

Education Out Loud Case Study: IID

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Introduction

This case study is part of a larger body of work funded by the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) Education Out Loud (EOL) programme. It explores the advocacy and policy influencing (API) activities of the Institute of Informatics and Development (IID), an organisation receiving funding from EOL, and the process, results and impact of action research project they conducted in partnership with MDF/ Australian Council for Education Research (ACER), an EOL 'Global Learning Partner' (GLP).

EOL is the GPEs fund for advocacy and social accountability. The fund aims to support civil society organisations (CSOs) to be active and effective in shaping policy for the communities which they serve, particularly those that are vulnerable or marginalised. As part of EOL's strategy, they have engaged a number of GLP to enhance the evidence base for effective API and crucially support the CSOs they fund (grantees), to develop their API strategies and become more effective. The MDF/ ACER consortium is one such GLP. They worked closely with a number of grantees in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia to develop action research projects, to test key assumptions in their programme theory of change (ToC). The aim of this was to support grantees to engage in adaptive management practices and ultimately improve the effectiveness of their API activities.

Case Study Context

Education Out Loud Context

It is well documented that there is a global learning crisis. UNESCO UIS (2018) estimates that 617 million children and adolescents are not proficient in either reading or mathematics. Two-thirds of these children are actually in school or were in school but dropped out. 258 million children, adolescents and youth are unable to access formal education (UNESCO UIS, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic has further disrupted education and affected over 1.5 billion students across 190 countries, deepening inequalities in learning, especially for the most marginalised and disadvantaged children (EC, 2023).

GPE works with international partners, governments, and other organisations to address this challenge and contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4: "to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". GPE 2025 strategic plan (2022) is aligned with SDG 4 and aims to "accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive, and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century".

Civil society plays a very important role in GPE country-level work by contributing to the development and monitoring of education sector policies and plans. GPE has been providing funding to CSOs since 2009 and currently supports CSOs through its Education Out Loud (EOL) programme (GPE, 2023; EOL, 2023). As stated, the aim of the EOL programme is to support CSOs to be active and effective in shaping policy for the communities which they serve, especially those that are vulnerable or marginalised. It does this by providing training opportunities, access to national and international networks, and crucially funding.

Since GPE has been active in this area, there have been significant advances in access to education, especially for girls (CGD, 2022). However, further action is needed to address the learning crisis and achieve SDG4. This is particularly true for girls in marginalised communities or with other forms of disadvantage, because

gender remains a multiplying factor when it intersects with other forms of disadvantage such as girls who also have a disability or come from a lower socio-economic background (UNESCO, 2022). It is within this context that this research project operates and tries to make a meaningful contribution towards the achievement of SDG4.

Action Research Project Context

The research project explores civil society's contributions to advancing equity and improving learning through different approaches and methodologies for education API. It focusses on how CSOs engage in API to improve equitable learning outcomes, particularly in relation to gender, intersectionality, and social inclusion. The main objective of the research is to investigate, review and learn from three EOL grantees' education API efforts, with the aim to identify strategies and practices that have proved effective in instigating change at local, regional and system levels, and shed some light on the conditions that have contributed to their effectiveness.

Actionable learning agendas were co-produced with the selected grantees, to jointly examine the conditions and reasons as to how identified strategies and practices have been effective. Through engaging in the action research process, grantees and their associated partners generated evidence on the effectiveness of their API practices, which allowed them to engage in adaptive management practices and enhance future effectiveness. Whilst the project was conducted jointly with grantees, MDF/ ACER provided overall leadership of the research and quality assurance. Nevertheless, this was very much a collaborative process, in which MDF/ ACER guided the research by providing advice, tools, and feedback, and facilitated critical reflection. In summary, the research examines:

- Effectiveness of API strategies and practices
- Different approaches, methods, strategies, and tools of API
- The processes related to the development, design and implementation of evidence-based lobby and advocacy in education
- Organisational and partnership capacities to implement API
- Organisational capacities for implementing actionable learning agendas and adaptive management in the field of API

The grantees ACER/ MDF partnered with as part of this action research project are IID (OC2, Bangladesh), School for Life (OC2, Ghana), and the GEAR Alliance (OC3, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). They are all recipients of EOL grants, from either OC2 or OC3. All the organisations worked with in the project are members of the Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 56 diverse nations around the globe. The commonwealth has its roots in a shared history, which has left its mark on the political structures and institutions of the countries in the study and ostensibly produced a number of commonalities between the contexts. These include: presidential and multiparty systems; constitutional frameworks; independent judiciaries; regular elections; respect for the rule of law; a free press and active civil society; and the English language. Nevertheless, all contexts have their own distinct political history, culture, and challenges. As such, this mix of commonality and diversity means the contexts present a fascinating dynamic in which to explore effective API strategies.

Grantee Overview

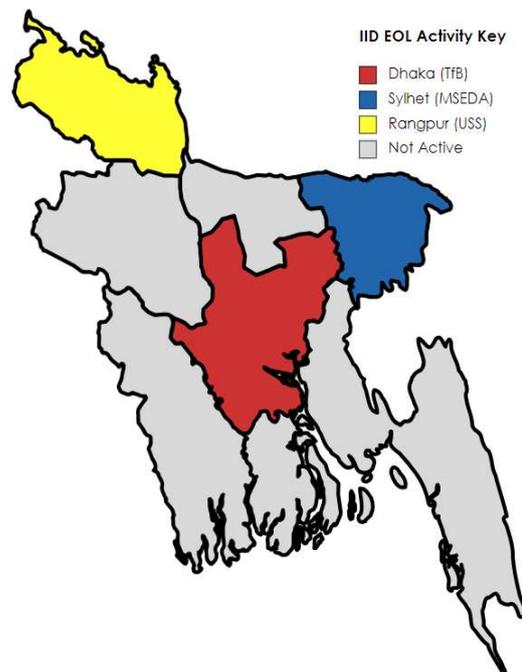
The education system in Bangladesh has undergone significant change since the country's independence from Pakistan in 1971. In 1973 the community-sponsored school system, in which communities felt a moral obligation to take an active role in schools, was transformed into a centralised national system. This caused a shift in the

sense of ownership of the education system and a disconnect between community and school. This in turn led to the development of a system, which lacks accountability and community monitoring, and has left the system vulnerable to shocks that disproportionately affect already disadvantaged students. Nevertheless, there have been some notable achievements since the centralisation. For example, the primary net enrolment rate has increased from 60 percent in the mid-1980s to over 90 percent in 2020 and at the secondary level it has increased from 45 percent in 2000 to 67 percent in 2020. However, whilst access has improved, quality remains a concern. It is within this context IID and the e!quality project operate.

IID was founded in 2013. It is a public policy institute in Bangladesh, which promotes informed public participation in the public policy process. It has a number of thematic areas it focuses on, including education and skills. Within education and skills, they conduct policy research, assessment, and advocacy work at the national level, and in their advocacy work. They also engage at the international level, being members of both the PAL Network and UNESCO’s Network on Education Quality and Monitoring in the Asia-Pacific.

EOL provides funding to IID for its e!quality project. The project is delivered by a consortium of five organisations: IID, #NextGenEdu, Multipurpose Socio-Economic Development Association (MSEDA), Udayan Swabolombee Sangstha (USS), and Teach for Bangladesh (TfB). The project is funded as an OC2 grantee, meaning it should have a focus on strengthening civil society roles in promoting the transparency and accountability of national education sector policy and implementation. As such, the project will run between January 2022 and June 2024 with the overall goal to strengthen the role of Bangladeshi civil society in producing an equitable, resilient, and future-ready education system. The project aims to achieve its goal by empowering three disadvantaged groups to strengthen community-based monitoring of education finances. The three groups are the ‘Khasia’ of Sylhet district (a Mongolite ethnic group), the “Dalit” or “Horijon” community in Gaibandha, and internally displaced climate migrants from the outskirts of Dhaka. MSEDA works with the Khasia, who reside in the tea estates of Sylhet district. USS work with the socio-economic minorities and Dalit people of the Horijon community in Bonar Para area of the Gaibandha district. TfB works with the internally displaced climate migrants of the Kamrangirchar area to build civic engagement at the local level. This can be seen on the map in figure 1.

Figure 1: E!quality Project Active Regions in Bangladesh



In line with IID’s 3i mission (inquire, inform, involve), the project empowers the groups in three ways. Firstly, the project collects empirical evidence to reinforce CSOs-CBOs voices on transparency and accountability of Education Sector Policy (ESP) commitments and budget allocation. The e!quality consortium (i) conducts Education Strategic Plan audits to identify any mismatches between policy and financing, (ii) assesses the post-pandemic resilience of the education system in protecting disadvantaged groups.

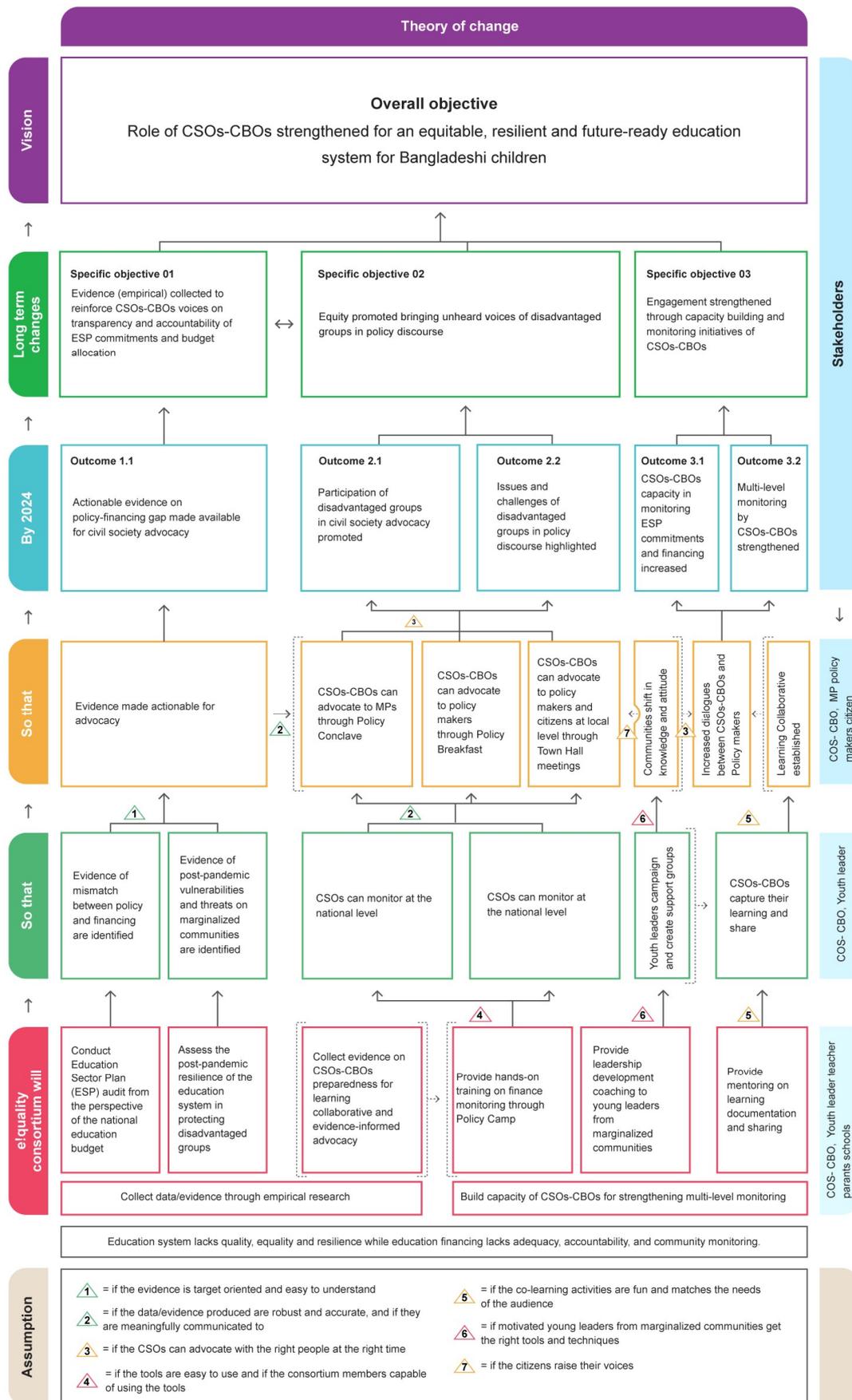
Secondly, to promote equity, the project brings the voices of disadvantaged groups into the policy discourse. To do this, they (i) collect evidence on CSOs-CBOs in preparedness for learning collaborative and evidence-informed

advocacy practices and (ii) provide training on finance monitoring through Policy Camp. This enables CSOs to monitor at the local and national level.

Thirdly, to strengthen engagement, the project will conduct a number of capacity building and monitoring initiatives with CSOs-CBOs. To do this, the project will (i) provide leadership development coaching to young leaders from marginalized communities, and (ii) provide mentoring on learning documentation and sharing so that CSOs-CBOs can capture their learning and share.

These are represented in the E!quality project theory of change in figure 2 below:

Figure 2: E!quality Project Theory of Change

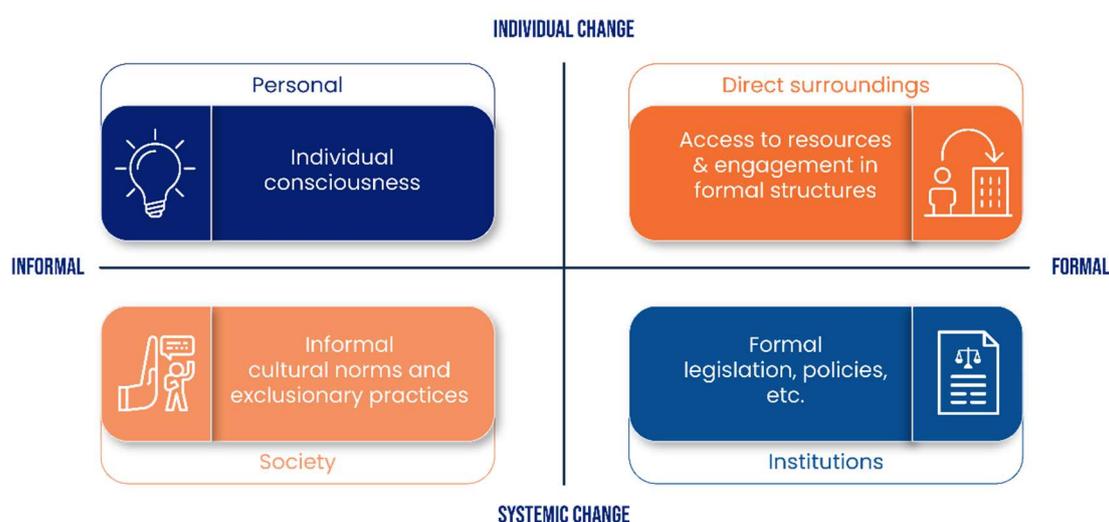


Action Research Process

Overall Approach to Case Studies

The research investigated grantee’s API efforts, through a review of their existing approaches with the particular focus on their ToC. The review made use of the Social Change Matrix (SCM) (see figure 3) to identify and review the various underlying key assumption(s) that support pathways to their vision of success. The assumptions were jointly analysed in relation to the relevance and impact of the change in educational systems the grantee wants to bring about, and constituted the basis for an action research project for the grantees to conduct.

Figure 3: Social Change Matrix



In addition to reviewing the grantees’s ToC and the development of SCM, additional research included a review of relevant documents, such as, policy and planning reports and other documents related to participatory API activities, and specific background literature in order to better contextualise the research’s focus in each country. Furthermore, each grantee underwent a capacity assessment in order to tailor capacity building activities to their particular needs. Where available, the research also examined any additional evidence-based education API approaches, such as citizen-led assessment (CLA). CLA is an important initiative implemented by CSOs that is supported by the EOL programme. The research explored other approaches to strengthen advocacy for equitable learning outcomes particularly in relation to gender, intersectionality, and social inclusion.

In order to support the development of these case studies, stakeholder consultations were conducted in each country, aligned to the specific research questions of each grantee. Respondents consisted of representatives from the grantees, grantee associate organisations and stakeholders, and the regional management unit (RMU). Where appropriate, other GLPs were contacted in relation to specific actionable learning agenda items or findings, in order to consider any additional inputs they may have, such as suggested literature and similar research findings, as well as to share our knowledge from the research.

