

CUTS after the Evaluation of the TDP Project: A Review

In June 2009, the Department for International Development (DFID), UK and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINBUZA), The Netherlands, as development partners, came out with an evaluation of the CUTS project entitled “Linkages between Trade, Development and Poverty Reduction” (TDP) – a three year initiative (2004-2007) covering 13 countries and involving 19 partner organisations. The evaluation recognised the important role played by CUTS in trade and development issues:

Despite the shortcomings noted in this evaluation, CUTS fulfils an important role in supporting Developing and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the field of trade and development issues, and has established a solid base for future work in this field. It is, therefore, recommended that support to CUTS is continued so it can build on the TDP project achievements.

The evaluation pointed out organisational weaknesses emerging following a period of rapid growth and said that future support from those conducting the evaluation should be conditional on CUTS demonstrating its willingness to address these. It, however, also recommended donors to “focus support on a facilitating a strategic review and reflection process followed by appropriate capacity building and organisational strengthening”. Such support has still not been forthcoming from any of the evaluating donors.

CUTS has, however, gone forward with reforms, to the extent possible, on the basis of the specific recommendations made by the evaluation and conversations with the evaluators. The specific recommendations and corresponding actions taken are captured in the table below. It deserves to be noted here that some of the shortcomings, on the basis of which recommendations have been derived, related specifically to the implementation of the TDP project and did not characterise project implementation in general by CUTS. In such cases, an attempt has been made to portray the broad current picture in the organisation in regard to the referred area, which invariably is consistent with the state desired by the evaluation.

S. No	Recommendation	Action Taken/Contemplated
1.	Geographical expansion into new areas should wait until existing partnerships have been strengthened (or dissolved), the scope and capacity of existing regional resource centres has been consolidated, and an in-depth understanding of local cultures and contexts has been developed by staff at all levels.	No geographical expansion has been undertaken since the evaluation. Instead, one resource centre is being closed down in 2010. Additionally, capacity building of resource centre staff has been undertaken through orientations and in-house programmes as well as an increase in staff at various resource centres, including those at Lusaka and Nairobi. A number of head office staff members have also been visiting the overseas resource centres and thus obtained and helped to develop an in-depth understanding of local cultures.

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		<p>Further, appointment of dedicated desk officers (region wise) at the head office has resulted in better coordination with the resource centres and enhanced understanding of local culture and contexts.</p>
2.	<p>While pride in its organisational reputation and achievements is natural, CUTS should give time to reflecting on what it is trying to achieve in terms of medium and long term outcomes in relation to poor and marginalised people. It is this aim that should drive strategies and plans.</p>	<p>A Vision Document, 2034 (50 years after the establishment of CUTS) has been brought out which does outline these objectives. Prominence is given to outcomes which would show achievement of inclusive growth with resulting focus on the needs of the poor and marginalised people.</p>
3.	<p>CUTS should develop an overall communications strategy that can be an umbrella under which each project has its own specific influencing and advocacy strategy.</p> <p>These strategies should be formulated either during the development of project proposals, or inception phase of the project. CUTS staff should be provided with advocacy capacity building to enable them to be involved in the design and implementation of such strategies.</p>	<p>An unwritten communications strategy involving the use of issue related and project specific meetings; and dissemination of press releases, newspaper articles, newsletters, briefing and viewpoint papers as well as policy option notes to targeted stakeholder groups/networks such as media, academia and policy makers already exists.</p> <p>We are at the beginning of a process which will come out with an explicit communications strategy. There is a section on CUTS RAN (Research-Advocacy-Networking) methodology in the Vision Document. This provides guidelines about planning and its interlinked components – project, financial, advocacy and communications planning. These guidelines would be used to construct a strategic planning document with a specific plan for each programme centre. The plan would specify a communications as well as advocacy strategy.</p> <p>The overall advocacy plan would consist of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • project specific advocacy plans • non-project advocacy plan which would

