raise awareness of women's rights in Ethiopia. Mohammed (2003) notes that their meticulous community-based research was matched by detailed engagement with the text of the Qu'ran on the rights of women. Equipping women with this knowledge at community workshops helped them to raise the issues with their families, communities and Sharia courts. A very similar tactic was used by the Aga Khan network, working to raise the standards of education for Muslims in Kenya. They used a combination of two arguments: i) that the Qu'ran should inspire action for social inclusion; and ii) that inadequate pre-school education for Sunni Muslims was leaving them poorly equipped for formal teaching.[8]

In these instances, it seems that established issues, knowledge and understanding can constitute an important lever for bringing new issues to the fore. Ideology, religious beliefs and mainstream views can work in tandem with more challenging ideas, 'piggybacking' on the respectability of the former.

Framing the terms and mobilising opinion

CSOs can be key agents in coining or popularising a particular vocabulary within policy debates. Shaping terminology is often more than just wordplay: it can be critical to ensuring which ideas and interests are noted and which are not. Roe (1991), among others, has emphasised the importance of 'policy narratives' from a theoretical perspective. Thompson and Dart (2004) use the case of welfare reform in Canada to illustrate this point. They argue that, through the discourses that they use, CSOs have framed the 'subjects' that social policy is intended to benefit, thereby framing the ultimate trajectory of this policy.

Many religious CSOs take this further, using language derived from spiritual sources to emphasise a moral dimension in policy agendas. They can create ideas that carry a sense of morality in policy

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[8] See: http://www.akdn.org/

debates without alienating those who do not share their religious derivation (Omar, 2004). Hutanuwatr and Rasbach (2004) suggest that Buddhist values provide an alternative to modernising development agendas, offering a conceptual basis on which self-reliant, non-violent communities can form.

The concepts which underlie CSOs can be critical in inspiring and energising its members. It seems here that the communication of evidence, rather than its empirical basis, is the critical factor for policy influence. Whether sparking a trend or creating a vantage point within a long-running discussion, the key is to coin phrases and ideas which have resonance within a particular social context.

Crystallising the agenda

Some policy processes are tied to specific institutional arrangements through which agendas must formally be set. When it comes to interfacing with complex bureaucracies, donors and governments, the importance of evidence in the work of CSOs comes quickly to the fore. Many writers are particularly pessimistic about the ability of CSOs to influence 'high' policy agendas. Brock and McGee (2004), for example, suggest that trade policy processes are so dominated by the liberalisation ideology of donors that CSOs lose any legitimacy in discussions around the agenda as soon as they begin to question it. The value placed on donor 'coordination and convergence' is used to sideline CSOs from agenda setting unless they bolster the consensus view. Cornwall and Gaventa (2001) note that knowledge derived from more academic sources is privileged against that from CSOs involved in the practical provision of services. There is a dilemma here as to whether CSOs should respond to this by using more academic evidence in their work to bolster the credibility, or find other ways to capture their practical expertise as evidence in a more credible way.

CSOs involved in service provision often fail to interpret and apply their work in a way that could reframe policy problems. Pettifor (2004) has argued that this places a particular impetus on the importance of analysing evidence well. She explained the success of the Jubilee 2000 campaign in raising the issue of debt relief through its ability to 'cut the diamond' of evidence − amassing a substantial volume of data and being able to present it in a way which makes the policy implications clear. It may be that the amount of evidence needed to change an agenda is directly proportional to how radical this change may be.

When CSOs are specifically mandated to influence agenda setting, however, they may find more success. Many poverty reduction strategy processes have made explicit attempts to fold CSOs into the ways in which problems are framed and the selection of which issues to address. Participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) have been reasonably successful in working towards this (Pollard, 2004). In both Rwanda and Kyrgyzstan, PPAs were undertaken by CSOs commissioned by the government. Both documents were very successful in setting the agenda for poverty reduction in an evidence-based way. In Rwanda, a CSO facilitated the 'Ubdbeme' initiative as an action research tool. This was based on traditional Rwandan practice of community self-help, and became a central feature of the PRS. In Kyrgyzstan, CSOs gained access to communities usually sceptical of government officials, gathering rich data on poverty in the country. In both cases, these documents became key reference points, against which the success of the PRS was later measured (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001). These examples make clear that the question of whether CSO research is influential or not may be a question of whether or not they are included in policy processes and can respond accordingly.

It seems different tactics are effective when CSOs are deliberately incorporated into the *process* of agenda setting, and when they are not. When the contribution of CSOs is already written into the

policy process, their work seems most effective when it is demonstrably rigorous, with an explicit method of synthesising public interests and views (see Keck and Sikkick, 1998). When CSOs must compete to influence agendas, this empirical quality is perhaps less meaningful than the way they package their work. Those aiming to make more radical changes to mainstream agendas may need to make special efforts to be explicitly systematic and empirically rigorous, whereas those closely aligned with dominant views may need to position their work particularly delicately in a political context.

