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Strategies for Effective Policy Advocacy:

Demanding Good Governance in Africa

George Katito and Faten Aggad

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CONTENTS

About the authors	4
Acknowledgements	4
Foreword	5
Chapter 1 Introduction	7
A character study of successful African advocacy campaigns	7
The regional and global context	9
African solutions to African problems?	10
The four pillars of effective advocacy	14
Chapter 2 Effective Strategic Planning	16
Introduction	16
Designing a strategic plan	16
Chapter 3 Networks	29
Introduction	29
Defining a network	29
Building functional networks	29
Using networks to attract ‘membership’ and build legitimacy	31
Networks as a source of evidence	32
Using networks to strengthen capacity	32
Leveraging international networks	33
Chapter 4 Effective Engagement with Decision Makers: Playing Politics	34
Introduction	34
Engaging parliamentarians	34
Expertise for effective engagement	35
Identifying opportunities for influence: Mapping the political landscape	36
Suing government: A strategy of last resort	40
Race, ethnicity and social taboo	42
Chapter 5 The Role of Evidence and the Use of Technology in Advocacy	44
Introduction	44
Rethinking the role of information in influencing policy	44
Tools for gathering relevant information	46
Twenty-first-century-century rabble rousing: The use of mobile technology By ‘smart mobs’	50
Harnessing mobile technology for policy influence: Key challenges and opportunities	52
Chapter 6 Towards Effective Demand-Driven Democracy:	
A Summary of Recommendations and Findings	55
Introduction	55
Ten tips for effective African advocacy	55
Endnotes	59

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The project admittedly tackles an ambitiously formidable subject, largely due to the dearth of compelling, contemporary African examples of civil society leading noteworthy policy or social change. Governance and policy reform in several African countries continues to be driven by African governments, through initiatives such as the APRM, as SAIIA's six years of research into the APRM suggests. As such, the following study broaches a subject starved of compelling material. However, it creates an accessible set of lessons from civil society activists, academics, diplomats, representatives of donor agencies and civil society experts that have played leading roles in a few — but notable — episodes of civil society-led policy reform. The authors owe a considerable debt of appreciation for the time and valuable insights lent by these rare civil society practitioners and experts for the purposes of this study.

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FOREWORD

Coming as I do from a major Zambian civil society organisation (CSO) — or, as we like to say, an FBO (‘faith-based organisation’) — I read with great interest the SAIIA study on strategies for effective policy advocacy. I am a firm believer in the essential role that civil society must play if democracy is to be truly effective and equitable. This is particularly true of civil society groups that engage in efforts to influence the direction and content of public policy.

The SAIIA study focuses attention mainly on southern African experiences and builds its arguments and lessons based on case studies particularly in South Africa and Zambia. My experience in Zambia for the past 20 years has reinforced in me the belief that this country is a place both of immense *potential* and enormous *problems*. One of the richest countries in Africa in terms of resources, it is one of the poorest countries in the world in measurements of human development.

But in my view, the potential definitely outweighs the problems. The challenge is how to put this potential to work in solving the problems. And it is here that case studies demonstrating both successes and failures of civil society’s efforts to bring about policy change are very helpful indeed. This makes the current study not just an academic exercise, but a realistic ‘cookbook’ of menus and recipes for the social change we so desperately need.

I found the authors’ treatment of their subject under the rubric of ‘four pillars of effective advocacy’ particularly helpful, i.e. *strategies, networks, politics and evidence*. Their analysis of each of these pillars rang true with my Zambian experience of the work of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

For example, our successful Jubilee campaign to get Zambia’s enormous external debt (\$7.2 billion) cancelled required us to continually review and reshape our strategies — moving between short-term objectives (reduce annual payments to free up resources for social programmes) and long-term objectives (establish a debt mechanism to assure public accountability in taking out new loan). Our network of friends locally, regionally and internationally assured that pressure for cancellation was applied credibly and consistently. It was in efforts to ‘play politics’ that we strengthened our efforts — learning how to deal with Zambian government ministries, international financial institutions and allies of various ideological orientations. Growth in our use of information and communication technology came slowly, but we matured in the use of the Internet, web pages and mobile phones.

Analysis of another example of our work became clearer to me — in both its successes and difficulties — when reviewing the ‘four pillars’. The JCTR has for many years prepared a monthly ‘Basic Needs Basket’ to show in a simple but clear format how much it costs a family to meet its requirements for decent living. Our strategies have evolved over the years as we have refined the template of costs; our networks have grown as we have incorporated women’s groups, trade unions, health activists and churches into them; our political engagement has brought us into more contact with parliamentary committees; and our information outreach has expanded through the sending of hundreds of regular emails.

Yes, the ‘four pillars’ approach in understanding policy advocacy is indeed helpful.

But something that struck me as missing in reading the SAIIA study was discussion of another necessary ingredient in the JCTR’s success, the *value dimension*. By this I mean the explicit focus on the ethical or moral content of advocacy efforts. It seems to me that there certainly have been strong value emphases — both implicit or explicit — in the two policy advocacy campaigns that the study concentrates on: South Africa’s Treatment Action Campaign and Zambia’s Anti-Third Term Campaign. The TAC stressed equity in the use of public resources and the Anti-Third Term Campaign stressed respect for democratic sensibilities in protecting the Constitution.

I bring up this issue of values because I believe that the recognition, definition, emphasis and orientation of this dimension definitely add to the effective efforts of CSOs to bring about change. I have seen this in our JCTR work and observed it in the efforts of the many CSOs we co-operate with in advocacy campaigns. Values make a difference!

Why is this so? Because at the most basic level, values — our ethical frameworks and moral stances — *motivate* us in promoting the changes (even when they appear unattainable), *guide* us in designing the strategies (lifting out priorities and identifying allies) and *sustain* us in keeping up our efforts (even in the face of setbacks).

Indeed, I sometime get asked why civil society in Zambia is such a lively social reality. It often appears to be more serious in its intent and commitment than government agencies and to have more fun than sporting activities! I think this is because civil society at its best is ultimately about working for the betterment of human life for both individuals and communities.

That’s a big task; but with *values* added to *strategies*, *networks*, *politics* and *evidence*, it’s an achievable one.

Peter Henriot

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A CHARACTER STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL AFRICAN ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

This study recommends strategies and tactics to civil society organisations (CSOs) seeking to influence policy reform. It draws largely on the experience of successful civil society advocacy campaigns in sub-Saharan Africa, develops a character study of these initiatives and posits a set of recommendations for aspirant policy reform campaigns. It also draws valuable lessons from examples of where CSOs have failed to achieve their goals.

While this study stems from a research programme whose primary focus has been the nature of ‘supply-side’ initiatives to improve governance — with a particular focus on the efforts of African governments to improve standards of governance from the top down through the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) — it distils and articulates lessons on the opportunities and challenges inherent in *demanding* good governance. As such, it interrogates the nature of campaigns to demand improved governance by civil society that have been successful despite being ambitious, unsolicited and often conducted in the face of hostile governments.

What is advocacy?

The term ‘advocacy’ is often used as a catch-all phrase for any form of social activism. However, ‘advocacy’ in this study specifically refers to civil society-led efforts to generate political support for formulating policy or improving implementation.

More broadly, ‘advocacy’ in this text refers to

a process that involves a series of political actions conducted by organized citizens in order to transform power relationships. The purpose of advocacy is to achieve specific policy changes that benefit the population involved in this process. These changes can take place in the public or private sector. Effective advocacy is conducted according to a strategic plan and within a reasonable time frame.¹

Defining civil society

'Civil society' is a contested concept. It is crucial to define the term as it is used in this study.

Bayart defines civil society as 'society in its relation with the state ... in so far as it is in confrontation with the state'.² This definition, albeit popular, is problematic and perpetuates a misunderstanding. As Kasfir notes, the 'concept of civil society has been shaped to serve the goal of better governance, particularly democratic reform, rather than a deeper understanding of the relationship between social formations, the associations that represent them and the state'.³ CSOs do not necessarily exist only (or at all) to oppose the state. In fact, at times, they have either assisted or even replaced the state, especially on issues of service delivery.

Civil society has also been defined in terms of a

space or realm ... defined by newly constituted norms about what the state should and should not do and by the rules of politics in that space ... [it is the] processes by which norms about the shape, content, and behaviour of a public sphere emerge and why one particular set becomes dominant.⁴

While this definition reflects the nature of a large number of CSOs, it excludes those that do not necessarily focus on how the state should and should not act. Indeed, the function of a given CSO determines its relationship to the state. Some organisations, such as recreational groups, exist independently of what the state does or does not do. Therefore, it is important to take the function of CSOs into account.

In this respect, we use the classification of CSOs by Court *et al.*⁵ The classification is subject to the particular role or roles CSOs play:

Representation: groups representing the voice of a group of citizens;

Advocacy: groups lobbying for a particular issue (this is the realm of interest groups);

Service delivery: groups that implement a development agenda or provide services such as legal advice and health care (humanitarian groups fall into this category);

Technical input: specialised organisations that provide information and advice (policy think tanks form the bulk of this group);

Capacity building: organisations that provide training or funding to other CSOs;

Social function: groups that foster collective recreational activities (these include sports associations); and

Social movements: groups that represent 'collective challenges [to elites, authorities, other groups or cultural codes constituted] by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities'.⁶

We acknowledge that some CSOs take on more than one of the functions listed above. Therefore, rigidly classifying them into a single category may be problematic. In this sense, the classification is used only as a framework for studying the role of civil society.

Given the many issues on which CSOs engage, it becomes important to broaden the definition. Therefore, civil society is used to refer to *organised associations that operate in the realm between the family and the state with a view to shaping a given issue*. In our understanding, civil society excludes political parties.

Our focus is on those CSOs wishing to engage in policymaking processes. By policy we mean *the plans or regulations, in this case put in place by government, to address issues related to the functioning of the state*. Policymaking processes, therefore, imply the set of mechanisms and instruments through which such regulations come into existence, from the problem formulation phase, to the debate on a suitable solution/law, to the implementation phase.

THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT

Sub-Saharan Africa's widely documented developmental challenges make rigorous CSO advocacy particularly critical and urgent. As high levels of socio-economic underdevelopment persist in most African countries — and as a dramatic downturn in the global economy slowly unfolds — relevant policy solutions and proactive civil society engagement with policy processes are undoubtedly critical. Arguably, a substantial proportion sub-Saharan Africa's policy challenges are inextricably linked to endemic poverty. An estimated 50% of sub-Saharan Africa's population lives below the World Bank's poverty line of \$1.25 per day — a proportion that the World Bank expects to increase dramatically as a result of the current financial meltdown.⁷ Thirty-four of Africa's 54 countries qualify for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Levels of inequality remain glaringly stark in several African countries, including Zambia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda, where more than 60% of the populations live in abject poverty.⁸

Yet governance assessments such as the APRM reveal that policy frameworks in several African countries often lack the effectiveness to deliver on development goals. Indeed, African countries continue to perform poorly on crucial indicators of development. As a case in point: several African countries continue to struggle to effectively tackle high levels of illiteracy, which in turn hampers their prospects of improving the chances of lifting their populations out of poverty. While some have made notable progress in increasing primary school enrolment, completion rates remain remarkably low. For instance, Madagascar has a 93% enrolment rate, but less than a 60% completion rate. Other pertinent developmental challenges — posed by low levels of access to health care, high infant mortality, and deeply unequal access to food and nutrition along gender lines — also underscore the need for effective civic engagement in developing workable solutions to these problems.

Similarly, as food insecurity grows continentally and regionally, so does the need for holistic and effective policy responses and a rigorous civil society. An estimated 27% of Africa's population are classified as lacking basic food security⁹ — i.e. the reliable availability of sufficient nutritious food¹⁰ — either because there is no food or because they cannot afford it. More worryingly, there are few encouraging signs that food security is likely to increase. In general, food security is seriously threatened by highly

underdeveloped agricultural markets and sectors, environmental degradation, frequent crop loss, limited access to markets and poor infrastructure.¹¹

As is widely acknowledged, geography often exacerbates the continent's policy challenges. This is particularly applicable to sub-Saharan Africa's 16 landlocked economies whose geography renders them relatively unattractive to foreign direct investment. Investors frequently note, for instance, that trade with such landlocked countries is severely crippled not only by the lack of extensive road and rail infrastructure, which prolongs the time and cost of transporting goods from continental Africa, but by cumbersome and often antiquated policy and regulations.¹² Civil society and African governments, therefore, have a particularly important role in consistently developing policy and regulatory responses to the economic and socio-economic effects of their countries' unfortunate geographies.¹³

The well-documented 'resource curse' affecting several countries, where revenues from abundant natural resources are routinely mismanaged, presents yet another challenge. Increasingly, resource-rich African countries need robust public service sectors, effective parliaments and innovative policies to manage resource wealth and exercise effective oversight over the corporate governance of investment into African commodities.¹⁴

However, despite the clear need for effective and responsive policy to tackle Africa's well-known problems, civic engagement with policymakers very often takes place in hostile political and legal environments. CIVICUS, an organisation that analyses civil society globally, finds that the quality of CSO contributions to policy is often restrained by uneasy CSO relations with government, hostile and restrictive legal environments, fragmented and combative relations among CSOs themselves, and policy spaces flooded by foreign solutions and recommendations that stifle creativity and initiative.¹⁵

Thus, effective advocacy in Africa, while critical, is often lacking in countries where it is needed the most. However, as African countries stand on the brink of unprecedented policy challenges as a result of the current global economic meltdown — it is vital that civil society develop strategies of engaging with policy processes that are both effective and timely. The following collection of strategies hopefully provides useful information for organisations seeking to influence the shape, and implementation of policy under challenging conditions.

AFRICAN SOLUTIONS TO AFRICAN PROBLEMS?

The APRM is perhaps the most notable of all the efforts to invigorate the engagement of civil society in pinpointing problems and developing solutions. Recognising this need, by March 2009, 29 African countries had committed themselves to providing CSOs with an opportunity to contribute policy input to improve political, socio-economic, corporate and economic governance. In many instances, CSOs have embraced the opportunity.

