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Towards an Understanding of Civil Society Organisations' Involvement in Monitoring and Evaluation

Unpacking the Accountability and Feedback Function of M&E

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Comments on this Discussion Paper are invited.
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Abstract

The focus on Aid effectiveness and the adoption of aid modalities, such as budget support, has put the spotlight on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). Both donors and recipient countries are asked to reform their M&E system in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action. These reforms should improve country-led M&E systems and enable them to perform their dual function: 1) strengthening (domestic) accountability to ensure the implementation of programmes and policies, and, 2) provide feedback to improve programmes and policies.

This paper will focus on one aspect of the M&E reforms: the involvement of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in M&E systems, either in an institutionalized or independent way. As a first step to understand how M&E in general, and CSO-led M&E in particular, can fulfil its dual function, the concepts of accountability and feedback will be unpacked drawing upon a broad range of literature. Theories around accountability provide insights about the ways in which CSOs can use M&E evidence to improve domestic accountability. Secondly, public policy analysis theories highlight the complex and non-linear character of policy-making and change. Thirdly, the literature on evaluation use and influence explains the different ways in which evaluation can influence policymakers (or not). Last, the literature on research – policy interface focuses on the different factors that are mediating the influence of CSO-led M&E on programmes and policies. Building further on the main elements of the literature discussed, the paper will then present a conceptual framework that aims to increase our understanding of CSOs' involvement in M&E in the current development context.

Résumé

L'attention portée sur l'Efficacité de l'Aide et l'adoption des modalités d'aide, tel que l'appui budgétaire, a mis l'accent sur le Suivi et l'Evaluation (S & E). Les donateurs aussi bien que les pays bénéficiaires sont invités à réformer leur système de S & E, en conformité avec les principes de la Déclaration de Paris et du Programme d'action d'Accra. Ces réformes devraient améliorer les systèmes de S & E gérés par les pays et leur permettre d'assumer leur double fonction : 1) renforcer la responsabilisation (intérieure) afin d'assurer la mise en œuvre des programmes et des politiques, et, 2) fournir un retour d'information afin d'encourager l'élaboration de politiques sur base de données objectives.

Le document présent traite en particulier un aspect des réformes S & E, à savoir l'implication des organisations de la société civile (OSC) dans les systèmes de S & E, que ce soit de manière institutionnalisée ou indépendante. Dans un premier temps, pour comprendre comment le S & E en général, et celui mené par des OSC en particulier, peut remplir sa double fonction, les notions de responsabilisation et de retour d'information seront précisées, en s'appuyant sur un large éventail de la littérature. Les théories sur la responsabilisation fournissent une compréhension sur la façon dont les OSC peuvent utiliser les données de S & E pour améliorer la prise de responsabilité intérieure. Dans un deuxième temps, les théories d'analyse de politiques publiques mettent en évidence le caractère complexe et non-linéaire de l'élaboration des politiques et de changement. Dans un troisième temps, la littérature sur l'utilisation et l'influence de l'évaluation explique les différentes façons dont l'évaluation peut (ou non) influencer les décideurs. Pour finir, la littérature sur l'interface entre la recherche et la politique se concentre sur les différents facteurs qui influencent le S & E, mené par des OSC, sur les programmes et les politiques. En s'appuyant sur les principaux éléments de la littérature examinée, le document présente ensuite un cadre conceptuel qui vise à améliorer notre compréhension de l'implication des OSC dans le S & E dans le contexte actuel du développement.

1. Introduction

In response to the mounting critique around Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) during the '90s and an increased questioning of the impact of aid, a New Aid Approach (NAA) emerged, constructed around the principles of ownership, participation, harmonization, alignment and results-based performance amongst others. Instruments such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the Paris Declaration (OECD/DAC, 2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (OECD/DAC, 2008) are expressions of this NAA. The shift in thinking combined with the adoption of new aid modalities such as general and sectoral budget support has turned the spotlight on M&E. Because donors are moving away from an ex-ante type of conditionality towards an ex-post type of conditionality, where aid is given based on a proven record of progress and results, country-led M&E systems are subjected to an ambitious reform agenda (Holvoet and Renard, 2007: 67). To be able to respond to the new challenges, developing countries are asked to better define and elaborate their national M&E system, to make it more results-oriented and robust, and to allow participation of various non-state actors. On the other hand, donors are asked to harmonize and align their own M&E systems with the country's M&E system to reduce the administrative burden on recipient countries. National M&E systems thus have two main functions: first, accountability, particularly domestic accountability, to ensure the implementation of (pro-poor) policies and programmes, and, second, to provide feedback to support "the realization of results-oriented, iterative and evidence-based policy-making" (Holvoet and Rombouts, 2008: 579).

Adding to the complexity, the participation discourse of donors has percolated into the M&E reform agenda, and governments are pressured to allow broad-based participation of different stakeholders within their national M&E system. Various documents related to the NAA, such as the PRSP Sourcebook, have elaborated on the role CSOs[1] should play within M&E (Prennushi et al., 2002). In practice, however, there is a wide variety of formal and informal arrangements through which CSOs participate within M&E systems. In some countries, CSO participation is institutionalized in the form of working groups, forums, steering committees, and others; in other countries, CSOs are carrying out M&E activities in an independent way. In some sectors, like the health sector, there are joint spaces for evaluation between donors, government and CSOs called Joint Sector Reviews (JSR). The promotion of broad-based participation of CSOs within the M&E system is based on the following assumptions: first, their involvement is believed to improve domestic accountability, which refers to the accountability relations between government and its citizens (Hickey and Mohan, 2008); second, they have a comparative advantage because, compared to external evaluators, they are closer to the local community and able to monitor over longer periods of time, especially at decentralized level (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001); and last they have sound experience in the use of participatory and qualitative M&E tools, which complements the quantitative approach that dominates most official M&E systems (Prennushi et al., 2002).

Despite the official discourse, civil society involvement in official M&E systems and in M&E in general, appears difficult in practice and is not systematically researched (Eberlei, 2007). Most literature on M&E in the context of the NAA is dealing with the challenges govern-

[1] For the purpose of this paper, the term Civil Society Organisations refers to a wide variety of organisations, beyond non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as trade unions, think tanks, community-based organisations and others.

ments are facing when they set up their national M&E systems. The existing literature on the experience of CSOs in M&E concentrates on their involvement during the implementation of the first PRSP generation and mainly discusses the opportunities and obstacles CSOs are facing. More importantly, however, is the lack of knowledge and research about the influence of CSO-led M&E [2], in terms of accountability and providing feedback to improve programmes and policies.

The present paper aims to fill this gap by providing a conceptual framework for studying the role and influence of CSOs within M&E, both in terms of accountability and feedback. To better understand how M&E in general, and CSO-led M&E in particular, can fulfil these two main functions, this Discussion Paper will attempt to unpack the concept of accountability and feedback for improved programmes and policy by giving an overview of the different ways in which both have been defined and discussed within the literature. In addition, a conceptual framework will be proposed that builds upon the main elements discussed throughout the paper. The aim of the conceptual framework is to inform future research on CSO-led M&E in developing countries. Based on the framework, specific research questions and testable assumptions can be deducted to understand the ways in which CSO-led M&E contributes to accountability and feedback (or not), and the results of their involvement.

The Discussion Paper is structured in the following way: chapter two is dedicated to the accountability function of M&E and its 'deconstruction', drawing on a wide range of literature. The feedback function of M&E will be unpacked in chapter three and four. More specifically, chapter three will explain some public policy analysis theories that are important to understand how policy-making and policy change occur. Chapter four will focus on the evaluation use and influence theories developed in the North, and the knowledge/research – policy interface frameworks applied to study policy influence in developing countries. Finally, chapter five will conclude by presenting a conceptual framework that has the ambition to increase our understanding of CSOs' involvement in M&E in the current development context.

[2] The term CSO-led M&E is adopted here to refer to the array of M&E activities in which CSOs are involved at the programme and policy level. It is important to point out that these M&E activities go beyond the (internal) M&E activities CSOs are undertaking at the level of their own projects and programmes.