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		<p>take into account present socio-economic realities to complement and supplement the above advocacy plans in promoting broader goals and vision of CUTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communications strategy which would outline the channels and human resources that would be used to carry out advocacy activities • networking plan <p>CUTS has already undertaken efforts to build the advocacy capacity of its younger staff through 'on the job training'/mentoring and off site training.</p>
4.	<p>The website requires a considerable reform/improvement to make it accessible to external users. Hopefully, a donor will provide the funds to support a re-design of the site and the re-loading of CUTS research and briefing documents.</p>	<p>CUTS has used its own resources and staff time to redesign its websites for easier access without any outside help. These efforts can be further improved with donor assistance for external professional guidance on website development and management.</p>
5.	<p>Networking needs to become a consciously planned and properly resourced activity.</p>	<p>Networking has been a way of life for CUTS since its inception and it has enjoyed a reputation of being excellent in networking. All projects have an inbuilt component on networking.</p> <p>As a part of conscious planning for networking, CUTS makes it a point, budget permitting, to attend important events such as WTO Public Forum, OECD Global Competition Forum, ICN Annual Meetings and UNCTAD Public Symposium.</p> <p>CUTS has established important networks both at the grassroots and at the level of international policy makers. For example, through its Project entitled, <i>Grassroots Reachout & Networking in India on Trade & Economics</i> (GRANITE) it reaches out to eight state partners in India in regard to</p>

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		grassroots perceptions and feedback about matters related to national trade policy. At the national and international level it operates e-networks such as FunComp; COLF; CUTS TradeForum, etc. with membership running into thousands.
6.	<p>For sustainability, networks formed as a result of CUTS' activities should be encouraged to develop their own aims and (SMART) objectives, as well as plans for delivering on these.</p>	<p>An example of a sustainable network launched by CUTS, in association with other organisations is <i>South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics & Environment</i> (SAWTEE). This is a network of social activist groups and media persons in the South Asia region initiated in December 1994 to conduct various programmes on international trade, regional cooperation and sustainable development, and national issues with a focus on the regional development of South Asia. SAWTEE's collaboration as a partner has been sought by CUTS repeatedly in the area of the former's focus, as illustrated by its role in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TDP project (2004-07) as research partner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>WTO Doha Round & South Asia: Linking Civil Society with Trade Negotiations</i> (SAFIT) project (2005-06) as research partner • Several others in the area of competition and regulatory law & policy <p>Creation of a sustainable network has also been attempted to some extent through the International Network of Civil Society Organisations on Competition (INCSOC - over 136 members from 65 countries) and the facilitation of its sustainable and effective functioning through a virtual network and a global 'Steering Committee'. Annual and regional meetings are organised, whenever possible, on the sidelines of international conferences to discuss past activities and chart the agenda ahead.</p>
7.	CUTS should provide full	This is already happening.

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	<p>guidance to partners regarding research tasks. This should refer them to relevant analytical frameworks and methodologies for their consideration. Special attention should be paid to frameworks and methods for assessing poverty impacts.</p>	<p>In the recently concluded <i>Regulatory Reforms in Electricity Sector in South Asia</i> (RESA) project, supported by Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), terms of reference (ToRs) for the purpose of research and also capacity building activities such as grassroots interface meetings were developed and finalised in consultation with the project partners during the launch of the project.</p> <p>As part of the 7Up4 project, supported by DFID, UK and International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, CUTS drafted a 'research methodology note' and finalised it after discussing with partners at the Project Launch Meeting. Subsequently, a 'Guidance note for Research' was also developed and shared with partners – thus, expanding the research methodology and incorporating various tools that would be used to conduct the research, in line with the project schedule.</p> <p>In regard to projects such as TDP which aim at poverty reduction it is often very hard to assess whether this ultimate objective has been achieved. This is because such poverty reduction involves a considerable gestation lag following the introduction of suitable stimuli through the project. A provision for lagged impact analysis or a sequence of follow up projects might be necessary in this regard. A suitable framework incorporating one or both of these options might be necessary but would require the sustained support of donors.</p>
8.	<p>Guidance should also stipulate the need for executive summaries and recommendations as well as the provision of references for all facts, figures and papers consulted, etc.</p>	<p>This is being done. Here we take two examples of trade projects being currently implemented by CUTS Geneva Resource Centre (CUTS GRC) in partnership with several African groups and CUTS Africa Resource Centres in Lusaka and Nairobi. Research guidance in the <i>Fostering Equity and Accountability in the Trading System</i> (FEATS) project¹, supported by the Hewlett Foundation,</p>