Yet our experience shows that CSO engagement has not always been robust, lively and productive. Organisations sometimes stayed away from key meetings, or missed the chance to put their views in writing, or simply distrusted the process to such an extent that they disengaged from it.¹⁶ This study, therefore, is partly informed by the authors' extensive research into the quality and extent of civil society engagement with the APRM, and intends to contribute to effective CSO engagement with policy through the APRM and beyond.

By interviewing members of CSOs, academics and policymakers in South Africa and Zambia, and by surveying their literature, it became apparent that there was widespread recognition that, outside of the APRM, case studies of effective civil society influence on policies tailored to an African audience were extremely rare. Nonetheless, through episodes of policy influence captured in this study, we hope to distil lessons from the limited pool of successful advocacy initiatives in the region. The ‘profile’ text boxes below give brief descriptions of organisations and campaigns that have succeeded in influencing the shape and implementation of policy. These are extensively analysed in this study in addition to other case studies.

Profile 1: Civil Society for Poverty Reduction, Zambia

Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) describes itself as an anti-poverty advocacy network, established in 2000 to ‘ensure that civil society effectively and meaningfully participates in the design, formulation, implementation and monitoring of Zambia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper’.¹⁷ The network is composed of more than 140 organisations negotiating the space between the grassroots level and national policy in Zambia. The network produces a vast array of research into and policy analysis of the implementation of pro-poor socio-economic policy, facilitates civic engagement with government and advocacy, oversees information management and networking, and supports governance and institutional development.

The CSPR network has been instrumental in shaping Zambia’s national development plans and other poverty reduction policies in the country, and has a track record as an influential pro-poor advocacy network. Its success at developing and sustaining a functional network of like-minded organisations, commitment to a well-defined strategy, strategic use of information to strengthen its advocacy efforts, and political sophistication have all contributed to its relative comparative advantage over similar policy organisations. Its notable ability to offer sustained policy input offers a rich set of strategies for CSOs seeking to influence policy elsewhere.

Proving the policy impact of any given advocacy campaign is complex, given the range of factors that steer the course of policy: policy changes are often as much a result of timing as they are the product of the personalities that shape them, the economic context and other factors. As such, the study opts to focus primarily on two advocacy campaigns whose impact has been tested by the passage of time and proved by the successful implementation of policy reforms.

The first campaign extensively studied in this study is the Oasis Forum’s campaign to influence constitutional reform in Zambia (see Profile 2 box, below). This is supported by references to a similar campaign launched in Benin, West Africa, entitled *Touches pas ma Constitution* (‘Don’t touch my Constitution’). Formed in 2001, the Oasis Forum’s main objective was to prevent the Constitution from being changed to allow Frederick Chiluba to run for a third term as president of Zambia. The Forum was composed of the Law

Association of Zambia (LAZ), the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Co-ordinating Committee, the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia. Subsequently, 22 members of the leading political party, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy, joined.

The Forum capitalised on the experience of its members in order to educate the population, to take informed positions on constitutional reforms and the third term, and to mobilise resistance in what came to be seen as the ‘golden moment’ of Zambian civil society. Through tactics that will be explored in this study, it succeeded in rallying support against Chiluba’s bid for a third term, leading him to formally abandon the bid on 2 January 2002.

Profile 2: The Anti-Third Term Campaign, Zambia

In 2001 Zambian President Frederick Chiluba tried to change the country’s Constitution to allow him to run for a third term. Chiluba and his supporters used several tactics to drum up public support for the move. For example, an Office of District Administrators was established and staffed with party cadres who were sent out into the districts to intimidate people opposed to the third term, even if violence was required to change the minds of opponents. Traditional leaders were lobbied, and were often gulled into believing that they were signing up for an increase in subsidies.

It did not work. Activists from a range of civil society groups who formed an umbrella body, the Oasis Forum — among them lawyers, religious leaders, women’s organisations, youth groups, human rights activists and trade unionists, who were joined by individual members of parliament (MPs) who opposed changing the Constitution. Groups mobilised their own constituencies — clerics organised prayer meetings, MPs lobbied colleagues and wrote articles for the independent press, and lawyers and others staged debates and discussions. Popular campaigns were aimed at ordinary citizens, who wore green ribbons to show their disapproval of a change in the Constitution, or blew whistles or honked their car hooters at specific times.

This demonstration of people power was effective. Only weeks after the campaign began, Chiluba announced that he would not pursue a third term.

Source: Chella C & S Kabanda, ‘Lessons in effective citizen activism: The Anti-Third Term Campaign in Zambia’, *SAIIA Occasional Paper*, 6. Johannesburg: SAIIA, 2008.

Profile 3: Touches pas ma Constitution, Benin

Benin was viewed as a stable small country in the troubled West African region — but in 2005 the then president, Mathieu Kérékou, sought constitutional changes to enable him to serve a third term. Beninese consultants working on a commissioned study on constitutional reforms in Kenya realised that a similar process was unfolding in their own country. The *Touches pas ma Constitution* campaign was launched by a coalition of CSOs to oppose the changes. Campaigns highlighted the dangers of a third term. As was the

case in Zambia, CSOs in Benin gained the support of parliamentarians and members of the ruling party. The campaign resulted in Kérékou withdrawing his bid for a third term and declaring on 11 July 2005, 'if you do not let go of power, a day will come when power leaves you'.¹⁸

This study also features a second key case study: that of the Treatment Action Campaign's bid to influence government policies on access to Aids treatment in South Africa. Formed in December 1998 in Cape Town, South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) sought to influence public policy to provide treatment for people with HIV and help reduce the number of new HIV infections. Among other actions, it lobbied for policy changes, provided education on HIV/Aids and urged greater access to HIV drugs.¹⁹

The TAC's defining triumph, however, was its successful legal action against the South African government that forced the latter to allow the distribution of Nevirapine, a drug that inhibits mother-to-child transmission of the HI virus. After numerous attempts to engage the then minister of health, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, the TAC charged her and the nine provincial health ministers with breaching their 'constitutional and international obligations in failing to provide Nevirapine to women outside the limited pilot sites'.²⁰ The TAC won the court case, and the decision — which the government contested — was upheld on appeal.

Profile 4: The Treatment Action Campaign, South Africa

The TAC was formed in South Africa in 1998 with the objective of advocating for increased access to treatment for people living with HIV and for state interventions in helping prevent the spread of the disease. While the TAC has succeeded in numerous campaigns to increase the physical and financial accessibility to HIV treatment in South Africa, its successes in pressuring the deeply reluctant government into reforming its HIV policy and offer countrywide access to anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment and treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV are particularly instructive case studies for CSOs seeking to influence policy elsewhere.

More specifically, the TAC's use of legal instruments to push for substantive reforms to South Africa's public health policy is a potent case study of the power of functional networks and innovative political strategy. However, it is critical to mention that a substantial proportion of the TAC's success is attributable to the Aids Law Project (ALP), a human rights organisation that seeks to 'influence, develop and use the law to address the human rights implications of HIV/Aids in South Africa, regionally and internationally'.²¹ The ALP provided legal advice and support to the TAC in several court actions to pressure the South African government into national HIV policy reforms.

Beyond their success in attaining predetermined goals, these and other case studies provide a wealth of lessons for CSO-led advocacy campaigns elsewhere.

Profile 5: Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, Zambia

Formed in 1988, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) is a 'research, education and advocacy team that promotes study and action on issues ... [of] social justice in Zambia'.²² It is one of the most influential civil society groups in Zambia and formed part of the Oasis Forum (see Profile 2, above, for further information on the Oasis Forum). Its work on budget monitoring and poverty reduction provides an instructive model for other CSOs seeking to influence and monitor policy implementation. The JCTR has a notable suite of initiatives and publications, including the monthly 'Basic Needs Basket', which assesses levels of poverty in Lusaka and attempts to engage government on the issue. It has also led a number of campaigns that shaped poverty reduction strategies in Zambia and internationally. These include a campaign on debt cancellation that caused international partners to cut the country's debt. The JCTR is also involved in social teaching in churches to create awareness of poverty.

THE FOUR PILLARS OF EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

This study argues that in the African context, successful policy influence, as evidenced by the case studies that the study contains, often hinges on four critical pillars — namely, the quality of strategy, the extent and functionality of networks, the level of political and legal sophistication, and the ability to leverage knowledge and information and communications technology (ICT). In subsequent chapters, this study argues the following:

The quality of strategic planning has a direct bearing on the success of CSO-led advocacy: While it is taken for granted that CSOs typically develop strategic plans, several practitioners admitted that poor quality policy input from CSOs often stemmed from a lack of a clear and coherent strategy. Furthermore, CSOs often failed to achieve their intended effect because of inadequate strategic planning. Drawing from the experiences of CSPR and the TAC, Chapter 2 provides recommendations for effective strategic planning.

Forming connections between/among organisations has no intrinsic value unless extra effort is made to develop functional and targeted networks: CSOs struggling to exert influence are often advised to 'form networks'. But networks give rise to unique dynamics that need to be managed effectively. As a case in point, CSOs that have attempted to influence the APRM in Tanzania and Zambia have struggled to meet their intended objective largely because their networks failed them. Chapter 3 explores how CSOs can leverage networks for policy influence and, more specifically, how CSOs can advance their goals by making networks functional, as opposed to merely sustaining them.

Successful policy advocacy often depends directly on a willingness to ‘play politics’:

The study explores the dynamic environment and context in which policy is formulated. Effective input often thrives on the ability of CSOs to navigate their political environments and ‘play politics’ where necessary. Chapter 4 unpacks the political ‘secrets to success’.

Successful advocacy will increasingly depend on harnessing technology for activism:

With mobile/cellular telephones becoming ubiquitous, mobile technology is an everyday tool for communication and other ends — from banking to health service delivery. It has also become increasingly important for CSOs seeking policy influence. Chapter 5 assesses emerging trends and evaluates the role of information, in addition to the judicious use of traditional forms of gathering evidence, to inform policy.

CHAPTER 2

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

‘Strategy’, ‘strategic thinking’, and ‘strategic plans’ are concepts most often associated with the business sector. For many, they are viewed as having little relevance to the functioning of non-profit organisations — including CSOs. Yet strategic planning is increasingly part of the *modus operandi* of any effective institution throughout the world.

Organisations that have succeeded in influencing policy changes have all engaged, in one form or another, in a process of strategic planning. For the purpose of this chapter, being strategic implies ‘being clear about the organisation’s objectives, being aware of the organisation’s resources and incorporating both into being consciously responsive to a dynamic environment’.²³ Hence, strategic planning refers to a ‘disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organisation is, what it does, and why [and how] it does it’.²⁴

CSOs in Africa can often identify the issues they want to tackle. However, interviews conducted with stakeholders indicate that such groups rarely have a clear understanding of the need for a strategy to influence the policy process. Few are able to develop a comprehensive written strategy that clearly stipulates specific objectives, tools and tactics to be used, and many often fail to demonstrate an understanding of the broader context in which a particular organisation operates. This broader context has regard for the relationship between the issue in question and issues in other areas. It considers how to advocate effectively for change and how to use limited resources efficiently.

This chapter explores the concept of strategic planning and its relevance to CSOs. Based on interviews with members of organisations in selected African countries, it looks at key elements of a strategy, especially in the context of policy influence. Key questions are: *What* objective is the organisation trying to achieve? *How* does it plan to achieve the objective? *Who* does it need to influence? *When* is the right time to carry out the elements of the strategy?

DESIGNING A STRATEGIC PLAN

Be it a long, detailed document that tackles the planning of an entire institution or a shorter one devoted to an issue-specific campaign — such as increasing access to ARV drugs for HIV patients — a strategic plan is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, strategic planning is about creating an operational framework to enable greater focus and to prioritise activities. It is about deciding what *exactly* should be done, why it should be done and how to do it. It takes into account the organisation’s strengths and weaknesses. An organisation that has limited human and financial resources can benefit from strategic planning by acknowledging its limitations, capitalising on its strengths and compensating

for its weaknesses. Being conscious of its limitations allows it to set priorities and use its resources efficiently.

Secondly, strategic planning allows for an issue to be contextualised in a broader framework of policy changes. Such an exercise is better known as *environmental scanning*. Identifying key factors that could influence the campaign will allow the organisation to plan better and to develop a better-informed strategy.

Thirdly, by going through a process of strategic planning, the organisation is better able to articulate its objectives and to have a very specific idea of what the changed policy should look like and what it aims to achieve. Therefore, strategic planning becomes a tool through which organisations develop a framework that guides their engagement with policymaking processes.

There are different stages in the strategic planning cycle.

Identify the issue

What issue(s) will the campaign tackle? For instance, if an organisation deals with HIV/Aids and is not satisfied with government's handling of the pandemic, it is important to identify precisely the root cause of the problem. Is it an issue of policy, or delivery, or both?

It is also crucial to identify potential issues and focus on them. Being strategic is about being proactive. CSOs do not have to wait for a process to be launched by a government to get involved. From our interviews, this seems to be a weak point in the way African civil society groups function. They are mostly reactive.

Speaking about the Non-Governmental Organisations Bill in Uganda (which was an effort to restrict civic engagement by empowering the government to regulate the activities of CSOs), Arthur Larok, a member of Ugandan civil society, noted that

the state was the key driver. Despite what was an unexpected desire to review the 1989 [NGO Statute] within the NGO community, NGOs were not proactive enough and their desire did not translate into an explicit demand for legal or policy change.²⁵

The result was that civil society found itself 'playing catch-up'.²⁶

This point was raised by others. In interviews with donor representatives, one Zambian national working for a major international institution noted that 'civil society is not relevant [right now]'.²⁷ A local employee of another donor organisation, who has worked for a number of local CSOs in Lusaka, noted that 'civil society [in Zambia] is very reactive, not proactive. When there is a crisis they react, but only once the crisis is well established'.²⁸ He referred to budget tracking, arguing that civil society did not monitor the process from the start, but rather became involved only once discussion of the budget began in parliament.