2. Accountability

In the past decades the concept of accountability has increasingly been used in so many contexts that its meaning has become malleable and fuzzy (Newell and Bellour, 2002). So far, the existence of more than 100 different definitions and types of accountability has been reported in the literature (Lindberg, 2009: 2). Despite this variety, the ultimate goal of accountability remains the same: to keep power under control and prevent abuses. As Schedler (1999: 14) points out: "Today, it is the fashionable term of accountability that expresses the continuing concern for checks and oversight, for surveillance and institutional constraints on the exercise of power". Within the development discourse accountability has also become popular, which is visible in key publications such as the World Development Report on improving public service delivery (World Bank, 2004), the importance of accountability in the second generation of PRSPs (Hickey and Mohan, 2008), and the increasing emphasis on Social Accountability (Malena et al., 2004; McNeil and Malena, 2010). Further, many donor discourses have emphasized the importance of accountability for the realization of the good governance agenda, public sector reform and ultimately, democracy (Lindberg, 2009; Newell and Bellour, 2002).

This section will first sketch the different ways in which accountability has been conceptualized and defined. It is important to keep in mind that the paper focuses on the broad concept of political accountability, which is concerned with "the behaviour of ***any*** public official" (Schedler 1999: 22); the topic of private or corporate accountability is not relevant for this paper. Next, this chapter will discuss how accountability is perceived within the current development discourse, by trying to answer three questions. 1) How is the accountability function of M&E conceptualized within the NAA? 2) How can CSOs contribute to increased accountability? 3) How can CSO-led M&E contribute to accountability? The section will conclude by summarizing the main points and presenting the first part of the conceptual framework that will be discussed more extensively in chapter five.

2.1. Defining accountability

As indicated in the introduction, accountability has been defined in many different ways across a wide range of contexts. Concepts such as monitoring, oversight, and control are often associated with accountability, but they are not genuine synonyms (Schedler, 1999). In order to create some clarity authors such as Lindberg (2009) and Philp (2009) have tried to define the core characteristics of any form of accountability. The following five dimensions are at the core of accountability (Lindberg 2009:8):

- "An agent or institution who is to give an account (A for agent);
- an area, responsibilities, or domain subject to accountability (D for domain);
- an agent or institution P to whom A is to give account (P for principal [3]);
- the right of P to require A to inform and explain/justify decisions with regard to D;
- and the right of P to sanction A if A fails to inform and/or explain/justify decisions with regard to D".

[3] Many definitions of accountability use the letter B to refer to the accountability holders or the principals, Lindberg (2009) uses the letter P instead.

The last characteristic of accountability is subject to some debate between different authors. Lindberg (2009) and Philp (2009), for example, argue that the right to sanction A only applies when A fails to inform or give an account to P, but not for the content of the given account. Most other authors, however, argue that A can also be sanctioned for the content or in other words if they misconduct or fail to act according to agreed standards (Hickey & Mohan, 2008; Rubenstein, 2007; Schedler, 1999). The latter point of view will be adopted here [4], as will become clear in the following sections.

2.1.1. Answerability and enforceability

> "A is accountable to B when A is obliged to inform B about A's (past or future) actions and decisions, to justify them, and to suffer punishment in the case of eventual misconduct" (Schedler, 1999: 17)

Schedler's (1999) work on the two dimensions of accountability, which are answerability and enforceability, has contributed significantly to our understanding of accountability. As indicated in the definition used above, **answerability** refers to the fact that accounting agents can ask power holders to provide information about their actions (transparency) and their reasons for doing so (justification). "Accountability thus involves the right to receive information and the corresponding obligation to release all necessary details" (Schedler 1999: 15). Receiving information not only refers to obtaining data and evidence, for example through monitoring, but also to reasoning and argumentation. Quite frequently, the concept of answerability has been conflated with the concept of accountability. **Enforceability**, on the other hand, refers to the capacity to impose sanctions, or to the act of punishing the more powerful if they fail to live up to their promises or if they are engaged in unlawful activities (Schedler, 1999). Without the element of enforceability or without the threat of sanction, one cannot talk about 'full' accountability. Enforceability thus requires the presence of accounting actors that have enough power and/or autonomy to impose sanctions. As will be discussed later on, CSOs usually lack the power and legitimacy to comply with this dimension of accountability.

Although Schedler (1999) mentions in his article that elements of enforcement refer to both rewarding good behaviour and punishing bad behaviour, he and other authors (O'Donnell, 1999; Rubenstein, 2007) emphasize more the element of sanction. If the goal of enforceability, and accountability in general, is to ensure that public servants and other actors comply with the established rules, then the focus should be on creating the right incentive structure rather than on punishment alone. Ackerman (2005: 13) expresses this more nuanced version when he mentions that: "The best accountability system is one that includes both punishments and rewards so that public officials have strong incentives both not to break the rules and to perform at their maximum capacity". In a similar way Brett (2003) points out that for institutions to be accountable and perform well both strong incentives and a real threat of sanction need to be present. Sanctions come in different forms and degrees and therefore not all sanctions have the same effect (Newell and Bellour, 2002). Exposure, which is often used by media and CSOs, is considered a weak sanction as it does not provide sufficiently strong incentives to policymakers and public

[4] If the enforceability dimension of accountability only refers to the right to sanction for failure to give an account, in my opinion, this does not create sufficient incentives to prevent abuse of power. To prevent abuse of power and to trigger corrective actions, which is the ultimate goal of accountability, power holders should also be sanctioned for the 'content' of their account.

authorities to undertake any corrective behaviour or to improve their performance. On the other hand, removing public officials from office and imposing economic and legal sanctions are examples of harder sanctions.

2.1.2. Accountability as a multi-staged process

> "Actor A (the power wielder [5]) is accountable for its treatment of Actor B (the accountability holder) if A faces significant and predictable sanction for failing to treat B according to recognized standards" (Rubenstein, 2007: 618).

As the quote above suggests, a slightly different way of conceptualizing accountability is by considering accountability as a process involving different stages (Rubenstein, 2007). While the first stage adds a new dimension to the previous definition of accountability, the last two stages are very similar to the answerability and enforceability dimension discussed above. During the first stage, standards are set, or existing standards are appropriated and agreed upon by the different parties. This step is important according to Rubenstein (2007) because without having agreed upon standards or being aware of them, power wielders are unable to demonstrate compliance with these standards or do not know how to avoid sanctions. In the same line, power wielders need to accept the standards as legitimate, which may be a problem if they are imposed by external agents such as donors. The second stage, which is equivalent to the answerability dimension, is the information gathering and analysis stage. It is in this stage that M&E plays a crucial role because without reliable and timely information about power wielders' performance, accountability holders cannot demand answers and justification. In some cases, power wielders themselves are compelled to provide the necessary information about their performance because of strategic and moral reasons. In many cases, however, additional information has to be gathered in an independent way by the accountability holders (Rubenstein 2007: 619). The existence of Transparency and Freedom to Information Acts can facilitate this independent information gathering by creating an enabling environment but the implementation of such Acts remains challenging (Pande, 2008) (see also section 2.2.3). In the last phase, also called the enforceability dimension, a decision is taken whether power wielders should be sanctioned, how and to what extent. This phase is important because it provides an incentive for power holders to comply with the agreed standards. An additional phase can sometimes occur in which the standards are changed or adapted in accordance with both parties.

Although many authors have pointed out that power is at the heart of accountability, power relations are often shovelled to the background when pro-accountability initiatives or approaches are proposed. Broader social and political processes are likely to influence which actors can hold power and which ones are subjected to it, and in turn determine who defines accountability, in what way and how mechanisms will be enforced (Newell and Bellour, 2002: 23). As Ackerman (2005) further points out accountability is a dynamic process of constant negotiation, not just a state. Therefore, power relations are likely to shift between different actors as the dynamics unfold. Power relations also have important implications for CSOs that are involved in M&E processes, which will be discussed in section 2.2.3.

[5] Rubenstein (2007) uses the term power wielder to refer to the more powerful actors, and the term accountability holders to the less powerful actors who are holding the power wielders to account.

