

Improving the effectiveness of civil-society organizations in policy influencing, lobbying and advocacy

Literature review for the Terms of Reference for the IOB Evaluation of PILA

Max Schmalzl & Arco Timmermans, Campus The Hague, Leiden University

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Introduction and Approach

This literature review aims to identify related academic writing and create an overview of the current knowledge. How can CSOs in developing regions increase the effectiveness and impact of their PILA activities?

The literature will be categorized along two main dividers, the internal and the external dimension, to differentiate between actions taken within the CSO itself and those that are targeted at other actors. The internal dimension is, in this literature review, about information and knowledge capacity. The external dimension is composed of coalition building, a key element of mobilization, which refers to working together with other actors/stakeholders, and next other element, “speaking with one voice”, is about how message recognition with partners is secured or approved. The third element is labeled more generally, strategies, which contains further insights into PILA activity as they emerge from the literature.

The first step undertaken in this literature review was to consider one specific policy domain, that of food security, and this is reflected in the titles listed in this review. This was also done for the topic of labor conditions. In order to connect this part of the literature to the “bigger picture of PILA”, more general sources on advocacy (not specific

for PILA in particular developing regions or on particular policy topics) where added in a second step. This approach was followed to provide as much leverage as possible for supporting the finalization of the Terms of Reference.

This literature review was created by using the online database of Google scholar¹ and the Leiden University catalogue². The first step thus consisted of searching for academic literature connected to “food security” and various terms for “PILA”. This was repeated with “labor conditions” and “PILA”. In the second step the focus shifted to PILA search terms (public influencing, lobbying, advocacy and interest representation) without links to any specific field. After acquiring relevant literature, the containing references were used for further review.

CSO Information and Knowledge Capacities

For every organization —CSOs and NGOs alike— that wants to succeed in the fields of PILA, certain capacities are needed. Capacities are the combined abilities, skills and the expertise of the people working within that organization. According to the academic literature, capacities that are important to PILA are mostly in the domain of knowledge management, concerning the creation, sharing, connecting and applying of information.

Flores et al. (2005) see the clarification of objectives, in combination with a focus on improved contextual knowledge, as an important step towards overcoming “knowledge gaps”. These “gaps” usually concern the organizations ability to analyze the political economy—and with it the ability to find suitable “points of entry”—of an area or country where they wish to pursue PILA activities. Clarifying the organizations objectives and gaining access to more contextual knowledge heavily relies on the flow of information, especially when the CSO is based in the global north and works on projects in the south.

¹ <https://scholar.google.com/>

² <http://catalogue.leidenuniv.nl/>

Information about the political economy/political system that one has to work in is of great importance, especially refined expert knowledge about available regulatory instruments can prove as a useful resource (Koc et al., 2008). Such resources can be acquired and/or built up via engagement with complementary networks, regional partners and media networks who already possess this kind of information (Chaudhury et al., 2013).

According to Lewis & Madon (2004), an effective way to more organizational knowledge and resources, is to allow *“not only for top-down, but also for bottom-up agendas”*, enabling knowledge and ideas from “lower” levels to be used and implemented into advocacy work. Many CSOs struggle when they focus too much on input from the “political” leadership and other high ranking CSO members.

This demands for knowledge to be multi-directional, thus flowing not only in one direction, but connecting different stakeholders—for example scientists, local activists and policy workers. Investments in fields like communication, translation and the use of workers or facilitators—specialized for mediation between different stakeholders—are all ways to improve those capacities (Cash et al. 2003; Reid et al. 2009).

Actors usually assess knowledge by three different factors: credibility, salience and legitimacy. All those are important factors in knowledge-management. Only when all acting partners—stakeholders the CSO is working/collaborating with—see the presented knowledge as credible, salient and legitimate, will policy makers be able to use it effectively and with the proper persuasion behind it (White et al., 2010). One way to increase the acceptance of shared knowledge, within the partners of the CSO, is boundary work. It engages to connect knowledge—scientific and field work alike—from different disciplines, actors and cultures (Clark et al., 2011).

Maxwell et al. (2010) argues that—especially in fragmented community like global food security—the exchange of information is not only needed to facilitate cooperation between different organizations, but also increase the analytical capacity of the organization and CSOs, donors and connected governments alike should be willing to invest in it.