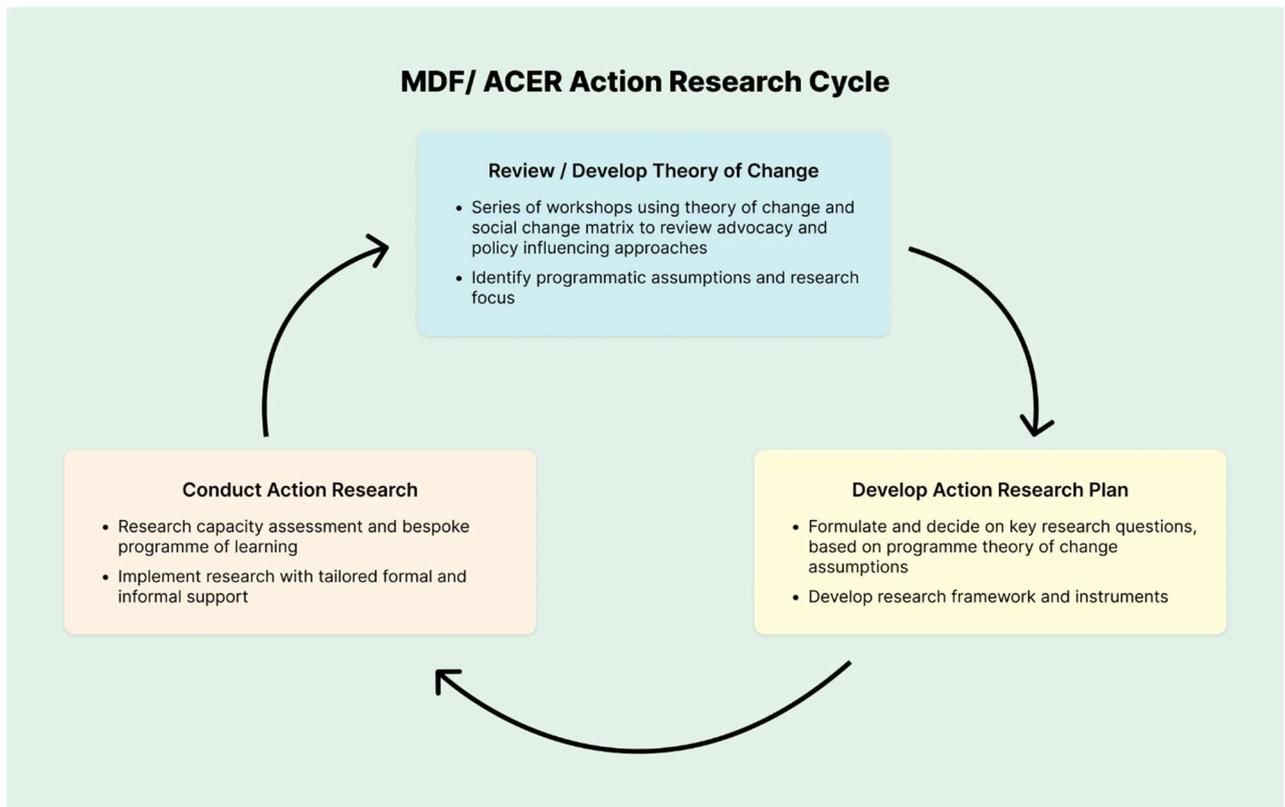
In summary, the participatory research consisted of:

- Documents and literature review, including CLAs where available.

- Review of ToC and development of SCM.
- Grantee capacity assessments and tailored capacity building activities.
- Grantee led action research projects.
- Stakeholder consultations.
- Research validation.

This process is captured in figure 4 below:

Figure 4: Action Research Process



IID Action Research

An agreed part of reviewing IID approaches to API was to work with them on re-examining their ToC and its associated assumptions, to better understand any gaps in information that is beneficial to the success of the programme. By engaging with their ToC, and by using SCM as a tool to map out the stakeholders influences and underlying assumptions that are needed for the change to succeed, IID was able to identify some information gaps that can be addressed via additional action research. IID and their associates conducted the action research and the findings of that research are linked back to their ToC using an adaptive management model to learn and act from the action research. This section summarised the activities at each stage of the action research process outlined in figure 4.

Review and Development

During the review and development stage of the action research cycle, IID collaborated with MDF/ ACER to use their ToC to identify their key actors and map out the outcomes (actor + action/behaviour) on the SCM. Then IID and MDF/ ACER brainstormed and formulated assumptions. This was done via a number of online workshops, using virtual whiteboard software. Examples of activities from these sessions can be seen in figure 5, 6, and 7.

Figure 5: IID ToC/ SCM Workshops

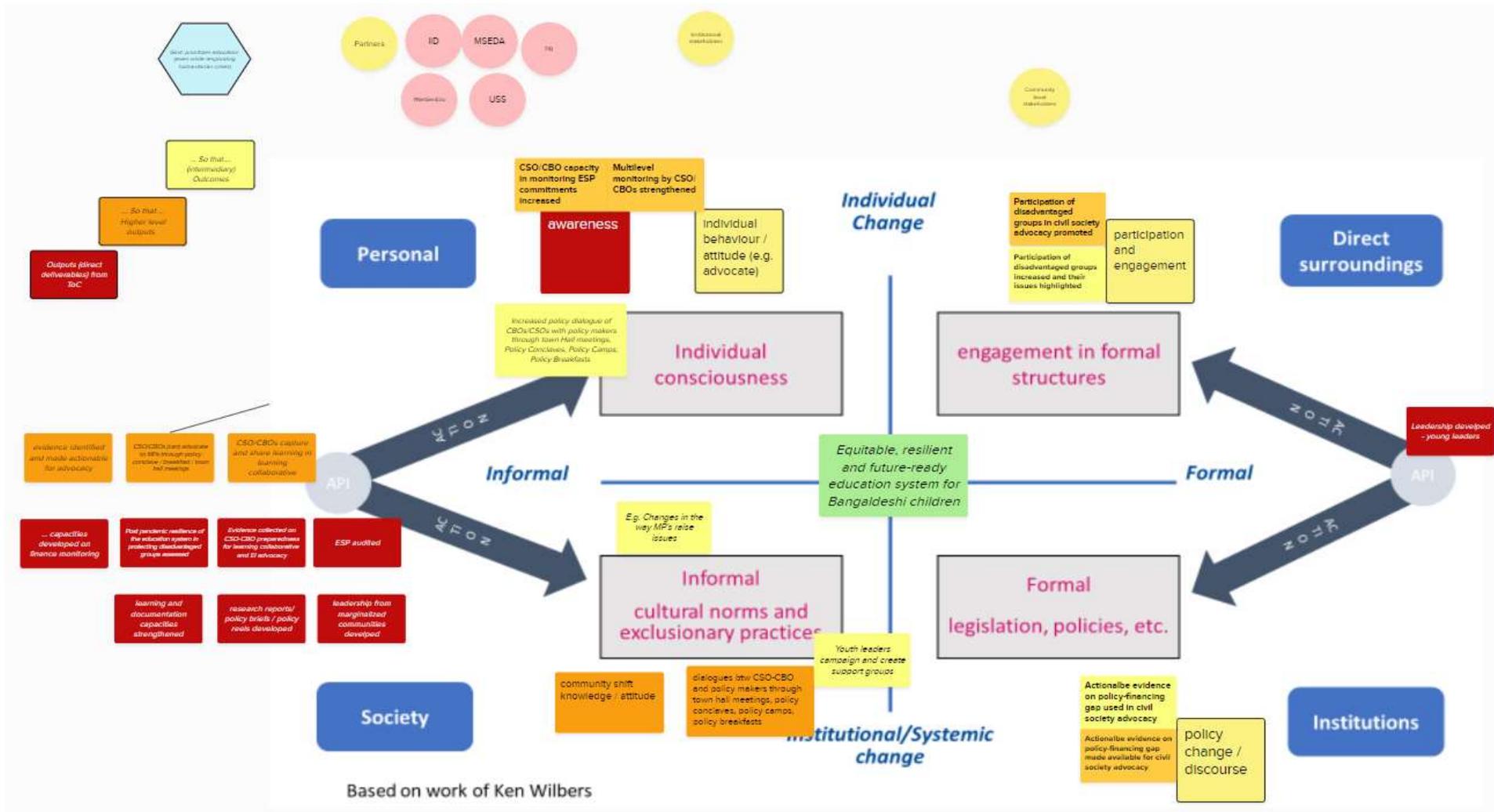


Figure 6: IID Workshop 1 Activity

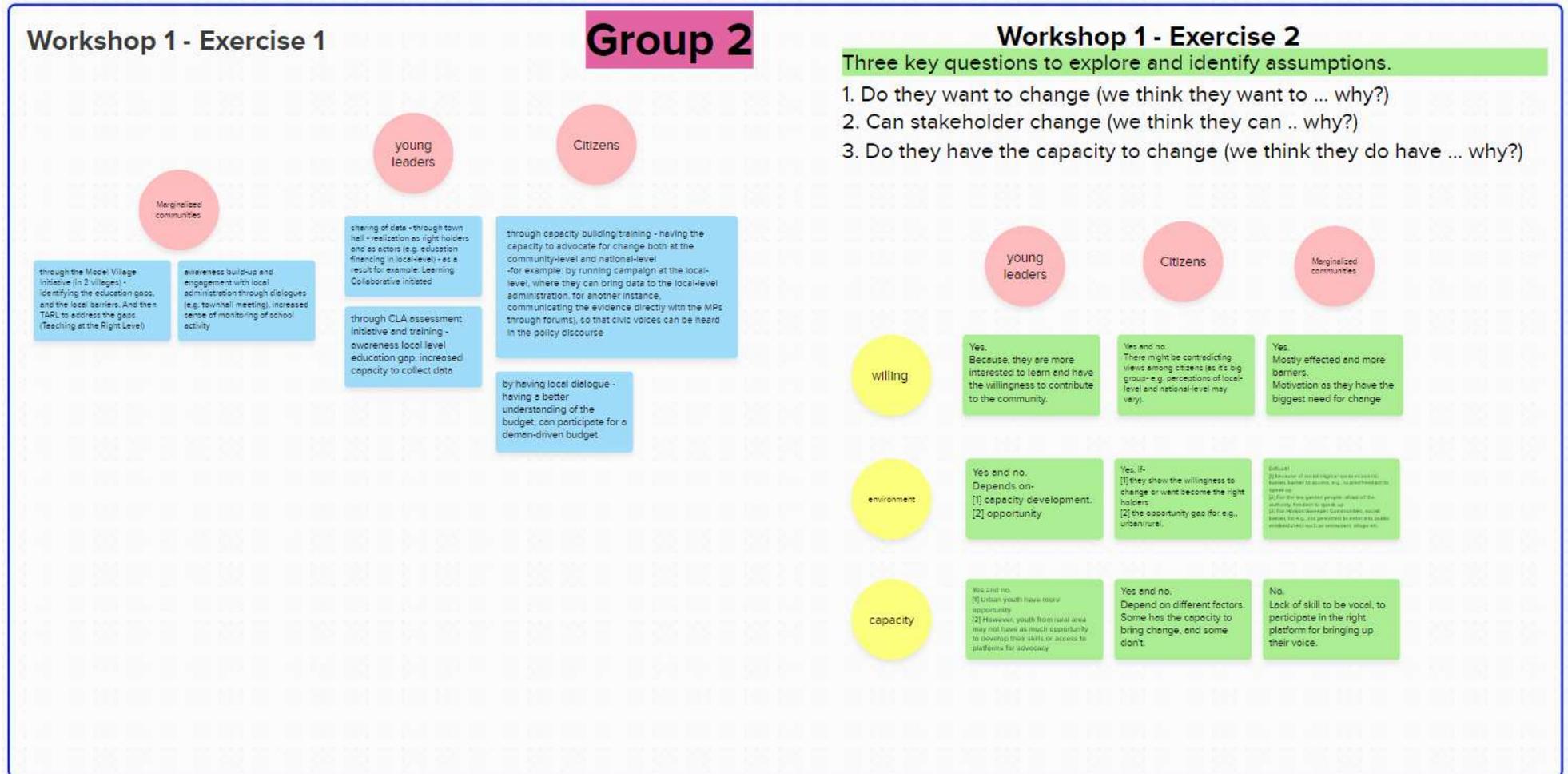
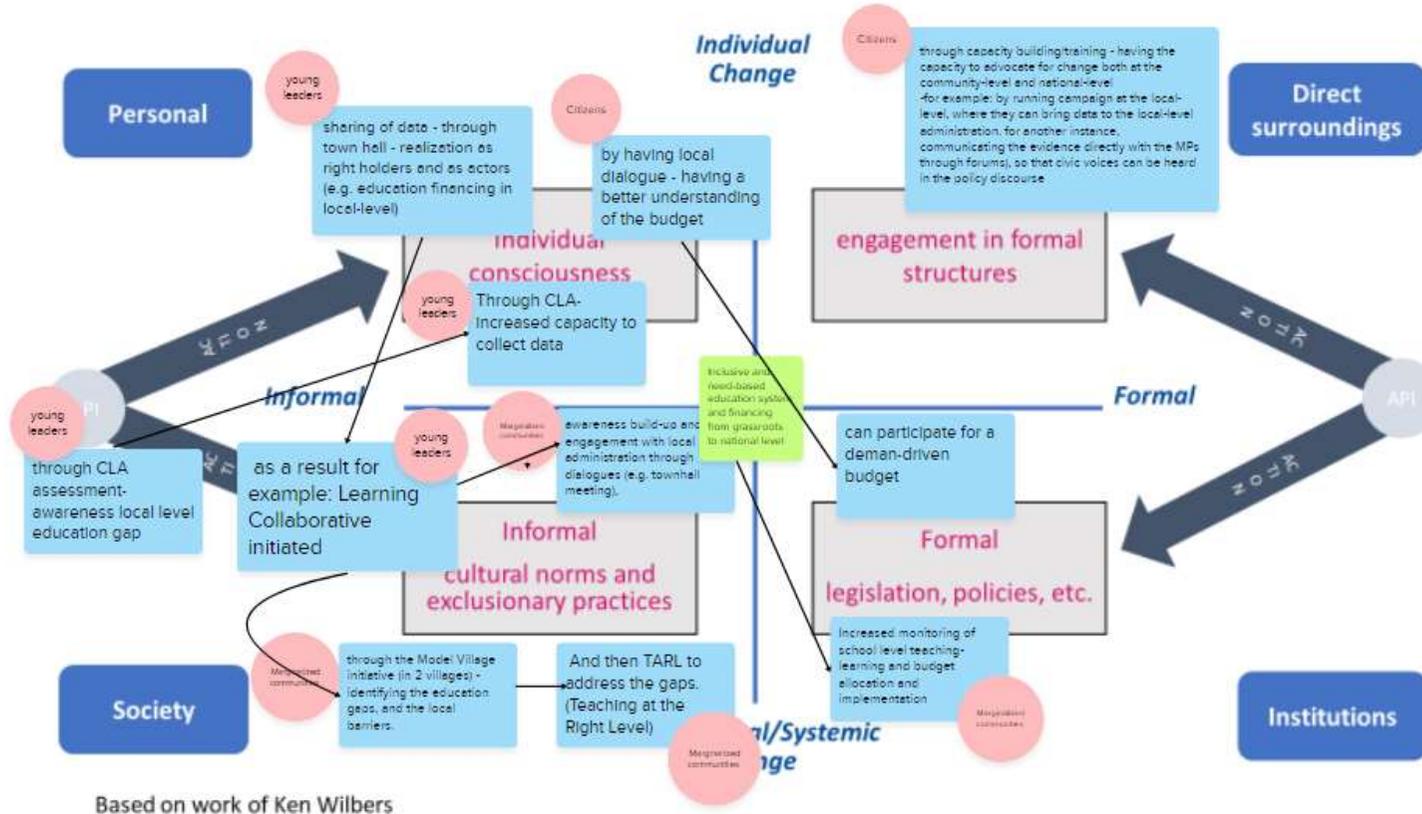


Figure 7: IID Workshop 2 Activity

WS2 - G2 - exercise 1

Group 2

1. Review the changes of the stakeholders in exercise 1, workshop 1
2. Map them onto the Social Change Matrix below - which quadrants do changes fall into?
3. You can even add more changes if relevant
4. If these changes happen, what impact would that have on overall social change? (you can add this on a green card)
5. You can connect the changes with arrows if relevant



