CSOs, Policy Influence, and Evidence Use: A Short Survey

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Executive Summary

The ODI Civil Society Partnerships Programme (CSPP) is a six year programme which aims to better enable Southern Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to use evidence in connection with contributing to pro-poor policy processes. With this goal in mind, under Outcome 1 of the programme: '*CSOs understand better how evidence can contribute to pro-poor policy processes'*; a survey of civil society organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe was implemented to address three major research questions:

- How are CSOs influencing policies in their country?
- What is the context in which they are influencing policy?
- What are these CSOs requesting from ODI? What types of support do they need?

The survey was designed to help us understand: (a) the types of evidence CSOs use for policy influence; and (b) the extent of success they feel they are having; (c) the incentives and disincentives for CSOs to use evidence; (d) how types of context affects all this; and (e) what they feel their needs are.

A number of clear and incisive findings were highlighted when analysing survey data. First, when assessing *CSOs agenda to influence policy* we found that the majority of respondents considered the objective of influencing government policy as highly relevant to their organisation's agenda. When specifying the ***areas of policy their organisations seek to influence***, 'Governance/Accountability' and 'Rural Livelihoods/Agriculture' were most often the areas of focus. Education and Gender issues closely followed. It was also interesting to note that the majority of CSOs were working to influence a wide number of policy areas, suggesting that the majority of CSOs are not single issue based, but working across a broader range or spectrum.

In response to a question regarding ***methods of policy influence***, the majority of the surveyed CSOs reported that they were networking with other organisations. It was interesting to note that three of the four lowest responses – 'work on projects commissioned by policymakers', 'newsletter to policymakers', and 'insider lobbying' – are activities most directly related to working with policymakers. Most responses tended to favour activities that are 'indirect.' When specifying the ***types of evidence that are used in seeking to influence policy***, the majority of respondents considered case studies to be the most effective form of evidence. On the other hand, a mere 32% of respondents regarded academic research papers as highly effective. Nevertheless, when given the opportunity to comment, most respondents indicated that combinations of types of evidence are used.

Assessing *frequencies of success,* the majority of respondents indicated that their organisations have experienced only moderate levels of success in regards to influencing policy. When asked to evaluate the overall success of civil society in their country, the sample perceived civil society to be achieving little in terms of influencing policy – even less than success of their own organisation. Furthermore, when responses were separated by region, it was apparent that respondents from certain localities experienced different levels of success: Only 21% of CSO representatives from Asia identified their organisation as successful, compared to 42% of African CSOs and 44% of Eastern European CSOs. Even more dramatic were the differences among success levels of civil society as a whole in a respondent's country. Whereas one third of respondents from Africa indicated there were moderate to high levels of success at the country level, there was not a single respondent from Latin America who perceived civil society as successful at influencing policy in their country.

Given these low levels of success, it is necessary to determine the factors that prevent success – *barriers to success*. According to the majority of respondents, the political context was neither favourable, nor overtly hostile, however average ratings were often accompanied by an open-ended comment that suggested a hostile political environment. These included: CSOs seen as opponents of the government; corrupt government officials; and lack of transparency. In other cases, there were several responses that acknowledged the positive aspect of the introduction of a democratic government, referring specifically to freedom of speech and media, yet at the same time it was noted that the way democratic space functions in practice limits engagement. Separately, we also found that as the favourability of the political environment increases, civil society in an organisation's country is more likely to experience higher levels of success. On the other hand, the variable of region failed to demonstrate any significant association. In regards to the main *barriers to CSO engagement*, the majority of respondents indicated that 'CSOs do not have sufficient capacity' (63%) and 'CSOs do not have enough funds' (59%). It is interesting to note that respondents barriers that are related to issues concerning their own organisation, thus placing blame on internal factors rather than external factors. When the question was refocused to assess the *main barriers to using research and evidence* to influence policy, CSOs influence was substantially limited because 'policymakers are not used to drawing on research and evidence', 'policymakers have limited capacity to use and adapt evidence in policy processes', and 'CSOs have limited capacity to use and adapt evidence in policy processes'.

When assessing *the characteristics that are associated with higher and lower levels of success,* we found that the key factors that are associated with higher levels of policy success are being from Asia or Africa, as well as working in a Government think tank. In addition, networking with other organisations, working on projects commissioned by policymakers, working with publications on policy issues and providing services were also key factors associated with higher levels of success. Lower levels of policy success were associated with being a consulting group or a university-based research organisation, using case studies as evidence to influence policy, trying to influence policy through websites or by holding seminars, as well as working in the area of housing policy

Finally, looking at *demands for support* the majority of respondents indicated that training/capacity building, access to the latest thinking on how to use evidence to influence policy and support for more research on policy issues are the types of support most needed to help their organisation to influence policy. Separating the responses by region, we found several variations on the types of support needed. The majority of respondents from Asia indicated that 'information on policy issues' as the most essential support need, whereas respondents from Africa indicated 'training/capacity building'. Respondents from Eastern Europe and Latin America considered neither as the most necessary (the majority of respondents from Eastern Europe indicated that both 'access to latest thinking on using evidence to influence policy' and 'support for more research' are the most important, whereas three types of support – 'access to latest thinking,' 'training/capacity building' and 'technical support' – were tied as the most important according to respondents from Latin America). It should be noted that variations that are exhibited within this study are not necessarily applicable to the general population, as our study lacked a random sampling method.

Assessing the single most important *action to improve policy impact of individual organisations*, top responses included: More financial support; Creation of space for civic engagement in policy discussions/public dialogue/dissemination bodies; Cooperation of legislative bodies; Monitoring and evaluation of policies and policymakers; Build capacities/train professions with regards to research and policy development; for staff to influence policy; for credible evidence-based policy influence; for the purpose of policy entrepreneurship; for lobbying; for the creation of a research unit within CSOs. Assessing the single *most important action to improve policy impact of CSOs in one's country*, top responses included: Empowerment of CSO capacities/resources; Support for more research and advocacy; Networking/sharing information; Civil society to work with research

bodies that are considered acceptable by government; Strengthen legal framework; Promotion of stakeholder forums; Faster implementation or passing of bills; Government to be held accountable for its activities.

1. Introduction

Purpose and significance

The ODI Civil Society Partnerships Programme (CSPP) is a six year programme which aims to better enable Southern Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to use evidence in connection with contributing to pro-poor policy processes. The programme focuses on four outcomes: (i) CSOs understand better how evidence can contribute to pro-poor policy processes; (ii) Regional capacity to support Southern CSOs is established; (iii) Useful information on current development policy issues, and how this knowledge can contribute to pro-poor policy, is easily accessible to CSOs; and (iv) CSOs participate actively in Southern and Northern policy networks to promote pro-poor policies.

As part of Outcome 1, we are interested in ensuring that CSOs better understand how evidence can contribute to pro-poor policy processes. In addition, we are also interested in: (a) the types of evidence CSOs use for policy influence; and (b) the extent of success they feel they are having; (c) the incentives and disincentives for CSOs to use evidence; (d) how types of context affects all this; and (e) what they feel their needs are. Therefore, a survey of civil society organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe has been implemented as part of the CSPP for the purpose of soliciting information on these areas of interest.