4.3   Influencing the formulation and adoption of policy

For many CSOs, involvement in the formulation and adoption of policy is central to a mandate of 'representing' the interests and view of poor people. CSOs are often key in both outlining the different policy options and deciding between them. This role gives them status as 'democratic' actors. But why should the views of CSOs be taken into account? The major issue is how CSOs can hold a legitimate place in the eyes of policymakers, and also in the eyes of the communities that they 'represent'.

Another important set of issues concerns the political context within which CSOs operate. There is increasing democratisation in many countries at the macro level, and many governments see CSOs as a legitimate and helpful partner. However, the context is also much less favourable in many countries and CSO activity may be actively discouraged. CSOs will need to respond differently depending on the macro context as well as the specific policy stance a government takes on a specific issue.

Working from 'outside the tent' [9]

Some CSOs work as mediators, influencing the formulation of policy by influencing the process in which it is formed. Van der Linde and Naylor (1999) use the example of Kenya's Nairobi Peace Initiative to demonstrate the value of having an independent agent who can facilitate dialogue between two warring factions. This informal network of NGOs was able to act as a go-between, using its tacit knowledge of the area sensitively to disseminate examples of inter-community cooperation in order to create a process for rebuilding peace. This kind of advocacy work was less successful in Israel, where NGOs used a similar technique to mediate between Bedouin people and those legislating against their rights to land (Greenspan, 2004). Greenspan describes how, despite their best efforts to act in a transparent, impartial manner, the evidence used by NGOs became so politicised that it no longer held any weight in policy discussions. In other circumstances, the political nature of evidence was critical in making it influential. An Indonesian CSO, lobbying to reformulate the government's birth control programme into a family welfare programme, deliberately integrated its findings on the effectiveness of this approach with passages from the Qu'ran and Hadith. This inflected the proposal with a call to respect the interests of the Muslim majority, who had recently been under pressure from Christian, Confucian, Hindu and Buddhist groups. Drawing out the political aspect of this evidence made it more attractive for the government, because they could act upon it as a statement of support for Muslims (Candland and. Nurjanah, 2004).

Some moves towards participatory policymaking – involving local communities in decisions which will affect them – have had more influence 'outside the tent' than inside, where they were originally directed. Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (2002) note that efforts to engage civil society participation in

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9 Maxwell uses the phrases 'inside the tent' and 'outside the tent' to indicate who is a key actor in formulation discussions.

macroeconomic policy have often had more success as an education process (for both civil society and policymakers), than as a means for civil society to contribute ideas which directly shape policy. The influence of civil society is 'softer', raising issues in the minds of policymakers but leaving it to them to interpret how these confer specific policy options. This kind of influence is difficult to gauge, which has made the monitoring of participative practices problematic and their accountability challenging (Driscoll, Christiansen and Jenks, 2004). Schusterman et al (2002) suggests that accountability problems are underscored by the difficulties in getting the full range of community members to take part in participative formulation processes. Working on an IIED project in Buenos Aires, Schusterman notes that most marginalised groups were loath to participate unless they could see the tangible and immediate benefits of doing so. However, the process of attempting to illicit their participation did improve their awareness of the issues and was useful as a kind of education exercise. It seems that initiatives to include civil society in the formulation of policy can in fact be influential in other ways.

To influence formulation from 'outside the tent' CSOs must often be persuasive to policymakers and local people simultaneously. Where there is a specific need to act and appear independent, tacit knowledge can be a valuable tool for negotiating complex situations. Sometimes, CSOs may influence the course of events in ways they did not originally intend. Here, knowledge is not exactly used as evidence (in a deliberate and persuasive way) by CSOs, but does create opportunities for individuals to apply it as they choose.

Working from 'inside the tent'

When CSOs have become formal participants in the formulation and adoption of policy, a number of questions have been raised over whether they are 'too close for comfort' to government and donors, who often control the terms of that engagement (Lewis, 1999). Hulme and Edwards (1997) suggest that when bilateral and multilateral donors provide funding for CSOs, and place these same CSOs at the centre of their 'good governance' work, CSOs quickly start to justify their position in terms of ideology rather than any empirical verification of their legitimacy or performance. Huddock (2000) and Ottaway and Carothers (2000) have argued that those CSOs selected to take part in formulation processes tend to be those whose political sympathies and approaches are already well aligned with donors, limiting the extent to which they influence policy in any meaningful way. The funding structures of CSOs seem to be a critical issue here. Ottaway and Carothers (2000) point out that donor efforts to 'strengthen' the capacity of CSOs to participate in formulating their assistance programmes often risk undermining the legitimacy on which their inclusion is premised. Lewis (1999) concurs that the pressures of maintaining good relations with donors when part of formulation processes can divert NGOs from their primary task of demonstrating accountability to those whose interests they are supposed to advance. While 10% of NGOs working with DFID claimed directly to 'represent' the South, most others staked their legitimacy on the basis of links to, and experience of, the South. However, their focus on being part of DFID policy formulation has meant that evaluation of their work has been developed to satisfy DFID priorities, while evaluation of their work as advocacy for others has been scarce.