¹ <http://www.cuts-grc.org/FEATS-Projects.htm>

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		involves seeking references and resources for information/facts included. In the <i>Building an Inclusive East African Community (BIEAC)</i> ² Project, supported by <i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)</i> , briefing papers and policy briefs summarising the main issues, lessons and recommendations have been developed by the partners with guidance from CUTS research staff.
9.	For the purposes of successful policy engagement, it is recommended that partners consider working on sectors/issues that are on the current national reform agenda.	This is being done. Both FEATS and BIEAC projects have been designed after taking into account the lessons from the TDP project and feedback from the project partners regarding issues of contemporary relevance in their specific national and regional contexts.
10.	For future projects CUTS should carefully assess the strengths and weaknesses of potential partner and be prepared to provide support and capacity building where required.	<p>CUTS regularly reviews performance of its partners and reorient its engagement accordingly. CUTS is engaged in regular capacity building of partners both in terms of raising awareness on issues of importance in their constituencies as well as supporting their objectives.</p> <p>For example, under the RESA project, we had allocated funds to provide support to four local civil society organisations (CSOs) to participate in events relating to electricity regulation in order to enhance their skills and knowledge, as part of a capacity building initiative which was built into the project itself.</p> <p>Subject to flexibility in project design, additional funds have also been provided to partners needing additional support to achieve their project objectives -- for example to <i>Conseil de consolidation des ONG de Développement (ADIR)</i>, Burundi, under the BIEAC project.</p>

² <http://www.cuts-grc.org/BIEAC-Projects.htm>

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11.	Ideally, partners should be capable of undertaking both research and advocacy.	This is not always possible, but is being done wherever possible -- for example, in the cases of Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) in Tanzania, Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in Kenya, Namibia Policy Research Unit (NEPRU) in Namibia and Consumer Education Trust (CONSENT) in Uganda in Africa; and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) in Bangladesh and SAWTEE in Nepal in South Asia.
12.	Some of partners should be “strategic partners”, having a significant role in project design, and decision making during project implementation.	<p>CUTS has a large number of strategic partners narrowly defined as “those organisations with whom repeated and focussed collaboration has taken place” – Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Pakistan, Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) in Sri Lanka, SAWTEE in Nepal, Economic Institute of Cambodia (EIC) in Cambodia, ESRF in Tanzania, Southern and Eastern African Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) in Uganda, IEA in Kenya, Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD) in South Africa etc.</p> <p>The 7Up4 project illustrates how partners have been engaged so these can play a significant role in project design and subsequent implementation: CUTS organised a couple of rounds of (otherwise unscheduled) ‘partners’ review meetings’, as there was a need to refine some elements of the project methodology. These review meetings provided opportunity to the partners to contribute towards shaping some of the subsequent activities (especially pertaining to advocacy and capacity in regard to competition) at the national level.</p> <p>As a further example, in the FEATS project Phase I, partners were involved in providing inputs for development of ToRs and concretisation of data/information requirements while research was conducted in-house by qualified CUTS researchers. In Phase II, ToRs were developed by engaging with partners as well as individual researchers undertaking the research, and</p>