Research Questions

The survey of CSOs addressed three major research questions:

- How are CSOs influencing policies in their country?
- What is the context in which they are influencing policy?
- What are these CSOs requesting from ODI? What types of support do they need?

The answers to these questions will guide and inform the work of the overall programme.

Methodology: Subjects, Instrument, and Administration

The CSPP aims to extend ODI's work with government, non-government and private sector organisations committed to contributing to policies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals; to the importance of evidence-based policy-making; and to the value of civil society participation in the policy process. Given this objective, the CSPP distributed the survey to over 300 Southern CSOs engaging in the aforementioned goals. The list of CSOs was selected from RAPID and CSPP mailing list database.

From this arises a weakness with the methodology – selection of CSOs from the ODI database has an inherent bias towards CSOs which are likely to be involved in policy influence activities. To avoid further bias, recognising that resources of technology are often limited in the South, respondents had the option of completing the survey via web page or electronic mail attachment – with the exception of 38 CSOs who completed the questionnaire by hand as part of a two-day CSPP workshop in Kenya. All interviewing methodologies utilized an identical survey instrument; a questionnaire, consisting of twenty-one, multiple choice and open-ended questions (see Annex 1). The questionnaire was divided into two parts – one half of the questions probed information of the respondents individual organization and the other half sought information regarding civil society as a whole within the context of the respondent's country.

The CSPP defines CSOs as "any organizations that work in an arena between the household, the private sector and the state to negotiate matters of public concern".[1] As a result of the broad nature of the definition's interpretation, the survey targeted a variety of organizations, such as non-government organizations (NGOs), community groups, independent research institutes/think tanks, government research institute/think tanks, university-based research departments, freelance consultants (individual researchers), consulting companies, networks, professional unions, and faith-based organizations (FBOs).

The survey received completed questionnaires from 130 respondents. Despite the possibility of a heterogeneous sample, the majority of respondents came from NGOs and therefore the possibility of sample bias is recognised in our conclusions. Furthermore, most respondents were members of CSOs working in African nations, however, there were quite a number of respondents representing CSOs from Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America (as before possibility of sample bias is therefore recognised in our conclusions). The large number of respondents from Africa was, to some extent, attributable to the distribution of 38 questionnaires during the two-day CSPP workshop in Kenya. The position of the respondent within his or her organization varied tremendously. Positions ranged from Chief Executive Officer to Research Fellow; however, most respondents would fall into the category of executive director/coordinator.

Given the considerable variation of participants in the study, findings of the survey cannot be generalized to the general population of Southern CSOs. On the other hand, given the preliminary nature of this study, the broad range of selected subjects is of great assistance for essential insights into the topic of CSOs, evidence, and policy.

Analytical Method

The performance of data analysis was conducted through the use of the statistical package, SAS. Statistical tests focused on the three fundamental research questions (see Respondents' characteristics under Section 2). The analysis included tests of frequencies and regressions models. All percentages are based on total number of respondents who replied to a given question, rather than on the overall number of respondents in the study.

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[1] Taken from DFID; Information and Civil Society Division.

2. Results

Respondents' Characteristics, General Demographics

Participants in the survey were staff members of 130 CSOs (61 non-government organisations, 1 community group, 15 independent research institutes/think-tanks, 3 government research institutes/think-tanks, 11 university-based research departments, 1 freelance consultant/individual researcher, 6 consulting companies, 14 networks, and 17 alternatives). Among those who responded with 'other,' 3 were professional associations/unions, 6 faith-based organisations, and 2 action-learning organisations/citizen social movements. The respondents represented a total of 33 countries[2] from four regions[3] of the world (Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America). Out of the 130 respondents, 67% were representatives from Africa,[4] whereas only 6% of the respondents were from Latin America.

Figure 1: Percent of Types of Organisation
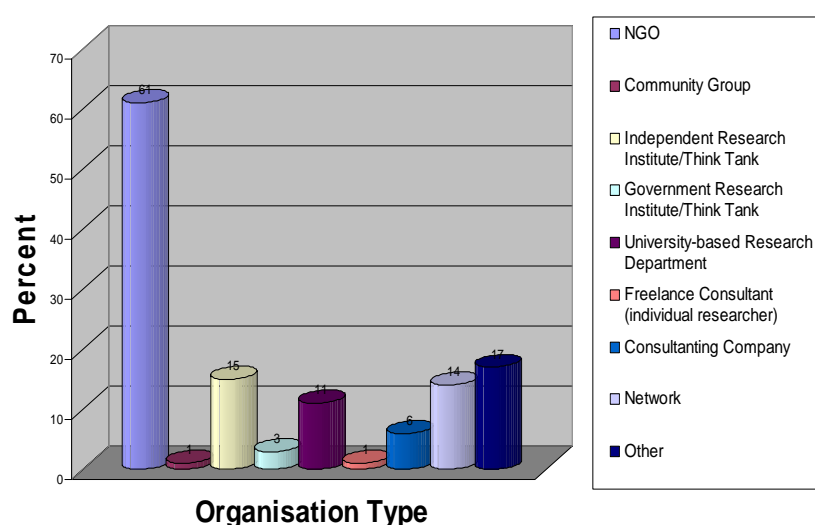
Figure 2: Number and % of Respondents by Region

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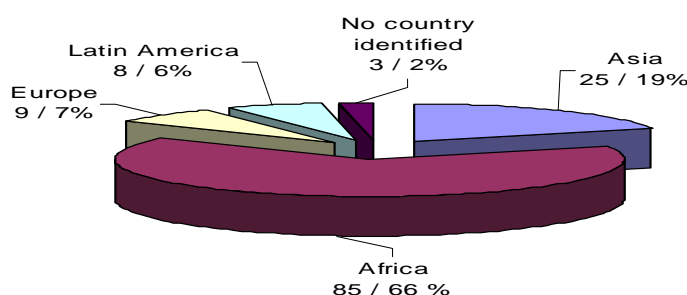
[2] Countries included Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Georgia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Mozambique, Nairobi, Nepal, Nigeria, Peru, Russia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan, and Zambia.
[3] Note: regions were defined by UN definitions
[4] This was in part due to the amount of questionnaires collected after a workshop in Kenya.

CSOs, Policy Influence, and Evidence: Factors of Success

CSOs and their agenda to influence policy

We asked participants of the survey to rate the extent to which they seek to influence policy. Based on a five-point Likert scale, ascending from 'not at all' to 'very much,' ***the majority of respondents (78%) considered the objective of influencing government policy as highly relevant*** to their organisation's agenda (Q5).[5] The mean response for this inquiry was 4.3, while the mode and median were both 5.