Evidence may be a useful tool for dealing with these issues. Aart Scholte et al. (1998) found that the WTO had a definite bias towards CSOs that conformed to the institution, neglecting its reformist and radical critics to maintain an artificially positive view of its policies. There were, however, some CSOs which, despite their radical stances, backed up their views with systematic, rigorous and accessible evidence. These organisations were an influential minority, which the WTO would seek out as representatives of dissenting views. It may be that CSOs can adjust their use of evidence to carve out a specific role within the formulation process.

Malena (2000) suggests that NGOs working with the World Bank fall into one of four categories: 'beneficiaries', 'mercenaries', 'missionaries' or 'revolutionaries'. Each of these is involved for different reasons and can use evidence to illicit influence in different ways. Those who take very adversarial positions (the revolutionaries) may do well if they make their views accessible through provision of thorough and indisputable evidence. While their views may not be directly represented in policy, they form a 'reference point' in the debate which sets the parameters within which policy will form. Those whose interests are closely aligned with the Bank (the beneficiaries) may seek to highlight the political aspects of evidence – acknowledging their stake in it and the potential for it to be disputed, in order to avoid being accused of exploiting their opportunities.

Some policy processes, notably PRSPs, explicitly require civil society to be involved in the formulation process. CSOs have often been critical agents in facilitating this. To take just one example from the PRSP literature, during the first Bolivian PRS the Catholic Church organised a large consultation exercise, 'Jubilee 2000', which was highly successful in engaging the public with formulation issues (Driscoll, Christiansen and Jenks, 2004). Within Bolivia's diverse and fractious civil society, the Church was one of the few organisations that held widespread credibility and respect. Strong links with local communities and with the government allowed it to generate high-quality, well evidenced contributions to debates on PRS formulation, which were successful in feeding into the strategy. Scale and rigour may not, however, always be enough to allow consultations to influence formulation processes. Maglio and Keppke (2004) describe how almost 360 activities, involving 10,000 participants, failed to influence the process of Strategic Regional Plans in São Paulo. While these events were extremely effective in galvanising the energies of the CSO community, they did not capture the imagination of elites and those from the economic and business communities. Elite groups acted through their traditional lobby in the City Council, where policies were officially approved and enacted. The absence of elites from the CSO activities undermined the credibility of these consultations – which had staked their claim to legitimacy on gathering public opinion in a fully comprehensive way. Instead, the consultations became simply political representations of the interests of CSO groups, which eroded their legitimacy as part of the *process* of policy formulation.

These examples demonstrate that, even where some kind of evidence is used to try to generate CSO policy influence, it does not follow that this will happen – or, if policy does change, that it will be pro-poor. It may not even strengthen the accountability of CSOs to the poor. Evidence can be a critical means to create 'reference points' for arguments within a debate but, overall, the important factor in whether CSOs can use evidence to influence policy here is how well they are integrated within a policy process. A CSO which uses evidence in a rigorous and robust way may increase its chances of being included, but it may need to provide evidence of its political position as much as its competence.

If political use of evidence matters as much as technical use, CSOS are bound to face dilemmas when there is a trade-off between promoting positions that are based strictly on the evidence and those that may not be as supported, or at all supported, by evidence but which fit with political reality. In sum, there may be trade-offs between influence and evidence-based influence. The nature of the political context is crucial to CSO strategy.

4.4   Influencing the implementation of policy

Many CSOs directly influence the implementation of policy, being the primary agents responsible for instituting policy shift and making it a reality 'on the ground'. They may be commissioned as 'service providers' by governments or donors, or they may work independently. CSOs can also

provide valuable expertise to other agencies responsible for implementing policies. In all of these cases, evidence may be a valuable tool for making the implementation of policy more effective.

Providing services

Providing services is one of the most widespread and also the most controversial parts of the sector's work. CSOs are often well placed to provide key services like health and education and replace the state – particularly where states are weak and/or where CSOs have embedded relationships at community level. There is, of course, huge diversity in the sector, and many CSOs will not have the resources or connections to provide services effectively.

The idea that providing services brings CSOs closer to local communities has been widely criticised. A host of authors argue that when CSOs enter into contractual agreements to provide services with governments or donors, they cater their activities to these interests rather than to those of local communities (for example, Clayton, Oakley and Taylor, 2000; Cooley and Ron, 2003). Foweraker (2001) has argued that even if CSOs have been successful in providing services to small areas, they may face problems in scaling these up or implementing services outside any immediate community in which they have roots.

Both Foweraker (2001) and Robinson and White (1998) argue that governments should make better efforts to capitalise on the experience of CSOs in policy – creating an 'enabling environment' where their expertise in implementation is translated into shifts in the agenda, formulation and evaluation of policy. Mismatch between the implementation of services and the other parts of the policy process is a major source of frustration for many CSOs. Although CSOs have a great direct influence on policy as a course of action, this work is often disconnected from any influence over policy as a plan of action. CSOs often find problems in translating their practical knowledge and experience into evidence which can inform the shape and direction of future policy. If the expertise of CSOs in service provision were properly capitalised on as evidence, it could improve the value of other CSO work and the effectiveness of policy.