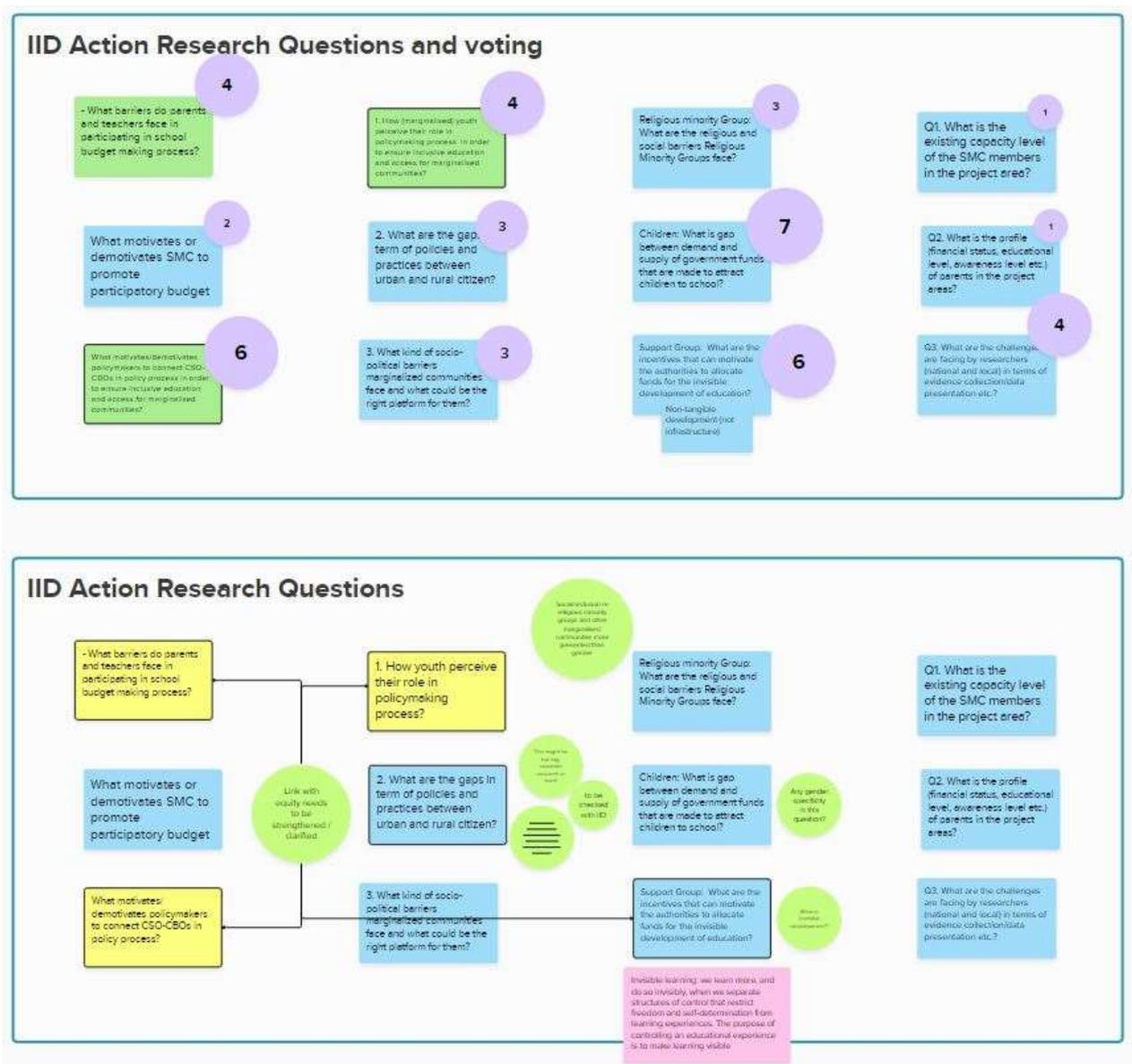
Develop Action Research Plan

IID then moved into the 'Develop Action Research Plan' phase of Figure 4. This phase began with an evaluation of the e!quality project assumptions, as formulated in the workshops. This focussed on:

- Which assumptions they would like to, or needed to, know more about in order to become more effective as organisation
- What could and would they do with the information gained through action research.

They then were able to prioritise their potential research questions through voting and discussion in an online workshop. This can be seen in figure 8. The squares are some of the main assumptions and associated research questions drawn out of ToC, and the circles represent votes by IID colleagues and their key stakeholders, to prioritise the importance of the researching that question in relation to realising the main impact of the e!quality project's ToC.

Figure 8: IID Assumption and Research Question Prioritisation and Scoring



Following this, further prioritisation of potential research questions took place to develop their learning agenda. Key discussions focussed on:

- Who would/ should be involved in collecting the information in the learning agenda?
- How would they use the information, focussing on organisational decisions that would need to be made?
- How useful is it i.e. how would it help them as organisation?
- What were internal and external conditions that needed to be in place for using the information and translating that in revised strategies.
- Deciding on key number of research questions.

This allowed IID and their associates to finalise their research questions and framework. The research questions and a summary of their methods can be found below, and the full framework is available in Annex 1.

Research Questions

The core objective of IID's action research was to identify the reasons that motivate and demotivate stakeholders to engage in public policy process. The following three Research Questions were identified:

1. To identify what motivates/demotivates policymakers to connect CSO-CBOs in policy process.
2. To understand how youth perceive their role in policymaking process.
3. To explore what barriers do parents and teachers face in participating in school budget making process.

This action research project only explored the first research question. The second and third research questions are planned to be explored in due course.

Methods

IID used Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews to collect the data for this action research project. They collected the data from a range of stakeholders, including Minister, MPs, bureaucrats, NGO leaders, representative of CSOs and CBOs at national and local level.

Conduct Action Research

After finalising the research framework, IID moved into the next phase of the action research process. This began with the MDF/ ACER conducting a capacity assessment of IID, in order to develop a bespoke programme of learning. For IID, MDF/ ACER delivered a capacity building session on qualitative data analysis, in addition to a 'pre-research validation' workshop, to ensure they were on the right track. As part of the organisational capacity building, MDF/ ACER also facilitated regular reflection sessions, informal advice, and feedback on research approach, tools, and outputs. With this support, IID were able to conduct a successful action research project, which reportedly had a significant impact on organisational learning and management practices. The full report can be found in annex 2.

Once the research was finalised, a validation session was held. This took the form of an online workshop, in which the grantee and their key stakeholders rationalised the findings of the research, and any associated

actions, and revisited the SCM and situated their findings within it. Virtual whiteboard software was used to support these sessions and document the discussions. Figures 9, 10, 11, and 12 show this, and are presented in the order the activities took place. The key findings from IID's research are:

Factors that motivate policy makers to connect with CSOs/ CBOs include the following.

- Incentives & benefits: Financial appeal, exposure trips
- Expertise and capacities of CBOs-CSOs
- Alignment of agenda / interests, political and local
- Opportunity to promote self and own agenda
- Organization's reputation and acceptance in the community
- Existing Relationship between the organization

Factors that demotivate policy makers to connect with CSOs/ CBOs include the following.

- Negative public perception due to political differences
- Lack of funding and sustainability of long-term initiatives
- Limited of knowledge/understanding
- CSO/CBOs role perceived as policing rather than cooperator
- More Interest in receiving recognition than actual contribution
- Lack of incentive for politicians

The IID team shared that they felt the action research project had helped them better frame their existing initiatives and supported them to implement more sustainable and equitable change. They felt the SCM was particularly useful in this regard, and helped them to understand that inclusivity is about engaging in informal spaces and with cultural attitudes. Before this project, they did not focus too much on informal individual change, but rather focused on policies and their underlying evidence base. However, they now focus on trying to influence individual change. To do this, they have begun conducting stakeholder mapping and supporting capacity development. For example, they have implemented a survey to understand local communities' role in school budget decision making. They found that the surveyed communities did not understand their role in the budget decision making process, and are now looking at how they can support that capacity development. The project also supported them to understand the capacity development needs of their partners, which led to them holding a number of workshops in parallel to this project and commitment to provide more capacity building sessions going forward. Additionally, IID have mapped the findings of the project to their 3i approach to API (discussed below) and have committed to integrating the SCM into their future work.

Figure 9: Mapping Research Findings into updated actions/ outcomes

- Listen carefully to the presentation of research findings. Which actions (changes made by social actors) do you hear?
- Translate key research findings into updated actions/ outcome/ changes and assumptions/conditions in the ToC / Social Change Matrix
- Assumptions: Which reasons for engaging between MPs and Civil Society actors do you hear?
- Split up into small changes, rather than big, vague changes
- Write these changes on cards

Let's remind ourselves of the assumptions

Group work 1

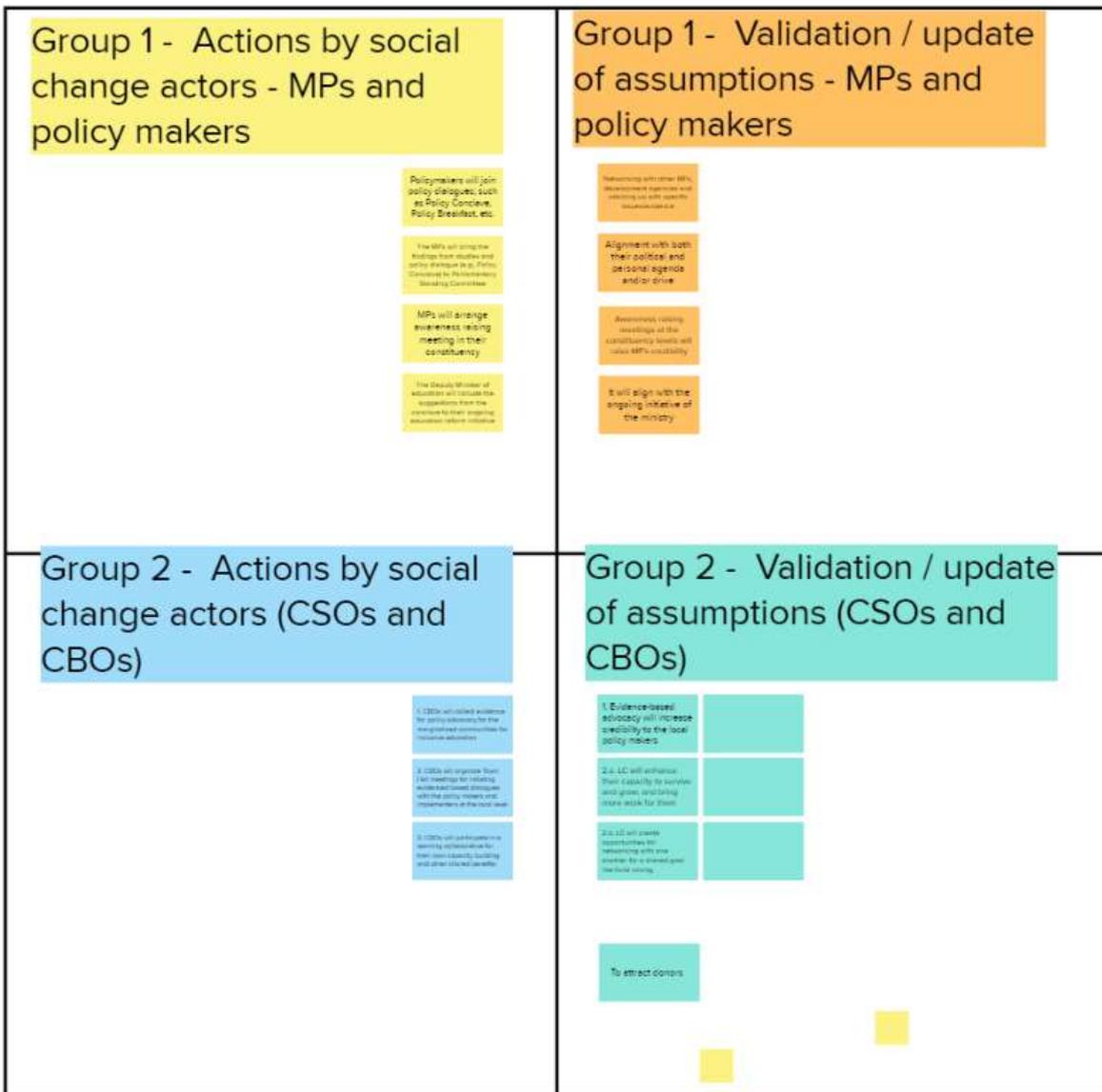


Figure 10: Mapping the Research Findings to the SCM

Place the cards in the Social Change Matrix - in which quadrant do they fit?

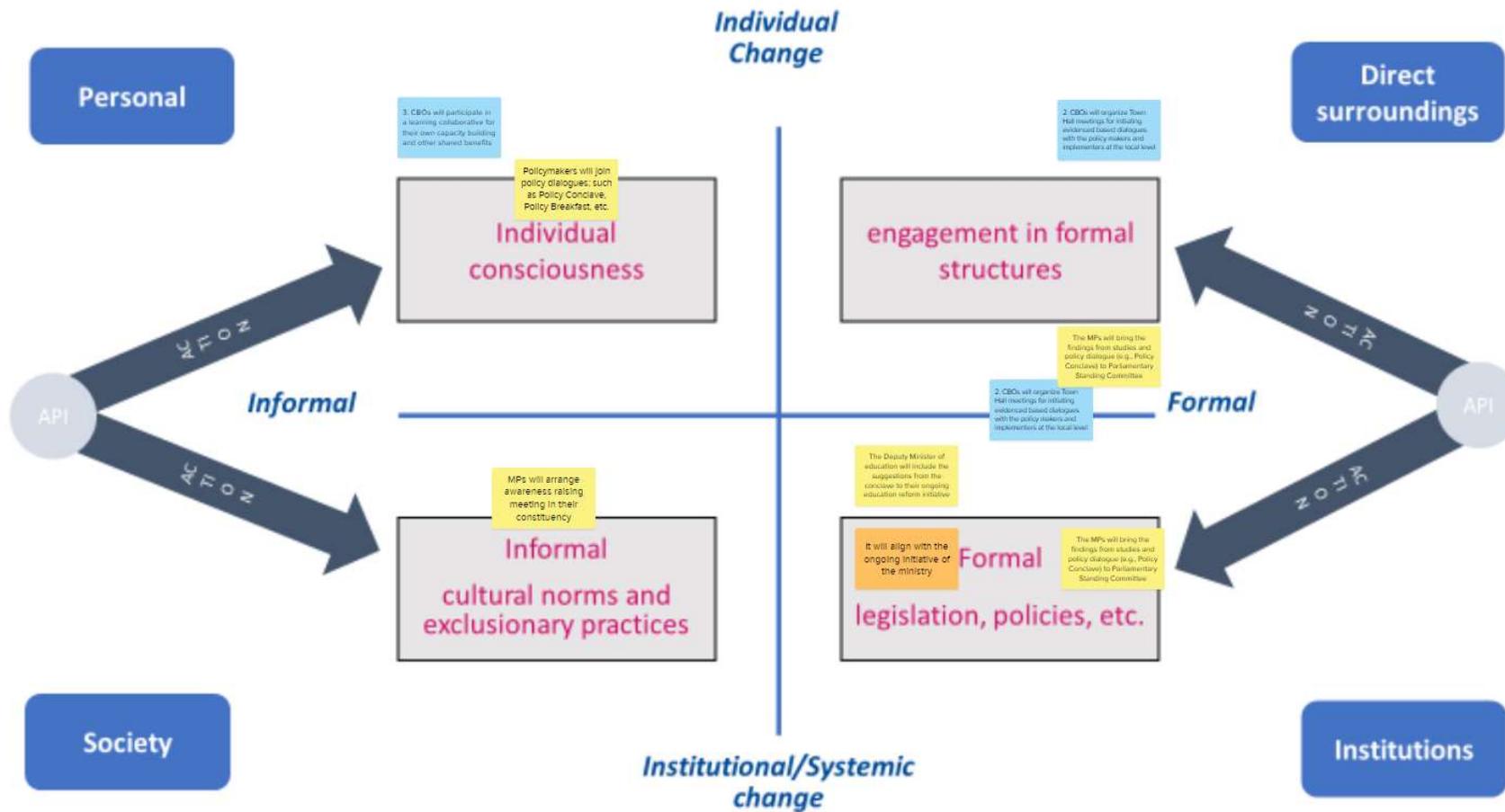


Figure 11: Mapping the Research Findings against the Research Objectives

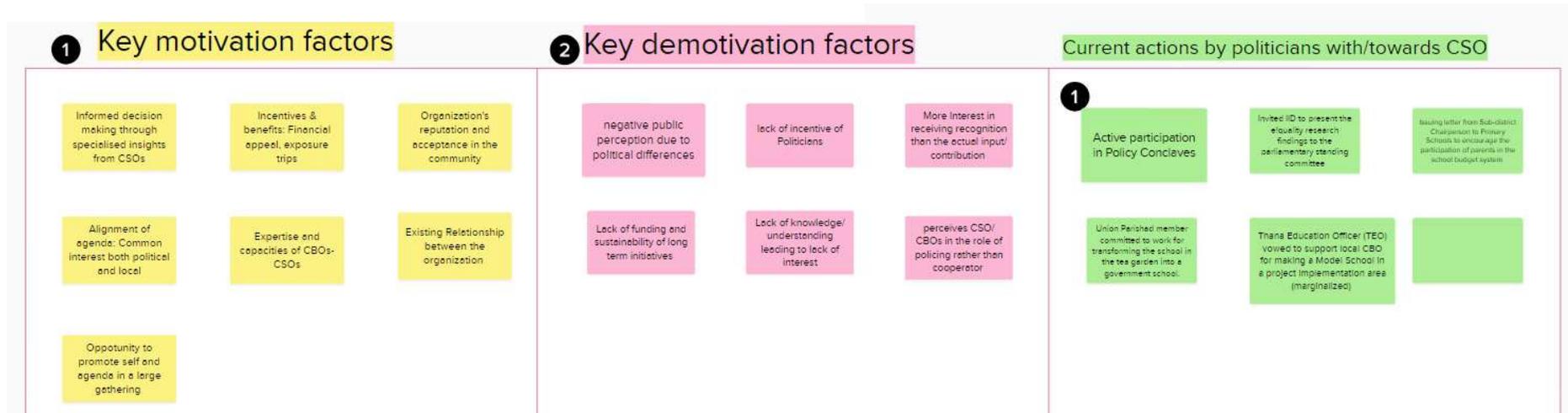


Figure 12: Breaking Down Actions Resulting from the Research



Approach to API

IID follow their 3i approach to API activities – inquire, inform and involve. This can be summarised as know the issue (do the research), inform different groups of stakeholders (local, national, global levels), bring together in the same space the key voices on the issue being examined. To compliment this approach, they also utilise the social accountability model, drawing synergies between both strategies in all their work.