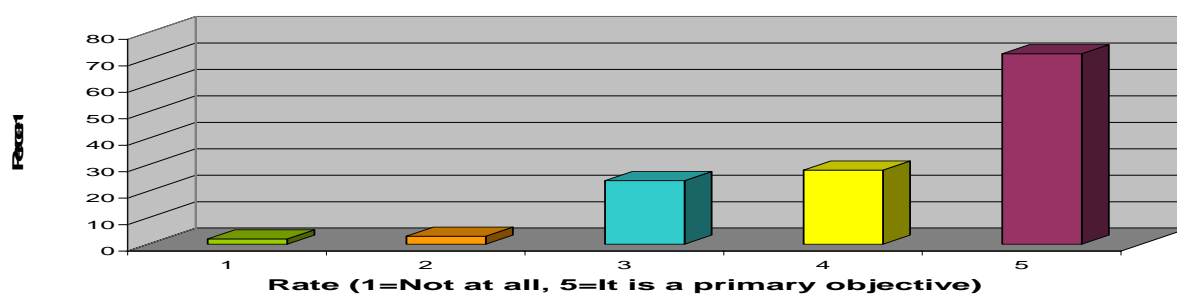**Figure 3: Extent to which CSOs try and Influence Policy[6]**

When specifying the areas of policy their organisations seek to influence, a substantial proportion of CSOs indicated that ***'Governance/Accountability' and 'Rural Livelihoods/Agriculture'*** were most often the areas of focus.

Figure 4: Policy Areas that CSOs try and Influence[7]

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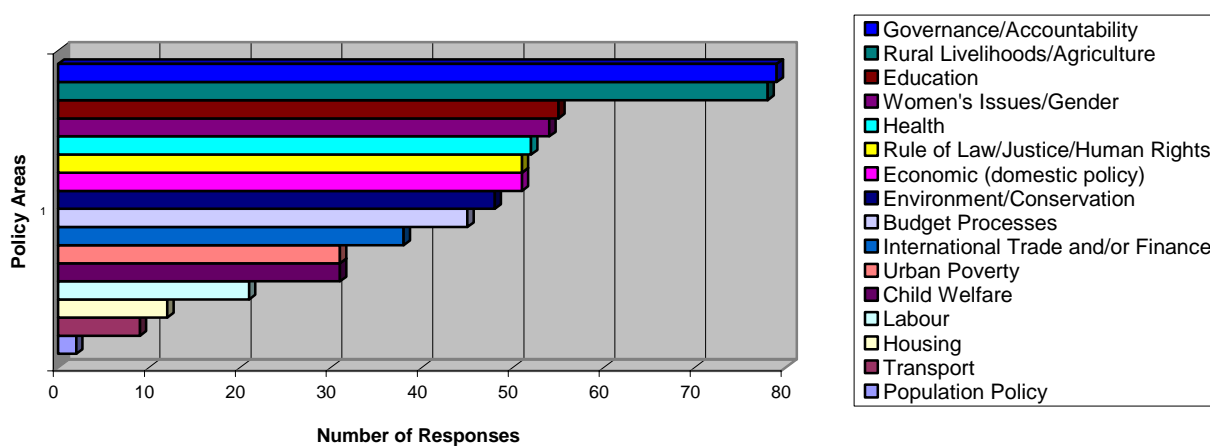
[5] The definition of 'highly relevant' is respondents who chose rates 4 and 5 on a 5-point Likert scale.

[6] In generating these results there is the possibility of a bias in the sample collected, given that those CSOs in contact with the ODI are more likely to be engaged in policy influence than the 'average grassroots' CSO.

[7] We note that given the nature of the sample there is a possibility that sample bias and or outliers could distort the results. This is relevant for all following figures.

It was also interesting to note that the majority of *CSOs were working to influence a wide number of policy areas.* The mean number of policies which CSOs targeted was 4.7, with median 4. This suggests that the majority of CSOs are not single issue based, but working across a broader range or spectrum.

Figure 5: Number of Policy Areas Influenced by Each CSO
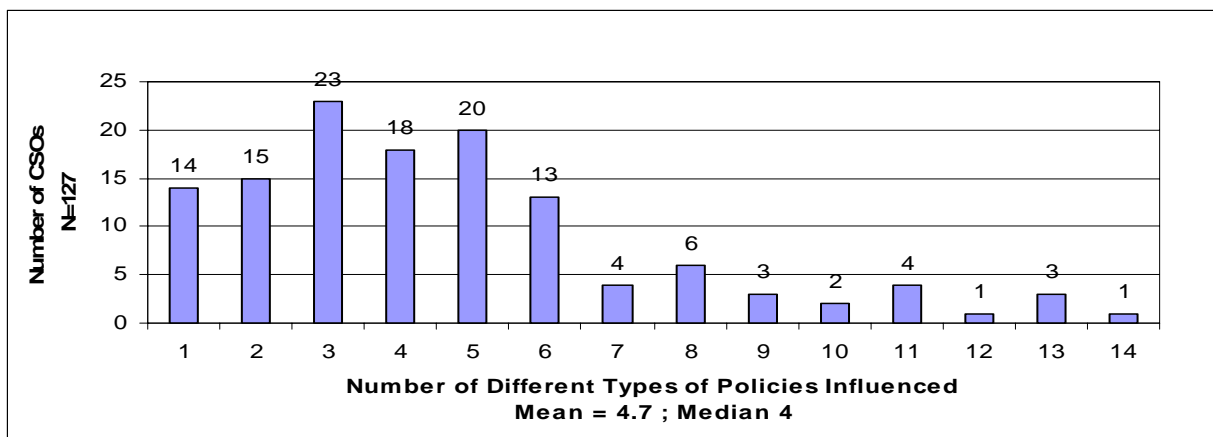
With the intention of assisting Southern CSOs in influencing policy, it is necessary for ODI to first understand how CSOs are currently approaching the matter. In response to a question regarding their methods*, the majority of the surveyed CSOs report that they are 'networking with other organisations.'*[8]

Figure 6: How Organisations Seek to Influence Policy
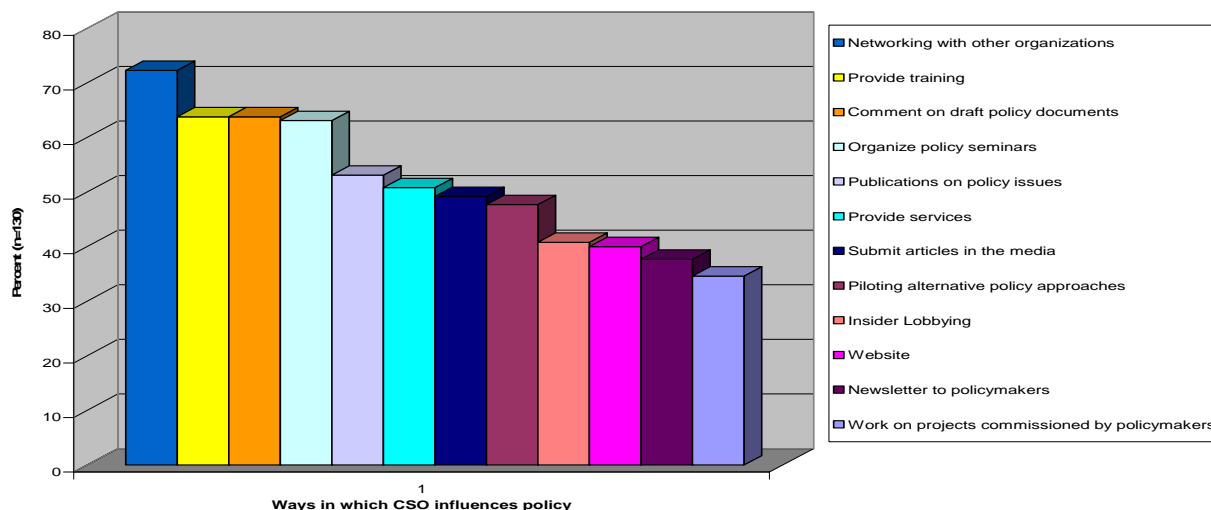
It is interesting to note that three of the four lowest responses – 'work on projects commissioned by policymakers' (35%), 'newsletter to policymakers' (38%), and 'insider lobbying' (41%) – are activities most directly related to working with policymakers. Most responses tend to favour activities that are 'indirect.' Furthermore, the small percent of respondents (40%) using websites to facilitate policy influence may suggest electronically disseminated research may not be the best means of communicating information. However, it is unclear if these findings suggest that there is little availability of electronic means of communication or that website use is deemed less valuable.