According to our research, the ability to identify emerging issues was what enabled some organisations not only to engage in the process early, but also to build credibility and a reputation in their field. During our fieldwork in Zambia, a number of observers argued that the success of organisations such as the JCTR and Caritas-Zambia could be credited to their broader organisational goal of contributing to poverty alleviation through extensive work on budget tracking (tracing government expenditure in different sectors against government commitments and financial reports).

Individual organisations and groups will identify the strategic issues that concern them, and develop their expertise accordingly.

What is the objective or mission?

Each organisation or group engaging in the policymaking process should clearly articulate its aims. Is its mission to change a specific section of a law or the entire law? What is the focus of the organisation or the campaign? Some organisations are overstretched, which places pressure on their resources and hampers their ability to exert influence, given their lack of focus. By identifying a clear institutional mission or campaign objective, the organisation is not only able to rationalise its activities and utilise its resources better, but it also develops a deeper understanding of that mission, since it is specialising in it.

Furthermore, purpose dictates tactics. For instance, if the purpose is to improve the lives of HIV-positive people, the organisation may have to choose between being a service-oriented or an advocacy NGO. If its purpose is to change the manner in which government handles HIV/Aids, its strategy will deal with advocacy techniques. Some organisations try to engage in the policymaking process without being able to articulate specifically what they aim to achieve by doing so. Using the example of the NGO Bill in Zambia, a professor at the University of Zambia who advises a donor organisation noted that Zambian CSOs ‘were not clear about what they wanted’ when debating the NGO Bill.²⁹

There was consensus that the proposed bill was not favourable to the functioning of a free civil society movement because it required organisations to be registered and approved by a board appointed by the Ministry of Home Affairs, thus giving government the power to control the organisations and co-ordinate NGO work. But local CSOs were unable to articulate their objections until local chapters of international organisations like Amnesty International-Zambia and Médecins Sans Frontières-Zambia devised a strategy that seems to have delayed government’s efforts to take the bill to parliament.³⁰ If CSOs are not able to state clearly what they are opposing and what they want done about it, their vagueness will provide government and other critics with ammunition to discredit them. However, they must also take account of the environment in which the policy is being formulated. Tactical choices are important, as becomes evident in comparing efforts in Zambia and Uganda to block bills designed to give government the power to regulate NGOs. Different tactical choices in the two countries meant that the Zambian protests were successful, while those in Uganda failed.

In the early 2000s, the governments of both Uganda and Zambia (like other countries, including Ethiopia) had formulated NGO Bills to regulate the activities and funding of CSOs. They believed that donor-funded CSOs represented a challenge to sovereignty by giving room to donors to influence national policy. There was also a perception that civil society needed to be transparent and accountable about sources of finance and expenditure in the same way that governments supposedly are.³¹ The bills were brought to both parliaments. Zambia withdrew its proposed legislation and Uganda approved it. The ‘secret’ of CSO success in Zambia was said to lie in the tactics used.

In Zambia, international and local CSOs succeeded in mobilising international donors who, in turn, put pressure on the government.³² Ugandan civil society chose a different route; it proposed an alternative bill. Larok notes:³³

By 2004, NGOs in expression of extreme frustration now acting collectively under a coalition called CONOB (Coalition on the NGO Bill) decided to produce an alternative: a model of what they were asking government. While the move to produce an alternative bill was ... innovative and proactive in the circumstances, it effectively sealed our fate regarding any hope that the draft NGO Bill before Parliament could change. Why? Essentially because with an 'alternative bill' we stopped engaging with the main process in Parliament That was the end of the story.

Mobilisation of donors worked in Zambia, but it might also have led to an opposite result — CSOs becoming alienated from their constituencies or their government because of their association with donors. A thorough assessment of the pros and cons of each tactic is therefore crucial to determine the risks and implications associated with any choice.

Lessons from the NGO Bill in Uganda

- **Comprehend the bigger picture:** The NGO Bill (subsequently passed into law) was one of several pieces of legislation being pushed by the regime as part of a larger political project to retain its power base.
- **Improve participation and engagement** by assessing the following: Are we too elitist in managing our engagements? Are there ways to ensure participation apart from conventional workshops, which involve expenses like transport, accommodation, food and upkeep?
- **Diversify the target group:** Identify multiple targets to influence. For instance, instead of targeting only the parliamentary committee involved, an effort could have been made to talk to MPs. Many MPs who voted for the NGO Bill in 2006 had only a scanty idea of what it was about.
- **Diversify leadership:** Involve other NGOs, at different levels.
- **Engage with actual drafters,** for instance, the consultants who were contracted by government to come up with the proposal.

Source: Adapted from Larok A, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–5.

The danger of not having a specific purpose also leads organisations to work on randomly chosen issues and change focus depending on donor priorities. This point was raised by a number of observers. A donor representative in Lusaka noted that some organisations formulated irrelevant proposals in the belief they were doing what donors wanted. At the time of our visit, one institution put a proposal to the Zambian government for tracking aid, believing that the donor wanted to sponsor the project. But the donor representative told us: 'We have enough systems to track our aid. What we wanted was for organisations to track government expenditure at a local level.'³⁴ In such cases, civil society loses focus, relevance to local realities and legitimacy.

Involve your members

Ownership of the strategy is crucial to success, so organisations must involve members from the beginning. Input can be requested from different quarters to avoid the entire organisation having to sit in a large venue and plan its campaign. This is particularly important for large organisations with branches across the country. The TAC, for instance, asks members in provincial branches to provide input for integration into a national plan, after which the national executive designs strategy. Taking into consideration the contribution of all members promotes ownership and participation.

Scan the operational environment

This is one of the most important steps. The concept of ‘operational environment’ is often understood in terms of ‘the legal, administrative, policy and regulatory framework for NGOs seen either from the vantage point of the state or in relation to it’.³⁵ In other words, it is about knowing the actors and the frameworks guiding them. It thus becomes easy for a CSO to rely on ‘restrictive’ regulations to explain a lack of engagement in policy. For instance, while working on the APRM, often CSOs argued that their lack of engagement came about because they were not invited to the consultations.³⁶ But other channels were available to them, e.g. lobbying parliamentarians or simply asking to be involved.

Although a restrictive environment may, indeed, hamper CSOs — e.g. if an emergency law limits their ability to comment on government decisions — the fault is sometimes closer to home: a restrictive internal operational environment within the organisation itself. Be it lack of human resources or funding, this internal environment should be taken into account when developing a strategic plan. The absence of strategic thinking within some organisations is also important, especially since members themselves often have difficulty in assessing where the organisation is going.

It is important to recognise internal and external factors that may hamper or enable African CSOs. Therefore, the definition of ‘operating environment’ should be broadened to include the following:³⁷

- understanding the underlying forces/motives for the state to put legal and regulatory regimes in place;
- understanding the internal values, systems and policies of the CSOs themselves, which are important to comprehending how they function and how they engage with their internal and external environments;
- understanding relations within CSOs themselves, including their internal power relations; and
- understanding sources of funding.

All these aspects need to be fully assessed when developing a strategic plan.

Reflecting on the failure of civil society to block the adoption of the NGO Bill in Uganda, Larok notes:³⁸

I think the biggest undoing was our inability to understand the wider political context in which the NGO Bill and Act is located. The NGO Bill [and] Act processes were not isolated

and therefore it was not an issue about NGOs per se. The NGO Bill and Act were just one of several pieces of legislation that were being pushed by the regime in power as part of a bigger political project to retain its power base by [restricting] the enterprise of other actors ... So the lesson for us would be to engage more with the wider political context within the emblem of the good governance agenda.

The TAC in South Africa understood this early enough and has capitalised on it by expanding its outreach to cover labour issues and thus, in the process, forming alliances with organisations such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions, which proved a valuable partner.

Get the timing right

Is the time right to lobby for change? This became obvious from our discussions with the Oasis Forum in Zambia and the *Touchez pas ma Constitution* campaign organisers in Benin (see Chapter 1, Profiles 2 and 3). In both instances, it was clear that many people across each country — including political actors — did not wish to see their presidents, Chiluba and Kérékou respectively, serving a third term. The balance of forces (in-party discontent and support of CSOs by parliamentarians) was in favour of CSOs, hence allowing them to mobilise and demand change. Members of the public were informed enough to know their rights and to side with CSOs. In the case of Zambia, church groups had done a tremendous job in informing their followers of the Anti-Third Term Campaign through sermons and radio broadcasts.³⁹ Similarly, some political actors changed their spots. Members of the ruling party in both Zambia and Benin wanted change and played an important role in blocking third terms.⁴⁰

This is not to imply that CSOs should sit and wait for the ‘right moment’. Rather, it is about recognising opportunities and being ready to take advantage of them. Environmental scanning should allow them to identify the appropriate moment for intervention. There is no clear rule to determine when it is too early or too late. It is up to the discretion of the organisation itself to make a critical judgement call, depending on the situation at hand.

Analyse stakeholders

To achieve impact, CSOs need to study the stakeholders involved in a particular issue, be they individual ministries in government, the legislature or other actors (i.e. donors). More importantly, it is crucial to understand and engage legislators and presidents, as these are the only public servants that are directly accountable to the public through elections. Appreciating this political dynamic could serve as a valuable leverage tool — understanding the powers of the legislature to propose, amend or oversee policies and legislation is critical to targeting advocacy efforts effectively. Such analysis allows the organisation to customise its campaign. If it is leading a campaign on HIV/Aids, the CSO should assess different aspects: Who formulates HIV/Aids policy? What powers does the legislature have to create or oversee the implementation of policy? Are legislators empowered with the information, skills and support to effectively carry out their functions? Is the ministry of health receptive to civil society contributions? Is the failure to respond to the pandemic caused by a lack of political will, a lack of information or a

lack of support, e.g. research and capacity to deliver?

Careful analysis of stakeholders will allow the organisation to develop its advocacy message. Using the example above, should the HIV/Aids advocacy group call for stronger political will, or opt for a more supportive stance by offering to facilitate service delivery?

Decide whom to target

The analysis of the various stakeholders prepares the ground for determining whom the target of the campaign should be. For instance, where is the bottleneck when it comes to HIV/Aids policy? Is it to be found in the ministry of health, which is responsible for proposing policy; or is it in parliament, which is responsible for passing health bills, conducting oversight or passing budgets? The section on ‘playing politics’ later in this guide will provide advice on choosing your target.

Gather information

Once the CSO has identified the issue and assessed its internal capacity, it becomes important for it to gather all relevant information. For instance, if it is trying to block legislation, it needs to know what has been done so far (i.e. has a study been commissioned? Who is in charge of the reform? When is the bill scheduled to be debated in parliament?).

Gathering information is also about gathering evidence. ‘Shout loud, but back up with research’, said Fr Peter Henriot of the JCTR, one of the most influential groups in Zambia.⁴¹ Indeed, evidence-based advocacy is increasingly assisting CSOs to push for reforms. Institutions that have successfully sustained policy engagement often have research departments to which they allocate an increasing portion of their budget. Our interviews with organisations such as the TAC, JCTR and Caritas-Zambia, all with a proven track record of policy impact, show that these groups have dedicated research departments that rely on evidence from branches and allies to develop policy positions. Developing informed positions based on concrete evidence and not rumours or perceptions has helped these organisations to gather support and legitimacy.

Choose the right tactic

‘It is important to find the right [tactic] to deal with the challenge at hand’, and ‘this may differ from one situation to the other’, according to one informant.⁴² Indeed, for each situation there is a tactic — or tactics. Most of the organisations interviewed relied on the mobilisation of ordinary citizens as a basic tool. In Benin (*Touches pas ma Constitution*), Zambia (Oasis Forum) and South Africa (TAC), different stakeholders, ranging from community representatives to political figures, were mobilised to the streets to support the cause. The TAC also opted for direct meetings with government officials and resorted to the legal system, notably by taking the South African government to court to force it to distribute free ARV drugs (see Chapter 1, Profile 4).⁴³ Mobilisation and legal recourse were clearly useful tactics for some organisations, but others have chosen different tactics to cope with specific situations. Some succeeded; others did not. The choice of the ‘right’ tactic is fundamental.

Decide whom to ask for support

This is an important question in developing a strategy. Possible role players range from government officials to parliamentarians to government consultants. A constituency that proved particularly supportive in the three countries under study were parliamentarians, who provided political support and crucial ‘inside’ information (see Chapter 3: Networks). But civil society should remember that it is important to ‘co-operat[e], but not [be] co-opt[ed]; engage, but not [get] marr[ied]’.⁴⁴

Lessons learned by the JCTR: How to successfully influence policy

- Educate/cultivate the media by hosting lunches or writing a weekly column in a local newspaper.
- Produce good research.
- Attract attention. The ‘Basic Needs Basket’ survey gets good press coverage. ‘If you do good research, even if [governments] don’t like you, they can’t ignore you.’
- Maintain visibility, for instance, through a regular flagship publication.
- Emphasise the value dimension (for the JCTR, the focus is on what particular policies mean for the poor).
- Build legitimacy through good contact with ordinary ‘folks down at the grassroots’.
- Do not be an elite group.
- Co-operate with other organisations and stakeholders.

Source: Interview with Fr Peter Henriot, JCTR, Lusaka, 25 July 2008.

Choose a partner

Partnering with another institution to implement a strategy, especially a campaign strategy, may prove fruitful (see Chapter 3: Networks). Explore available options and look for an organisation that can compensate for weaknesses in your own group.

Employing the media as a strategic partner

Sensitise the media: The media can attract attention to your cause and so raise your profile. In all case studies in this study, the media proved to be pivotal. The Oasis Forum in Zambia used different types of media to speak to different audiences. The role of *The Post* newspaper was mentioned repeatedly as giving a voice to the Forum. By publishing opinion pieces and other editorial material, it became a part of the debate. To illustrate the important role of the media, the Oasis Forum attributes the success of its campaign in

large part to the wide coverage of campaign-related activity in printed media.⁴⁵

Church groups also used the media to sensitise listeners and viewers. The Catholic Church in Zambia had an evening slot on national television and, despite censorship, was able to broadcast a session focusing on the third term debate — a session that led to the dismissal of the head of the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation. The resultant public attention made the Forum more popular and rallied more supporters.⁴⁶

Church groups also made use of community radio stations, which have a wide reach. They regularly broadcast discussions on the implications of a presidential third term, which played a central role in sensitising people at the grassroots. These people became a central force in opposing the proposed constitutional change.