As an organisation, they are passionate about evidence backed advocacy. They collect evidence at local, regional, and national levels. Then they take the evidence back to policy makers. When approaching policy makers, they utilise the engagement matrix in figure 13. The four quadrants can be defined as follows:

Figure 13: Approaching Policy Makers Matrix



Public Critical	This approach aims to influence policymakers, by raising awareness of issues in the public interest. This may include API activities such as advocacy campaigns, media campaigns and policy forums.
Non-public Critical	This covers more discrete engagement approaches, which are critical, but non-threatening. An example of such an approach is the policy breakfasts outline in greater detail below.
Public Supportive:	This covers activities where IID's views and the government's align. They believe that on some issues where CSO-government partnerships produce better impacts on governance and development. Examples of activities in this quadrant include supporting MPs via campaigns, rallies, or events on specific shared causes.
Non-public Supportive:	Examples of activities under this quadrant focus on project evaluation, capacity building and program supports from IID, which are meant to help the policymakers achieve national development goals.

Associates of IID noted, that they are youthful and flexible organisation, which are changing the way API is conducted in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, that is not to say they do not have strengths in traditional API practices. Partners reflected that one of the organisation's main strengths is communicating complex research in easy to understand written documents. As part of this study, IID, the wider equality consortium, and their partners shared some examples of their API activities. A number of the main examples are outlined below.

Hello MP

A recurring theme in the wider research was grantees providing spaces to connect key stakeholders on an issue, where previously no effective platform or space existed. A particularly strong example of this was an initiative called 'Hello MP' in Bangladesh, which connected people from remote communities with policy makers and allowed them to respond to challenges directly. For instance, in one area, people could not go to school or hospital because there was no road. This project allowed the remote communities circumvent the corrupt 'middle men', which had been blocking such infrastructure developments, and straight to the policy maker, who was able to get the road built. The process of 'Hello MP' is outlined in the video.



Policy Hackathons

As part of a programme to support youth participation in democracy, IID held a 'hackathon' to support youth to develop the skills they need to carry out advocacy. This takes the form of a four-day residential bootcamp. As part of the camp, they were able to collect data from over 800 youths across different parts of the country, which informed the development of a youth manifesto for the upcoming election (process outlined in figure 15). The organisation supported youth representatives to present the manifesto to a policy conclave, and MPs were reportedly very receptive to the ideas presented (find the youth manifestos for [2015](#) and [2020](#) linked here). Two key learnings from this activity by the organisation are, firstly, to try to keep the sessions as simple and engaging as possible. For example, they use lots of visuals and bring in contextual and actionable evidence. Secondly, is to ensure youth representatives prioritise their needs/ requests. This will be incorporated into the camps in the next iteration of the activity. The hackathons also allowed the organisation to conduct a range of follow up activities in communities across the country to further validate the findings and enhance API activities, and has inspired youth groups to conduct this type of advocacy work themselves, and crucially provided them with the skills to do so.

Figure 14: IID Policy Hackathon 2023



Figure 15: IID Youth Manifesto Process



Policy Breakfasts

IID shared that they use policy breakfasts as a way to have non-public critical discussions with policy makers. These sessions are evidence informed and results driven, and utilise Chatham House rules, to support an open, frank, and productive debate. IID have been partnering with national and international organisations for these, including National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the High Commission of Canada in Bangladesh. The sessions include 30 minute opportunity for networking, discussions on the focus area, and compilation and presentation of policy recommendations that result from the discussions. Participants at the events include a specially selected panel of key influencers in the topic area, which will deliver keynote speeches, additional subject matter experts and academics, and relevant policy makers and industry leaders. IID reported that policy breakfasts were effective in API, and shared an example of where this approach was successful. Prior to COP 27, they held a policy breakfast on loss and damage. Many policy makers, who were going to the COP, came to the meeting to

discuss challenges in their constituencies, and the collation of the sessions findings was sent with the delegation to COP to inform their work. The process for the session is summarised in figure 16.

Figure 16: IID Policy Breakfast Process



Regional Learning Event

Having concluded the action-research and validated the action-research findings on 13th September, IID and MDF/ACER, in close collaboration with RMU PA, jointly designed and conducted an experience sharing Learning Event/Workshop on 22-23 November 2023. The purpose of this workshop was to share the action-research outcomes and methodology with a cross section of EOL grantees and IID's CSO partners in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the learning event aimed to support the participating CSOs to apply their own experience to the MDF/ ACER action research methodology and identify suitable real-world topics for their own action research.



The learning event was intended to support EOL grantees and CSO participants to reflect on their practices. Furthermore, the event was designed to enable grantees in Bangladesh which did not participate in the action research and learning process to learn from the process and connect it to their own reality in API for Inclusive Education.

Participants were invited from IID, IID's EOL subgrantees, and additional participants through an open call for applications to attend the workshop. More than 200 applications were received, out of which IID selected 10 from different education related CSOs, based on their motivation, relevant background and work area. From EOL, the workshop was attended by Marianne Olesen (Oxfam Denmark) and Janak Pant (RMU AP, Oxfam Nepal)

Primary Objective:

- The workshop aims to enhance NGO advocacy in education through comprehensive understanding and collaborative application of the Social Change Matrix.

Sub-objectives:

- To deepen participants' comprehension of the Social Change Matrix by dissecting its components and methodologies, thereby fostering a robust understanding that underpins its application in transformative social strategies.
- To facilitate a dynamic learning exchange on effective education policy advocacy, using real-world scenarios and group activities to explore innovative approaches and best practices within the sector.
- To cultivate an environment that encourages collaborative advocacy efforts, empowering participants to leverage collective expertise and insights, thereby enhancing the impact and reach of their initiatives in the education sector.

Methodology

The workshop was participatory and inclusive, with a focus on learning from each other. This included work modalities such as group discussions and brainstorming, mapping exercises, and dialogue practice sessions. The workshop modalities ensured that all participant voices were heard and included in the discussion.



Valuing the role of the participants in advocacy and policy influencing activities, facilitation of the learning event included reflective moments so participants will use the findings and commit to adapted action. The Social Change Matrix was used to structure participants' ideas, experiences so they can develop their actionable research connected to their theory of change. The agenda for the learning event can be seen in appendix 1.

Before day two of the workshop commenced, IID held a 'Policy Breakfast'. IID invited a number of prominent policy makers and educational influencers in Bangladesh to discuss issues of concern related to education, specifically, the recently introduced new national curriculum. This event was organized separately from the learning workshop, but all participants were invited to the policy breakfast to share their views and engage with the policy makers and influencers.

Reflections

The workshop was designed, prepared, and facilitated in collaboration between the MDF/ACER consortium and members of the IID team. This worked out very well as it allowed for the consortium to present the SCM methodology and facilitate related group work with the participants, and IID to add their experiences in the process, ensure full contextualization to the realities of the participants and further strengthen their networks with the participating CSOs.

Participants were very active and enthusiastic about the workshop content, groupwork, and the range of opportunities for learning and networking. It gave them the chance to discuss and review their advocacy practices, take a fresh look at their stakeholders, and share challenges with other participants from different organisations. The 'Policy Breakfast' gave them opportunity to engage with policy makers and influencers,

exchange views, and ‘test’ their assumptions. Participants commented that they found the workshop very useful, innovative and reflective.

Conclusion

The overall objective of the research was to investigate, review and learn from IID’s (and IID’s partners’) education API efforts, with the aim to identify strategies and practices that have shown to be effective in instigating change at local, regional and education system levels, and shed some light on the conditions that have contributed to their effectiveness.

The process started by IID formulating their research questions and developing their research framework and research tools. The Social Change Matrix (SCM) was used to review the Theory of Change and ToC assumptions, which was the main input for formulating the key research questions. IID implemented the research by integrating it in their planned research activities. After the research was concluded, ACER/ MDF facilitated a ToC validation workshop with IID to reflect on the ToC/ SCM and check the assumptions. The ToC/ SCMs was updated and refined at this stage.



IID produced a piece of research, the findings of which allowed them to make adaptations and improvements to their API activities. Nevertheless, additional follow-up research will be needed to understand the longer-term impact of the project, particularly in relation to adaptive management practices.

As a final step in the process was an in-person workshop that was co-facilitated by IID and MDF/ ACER to share the findings with IID’s CSO network partners and Bangladesh-based EOL Grantees.

The next steps are for EOL grantees and sub-grantees (CSO network) to find common ground and have aligned their agendas with regards to advocacy for inclusive primary education.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Learning Event Agenda

EmpowerED: Education Policy Advocacy through Social Change Matrix Session Plan

22 Nov, Day 1: Understanding the Social Change Matrix and the Education Landscape	
Time	Sessions
9:00-9:30	Arrival and Registration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome pack distribution with workshop materials
9:30 – 10:00	Ice-Breaking Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present workshop overview, objectives and agenda Introduction game - interactive activities allowing participants to introduce themselves and their organizations
10:00-11:00	Session 1: Introduction to the Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop expectations: A two-way sharing of what participants hope to learn and what facilitators expect to deliver through an interactive activity Unveiling the Social Change Matrix: An engaging storytelling approach narrating the inception, purpose, and key components.
11:00-11:30	Tea/Coffee Break (Refreshments provided)
11:30-1:30	Session 3: Interactive Application - Social Change Matrix and Education Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group Activity: Identifying Challenges - Role-playing exercise where groups represent different education sector stakeholders to understand diverse perspectives and map the challenges. Real-world Problem Solving: From previous session on challenges and issues, formulate vision and place in the middle of the SCM, brainstorm stakeholders and write on yellow cards What do you hope/expect these stakeholders to do (differently) in order to achieve the vision?
1:30 – 2:30 Lunch Break (Networking opportunity)	
2:30-4:00	Session 4: Case Studies (Local & Global Perspectives) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation by ACER UK Presentation by IID on Action Research projects and results of the 2 Africa Grantees
4:00-5:00	Assumption & Wrap-up of Day 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief introduction on Assumptions Participants formulate assumptions and questions they want to ask the policy makers and influencers during the policy breakfast

23 Nov, Day 2: Mastering Policy Advocacy through the Social Change Matrix	
Time	Sessions
9:30 – 11:30	Policy Breakfast – Separate event organised and moderated by IID
12:00 – 13:00	Morning Recap and Energizer Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quick interactive recap of Day 1. Reflection from the Policy Breakfast: identify key stakeholders mentioned during the policy breakfast, reflect on learning about these stakeholders (their motivation, capacity, influence)
13:00 – 14:00	Session 1: Blueprinting Policy Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative Workshop: For key stakeholder, formulate assumptions about their ability/motivation/influence to make the changes to achieve the outcomes

2:00 – 3:00 Lunch Break (Networking opportunity)	
3:00 – 4:30	<p>Session 2: Group Activity - Constructing an Advocacy Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative Exercise: Participants draft step-by-step action plans to achieve the outcomes: how can they influence their target stakeholders towards the change? • Market place presentations
4:30 – 5:00	<p>Closing Ceremony</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective Circle: Participants share one commitment they are taking away from the workshop. • Reflections on the workshop from EOL • Certification Ceremony: Distribution of certificates and tokens of appreciation. • Feedback Capture: Digital kiosk setup for participants to submit their feedback on the workshop.

Annex 1: IID Research Framework

Action research on:

Understanding stakeholder motivations and demotivation to engage in public policy process: learning from IID's e!quality project on public investment in education

Background

At the beginning of 2023, MDF and ACER in consultation with Regional Management Unit (RMU) in Nepal proposed to IID to participate in an action research on IID's e!quality project. This support, as part of Education Out Loud's global learning partner initiative, envisions to help grantee like IID achieving their project's outcomes more efficiently while also generating knowledge on education advocacy and policy influencing (API). The action research will concentrate on how civil society organizations (CSOs) engage in API to improve equitable learning outcomes, particularly in relation to gender, intersectionality, and social inclusion.

After two virtual meetings and a series of email communication, IID happily agreed to participate in the research. As part of it, MDF and ACER facilitated two workshops in January and February 2023 with the researchers and project management team at IID to contextualize the social change matrix for e!quality project and explore the potential research questions. This document is produced as the next step to further elaborate the methodology including research questions, objectives and scope of the action research.

Objectives and research questions

The core objective of action research to identify the reasons that motivate and demotivate stakeholders to engage in public policy process. In order of the project priority, the three Research Questions are:

1. To identify what motivates/demotivates policymakers to connect CSO-CBOs in policy process.
2. To understand how youth perceive their role in policymaking process.
3. To explore what barriers do parents and teachers face in participating in school budget making process.

Scope

The proposed action research seeks to align with the scheduled activities and priorities of the e!quality project and aims to support the project in achieving its objectives. As a first priority, IID will gather data and information on the first Research Question, which will involve engaging Members of Parliament and top NGO leaders during a residential event called Policy Conclave in March 2023 and in-person meetings by May 2023. The second priority will focus on gaining perspective on youth's role in the policymaking process from previous youth initiatives, ongoing project activities e.g., Policy Hackathon (in March 2023) and Policy Camp in mid of 2023 and future project activities in 2024. Finally, in 2024, as the third priority, IID may explore the third Research Question based on the project implementation priorities and future extensions.

Methodology

Aligned with the core objective, this action research will encompass different data collection methods for three Research Questions. Briefly- the timeline, method and research participants are summarized in the following table.

Research Questions	Time	Method of data collection	Research participants	Potentially aligned project activities
Specific objective 1	Year 2023 (by Aug)	FGD, KII, case study	Minister, MPs, bureaucrats, NGO leaders, representative of CSOs and CBOs at national and local level	Policy Conclave and follow up activities
Specific objective 2	Phase I – Aug, 2023 Phase II- Sep'23- Aug'24	Literature review, FGD, and KII	Youth including leaders and representative of marginalized communities	Policy Hackathon, Policy Camp and other youth engagement activities
Specific objective 3	Year 2024	TBD	Parents, teachers and School Management Committees (SMC)	Resilience study on national scale, and model village

Data collection methods

Research Question 1

To identify what motive and demotivate the policymakers from connecting CSO-CBOs in the policy process, we will collect data through Key Information Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and (if possible) case study. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with ~ 6MPs and 4-5 KIIs will be conducted with the minister, bureaucrat, and NGO leaders during the Policy Conclave and its follow activities. Based on time and resources, case study method may be employed for comparing, evaluating and understanding different aspects from FGD and KIIs.

Research Question 2

To understand youth perspective on their role in the public policymaking process- we will collate data from IID's previous youth initiative in the form of literature review, and also collect data through FGD and KII with the youth. An FGD will be conducted during the Policy Hackathon in March 2023 with 6-8 youth; 6-8 KIIs will be conducted in during Policy Hackathon and Policy Camp, online survey on Youth Manifesto and other youth engagement initiatives of the project.

Research Question 3

To explore what barriers do parents and teachers face in participating in school budget making process, we will consult with the parents, teachers and SMC members. Specific method of data collection to be decided later as the project progresses.

Research participants

The respondents for the action research will be mostly recruited from list of participants of activities/events of e!quality project. For example, the MPs, minister, bureaucrats and CSO-CBO leaders who will participate in the Policy Conclave will be invited to be the respondent. The youth who will be participating in Policy Camp, Policy Hackathon, youth campaigns and other activities will be also invited to participate in the action research.

Timeline

The activities related to Research Question 1 and 2 will be carried out in the following timeline. The detail timeline for Research Question three will be shared later.

Activities	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Finalizing research design							
Informal interviews for instrument development							
Co-developing data collection instruments							
Finalizing data collection instruments							
Data collection							
Transcription							
Data analysis and reporting							
Validation workshop and ToC revision							
Report							

Conclusion and next steps

Through this research partnership, IID will be able to leverage the expertise and resources of MDF and ACER to systematically investigate the e!quality project, identify areas for improvement, and optimize the project's implementation. Moreover, the partnership will contribute to the advancement of knowledge and best practices in education advocacy and policy influencing (API), which will have broader implications for the field of education and development.

