



An ebpdn global project: Influencing global policy processes in Japan

The first half of 2008 was an important time of Japanese leadership in the development arena. Not only did they host the G8 nations on Hokkaido in July, they also held the 4th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) in Yokohama at the end of May. The convergence of these two high-level events led the [Overseas Development Institute](#) (ODI) and partners from the [Evidence-based Policy in Development Network](#) (ebpdn) working across six countries to focus their attention on Japan's approach to assistance and aid. The Japanese government has historically emphasised the quality, not just the quantity, of its aid, and it has made specific claims to that end. In particular, Japan highlights its support for self-reliant, demand-driven development for recipient countries and establishing effective partnerships. The goal of the ebpdn partners was to test these claims through evidence-based enquiry in the hopes of influencing Japan's aid policies and those of other G8 nations.

The ebpdn is a worldwide community of practice supported by ODI's [Research and Policy in Development Programme](#) (RAPID) to help organisations promote more evidence-based, pro-poor development policies. The ebpdn has developed over the course of the last three years, and the [Japan G8 Global Project](#) was the network's first initiative to work together internationally on a topic of common interest. The secondary goal of this exercise, therefore, was to foster stronger connections among project partners and create a space for learning and sharing.

The overarching challenge was to get evidence from the grassroots into a global level. As it was a learning exercise, it was important that partners got direct exposure to policy processes and that work was not simply channelled through ODI to the UK government and then to the G8. Untangling the maze of actors and how partners could interact with them became another challenge. This was all made more difficult by a policy environment focused more on governments than on other country-level non-state actors. There were also difficulties as some partners were more experienced as campaigners than research organisations.

The first step in meeting these challenges was an [organisational workshop held in Ghana](#) during which a cohesive framework for generating evidence was established, using the RAPID framework that ODI has developed and tested in many contexts over the years. The main policy questions to be tackled were agreed from this process. Partners also drew up stakeholder analyses in an attempt to map out the links and connections they had to participants in the G8 and TICAD processes. One of the main results from this mapping was closer links with the TICAD Civil Society Forum, which had already established a Japan–Africa partnership of civil society organisations with credible spaces and entry points into the TICAD process. And outside of TICAD, ODI also worked hard to forge links through the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and directly with the Japanese government (both with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, known as JICA, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or MOFA) and civil society, like the policy think tank the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS).

These various links, entry points and relationships proved essential in keeping the project moving forward, as disagreements emerged early on in the evidence gathering process that needed the positional credibility of various project partners to overcome. For instance, although a comprehensive research framework was established at the initial workshop in Ghana, each of the country partners developed their own research methodology and approach, focusing on questions that were most relevant to their context. In several cases, these country-level approaches were perceived as too aggressive, and ODI was pushed into a mediatory role.

All partners produced country-level reports, but due to the sensitivity of the findings it was decided that ODI would develop a synthesis report in coordination with partner organisations. The report was circulated among contacts in JICA and MOFA as a means of ensuring the accuracy of the evidence generated and opening further dialogue on the issues highlighted in the report. Although the report was never officially published, circulating it within the Japanese government has certainly spawned reaction and debate internally. The ebpdn project briefing: [Reforming aid in 2008: An agenda for Japanese leadership](#) that became the key output is also the most downloaded resource on the ebpdn website.

It is unclear the extent to which these issues were raised at TICAD and the G8, but we are continuing to monitor documents and policies coming out of the so-called New JICA, established in October 2008 as the world's largest bilateral aid agency, to understand better the impact of this research.

Certainly this experience has led to closer relationships with Japanese agencies for several of the partners. The Ghanaian partner, for example, was invited for a meeting with the country JICA office. The work also attracted media interest, with partners appearing on both [CNBC Africa](#) (TV) and BBC Afrique (radio). The Bangladesh team also made a film based on the findings of their report that was widely distributed. The contribution by the Malawi Economic Justice Network, a project partner, of a case study to a report on One Village One Product (OVOP), has led to joint ODI and JICA research on how the experiences of similar programmes in Asia and Japan could be used to improve the programme in Malawi and be expanded to other African countries.

If engaging stakeholders early and often in order to find multiple entry points for the evidence worked well, there were also important lessons to be learned. One difficulty was working equitably with partners when the various Japanese departments were clearly holding ODI accountable. There became a need to carefully monitor the wording of outputs, which limited the ability of partners to drive the process in the direction they desired.

Timing was also an issue. The policy processes targeted had a tightly controlled timeline, and making sure the research from all countries was available at the appropriate moments was challenging, especially given the sensitivity with which it became necessary to approach the process. In retrospect, it might also have been helpful to focus on relationship building before jumping straight into substance. Finally, this case also showed the importance of understanding the cultural context of those one is trying to influence. Focusing on the TICAD and G8 processes might not have been the most ideal timing to examine Japanese aid practices as the Japanese government was most concerned with making sure these high-level events went off without a hitch. The initial approach was also likely too direct for a culture that can be more subtle.

Going forward, the information collected during this project will feed into other strands of work on aid practice and on Japanese development policy. The ebpdn partners are also continuing to work together on other projects as the network continues to evolve.

More information on this project can be found on the ebpdn website at: <http://www.ebpdn.org/projects/project.php?id=41>. The information was also collated on the ODI website on a special 'ODI on... TICAD and the G8' page, which can be found at: <http://www.odi.org.uk/odi-on/japan-2008/index.html>