In South Africa, support from the media enabled the TAC to establish itself as an authority in the fight against HIV/Aids. Its opinions on government policy and other Aids-related issues are regularly quoted by local and international newspapers.

Inevitably, political climates differ across the continent and different challenges prevail. Engaging the media may prove difficult in countries where there are restrictions on media freedom. Francophone Africa is a particular problem in this regard. Members of the media usually insist on payment to cover an event or publish an opinion piece, so involving them can become a financial burden. But, as Reckya Madougou, a co-ordinator of the anti-third term campaign in Benin, noted, once the media realise that a campaign is relevant to them, they become willing to compromise. 'Journalists did co-operate and have often covered stories with heavy discounts — if not free of charge', she noted.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, having to pay for publicity may undermine processes that could otherwise benefit an entire nation.

Not all organisations know how to engage the media. As civil society trainer Victoria Ayer noted:⁴⁸

All too often, NGOs' only media activity is to send out press releases that talk about an activity that the NGO has done (or an invitation to another tedious press conference) and all the NGO really wants is for the media to serve as a validator. Rather, NGOs must create media events that go beyond public relations for themselves. Journalists need stories that have conflict/controversy/broad appeal.

So, how can an organisation generate media interest? There is no magic recipe, and even the few available options are not always successful. Nonetheless, it is useful to explore three techniques.

The first is to **contribute opinion articles** to local newspapers. Many editors, especially of independent newspapers, are interested in reflecting the views of CSO practitioners and advocates. The first step is to compile a list of independent newspapers and their editors' contact details.

The next step is to write the article. Remember, editors want material that is written in simple language that is both accessible to ordinary readers and timely — i.e. that deals with current issues. If an organisation wants to raise awareness on an issue that is not yet in the public eye, it should look for ways to link it to something currently in the news. An organisation working on budget tracking would find it useful to try to place an article at

a time when the annual budget is being debated in parliament. But if it wants to sustain the debate during the rest of the year, one way to do this is to link its contribution to the perennial issue of corruption. Creativity is called for in writing opinion editorials.

Another technique is to **train journalists** on the issue on which your organisation is working. This is widely used by the TAC, which provides training to journalists focusing on HIV/Aids. The technique does not guarantee success. SAILA, for which the authors of this study work, conducted training to sensitise journalists and editors from across Africa about the APRM over the period 2003–05. Only a handful continued to follow the implementation of the programme when they returned to their countries, but securing the backing of a handful of journalists is better than having no backing at all.

The last technique was suggested by Fr Henriot of the JCTR in Zambia. His organisation invites journalists to lunches at which it **exposes them to new findings** by the JCTR's research department on a variety of subjects. A combination of this technique and writing opinion pieces has helped the JCTR gain support among media practitioners. Media tours can also be considered. This involves, for instance, inviting the press to the site of a problem and allowing journalists to speak directly to affected people.⁴⁹

Finally, organisations need to understand that a media profile cannot be developed without their own active engagement. An organisation needs to reach out to the media to ensure that, in the longer term, the media reach out to the organisation when they require information.

Attracting the attention of the media should not be a once-off effort, but an ongoing process. Integrate the media into your strategic thinking process and your strategic plan.

Arrange the division of labour

What is the human capacity of the organisation? Who will implement each section of the plan? Should some work be outsourced? Does the organisation have the financial resources to do so? These are the sort of questions that should be answered in designing a strategic plan.

Decide on fundraising

When developing a strategy, it is important to look at ways to finance it. Fundraising is a difficult issue for many CSOs. There are too few donors for too many organisations competing for the same source of funding. It is here that the details of the strategic plan become important. The clearer an organisation is about its objectives and strategy, the more likely is it to receive funding. But fundraising remains a complex process and requires creative approaches.

The TAC provides a useful example. It has a large international network and a fundraising group in the UK called Friends of the TAC (FOTAC). Its main mandate is to raise HIV/Aids (and TAC) awareness among different stakeholders, donor agencies and private individuals. FOTAC has proved to be a major vehicle for raising funds.

Collecting funds from membership subscriptions is also common among the groups we interviewed. Although revenues may be limited, it at least allows the organisation to build a buffer against changing donor priorities, thus making its work more sustainable.

Write the plan

‘Any good organisation has got to have paper trails.’⁵⁰ This is the last step in the process of strategic planning. Once an organisation has decided on the points raised above, it should compile a written document to which it will refer during its campaign. This document should incorporate the detailed activities that the organisation will undertake and should be combined with a financial plan.

This is not the end of the process. Next comes **implementation**, and a number of steps need to be taken into account here.

Continuously reassess your tactics

While it is important to start with a clear strategy setting out the tactics they will use, it is not uncommon for CSOs to *adapt* their tactics in response to unforeseen situations. Indeed, it is crucial to evaluate tactics continuously. Perhaps a particular tactic is not working. Perhaps the external operational environment has changed.

Organisations like the TAC develop a contingency plan (or plans) when choosing tactics. The TAC prefers to engage with government on available platforms; however, ‘we have a legal strategy in place in the event things don’t work out’, noted Andrew Warlick, a development officer at the organisation.⁵¹ And legal strategy can also evolve, according to Jonathan Berger, a senior researcher with the ALP, an organisation that has carried out legal action on behalf of the TAC.⁵² As a case in point, the ALP has already developed a set of tactics to effectively engage in advocacy concerning the Medicines Control Bill, which was being debated in parliament at the time of writing.

Some organisations decide to change tactics later in the process. In Benin, for instance, CSOs lobbying to block President Kérékou from changing the Constitution focused initially on parliamentarians and other political figures. But when they received leaked information revealing that the president proposed to defend his plans to stay in office by arguing that the country could not afford elections, the CSOs added donors to their target list. The result: a campaign success. Donors contributed a substantial sum to election funds, denying Kérékou the excuse he needed to cling to power. Campaigners need to look for gaps and design tactics to counter any attempt to undermine their campaigns.

Engage persistently and continuously

Early engagement is important, but consistent and continuous engagement is even more so. To use the example of the NGO Bill in Uganda, it did not serve the campaign well to disengage because activists were dissatisfied with how the government was handling the matter, or because they had developed an alternative proposal. In other words, persistence will eventually drive home your message.

Keep an ear to the ground

Being well informed about government plans can prove to be a valuable asset. Reckya Madougou, a co-ordinator of the anti-third term campaign in Benin, told the authors:⁵³

We were informed by parliamentarians that the government planned to announce that there were no financial resources to hold the elections in a bid to extend Kérékou's hold on power. [Government] was lobbying the Senate to postpone the election date. Such information was vital to NGOs, as they quickly mobilised international partners to inquire about the funding issue and even to fund the elections. The US and the UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] eventually footed the bill, and elections were held in 2006.

Thus, keeping an ear to the ground allowed a civil society group to develop a counter-strategy to support its overall objective.

Go prepared

During interviews, we were told about the lack of preparedness of some CSOs when attending crucial meetings. Observers in Zambia noted that some CSO representatives had not informed themselves well enough to engage in useful discussions with donors, civil society and the Zambian government. In their defence, civil society representatives argued that documents were not always received on time, denying them the chance to reflect on the issues under discussion. It was a valid argument. But sometimes the blame lay with CSOs themselves for not displaying enough initiative. In Zambia, it was noted that CSOs were insufficiently prepared for participation in Sector Advisory Groups, a structure designed to encourage interaction among donors, civil society and government — and this despite the fact that meetings were held regularly and that participants could request documents well in advance. Donors said that they had not been asked for any documents.⁵⁴ It is important that CSOs remain resourceful.

Keep your constituency informed

When implementing a plan, and especially a campaign, it is important to keep constituencies informed about progress. The TAC, the Oasis Forum in Zambia and the *Touches pas ma Constitution* campaign in Benin all found that open communication channels helped to sustain support. They build trust and maintain momentum and interest.

Conduct effective monitoring and evaluation

This aspect of the campaign cycle is important because it allows an organisation to assess its strategy, adapt it to emerging realities and learn from documented experience. It is also valuable for fundraising purposes. Donors — be they foreign agencies or local organisations — increasingly want to know what practical impact their donations have made.

Remain humble

The best way to neutralise someone is to make them feel important. The Zambian government succeeded in neutralising civil society organisations who felt they were too important to engage with government according to a representative of an international NGO in Lusaka. As such, it is critical that CSOs maintain a high level of humility and willingness to engage in government.⁵⁵

To conclude, strategic planning is a crucial first step to conducting a successful campaign. Good planning assists in achieving the desired objectives. But strategic planning should be conducted in a thorough way, and as objectively as possible. Likewise, the environment should be assessed realistically and accurately.

This chapter does not offer an exhaustive list of the things a CSO should take into account in developing a strategic plan, but merely a guide. CSOs should add points they consider relevant and important to their specific situations. The more factors that are considered, the more comprehensive the plan will be. The chapters to follow provide a more detailed account of specific topics. Among them are the power of networks, the role of the media and the importance of using modern technology.

CHAPTER 3

NETWORKS

INTRODUCTION

Advocacy is about influence. As policy processes become increasingly complex, thus drawing in different actors and factors, influence cannot be secured by an individual organisation. The use of networks and the services available through other role players, such as the media, becomes central to a successful advocacy strategy. In our interviews with CSOs, it was clear that their involvement in a network and their effective use of media contributed to strengthening their work.

This chapter looks first at the role of networks and their contribution to the work of CSOs, before focussing on ways to build a strong network. The media are discussed as constituting a ‘network’ on which CSOs can rely.

DEFINING A NETWORK

According to Church *et al.*, ‘[a] network can be called a network when the relationships between those in the network are voluntarily entered into, the autonomy of participants remains intact and there are mutual or joint activities’.⁵⁶ A **network** is therefore a *dynamic, constantly evolving structure, whether formal or informal, in which different organisations come together to consolidate resources and work towards the same objective*. It is distinguished from **networking**, which is *the exercise of linking up to other individuals and organisations without necessarily creating a structure that allows for joint activities*. Although there are distinctions among the different forms of co-operation among groups — coalitions, networks and alliances⁵⁷ — the term ‘network’ is used broadly in this guide to refer to all three forms of co-operation.

There is no paucity of literature arguing for the benefits of networks. Networks can play different roles and benefit non-profit organisations on many levels. Based on our interactions with several CSOs in sub-Saharan Africa, networks can serve as tools in three ways:

- to legitimise and strengthen advocacy;
- to raise funds; and
- to build capacity and fill capacity gaps.

BUILDING FUNCTIONAL NETWORKS

Making a network function effectively and to the satisfaction of its members is hard work. Our interviews with civil society groups and networks show that a number of

basic elements must be considered. The list that follows features aspects common to all interviewees, but is not exhaustive.

Build a common vision and mission

For any relationship to work effectively, all parties need to be looking in the same direction and working towards the same end. A functional network and a durable collaboration depend on the ability of members to indeed have a common vision. Without it, conflict will emerge on the purpose of actions taken by the network and/or its members, which may lead to the collapse of co-operation.

The Oasis Forum in Zambia, which successfully blocked Frederick Chiluba from securing a third term as president of the country, was thereafter not able to collaborate in a united boycott of an arguably flawed constitutional reform process under way in the country. The reason was a lack of common vision between, in particular, church groups and the lawyers of the LAZ. The latter wanted to engage with government to secure a place at the consultations table. The former favoured a boycott, because its members believed that civil society was not genuinely consulted. The disagreement led to the de facto dissolution of the Oasis Forum.

Visions and missions need to be realistic to ensure that deliverables are achieved and member interest remains high. Visions that are too broad and ambitious do not allow the group to progress and put forward concrete proposals. The result is a lack of delivery. Tanzanian civil society had big dreams, wanting to make broad submissions on macroeconomic reforms and electoral systems. But those involved paid scant attention to detail, e.g. what section exactly of the electoral system should be reformed? An unfocused vision led to an absence of progress. Focus is crucial.

Create a functional structure

In most cases under study, the network structure was loose. Financial support for organisational work came from each organisation's own financial pool. Staff members' time was shared with the network. The lack of structure was explained by the ad hoc nature of the advocacy effort.

Some organisations prefer a more formal structure with a permanent co-ordinating body — a secretariat. If this route is chosen, a number of considerations apply. Chief among them is the need to ensure that a precise mandate for the secretariat is drawn up. The role of member organisations should also be stipulated clearly. Overlaps and misunderstandings may lead to conflict. The lack of a clear mandate can also result in the secretariat intervening in the internal functioning of member organisations, leading to tensions. Thus, it is important to agree on terms at the outset and ensure that the secretariat plays a co-ordinating role and not a managerial one.

Furthermore, financial rules and procedures for secretariat staff need to be laid down. This is particularly important to foster transparency. Because the secretariat may be financed by member organisations, it is necessary that it is seen to act in a responsible and transparent way, avoiding a waste of resources.

The importance of this point is illustrated by comparing the success of CSPR in Zambia to the limited role played by the Zambian APRM Civil Society Secretariat. CSPR

is a secretariat that serves 140 CSOs, many operating at the grassroots level. Its mandate is clear: to co-ordinate and package the work of its affiliates with a view to influencing development policy. It does its own fundraising and has a dedicated staff. The role of members is also defined. This clarity enabled CSPR to influence policymaking processes, including the Zambian government's Ninth National Development Plan.

On the other hand, the Zambian APRM Civil Society Secretariat brings together a few domestic CSOs working in different fields, with the aim of ensuring civil society input into the APRM. Although it was able to mobilise members to oppose some government decisions on the APRM (e.g. the creation of a governing council without consultation), the lack of clear mandate hampered it in pursuing a more ambitious and active agenda.