2.1.3. Different types of accountability

Besides the variation in definition, different types of accountability have also been proposed and described in the literature, each with their own answerability and/or enforcement mechanisms. Classifying different types of accountability can occur according to various criteria (Lindberg, 2006; Schedler, 1999). As mentioned before, this paper will mainly focus on the broad concept of political accountability. Within political accountability, one possible classification criterion is to look at what public officials are accountable for. Examples include being held accountable for the use of public money (financial accountability), for legal rules (legal accountability), and for bureaucratic procedures (administrative or bureaucratic accountability), amongst others. However, subtypes of accountability are most often organized according to the following 'spatial' lines: horizontal, vertical and, more recently, diagonal accountability. Whether or not accountability is horizontal or vertical will depend on the source of accountability, that is external or internal, and its relative power. This distinction according to the vertical – horizontal axis is relevant because it takes into account the different implications of power, the different enforceability mechanisms, and the different roles CSOs can play within each dynamic. Before discussing these types in more details, it is important to point out that both formal and informal accountability mechanisms can come into play within these different accountability spaces.

Vertical accountability can be described as the use of external mechanisms by non-state (external) actors to hold policymakers to account (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001: 366). In vertical accountability, the relationship between the accountability holders and the power wielders is unequal. The most conventional mechanism used in vertical accountability are elections, where citizens (less powerful) can sanction or reward the current government for their past performance. Other examples are exposure of public officials' wrongdoing in the media, and lobbying. Taking into account the direction of accountability between the more powerful and the less powerful, one can talk about upwards (vertical) accountability or downwards (vertical) accountability. Within the aid context, upwards accountability is used when governments or NGOs are accountable towards donors, while downwards accountability, also called domestic accountability, is used to refer to efforts by government to become more accountable towards its citizens.

Horizontal accountability, on the other hand, occurs between actors that have equal power. Because power is not easily measurable, Schedler (1999:26) proposes to 'translate' equal power by looking at the level of autonomy or the degree of mutual independence that exist between the actors in question. O' Donnell (1999:38) defines horizontal accountability in the following way: "The existence of state agencies that are legally enabled and empowered, and factually willing and able, to take actions that span from routine oversight to criminal sanctions or agencies of the state that may be qualified as unlawful". As such, his definition implies that within horizontal accountability there is no room for non-state (external) actors to participate directly in accountability initiatives. His narrow definition has given rise to debate amongst scholars and has ultimately led to the emergence of the notion of diagonal accountability which will be discussed in the next section. O' Donnell (1999) identifies several elements that can affect the effectiveness of horizontal accountability mechanisms. The first element is the willingness and the autonomy of the agency in question to carry out their accountability functions, which is also linked to the incentive structure in place. Some agencies may have the legal authority but not the actual autonomy (or power) to carry out these functions. The second

element is the presence or absence of networks within the horizontal accountability structures. When different agencies, such as the judiciary for example, are in alliance with other agencies, horizontal accountability is more effective. Another important element that can increase horizontal accountability is the generation of timely information, which is also one of the 'tasks' of M&E. O'Donnell (1999: 45) believes that CSOs (media, research and dissemination institutions) can play an important role in providing timely and relevant information without replacing the independent, autonomous horizontal agencies. He further pleads for the participation of a broad range of actors beyond the government in the definition of indicators and the method of collection. However, he fails to specify through which mechanisms CSOs can play these roles.

Synergies exist between horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms which are described differently according to different authors. The bottom line is that both horizontal and vertical accountability can mutually reinforce each other. Some authors (Newell and Bellour, 2002; O'Donnell, 1999) have pointed out that the presence of strong CSOs within the vertical accountability axis can stimulate horizontal accountability agencies to take action. Strong vertical accountability can also put pressure on governments to take horizontal accountability seriously and to sustain it (Schacter, 2000: 2). Goetz and Jenkins (2001) argue the other way around, and suggest that strong horizontal mechanisms can reinforce existing initiatives at the vertical level. In addition, the authors point out that some CSOs are engaged in monitoring and auditing activities that are traditionally carried out by actors within the horizontal axis. These initiatives "challenge the vertical – horizontal dichotomy on which understandings of accountability have been based", and are referred to as **diagonal or hybrid** accountability initiatives (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001: 364). Because of the important role of CSOs within hybrid accountability, this subtype will be discussed in greater detail in section 2.2.2.1.

2.2. Accountability within the current development discourse

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, strengthening accountability is a crucial aspect of good governance within the context of international development (DFID, 2007; Gordillo and Andersson, 2004). Further, accountability, especially domestic accountability, is an essential element of the NAA (Holvoet and Rombouts, 2008: 593). Since the late 1990s, several initiatives have emerged that aim to strengthen accountability relationships, despite the fact that it is a long-term and complex process. It is beyond the scope of this paper to give an overview of all the accountability processes that have gained importance within the development discourse. To limit the discussion, we will focus on the relationship between M&E, CSOs and accountability, and try to answer the following questions: first, how is the accountability function of M&E conceptualized within the NAA; second, how can CSOs contribute to increased accountability in general; and third, what happens, in terms of accountability, when CSOs participate in M&E activities?

2.2.1. How is the accountability function of M&E conceptualized within the NAA?

Within the NAA, the accountability function of M&E is somewhat ambiguous depending on the different readings of accountability. M&E is perceived as a crucial tool to ensure performance and improve accountability, and in this sense, it is linked to performance-based or results-oriented accountability. This managerial perception of accountability is concerned with whether or not a programme or policy has achieved its stated objectives (Lehtonen, 2005).

Similarly, this 'neutral view' has also contributed to the more technocratic approach donors have adopted towards M&E, thereby ignoring more systemic and institutional or 'political' issues (Holvoet and Rombouts, 2008). On the other hand, referring to Schedler's (1999) dimensions of accountability, one can perceive that the NAA discourse is characterized as much by its emphasis on answerability as its silence on enforceability. Interestingly, whenever definitions of accountability are available in these documents, the enforcement dimension is present in the definition, but its 'implementation' is largely ignored. Using and creating information on the performance of government regarding programmes and policies, and involving CSOs in this task, may indeed achieve answerability but not enforceability (Hickey and Mohan, 2008: 239). Although M&E is undeniably a very important instrument to ensure and improve accountability, the enforceability dimension should also receive attention if a 'genuine' improvement in accountability is sought after. In general, CSOs do not have enough power to sanction governments and the occasions where donors completely suspend funding because of poor performance are still rather exceptional. Part of the lack of emphasis on enforceability could be explained by the fear of donors to negatively influence the 'ownership' principle of the Paris Declaration. Further, if the enforcement element is too strong, and "if failure to achieve the agreed targets has unpleasant financial consequences there is little incentive to strengthen monitoring systems, which have the potential to highlight that failure" (Lucas et al., 2004: 38).

2.2.2. How can CSOs contribute to increased accountability?

Several authors have referred to the (erroneous) widespread belief that the mere participation of CSOs within policy processes, such as the PRSP, will lead to increased accountability between the state and its citizens (Booth, 2005; Eberlei, 2007; Hickey and Mohan, 2008; Lucas et al., 2004; Molenaers and Renard, 2006). Whether CSOs' involvement in policy processes will ultimately contribute to accountability will depend on a number of factors such as the type of participation promoted, the type of CSOs involved, their capacity and the broader political structure in which they operate, amongst others (Booth, 2005; Eberlei, 2007; Lucas et al., 2004; Molenaers and Renard, 2006). Further, CSO participation in practice is often ad-hoc, consultative and without the disciplinary power that is necessary to genuinely strengthen accountability (Hickey and Mohan, 2008). Thus, although CSOs' participation in policy processes has the potential to increase accountability, the links between both are far more complex than sometimes portrayed.

Traditionally, the role of civil society within accountability has been located in the vertical axis, as discussed earlier. Through elections, lobbying and other mechanisms, CSOs are able to hold governments accountable for their past performance. Nevertheless, several authors (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006b; Goetz and Jenkins, 2005), have highlighted the weakness of voting as an instrument of accountability because of various reasons such as information asymmetry and the fact that voters are punishing or rewarding government's performance as one single package. In addition, horizontal accountability mechanisms are also deficient in many developing countries (O'Donnell 1999). In this light, new approaches towards accountability that rely on civil society participation have gained importance as a tool to increase domestic accountability. Both hybrid/diagonal accountability and social accountability are two examples of such new approaches that are sometimes referred to as the "new accountability agenda" (Hickey and Mohan: 238).

