Short WORKSHOP REPORT FORM

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

Coordinator: Finn Heinrich, Transparency International

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

Moderator: Finn Heinrich, Transparency International

Rapporteur: Suzanne Mulcahy, Transparency International

Panellists

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

Main Issues Covered

The workshop brought together researchers and practitioners who have used evidence-based research to achieve policy change in the area of anti-corruption and have stories and skills to share with the broader anti-corruption community. The workshop 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. Each of the contributors shared their experience of using evidence to instigate a policy change in relation to the fight against corruption.

The workshop opened with an introduction by Finn Heinrich on the topic of the challenges and opportunities of using research findings to effectively advocate for change at a policy level. He noted the general trend of moving toward evidence-based policymaking but commented that in anti-corruption policymaking, this had not become as widespread as in other fields. This he attributed to the fact that issues of anti-corruption and governance are 'intrinsically political'.

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 focused 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 those activists, 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 government reform. Whistleblowing 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, and 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.

The presentations were followed by a short Q&A. One of the key issues that emerged was the potential tension between purely academic research and 'action research'. This led to further questions around the contested definition of research.

This was followed by an interactive break-out session where workshop participants were asked to don the perspective of, respectively, evidence producers (researchers), evidence-users (advocacy CSOs) to identify tips and guidelines for their group on how to ensure effective translation of evidence into policy.

Main Outcomes

The break-out session led to fruitful discussions and the main outcomes are described below.

The researchers group:
- Academic research and action research differ both in process and purpose
    - o It should not be an either or, they could mutually benefit from each other
    - o There is a need for better cooperation of academic researchers and organization staff involved in action research.

Civil society activists:
- The contexts in which we work are very different.
- This impacts on the type of advocacy that is appropriate
    - o In Sri Lanka for example, there is little scope for influencing policies at the national level, but much more so at the local level.
    - o One effective means for mobilization is providing easy to read summaries of research findings to broad audiences.
- Important to create alliances of experts from different academic backgrounds (such as anthropology).
- Challenge to get response from AC commission on research results.

Policy-makers:
- Presentation of information is important. It has to be short and digestible for policy-makers
- Best practice case studies are also a good way to convince policy-makers about an evidence-policy link

Recommendations, Follow-up Actions

- Major lessons from the workshop:
    - o Go local, if national doesn't work
    - o Look for unusual allies
    - o The phase after gathering the evidence 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.

Workshop Highlights (including interesting quotes)

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.