Continuously evaluate the network

How does the network add value to the work of a member organisation? Is it bringing about the desired change? It is also important to assess the contribution of each member organisation, how and where the interaction takes place (channels of participation), and what role the secretariat plays other than that of networking. The benefits drawn from participation in a network should be evaluated constantly.

It is hard work building a network, but it can pay off. Our interviewees have identified some of the benefits. All our case studies involve either a network or an organisation operating within a network. We did not set out to prove that networks are central to the work of organisations trying to influence policy, but this emerged anyway.

USING NETWORKS TO ATTRACT 'MEMBERSHIP' AND BUILD LEGITIMACY

The legitimacy of CSOs, especially in Africa, is frequently questioned by critics, including governments. Often, they are accused of not being representative, of not having the authority to speak for others, of being foreign controlled or of lacking in-depth knowledge of complex policy issues. This perception may reduce their impact and provide governments with excuses to justify excluding them from policymaking processes. Countering the perceptions that they lack legitimacy should be a central focus of civil society groups across Africa.

All networks interviewed here had a strong membership component — either formally registered members or unregistered supporters who maintain regular involvement. The presence of members has a dual effect. Firstly, it helps establish the organisation or network as representative. Church groups in Zambia that are also members of the Oasis Forum are perceived by many observers to be legitimate and representative. Because most of Zambia's population is Christian⁵⁸ and the three major church bodies — the Council of Churches of Zambia, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia and the Zambia Episcopal Conference — were involved in the Oasis Forum, it led to the network being acknowledged as representative of the majority of the people of Zambia. The involvement of churches therefore provided the necessary legitimacy.

Similarly, the government initially accused the *Touche pas ma Constitution* in Benin of being the voice of opposition parties. But it quickly became clear that the campaign

had gathered support from groups representing various constituencies, both nationally and locally. Questioning the legitimacy of the campaign became difficult, and attempts to change the Constitution to allow President Kérékou to run for a third term were dropped.

The power of membership is also crucial when mobilisation is needed. An ability to mobilise, especially at the grassroots level, has proved valuable for most of the organisations under study. Zambian churches educated their members about the danger of a third term for Chiluba, dedicated Sunday sermons to the issue and channelled their message through church radio broadcasts. Thus, they created awareness and prepared people for mobilisation, adding an element of pressure to the campaign.

NETWORKS AS A SOURCE OF EVIDENCE

Conducting research and collecting evidence can be costly activities, and many CSOs in Africa cannot afford them. Involvement in a network, however, may provide a cost-effective solution to this problem. Members can exchange information and exploit special knowledge that a partner has. CSPR in Zambia, a network of 140 organisations that focuses on budget tracking, asks members to provide information on budget expenditure in their provinces or municipalities.

Some can provide ‘raw’, first-hand information that may be crucial in developing an evidence-based advocacy plan. This information is channelled to CSPR, which, acting as a secretariat, compiles reports based on it. This makes CSPR more ‘respectable’, both for government and donors. As Dorica Nkhoma of CSPR noted: ‘Our success can be attributed to reliance on evidence’, thus stressing the importance of evidence-based advocacy.⁵⁹ This evidence was drawn in part from grassroots constituencies, because members had links to them. A network made sourcing evidence easier. One result was that CSPR helped shape parts of the Fifth National Development Plan and was able to lobby successfully for a section to be included dealing with social protection.

USING NETWORKS TO STRENGTHEN CAPACITY

CSOs are often under-resourced and understaffed, and sometimes lack the technical skills for campaigns, yet it is costly to get advice from specialised institutions. In addition, advocacy in the policy arena requires detailed understanding of processes, regulations and laws that civil society groups do not always have. Networks provided solutions to the organisations we interviewed, allowing them to fill technical gaps. The Oasis Forum in Zambia and the TAC in South Africa offer good examples of this benefit.

The Oasis Forum drew from the expertise of the diverse specialised groups in its membership. The LAZ offered a legal dimension, and legal evidence, in opposing a third term for Chiluba. For its part, LAZ benefitted from its partnership with church groups and others, which helped to generate popular support; something it might have had difficulty in achieving alone. Thus the Forum provided benefits and gave additional capacity to its constituent groups.

A similar effect was identified in the close relationship between the ALP and the TAC. The ALP had been central to the TAC’s litigation efforts, providing pro bono advice and

representation. Without this, many agree, the high cost of litigation could have hampered the TAC's work. In exchange, the TAC proved pivotal in helping the ALP to fulfil one of the latter's central mandates. Says Jonathan Berger of the ALP: 'Co-operation with the TAC is part of our core area of work ... it is a mutually beneficial ... and dynamic relationship.' The 'core area' was litigation 'to protect, promote and advance the rights of people living with HIV/Aids'.⁶⁰

While organisations are sponsored individually, donors recognise that very few have the capacity to do everything, so linkages become important. From our research, it emerged that some donors prefer to support organisations that are able to build linkages and thus complement one another.

LEVERAGING INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

International networks are often underestimated by local CSOs, but the case of the TAC in South Africa shows that the former can be crucial, not only to build pressure on government, but to raise funds (an Achilles heel for African civil society groups). Through a UK-based charity group, FOTAC, the TAC was able to raise some of the money it needed for its activities.

While networks can be very beneficial, not all of them are. Some are dysfunctional and do not bring results. Sometimes they can be a waste of resources. Our research has shown that only networks that have a strong base — i.e. that consist of member institutions with solid structures themselves — have the potential to succeed. Weak institutions can only lead to weak networks, so it is important to choose partners carefully and to consider the factors necessary for success, as outlined above.

CHAPTER 4

EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH DECISION MAKERS: PLAYING POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

In addition to developing a coherent strategy and building functional networks, winning political support is crucial to effective policy influence. The experience of the TAC and the Oasis Forum — along with other examples introduced in this chapter — strongly suggest that CSOs have to be willing to actively participate in the political territory in which policy is made to be effective in influencing policy. This environment is often intimidating. It is characterised by fierce competition for resources and a struggle for position and status.⁶¹ This could appear daunting for CSOs seeking to exert influence on sensitive political issues and for groups operating in hostile political circumstances.

Yet the experience of CSOs and politicians consulted for this chapter suggests that what is required is a clear and conscious understanding of the formal and informal processes surrounding a given policy issue — and a tactical approach to engaging these dynamics.

Most Zambian and South African civil society experts interviewed — from academia, international organisations, the diplomatic community and think tanks — thought that a key hindrance to effective CSO policy engagement was insufficient political savvy and strategy. A representative of an international financial institution working extensively with policy-oriented CSOs in Zambia said that CSOs in her field could increase their influence substantially by paying more attention to informal political dynamics and being more effective in anticipating political developments. They also needed to be well prepared to manage past and current political realities.⁶²

This chapter explores the political dimension of policy influence, without being a comprehensive scientific study of the role that political savvy plays in influencing policy.⁶³ It proposes a set of strategies based on experiences in Brazil, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa and Zambia. It is hoped that these will be instructive for CSOs seeking to make an impact on policy.

ENGAGING PARLIAMENTARIANS

Technically, policy influence should be exerted through parliamentary structures. But earlier research by SAIIA into parliaments in southern Africa suggests that such influence is rarely guaranteed just because it is stipulated constitutionally. Parliaments may have a legal obligation to exercise oversight over the executive and oversee policy formulation, but in practice they may lack the legitimacy or credibility to do so.⁶⁴ This may be because the executive does not take them seriously; or views parliamentary input as a sign of lack of ‘patriotism, disrespect or disloyalty’; or, indeed, because parliaments themselves are not

effective in carrying out their constitutional duties.⁶⁵ Such factors need to be taken into account when devising a strategy to exert political influence.

While gathering adequate evidence, using correct channels and attending to the technical aspects of policy influence are critical, it is equally important to have regard for the subtler political nuances at play.

South Africa offers a case in point. The political power of parliament has been in flux during the country's first 15 years as a democracy.⁶⁶ After the 1994 election it was an accessible institution offering an optimal route to civil society influence. But as government focus shifted from consultation to policy implementation, influence shifted to cabinet ministers, state departments and the executive, who became the key power brokers.

Under the Mbeki administration, civil society influence would have been more effectively channelled through the executive branch.⁶⁷ But the sands continue to shift as political parties gain leverage and parliamentary committees become significant institutions. This was noticeable after the African National Congress's December 2007 Polokwane conference, with more ministers and officials being called to regularly account to the National Assembly. Whether this trend continues after the 2009 elections remains to be seen. Increasingly, CSOs seeking influence will need to familiarise themselves with a rapidly changing cast of politically influential role players.

While exerting influence through parliamentary structures strengthens democratic culture and can be transparent, it is crucial to assess realistically how effective a route this is. In 2006 CSOs in Benin, seeking to block constitutional amendments that would give the president a third term (see Chapter 1, Profile 3), centred their advocacy strategy on engaging key holders of de facto political power such as the donor community.⁶⁸ Their sensitivity to where actual power lay was, arguably, a key factor in their ultimate success in averting a potential constitutional and democratic crisis.

EXPERTISE FOR EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Influencing policy through parliament cannot be reduced to political posturing and manoeuvring. South African and Zambian parliamentarians, asked to provide recommendations to CSOs, stressed the importance of technical expertise and feeding high-quality information into parliamentary processes. Indeed, parliaments often lack the research capacity and professional skills necessary to generate informed policy decisions themselves, and CSOs could play a critical role in meeting this deficiency.

One South African parliamentarian commented that a proposal submitted by an influential CSO was battling to gain buy-in from its traditional allies and opposition parties in part because its submission was poorly researched and written. She stressed the need for attention to detail, succinct expression and robust research.⁶⁹ The value of succinct materials cannot be overstated. When targeting parliamentarians, *brief*, informative communications are essential. This involves knowing exactly what the target group needs to know, in order to influence its members' thought processes.

To be more effective in parliamentary structures, the following recommendations were offered by policymakers and organisations that had successfully navigated this route:

Develop a detailed record of policy discussions and gather minutes of parliamentary debates (i.e. be informed)⁷⁰: Where possible, get written accounts of parliamentary discussions, access minutes of policy debates, and attend open sessions and take elaborate notes of key contentions. In some countries, these records are available electronically. Being aware of previous commitments and comments is a potentially effective way of holding policymakers to their promises.

Gain the endorsement of strategic individuals from the outset: Endorsements and/or explicit statements of support, whether oral or written, from influential people strengthen any case. The Zambian effort to block an extended presidential term (see Chapter 1, Profile 2) drew strength from endorsements by 21 parliamentarians. Some had personal interests, some had career-oriented motives and some genuinely wanted to avert a constitutional crisis.⁷¹ Developing a formal schedule, having extensive background documentation and adopting a highly professional approach to persistent lobbying were critical to gaining enough internal support to stop the constitutional change.⁷²

Cultivate research and professional alliances with policy advisors: Establishing personal relationships with key stakeholders is critical, but may not be immediately attainable. Cultivating relationships with advisors who have the ear of relevant stakeholders is a less direct, more gradual, but equally effective avenue. Its value was vividly demonstrated in the case of Uganda's Mabira Forest campaign, which sought to halt what activists claimed was a violation of environmental policy. Uganda's government had committed itself to granting a sugar producer, the Mehta Group, two-thirds of forest-covered land in the Mabira Forest in apparent violation of the country's Natural Environment Act. Said one leading activist: 'A defining success factor was that the campaign had access to sensitive official information, including cabinet documents. Without that, government might well have succeeded.'⁷³

Include expert analysis and testimonials where necessary⁷⁴: Appealing to scientific evidence has proven to be an effective advocacy tool for South Africa's TAC (see Chapter 1, Profile 4). However, in countries where such expertise is lacking or where experts and professionals maintain their distance from advocacy in order to avoid compromising their research,⁷⁵ international networks and partnerships could play a vital role in filling knowledge vacuums, while lending scientific credibility to policy reform efforts.

IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFLUENCE: MAPPING THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Top-down influence through key players

Attempting to gain access to high-level public officials is likely to be frustrating, demanding and difficult — and perhaps impossible, in some instances. However, experiences in Uganda and South Africa suggest unsurprisingly that gaining the support of heads of state or ministers is decisive and indispensable. Ugandan HIV/Aids activists owe much of their

widely acclaimed success to the buy-in of the central government. Civil society success in gaining high-level political support for its positions on HIV/Aids stemmed from its ability to market the strategic importance of its proposals on prevention, education and awareness.⁷⁶

On the other hand, attempts by South Africa's TAC to influence the executive branch to provide ARV treatment were more frustrating — largely because of a tense political environment and the TAC's limited ability to win support where it mattered most. Arguably, a further complication arose because the TAC could not reconcile its advocacy goals with the broader objectives of the government nationally and those of the health sector.⁷⁷ Lack of political support at the executive level helped ensure a markedly more contentious and protracted campaign.⁷⁸

These disparate experiences underscore the critical role of political buy-in at the executive level.

Using invited public participation spaces⁷⁹

Consultative processes in which governments solicit input from stakeholders provide an opportunity to gain invited access to key executive-level officials. Yet, as a Ugandan civil society representative warns, these could produce little policy value unless CSOs seize the chance to propose feasible solutions and propound their views.⁸⁰ One opportunity arises because a growing number of African countries have committed themselves to inviting policy input through the APRM. Some CSOs have embraced the opportunity to present their policy concerns. Uganda's Minority Rights Group International, a group working to secure rights for minorities and indigenous peoples, used the APRM process to propose a focused set of policy reforms. Specifically, it wants to pressure government to:

- provide restitution and compensation for ethnic and other minorities dispossessed of land;
- create a development strategy for minority groups; and
- develop an early warning mechanism when land claims conflict with natural resources protection.⁸¹

However, not all CSOs have found engagement with the APRM productive. In some instances, government officials have dominated the process and civil societies have felt intimidated. CSOs have not always been invited to participate timeously. In Ethiopia, some CSOs believe that the new NGO Act has limited the ability of foreign-funded organisations to make a proper contribution.⁸² In South Africa and other countries, concerns were raised about the heavy influence that government officials brought to bear during APRM consultations.⁸³ In Tanzania, stakeholders complained of a lack of publicity and that the CSOs that were invited were not sufficiently representative.⁸⁴

In short, the golden opportunity to influence key political role players through such consultative processes turned out to be disappointing.⁸⁵ Participation demanded extensive preparation, succinct and digestible policy messages, a willingness to defend policy positions and a readiness to tackle the dynamics that arose in highly politicised policy spaces. Establishing trust with key political figures and obtaining quality access to them call for a commitment to seizing all possible chances to engage in dialogue on policy issues.⁸⁶

Building trust through informal settings

Opportunities to influence high-ranking public officials are understandably limited, but political power brokers may be open to softer forms of influence. For instance, an informal event organised in a more congenial atmosphere than a formal meeting could, at the very least, be used to promote policy proposals.