Technical assistance

Many CSOs do not play a practical part in implementing policy themselves, but do offer technical advice and expertise on how it might be better implemented. Think tanks have become a growing part of this sector, often acting as a bridge between those with practical experience of implementation and those with responsibility for policymaking. Booth (2003) suggests that in Bolivia, the key to the success of the think tank sector has been in bridging these two communities. During the PRS process, several think tanks there mediated a rather antagonistic relationship between grassroots CSOs and government agencies. They have provided clear and independent explanations of the process for both groups, taking much of the heat from their discussions to isolate the key issues for debate. Their technical expertise, combined with their impartial political stance, allowed them to introduce more evidence into the public consultation process. Lewer (1999) warns that groups with access to 'technical' evidence must be careful not to create hierarchies that exclude other kinds of evidence, such as the views and experiences of local communities.

Issues of hierarchy often seem to arise around 'capacity building' efforts. These latter are another key way in which CSOs with technical expertise contribute to the implementation of policy – by facilitating the development of those CSOs that are responsible for implementation. Many capacity-building CSOs may shy away from aiming to 'influence policy' themselves – in this role, they work to facilitate the influence of others, not to steer what that influence might be. In the course of the

PRSP initiative, many INGOs have found this a challenging task. To take another example from Bolivia, INGOs came under great pressure to avoid 'interfering' with local politics while ensuring that local community monitoring systems were not dominated by patronage (Driscoll, Christiansen and Jenks, 2004). Here, it was difficult for INGOs to use their understanding of 'what works' in monitoring systems directly as evidence – to persuade a group of a specific course of action – as they were not seen as having a right to do this. Instead, this understanding had to be used in a tacit form, to underpin the process through which they worked and ensure that the appropriate parties had full information and opportunities to make decisions. Bebbington and Mitlin (1996) have suggested just this – that capacity building should be seen as neither a means nor an end, but as a process. This thinking underpins James' 'people-centred' approach to capacity building, focusing on the personal and cultural challenges involved to argue that technical 'experts' need to be more adept at *asking* questions, than at *knowing* the answers (James, 2002).

Those contributing to implementation through technical assistance must be as adept in using their knowledge in an appropriate way. To ensure that technical understanding does not dominate the knowledge of others, they must foster a 'learning approach', and be able to translate their expertise into tacit and implicit as well as explicit forms. These skills may help CSOs involved with technical assistance to negotiate delicate relationships in their work.

Independent action

Some CSOs have sidestepped all these problems by simply getting on with the job of changing their communities and paying no attention to whether this is acknowledged in 'official' policy spheres. Bayat (2000) notes that the most effective means for CSOs in the Middle East to change the course of events on the ground has been through direct action, as he puts it 'the quiet encroachment of the ordinary'. This has been far more successful than demand-led social movements, which have been dogged by clientelism and hierarchy. Bayat argues that direct action has created realities on the ground which authorities will 'sooner or later' have to adjust their policies to suit.

A similar case demonstrates how evidence may be important in improving the effectiveness of independent action. Young et al (2003) found that independent veterinarians working to provide illegal, but highly effective, animal care in Kenya relied heavily on sharing evidence to do their work. Workshops bringing together qualified vets with those with basic training were critical forums for sharing and solving problems, monitoring the success of the scheme and allowing it to grow. While sharing evidence was key in allowing the scheme to be effective, it did little to help it become legitimate, and policymakers were roundly dismissive of the initiative. Here, evidence was highly influential on policy as a course of action, but dislocated from policy as legislation, owing largely to the contextual factors at play. The key was not the academic evidence but the fact that vets had the opportunity to see something working with their own eyes. This convinced them to change practice, despite the fact that the activities were technically illegal. Eventually, the official policy community came to understand the value of the approach – although practices have still not been made legal.

This section brings out three broader points regarding evidence and policy implementation. First, expertise can help improve service delivery. Secondly, the sharing of experience on the ground – 'seeing is believing' – can be very convincing for policy change. Thirdly, there seems to be a need for more effective ways to link implementation experiences with other parts of the policy process.

4.5   Monitoring and evaluating policy

Evidence is an intrinsic element of monitoring and evaluation, which must invariably synthesise and analyse information to substantiate judgements on the successes and failures of policies. The effectiveness of CSOs in influencing evaluation processes depends on two factors: whether they can gather and use evidence to make a sound assessment of policy; and whether they can use evidence to demonstrate their legitimacy in doing this.