2.2.2.1. Diagonal/hybrid accountability

As mentioned earlier, state agencies and other autonomous agencies that are involved in oversight or audit operate within the horizontal accountability axis. Nevertheless, some authors (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001; Schmitter, 1999) have documented that non-state actors can also take up horizontal accountability functions, which has been referred to as **diagonal or hybrid accountability**. Hybrid accountability is not widely studied, but initiatives are starting to surface in developing countries fuelled by the lack of trust in horizontal accountability agencies and the lack of effectiveness of vertical initiatives in which CSOs are involved (see for example Goetz and Jenkins 2001 for initiatives in India). In addition, new initiatives are emerging under the impulse of the good governance agenda and the NAA. In some countries, such as Ghana, government has committed itself to involve CSOs in social auditing and other M&E activities, at least on paper (NDPC, 2005: 8). In this sense, hybrid accountability may be a useful concept to work with when studying the influence of M&E activities performed by CSOs within these spaces.

For hybrid accountability to work effectively the following five conditions should ideally be present [6]: 1) citizen participation should be institutionalized, 2) CSOs should have a continuous presence within the diagonal accountability space, 3) the dialogue between state and non-state actors should be institutionalized, 4) CSOs should have free access to information and 5) they should be able to disseminate their findings and results directly to the legislative bodies (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001). Most of these conditions are also valid for horizontal and vertical accountability initiatives, especially the institutionalization of participation and the continuous presence of the involved actors (Newell and Bellour, 2002). Another element that increases the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms in general is the presence of champions and reform-oriented people when there are windows of opportunity (O'Donnell, 1999).

Last, Goetz and Jenkins (2001: 365) argue that what distinguishes hybrid accountability from other types of citizen engagement, such as citizen report cards, is their involvement in performance and financial auditing, which are at the very core of horizontal accountability, and which challenge "the state's monopoly over responsibility for official executive oversight". Social accountability, on the other hand, is a broader approach to accountability, which encompasses different forms of citizen engagement beyond auditing and performance monitoring. In contrast to hybrid/diagonal accountability, social accountability has become increasingly popular in recent years and will therefore be discussed more extensively.

2.2.2.2. Social accountability

Recently, the World Bank has actively promoted the concept of **social accountability**, which they define as "an ***approach*** towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organisations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability" (Malena et al., 2004: 3). Social accountability is similar to hybrid accountability in the sense that it challenges the vertical – horizontal divide

[6] As pointed out by Nicola Jones the threshold to reach these criteria in practice is quite high, especially in developing countries.

[7], but it encompasses a broader range of initiatives that go beyond civic engagement in performance and social auditing.

Referring back to Rubenstein's (2007) conceptualizations of accountability as a multi-staged process, DFID (2007) proposes an interesting way of 'classifying' the different social accountability initiatives. Although the different stages are interlinked, CSOs can engage within the following pro- accountability initiatives (see Box 1). Based on the proposed classification CSOs involved in social accountability initiatives are not only carrying out M&E activities (such as public expenditure tracking, citizen report cards, and budget analysis), but can also be involved in policy advocacy, budget literacy, civic education, lobbying and coalition building, amongst others (Malena and McNeil 2010: 8).

Box 1 : Ways in which CSOs can engage in social accountability initiatives

- Influencing **standard-setting** (e.g. lobbying for legislation on transparency, adherence to international commitments on human rights)
- Carrying out **investigation** (e.g. monitoring and evaluating government programmes through participatory expenditure tracking systems)
- Demanding **answers** from the state (e.g. questioning state institutions about progress, Parliamentary public hearings)
- Applying **sanctions** where the state is found to be lacking (e.g. protests, boycotts, strikes or negative publicity)

Source: DFID (2007: 5)

Ackerman (2005) proposes a different way of classifying the various social accountability initiatives by placing them along six different dimensions visualized as continuums (see Table 1). He further points out that these six dimensions are not only valid for the social accountability approach, but also for other types of accountability. Depending on the wider context, these six dimensions will combine in different ways to constitute effective social accountability initiatives. Ackerman (2005: 26) mentions that "in the end, the goal is to construct a healthy balance within the overall accountability system in a particular location".

[7] Authors such as Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000) and Perozzotti and Smulovitz (2006a) consider social accountability as a (new) vertical accountability mechanism. They were among the first to study the emergence of this type of non-electoral accountability mechanisms led by citizen's associations and movements in the context of Latin America. Since the publication of their work, the concept has been adopted by other authors and organisations, such as the World Bank. The meaning of the concept has somewhat broadened in recent years, and initiatives to support this type of accountability are mushrooming across the globe (McNeil and Mumvuma, 2006).

Table 1: Six dimensions of social accountability

Dimension	*Extremes of the continuum*		
Incentive Structure	Punishment		Reward
Accountability for what?	Rule following		Performance-based
Level of Institutionalization	Low		High
Depth of involvement	External		Internal
Inclusiveness of participation	Elitist		Inclusive
Government Branch	Executive	Judicial	Legislative

Source: Ackerman (2005: 26)

With the incentive structure the author refers to the same dimension that others have called the enforcement dimension. Unlike the other models that mostly emphasize the sanction aspect of the incentive structure, Ackerman (2005) explicitly acknowledges both the reward and punishment aspect in his model. The second dimension takes into account whether CSOs are holding public officials accountable based on the set of rules, or based on the performance of their programmes and policies. Because solely emphasising the performance leaves the way open for malpractices and discretion on how to reach certain performance indicators, it is important that social accountability mechanisms monitor both the performance and the procedures leading to the performance (Ackerman, 2005: 15). The third dimension refers to the widespread acknowledgement that participation of CSOs in accountability initiatives should be institutionalized, instead of organized through workshops and consultation on an irregular, ad-hoc basis (Eberlei, 2007; Goetz and Jenkins, 2001). Participatory mechanisms can be institutionalized through strategic plans, rules and procedures, such as in the case of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs); they can also be regulated by law, but this is rather exceptional. A last option would be the creation of special government agencies that assure the participation of CSOs within government activities (Ackerman, 2005). The latter option is the most common one, as changing the law can be quite a long and complex process. Ackerman (2005) further points out that creating spaces for participation does not automatically lead to pro-accountability reforms. CSOs are not intrinsically good, nor do they always have the capacity to engage in a meaningful way. In addition, by being too institutionalized CSOs are more easily co-opted or controlled by government.

The fourth and the fifth dimension both correspond to different aspects of participation. Depth of involvement tries to capture to what extent CSOs are involved in the 'core' of government activities, which is different from the level of institutionalization. Having access to all relevant information about the process and the decisions taken by government is important for CSOs, but on the other hand, CSOs should also try to maintain their autonomy. The source of funding may also distort the balance between participation in core government activities and maintaining autonomy (Ackerman, 2005; Lucas et al., 2004). Regarding the inclusiveness of participation, social accountability initiatives seemed to be biased towards less critical CSOs: governments are more likely to engage with urban, professional NGOs and think tanks, than with trade unions and social movements (Hickey and Mohan, 2008). Donors too are less likely to fund 'controversial' CSOs such as trade unions to participate in social accountability initiatives (Driscoll and Evans, 2005: 13). For pro-accountable reform to be effective, a wide range of

CSOs should be involved (Ackerman, 2005). Authors such as Court et al. (2006: 15), however, argue that involving a broad range of CSOs is not enough, because there are internal barriers to CSOs (lack of capacity, time and resources) that hamper their meaningful participation in such social accountability initiatives. Capacity building, joining networks and coalitions and other support measures are necessary before these smaller CSOs can be involved in a meaningful way. The last dimension refers to the fact that pro-accountability reform is not only desirable in the executive branch, but also in the judicial and legislative branch of the government. Networking between CSOs and legislators, for example, is a promising path to improve accountability (Jones and Tembo, 2008).