- Cash, D. W., Clark, W. C., Alcock, F., Dickson, N. M., Eckley, N., Guston, D. H., ... & Mitchell, R. B. (2003). "Knowledge systems for sustainable development". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 100(14), pp. 8086-8091.
- Chaudhury, M., Vervoort, J., Kristjanson, P., Ericksen, P., & Ainslie, A. (2013). „Participatory scenarios as a tool to link science and policy on food security under climate change in East Africa". *Regional Environmental Change*, 13(2), pp. 389-398.
- Clark, W. C., Tomich, T. P., van Noordwijk, M., Guston, D., Catacutan, D., Dickson, N. M., & McNie, E. (2011). "Boundary work for sustainable development: Natural resource management at the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 200900231.
- Flores, M., Khwaja, Y., & White, P. (2005). "Food security in protracted crises: building more effective policy frameworks". *Disasters*, 29(s1), pp. S25-S51.
- Koc, M., MacRae, R., Desjardins, E., & Roberts, W. (2008). "Getting civil about food: The interactions between civil society and the state to advance sustainable food systems in Canada". *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 3(2-3), pp. 122-144.
- Lewis, D., & Madon, S. (2004). "Information systems and nongovernmental development organizations: Advocacy, organizational learning, and accountability." *The information society*, 20(2), pp. 117-126.
- Maxwell, D., Webb, P., Coates, J., & Wirth, J. (2010). "Fit for purpose? Rethinking food security responses in protracted humanitarian crises". *Food policy*, 35(2), pp. 91-97.
- Reid, R. S., Nkedianye, D., Said, M. Y., Kaelo, D., Neselle, M., Makui, O., ... & Clark, W. C. (2009). "Evolution of models to support community and policy action with science: Balancing pastoral livelihoods and wildlife conservation in savannas of East Africa." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, pnas-0900313106.
- White, D. D., Wutich, A., Larson, K. L., Gober, P., Lant, T., & Senneville, C. (2010). "Credibility, salience, and legitimacy of boundary objects: water managers' assessment

of a simulation model in an immersive decision theater.” *Science and Public Policy*, 37(3), pp. 219-232.

Coalition Building, Speaking with One Voice and Strategizing

When a CSO is conducting PILA, there are usually other actors and stakeholders involved in the same policy arena. This leads to the questions if one should work with partners, or work alone. The general notion within academic literature is that it depends on the specific context, and both internal (capacities and interest) and external (abilities of other actors) factors play a part. Hojnacki (1997) argues, that organizations with a narrow policy field are usually better of working alone, but in a situation where one engages a broader field of policy issues or PILA is met with a strong opposition, joining forces will increase effectiveness. Policy issues with a clear line of opposition and support seem generally better suited for coalition lobbying than action alone (Nelson & Yackee, 2012).

Broader policy fields can also emerge within single issues and without the CSO actually increasing its “policy portfolio”. This is due to the fact that some policy issues (food security example) need a broader scope to be tackled effectively. As a result, policy areas that seem separated and narrow in the beginning might need further inspection and also could benefit from coalition efforts (Barling, Lang & Caraher, 2002). Cooperation between different actors in a policy field needs to be coordinated. A horizontal approach, including actors without creating a hierarchy and providing for accountability, can provide for that and create momentum for change (Gillespie, 2013).

A “new trend” in coalition building is the increasing number of CSOs that join forces with for-profit organizations to advance their policy agendas. The changing and complex policy arenas, often stretching over national borders, pose a threat to PILA efforts, because it requires CSOs to expand their efforts, in order to keep up with the

globalization of PILA targets. Hertel (2010) claims that engaging in such a new form of a “Public Private Partnership” (PPP) opens up new possibilities for CSOs, especially in the global context. PPPs can be used to gain information about possible points of entries for PILA work, to enforce and implement monitoring standards and even to reduce possible unwanted dependencies from other CSO partners.

Another way to try and increase the chances of success for a CSO engaged in PILA is to find support for the core message(s). Corell & Betsill (2001) argue, that combined efforts from different actors—relaying the same message—increases their chance of overcoming pre-existing hindrances that can arise from the nature or history of a specific issue. When “speaking with one voice”, CSOs are able to frame the issue differently and appear more homogeneous. As a result, they project more influence on the over-all opportunity structure. Sobhan & Rahmatullah (2003) demonstrate that this is especially important when it comes to issues with more than just a national scope.

Working together is about perceived legitimacy. Without being perceived as a legitimate actor, advocacy efforts made by CSOs will most likely fall short. Strategies for building a strong “legitimacy chain” are manifold. Legitimacy can be derived from exceptional technical expertise, a strong connection to actors in the South, a special organizational history or many ties to other important actors (Hudson, 2000). Because of that, CSOs that appear to be on the same page as other organizations—be it partners in the south or connection to other CSOs—increase their own legitimacy. As a result, “speaking with one voice” not only strengthens the message of the group, but can also be beneficial to the individual actors. In some cases this requires actions “*to keep everyone happy*”, to achieve greater cohesion (Levine, Chastre & Ntububa, 2004).

Barling, D., Lang, T., & Caraher, M. (2002). “Joined-up Food Policy? The Trials of Governance, Public Policy and the Food System.” *Social Policy & Administration*, 36(6), pp. 556-574.

Corell, E., & Betsill, M. M. (2001). "A comparative look at NGO influence in international environmental negotiations: Desertification and climate change." *Global Environmental Politics*, 1(4), pp. 86-107.