As part of a broader strategy, the JCTR in Zambia held a lunch to increase awareness of its proposal to strengthen the legal and institutional framework governing external debt management.⁸⁷ Similarly, the Institute for Security Studies in South Africa held a cocktail-party-cum-briefing in 2008 to introduce stakeholders and political brokers to its new policy-influencing strategy.

Informal settings provide an opportunity to develop goodwill, demonstrate flexibility and transparency — and perhaps even create vital relationships. They also present an opportunity to gather ‘intelligence’ on the dynamics in politically sensitive areas.

Exerting policy influence through print

The JCTR believes that its high print output is a key to its policy influence. It distributes to stakeholders and policymakers nearly 200 articles, documents and publications a year on socio-economic justice issues. There is at least one opinion article published in the Zambian press every week.⁸⁸ The output allows it to develop instant ‘name recognition’, consolidate an image of professionalism and increase its standing as a reputable organisation. This sustained effort, however, presents a wide-reaching managerial challenge. It calls for a large investment of time, high levels of staff motivation, effective leadership and retention of talent, among other things. These are discussed later.

‘Outsourcing’ policy influence

Channelling policy recommendations through organisations and individuals with established access to political figures is worth considering. CSOs working on poverty reduction in Zambia, but lacking political clout, have ‘outsourced’ the influencing function to a network that is frequently called on to make policy input — CSPR.⁸⁹ Such an approach frees the CSOs to focus on other core activities. However, exerting political influence by proxy presents its own challenges, not least of which are the costs. CSPR, for instance, charges a fee for its ‘technical and political services’. Alternative routes — like making a direct written submission to public officials or parliamentary committees — may cost less and be equally effective.

Appealing to international agreements

Governments sign international agreements that commit them to upholding certain standards of behaviour and norms. Holding them to account domestically regarding these agreements can be another effective policy advocacy tool.⁹⁰ Activists can use a particular government’s record of compliance to exert moral pressure on it to honour its pledges. But the case is strengthened if it can be shown that compliance with an international agreement would benefit that government strategically, economically, politically and administratively.

Brazilian CSOs used international agreements to garner political support for reforms in agricultural labour policy. Brazil, which emerged from military dictatorship in 1985, has a centuries-old history of slavery and colonialism. It still grapples with the persistent use of forced labour, partly because the country is so large, which makes it difficult to ensure enforcement, and partly because there are loopholes in the law.⁹¹ By appealing to international instruments — notably the International Labour Organisation’s Conventions 29 and 105, relating to coerced labour, and its Declaration on Fundamental Principles of Rights at Work — political support was garnered for more effective ways to combat forced labour in agriculture. One result was the establishment of a government-led initiative to tackle the issue and rehabilitate victims of the system. Similarly, Zambia’s Land Alliance has used an appeal to international instruments, and more specifically African Union conventions, to rally political support for agrarian reform.

Gaining ‘street credibility’

Foreign-funded CSOs are often accused of owing allegiance to outsiders because of their sources of funding. They become easy targets for criticism that their policy input is illegitimate or that their motives are to serve the interests of a foreign constituency. In Ethiopia, a new law restricting participation by foreign-funded CSOs on issues of political governance and democracy, and granting government significant control over NGOs, among other things, was passed in January 2009.⁹² Similar bills and laws are being promoted in countries like Uganda and Zambia.

Gaining credibility could call for aggressive strategies, some of which are covered in greater detail in other chapters. Activist coalitions owe much of their success to popular political support, as Zambia demonstrated in blocking the third term bid. More specifically, these campaigns took key measures to demonstrate the breadth of their appeal and the extent of their support, which we recommend below.

Use symbols of solidarity and CSO–retailer corporate responsibility partnerships

Globally, the concept of wearing symbols of solidarity — in Zambia’s Anti-Third Term Campaign, green ribbons and T-shirts⁹³ — has become a popular way to demonstrate public support. A potentially effective, bankable means of distributing such symbols was adopted by the Global Fund to help African women and children with HIV/Aids. It created a civil society–retailer partnership with a global clothing retailer, GAP stores. In return for the sales it would gain, GAP agreed to distribute clothing branded with symbols of solidarity for the Global Fund’s advocacy campaign and provide some financial support to the fund. Such a model risks limiting a campaign’s reach to those communities who both want the goods and can afford them. But it does demonstrate public support for a cause by a sponsor willing to take the political and business risk of being associated with it. It could be an effective approach for campaigns with a longer life cycle.

Employ innovative forms of protest

One approach is to stage public demonstrations. On 14 February 2003 South Africa’s TAC organised a demonstration that attracted more than 20 000 people. It cited this as evidence of broad support for its campaign for greater access to Aids treatment in a memorandum to then President Thabo Mbeki and then Deputy President Jacob Zuma, whose political

opposition to the campaign had been widely documented.⁹⁴ Protest, combined with other strategies, played a crucial role in leading to an eventual government buy-in. Zambia's Anti-Third Term Campaign also relied on public protest, but opted for a less orthodox approach. The campaign co-ordinated what it termed an 'audible and visual symbol of outrage'. Members of the public were asked to demonstrate their support either by honking their car hooters or blowing a whistle at 5 p.m. each Friday. The innovative campaign was effective on several counts. It underscored public support, maintained public enthusiasm and gained free publicity among less informed people. Better still, it repeatedly conveyed public dissatisfaction to key political figures and power brokers.

Pass the authenticity test

Enjoying broad public support may not necessarily gain the credibility needed to build trust with key political figures. Zambian civil society experts cite their country's current constitutional review process as a case in point. It enjoys broad support, but, commentators argue, has failed to achieve the desired result, partly because of questions about the motives of some of the individuals involved. It is often claimed that key protesters are doing it for the substantial money involved, whether they win or lose, and that they have a vested interest in prolonging the process. Some are accused of adopting positions in conflict with the views of their own CSOs on policy reform. These criticisms have rubbed off on the CSOs themselves.

While these are subjective judgements based on perceptions, it is clear that organisations that can demonstrate their authenticity at the individual and institutional levels gain greater public credibility and strength. The TAC, in particular, uses the personal testimonies of individuals affected by government policy to validate its calls for policy reform. It also engages knowledgeable professionals who have direct experience of the impact of government's HIV/Aids policy, and employs a broad base of volunteers to perform crucial aspects of its work. All these methods help to demonstrate the organisation's authenticity, giving its campaign credibility as an initiative run by individuals with genuine commitment.

SUING GOVERNMENT: A STRATEGY OF LAST RESORT

The judiciary could be a powerful independent arbiter in resolving constitutional and other legal conflicts arising from policy reform. Nonetheless, the use of the courts inevitably gives rise to challenges: at best, it creates an adversarial and confrontational atmosphere that might complicate government interaction with civil society and jeopardise future policy dialogue. More often than not, the costs are high. And judicial systems may not be efficient enough to deliver the desired result, or impartial enough to give CSOs a fair chance of redress.

CSOs in South Africa found that using the courts was an effective strategy, but the same could not be said for civil society representatives interviewed in Tanzania. An activist/lawyer remarked that Tanzanian courts were generally inefficient, record keeping in them was not always optimal and court cases unduly prolonged, sometimes by bureaucratic inefficiency, sometimes through political interference.⁹⁵ Litigation often called for specialised expertise that may not be accessible and was often costly. Court officials

did not always respond promptly because of inadequate training or because they were demotivated by poor pay or working conditions.⁹⁶ Legal professionals might be reluctant to take politically charged cases.

The use of courts is thus often advised as a strategy of last resort. Based on the experience of organisations interviewed for this study, the following are critical questions to pose:

1 Could the objective be achieved more effectively by relying on an assessment of needs as opposed to claiming rights?

Although the TAC has used the courts successfully, it could be argued that the same result might have been achieved by a different approach. Indeed, CSOs in Brazil and some African countries (Rwanda and Namibia) achieved similar goals largely by demonstrating the clear need for change.

2 What increased capacity is needed to tackle litigation-based advocacy?

In-depth knowledge of the legal system — and therefore professional legal help — is indispensable in engaging with policy through litigation. Training non-legal staff on the basics of the legal system may also be necessary.⁹⁷ And being aware of precedents and previous rulings may strengthen litigation-based advocacy. It may be useful to involve sympathetic legal aid organisations or associations of lawyers who could do some of the work *pro bono*.

3 What role, if any, could international pressure play?

International civil society and other networks could play a critical role in exerting pressure for an out-of-court settlement. The TAC acknowledges the role of international pressure in enabling it to reach a settlement after it went to court to fight for lower prices for Aids drugs. In taking legal action, it argued that there was a constitutional right of access to health care and that the state had to make sure that the right was realised. It claimed that pricing structures imposed by pharmaceutical companies violated state policy, and challenged the companies to comply with national policy. Ultimately, international pressure is said to have compelled the TAC's respondents to settle out of court and adjust the pricing of publicly available Aids treatment.⁹⁸

If government claims lack of funds to implement a policy ruling, what is the next step? The TAC, driving to increase the roll-out of Nevirapine, a drug that reduces the risk of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/Aids, was confronted by a state claim that it did not have funds after a court ruled that it must provide free treatment. In response, the TAC did a detailed assessment of fiscal data — in particular, the government's Intergovernmental Fiscal Review — to demonstrate that the state submission was not completely accurate. Taking the TAC's approach as 'good practice', an effective way to challenge claims of insufficient funds could be to identify wastage elsewhere or recommend alternative funding streams and fiscal reforms.

4 Can a legal route be presented as an initiative for 'the people', rather than an elitist exercise that lacks credibility?

Public hearings and consultations could bolster the credibility of a litigation-based campaign.⁹⁹ Gathering anecdotal evidence could also help to strengthen a case, but

quality responses require explicit, considered questions, preferably in the first language of the respondents and distributed in advance.¹⁰⁰ Civil society constitutional reviewers in Zambia, for instance, found that responses from the public often lacked the specificity required to make a compelling case, especially if questions were not pointed and expressed in accessible language.¹⁰¹

5 If an organisation has little or no experience of litigation-based advocacy, who can it talk to?

Assessing good practice elsewhere could be useful in assessing what works.¹⁰² If funds are available, it is likely to be markedly more effective to travel to the source and meet face to face. Zambian CSOs and other stakeholders involved in constitutional reform undertook study tours to countries that had experienced similar processes and had acquired technical knowledge and an understanding of the dynamics involved. The tours were funded by the UN Development Programme. Malawian CSOs visited Zambia to learn about the Anti-Third Term Campaign, and successfully prevented similar constitutional manipulation in their own country. An alternative is to have extensive telephone discussions or exchange emails to gain knowledge of international best practice and build confidence about using the law to bring about policy changes.

RACE, ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL TABOO

As we have said, attempting to influence policy is often inexorably linked to existing party political tensions, ‘donor politics’, power politics and even petty personality clashes. Here we take a more detailed look at these factors as they related to the TAC’s campaign to change South African health policies.

Battling racial/ethnic prejudice

South Africa’s history of tense race relations often manifested itself strongly in the tone and vocabulary of the discourse surrounding the TAC’s advocacy campaign.¹⁰³ Not only was the issue intrinsically controversial, but it also evoked intense emotion. The fact that the campaign’s most vocal leaders were of mixed race (so-called ‘coloureds’) or whites often attracted sharp criticism.¹⁰⁴ Mark Heywood, a leading voice for the campaign, recounts that his motives were often strongly questioned based on his racial profile. A participant at a public event asserted: ‘Mark Heywood the white racist has succeeded in dividing the black people — that was his agenda all the time.’¹⁰⁵ It becomes easy to ‘shoot the messenger’ if the message being delivered is uncomfortable to the powerful.

An in-depth study of racial attitudes and their impact on South African politics and policy is beyond the scope of this study. But it is necessary to note that such attitudes often create a palpable informal political dynamic in policymaking in general.¹⁰⁶ In the case of the TAC, racialised policy debate at the very least contributed to a protracted, delayed process of reforming Aids policy and was a contributory factor to the delayed provision of treatment to patients that required it most.

The TAC’s experience seems to suggest that while racial and ethnic identities are not popularly discussed as an aspect of policy, they do impact on political perceptions and the

process of policymaking, and therefore need to be managed. More comprehensive studies suggest that, at the very least, it is crucial to recognise the reality of racial and ethnic tensions by creating racially and/or ethnically diverse organisations as a means of gaining trust. More importantly, it could be vital to manage processes to creatively integrate ‘diversity’, cultivate a culture of learning, manage for racial bias and widen access to organisational information and resources.¹⁰⁷ Ethnically and racially diverse organisations that are well managed and qualitatively integrated could be more efficient, both at gaining credibility and delivering on their agenda.