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[8] Based on respondents who chose rates 4 or 5, again on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is 'not at all' and 5 is 'very much,' concerning specific activities they use to influence policy.

Finally, we should note *that the majority of CSOs used a large number of tools to influence policy.* This suggests a high degree of sophistication and an effective process of policy engagement:

Figure 7: Number of Different Tools Used
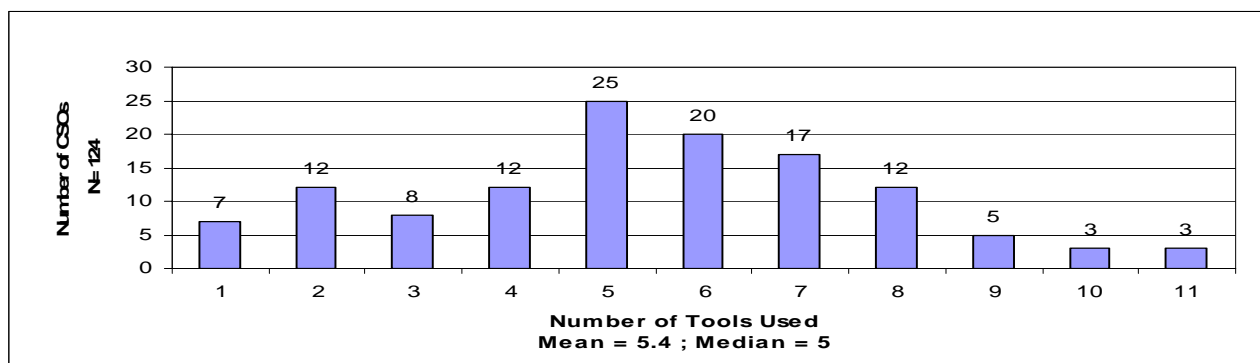
When specifying the types of evidence that are used in seeking to influence policy, *65% of respondents considered case studies to be the most effective form of evidence*.[9] On the other hand, a mere 32% of respondents regarded academic research papers as highly effective. Nevertheless, when given the opportunity to comment, most respondents indicated that combinations of types of evidence are used.

Figure 8: Types of Evidence That Are Most Effective When Seeking to Influence Policy[10]

Again, it is interesting to note that on average CSOs utilised a multiple number of evidence forms, when attempting to influence policy. This is a positive finding, as different forms of evidence are appropriate for different stages of the policy process and different actors:

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[9] Based on respondents who chose rates 4 or 5, again on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is 'not at all' and 5 is 'very effective,' concerning specific activities they use to influence policy.
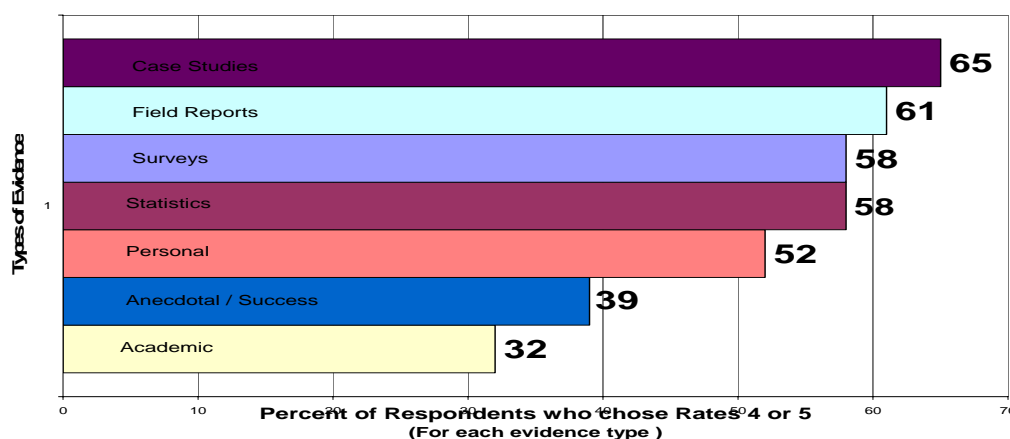
[10] Note that this result may have been biased by the nature of the sample containing a disproportionate number of NGOs, in compared to other CSOs such as Think Tanks, which are more biased towards academic reports.

Figure 9: Number of Different Types of Evidence Used
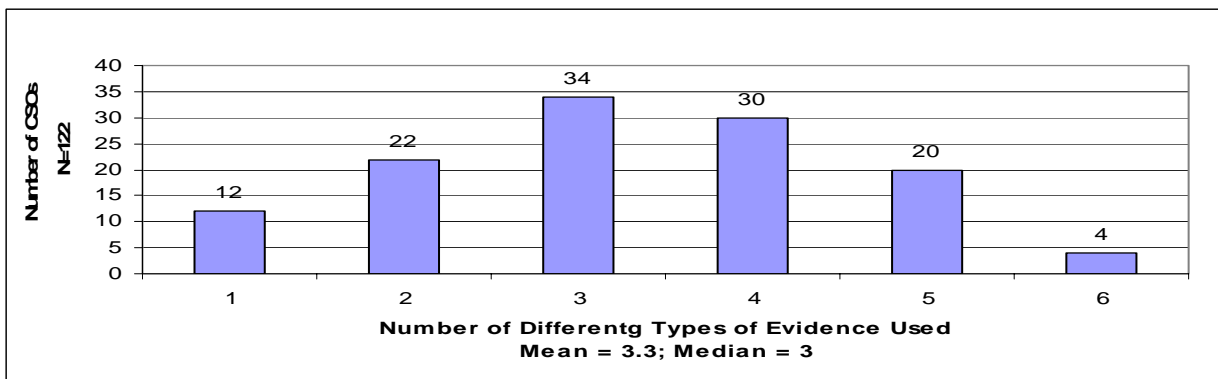
Frequencies of Success

Despite the majority of surveyed CSOs who consider influencing policy as a primary objective of their organisation, respondents indicated that their organisations have experienced *only moderate levels of success in regards to influencing policy* (mean rate=3.24).[11] When asked to evaluate the overall success of civil society in their country, the sample perceived civil society to be achieving little in terms of influencing policy (mean rate=3), even less so than compared to the success of their own organisation.