The empirical evidence that exists about the involvement of CSOs in social accountability initiatives gives a mixed picture. Blair (2000: 28), for example, analysed six case studies [8] and found that CSOs did not play an important role in accountability at the local level. Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006a: 350) analysed different social accountability initiatives in Latin America, and in their conclusion they identified three factors that were related to the effectiveness of social accountability mechanisms: first, "the mobilization and organization of uncoordinated public opinion"; second, "the interaction among different strategies and mechanisms of accountability; and third, the existence of institutions with the ability to enforce sanctions". As indicated in footnote seven, the type of social accountability initiatives they studied was more restrictive than the current broad range of social accountability initiatives. It is expected that more empirical evidence will emerge in the coming years, as the support for such initiatives has mushroomed in developing countries, especially in Africa (McNeil and Malena, 2010; McNeil and Mumvuma, 2006)

2.2.3. How can CSO-led M&E contribute to accountability?

While the two previous sections have focused on the importance of M&E for accountability in general, and the role of CSOs in strengthening accountability, this section will combine both and attempt to explain how CSO-led M&E can contribute to accountability. The NAA has prompted governments to allow CSO participation in a variety of policy spaces, including M&E spaces. Lucas et al (2004: 20) comment that "in principle, civil society involvement in PRS monitoring [and evaluation] should have a number of benefits. If effective it can indeed increase the input and agency of CSOs and improve the transparency and accountability of government action". CSOs do not operate within a vacuum, but within a broader socio-political context that can facilitate and/or inhibit their effective involvement in M&E. Some of these obstacles relate to the lack of financial resources as well as the lack of time and analytical skills to undertake M&E activities beyond the project-level. In addition, many CSOs operate within a legal environment that does not guarantee the right to information, making access to information quite challenging (Eberlei and Siebold, 2006; Goetz and Jenkins, 2001). The most challenging obstacle, however, is the unequal power relations in the accountability relation (Rubenstein, 2007) and the perceived lack of legitimacy of CSOs' engagement in M&E activities. Therefore, it is often difficult to comply with the enforceability dimension of accountability. In other words, although CSOs can demand answers from the power wielders, they usually fail to impose correc-

[8] The six case studies (in Bolivia, Honduras, India, Mali, the Philippines and Ukraine) did not focus specifically on social accountability initiatives but on the links between participation and accountabilility at the local level. Some elements of social accountability, however, were studied, such as CSO involvement in local policy-making, the institutionalization of public meetings and the use of citizen satisfaction surveys.

tive behaviour on their behalf. Thus, the key is to understand how CSOs are involved in M&E initiatives, and how this involvement can lead to improved accountability, looking at both answerability and enforceability. CSOs are faced with obstacles, but at the same time, they also take advantage of opportunities and develop strategies to amplify their strengths and counter the obstacles. To start addressing these challenging questions, some elements can be drawn from existing theories and frameworks just discussed, but additional empirical research is needed to further advance our understanding.

Taking Ackerman's depth of involvement dimension, CSOs can embark on the M&E journey, either through representation in official M&E working groups and committees within the national M&E system, or independently. While the former situation may increase the access to relevant information and other resources, the latter option is more favourable for CSOs in terms of maintaining their autonomy and being recognized as an independent source of information. The existing literature on this topic suggests that institutionalized participation of CSOs within the official M&E system is rather an exception (Lucas et al., 2004; Eberlei and Siebold, 2006). Because of the pressure on governments to include CSOs within their national M&E system, interesting dynamics are expected to emerge which show how governments are trying to comply with donor requirements while at the same time maintaining their power and interests. This point is captured very well in a quote from Gordillo and Andersson (2004: 309): "The more power the political elites possess relative to the power of citizens and their political opposition and other actors – the weaker the incentive is for such an elite to transform established M&E programmes into an instrument for more public sector accountability". To comply with donor requirements, only like-minded CSOs who are capital-based, for example, will be allowed to have a seat within the national M&E workgroups, units and other related spaces (Hickey and Mohan, 2008). Another strategy used by the government is the setting up of 'empty' accountability initiatives to create the illusion that CSOs are involved in public policy and that there is a direct dialogue between state and civil society (Booth, 2005). These initiatives "give the impression of a government willing to listen, and they inform officials about public perceptions of government behaviour, but they enforce neither an answer from officials, nor impose sanctions for poor performance" (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001: 380). Such window-dressing initiatives not only create false expectations and frustrations, they also hinder the emergence of more 'genuine' forms of accountability. In addition, governments often try to downplay the influence CSOs could have in accountability spaces by saying that they do not have a democratic representative mandate (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001).

Compared to the literature on institutionalized participation of CSOs within the M&E system, more information is available on CSOs that are carrying out M&E activities in an independent, often ad-hoc way (Eberlei and Siebold, 2006; Wood, 2005). CSOs that are engaged in independent M&E are often supported by donors who promote 'social accountability-type' initiatives. In recent years, a strong subset of social accountability initiatives has emerged "that emphasizes a solid evidence base and direct dialogue and negotiation with government counterparts" (McNeil and Malena, 2010: 6). This solid evidence is mainly collected through M&E practices at the input, output and outcome level. Examples include public expenditure reviews (input), public expenditure tracking (input & output), and the use of citizen report cards and community score cards (outcome). CSOs are thus primarily working around budget processes, and the quality/performance of public services (McNeil and Mumvuma, 2006; McNeil and Malena, 2010). This subset of social accountability initiatives also shows much overlap with the

hybrid accountability initiatives discussed earlier and will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

In the case of independent M&E, the challenge for CSOs is to use the M&E evidence they have gathered as a tool for accountability. The obstacles discussed previously not only make it difficult for CSOs to demand answers from government, but more importantly, to apply 'sanctions'. However, CSOs use a variety of strategies, some of which are discussed below, to create pressure for government to give account and indirectly create incentives for government to take corrective action. A confluence of different factors will influence whether or not change does occur in the end, but little research is available to elaborate further on this point.

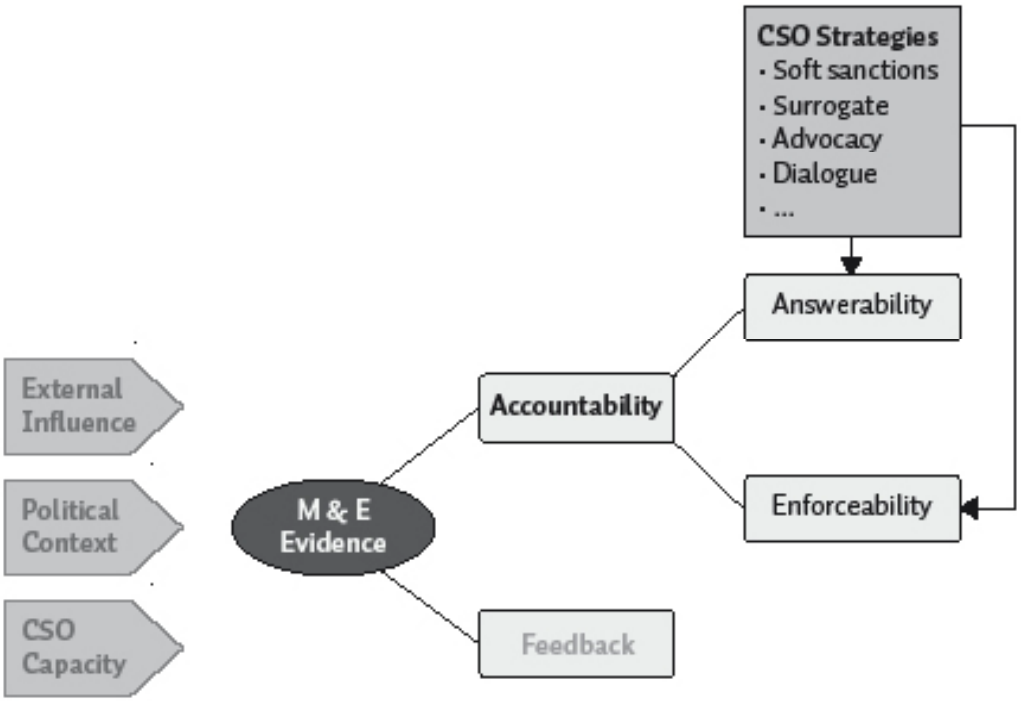
Rubenstein's (2007) concept of surrogate accountability offers an interesting angle to study how CSOs deal with some of the obstacles they have to face, as a consequence of power inequalities. Donors usually focus on reducing inequalities between different actors by, for example, investing resources in capacity building and other CSO-strengthening activities. Reducing inequalities in this way, however, is a long-time process and depends on broader social and political factors. A shorter term alternative to deal with power inequalities is the dynamic of surrogate accountability. "Surrogate accountability involves an actor – a surrogate – who substitutes for accountability holders during one or more phases of the accountability process: setting standards, finding and interpreting information, and, most importantly, sanctioning the power wielder if it fails to live up to the relevant standards" (Rubenstein, 2007: 617). During the information stage accountability holders sometimes do not have sufficient resources or do not have access to information to monitor compliance with the standards. When power inequality exists power wielders do not have much incentive to share crucial information (Gordillo and Andersson, 2004). In such cases surrogate accountability may help in the collection or, more commonly, the analysis of data. From a quick glance at the literature it appears that CSOs are more involved in monitoring than in evaluation, which is usually performed by third parties such as think tanks and independent consultancies, who are then acting as surrogates. Such organisations may be perceived as more 'neutral' by government (and donors), and, as a consequence, have easier access to the required information. It is especially during the last phase, the sanctioning stage, that the inequality in power is most felt: "Many prominent accountability mechanisms rely on accountability holders to impose or help impose the sanction. As a result, if accountability holders are weak, accountability mechanisms that rely on them are severely compromised" (Rubenstein, 2007: 620). Here again, surrogate accountability can allow third parties to sanction power wielders on behalf of the accountability holders while negative consequences are avoided for the 'original' accountability holders. Within the context of aid, donors or peer-reviewed spaces could function as enforceability surrogates (Hickey and Mohan, 2008: 239). The downside of surrogate accountability is that preferences of surrogate accountability holders may not be the same as the ones of accountability holders, and that the attitude of surrogates can become paternalistic. Also, surrogates should try to keep a balance between 'empty' sanction threats and too severe sanctions, which could provide even less incentives for power wielders to share information. To conclude Rubenstein (2007) mentions that although surrogate accountability has its advantages and can be considered as a 'second-best alternative', it is still 'inferior' to standard accountability.