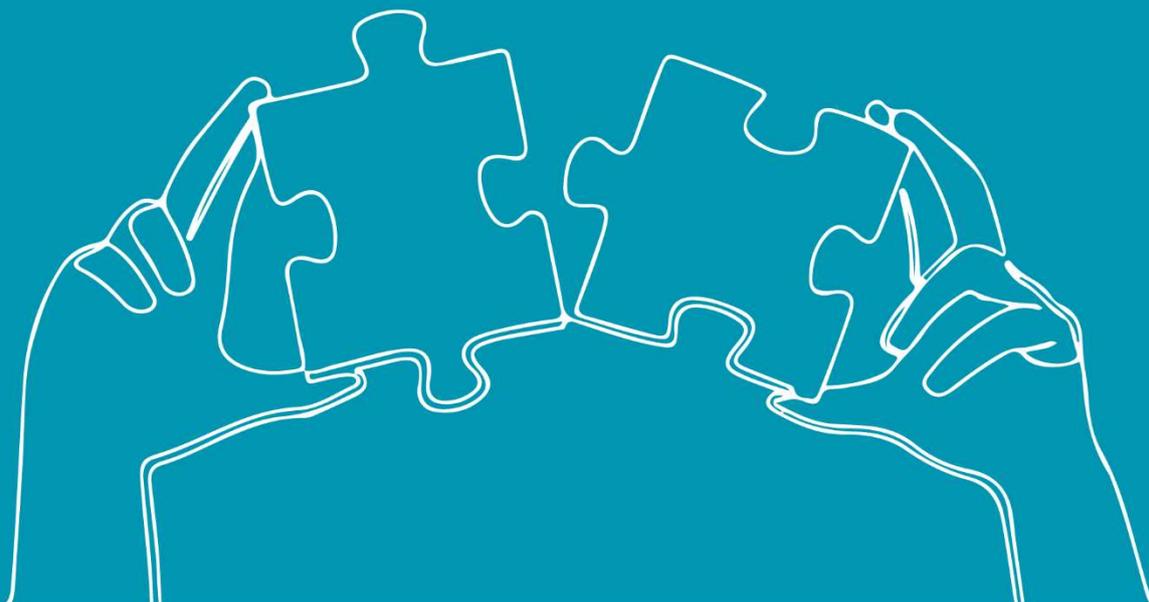
The next step in this action research project is to develop the questionnaires for the FGD and KII, and collect the data through these methods. Once the data has been collected, it will be analyzed and a report will be produced, highlighting the key findings from the research. Based on the findings, strategies will be developed on how to use the produced knowledge during the implementation of the e!quality project. These strategies may include changes to project activities, modifications to the approach towards API, and targeted advocacy efforts aimed at policymakers and other stakeholders. Ultimately, the goal is to optimize the e!quality project's implementation and generate new knowledge and best practices for education advocacy and policy influencing.

Annex 2: IID Action Research Report



Bridging the Gap:

Understanding Policymaker-CSO-CBO Dynamics in Policy Advocacy



MDF
EMPOWERING PEOPLE.
CREATING IMPACT



Bridging the Gap: Understanding Policymaker-CSO-CBO Dynamics in Policy Advocacy

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This report is the result of collaborative efforts between the Institute of Informatics and Development (IID), Management for Development Foundation (MDF) Training & Consultancy, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). It is presented as an action research document, aiming to provide insights into the dynamics of policymaker engagement with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in the context of Bangladesh. The findings, recommendations, and conclusions presented in this report are based on research conducted through a joint effort involving these organizations. The report aims to contribute to informed discussions and evidence-based practices in the field of policy advocacy and engagement. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the official views of any specific organization or entity. The collaborative nature of this endeavor underscores the commitment to fostering transparent, equitable, and participatory policymaking processes.

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List of Acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
CBO	Community-based Organizations
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GUK	Gono Unnoyon Kendra
IID	Institute of Informatics and Development
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MDF	Management for Development Foundation
MP	Members of Parliament
MRA	Microcredit Regulatory Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
PAL Network	People’s Action for Learning Network
RMU	Regional Management Unit

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Executive summary

This action research report examines how policymakers in Bangladesh engage with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). We found that policymakers collaborate with these groups because they offer expertise, specialized knowledge, and financial resources. CSOs bridge the gap between marginalized communities and policymaking, leading to more responsive policies.

Resource mobilization is a key motivation. CSOs have diverse funding sources and flexible models, enabling innovation and efficient program delivery. They provide technical assistance and grassroots insights, improving policy outcomes. Transparency and accountability also motivate policymakers, with CSOs acting as watchdogs to ensure policies align with public interests.

However, barriers exist, such as political differences, loss of control, and administrative complexities. Resource constraints, bureaucratic hurdles, and power dynamics can hinder collaboration. Negative public perceptions and a lack of trust further complicate the relationship.

To address these barriers, we recommend defining roles, building awareness, and fostering transparent partnerships. Aligning agendas and highlighting mutual benefits are essential.

Our report draws insights from the Institute Informatics and Development's (IID) experience. IID focuses on evidence-based policy advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative networks. Through training and replication, IID empowers CSOs and CBOs in policy engagement.

In conclusion, this report reveals the nuanced landscape of policymaker engagement in Bangladesh. Balancing motivations, barriers, and strategies offers transformative collaboration, fostering inclusive and transparent policymaking.

Introduction

Public policy processes play a pivotal role in shaping the socioeconomic and educational landscape of a nation. The engagement of stakeholders, particularly civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), in these processes is crucial for ensuring equitable learning outcomes and driving social change. This study embarks on an action research journey to delve into the motivations and demotivation that drive or hinder stakeholders' participation in public policy processes, with a particular focus on gender, intersectionality, and social inclusion within the context of IID's e!quality project on public investment in education.

Background

In the early months of 2023, the collaborative efforts of Management for Development Foundation (MDF), Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), and the Regional Management Unit (RMU) in Nepal culminated in an invitation to the Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) to partake in an action research endeavor. This initiative, supported by Education Out Loud's global learning partner initiative, aspired to not only enhance the efficiency of IID's e!quality project approaches but also to contribute to the generation of knowledge pertaining to education advocacy and policy influencing. The focal point of this research is to unravel the intricate processes through which CSOs engage in advocacy and policy influencing to bolster equitable learning outcomes, paying special attention to facets of gender, intersectionality, and social inclusion.

Through meticulously designed workshops conducted in January and February of 2023, researchers and the project management team at IID embarked on a collective journey with MDF and ACER to contextualize the social change matrix for the e!quality project and explore the promising horizons of potential research questions. This document solidifies this collaborative effort, crystallizing the methodology, research questions, objectives, and scope of the action research.

Objectives and Research Questions

The focus of this action research is to uncover factors which encourage or hinder stakeholder engagement in public policy processes. Specifically, this study aims to:

Explore Policymakers' Motivations and Demotivation: By delving into the intricacies of what drives and impedes policymakers, this research seeks to explore factors which influence policymakers in connecting CSOs and CBOs with the policy-making process.

Methodology

This chapter outlines the comprehensive methodology employed to explore the dynamics of engagement between policymakers and CBOs and CSOs in the context of policy advocacy. The methodology encompasses data collection techniques, research instruments, and analytical approaches used to unravel the motivations, challenges, and experiences of policymakers and CSO-CBOs.

Research Approach

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, alongside observational insights, to understand CSO-CBO engagement in policy advocacy. By integrating various data sources, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and observational data, a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities within the CSO-CBO landscape is attained.

Data Collection

Policymaker Perspectives

To capture the motivations, challenges, and experiences of policymakers collaborating with CSO-CBOs, the following strategies were employed:

- **Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with Members of Parliament (MPs):** In March 2023, a dynamic FGD was conducted during the '[Policy Conclave on Educational Justice](#)', involving 10 MPs¹. This interactive session facilitated a deep exploration of the factors that motivate and demotivate policymakers in connecting with CSO-CBOs within the policy process.

Key Questions Asked in the FGD with MPs

- **Motivations:** MPs were invited to describe instances where they had collaborated with NGOs, civil society, or CSOs-CBOs in policy development or implementation.
- **Motivating Factors:** Participants shared the factors that drive their interest in collaborating with NGOs and CSOs-CBOs.
- **Impact on Work:** MPs discussed how collaborating with these organizations contributed to their own work, offering specific examples.
- **Effective Collaboration Stage:** Participants provided insights into the stages of the policy process where CSO-CBO collaboration had proven most beneficial.
- **Utilization of Evidence:** MPs discussed the utility of evidence produced by CSOs-CBOs in their policymaking, providing illustrative examples.

CSO-CBO Perspective

To comprehend the motivations, challenges, and experiences of CSO-CBOs in engaging with policymakers for policy advocacy, the following methodologies were employed:

- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from eight diverse CBOs. These interviews

¹ <https://iidbd.org/parliamentarians-vow-to-ensure-educational-justice/>

facilitated a nuanced exploration of learning needs, challenges, and capacity-building perspectives.

- **Survey:** A structured survey, informed by preliminary KIIs and literature, was distributed to a selected sample of 41 CBOs, capturing insights from a range of positions within the organizations, including Executive Directors (ED), CEOs, Directors, Chairpersons, Program Coordinators, and Program Managers. The survey encompassed questions about organizational characteristics, skills gaps, preferred learning techniques, and obstacles to capacity development.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Two FGDs were conducted with a total of 10 CBOs. FGDs allowed members to exchange knowledge and discuss shared experiences related to learning needs, fostering diverse perspectives and insights.
- **Observational Data:** As the secretariat of the 'CSO Alliance Bangladesh', we drew on observational data gained from experiences with CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs across Bangladesh. These insights provide real-world context and additional depth to the findings.

Literature Review

In addition to primary data collection, the study undertook a comprehensive literature review. Academic publications, reports from development organizations, news articles and relevant documents were extensively reviewed to understand the emergence of CSOs in Bangladesh and to identify challenges and recent trends in CSO-policymaker collaboration. This review informed the contextualization of the study and provided a basis for interpreting the primary data findings.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was employed to extract meaningful insights from the collected data. The KIIs, survey responses, FGD transcripts, and observational data were rigorously examined to identify recurring themes related to the motivations, challenges, and experiences of both policymakers and CSO-CBOs.

Limitations

While the research design aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding, certain limitations are acknowledged. This study was conducted within a context characterized by various challenges and constraints, which need to be acknowledged in interpreting the findings and implications. The limitations encompassed:

- **Sensitivity and Authoritarian Environment:** The intricate and sensitive nature of the issues under investigation posed complexities in understanding the motivations and challenges faced by policymakers. The authoritarian environment surrounding policy discussions added an additional layer of complexity, potentially influencing the candidness of responses.
- **Government's Caution Towards CSOs:** The government's cautious stance towards the activities of CSOs introduced challenges in accessing accurate and transparent information about policymakers' interactions with CSO-CBOs. This caution might have impacted the degree of openness and honesty in responses.

- **Potential Response Bias:** Given the environment's sensitivity, there is a possibility that the responses obtained from policymakers and government officials were influenced by biases, potentially limiting the depth of insights into the motivators and barriers for CSO-CBO collaboration.
- **Political Situation and Reluctance:** The prevailing political situation could have contributed to a reluctance among respondents to share certain information on record. This might have affected the comprehensiveness of the data collected.
- **Small Sample Size:** The study's sample size of MPs and CBOs was relatively small. This limitation may affect the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of policymakers and CSO-CBO representatives.
- **Time Constraints:** The project was constrained by a tight timeline, limiting the extent to which training for local CBOs could be thoroughly absorbed and effectively replicated. This could have impacted the quality and depth of engagement with these organizations.

Findings and Discussion

Evolution of Civil Society Organizations in Bangladesh

The emergence of CSOs in Bangladesh can be traced back to the 1950s when activists and students began protesting the Pakistani ruling class (Holloway, 1999). This period witnessed the formation of informal voluntary associations, particularly student and youth clubs, united by a shared Bengali identity. The Comilla Approach, introduced in 1956 by the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development, emphasized rural development through grassroots cooperatives and people's participation.

The 1960s and 70s marked an era of youth-led activism and significant societal transformation, laying the foundation for what are now termed CSOs/NGOs. Notable social movements, including the six-point movement in 1966 and the students' movement in 1969, galvanized civil society against an oppressive regime.

The devastating 1970 Bhola cyclone exposed West Pakistan's apathy towards Bengali citizens, catalyzing the emergence of the NGO sector. This crisis prompted international and local responses, becoming a turning point for organized relief efforts and the subsequent development of structured NGOs like BRAC.

During the 1971 war for independence, civilian volunteers, community clubs, and student organizations played vital roles in supporting liberation efforts both within Bangladesh and abroad. In the post-independence period, CSOs/NGOs gained prominence as poverty-alleviation and development entities, often complementing the state's initiatives and bridging service gaps (World Bank, 2006).

The 1980s witnessed the maturation of a more formalized NGO sector, influenced by global trends. Organizations initially focusing on relief and rehabilitation shifted towards comprehensive community development (Korten, 1991).

CSOs engaged in diverse activities such as commercial ventures, healthcare services, and non-formal education, successfully constructing an alternative framework that reached marginalized communities, at times circumventing bureaucratic barriers (Kennedy, 1999). The influential concept of Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' shaped operational strategies, prioritizing grassroots empowerment and conscientization.

Amid struggles against military rule and an expanding civic engagement landscape, multilateral aid agencies aimed to strengthen civil society. This period led to the inception of entities like PRIP Trust, fostering state-CSO relationships. Thematic networks of CSOs/NGOs emerged to amplify civil society and advocate for various causes.

Despite regulatory challenges, the formation of the NGO Affairs Bureau in 1990 streamlined NGO operations, highlighting the sector's commitment to accountability (Holloway, 1999).

In conclusion, the trajectory of CSOs in Bangladesh spans from early activism in the 1950s to organized relief efforts during the Bhola cyclone, active participation in the war of independence, and subsequent evolution into pivotal development agents. Over time, CSOs have not only complemented state efforts but have also held it

accountable, addressed market gaps, shaped market dynamics, and contributed to the growth of civil society. Despite challenges, these organizations have played a pivotal role in shaping social progress and development in Bangladesh.

The relationship between CSOs and the state in Bangladesh has evolved over the decades from indifference in the seventies to collaboration in the 2000s. Initially marked by complex bureaucratic barriers to foreign funding in the 1990s, the state's stance shifted towards cooperation with CSOs in the subsequent years, resulting in socio-economic progress. In essence, CSOs play a pivotal role in driving social change by complementing, challenging, and shaping state and market actions. Through advocacy, service provision, and capacity-building, CSOs contribute to building a fairer and more just society.

Engaging with Policymakers: Strategies, Adaptation, and Evidence-Based Advocacy

Policymaker engagement is crucial for CSOs and CBOs to drive policy influence and social change. This section presents survey findings from CSO-CBO representatives, unveiling communication strategies, adaptation methods, and evidence use patterns that illuminate engagement dynamics. This analysis reveals both positive dimensions and areas of improvement in their engagement endeavors.



FIGURE 1. STRATEGIES USED BY ORGANIZATIONS TO ENGAGE IN ADVOCACY WITH POLICYMAKERS.

CSOs and CBOs are increasingly recognizing the value of strategic precision and inclusive planning. Over 54% of the organizations reported formulating precise strategies that delineate advocacy objectives, activities, and projected outcomes. This meticulous approach equips them with a roadmap to navigate intricate policy terrains effectively. Moreover, around 59% of the organizations engage in advocacy with policymakers by seeking input and insights from beneficiaries and stakeholders. This

collaborative strategy ensures that policy proposals resonate with the needs and concerns of the communities they represent.

Collaboration and Communication

Collaboration stands out as a cornerstone of impactful advocacy efforts. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) reported leveraging partnerships and networks to amplify their advocacy initiatives. This collaborative approach underscores the recognition that addressing multifaceted policy challenges often necessitates collective action. Furthermore, the survey reveals that consistent communication with policymakers is a prevalent practice, with over 56% of organizations maintaining an ongoing dialogue. This sustained engagement is instrumental in cultivating relationships, providing updates, and ensuring that policymakers are well-informed.

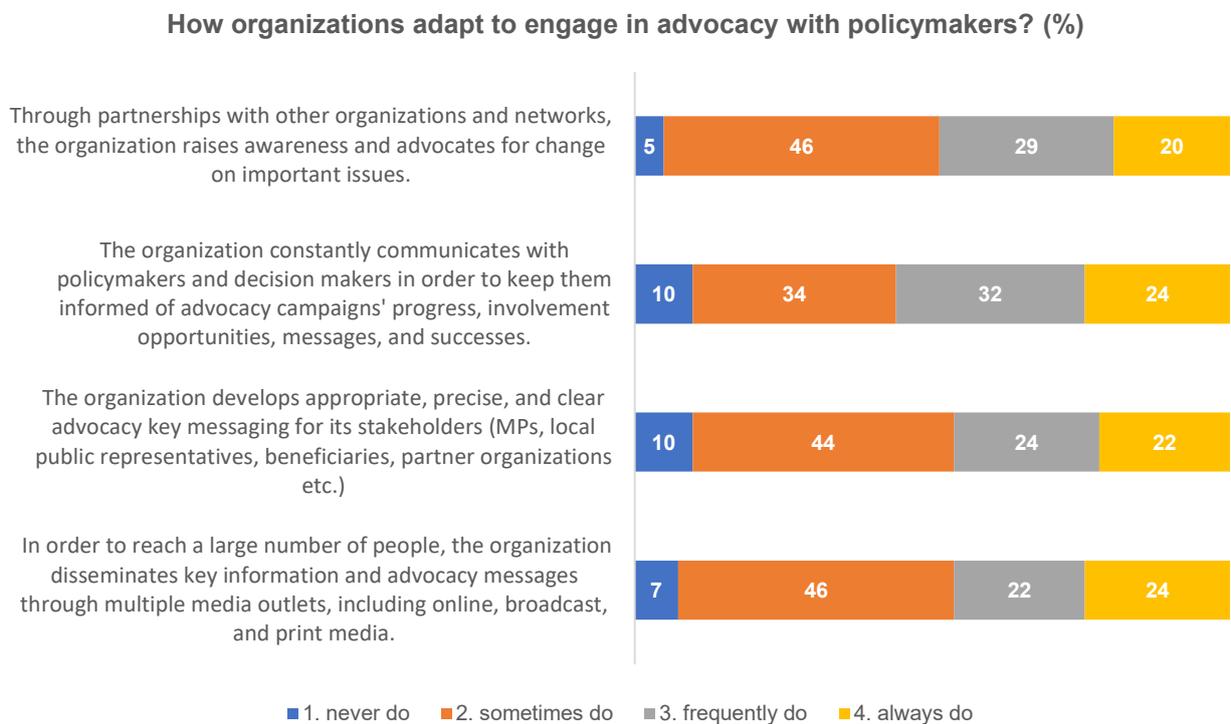


FIGURE 2. HOW ORGANIZATIONS ADAPT TO ENGAGE IN ADVOCACY WITH POLICYMAKERS?