Once responses are separated by region, *it is apparent that respondents from certain localities experience different levels of success*. For example, only 21% of CSO representatives from Asia identified their organisation as successful at influencing policy in their country, compared to 42% of African CSOs and 44% of Eastern European CSOs. Even more dramatic are the differences among success levels of civil society as a whole in a respondent's country. Whereas one third of respondents from Africa indicated there were moderate to high levels of success at the country level, there was not a single respondent from Latin America who perceived civil society as successful at influencing policy in their country.[12]

Figure 10: Success Frequencies

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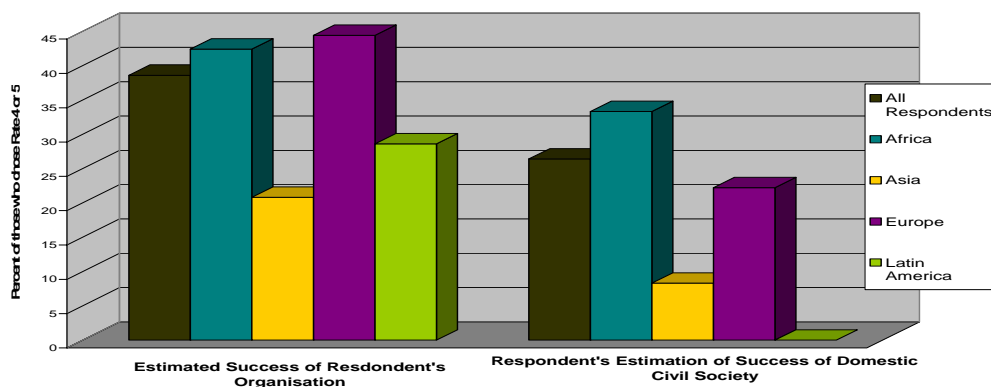
[11] Based on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is 'not at all successful' and 5 is 'very successful' in influencing policy.

[12] However, it should be kept in mind that this particular trend in data cannot be applied to the population of regional CSOs. Given the fact that our sample was not chosen at random, our study lacks all potential for generalizability.

For the purpose of elucidation, we asked respondents in the questionnaire to comment on their rating choice regarding success levels. From these responses, it is apparent that evaluations of success levels are highly dependent upon the various perceptions and definitions of success. For example, a Nigerian CSO representative argued that there is a considerable need for improvement in regards to influencing policy, as success is equated with 'a situation where all major government policies will be influenced by CSOs.' On the other hand, a more functionalist approach has been taken by a CSO representative from Cambodia, who recognizes that measuring success is rather difficult given there are other groups involved in the process of influencing government, not solely CSOs. Therefore, it should be noted that, when analysing the data, definitions of success are, indeed, conditional.

Barriers to Success

Given these low levels of success, it is necessary to determine the factors that prevent success. To address this matter, respondents were asked to assess the favourability of the political environment for CSO engagement in policy processes in their country, as well as specify the three most important barriers to CSO engagement in policy processes. Assuming research and evidence may increase opportunities for success, surveyed CSOs were also asked to identify the three most important barriers to using research and evidence when seeking to influence policy in their country.

Assessments of the political environment illustrated that, according to the majority of respondents, the *political context is neither favourable, nor overtly hostile* (mean rate = 3.1). Then again, it was often the case that a rating score of 3 was accompanied by an open-ended comment that suggested a hostile political environment. For example, when asked which political factors make it difficult or easy to engage in policy processes, a respondent who chose a rate of 3 regarding the political context of CSO engagement, specified only negative factors of engagement (e.g. 'civil society organisations have always been seen as opponents of the government'). In other cases, there were several responses that acknowledged the positive aspect of the introduction of a democratic government, referring specifically to freedom of speech and media, yet at the same time noted that the way democratic space functions in practice limits engagement (e.g. corrupt government officials, lack of transparency, etc).

In regards to the main barriers to CSO engagement, the majority of respondents indicated that *'CSOs do not have sufficient capacity' (63%) and 'CSOs do not have enough funds to do this' (59%).*[13] It is interesting to note that out of the 8 responses available to rate, respondents chose the two that are most related to issues concerning their own organisation, thus *placing blame on internal factors rather than external factors* (such as policy processes and attitudes of policymakers).

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[13] Percent based on those respondents who indicated 1, 2 or 3 for a particular barrier, where 1='most important.'

Figure 11: Main Barriers to CSO Engagement
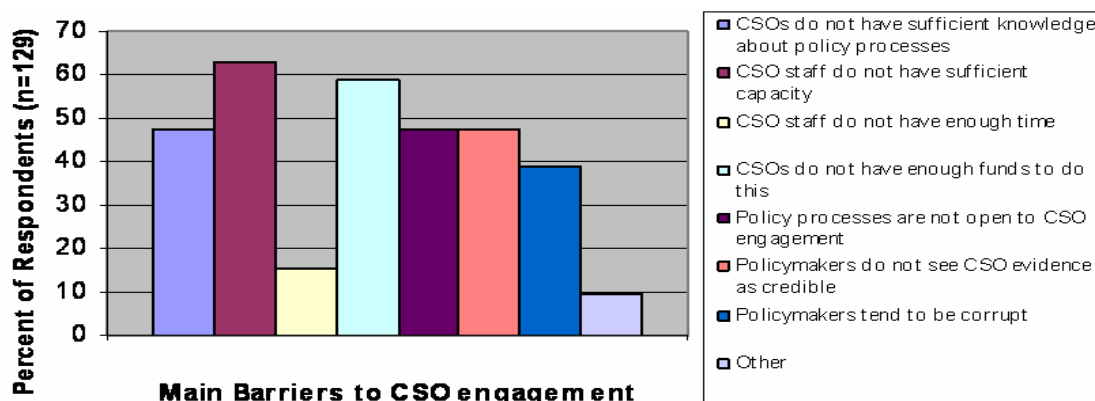
Among those who responded with other, there were quite a few respondents who cited the slow bureaucratic process of policymakers as a main barrier to CSO engagement with policy processes.

When the question was refocused to assess the ain barriers to using research and evidence to influence policy CSOs, noted that *policy influence through research and evidence is substantially limited* because 'policymakers are not used to drawing on research and evidence' (70%), 'policymakers have limited capacity to use and adapt evidence in policy processes' (66%), and 'CSOs have limited capacity to use and adapt evidence in policy processes' (65%).[14]

Figure 12: Main Barriers to Using Research and Evidence to Influence Policy

In addition, those who responded with 'other' frequently regarded 'paucity of funds,' 'inaccessible information,' 'donor-driven research,' and 'inability to reach broader public' as main barriers to using research and evidence to influence policy.

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[14] Percent based on those respondents who indicated 1, 2 or 3 for a particular barrier, where 1='most important.'

