

Long WORKSHOP REPORT FORM

Number and title of workshop: Off the shelf! Strategies and skills for transforming research into tangible anti-corruption policies and practice

Coordinators: Finn Heinrich

Date and time: Saturday 13 November 2010, 14:00-16:00

Moderator: Finn Heinrich

Rapporteur: Suzanne Mulcahy

Panellists (Name, institution, title)

Pilar Domingo, Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
Mercedes de Freitas, Executive Director, Transparencia Venezuela
Adam Foldes, Acting Director, TI Hungary

Summary

The workshop brought together researchers and practitioners who have used evidence-based research to achieve policy change in the area of anti-corruption. It focused on learning – specifically, on sharing the skills and capacities needed for CSOs and research institutes to effectively translate research into action in the field of anti-corruption. While the first presentation outlined key challenges in evidence-policy linkages and highlighted the usefulness of political economy analysis in bridging the gap between evidence and advocacy, the following contributions shared particular success stories of using evidence to instigate a policy change in relation to the fight against corruption. These range from using a National Integrity System assessment as a platform to successfully lobby the government to introduce protection for whistleblowers in Hungary, to using a municipal transparency index to pressurize Venezuelan municipal governments to introduce freedom of information legislation.

The workshop then broke out into small groups to discuss the main insights and “tips” for evidence-based advocacy/policy from 3 different perspectives: 1) evidence creators (researchers), 2) evidence users (CSOs), 3) evidence targets (policy-makers). The researchers group focused on the distinction between academic and action research and identified the need for better cooperation of academic researchers and organization staff involved in action research. The CSO group noted that context matters in terms an open vs. closed government and noted the importance of creating alliances of experts across different academic backgrounds. The policy-makers group notes that the presentation of the information is crucial, i.e. it has to be short and digestible. Also, best practice case studies are seen as a good way of convincing policy-makers about specific policies based on robust evidence.

Summary of presentations

Pilar Domingo (ODI) gave a conceptual overview of the challenges and opportunities of achieving research-policy linkage with a specific focus on governance and anti-corruption and on the elements which contribute to making the link. She drew on her experience with the ODI in a forestry governance programme in Tanzania which used a problem-driven political economy approach to identify incentive structures and key stakeholders and come up with a strategy for targeted advocacy. She focussed on the merits of problem-driven political analysis as a tool to facilitate research uptake for policy and practice. She echoed Finn Heinrich's opening comments by highlighting the problem of *'policymakers continuing to use blue-print solutions that are not embedded in local contexts and structures without attention to local legitimacy narratives and informal rules of the game'*. The approach presented by Domingo is designed to try to open the black box of political will through problem-driven political economy analysis.

Among the challenges identified by Domingo for CSOs engaged in this type of research were practical challenges (resources and capability limitations); asymmetries in information and knowledge perpetuated by lack of access to information; issues of political sensitivities that can jeopardise other aspects of a CSO's work. In order to address these challenges, she proposed a number of solutions including working collaboratively in strategic coalitions with other organisations and experts to generate knowledge; engaging with stakeholders along the accountability chain and identifying incentive structures where change is possible. She also highlighted the 'ethnographic element' to this type of research approach which allows the organisation to identify individuals who are *'champions for change'* within institutions who can be partners in trying to achieve change.

Merchy de Freitas (TI Venezuela) shared her experience of how TI Venezuela used a municipal transparency index to pressure Venezuelan municipal governments to introduce freedom of information legislation. She began by reminding participants that TI Venezuela 'does not work for the purpose of publishing books and putting them on the shelf- we work for change'. She described a number of areas in which TI Venezuela actively generates research which can be used to achieve success in the fight against corruption. Specifically, she focused on the development of system of indicators of transparency which are based around best practices. The focus on the municipal level was key, given the difficult national political context.

She also noted the tension between experts (academics etc) and the activists, those who know the political contexts.

Furthermore she commented that the timing of the release of research study can be very important to ensure a greater impact. Amongst other things, this is also important to protect ourselves. 'Research is not an end, it is a means to generate change'

Finally, she highlighted the need for a strong media strategy – one of the key means through which recommendations reach the political actors.

Adam Földes (TI Hungary) reported on how TI Hungary used a National Integrity System assessment as a platform to successfully lobby the government to introduce protection for whistleblowers in Hungary.

The NIS assessment analyses the institutional structure and the risks of corruption. In Hungary the most important issues which emerged from the research were party financing, public procurement, law enforcement agencies and local govt reform. Whistle blowing was identified as a cross-cutting issue and therefore TI Hungary decided to focus advocacy around this issue. One of the key elements of transforming research into policy was to identify the stakeholders. In this case, TI Hungary identified the embassies, an particularly the US embassy as allies. By working with the US Ambassador, TI Hungary managed to get

whistleblowing on the agenda and to draft a law which would subsequently be adopted by parliament.

Unfortunately there is no body to implement the legislation at present and TI Hungary is advocating to change this currently.

Main Outputs

After the presentations, workshop attendees broke out in small groups to discuss the main insights and “tips” for evidence-based advocacy/policy from 3 different perspectives: 1) evidence creators (researchers), 2) evidence users (CSOs), 3) evidence targets (policy-makers). The researchers group focused on the distinction between academic and action research and identified the need for better cooperation of academic researchers and organization staff involved in action research. The CSO group noted that context matters in terms an open vs. closed government and noted the importance of creating alliances of experts across different academic backgrounds. The policy-makers group notes that the presentation of the information is crucial, i.e. it has to be short and digestible. Also, best practice case studies are seen as a good way of convincing policy-makers about specific policies based on robust evidence.

Recommendations, Follow-up Actions

Major lessons and recommendations from the workshop included the following:

1. If the political context at the national level is not conducive for evidence-based advocacy on corruption, one option is to target the local level instead
2. In your efforts of evidence-based advocacy, you need allies to influence the government. Here, you should look in “unusual places”, such as Ambassadors of foreign countries.
3. The advocacy planning state is of key importance, i.e. there needs to be a second round of research to identify the relevant stakeholders to address and work with. Here, political economy analysis is a very useful tool.

Highlights

Merchy de Freitas (TI Venezuela): ‘We do not work for the purpose of publishing books and putting them on the shelf- we work for change’.

Pilar Domingo, Overseas Development Institute (ODI) spoke of the need to identify individuals who are ‘champions for change’ within institutions who can be partners in trying to achieve change.

Signed and date submitted

_____Finn Heinrich, 30.11.2010_____