Other strategies to transform M&E information into a genuine tool of accountability have been reported in the literature on social accountability initiatives and include ad-

vocacy, networking with media and other organisations, and the use of informal accountability mechanisms. With regard to the enforceability dimension, rather than sanctioning government, these CSOs try to incentivise government to take action through the use of informal, 'softer' mechanisms such as exposure in the media, mobilization of public opinion, and dialogue. However, there is a lack of research available on the impact of these initiatives (Malena et al., 2004; McNeil and Mumvuma, 2006; McNeil and Malena, 2010).

In sum, being involved in various M&E activities can provide a springboard for CSOs to hold governments accountable, but their mere involvement or the mere act of monitoring (and evaluating) is not sufficient. To demand answers from government and, more importantly, to meet the enforceability dimension, additional strategies are fundamental to transform M&E evidence into a tool of genuine accountability. The key elements discussed in this chapter are represented in the first part of the conceptual framework presented below (see figure 1). The boxes on the left represent factors related to the broader political context in which the CSOs operate and factors related to the capacity of CSOs. In the remainder of this paper some of these factors will be discussed in more details. These factors will influence how M&E evidence, gathered by CSOs, can be used to hold governments accountable, both in terms of getting government to respond (answerability), and in terms of creating the right incentive structure for government to take corrective action (enforceability). Some strategies have been discussed briefly in this chapter, but more empirical and systematic research is needed to better understand these strategies and their effects. The next two chapters will discuss how M&E knowledge can be used to provide feedback or to influence programmes and policies.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework – accountability dimension



3. Understanding Public Policy Processes

The current aid discourse promotes evidence-based policy-making and the use of evidence to manage for development results. Within this context, it is crucial to have a sound M&E system that is able to generate relevant and timely evidence to inform programmes and policies and to modify them if necessary. Providing feedback to improve programmes and policies, is the second main function of M&E. Suggestions and recommendations on how to increase the use of M&E knowledge in policy-making often fail to take into account the complexity of policy-making and offer a more rational and managerial point of view. If M&E results are to play a more important role within policy-making it is crucial to understand how policy processes and, particularly, policy change occur.

This chapter will discuss some models of policy-making and policy change that have mainly been developed within the North American and/or European context. Some of these general theories have been applied to study policy-making in developing countries, but, to the best of my knowledge, the published literature on this topic is rather small [9]. Some of the discussed models of policy change in this chapter are situated more towards the rationalist end, while other models are situated towards the political end of the continuum when it comes to explaining how programmes and policies are created and changed. "Each of these models presents its own conceptualization of how the policy process works and, therefore, its own assumptions regarding the use of research-based knowledge in policy formulation, decision-making and/or policy implementation" (Neilson 2001: 13). This chapter will also pay attention to the way in which the different public policy theories and models explain programme and/or policy change. Schlager (1999: 251) argues that "frameworks, theories and models of the policy processes, by definition, must account for policy change. Each of the theories comes to grips with policy change slightly differently, and together they raise some difficult questions regarding how to measure change".

3.1 Rational models of policy-making and policy change

> "The process of public policymaking includes the manner in which problems get conceptualized and brought to government for solution; governmental institutions formulate alternatives and select policy solutions; and those solutions get implemented, evaluated, and revised. (Sabatier, 1999: 3)"

The **policy process or policy stages model** is one of the most widely known models of policy-making. One of the pioneers of this approach was Lasswell (1956) whose model describes "the functional stages or phases that a given government policy (or program) would go through during its policy life" (Deleon, 1999: 20). The policy cycle model, as currently known, is an adaptation of Lasswell's early work and consists of the following stages: agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation and policy (monitoring and) evaluation. In this linear model, a policy or programme is evaluated after its implementation, and depending on the results, the policy or programme is terminated, modified or continued. As Sutton (1999: 9) points out: "This model assumes that policymakers approach the issues rationally, going through each logical stage of the process, and carefully considering all relevant information". The quote by Sabatier (1999: 3) used above reflects the rational thinking that is embedded

[9] Some more recent examples include a study on the application of the Advocacy Coalition Framework to study water policy in Ghana (Ainuson, 2009), and a review study of the ACF in an international context (Weible et al., 2009).

in this model of policy processes. On the other hand, although the model fails to represent the non-linear and complex processes of 'real' policy making, it does offer a useful analytical tool for researchers in "highlighting the various points at which critical policy decisions are made" and pointing towards "the crucial factors in policy-making" (Palumbo et al., 2004: 659). The model also implies that information gathered during the M&E phase will feed back into the agenda-setting stage of the policy cycle, and help decision-makers with the policy formulation. Neilson (2001) suggests that many donors like this rational model because it somehow diminishes the interference of politics. Grindle and Thomas (1991: 122) go further by saying that "a roughly linear model of the policy process is implicit in many analyses or proposals for reform" and that donor-driven reforms often assume that "getting the policies right" is sufficient to ensure the correct implementation of these policies.

Another contribution to the understanding of policy change is Lindblom's concept of **incrementalism**, or what he refers to as "the Science of Muddling Through" (Lindblom, 1959). This model is not a 'pure' rational model but it is situated somewhere in the middle on the continuum. Lindblom argues that most policy decisions involve a series of small steps that only result in an incremental change from status quo. "Policymakers do not consider options that would lead to radical change. This is because usually, though not always, what is feasible politically is only incrementally or marginally different from existing policies" (Sutton, 1999: 30). The incremental model has been criticized for being too conservative and failing to explain how more radical policy changes occur (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003: 172). However, the incrementalist approach offers a good model for explaining a particular style of decision-making/policy change that appears to be quite common in developing countries (Carden, 2009).

3.2. Political models of policy-making and policy change

While the rational models contributed to a better awareness and analysis of the different processes within policy-making, they fail to portray the far less rational and linear reality of policy-making. To capture the dynamic and chaotic process of policy-making, several models have been developed, some of which can be grouped under the heading "policy network approach". Neilson (2001: 21) explains: "The approaches [...] differ from the rationalist models in that these models explain policy change as a function of the diverse actors and/or groups of actors found within the policy-making system and, therefore, better illustrate the complexities of the system".