Gillespie, S., Haddad, L., Mannar, V., Menon, P., & Nisbett, N. (2013). „The politics of reducing malnutrition: building commitment and accelerating progress." *The Lancet*, 382(9891), pp. 552-569.

Hertel, S. (2010). "The paradox of partnership: Assessing new forms of NGO advocacy on labor rights." *Ethics & International Affairs*, 24(2), pp. 171-189.

Hojnacki, M. (1997). "Interest groups' decisions to join alliances or work alone." *American Journal of Political Science*, 61-87.

Hudson, A. (2000). "Making the connection: Legitimacy claims, legitimacy chains and northern NGOs' international advocacy." *New roles and relevance, development NGOs and the challenge of change*, pp. 89-98.

Levine, S., Chastre, C., & Ntububa, S. (2004). "Missing the point: an analysis of food security interventions in the Great Lakes." ODI.

Nelson, D., & Yackee, S. W. (2012). "Lobbying coalitions and government policy change: an analysis of federal agency rulemaking." *The Journal of Politics*, 74(02), 339-353.

Sobhan, R., & Rahmatullah, M. (2003). "Role of Civil Society Organizations in Influencing the Policy Discourse in Bangladesh." *EGM on Engaged Governance for Pro-poor Policies: South-South Cooperation*.

Coalition building and speaking with one voice are about mobilization of supporting actors and organizations and the transmission of messages. In addition, given the constant need for CSOs to orient themselves on the environment in order to be effective in PILA and also to survive, further elements of strategizing call for attention when assessing effectiveness.

Effective advocacy depends on the performance of the CSO who is engaged in PILA activity. This performance is connected to the reputation an organization is able to accumulate. Hudson (2002) writes, that CSOs who wish to pursue lobbying activity have to be seen as legitimate development actors first, in order to get recognized as a legitimate PILA actor later. Many service delivery organizations realize that strict operational development—without policy influencing—lacks sustainability. An example is the transformation from “development-as-delivery” to “development-as-leverage”, where previously build capacities are used as an entry point into interest representation and advocacy.

New policy issues and advocacy targets are crossing the boundary between national and international levels. This calls for new ways of tackling advocacy. O’Rourke (2006) proposes a model which combines top-down and bottom-up approaches to increase pressure. An example would be combining lobbying efforts (targeted at a corporation or government organization) in one country with direct action (protests at a factory for example) in another, to create two points of entry into the discourse. Another, but similar, concept is to engage in a so called “transnational advocacy network”, which is a coalition formed by CSOs who operate in different countries (Trubek, Mosher & Rothstein, 2000). This allows for the channeling of combined efforts into effective multi-level advocacy, creating pressure for policy change at different levels.

Balance of power is a big issue for CSOs acting in the field of PILA. Governments and big corporations usually possess a lot more resources and thus can become difficult opponents to effective advocacy. But this imbalance is reverted when it comes to perceived legitimacy (Hayes, Fox & Shogren, 2002). Not only are CSOs generally seen as more legitimate and trustworthy than multinational enterprises or government organizations, “negative” information (for example criticizing a specific company or government) also carries with it the same attributes.

As a result, Conroy (2001) argues, that CSOs can increase their advocacy lever by increasing pressure on private (and governmental) organizations. This is due to the fact that—especially in the case of big corporations—they want to achieve a status of legitimacy, a fact that CSOs can and should use to insert them into the process (Doh &

Teegen, 2002). Aside from pure publicity and striving for legitimacy, CSOs also pose a threat to the economic interests of large organizations. Through interruptive actions *“NGOs can force companies to recognize their negative externalities and develop essential social development strategies to attenuate them.”* (Vachani, Doh & Teegen, 2009).

Conroy, Michael E. (2001). “Can Advocacy-Led Certification Systems Transform Global Corporate Practices? Evidence and Some Theory”. Political Economy Research Institute, Working Paper Series No. 21.

Doh, J. P., & Teegen, H. (2002). “Nongovernmental organizations as institutional actors in international business: Theory and implications.” *International Business Review*, 11(6), pp. 665-684.

Hayes, D. J., Fox, J. A., & Shogren, J. F. (2002). “Experts and activists: how information affects the demand for food irradiation”. *Food Policy*, 27(2), pp. 185-193.

Hudson, A. (2002). “Advocacy by UK-based development NGOs.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 31(3), pp. 402-418.

O’Rourke, D. (2006). “Multi-stakeholder regulation: privatizing or socializing global labor standards?” *World development*, 34(5), pp. 899-918.

Trubek, D. M., Mosher, J., & Rothstein, J. S. (2000). “Transnationalism in the regulation of labor relations: International regimes and transnational advocacy networks.” *Law & Social Inquiry*, 25(4), pp. 1187-1211.

Vachani, S., Doh, J. P., & Teegen, H. (2009). “NGOs’ influence on MNEs’ social development strategies in varying institutional contexts: A transaction cost perspective.” *International Business Review*, 18(5), pp. 446-456.