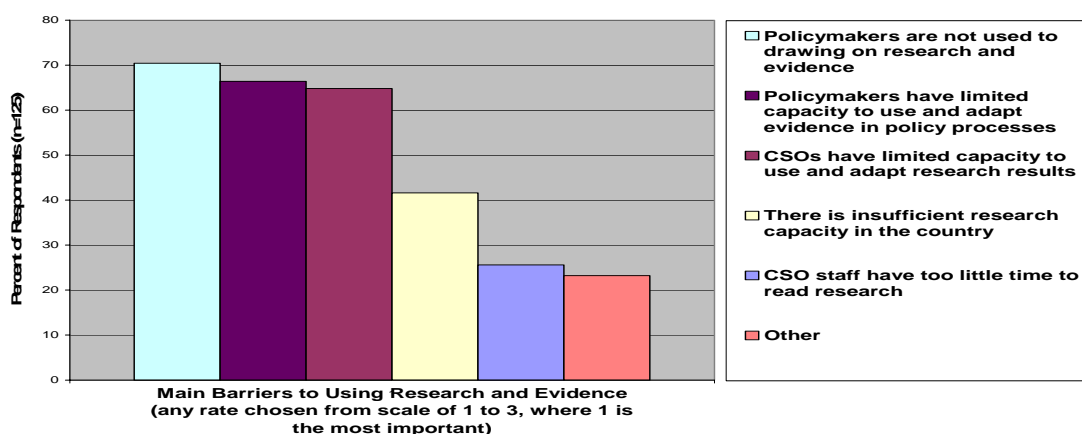*Lessons Learned in regards to Policy Influence and Success*

In order to identify the characteristics that are associated with higher and lower levels of success, we ran regressions (α=0.10) based on the following dependent variables:

- Individual organisation's level of success in regards to influencing policy
- Extent to which CSOs seek to influence policy
- Success level of civil society in CSO's country in regards to influencing policy

Each of these dependent variables was then measured against the following independent variables[15]:

- Region
- Type of organisation
- Ways in which CSOs seek to influence policy
- Most effective types of evidence used in order to influence policy
- Policy areas which CSOs seek to influence

As for individual CSOs, we have found that, after controlling for all other variables, *the key factors that are associated with higher levels of policy success are being from Asia* (p=0.0247) *or Africa* (p=0.0914), as well as *working in a Government think tank* (p=0.015). [16] In addition, *networking* with other organisations (p=0.0691), *working on projects commissioned by policymakers* (p=0.0003), *working with publications on policy issues* (p=0.0301) and *providing services* (p=0.0443) are also key factors associated with higher levels of success, as well as *working in the area of women's issues* (p=0.0079).[17] Lower levels of policy success are associated with being a consulting group (p=0.0090) or a university-based research organisation (p=0.0915), using case studies as evidence to influence policy (p=0.0464), trying to influence policy through websites (p=0.0118) or by holding seminars (p=0.0206), as well as working in the area of housing policy (p=0.0979). All other organisation types, types of most effective evidence, areas of policy influence and types of influence were insignificant.

We found that *the extent to which CSOs seek to influence policy is more likely to be larger when CSOs are networking* (p=0.0168) and *working on governance* (p=0.0929) and *women's issues* (p=0.0066). On the other hand, the degree to which CSOs are seeking to influence policy is reduced when CSOs are using anecdotal evidence (p=0.0219) to influence policy and working in the area of international trade (p=0.0832). Once again, all other organisation types, types of evidence used, areas of policy influence, and types of influence were insignificant.

When running the regression on the success of civil society, most of the variables were removed as they pertained to individual organisations, such as types of policy pursued, types of evidence used. As a consequence of this, we only looked at region and political environment. *We found that as the favourability of the political environment increases, civil society in an organisation's country is more likely to experience higher levels of success* (p=0.0088). On the other hand, *the variable of region failed to demonstrate any significant association*.

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[15] We would repeat the prior assertions that possible sample bias (due in particular to NGO dominance and regional / country variation is sample size) may distort certain results and therefore we advise against assumptions of generic applicability of these results across all Southern CSOs.

[16] Note: All findings in this section control for other variables in the survey. It should also be noted that all findings are only representative of the respondents of this particular survey.

[17] Note: After these tests were run, respondents who chose 'other' regarding the areas of policy influence were separated and grouped within existing categories of policy areas of influence. Therefore, it is possible that the significant associations between each of the three dependent variables and the independent variable of policy areas that we see here may, in fact, be different if we were to run the tests again; this time accounting for the new data.

Demands for Support

Frequency of Top Choices

We asked respondents to choose the most necessary types of support that would help their organisation the most in influencing policy. In the questionnaire, examples of types of support were provided and respondents were asked to rate the three most important using a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 is the most important. The majority of respondents indicate that *training/capacity building* (60%), *access to the latest thinking* on how to use evidence to influence policy (54%) and *support for more research* on policy issues (52%) are the types of support most needed to help their organisation to influence policy.

Figure 13: Types of Support Needed[18]
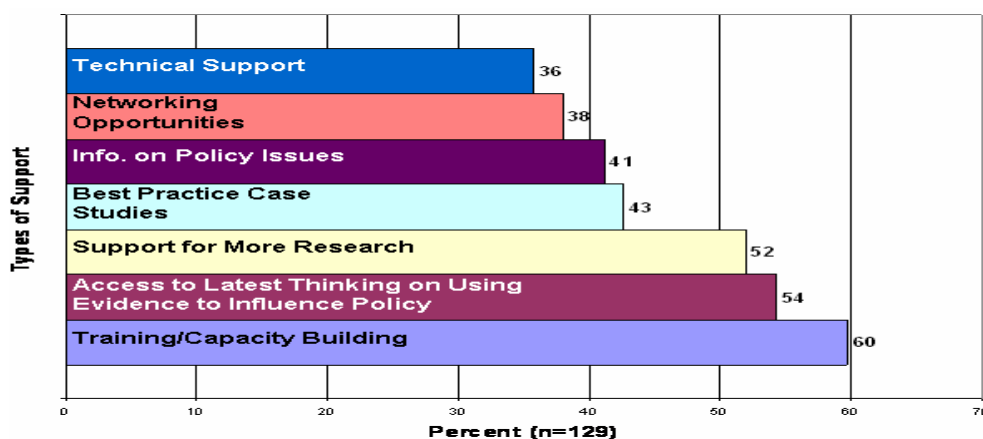
Top Choices of Support by Region

After *separating the responses by region, we found several variations* on the types of support needed among the four separate regions. For example, the top choices of support were different for each region. The majority of respondents from Asia (68%) indicated that 'information on policy issues' is the most essential support that they need in regards to influencing policy, whereas most of the respondents from Africa (63%) indicated that 'training/capacity building' is the type of support that they are most in need of. Respondents from Eastern Europe and Latin America considered neither of these types of support as the most necessary (the majority of respondents from Eastern Europe (67%) indicated that both 'access to latest thinking on using evidence to influence policy' and 'support for more research' are the most important, whereas three types of support – 'access to latest thinking,' 'training/capacity building' and 'technical support' – were tied as the most important (63%) according to respondents from Latin America).