Tackling territorialism

Because policy is a contested space, governments often claim a mandate to lead policy processes and view advocacy as a device to undermine that leadership. South Africa’s Department of Health, for example, points out that its broader plan for tackling HIV/Aids would have revolved primarily around addressing poverty and providing palliative care, traditional medicines and appropriate nutrition.¹⁰⁸ This vision clashed fundamentally with the TAC’s approach of societal mobilisation, strong political leadership and ARV treatment.¹⁰⁹ In retrospect, it could be argued that the TAC’s campaign, which sometimes ridiculed the state’s approach, was detrimental to its cause. A more co-operative stance could have been more fruitful. ‘Civil society organisations are likely to be more effective at policy influence through co-operation — and this does not equate to co-option’, according to Fr Peter Henriot of the JCTR in Zambia.¹¹⁰

Social taboos

The stigma and social misconceptions attached to HIV/Aids are widely documented and make for management complications. Related social prejudices — linking HIV/Aids to ‘promiscuous homosexuals in the West’¹¹¹ — further animated the policy debate. As a result, CSOs hoping to address policy on socially sensitive issues such as female genital mutilation, abortion, gay rights and reproductive rights for women often need to develop strategies that are strongly evidence based, in order to counter prejudice and taboos with hard facts.¹¹² The TAC could argue that the proper counter to the hostile political response it received, arising in part from the stigma attached to the disease, was to produce anecdotal evidence and scientific support, and — more basically — to persist in aggressively pushing for reform.

Initiating and managing programmes advocating policy reform and ultimately succeeding in this aim could depend on how well the political dimension of policy advocacy is managed. It calls for acute sensitivity to the state of play on a given policy issue and a readiness to plan for multiple possible scenarios. Adequate funding, robust management and other factors are critical. But being able to engage effectively with political institutions is also vital to success. Would-be campaigners should not be intimidated. Case studies and personal experiences recorded in this chapter suggest that the challenges are surmountable. With foresight, aspects of political tension can be effectively eliminated, or at least managed.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF EVIDENCE AND THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ADVOCACY

INTRODUCTION

Credible and current evidence is indispensable to identifying policy priorities and proposing effective recommendations.¹¹³ More importantly, accurate evidence is critical to measuring the success of the policies that are being implemented. As a case in point, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), a London-based think tank, underscores the role that information and evidence have played in the reform of Tanzania's health system. Among other positive changes, the ODI attributes a reduction of Tanzania's infant mortality rate by 40%¹¹⁴ directly to policy reforms informed by the results of household surveys into national disease patterns and trends.

While the use of evidence to inform policymaking is not novel, this chapter explores the dynamic environment in which information is collected and looks critically at the process in developing countries. In particular, it looks into circumstances peculiar to South African and Zambian CSOs.

A key challenge associated with southern African policy processes is the lack of research and policy capacity, which is well documented. In an ideal world, the demand by governments for reliable information could be partly satisfied by CSOs with the required financial, human and social capital.¹¹⁵ In practice, however, the challenge of filling information gaps is often complicated by relations between governments and policy-oriented CSOs that are rarely cordial, co-operative or synergistic.¹¹⁶ Bearing in mind the hostile contests in which CSOs produce information and perform advocacy in several sub-Saharan African countries, this chapter proposes means of gathering and packaging information to support advocacy campaigns. It also covers the use of modern technology in advocacy. Such technology can assist CSOs not only to receive and disseminate information, but also to raise public awareness of issues.

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF INFORMATION IN INFLUENCING POLICY

Information provides an empirical base on which to formulate responsive policy and can be a powerful tool to create positive political reform. But it also has a dimension beyond the academic and scientific. Often, it is also viewed as an instrument to strip governments of political autonomy — which means it is intricately tied to broader struggles for power.

Evidence offered to influence policy is often assessed by subjective criteria and shaded by value judgements. Who provided the information? What are their motives? Do they have an agenda? What are the political and economic implications of acting on the information?

Will policy reform threaten the status quo? Who is the ultimate beneficiary?

Analysis suggests strongly that in developing countries it is critical to take into account the social and economic context in which information and evidence are generated and to develop a strategy for negotiating these dynamics before investing in research designed to promote policy reform. Being adequately prepared for social and economic consequences can help to achieve comprehensive strategies that will see advocacy succeed. But lack of preparation could leave CSOs insufficiently equipped to manage setbacks.

Policy evidence and the debate over donor aid effectiveness

CSOs tied to donor funding have unique challenges when they attempt to build trust and legitimacy with the governments that they lobby. As is widely known, the integrity of information generated by CSOs sponsored by donor agencies is often highly contested. The donors are often accused of not being transparent enough about their motives in providing funds — sceptics believe that they are rarely completely altruistic. For example, Western-backed organisations are accused of trying to advance the policy objectives of foreign governments. Even more cynically, they are said to exist to serve the interests of Western politicians in ‘spending their own budgets, after which everyone seems to lose interest in what happens to the money or what effect it has’.¹¹⁷ Some argue that foreign-funded organisations are actually detrimental, inhibiting the development of functional, autonomous, democratic systems in Africa.¹¹⁸

Negative perceptions of foreign-funded CSOs as being driven by ‘mindless money-pushing’ and ‘selfish-careerism’¹¹⁹ could shape the response they receive from policymakers to their ‘evidence’.¹²⁰ Zambian policymakers, for instance, noted that their trust was undermined by reports of weak systems of financial accountability and what they perceived as the inflated salaries of CSO leaders and their staff members.¹²¹ At the very least, this calls for a rigorous approach to demonstrating the trustworthiness of donor-funded CSOs. Central to this would be to deliver flawless information. It should be derived from rigorous research and extensive literature review, and should reflect a well-defined rational study design, a judicious choice of methods and tools, and effective monitoring indicators.¹²² Given the negative perceptions, attention needs to be paid to finesse, nuance and modes of approach.¹²³ A leading South African activist, Zanele Twala, says that a weakness in South African CSOs is not that they lack research capacity, but that they tend to disseminate their findings in a combative, accusatory tone.¹²⁴ Other southern African civil society experts noted that both foreign-funded and local CSOs appeared to feel morally compelled to be overly critical of policymakers and policy. This undermined trust and ensured a poorer reception for the information.¹²⁵

Essential as they are, managing perceptions, navigating donor politics and striving for research excellence are not enough. They are ultimately subject to economic factors that influence how successfully evidence is incorporated into policy processes, as discussed below.

The economics of policy evidence

Policy reform inevitably has economic consequences, making it extremely important to be able to spell out clearly the cost of proposed policy reforms. It is said that the South

African government's decision to distribute ARV treatment more broadly was strongly influenced by a study of the fiscal implications of doing so.¹²⁶

Determining economic implications is often complex, requiring particular analytical skills. A rudimentary analysis — identifying 'who gets what' and evaluating costs, benefits, opportunities and risks — could be sufficient.¹²⁷ But a more substantive strategy devised by civil society–business partnerships may give a better picture of economic impact and so provide a more convincing case for policy reform. In practice, however, the economic dimension is rarely factored into civil society strategy to achieve change.

The role of information in challenging core beliefs and assumptions

There are times when reforming policy means challenging core cultural and social beliefs. It demands information that questions age-old norms in a constructive tone.

Offering universal primary education provides an example of a little-questioned intervention to remedy high illiteracy levels in developing countries. In Zambia, the conventional wisdom was that abolishing school fees would be enough, of itself, to improve literacy. One organisation challenged that assumption: the JCTR.

The result of that challenge was that Zambia now has a more holistic education policy. The JCTR produced a research study entitled 'How free is free education?' that questioned the key premise that informed Zambia's education policy — i.e. that universal, free education would be enough to increase the level of literacy and ease access to primary schooling. The study showed that hidden costs, including school uniforms, 'user fees' and levies imposed by schools, placed education out of reach of close to 20% of primary school children at the time.¹²⁸ Based on these findings, the JCTR developed policy recommendations (among them reform of teachers' pay and school feeding programmes) that provided policymakers with the information they needed to make policy reforms.

TOOLS FOR GATHERING RELEVANT INFORMATION

Hard evidence and information are compelling, and provide the basis for policy reform. While few policy-oriented CSOs have the capacity to conduct surveys on the scale required to provide credible policy input, tools such as the public expenditure tracking survey and the citizen report card can be used to acquire relevant and credible information.

Public expenditure tracking surveys

Public expenditure tracking surveys (PETS) seek to determine whether allocated state funds are put to their intended use, and if not, why this is the case.¹²⁹ Increasingly, they are being recognised as efficient tools to identify systemic and other bottlenecks and regional disparities and to provide a basis for specific policy recommendations. First implemented in Uganda in 1996, the tool has been adapted to inform education sector policy in countries such as Zambia and Tanzania and health policy in Rwanda, Nigeria and Ghana.¹³⁰ Conducting such surveys requires a substantial investment of resources and calls for extensive planning and efficient management.

PETS: A brief 'how-to' guide	
Consult, identify issues and determine the scope of the survey	To start, it is critical to consult key stakeholders, including government agencies, donors and CSOs, in order to define the purpose and objective of your study, identify the most pertinent issues and problems, prove your understanding of government resource flows and determine capacity requirements.
Perform a rapid data assessment	Determine whether fiscal data is available at various levels of government in order to be able to track expenditure.
Develop a set of questionnaires to gather information from key non-governmental stakeholders	To verify data gained from written sources, it is important to gather relevant information from stakeholders in a given policy area. Typically, this involves creating surveys to guide interviews with private sector service providers and CSOs.
Design a survey to assess services at the facility level	<p>To determine whether earmarked expenditure is put to its intended use, a questionnaire assessing delivery of services at the facility level is crucial. Information about the following six core areas should be gathered when conducting PETS at this level:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Characteristics of the facility: i.e. size; ownership; years of operation; hours of operation; catchment population; competition from other service providers; access to infrastructure, utilities and other services; and the range of services provided; 2 Inputs: i.e. the financial resources invested in implementing policy; 3 Outputs: often measured in terms of specific aspects of policy implementation (e.g. enrolment statistics, inpatients and outpatients treated, etc.); 4 Quality: includes aspects such as staff behaviour, observed staff practice and the provision of services such as laboratory testing in the context of health policy, etc.; 5 Financing: i.e. sources of finances (government, donors, user charges, etc.); and

	<p>6 Institutional mechanisms and accountability: entails collecting information on mechanisms meant to ensure accountability, findings from supervision visits and details of management structures; and evaluating reporting and record-keeping practices and audits.</p>
<p>Conduct training, field testing and implementation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Allocate time to train enumerators and their supervisors. 2 Conduct a pilot to test questionnaires on a sample of respondents.¹³¹ 3 Implement the survey.
<p>Assess data quality and perform verification</p>	<p>Ideally, data collection should be managed throughout the survey process. However, it may be more feasible to assess the quality of data periodically and identify bottlenecks in time. Alternatively, a dedicated period of time immediately after implementation should be devoted to developing a complete data set.</p>
<p>Analyse, report and disseminate</p>	<p>An analysis of data, distilled into an accessible report, should be conducted, either by the team directly responsible or by an independent consultant, where possible. More importantly, findings need to be disseminated to relevant stakeholders and publicised through the media to stimulate public debate on findings.</p>
<p>Source: Adapted from Dehn J, R Reinnika & J Svensson, <i>Survey Tools for Assessing Performance in Service Delivery</i>. Washington, DC: World Bank Institute, 2002.</p>	

Citizen report cards¹³²

A citizen report card is the most commonly used instrument for participatory service delivery assessments. It is a survey instrument used to tap information on the basis of users' awareness [of], access to and satisfaction with publicly provided services. It provides information about the key constraints that the poor face in accessing social services, [and the] views of the communities about the availability, adequacy [and] quality [of] and access to basic public services.¹³³

Citizen report cards (CRCs) are a tool to rate the performance and quality of government services. Practitioners are quick to note that while CRCs solicit user feedback, they are not opinion polls.¹³⁴ To produce credible and relevant information, surveys need to be rigorously conducted and often require a significant investment of time and human and financial resources.¹³⁵ It can be helpful to seek a partner organisation with statistical survey and analytical skills such as research institutes/think tanks that have the right technical requirements.¹³⁶ While the technical dimension is vital, the environment in which CRCs are compiled is equally important in ensuring influence over policy.

The CRC process seeks to evaluate and assess government performance and can be viewed as an illegitimate effort or a political threat. The Public Affairs Centre, a CSO based in Bangalore, India, that developed the concept, notes that some of the challenges to CRCs are not primarily technical. A key problem was that of 'establishing space and legitimacy without a formal mandate'.¹³⁷

Granted, the problem does not apply to CRCs alone. Critical evaluations of government performance (especially when they come from CSOs) are likely to evoke anxiety among governments eager to project their competence to domestic and foreign constituencies.¹³⁸ Other factors such as tension between governments and CSOs, recent political history, suspicion of donor motives, and even local customs and traditions could also affect the extent to which research findings are adopted. This makes it vital to adopt an approach that includes policymakers in the design and implementation of research for advocacy by maintaining a co-operative tone, clarifying the scope and purpose of the surveys, and actively building trust among public officials.

A once-off CRC may have limited policy impact, so provision should be made for follow-up surveys. CRCs have been adopted in many countries, including Albania, the Philippines, Rwanda, Ukraine and Uganda. Their policy impact is not always easily discernible, however. The deputy director of Social Weather Stations, a Manila-based research organisation, reports that a key weakness in his organisation's successful 2000 citizen survey was the lack of subsequent surveys to assess its impact.¹³⁹

The impact of a CRC survey may be substantially increased by scaling it up to the national level. While citizen surveys often produce evidence that convincingly reveals the nature of a problem, the impact of CRCs could be substantially increased if partnerships could be formed with government agencies to make the process more representative of the nation as a whole. Indian CSOs have become more effective by replicating surveys in an increasing number of regions, so providing even more compelling policy evidence.

The media should be used to draw attention to important talking points and key survey findings. The media can be important allies in disseminating research findings, highlighting issues and creating public awareness. They can also play a crucial role in exerting pressure for policy reform. CSOs in Ukraine point out that the country's media played a vital role in monitoring government performance in implementing reforms prompted by CRCs relating to transparency and service delivery.¹⁴⁰

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY-CENTURY RABBLE ROUSING: THE USE OF MOBILE TECHNOLOGY BY 'SMART MOBS'¹⁴¹

The benefits of ICT are manifold, but its proper exploitation requires a grasp of the legal frameworks that govern its use and an understanding of the finer details that make it effective.