Three policy network approaches will be presented here, which are the **epistemic community**, the policy community and the advocacy coalition approach. According to the type of network, the connectedness between its members varies. In general, members of epistemic communities are closely connected; they share the same expertise and knowledge base and a similar causal understanding of the issues. Epistemic communities consist of "knowledge actors – professionals, researchers, scientists – who share common ideas about policy and seek privileged access to decision-making forums on the basis of their scientific expertise and scholarly knowledge" (Stone, 2000: 253). In addition, the expert knowledge of certain epistemic communities is highly valued and can therefore achieve a powerful influence on policymakers (Sutton, 1999). Stone (2000) gives the example of the powerful influence neo-liberal economists and other academics had on the policy formulation processes in developing countries, through the intermediary of the World Bank and the IMF. Members of **policy communities** also share

common knowledge, but they are loosely connected with each other. Policy communities can be described as "stable networks of policy actors from both inside and outside government that are highly integrated with the policy-making process" (Stone 2000: 253). The different policy actors are active within certain policy domains, such as health or education, and are trying to influence policy-making or decision-making both from within and outside government. A last type of loosely connected policy network is called **Advocacy Coalition Framework** (ACF). What distinguishes this type of network from the two others is its cohesion in terms of shared beliefs and values. Advocacy coalitions are composed of "people from various governmental and private organisations that both (1) share a set of normative and causal beliefs and (2) engage in a nontrivial degree of coordinated activity over time" (Sabatier and Jenkins - Smith, 1999: 120). Concretely, coalitions can comprise of different government agencies, journalists, non-for profit organisations, think tanks, the media and business organisations, amongst others (Lindquist, 2001: 11). Within a certain policy area there are typically between two and four different, 'competing' advocacy coalitions that are trying to push for their solutions or views on a particular problem (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999).

The three network models are particularly useful for mapping out the different actors that are involved in policy processes within a certain policy sector and their corresponding influence (Neilson 2001: 28). Networks can also be conceptualized as "one route to policy influence" (Stone, 2000: 250) and important channels for the diffusion of information and knowledge, especially in developing countries where access to information sources is often limited (Neilson, 2001). "Networks, especially among and between think tanks and research institutes and/or organizations, are an important means for disseminating the policy message that a particular network or community (i.e. policy community, epistemic community) wishes to advocate or push to the forefront of the public agenda" (Neilson 2001: 26). Focusing specifically on policy change, the ACF provides a more elaborated explanation than the two other network models. In the ACF a distinction is made between changes in the core beliefs and values of the coalition members and, more narrow or secondary aspects of their belief systems. The core beliefs and values of the coalition, which are the "coalition's basic normative commitments and causal perceptions" (Sabatier and Jenkins - Smith, 1999: 121) are quite stable and very difficult to change. External shocks or crises are needed to shake these core beliefs of the coalition, eventually resulting in policy change. Secondary aspects of the belief system, on the other hand, can be altered as a consequence of research, sound information (including M&E information), or even "compelling anecdotal evidence" (Lindquist, 2001: 12). Policy change is thus more likely to occur at the level of these secondary issues.

A last model that is quite influential in public policy is the model of agenda-setting developed by Kingdon (1984), also referred to as Multiple Streams model. Within policy-making, there are three streams of variables that exist independently from each other and evolve over time: the problem stream (perception of problems), the policy stream (pool of problem analysis and solutions) and the political stream (external, contextual factors). For an issue to enter the official policy agenda the different streams have to intersect at a specific, favourable point in time, also called policy window (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003: 136). Policy entrepreneurs or brokers play a key role in the promotion of a certain solution or problem during the short lapse of time when a window opens to secure entrance on the official agenda. Policy entrepreneurs cannot control when windows open, but they are usually ready to act quickly when an opportunity arises, and they are persistent. Neilson (2001: 33) writes, "it is the timing of different events within

the various streams, along with someone who is willing to invest time and energy to champion an idea or a proposal in order for subjects to be placed on the decision agenda". This model has the advantage to take into consideration and reflect the messy and fluid processes that go hand in hand with policy-making, while at the same time providing a comprehensive explanation of how issues can enter the official agenda and results in new or modified programmes and policies. This model also "gives credit to the role of ideas - of knowledge and information – in policy change, without assuming that governments always take a comprehensively rational approach to decision making" (Porter and Hicks, 1995: 23). The idea of policy windows comes back in different theories and models including models of evaluation use and influence discussed in the fourth chapter.

3.3. Policy processes in the South

A relevant question is whether the discussed theories of policy-making are also appropriate to study public policy processes in the South. Authors such as Horowitz (1989: 197) have suggested that the differences between developing and developed countries in terms of policy processses "amount to matters of degree rather than of kind". In a similar way, Porter and Hicks (1995) suggest that 'Northern' policy-making theories are a useful entry points for studying public policy processes in developing countries. Grindle and Thomas (1991), for example, have contributed to a better understanding of policy processes in the South, by trying to adapt and discuss existing policy models in a critical way. However, as mentioned in the introduction of the chapter, the volume of these types of studies is rather small.

In contrast, a vast amount of literature is available on the characteristics of the political/policy environment in developing countries and on policy implementation challenges, amongst others. Changes in the Aid architecture, such as the introduction of PRSPs, the emphasis on good governance and the focus on evidence-based policy-making, have stimulated such type of research. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review this literature extensively, but some relevant elements of the political context and the actors involved will be discussed here and in section 4.3. Some of the differences between developed and developing countries that are relevant for policy-making include the dominance of the executive branch over the legislative and judicial branch; the persistence of patronage relationships; the higher turnover of staff within government; the smaller amount of research institutions, universities, think tanks and other organisations that are able to participate in policy networks and policy processes; the lack of human and financial capacity both in governments and non-governmental organisations, and the relatively high (indirect) influence of donors on policy processes in the South (Carden 2009: 5; Grindle and Thomas, 1991). On this last point, Conteh and Ohemeng (2009) highlight the debate that exists between those who view policymakers in the South as passive recipients of policies developed by the IFIs and donors, and those who believe that this influence is overstated. In the section on knowledge/research - policy interface (section 4.3), additional elements of policy-making in the South will be brought into the picture.

In sum, several public policy models and theories have tried to grapple with the complex, non-rational processes of policy-making and offered explanation on how policy change occurs. In addition, different policy network approaches have drawn the attention towards the multitude of actors that are involved in different ways, at different times in policy processes. These images are in stark contrast with the linear, rational model often portrayed in handbooks

that offer advice on how to increase the use of M&E results in policy-making, especially within the development context. The complex and non-rational character of policy processes should be kept in mind when reading the next chapter on the use and influence of evaluation research in policy-making, and the link between knowledge and policy in the South.

4. Knowledge/Research - Policy Interface

While the previous chapter focused on the complexities of policy-making and change, this chapter will attempt to shed light on the links between knowledge/research and policy to deconstruct the feedback function of M&E, as explained in the introduction. Within the context of the USA, the literature on knowledge utilization emerged during the '60s and '70s, after the disenchantment of social scientists with the lack of research use in policy-making. The research on evaluation use and influence also has its roots within this broader knowledge utilization literature, as evaluation is one way through which knowledge can be generated in a systematic way. Because the second part of this paper focuses on deconstructing the feedback function of M&E, the emphasis will be on the evaluation use and influence literature, and not the broader knowledge utilization literature. On the other hand, there is a lack of specific literature on evaluation use and influence in developing countries and, therefore, the recently developed frameworks explaining the research – policy interface in the South will be taken as a starting point for analysing this feedback function in developing countries. Before getting to the core of the topic, this chapter will start with a short section on the different meanings and types of knowledge and research to avoid confusion and 'set the base' for the subsequent sections.

4.1. About knowledge, research and M&E

Many studies regarding the research/knowledge – policy interface are not defining what they mean by knowledge and/or research, which creates confusion and contradictions (Neilson 2001: 7). Although research, knowledge, information and evidence do not share the exact same meaning, they are often used interchangeably, and this paper will inevitable fall into the same trap. In addition, a multitude of different terms, such as evidence-based policy-making, results-based policy-making, and managing for development results, are used to express the shift towards a more rational approach to policy-making, based on sound evidence and knowledge. The key is to understand how knowledge is conceptualized, "how different types and sources of knowledge are put to use, and the opportunities and challenges for mobilizing these types of knowledge" (Jones et al. 2009: 6).