Evidence-Based Advocacy Empowering Communities

One of the survey's noteworthy insights is the emphasis placed on evidence-based advocacy that empowers communities. A substantial 47% of organizations routinely provide policymakers with research reports and materials founded on empirical findings. This practice underscores the organizations' commitment to transparency, credibility, and their role as informed sources in policy discussions. Moreover, the frequency with which organizations present the demands and issues of communities to policymakers through various means—personal visits, phone calls, invitations, forums, and more—establishes a direct channel for community voices to influence policy decisions.

How often organization presents various demands and problems of the community to decision-makers, local government representatives for advocacy purposes (%)



FIGURE 3. HOW OFTEN ORGANIZATIONS PRESENT EVIDENCE TO DECISION-MAKERS.

Limited Research-Driven Advocacy

Despite the prominence of research efforts (78%) among organizations, only 42% reported always or frequently employing research findings to advocate with policymakers. This points to a potential gap in translating research into actionable advocacy strategies. For these organizations, bridging this gap could lead to more targeted and impactful advocacy efforts that are grounded in substantiated evidence.

Inconsistent Adaptation

While a significant majority (76%) of organizations *occasionally* to *consistently* adjust their advocacy strategy based on evolving policy issues, the practice of continuous monitoring and adjustment remains relatively lower. This inconsistency might hinder organizations from fully adapting to the dynamic policy landscape. A more proactive approach to adapting strategies could enhance the relevance and effectiveness of advocacy initiatives.

Underutilization of Key Messaging

The survey results indicate that key messaging—a crucial tool for conveying advocacy messages succinctly—is underutilized. Only 46% of organizations reported developing appropriate, precise, and clear advocacy messages. This represents a missed opportunity to communicate targeted messages effectively to policymakers. By harnessing the potential of key messaging, organizations could enhance the impact of their advocacy efforts.

Uneven Utilization of Communication Outlets

While organizations exhibit a tendency to disseminate key information through multiple outlets (70%), including online, broadcast, and print media (46%), and partnership-

driven awareness campaigns (49%), the utilization of these channels is not consistent across the board. A more balanced approach to communication outlet utilization could ensure comprehensive dissemination of advocacy messages and broader stakeholder engagement.

Limited Variety in Contact Methods

The survey results highlight a tendency among organizations to favor certain contact methods—such as phone calls, letters, and invitations—over others. This limited variety in contact methods could potentially hinder organizations from exploring a diverse range of engagement approaches. A broader repertoire of engagement methods could lead to deeper and more varied interactions with policymakers.

The analysis of the survey results underscores the positive strides made by CSOs and CBOs in refining their advocacy strategies, embracing evidence-based approaches, and fostering collaborative efforts. While these aspects contribute to the effectiveness of engagement with policymakers, there remain areas for improvement. Bridging the gap between research and advocacy, adopting consistent adaptation practices, maximizing the potential of key messaging, diversifying communication outlet utilization, and exploring varied contact methods can collectively enhance the impact of CSOs' and CBOs' advocacy endeavors and bolster their influence on social change.

Challenge and Recent Trends in CSO-Policymaker Collaboration

Restricting Funding: The Impact of the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act

In 2016, Bangladesh introduced the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act, intended to regulate foreign funding for civil society organizations (CSOs) to ensure transparency. However, its implementation has given rise to far-reaching consequences.

The introduction of the Foreign Donations Act has disrupted the traditional revenue source of many CSOs in Bangladesh—foreign funding. This funding has historically played a pivotal role in enabling CSOs to implement projects, conduct research, and advocate for various social and policy changes. Unfortunately, the Act's implications have been profound:

- **Financial Constraints and Disruption:** Foreign funding, which has been a cornerstone of many CSOs, enabling them to address critical societal issues such as human rights, education, health, and poverty alleviation, has been severely constrained due to the Foreign Donations Act. This disruption poses a significant challenge to the operational capacity of CSOs and their ability to fulfill their roles effectively.
- **Challenges in Registration and Compliance:** The Act mandates that CSOs receiving foreign donations must register with the government and disclose detailed information about their funding sources. However, the process of registration and compliance has proven to be complex and time-consuming. Navigating the bureaucratic intricacies has become an additional burden for CSOs, diverting their attention from their core activities and causing delays in funding disbursement.

- **Impact on Project Implementation:** As a direct consequence of the financial constraints brought about by the Act, CSOs have been forced to reconsider the scope and scale of their projects. Some organizations have been compelled to scale down or even halt their operations due to insufficient funds. This ripple effect negatively impacts the communities and beneficiaries that CSOs serve, eroding the trust placed in their capacity to bring about positive change.
- **Chilling Effect on Civil Society:** Beyond financial constraints, the Foreign Donations Act has introduced an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear within civil society. CSOs are concerned about potential misuse of the regulation to target and stifle organizations that advocate for human rights, social justice, or that may be critical of government policies. This climate of apprehension has led to self-censorship among CSOs, inhibiting their engagement in advocacy and initiatives that might be perceived as sensitive by authorities.
- **International Criticism and Human Rights Concerns:** The Act has not gone unnoticed on the international stage. Various international human rights organizations and advocates have criticized the stringent regulations, arguing that they infringe upon the freedom of association and undermine CSOs' ability to function independently and effectively. Organizations such as the United Nations emphasize the significance of creating an environment that enables civil society to flourish.

Harshening Regulations: The Implications of the NGO (Operational Activities) Order

In 2018, Bangladesh introduced the NGO (Operational Activities) Order, aimed at ensuring proper governance and oversight of civil society organizations (CSOs) through government licenses. However, the implementation of this regulation has introduced its own set of challenges

Bureaucratic Hurdles and Delays: The requirement for CSOs to obtain government licenses has added layers of bureaucracy and administrative processes. As a result, CSOs are now faced with the task of navigating these hurdles before they can operate. This bureaucratic complexity has led to delays in project implementation, diverting valuable time and resources from CSOs' core activities and hindering their ability to respond promptly to societal needs.

Stifling Innovation and Initiatives: Furthermore, the Order raised concerns about stifling innovation and initiatives within the civil society sector. The added layers of regulation have the potential to discourage CSOs from pursuing new projects that could benefit communities and address pressing societal challenges. This limitation diminishes the potential positive impact that CSOs can have as drivers of social change.

Critique of Burdensome Regulations: Critics, including CSOs and human rights advocates, have highlighted the burdensome nature of the NGO (Operational Activities) Order. They argue that the regulation's complexities hinder civil society's ability to swiftly respond to evolving societal dynamics and needs. In order to foster a vibrant civil society, regulatory frameworks should encourage, rather than obstruct, CSOs' endeavors to address pressing issues.

Inclusive Policy Making: Inclusive policymaking is essential to strike a balance between regulatory frameworks and the growth and innovation of civil society. The government should consider policies that streamline regulatory procedures while ensuring accountability and transparency. Engaging CSOs in the policy-making process can lead to regulations that effectively balance governance and civil society's crucial role.

Accusations of Anti-Government Activities: Impact on Civil Society Engagement

A concerning trend in Bangladesh is the characterization of civil society organizations (CSOs) as anti-government entities, often followed by accusations of working against national interests. This narrative has had profound implications for the role of CSOs in promoting democracy and social development.

Atmosphere of Fear and Self-Censorship: The labeling of CSOs as anti-government has engendered a climate of fear and self-censorship within the civil society sector. Organizations that fear being associated with dissent or criticism of government policies may opt to abstain from engaging in advocacy or initiatives that could attract negative attention. This self-imposed silence reduces the space for open dialogue and the exchange of ideas.

Inhibiting Advocacy and Civic Engagement: This narrative has a chilling effect on CSOs' ability to engage in meaningful advocacy and civic participation. The fear of retaliation or legal repercussions discourages CSOs from raising their voices against government actions, policies, or decisions. This has detrimental consequences for holding governments accountable and advocating for policies that benefit society at large.

Challenging the Foundations of Democracy: Ultimately, the trend of accusing CSOs of anti-government activities undermines the foundational principles of democracy. A healthy democracy relies on an independent civil society that can provide checks and balances to government power. Limiting CSOs' critical engagement with government policies diminishes the potential for democratic institutions to function effectively.

Promoting an Inclusive Narrative: Promoting an inclusive narrative is crucial for fostering constructive civil society-government relations. Governments should acknowledge the diverse and essential roles CSOs play in societal development and democratic governance. An environment of open dialogue, constructive criticism, and collaboration between CSOs and government can lead to more informed policy-making and sustainable development outcomes.

Government Interference: Undermining Autonomy and Credibility

In Bangladesh, the suppression of CSOs extends to instances of direct government interference in their work. Reports of raids on the offices of CSOs engaged in human rights work have raised concerns about the government's intentions.

Chilling Effect on Autonomy: Government interference, such as raids on CSO offices, sends a clear message of scrutiny and potential threat to civil society. This interference fosters a climate of self-censorship as CSOs become cautious about

activities that might attract government attention. Consequently, the ability of CSOs to address critical issues and advocate for societal change is hindered.

Diminishing Credibility: Moreover, government interference has the potential to compromise the credibility of CSOs. Raids on the offices of CSOs working on human rights issues cast doubt on the legitimacy of their work and tarnish their reputation. This erodes their ability to mobilize public support and engage in effective advocacy.

Bureaucratic Harassment: Detering Freedom of Operation

Bureaucratic harassment is a strategy employed by the government to discourage civil society organizations (CSOs) from operating freely and independently. This tactic involves subjecting CSOs to administrative burdens, delays, and intimidation.

Delays and Disruption: Introducing administrative hurdles and delays disrupts the operational efficiency of CSOs. Delays in obtaining permits or approvals impede CSOs' ability to respond promptly to societal needs or emergencies, hindering their contributions to social development and advocacy.

Intimidation and Compliance: Bureaucratic harassment often includes intimidating tactics such as unwarranted information requests or visits from government officials. These tactics pressure CSOs into compliance with government directives or create an atmosphere of uncertainty. Intimidation deters CSOs from pursuing their initiatives and engaging in activities that challenge government narratives.

Stifling Civic Engagement: This stifling of civic engagement undermines the environment necessary for a robust civil society. CSOs should be able to operate without unnecessary obstacles, facilitating their ease of operation and supporting their initiatives for a more vibrant and effective civil society sector.

Lack of Clarity in Laws: Impeding Understanding and Action

The complex and unclear laws governing civil society organizations (CSOs) create confusion, hindering their ability to understand the scope of their activities. This lack of clarity obstructs CSOs' engagement in meaningful initiatives and advocacy.

Legal Ambiguity: CSOs often struggle to interpret and navigate intricate legal frameworks. The lack of clear definitions and guidelines can deter CSOs from pursuing activities they are entitled to engage in, limiting their positive impact on society.

Diminished Confidence: Unclear laws erode CSOs' confidence in engaging with the government and the public. Fear of unintentional violations leads to self-censorship and hesitancy in addressing pressing societal issues, diminishing civil society's contributions.

Promoting Clarity and Transparency: To foster an enabling environment, legal frameworks must be transparent and easily understood. The government should provide clarity and simplify regulations, empowering CSOs to operate confidently and contribute more effectively to societal development and advocacy.

Lack of Access to Justice: Biases in the Legal System

CSOs targeted by government actions face barriers when seeking justice through the legal system due to biases and fear of reprisal:

Biased Legal Processes: Perceived biases in the legal system undermine CSOs' confidence in seeking justice. Challenges in receiving fair treatment, particularly in cases involving government actions, weaken the legitimacy of the legal process.

Fear of Reprisal: Fear of retaliation deters CSOs from pursuing legal action against government actions. Negative consequences, including increased government scrutiny or punitive measures, discourage CSOs from using legal channels, limiting accountability.

Ensuring Equal Access: Governments must ensure an impartial legal system accessible to all citizens, including CSOs. Enabling CSOs to seek justice without fear encourages transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, contributing to a society valuing civic engagement and democratic principles.

Undermining Civil Society: Authoritarian Suppression

Authoritarian regimes employ various tactics to suppress the activities of NGOs and CSOs. These regimes are motivated by several factors.

Control: Authoritarian governments seek comprehensive control over all facets of society, including social, political, and economic realms. The presence of independent NGOs and CSOs poses a challenge to this control, as these organizations advocate for transparency, accountability, and individual rights. Such advocacy threatens the government's dominance and its ability to shape public narratives.

Political Threat: NGOs and CSOs can function as platforms for organizing and mobilizing citizens. This potential for collective action, whether through protests, advocacy campaigns, or broader movements, poses a perceived political threat to authoritarian governments. These organized efforts have the potential to challenge the government's policies, expose its shortcomings, and disrupt the status quo.

Legitimacy: NGOs and CSOs often work to uphold democratic principles, human rights, and good governance. Their presence can highlight the inadequacies of authoritarian regimes, thereby undermining their claims of legitimacy and stability. As NGOs and CSOs shed light on issues that the government might wish to keep hidden, their activities challenge the regime's narrative.

International Pressure: Many NGOs and CSOs have international connections and can draw attention to human rights abuses and undemocratic practices. This exposure on the international stage can lead to diplomatic pressure, condemnation, or even sanctions. Authoritarian governments may suppress these organizations to avoid scrutiny and repercussions from the global community.

Authoritarian governments utilize a range of methods to suppress the activities of NGOs and CSOs, effectively limiting their influence and impact.

Restrictive Laws: One common tactic involves enacting or manipulating laws to regulate NGOs and CSOs. These laws often impose stringent registration requirements, limit funding sources, and curtail the scope of their activities. Such legal constraints obstruct the ability of these organizations to function independently.

Censorship: Media censorship is another tool employed to limit the visibility of NGOs and CSOs. By controlling news outlets and framing these organizations negatively, authoritarian regimes undermine public support for their causes and initiatives. This censorship can hinder the dissemination of information critical to their advocacy.

Access to information: The government can restrict CSOs' access to information, such as government data or reports. This can make it difficult for CSOs to make informed decisions about policy issues and can limit their ability to hold the government accountable.

Harassment and Intimidation: Governments subject leaders, members, and affiliates of NGOs and CSOs to harassment, threats, and even violence^{2 3 4}. This climate of fear serves as a deterrent, discouraging individuals from engaging in activism and advocacy work. The potential for personal harm stifles the willingness to challenge the government.

Surveillance: Authoritarian regimes frequently engage in surveillance of NGOs and CSOs, gathering information about their activities, funding sources, and alliances. This surveillance equips governments with data that can be exploited to disrupt or discredit the work of these organizations.

Financial Constraints: Governments may freeze or seize the assets of NGOs and CSOs, rendering them financially incapacitated. Additionally, imposing onerous financial reporting requirements further burdens these organizations, diverting their resources from their core missions.

Bureaucratic Hurdles: Governments introduce bureaucratic obstacles, such as delays in granting permissions, licenses, or registration. These bureaucratic hurdles drain the time, energy, and resources of NGOs and CSOs, impairing their ability to function effectively.

Infiltration: Some regimes infiltrate NGOs and CSOs with informants or agents, effectively monitoring their activities from within. This strategy aims to gather intelligence and undermine their efforts from a position of insider knowledge.

Defamation and Discrediting: Authoritarian governments disseminate false information or propaganda to tarnish the reputation of NGOs and CSOs. These efforts portray these organizations as enemies of the state or foreign agents, eroding public trust and support.

Selective Prosecution: Governments may engage in selective prosecution, targeting leaders or members of NGOs and CSOs with fabricated charges. Such actions not

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/bangladesh-must-end-harassment-human-rights-defenders-un-experts>

³ <https://cleanclothes.org/news/2010/07/28/bangladesh-labour-organisation-harassed-by-government>

⁴ <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/ohchr-concerned-over-harassment-rights-advocates-civil-society-leaders-3411736>

only intimidate individuals but also discourage others from participating in activism and advocacy.