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		<p>meetings were held to finalise methodologies including details relating to the relative emphasis on empirical and literature-survey based research components, and analytical frameworks.</p> <p>Similarly, suggestions of national partners involved in the BIEAC project have been invited for designing post BIEAC projects. Their views have been sought on a continuous basis for project implementation.</p>
13.	<p>CUTS needs to strengthen its project management and ensure that a senior staff member is involved in the management of large projects on a (almost) full time basis. Financial management of grants should be improved. Project managers should receive regular financial reports enabling them to track actual expenditures and make conscious, strategic adjustments as necessary.</p>	<p>This aspect has been approached consciously by the organisation's management and systems have been strengthened. For example, apart from the Project Manager, the Centre Head and Head of Finance are involved in the management of all projects. This is done through a monthly meeting; and project specific meetings involving the project staff as well as the Centre Head/Deputy Head and Finance Staff.</p> <p>In addition, a staff meeting is being held in most centres at the beginning of the week to review all activities in the last week and to plan for the coming week. Furthermore, an MIS system has been introduced to keep the senior management, including the CEO, in the loop, who also review the processes every quarter or when required.</p>
14.	<p>Reporting to donors should be strengthened to include not only clear milestones and indicators but also clear accounts of changes to project design and their implications. Where possible presentations and verbal reports should accompany written ones to allow a genuine dialogue to take place.</p>	<p>Care is being taken to maintain regular communication with donors, especially to inform them about changes in project design and/or alterations in the project implementation schedule which are deemed necessary in the interest of the project.</p> <p>For example, in a recent project on collusion in healthcare delivery in India supported by Oxfam India, CUTS felt that it would be better to strengthen the advocacy element in the project. A meeting was arranged with the donor and the changes received enthusiastic support from the donor because of anticipated value addition. A letter was sent to the donor to summarise the</p>

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		<p>changes made and mutually agreed on.</p> <p>Similarly, under the BIEAC Project being implemented by CUTS GRC, the project activities were reviewed at the mid-point of the project period and additional activities introduced after consultation with and approval of the donor. These activities would facilitate better achievement of project goals.</p> <p>Illustrating further, the RESA project was divided into two phases including a mid term evaluation. Post the evaluation, the focus and design of the activities was amended to cover issues relevant to the national reform agenda.</p> <p>Verbal communication is regularly maintained with the development partners. For example, regular teleconferences as well as meetings are undertaken in most cases by all centres. In many cases such interaction is undertaken during project-related meetings also.</p> <p>To summarise, many of CUTS projects are reviewed mid-way in consultation with development partners, so that there is scope for course correction, etc. Such an assessment is either undertaken internally (as was done in the case of the 7Up4 project) or done by independent external consultants (as was done in the case of the 7Up3 project), and the outcomes discussed with donors to facilitate any suggested change.</p>
15.	<p>To successfully implement projects, CUTS needs not only financial support, but also a more meaningful engagement from its donors. This could include, <i>inter alia</i>, making assistance available during the development of project proposals (prior and during</p>	<p>This is being done. For example, the preparation of the project proposal relating to climate change and food security, which has been eventually supported by Oxfam Novib, was prepared through a long period of consultation and collaboration between CUTS and Oxfam Novib. This involved implementation of the toolbox approach which required explicitly delineating the channels linking project activities to project specific intermediate outcomes and goals as well</p>

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	<p>inception), supporting organisational development and internal capacity building, regular engagement during project implementation and being involved in any changes to project design.</p>	<p>as broader outcomes.</p> <p>Similarly, CUTS GRC started engaging with the donor a year ahead of the end of the FEATS project to design the upcoming FEATS project and thus factor in synergies with related work by other grantees of the donor. During the ongoing FEATS project, the donor supported internal capacity building of CUTS staff and connected them to other grantees in related fields.</p> <p>In addition to being a supporter of CUTS work on Competition Policy and Law issues for over a decade, DFID, UK has also been an extremely cooperative partner, especially in terms of providing inputs for the refinement of the methodology of CUTS projects on competition issues (e.g. in case of the 7Up projects).</p>