Promoting information availability and transparency

CSOs have a key role in making information on policy publicly available in an accessible format. Where they retain independence from the state, media organisations have often led the CSO community in this task. The internet has enabled groups such as One World and IPS[10] to become global hubs for the civil society media, publishing stories on a wide range of development issues and creating opportunities for both large and small groups to publish informative reports, commentaries and opinion pieces. Placing policy within the public domain has historically been the main contribution of the media to democracy and is fiercely protected by groups such as AMARC, the association for community radio broadcasters.[11] They have successfully used media campaigns to hold the Brazilian government to account over its closure of the Porto Alegre independent radio station. While the role of the media in monitoring is frequently asserted, there is a lack of research assessing its impact in any systematic manner on policy.[12]

Those CSOs more oriented around research have often played a part in synthesising information so that it can be used as evidence. Tracing the success of Mexican activists in critiquing the World Bank, Fox (2001) argues that the lack of good-quality information on institutional performance has allowed independent advocacy groups to gain great leverage through their own monitoring work. The PRSP synthesis project (ODI) has also developed a strong base of users and become widely cited, by filling a gap left by donors, governments and civil society groups in-country. Arguably, these other agents have too much of a stake in the initiative to provide independent, crosscutting analysis on its progress as a whole. Here, the independence of CSOs and combined reputable expertise are critical to the success in monitoring (PRSP Monitoring and Synthesis Project, 2004). There are numerous other agencies, often based in the North, which provide centres for monitoring information.[13] One of the most successful has been the International Budget Project (IBP), which helps to facilitate CSOs in developing countries to analyse and influence budgets. To take one example of their work, the IBP was used to publish a comprehensive review and analysis of the Kenyan budget process undertaken by CSOs, finding the process to be in need of review.[14] The detailed plan of action proposed was widely cited and discussed, and seems to have made a modest but tangible contribution to future budget work. The IBP's method of publishing information and sharing tools regarding how to go about monitoring practices demonstrates the link between the task of making monitoring transparent, and that of making it participative.

Promoting transparency depends on a CSO's ability to use clear, conclusive and easily accessible evidence which explicitly proves a point to a wide audience. Policy impact depends on how far the evidence is communicated – when an issue is highly 'exposed' in itself, this creates pressure for

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10 One World is a consortium of CSOs which gathers news from 1,500 organisations worldwide. IPS is the largest reporter of global issues. It is a network of journalists in more than 100 countries, with satellite communication links to 1,200 outlets.
11 See http://www.ipsnews.net/interna.asp?idnews=24991.
12 Kitty Warnock, Panos, in conversation.
13 See http://www.bond.org.uk/advocacy/monitorself.html for links to some key projects.
14 See http://www.internationalbudget.org/resources/library/Kenyatransp.pdf.

change. High exposure is likely to come from an agency which is well networked, reputable, and of high status. These agencies can act as conduits for less resourced CSOs.

Participative monitoring

While promoting transparency is perhaps most effectively performed by large 'elite' CSOs – the best networked media organisations and the most reputable research groups – a much wider variety of groups can be successful in 'participatory monitoring'. Participation in monitoring and evaluation has been a relatively recent addition to the 'participation paradigm' that has gained momentum in development in recent years (Driscoll, Christiansen and Jenks, 2004). It builds on the work of trade unions, which have a long history of evaluating policy through stakeholders.[15] Some have argued that when CSOs are involved in evaluation, they will find greater parity with those who contract them to provide services, increasing their ability to improve their work directly and reap the benefits of their experience (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001). A number of tools have been made available to help CSOs engage in this kind of activity, including guidelines, flow diagrams, case studies and facilitation exercises (Malena, 2004). The major difference between participatory monitoring and conventional evaluation techniques is that, in the former, local people collaborate with development agencies and policymakers to decide what constitutes successful policy, and what indicators might demonstrate this success (Guijt, 1998). This requires a greater emphasis on negotiation, learning and flexibility among these agents – which has translated into a focus on the process which must be undertaken to incorporate the views of different parties.

The key issues regarding whether CSOs are successful in influencing participatory monitoring seems to be around process and timing. Krafchik (2004) notes that, while civil society organisations are making effective contributions to the formulation of budgets in developing countries, the timing of auditing processes gives them little incentive to scrutinise these budgets once they are spent. Audit reports are usually presented two years after the close of the financial year, at a time when other budgeting issues compete for CSO attention. By this time, in the fluid structures of many CSOs, the relevant individual and institutional knowledge of this spending may have been lost. Driscoll, Christiansen and Jenks (2004) note similar issues around the participatory monitoring of PRSPs. As the initiative moves into the implementation phase, participatory evaluation techniques often pose new challenges for CSOs, donors and governments, which may not have engaged in such processes before. There are often problems around how to build the capacity of CSOs to participate in these processes without undermining the independence with which they do so. Driscoll, Christiansen and Jenks (2004) suggest that such initiatives be assessed as part of an iterative process, where shortcomings in initial evaluations may yet form a constructive base for the future.

If process is the key to participatory monitoring, the way to maximise CSOs' chances of influence may be to build good learning processes internally. Developing better institutional memory can be an effective means to ensure analysis, reference to, and follow-up of past events. This allows CSOs to draw on their full range of available knowledge, allowing it to be capitalised on as evidence.