Mobile phones are increasingly used to receive and disseminate information and raise public awareness of issues. They are an accessible advocacy tool, and as they become more pervasive in Africa, they offer the potential to enhance the impact of advocacy significantly. The number of mobile phones is growing on the African continent — and across the world.

Global mobile phone usage

- Eighty per cent of the world's population is covered by mobile networks; this is expected to increase to 90% by 2010.
- Two hundred and eighty million global mobile subscribers live in Africa.
- The use of mobile technology has grown consistently in Africa — by 38% in 2007, ahead of the Middle East at 33% and the Asia-Pacific region at 29%.
- Eighty per cent of future subscriber growth is expected to come from developing markets.

Sources: GSM Association, 'Universal access: How mobile can bring communications to all', *Wireless Intelligence*, 2008, <<https://www.wirelessintelligence.com/Data.aspx>>.

The benefits of mobile phones in social mobilisation are easily identifiable. They have been used in a growing number of advocacy campaigns, including Zambia's Anti-Third Term Campaign, where text messages were used to call members to action and protest. Ring tones are increasingly used to popularise social and political issues. In the Philippines, part of an alleged conversation between an electoral commissioner and the country's president implicating both in electoral fraud has been converted into a popular ring tone. Observers say that it has stimulated public debate over electoral management and fuelled public pressure for the state to be held accountable for rigged elections dating back to 2004.

In Kenya, mobile phones broadcast video footage of post-election violence in 2007–08, accompanying a call for international reaction. Pictures of Zimbabwe's March 2008 election results posted outside polling stations were transmitted to help people judge the credibility of results.

Organisations like Mobile Metrix have introduced noteworthy innovations to gather data on such subjects as health, education, housing and land. Primarily using hand-held mobile devices, Mobile Metrix gives extensive training to what it calls mobile agents — 16–24-year-old community representatives — in survey methodology, technology and the basics of professionalism. These agents collect socio-economic data on communities that

lack the infrastructure to maintain statistical information. This information is fed to the government, non-government and private sectors to improve policy implementation and service provision.¹⁴²

By simplifying the process of collecting and collating data, ICT-based methodologies similar to Mobile Metrix's could be vital in feeding information on populations that are not accessible, but are often the main focus of 'pro-poor' policies. Operationally, it is clear that hand-held technologies make things easier for enumerators, and are more efficient than paper-based means of gathering information.

A similar innovation has been developed by kiwanja.net, an organisation that facilitates 'the application of mobile technology for positive social and environmental change in the developing world'.¹⁴³ 'Frontline SMS', its flagship software program, is increasingly recognised as an efficient tool to mobilise support, gather information and raise awareness. The programme is specifically designed for CSOs and is offered free.

Frontline SMS

Frontline SMS is computer software designed with NGOs in mind to ease large-scale communication through text messaging. The software is easily accessible, laptop based and used with GSM mobile phones. It allows for two-way communication between the distributing organisation and the message recipients. Other notable benefits are that it:

- does not require an Internet connection;
- stores all phone numbers and records all incoming and outgoing messages;
- is scalable, i.e. messages can be sent to individuals or large groups;
- enables two-way communication, which is useful for fieldwork or surveys;
- is easy to install and requires little or no training to use; and
- can be used anywhere in the world simply by switching the SIM card.

Frontline SMS software has been used to monitor public health in Kenya, capture and exchange field-based agricultural information in Tanzania, aid environmental protection and election monitoring in Nigeria, send information and agricultural prices to poor farmers in Laos, and lobby the ratification of the international arms treaty in India and Pakistan.

Frontline SMS software can be download free from <<http://www.frontlinesms.com>>.

Do's and don'ts of mobile advocacy

- Build trust with potential SMS recipients by gaining customer permission.
- Market your initiative through other media, e.g. billboards. The Internet may also prove useful.
- Be relevant: offer timely information and functional updates.
- Be action oriented: request recipients to forward notes, ask subscribers to make a call, etc.
- Use mobile messages to ask subscribers how they would prefer to engage in advocacy, i.e. give them choices.
- Be creative.
- Avoid bombarding subscribers. Provide an option for users to 'unsubscribe'.
- Be sensitive: avoid sending bulk messages at inconvenient times.
- 'Don't be dour.' Use humour; be engaging.

Source: Adapted from Veclas K, 'The do's and don'ts of mobile advocacy', 2008, <<http://mobileactive.org/dos-and-don-ts-mobile-advocacy>> .

HARNESSING MOBILE TECHNOLOGY FOR POLICY INFLUENCE: KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The socio-economic, political and legal environments can limit technology's efficacy in policy advocacy. Demographic realities — like age, gender, income and levels of education — will dictate the reach of mobile phones and other devices. So will political culture. And some people may simply be uncomfortable with modern technology.

Challenges

1 The legal and regulatory environment

Mobile-based advocacy campaigns need to comply with laws and regulations that protect customer privacy, control access to information or guard data. Regulations vary from country to country, and laws governing the privacy of mobile operator customers are often stringent and need to be read thoroughly. Restrictions relating to the security of data need to be carefully evaluated. Even compiling a contact list of suitable mobile phone users could infringe rules.

2 Corporate policy

The use of bulk messaging is often regulated by specific corporate policy related to security of contracts, complex billing methodology, avenues for complaint, content restrictions, intellectual property protection and so on, all of which need to be carefully considered

beforehand. Equally important is the need to gain clarity on costing details. If two-way communication is envisaged, the allocation of costs must be considered.

3 Novelty as a challenge

Despite the potential benefits, mobile technology remains a new and largely untested method of facilitating policy dialogue. Previous experience is limited, as is expertise. Furthermore, the novelty of the technology may mean that governments require strong reassurances about the integrity and reliability of information gathered in this way.¹⁴⁴

4 Language barriers

Given the ethnic and cultural diversity in many African countries, specific attention to language is vital. Communication through mobile devices — and particularly text messaging — often takes place anonymously and does not provide an opportunity to determine the preferred languages of recipients and their literacy levels.

5 Character restrictions

Text messages often restrict the number of characters that can be used. The universal average is 150 characters per message, but it can vary.

6 Quantitative versus qualitative policy input

Text messaging is not a substitute for extensive dialogue on critical policy issues. Mobile technology may play a vital role in gathering quantitative statistical data, but would be inadequate in soliciting elaborate qualitative data and input.

7 Linking expectations to reality

Mobile technology often fascinates new users. If a CSO focuses on the exciting possibilities of such technology, the prospect of a mobile advocacy campaign failing or not gaining broad public support may be overlooked. It is critical to manage expectation levels, understand mobile technology limitations in advocacy and be prepared to implement alternative strategies.

Opportunities

1 Geographic reach and time saving

Mobile technology presents an invaluable opportunity to conduct policy research or disseminate information over large geographical areas, at relatively little cost. Its use could reduce the time needed to implement advocacy campaigns.

2 Shortening the paper trail

Using mobile technology in advocacy reduces dependence on paper, which takes time and skill to file and store. And it obviates the need to translate survey data into electronic format. Researchers for the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa found that using hand-held mobile phones to conduct surveys reduced substantially the time needed to collect, collate and clean up data.¹⁴⁵

3 Engaging youth in policy processes

Given the popularity of text messaging among younger mobile phone users, the technology could play a critical role in encouraging the youth to become involved in policy processes. Independent organisations concerned with youth issues point out that mobile phones create a wide space for political influence among younger constituencies.¹⁴⁶ However, it is a largely unexplored field, and few case studies exist of the use of text or mobile technology to boost youth engagement in policy in Africa.

The quality of policy inevitably derives from the timeliness and strength of the information that underlies it. Increasingly, ICT presents an opportunity to meet the demand for timely and reliable policy evidence. Yet the extent to which information technology can be harnessed to exert policy influence ultimately depends on the ability of CSO campaigns to ensure that expectations are not unrealistically high and that they have a clear understanding of the costs and benefits.

CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE DEMAND-DRIVEN DEMOCRACY: A SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This study outlines critical lessons for CSOs seeking to shape and influence the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policy, with a specific focus on African civil society audiences. More specifically, the study proposes a set of strategies and tactics tailored to the needs of organisations seeking to demand better governance in the absence of ‘invited’ political spaces to participate in policy processes. While African governments have made notable progress toward creating opportunities for civic engagement with policy — through initiatives such as the APRM and others — this study argues that attaining good governance goals and social change in many African countries ultimately depends on the presence of assertive and professional CSOs that are prepared to demand improved standards of good governance from their governments.

While it is widely appreciated that CSOs are critical to improving standards of good governance and adding vitality to democratic debate, the reality in many African countries suggests that such organisations remain marginal to shaping policy and making meaningful contributions to improving standards of governance. This is in part due to the persistent determination of many African governments to cordon off political engagement from broader public participation and a tendency to closely manage public discourse from the top down and restrict participation in governance reform to closed circles.¹⁴⁷

This study posits a set of strategies for CSOs seeking to exert pressure on their governments to pursue more inclusive approaches to reforming governance, and shaping and implementing public policy. Based on examples largely drawn from southern Africa, elsewhere on the continent and further afield, the study identifies the following ten aspects as crucial to successful demand-driven policy reform.

TEN TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE AFRICAN ADVOCACY

1 Engage in focused and effective strategic planning

While the value of strategic planning is widely appreciated among CSOs, this study suggests that the acknowledged importance of strategic planning does not always translate into actual written strategies or the formulation of effective strategic plans. CSOs, however, need to formulate effective and focused strategic plans that contain a clearly defined set of

objectives and goals, solicit broad participation in their formulation, incorporate a keen and accurate stakeholder analysis, and engage the media.

2 Form functional networks

The study also stresses the critical importance of functional networks. As is the case with strategic planning, the value of networking is often widely recognised as crucial among CSOs. Yet compelling examples of influential civil society networks within sub-Saharan African countries seemed to be few and far between. Nonetheless, a characteristic common to successful examples of civil society influence on policy and the reform of governance contained here was the ability to consciously and deliberately manage functional networks. As such, the study singles out networks that are formed voluntarily, have broad popular membership, foster mutual dependence for information and are able to draw on international expertise as crucial to effective civil society engagement with policy.

3 Increase technical policy expertise

In addition to better strategy and effective functional networks, the study also underscores the role of professional and technical competence in effective civil society advocacy. Effective accountability efforts depend, to a great extent, on the ability of CSOs to develop a firm technical grasp of key policy issue areas and generate political endorsement to strengthen their cases for greater governmental accountability.

4 Be willing to 'play politics'

The study also highlights the importance of political sophistication in effective civil society advocacy. Successful accountability campaigns driven by civil society depended on the willingness and ability of CSOs to develop long-term formal and informal relationships with political office bearers that initially did not necessarily share similar values and points of view. The political environments in which several African CSOs operate are often arenas of fierce political repression and imperviousness to dissent. As such, the study calls for a willingness by CSOs to leverage existing political dynamics to their advantage. It is the willingness to 'play politics' that has accounted for the success of civil society campaigns in often hostile political conditions.

5 Employ innovative methods to enhance legitimacy

Innovative means of gaining credibility are also argued to be indispensable to successful advocacy in several African contexts. Among other means suggested, mass mobilisation through innovative protests is recommended as vital for CSOs operating in challenging political contexts. Furthermore, the study acknowledges the increasing importance of unorthodox forms of protest to effective civil society policy influence, including the distribution of symbols of solidarity, civil society–private sector partnerships and other innovative approaches that vividly demonstrate the extent of public support for civil society advocacy campaigns.

6 Use the law where necessary and feasible

While the use of courts is likely to yield mixed results, is financially costly and could be potentially counterproductive, the use of constitutional and other forms of law is proposed as a potentially powerful basis on which to launch civil society-led efforts to demand accountability, drawing from the experience of South Africa's TAC.

7 Navigate informal social norms and beliefs

Successful advocacy campaigns outlined in the study generally attained their policy goals in large part due to their ability to manage the 'informal realities' of operating in several African contexts, such as prevalent racism, ethnic prejudices, political defensiveness, territorialism and negative popular attitudes towards civil society, through a mixture of internal management reforms and fostering broad public membership, among other strategies.

8 Develop and present compelling economic arguments

While accountability campaigns are often framed in moral language, successful advocacy campaigns tended to present information that counted the economic costs of the problem at hand and presented a solid economic justification and business case for accountability. The study recommends the use of economic data and analysis as indispensable to effective advocacy.

9 Use popular social accountability tools creatively

The study also underscores the growing importance to effective advocacy of tools designed to hold governments to account for public expenditure and broader public management. However, the experiences of successful accountability initiatives included in this study suggest that it is the creative use of these tools that renders them effective for advocacy. Among other recommendations, the study proposes the use of the media to supplement the use of social accountability tools, the implementation of these instruments over recurring periods of time to measure progress, and the scaling up of community-based social accountability tools to the national level to increase the impact of tools.

10 Harness mobile technology

With the number of mobile network subscribers increasing globally and more so in Africa, the use of mobile technology is an increasingly important avenue for advocacy. At present, 80% of the global population is covered by mobile networks, with 280 million mobile subscribers living in Africa. The ubiquity of mobile phones presents an opportunity for social mobilisation and effective collection of information for advocacy, according to the study. Nonetheless, while mobile technology is a potentially powerful tool for social mobilisation, the study stresses the need to develop a firm grasp of the complex legal, corporate and technical implications of employing mobile technology as a tool for fostering demand-driven social accountability.

Demanding good governance therefore implies that, while CSOs in several African countries have (often rightly) tended to justify their marginal role in policy advocacy in terms of external factors — hostile environments, the lack of capacity, funding problems, etc. — the experience of successful advocacy campaigns seems to suggest that effective advocacy ultimately depends on the extent to which African CSOs are strategic, professional, creative and able to insert themselves effectively into the pertinent policy debates of their times.

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The African Peer Review Mechanism: Lessons from the Pioneers is the first in-depth study of the APRM, examining its practical, theoretical and diplomatic challenges. Case studies of Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Mauritius and South Africa illustrate difficulties faced by civil society in making their voices heard. It offers 80 recommendations to strengthen the APRM.

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