Co-optation: In some instances, authoritarian regimes attempt to co-opt compliant NGOs by offering them funding, recognition, or other benefits. This approach aims to align these organizations with the government's agenda, compromising their independence and effectiveness.

Lack of trust and coordination

Policymakers may view CSOs as being too critical of the government. This is because CSOs often speak out against government policies that they believe are harmful to the public interest. Policymakers may feel that CSOs are not helpful partners in policymaking, but rather that they are just trying to undermine the government (Chowdhury, 2019).

CSOs may view policymakers as being unresponsive to their concerns. This is because policymakers often make decisions that do not reflect the needs of the people that CSOs represent. CSOs may feel that their voices are not being heard and that their concerns are not being taken seriously.

This lack of trust can make it difficult for CSOs to engage with policymakers in a meaningful way. CSOs may be reluctant to share their information and ideas with policymakers, and policymakers may be reluctant to listen to CSOs. This can prevent CSOs from having a real impact on policymaking.

Factors Influencing Policymaker Engagement with CSO-CBO

This section explores the various factors that play a pivotal role in influencing policymakers' decisions to engage with external organizations such as CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs. These factors can either motivate or demotivate policymakers to collaborate based on their presence or absence.

Expertise and Specialization: Leveraging CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs for Informed Policy Development

CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs bring a wealth of expertise and specialization to the policy-making process, offering valuable insights that can significantly shape effective and comprehensive policies. The motivations behind policymakers' engagement with these organizations are intricately linked to their specialized knowledge and capacity to contribute to policy development.

Informed Decision-Making Through Specialized Insights: CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs often emerge as experts in specific sectors or issues due to their dedicated focus and grassroots engagement. This specialized knowledge equips them with an intimate understanding of the challenges, needs, and opportunities within their respective domains. Policymakers are motivated to collaborate with these organizations because their insights provide a nuanced and contextualized perspective on complex issues. For example, in the context of capacity building and learning needs of local CSOs-CBOs in Bangladesh, these organizations possess deep knowledge of the challenges they face, allowing policymakers to tailor interventions that address the unique constraints these entities encounter.

A substantial majority of organizations surveyed, accounting for 63%, underscored the need for improving their skills in data analysis. The findings from the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) provide valuable insights into the common challenges faced by grassroots Civil Society Organizations-Community-Based Organizations (CSO-CBOs) in analyzing data. These challenges primarily revolve around constraints in human resources, time limitations, and limited expertise within their research departments, which collectively hinder their ability to effectively analyze data and draw meaningful conclusions.

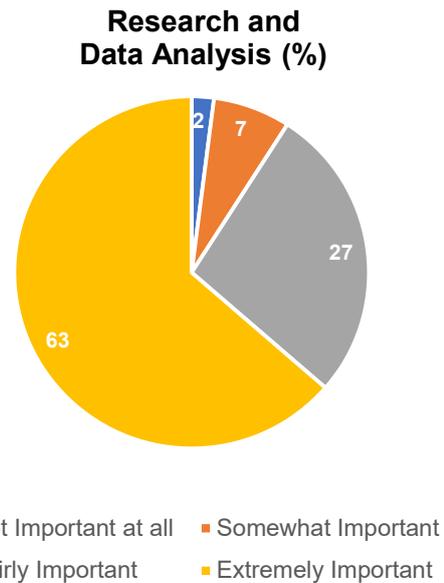


FIGURE 4. RESEARCH LEARNING NEEDS OF CSO-CBOs

Enhancing Policy Relevance and Effectiveness: Collaborating with CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs enhances the relevance and effectiveness of policies. These organizations often serve as intermediaries between marginalized communities and policymakers, bridging the gap between top-down decision-making and ground-level realities. The insights provided by CSOs and CBOs help policymakers design interventions that align with the actual needs and aspirations of the communities they aim to serve. In the case of the education sector's social accountability, local civil society's engagement ensures policies reflect the needs of marginalized groups, leading to more inclusive and impactful reforms.

A substantial majority (68%) of the surveyed organizations expressed an imperative need to develop their communication skills. This finding underscores the recognized significance of effective communication in enhancing the impact and reach of their policy advocacy efforts. Additionally, a significant fraction of respondents (78%) indicated a desire to acquire networking skills, specifically for engaging with potential donors or organizations.

External Validation and Credibility:

Policymakers recognize the credibility and external validation that CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs bring to the policy development process. These organizations operate independently and are often viewed as impartial entities, lending credibility to the policy recommendations they provide. Their involvement lends

weight to policy proposals, especially when advocating for marginalized communities. Studies have shown that policymakers are more likely to engage with CSOs when they can provide evidence-based recommendations, reinforcing the significance of specialized expertise (Oxfam, 2004).

Holistic Policy Formulation: CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs contribute to a holistic and well-rounded policy formulation process. Their diverse backgrounds and on-the-ground experiences bring a multiplicity of perspectives to the table, ensuring that policies consider a wide range of viewpoints. This inclusivity fosters policy outcomes that are comprehensive, equitable, and better equipped to address complex societal challenges. The multi-dimensional insights gained from engaging these organizations enrich the policy discourse and result in more effective solutions (Brinkerhoff, D., & Goldsmith, A., "Promoting Participatory Development," 2003).

Concerns about the organizational capabilities, technical expertise, and financial stability of CSOs can lead policymakers to doubt the effectiveness of collaboration. This perception of capacity constraints may deter policymakers from involving CSOs in policy development processes, as they may question the organizations' ability to contribute meaningfully.

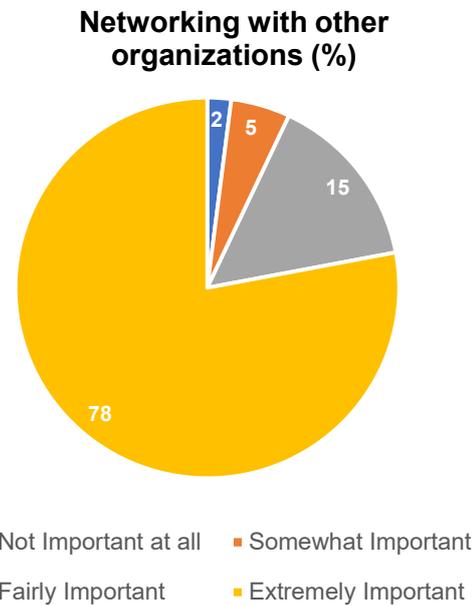


FIGURE 5. NETWORKING LEARNING NEEDS OF CSO-CBOs

One prominent theme that emerged is the perceived importance of establishing a peer-to-peer learning culture within CSO-CBOs. An overwhelming 88% of respondents acknowledged the significance of fostering an environment where organizations can share knowledge and experiences. This emphasis on peer learning reflects the organizations' recognition of the value derived from sharing best practices, collectively tackling challenges, and learning from one another's successes and failures.

However, the deficiency of skilled trainers emerged as a notable challenge, with 65% of surveyed organizations indicating its significance. This emphasizes the need for specialized expertise to effectively deliver training programs tailored to the unique needs of these organizations. An overwhelming majority of organizations surveyed (95.1%) identified a funding crisis as a significant hurdle in conducting learning sessions. This highlights the vital role of sustained financial support in facilitating capacity-building initiatives within CSO-CBOs.

Importance of establish a culture of peer-to-peer learning (%)

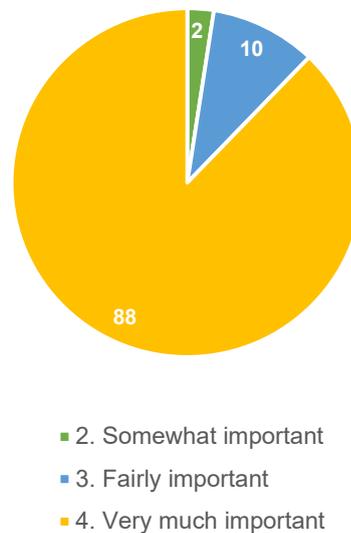


FIGURE 6. IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISH A CULTURE OF PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING.

What challenges the organization faced in attending/arranging learning sessions?

- Lack of willingness of the employees of the organization to receive training
- Lack of skilled trainers
- Lack of funds/financing
- Lack of initiative from management
- Not understanding which topic requires skill development (learning needs)
- Lack of proper training environment
- Lack of time
- There is no Challenge

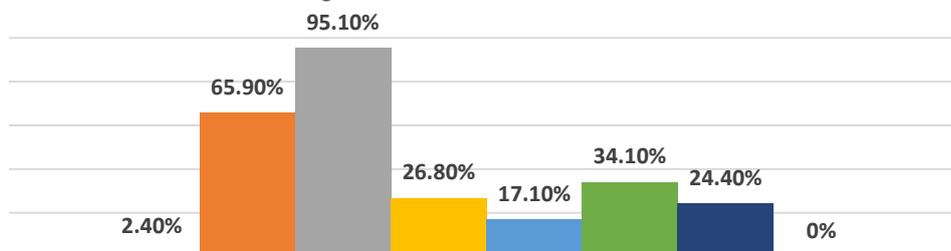


FIGURE 7. CHALLENGES ORGANIZATIONS FACE ARRANGING LEARNING SESSIONS.

Resource Mobilization

One of the key motivations for policymakers to engage with CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs is the potential for enhanced resource mobilization. These organizations often possess a diverse range of funding sources, including international donors, foundations, and private philanthropic entities. Collaborating with CSOs provides policymakers with an opportunity to tap into these additional resources to support and scale up their projects and initiatives.

CSOs like GUK and Gaibandha Rural Development Foundation exemplify the resource mobilization potential of such organizations. Their ability to attract funding from various sources, both domestic and international, has enabled them to carry out impactful projects that directly benefit marginalized communities. Policymakers recognize that partnering with CSOs can significantly supplement government funding, allowing for the implementation of innovative and sustainable initiatives.

Flexible and Innovative Funding Models: CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs often operate with more flexible funding models compared to government agencies. This flexibility allows them to experiment with innovative approaches, adapt quickly to emerging needs, and address gaps that may not be adequately covered by traditional government funding mechanisms. Policymakers are motivated to engage with CSOs because their unique funding models enable the exploration of novel solutions and the rapid deployment of resources.

Through partnerships with CSOs, policymakers can leverage these innovative funding models to pilot new programs or interventions. For example, the engagement of Sinnomul Mahila Samity with policymakers showcases how collaboration with CSOs can lead to the implementation of community-driven capacity-building projects. This innovative funding approach not only accelerates project implementation but also ensures that marginalized communities' specific needs are effectively addressed.

Access to Expertise and Technical Assistance: CSOs often bring a wealth of expertise, technical know-how, and field experience to the table. Policymakers recognize that engaging with CSOs provides them with access to specialized knowledge and skills that may not be readily available within government agencies. This expertise can range from thematic areas like education and social accountability to program design, implementation, and monitoring.

By collaborating with CSOs, policymakers can tap into this expertise to design more effective and evidence-based policies and programs. CSOs' practical insights gained from working closely with marginalized communities contribute to the development of contextually relevant initiatives. For instance, partnerships between policymakers and CSOs like IID have the potential to result in more informed and targeted capacity-building strategies that address the specific learning needs of CSOs and CBOs.

Transparency and Accountability

Policymakers are motivated to engage with CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs due to their pivotal role in promoting transparency and accountability. CSOs act as watchdogs, independently monitoring government actions, policies, and programs to ensure they align with public interests and adhere to established standards. This external oversight

contributes to a more transparent governance framework and fosters public trust in government institutions.

Collaborating with CSOs provides policymakers with an avenue to showcase their commitment to open governance and responsiveness. CSOs often utilize tools like social audits, community scorecards, and participatory budgeting to hold governments accountable for their promises and actions. This collaborative monitoring process not only helps identify areas of improvement but also enhances the quality and impact of policies and programs.

Citizen-Centric Approach: CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs have a strong presence at the grassroots level and maintain close connections with local communities, especially marginalized groups. Policymakers understand that engaging with these organizations facilitates a citizen-centric approach to policy formulation and implementation. CSOs act as intermediaries, conveying the voices, concerns, and needs of the communities they represent to policymakers.

By partnering with CSOs, policymakers gain valuable insights into the ground-level realities and can develop policies that are responsive to the diverse needs of marginalized populations. For instance, collaborations between policymakers and organizations like Gaibandha Rural Development Foundation demonstrate how CSOs contribute to more inclusive and people-centered development initiatives.

Improved Program Delivery and Impact: CSOs bring an on-the-ground perspective that policymakers may not always have access to. Their direct involvement in community projects and programs enables them to identify implementation challenges, gaps, and potential solutions. Policymakers recognize that engaging with CSOs can lead to improved program delivery, enhanced impact, and effective utilization of resources.

Project monitoring and evaluation skills also emerged as a priority, as indicated by 71% of respondents. This aligns with the broader objective of enhancing the accountability and impact assessment of CSO-CBO initiatives. The emphasis on acquiring such skills underscores the organizations' commitment to ensuring the effectiveness of their interventions.

Through partnerships with CSOs, policymakers can fine-tune policies and programs based on real-time feedback and community insights. This iterative approach helps streamline implementation processes, reduce inefficiencies, and ensure that initiatives

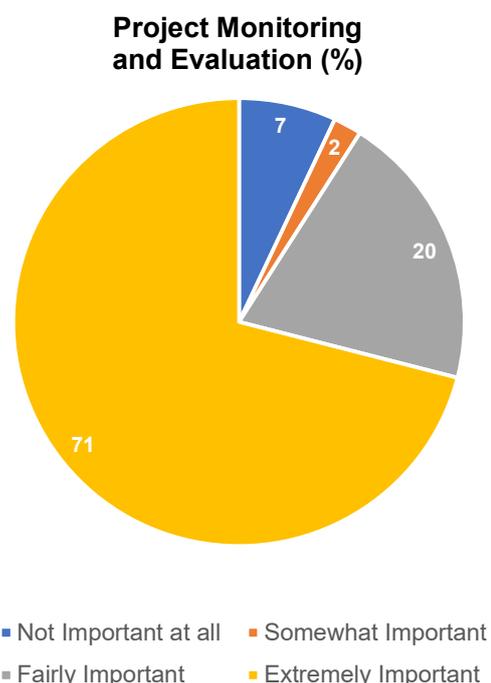


FIGURE 8. M&E LEARNING NEEDS OF CSO-CBO

achieve their intended outcomes. The collaborative efforts between policymakers and CSOs exemplify how such partnerships lead to more impactful and community-responsive interventions.

Innovative Experimentation and Scalability

Policymakers are increasingly motivated to engage with CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs due to their capacity for innovative experimentation. CSOs possess the flexibility to pilot and test novel approaches and interventions on a smaller scale, providing a controlled environment to assess feasibility, impact, and potential challenges. Policymakers recognize the value of such experimental initiatives, as they offer insights into effective strategies that can later be scaled up by the government for broader implementation.

Collaborations with CSOs allow policymakers to tap into a pool of creative and resourceful minds that are adept at designing and implementing innovative solutions. By partnering with organizations like GUK and Gaibandha Rural Development Foundation, policymakers gain access to proven prototypes and evidence-based practices that can be adapted and mainstreamed into larger policy frameworks.

Reduced Implementation Risks: CSOs often act as testing grounds for new policy ideas, which can help policymakers mitigate implementation risks. Collaborating with CSOs enables policymakers to observe potential challenges and unintended consequences on a smaller scale before committing to full-scale implementation. This proactive approach allows policymakers to make informed adjustments and refinements, leading to smoother policy rollout and improved outcomes.

Policymakers may find reassurance in knowing that CSOs have already conducted rigorous assessments of new approaches and have a deep understanding of the practical implications. This reduces uncertainties associated with untested policy initiatives and fosters more confident decision-making.

Responsive to Local Contexts: CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs often operate at the community level, where they have an intimate understanding of local contexts, needs, and dynamics. Policymakers recognize the value of engaging with these organizations to develop policies that are tailored to specific geographic and demographic conditions.

By collaborating with CSOs, policymakers ensure that their policies are relevant, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the unique challenges faced by different communities. This localization of policies enhances their effectiveness and increases the likelihood of positive outcomes, as demonstrated by initiatives like the partnership between Microcredit Regulatory Authority (MRA) and local NGOs in Bangladesh.

Alignment of Agendas and Political Differences

Policymakers in Bangladesh may be demotivated to engage with CSOs, CBOs, or NGOs if there are significant political differences or conflicting agendas between these organizations and the government. CSOs often operate independently and advocate for specific social, economic, or environmental causes that may not fully align with the policy priorities of the government.

Policymakers may fear that engaging with CSOs that have opposing viewpoints or agendas could lead to public disagreements, disputes, or challenges to their authority. The potential for public conflicts may discourage policymakers from actively seeking collaboration with organizations that are perceived as politically adversarial.

Fear of Loss of Control: Policymakers may also be demotivated to engage with CSOs, CBOs, or NGOs due to concerns about losing control over policy processes or outcomes. Collaborating with external organizations, especially those with active civil society engagement, may introduce unpredictability and uncertainty into the policy-making process.