In other cases, *there are huge differences among regions in regards to types of support desired*. For example, very few Latin American respondents (25%) considered 'support for more research' as a top necessity in comparison to the other three regions of Africa (50%), Asia (64%), and Eastern Europe (67%). Furthermore, only 4% of surveyed CSOs from Asia considered 'networking opportunities' as an important support needed, which is rather low with regard to the responses of the other regions. Once again, it should be noted that variations that are exhibited within this study are not necessarily applicable to the general population, as our study lacked a random sampling method.

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[18] Percent based on those respondents who indicated 1, 2 or 3 for a particular 'type of support', where 1='most important.'

Figure 14: Types of Support Required *(weighted by region)*
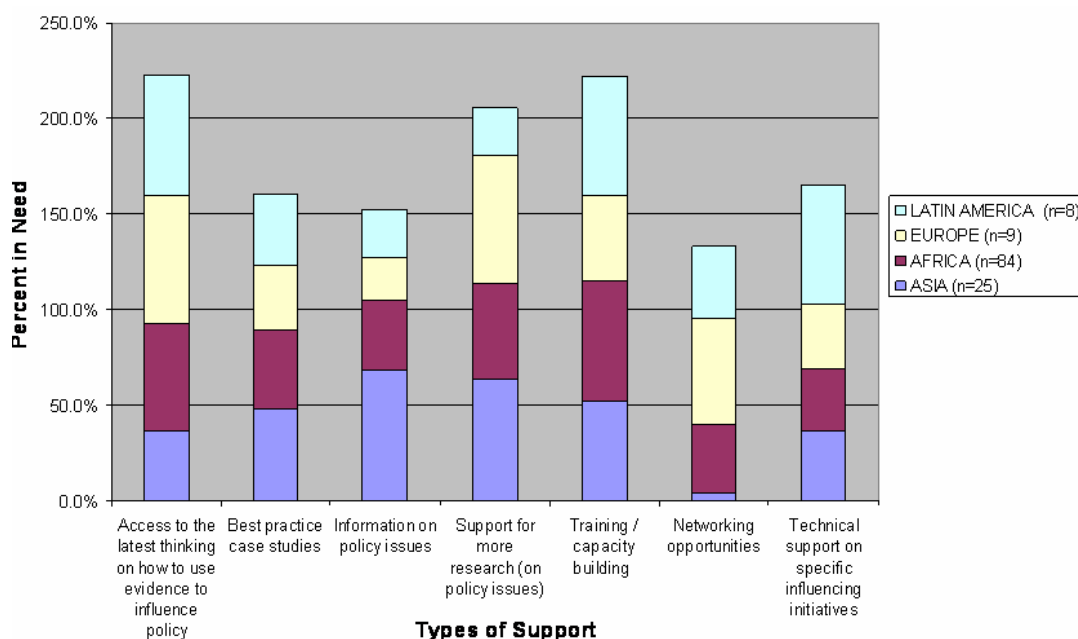
Single Most Important Action to Improve Policy Impact of Individual Organisation

After asking respondents to rate the most needed types of support, we asked them to give their opinion of the single most important action that needs to be taken to improve the policy impact of their organisation. The top responses included:

- More financial support
- Creation of space for civic engagement in policy discussions/public dialogue/dissemination bodies
- Cooperation of legislative bodies
- Monitoring and evaluation of policies and policymakers
- Build capacities/train professions with regards to research and policy development; for staff to influence policy; for credible evidence-based policy influence; for the purpose of policy entrepreneurship; for lobbying; for the creation of a research unit within CSOs

Single Most Important Action to Improve Policy Impact of CSOs in One's Country

Similar to the format mentioned above, we asked respondents to give their opinion on the most important action needed to improve the policy impact of CSOs, this time regarding civil society in general in their country. The top responses included:

- Empowerment of CSO capacities/resources[19]
- Support for more research and advocacy
- Networking/sharing information
- Civil society to work with research bodies that are considered acceptable by government
- Strengthen legal framework
- Promotion of stakeholder forums
- Faster implementation or passing of bills
- Government to be held accountable for its activities.

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[19] Most frequent response.

3. Conclusion

The ODI Civil Society Partnerships Programme (CSPP) is a six year programme which aims to better enable Southern Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to use evidence in connection with contributing to pro-poor policy processes. With this goal in mind, under Outcome 1 of the programme: '*CSOs understand better how evidence can contribute to pro-poor policy processes*'; a survey of civil society organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe was implemented to address three major research questions:

- How are CSOs influencing policies in their country?
- What is the context in which they are influencing policy?
- What are these CSOs requesting from ODI? What types of support do they need?

The intention of the survey was to address these three major research questions. Through exploratory, descriptive, and some explanatory findings, this report has examined all three questions and provided preliminary findings on a subject that is under-researched. A number of clear and incisive conclusions were highlighted. *First*, we found that the majority of respondents considered the objective of influencing government policy as highly relevant to their organisation's agenda. Governance/Accountability' and 'Rural Livelihoods/Agriculture' were most often the areas of focus. Education and Gender issues closely followed. It was also interesting to note that the majority of CSOs were working to influence a wide number of policy areas, suggesting that the majority of CSOs are not single issue based.

Second, the majority of the surveyed CSOs reported that they were networking with other organisations, but It was interesting to note that three of the four lowest responses – 'work on projects commissioned by policymakers', 'newsletter to policymakers', and 'insider lobbying' – are activities most directly related to working with policymakers. Most responses tended to favour activities that are 'indirect.'

Third, When specifying the types of evidence that are used in seeking to influence policy, the majority of respondents considered case studies to be the most effective and a mere 32% of respondents regarded academic research papers as highly effective. Nevertheless, most respondents indicated that combinations of types of evidence are used.

Fourth, the majority of respondents indicated that their organisations have experienced only moderate levels of success in regards to influencing policy. Evaluating the overall success of civil society in their country, the sample perceived civil society to be achieving little – even less than success of their own organisation. Furthermore, when responses were separated by region, it was apparent that respondents from Asia identified their organisation as far less successful than African CSOs and Eastern European CSOs. There was not a single respondent from Latin America who perceived civil society as successful at influencing policy in their country.

Fifth, the political context was seen as neither favourable, nor overtly hostile, however many open-ended comments suggested a hostile political environment, with CSOs seen as opponents of the government; corrupt government officials; and lack of transparency. There were several responses that acknowledged the positive aspect of the introduction of a democratic government. Separately, we also found that as the favourability of the political environment increases, civil society in an organisation's country is more likely to experience higher levels of success. In regards to the main barriers to CSO engagement, the majority of respondents indicated that 'CSOs do not have sufficient capacity' (63%) and 'CSOs do not have enough funds' (59%). It is interesting to note that respondents placed blame on internal factors rather than external factors. Main barriers to using

research and evidence to influence policy was 'policymakers not used to drawing on research and evidence', 'policymakers with limited capacity to use and adapt evidence in policy processes', and 'CSOs with limited capacity to use and adapt evidence in policy processes'.