Reflective practice

Another major theme in CSO influence of monitoring and evaluation is how these tools can be turned on CSOs themselves. As touched on earlier, the CSO sector, and particularly the NGOs within it, has come under increasing pressure to raise the standard of its own monitoring procedures – to become more accountable, pinpoint its legitimacy and work more effectively. This is a key

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15 See http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/english/agenda21chapter29.htm.

element to improving CSO work in service provision, but also to ensuring that work in advocacy and mediation is done on a sound basis. Many argue that the measurement and improvement of accountability goes hand-in-hand with the measurement and improvement of CSO influence. Lampkin (2004), for example, suggests explicitly that without mapping their sources of legitimacy, CSOs will not be able to attain influence on policy. Macdonald (1997) proposes that the sector develops 'fluid mechanisms for institutional authorisation', which may involve monitoring NGO representatives and holding them accountable. This is supposedly critical to the CSO's ability to evaluate the policies of others. Although all kinds of materials proliferate, providing tools for CSOs to set about their own evaluation, these may not be relevant for all CSOs (Green et al., 2001). Providing evidence of legitimacy seems to be critical to policy influence for many NGOs, often those working on advocacy – which need to demonstrate that their arguments are reflections of the interest groups whom they represent. This is critical for membership organisations, such as trade unions. It may also be critical for the effectiveness of CSOs working to provide services, which must be sure that they have the confidence of the communities they serve, and for the substantiation of the position of those which offer technical assistance, like think tanks, to show their advice is given on the basis of real expertise (Pettifor, 2004). In other circumstances, CSO influence is not necessarily contingent on providing any evidence that influence is deserved. In fact, some CSOs seem to manage rather well without it.

So, reflective practice may not necessarily determine whether CSOs will have influence, although it may help others determine how desirable they judge any influence to be. The key question then, is who is doing the judging. It may be that different kinds of evidence are required to legitimate CSO practice to different audiences and that, for some audiences, evidence is not necessarily important in the short term.

5. The RAPID framework

As we have seen throughout the previous sections, the factors underlying CSO policy influence compel these organisations to negotiate challenges at a number of levels. The issues underpinning research/policy linkages for CSOs lie within themes that are common to a range of actors in development work.

Through ongoing literature reviews, numerous case studies, and workshops with 'researchers' and 'policymakers', RAPID has developed a framework for understanding these thematic issues (see Figure 2). This outlines the various sets of factors which interrelate to promote (or hamper) bridges between research and policy (Crewe and Young, 2002). The framework is intended as a generic, perhaps ideal, model. In reality, the different spheres may overlap or disengage in a number of different configurations (Court, Hovland and Young, 2005). A brief explanation of each sphere is detailed below.

Figure 2 The RAPID framework
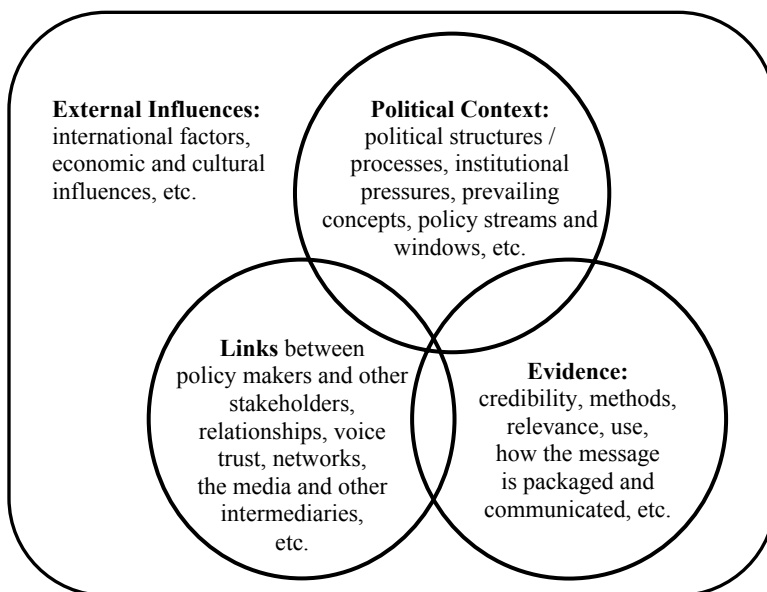
Source: Court, Hovland and Young (2005)

The political context: Political context is perhaps the most influential factor around research/policy linkages. There is a range of different aspects to the importance of context, not least the extent of civil and political freedoms in a country. The policy process and the production of research are in themselves political processes, from the initial agenda-setting exercise through to the final negotiation involved in implementation. Political contestation, institutional pressures and vested interests are highly significant. In addition, the attitudes and incentives among officials, their room for manoeuvre, local history, and power relations are especially influential as policy is implemented (Kingdon, 1984; Clay and Schaffer, 1984).

The evidence and communication: The quality of the research is clearly an important influence on whether it is taken up in policy. The influence of evidence is affected by its topical relevance, whether it is the 'solution to a problem' and, as importantly, the operational usefulness of an idea; it helps if a new approach has been piloted and the document can clearly demonstrate the value of a new option (Court and Young, 2003). Another set of issues here lies around communication. The sources and conveyors of information, and the way new messages are packaged (especially if they are couched in familiar terms) and targeted, can all make a big difference to how evidence is perceived and utilised. The key message is that communication is a very demanding process and it is best to take an interactive and continuous approach (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1998).