Policymakers who prioritize maintaining a high degree of control over policy formulation and implementation may be reluctant to involve CSOs that could influence public opinion or advocate for changes that deviate from the government's intended direction. This fear of relinquishing control can hinder genuine partnership and collaboration.

Negative Public Perception: Perceptions of negative public opinion or backlash against CSOs, CBOs, or NGOs can demotivate policymakers from engaging with these organizations. If certain CSOs have faced controversies, legal issues, or public scrutiny in the past, policymakers may hesitate to associate themselves with such entities.

Policymakers may be concerned that collaborating with organizations that have faced public backlash could lead to negative media coverage or damage their own reputation. In an effort to avoid potential political or public relations risks, policymakers may choose to distance themselves from CSOs that have a tarnished image.

Bureaucracy and Administration

Policymakers in Bangladesh may be demotivated to engage with CSOs, CBOs, or NGOs due to the bureaucratic complexities and administrative hurdles associated with such collaborations. Engaging with external organizations often requires navigating through intricate administrative procedures, legal frameworks, and coordination mechanisms, which can be time-consuming and challenging for policymakers.

Bureaucratic Red Tape: The bureaucratic processes and paperwork involved in establishing partnerships, obtaining permissions, and ensuring compliance with regulations can deter policymakers from actively seeking engagement with CSOs. The need to adhere to government protocols and legal requirements may slow down the pace of collaboration, making it less appealing for time-sensitive policy initiatives.

Resource and Time Constraints: Policymakers often face resource constraints, including limited staff and time availability. Engaging with CSOs, CBOs, or NGOs may demand additional time, personnel, and financial resources to manage communication, coordination, and joint activities. In a context where policymakers are already grappling with multiple responsibilities, the prospect of dedicating additional resources to collaborative efforts may seem burdensome.

Complex Coordination Mechanisms: Collaborating with diverse CSOs, each with its own priorities, mandates, and operational procedures, can complicate coordination

efforts for policymakers. Ensuring effective communication, aligning goals, and managing expectations among various stakeholders can require substantial effort and may lead to administrative challenges.

Risk of Mismanagement: Policymakers may be cautious about the potential risks associated with mismanagement or misallocation of resources in collaboration with CSOs. Concerns about financial mismanagement, conflicts of interest, or accountability issues can lead policymakers to approach such engagements with caution.

Budget and Resource

Resource constraints pose a significant demotivating factor for policymakers when it comes to engaging with CSOs, CBOs, or NGOs in Bangladesh. Policymakers operate within limited budgets and must allocate resources judiciously across various sectors and initiatives. This financial reality can impact their willingness and capacity to establish and sustain collaborations with external organizations.

Competing Priorities: Policymakers often have numerous pressing issues and priorities to address within the confines of a restricted budget. These competing demands may lead them to allocate resources primarily to essential services and core government functions, leaving limited room for investments in partnerships with CSOs.

Lack of Dedicated Funding: Engaging with CSOs may require dedicated funding to support collaborative activities, capacity-building efforts, and the implementation of joint initiatives. Policymakers may be hesitant to allocate funds specifically for such collaborations, especially when the outcomes and impacts of these partnerships are uncertain or difficult to quantify.

Administrative Overhead: Establishing and managing partnerships with CSOs can entail administrative costs related to coordination, communication, monitoring, and reporting. Policymakers may be deterred by the additional administrative burden and overhead costs associated with these collaborations.

Human Resource Constraints: Engaging with CSOs requires time, effort, and skilled personnel to manage relationships, ensure effective communication, and coordinate joint activities. Policymakers may be hesitant to divert valuable human resources away from other critical government functions to support collaborations with CSOs.

Authority and Control

The dynamic interplay between policymakers and civil society actors in Bangladesh is often influenced by power dynamics that can demotivate policymakers from engaging with CSOs, CBOs, or NGOs. Policymakers may view these external organizations as potential competitors for influence, recognition, and authority in shaping policy decisions.

Political Threat: Engaging with CSOs, particularly those with strong advocacy capacities, may be perceived as a political threat by policymakers. CSOs often serve as independent watchdogs, holding government officials accountable and advocating for policy changes. This proactive stance can create tension if policymakers perceive CSOs as challenging their authority or agenda.

Control Over the Policy Process: Policymakers may be cautious about collaborating with CSOs due to concerns about relinquishing control over the policy-making process. Collaborative efforts with CSOs could lead to negotiations, compromises, and shared decision-making, potentially diluting the unilateral power of policymakers.

Fear of Influence Manipulation: Policymakers may fear that engaging with CSOs could lead to undue influence over policy decisions. This concern is particularly relevant when CSOs have access to resources, information, or networks that could sway policy outcomes in favor of their priorities.

Strategies for Mitigation: To address these demotivating factors, policymakers can adopt strategies to establish transparent and mutually beneficial partnerships with CSOs. Clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and boundaries can help mitigate concerns about power dynamics and ensure that policymakers retain ultimate decision-making authority.

Complex Interplay of Motivations and Barriers in Policymaker Engagement

In addition to the motivating and demotivating factors discussed earlier, several distinct challenges influence the dynamics of policymaker engagement with CSOs in Bangladesh. These challenges underscore the intricate relationship between CSOs and policymakers, shedding light on complexities that shape collaboration dynamics.

Incentives and Benefits: Numerous CSOs, NGOs and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) maintain connections with policymakers, both during and after their active tenure. These relationships may be motivated by various benefits, such as exposure trips, project involvement, and incentives. Some bureaucrats and intermediaries are drawn to specific CSOs due to the potential advantages they offer. Often, special budgets are allocated to incentivize policymakers' attendance at events, creating a financial appeal. While this interplay is no secret, it highlights a complex intermingling of interests between CSOs and policymakers.

Alignment with Constituency Needs: Cooperation with impactful CSOs, NGOs, INGOs, can contribute to policymakers' credibility and public standing. This mutual association can enhance policymakers' image and resonate positively with their constituents. Policymakers, especially those with strong local connections, may opt to engage with CSOs and NGOs that address issues relevant to their constituency. This collaboration helps policymakers respond to community needs and connect with their electorate.

Alignment with Political Affiliations: CSOs' interactions with the government can be influenced by their perceived political affiliations. Organizations critical of the government may face reluctance from policymakers, leading to protracted approval processes and potential funding hindrances. Political transitions further impact this relationship, with heightened caution during elections affecting policymakers' willingness to collaborate with CSOs. Political leaders tend to minimize involvement during these times, while administrative leaders adopt a more stringent approach to oversight.

Shift to Bureaucratic Leadership: In authoritarian regimes, bureaucrats often take precedence over political leaders. Political leaders, who often possess stronger local connections, tend to see the value in collaborating with CSOs and NGOs as it aligns with their constituency's needs and political objectives. On the other hand, bureaucrats prioritize accountability to the central government or system rather than the local populace. They focus on establishing and enforcing rules and regulations, aiming to ensure a structured and standardized approach. For instance, in response to the COVID-19 situation, NGOs were prohibited from implementing projects associated with primary education or conducting programs involving government primary school centers without proper authorization ⁵. Pre-election periods increase policy bureaucratization, constraining CSOs' civic space.

Awareness and Knowledge Gap: Lack of policymaker engagement on specific matters can stem from a lack of awareness. Policymakers' motivation increases when they are educated on subjects through systematic processes. Training, campaigns, and interactions can transform unaware policymakers into proactive advocates. Networking, liaisons, and peer connections also play pivotal roles, facilitating introductions to other policymakers and fostering collective efforts.

In navigating these challenges, policymakers and CSOs can collectively work towards effective collaboration, addressing the complex interplay between motivations, barriers, and the evolving landscape of partnerships.

⁵ <https://www.dhakapost.com/education/38118>

IID's Approach and Impact: Leveraging Action Research for Effective Policy Advocacy

This chapter delves into the practical application of action research within IID's policy advocacy endeavors. Guided by the principles of social accountability and equitable policy outcomes, IID's journey illustrates the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice, resulting in positive change. Through a pragmatic strategy and engagement initiatives, IID has harnessed evidence-based advocacy, transformative learning, and collaborative partnerships to drive meaningful impact.

IID's Approach to Advocacy

Aligned with its vision of making policy public, IID's strategic advocacy approach is framed by three core missions, known as the 3i Missions:

1. **Inquire Evidence for Policy:** IID's emphasis on evidence-based policy stems from its dedication to collecting reliable data for informed policy decisions. The e!quality project exemplifies this mission, capturing actionable data at local, regional, and national levels for impactful advocacy.
2. **Inform Public and Policymakers:** Underpinning social accountability, IID ensures accessible, unbiased information reaches various stakeholders, including government officials, policymakers, youth, and community-based organizations. The e!quality initiative focuses on empowering stakeholders with better understanding and informed decision-making.
3. **Involve Public in Public Policy:** IID's commitment to collaborative policymaking resonates through dynamic platforms that encourage public engagement. By sharing internal insights, IID drives organizational growth and knowledge exchange through thematic and local-level learning collaboratives.

IID's Policy Advocacy Ecosystem revolves around strategic networks:

- **Parliamentarians' Network:** In collaboration with the Parliamentary Caucus on Social Justice, IID works alongside Members of Parliament to drive policy influence from within legislative frameworks.
- **CSO-CBO Network:** As the secretariat of CSO Alliance Bangladesh, IID facilitates collective action among CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs for impactful social change.
- **Youth Network:** IID empowers the youth through the Youth for Policy network, enabling them to shape policy dialogue and advocate for their generation's needs.



FIGURE 9. IID POLICY ADVOCACY ECOSYSTEM

IID's engagement strategies provide policymakers with immersive experiences in policy challenges. The 'Policy Conclave' is a notable initiative that fosters comprehensive policy discussions, uniting government and non-government representatives in a multi-day retreat.

IID's Experience of Action Research

Strengthened Conceptual Insight: Workshops on Social Change Theory prompted a reflective conceptual connection between theory and IID's real-world endeavors. The action research served as a compass, reinforcing the alignment between IID's actions and the fundamental principles of driving social change.

Reimagining Stakeholder Engagement: Action research insights, encompassing both process and outcomes, spurred IID to rethink stakeholder dynamics and engagement approaches. This reconsideration led to the incorporation of conceptual insights into IID's operational strategies and project implementations.

Translating Learning into Action and Replication

Practical Integration: The lessons garnered from action research have seamlessly integrated into IID's operational fabric. These insights are not only applied within IID but also shared with its CSO-CBO and Youth networks.

Replicating Insights: IID's commitment extends to sharing action research insights with its CSO-CBO and Youth networks. By identifying learning gaps, IID is developing a comprehensive curriculum on policy advocacy, empowering CSO-CBOs with tools to effectively engage in advocacy endeavors.

Scaling Impact: A significant milestone includes the inaugural training on Social Change Theory and Social Accountability conducted for 10 CBOs in Moulvibazar and Gaibandha districts. This signifies the beginning of a journey to replicate and amplify these initiatives, fostering a far-reaching positive influence.

IID's journey through action research exemplifies a dynamic interplay between theory and practice, yielding impactful policy advocacy outcomes. By bridging the gap between conceptual insights and tangible action, IID not only strengthens its own operations but also empowers its wider networks of CSO-CBOs and youth. This ripple effect of knowledge sharing, and replication amplifies the potential for positive change, underscoring IID's commitment to fostering inclusive and transparent policymaking.

Recommendations

The comprehensive analysis of motivational and demotivational factors influencing stakeholder engagement in public policy processes has illuminated critical insights that can guide the enhancement of collaboration between CSOs, CBOs, NGOs, and policymakers. Drawing from the research findings and the experiences of organizations like IID, a set of strategic recommendations is proposed to foster effective engagement and address the identified challenges:

Fostering Effective Engagement

Promote Evidence-Based Advocacy: Encourage CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs to engage policymakers with well-researched findings and statistics. The use of data-driven evidence enhances the credibility of advocacy efforts and underscores the importance of collaboration in informed decision-making.

Leverage Partnerships: CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs should explore the establishment of strategic partnerships with other organizations, both locally and globally, to amplify their voices and present a united front. Collaborative networks increase the collective impact and make it more difficult for policymakers to overlook their concerted advocacy efforts.

Tailor Messaging: Craft advocacy messages that align with policymakers' priorities and agendas. By framing issues in ways that resonate with existing goals, CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs can capture policymakers' attention and build a shared sense of purpose.

Inclusive Policy Co-Creation: Adopt participatory approaches that involve CSOs and community members in the co-creation of policies. Policymakers should actively seek input from marginalized communities and consider their feedback during policy formulation, leading to policies that genuinely address the needs of the people they aim to serve.

Strengthening Capacity and Collaboration

Establish Capacity Building Initiatives: Develop targeted capacity-building programs to enhance the organizational capabilities of CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs. These initiatives should focus on improving research, advocacy, and technical skills, enabling organizations to provide evidence-based recommendations and engage more effectively with policymakers.

Facilitate Collaborative Platforms: Create platforms that foster collaboration between CSOs, CBOs, NGOs, and policymakers. These platforms could include regular dialogues, workshops, and roundtable discussions where stakeholders can share insights, exchange knowledge, and jointly identify solutions to pressing issues.

Encourage Government-CSO Partnerships: Develop frameworks for formal partnerships between government agencies and CSOs. These partnerships could involve joint planning, implementation, and monitoring of policy initiatives, ensuring that CSOs' expertise is integrated into the policy-making process.

Scaling Successful CSO Initiatives: Identify successful CSO-led initiatives and explore opportunities to scale them up through government partnerships. This

approach leverages the innovative solutions developed by CSOs for broader societal impact.

Overcoming Challenges

Transparent Communication: Policymakers and CSOs should prioritize transparent and open communication to build mutual trust and dispel misconceptions about intentions and agendas.

Highlight Success Stories: Showcase case studies and success stories that illustrate the positive impact of CSO engagement in policy development. Highlighting tangible outcomes can inspire policymakers to recognize the value of collaborating with external organizations.

Policy Dialogues: CSOs and policymakers can engage in constructive dialogues to address concerns about foreign funding, registration, and access to information. Collaborative discussions can lead to streamlined regulations that facilitate engagement without compromising accountability.

Stakeholder Engagement Guidelines: Establish guidelines or frameworks that outline the roles, responsibilities, and boundaries of CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs in policy processes. Clearly defining expectations can mitigate fears of undue influence and ensure collaborative, rather than confrontational, engagement.

Promoting Transparency and Accountability

Regular Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish mechanisms for regular monitoring and evaluation of policy outcomes in collaboration with CSOs. This ensures that policies are achieving their intended goals and leads to iterative improvements based on feedback from affected communities.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Policymakers and CSOs should jointly engage in public awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of collaborative policymaking and the positive impact of CSO-government partnerships on society.

Conclusion

In a world marked by complex challenges and evolving socio-political landscapes, the role of CSOs and CBOs in shaping policies that prioritize marginalized communities has never been more vital. As this report has explored, the intersection of CSOs, CBOs, and policymakers is a dynamic space where motivations, barriers, and opportunities converge to influence policy outcomes.

The journey undertaken in this report has illuminated the multifaceted nature of CSO-CBO engagement with policymakers in Bangladesh. It has underscored the powerful impact that collaboration can bring to policy processes and outcomes. From the diverse motivations that drive policymakers to engage with CSOs and CBOs, to the complex interplay of challenges that shape these partnerships, the report has provided a comprehensive understanding of this relationship.

The collaborative potential between CSOs, CBOs, and policymakers is immense. It is rooted in the ability to harness expertise, innovation, and community voices to drive policies that are equitable, inclusive, and responsive. Policymakers, equipped with the insights and grassroots knowledge that CSOs and CBOs provide, can make informed decisions that lead to meaningful change. In turn, CSOs and CBOs, when armed with effective advocacy strategies, can serve as critical channels for citizen participation and accountability.

As this report concludes, it's crucial to reflect on the broader significance of this collaborative ecosystem. CSOs and CBOs have demonstrated that by actively engaging with policymakers, they can bridge the gap between policy design and implementation. This bridge, built on evidence-based advocacy, grassroots insights, and innovative solutions, holds the potential to transform policies from abstract ideas into tangible improvements in the lives of marginalized individuals and communities.

However, it is important to acknowledge the path of collaboration is not without its challenges. The intricacies of power dynamics, resource constraints, and political considerations underscore the need for strategic and adaptable approaches. CSOs, CBOs, and policymakers must navigate these challenges with a shared commitment to openness, transparency, and a common goal of positive societal change.

In conclusion, the report highlights the transformative potential of CSO-CBO engagement with policymakers in Bangladesh. As CSOs, CBOs, and policymakers continue to work together, they pave the way for more equitable, just, and responsive policies that resonate with the aspirations of the communities they serve. It is through these collaborative efforts that the promise of a more inclusive and prosperous future can be realized, where policies are not just documents, but instruments of meaningful change.

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Bridging the Gap:

Understanding Policymaker-CSO-CBO Dynamics in Policy Advocacy