Sixth, characteristics associated with higher levels of success, were being from Asia or Africa, working in a Government think tank, networking, working on projects commissioned by policymakers, working with publications on policy issues and providing services. Lower levels of policy success were associated with being a consulting group or a university-based research organisation, using case studies as evidence to influence policy, trying to influence policy through websites or by holding seminars, as well as working in the area of housing policy

Finally, looking at demands for support the majority of respondents indicated that training/capacity building, access to the latest thinking on how to use evidence to influence policy and support for more research on policy issues are the types of support most needed. Separating the responses by region, we found several variations. Asia indicated 'information on policy issues', Africa indicated 'training/capacity building', Respondents from Eastern Europe and Latin America considered neither as the most necessary. To improve policy impact, top responses included: More financial support; Creation of space for civic engagement in policy discussions/public dialogue/dissemination bodies; Monitoring and evaluation of policies and policymakers; Build capacities/train professions with regards to research and policy development; for staff to influence policy. Assessing the single most important action to improve policy impact of CSOs in one's country, top responses included: Empowerment of CSO capacities/resources; Support for more research and advocacy; Networking/sharing information.

It should be kept in mind that given the exploratory nature of the study, the results of the survey can not be generalized, as they are not representative of the whole population of CSOs. Despite the lack of generalisability, the results of the survey have important mapping and informative value. General findings will help form the basic framework for addressing the main objective of Outcome 1 of the CSPP; that is to increase CSOs' understanding of how evidence can contribute to pro-poor policy processes. These findings will also help guide the work of Outcome 2, and the broader CSPP, as the survey gathered information on the types of support CSOs need to build their capacity to contribute to pro-poor policies.

Annex 1: Questionnaire: CSOs, Evidence and Policy Influence

In order for us to make effective comparisons over time and across countries, the assessment instrument is a pre-coded, multiple-choice questionnaire. *Please indicate which standard answer comes closest to describing your case.*

We are well aware that these standard questions cannot capture the full complexity of civil society and policy issues. Therefore, please provide additional comments to better explain the situation in your country. *It is important to answer all the questions.*

Please note that, to focus the discussion, the survey is concerned only with civil society and policy issues at the <u>country</u> level.

1. Name of your organisation

2. What is your position within the organisation?

3. What type of organisation is it?

- o NGO
- o Community group
- o Independent research institute/ think tank
- o Government research institute/ think tank
- o University-based research department
- o Freelance consultant (individual researcher)
- o Consulting company
- o Network
- o Other (Please specify) _____

4. Which country do you work in?

5. To what extent does your organisation seek to <u>influence government policy</u> in your country?

- o 1 Not at all
- o 2
- o 3
- o 4
- o 5 It is a primary objective

Comment:

6. Overall, how would you rate the success of <u>your</u> organisation in influencing policy in your country?

- o   1 Not at all successful
- o   2
- o   3
- o   4
- o   5 Very successful

Comment:

Please explain your answer.

7. <u>How</u> does your organisation seek to influence policy?

	< Not at all				Very much >
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Work on projects commissioned by policymakers					
Piloting alternative policy approaches					
Comment on draft policy documents					
Organize policy seminars					
Newsletter to policymakers					
Insider lobbying					
Networking with other organisations					
Publications on policy issues					
Submit articles in the media					
Website					
Provide training					
Provide services					

8. Please say a little more about the approach you consider most successful, or list other ways in which your organisation seeks to influence policy that were not mentioned above.

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9. Please tell us which policy areas <u>your</u> organisation has tried to influence in your country in the past 12 months.

- o   Rural livelihoods / Agriculture
- o   Urban poverty
- o   Education
- o   Health
- o   Housing
- o   Environmental / Conservation
- o   Women's issues / Gender
- o   Child welfare
- o   Labour
- o   Budget processes
- o   Economic (domestic policy)
- o   International trade and/or finance
- o   Rule of law / Justice / Human rights
- o   Governance / Accountability
- o   Transport
- o   Other (please specify) _____
- o   Other (please specify) _____

Comment:

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ In your opinion, which of these policy areas have you had most success in influencing? │
│ And why?                                                          │
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10. In your organisation's experience, what <u>types of evidence</u> are most effective when seeking to influence policy?

Types of Evidence	< *Not at all effective*				*Very effective* >
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Surveys					
Statistics					
Academic research papers					
Field reports					
Case studies					
Personal testimonies from beneficiaries					
Anecdotal / success stories					
Other (please specify) _____					

11. Please say a little more about how you choose which type of evidence to use, and mention any other types not listed above.

12. What type of <u>support</u> would most help your organisation to influence policy? Please choose the <u>three</u> most important and number them from 1 (most important) to 3.

Rank 1-3	**Type of support**
	Access to the latest thinking on how to use evidence to influence policy
	Best practice case studies
	Information on policy issues
	Support for more research (on policy issues)
	Training / capacity building (If so, which training would be most useful? _____)
	Networking opportunities
	Technical support on specific influencing initiatives
	Other (please specify):
	_____
	_____

13. Please tell us a little more about your top choice.

[blank text box]

14. In your opinion, what is the <u>single most important action</u> that needs to be taken to improve the policy impact of <u>your</u> organisation?

[blank text box]

In the final section, we would like to ask you a few questions about CSOs in general, not necessarily just about your own organisation.

15. Overall, how successful is <u>civil society</u> in influencing government policy in your country?

- o 1 Not at all successful
- o 2
- o 3
- o 4
- o 5 Highly successful

Comment:

Why or why not?

[blank text box]

16. How favourable is the <u>political environment</u> for CSO engagement in policy processes in your country?

- o 1 Not at all
- o 2
- o 3
- o 4
- o 5 Very

Comment:

Which political factors make it easy / difficult for CSOs to engage in policy processes?

17. In general, what are the <u>main barriers</u> to CSO engagement in policy processes in your country? Please choose the <u>three</u> most important and number them from 1 (most important) to 3.

Rank 1-3	
	CSOs do not have sufficient knowledge about policy processes
	CSO staff do not have sufficient capacity
	CSO staff do not have enough time
	CSOs do not have enough funds to do this
	Policy processes are not open to CSO engagement
	Policymakers do not see CSO evidence as credible
	Policymakers tend to be corrupt
	Other (please specify):
	_____
	_____

Comment:

What do you think can be done about the most important barrier you chose above?

18. What are the main barriers to using <u>research and evidence</u> to influence policy in your country? Please choose the <u>three</u> most important and number them from 1 (most important) to 3.

Rank 1-3	
	CSO staff have too little time to read research
	CSOs have limited capacity to use and adapt research results
	There is insufficient research capacity in the country
	Policymakers are not used to drawing on research and evidence
	Policymakers have limited capacity to use and adapt evidence in policy processes
	Other (please specify):_____
	Other (please specify):_____

Comment:

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Please explain your answer.



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19. In your opinion, what is the <u>single most important action</u> that needs to be taken to improve the policy impact of CSOs in your country?

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20. Please feel free to offer <u>any additional comments</u> you may have, including any topics you think we may have missed in designing this survey.

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21. Please provide your name and address if you would like to receive a copy of the report based on this survey, and copies of three recent ODI publications on Civil Society, Research and Policy Issues.

First name:
Surname:
Address 1:
Address 2:
City:
Postal / Zip code:
Country:
Email:

Thank you very much for your time!

Please return completed questionnaire to <u>rapid@odi.org.uk</u>