Links: The framework emphasises the importance of links: of communities, networks and intermediaries (e.g. the media and campaigning groups) in affecting policy change. Some of the current literature focuses explicitly on various types of networks, such as policy communities, (Pross, 1986), epistemic communities (Haas, 1991), and advocacy coalitions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999). While understanding remains limited, issues of trust, legitimacy, openness and formalisation of networks have emerged as important. Existing theory stresses the role of translators and communicators (Gladwell, 2000). It seems that there is often an under-appreciation of the extent to and ways in which intermediary organisations and networks impact on formal policy guidance documents, which in turn influence officials.

External influences: The framework emphasises the impact of external forces and donor actions on research/policy interactions. While many questions remain, key issues here include the impact of international politics and processes, as well as the impact of general donor policies and specific research-funding instruments. Broad incentives, such as EU Accession or the PRS process, can have a substantial impact on the demand for research by policymakers (Court and Young, 2003). A substantial amount of research in the poorest countries is funded by international donors and conducted in the North, which raises a range of issues around ownership, legitimacy and whose priorities research should serve. As policy processes become increasingly global, this arena will increase in importance.

Although the RAPID framework is not specific to CSOs, it does provide an overview which may be useful for organisations in diagnosing the policy influence issues at stake in their work. Depending on which part of the policy processes CSOs engage with, issues around the political context, evidence and communication, links, and external influences will be weighted in different ways. When working to build awareness of a particular policy agenda, for example, CSOs may need to pay particular attention to developing their communication skills, whereas 'working from inside the tent' may require careful negotiation of political context. This literature review has pointed to a number of different ways in which CSOs use evidence to influence policy, while the RAPID framework gives an overview of the factors that make the use of evidence effective.

Taking these two sets of analysis together, it becomes possible to draw out key conclusions, issues and recommendations on how CSOs can better use evidence to influence policy.

6. Conclusion

Overview

While discussions of civil society are not new, 'civil society' has become a buzzword within international development. This is not surprising, given their increasing growth and reach to the poor – in terms of service provision, representation and building capacity. In short, civil society matters for development and CSOs have an increasing role in policy processes in many contexts.

This review underlines that many of insights from leading thinkers of the past – from Aristotle, Hobbes and Locke, through Rousseau, Tocqueville and Gellner – remain relevant today. What is particularly interesting from our perspective is the extent to which classical debates around civil society had the issue of evidence and knowledge at their heart. The emphasis on evidence and knowledge has largely been lost in current CSO discussions. Our view is that the sector is probably weaker because of it.

This paper has focused on the role of evidence as CSOs attempt to influence policy processes. The aim has been to synthesise the patchy literature, draw lessons, and identify areas for future work. Overall, it seems clear that using evidence effectively can be critical to the success of CSOs aiming to influence policy. However, this does not always work in a straightforward, obvious or 'rational' way. For many CSOs, making evidence rigorous and accessible is the first step in maximising their chances of policy influence. Clearly, though, the context in which CSOs operate and the relationships among different actors in a policy arena are often at least as important as whether evidence is robust. Often, it is not the nature of the evidence itself, but the way it is used which makes the difference when influencing policy.

If CSOs are to use evidence to bring about pro-poor policy they have three main objectives: to
- **Inspire**: generate support for an issue or action; raise new ideas or question old ones; create new ways of framing an issue or 'policy narratives'.
- **Inform**: represent the views of others; share expertise and experience; put forward new approaches.
- **Improve**: add, correct or change policy issues; hold policymakers accountable; evaluate and improve own activities, particularly regarding service provision; learn from each other.

All of this is much more easily said than done; reality is, of course, much more complex.

Rather than focus on the nature of the organisations themselves, or taking them as the starting point, we have taken the key elements of policy processes (agenda setting; formulation; implementation; monitoring and evaluation) as the starting point for analysis. We focus on how CSOs contribute to different components of the policy process and how they use evidence in their efforts.

To influence **agenda setting**, it seems that the key factor is the way CSOs communicate evidence. They may need to generate or crystallise a body of evidence as a policy narrative around a problem or issue. This can help create a window for policy change. However, CSOs often use evidence to build momentum behind an idea until it reaches a 'tipping point' and becomes widely accepted. They will need to use credible evidence if they are to establish themselves as legitimate actors.

To influence the **formulation** of policy, evidence can be an important way to establish the credibility of CSOs. Here, the quantity and quality credibility of the evidence that CSOs use seems to be important for their policy influence. CSOs need to be adept at adapting the way they use

evidence to maintain credibility with local communities and with policymakers, combining their tacit and explicit knowledge of a policy context. CSOs may need to present evidence of their political position, as much as their competence, in order to be included within formulation discussion.

To influence the **implementation** of policy, evidence is critical to improving the effectiveness of development initiatives. For many CSOs involved in providing services and implementing policy directly, a key issue has been translating practical knowledge and expertise into evidence that can be shared with others. Capitalising on the practical knowledge and experience of many CSOs can require careful analytic work in order that it is possible to understand how technical skills, expert knowledge and practical experience can inform one another. The key to influencing the implementation of policy is to demonstrate the operational relevance of evidence and to make such evidence relevant across different contexts.

To influence the **monitoring and evaluation** of policy, the key factors seem to be to generate relevant information and communicate evidence in a clear, conclusive and accessible way (whether internally within CSOs or to external policymakers). Many CSOs have pioneered participative processes that transform the views of ordinary people into indicators and measures which can make policy processes accountable. Others focus much more on empirical approaches to address issues of relevance. Direct communication with policymakers regarding the impact of their policies is often the key to influence in this arena of the policy process. However, many CSOs have been influential by gaining high media 'exposure' for their policy critiques.

Stripped down, then, the issues emerging in each part of the policy process can be mapped against the five different aspects of evidence that matter for policy influence:[16]

Component of the policy process/aspects of evidence	Agenda setting	Formulation	Implementation	Monitoring and evaluation
Availability		X		X
Credibility		X		
Generalisability			X	
Rootedness	X	X	X	X
Relevance		X	X	X
Accessibility (i.e. communication)	X			X

Recommendations

Taken as a whole, our review suggests seven main ways that CSOs could use evidence to improve their chances of policy influence. Some of these are not new, but what we hope to provide here is a systematic outline of the keys issues that seem to matter. The seven issues we have identified are:

i) **Legitimacy**: Legitimacy matters for policy influence. Evidence can be used in particular to enhance the technical sources of CSO legitimacy, but also representative, moral or legal legitimacy. Making legitimacy explicit can help others make decisions as to whether they wish to endorse CSO work. A more general point linked in with this is that CSOs are more likely to have an impact if they work together.

ii) **Effectiveness**: Evidence can be used to make CSO work more effective. Gathering evidence can be a tool for CSOs to evaluate and improve the impact of their work, share lessons with others, and capture the institutional memory and knowledge held within organisations.

iii) **Integration**: There is often a disconnection between CSO work on implementation or service delivery and the rest of the policy process. CSOs can have greater influence if they find better

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16 These were detailed under Section 2.1: Definitions.

ways to turn their practical knowledge and expertise into evidence that can be used to inform other parts of the policy process (agenda setting, formulation and evaluation). This could also help improve the learning which occurs across CSOs.

iv) **Translation**: Expert evidence should not be used to 'trump' the perspectives and experience of ordinary people. CSOs should find ways to turn peoples' understanding into legitimate evidence, and of combining community wisdom with expert evidence.

v) **Access**: Access to policymaking processes is vital for CSOs. Examples in this paper indicate that the question of CSO influence is often one of whether they are included in policy processes and can respond accordingly. Evidence can help CSOs gain better access to policy arenas. Using high-quality and uncontested evidence can allow even politically radical CSOs be included fully in policy debate.

vi) **Credibility**: Evidence must be valid, reliable and convincing to its audience. CSOs may need to adapt for different groups the kind of evidence they use – the same evidence may be credible to some but not to others. Credibility can depend on factors such as the reputation of the source and whether there is other accepted evidence which substantiates it.

vii) **Communication**: Evidence must be presented in an accessible and meaningful way. The most effective communication is often two-way, interactive and ongoing.

Gaps for further study

The study of the ways in which CSOs use evidence to influence policy is an emerging field. There remains no systematic, global study on the subject. This paper attempts to synthesise thinking from the (rather patchy) general literature on CSOs. However, a number of questions seem so far to have received little attention.

- How does the nature of a CSO affect the way that evidence is used in its work? Do think tanks, for example, need different kinds of evidence than service-delivery NGOs? Do different kinds of CSOs use different kinds of knowledge? How can this be shared?

- Do different kinds of policy field (emergent, entrenched) require CSOs to use evidence in different ways? Do 'emergent' policy fields respond to different kinds of evidence than 'entrenched' policy fields? How should CSOs change their evidence strategies in different policy contexts?

- How does the political context in which CSOs operate affect the way they should use evidence? Do different CSO tactics work best in parliamentary democracies, socialist republics, dictatorships or republics? How should CSOs use evidence in fragile or post-conflict states?

- How can evidence be used to improve the accountability of CSOs? Is a different kind of evidence useful for accountability 'down' to grassroots, 'up' to donors, or 'horizontally' in the CSO community?

- What methods can CSOs use to create evidence? How can they capitalise on their activities, knowledge and understanding as evidence? What options are open to CSOs which want to collect credible evidence, but have little funding or time for this?

- How do media-oriented CSOs use evidence in their work? How, when and where does 'media exposure' of evidence create policy influence?

- How do CSO networks use evidence? How do the connections among organisations change the way that evidence is effective in influencing policy?

The Civil Society Partnerships programme at ODI hopes to assess further the value of work on different aspects of these issues and continue its analysis in order to respond to some of these questions.

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