4.1.1. About knowledge

Knowledge can be generated through a variety of ways: through practice, through experience, and through research, amongst others. Knowledge generated through practice and experience is often referred to as tacit knowledge, while knowledge generated through research is labelled explicit knowledge (Nutley et al. 2003). Several authors have alluded to the existence of different types of knowledge, beyond scientific and research knowledge, which can contribute to policy and practice (Jones et al. 2009; Nutley et al. 2003). However, for research knowledge to influence or inform policy and practice it needs to be relevant, representative and reliable (Solesbury, 2001). Thus, although different types of knowledge are recognized as being able to influence policy-making, in practice, only one type of knowledge is promoted, the one derived from systematic investigation (Nutley et al., 2003: 128).

Current models of policy-making and decision-making usually focus on formal types of knowledge while the role of informal knowledge in policy processes is often ignored. Different types of knowledge seem to be arranged in a hierarchical pyramid with on top the

knowledge obtained through randomized control trials and impact evaluations and at the bottom the informal types of knowledge such as community voices (Jones et al. 2009; Weiss, 1999). Jones et al. (2009:7) further mention that knowledge generated during the implementation of (development) projects, programmes and policies, is an important type of knowledge that can influence policy, especially from the perspective of learning and accountability. Within public policy-making, there is often a tension between knowledge and power. Politicians seek to secure and maintain their power when achieving their policy objectives, which can come into conflict with received knowledge about a certain policy they are advocating. Knowledge creation is thus a political process that can challenge the existing power structures (Stone 2000: 247). The following quote by Solesbury (2001: 9) illustrates these tensions aptly: "Emphasising the role of power and authority at the expense of knowledge and expertise in public affairs seems cynical; emphasizing the latter at the expense of the former seems naïve".

4.1.2. About research, monitoring and evaluation

Similar to the cloud around knowledge, the differences and similarities between research, monitoring and evaluation are not always clear. Weiss et al. (2008: 29) explain: "We often use the word research to refer to all types of systematic empirical inquiry, including evaluation. We use evaluation to refer specifically to research that examines the processes and outcomes of social interventions". The distinction between monitoring and research has been explained in the following way: "Research can be distinguished from monitoring, the collection of data to indicate the state of some underlying process; monitoring produces information but not knowledge" (Trostle et al. 1999: 104). Monitoring provides information on specified indicators and "the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds" (OECD/DAC, 2002: 28).

Both research and evaluation generate one type of knowledge, which is systematic knowledge defined as "information collected using systematic social scientific procedures. Systematic speaks to the way the information is collected, analyzed and communicated. The process is based on a logical chain of reasoning linking empirical observations and conclusions in a coherent, shareable, and persuasive way with the aim to ensure objectivity, reliability and validity of findings" (Alkin and Taut, 2003: 3). Examples of systematic social inquiry are policy analysis, programme evaluation and traditional academic research. What research and evaluation have in common is their use of similar methods from social sciences to collect and analyse data. What distinguishes both is the purpose or intent for which the research is carried out (Weiss, 1998: 15). Evaluations are carried out to assess the "worth or significance of and activity, policy or program" (OECD/DAC, 2002: 22). Alkin and Taut (2003: 3) go one step further by arguing that the goal of research is to generate generalizable knowledge, contributing to "the body of knowledge in a particular field of research", while the goal of evaluation is to produce "context-specific knowledge or knowledge that is applicable only within a particular setting at a particular point in time, and intended for use by a particular group of people". In this paper, the difference between research and evaluation will not be considered as clear-cut and drastic as proposed by Alkin and Taut (2003). In accordance with Weiss' (2008) point of view, evaluation will be considered as a particular type of research. Therefore, the literature on research - policy interface can be applied to study the influence of monitoring and evaluation (research) on programmes and policies (feedback function). The next two sections will discuss the evaluation use and influence literature in the context of developed countries, and the research - policy interface literature in the context of developing countries.

4.2. Understanding research – policy interface in the North: evaluation use and influence

> "Use is a central outcome of any evaluation, because without it, evaluation cannot contribute to its primary objective, social betterment" (Christie, 2007: 8)

Although the utilization of evaluation results in policy-making is considered one of the main purposes of evaluations "most empirical studies have shown that the direct, instrumental use of evaluation results in decision-making is rather an exception than a rule […], while various indirect uses, […] are much more common" (Lehtonen, 2005: 170). The focus of this subchapter is on evaluation use and influence, and how different evaluation use concepts and theories have tried to explain why and how evaluations are used (or not) for decision- making and programme improvement. After a brief overview of the early literature on evaluation use, newer theories of evaluation influence will be presented to try and shed light on some of the underlying mechanisms mediating evaluation influence. To conclude, the relevance of these models to explain the influence of M&E evidence gathered by CSOs in the South will be discussed.

4.2.1. Evaluation use: a historical overview

During the '60s and '70s, the War on Poverty, a large-scale social welfare programme in the USA, employed many social scientists in its planning and evaluation phases. There was a strong belief amongst social scientists that their research was going to have a direct influence on policy-making (Neilson 2001: 3). Slowly evidence started to arise contradicting this widespread belief, and soon different scholars began to develop theories and explanations for the non-use of research (including evaluation results). Much of the research on utilization of knowledge grew out of disappointment and frustration from attempts to apply social science to government (Lindquist, 2001: 2; Porter & Hicks, 1995: 6). Examples of such studies are Weiss' (1977; 1979) research on different models of research utilization, and Caplan's two communities hypothesis. Caplan (1979) attributed the lack of evaluation use by policymakers to the difference in culture between researchers and policymakers. In a nutshell, policymakers value the usefulness of information, while researchers value its quality and reliability. Because of the differences between the "two-communities" there is a utilization gap that needs to be bridged. Suggestions to bridge the gap between both communities include an increase and improvement in communication strategies between both, which remains a prevalent recommendation today. Caplan's model is also known as the "two-communities' theory". The model, however, appeared too dichotomous – use versus non-uses – to account for the wider spectrum of ways in which research knowledge can (or not) influence policy-making. Weiss (1977, 1979), on the other hand, developed the concept of enlightenment in her early work, and elaborated on the different ways in which research, including evaluation research, could influence public policy. She emphasized the importance of knowledge and research in influencing and shaping ideas and widening the range of solutions to certain problems, which she referred to as 'enlightenment'.

The basis for evaluation use theory was thus developed early on, when Leviton and Hughes (1981) discussed the three main dimensions of evaluation use: instrumental use, conceptual use and symbolic/political use. The period in which these concepts were developed, from mid 1970s to early 1980s, is often referred to as "the golden age of research on evaluation use" (Henry and Mark, 2003). **Instrumental use**, then, refers to the direct use of evaluation

results for decision-making. According to Weiss et al. (2005) pure instrumental use is not very common because decision-makers take many other factors into account besides evaluations. **Conceptual use**, also called enlightenment, refers to the more subtle influence of evaluations on the cognitive and/or behavioural level. Weiss (1999: 471) defines conceptual use as "the percolation of new information, ideas and perspectives into the arenas in which decisions are made". Conceptual use refers to situations in which decision-makers and other concerned stakeholders find the evaluation useful but do not act or change their behaviour as a result. Some authors have suggested that conceptual use may be the "most important effect that research and evaluation have had on policy" (Weiss et al., 2005: 14) and "perhaps one of the most realistic uses of research since it rests on the idea of the accumulation of knowledge through the aggregation of findings that promotes a gradual shift in concepts and paradigms" (Neilson 2001: 10). **Political use** has many other synonyms such as legitimative, persuasive or symbolic use. Weiss et al. (2005: 13) describe symbolic use as evaluations that "can provide support for policies decided on the basis of intuition, professional experience, self-interest, organizational interest, a search for prestige, or any of the multiplicity of reasons that go into decisions about policy and practice". Politicians and decision-makers use evaluation findings to legitimate positions or decisions that have already been taken (Kirkhart, 2000: 10). Symbolic use is not by definition negative; when evaluation information is distorted or misused, the term misuse is employed instead. Avoiding **misuse** or misutilization of evaluation findings has remained an important concern for the evaluation community over the years. A better understanding of evaluation use through the elaboration of a sound theoretical framework could explain more thoroughly how certain factors and processes lead to evaluation misuse. However, given the complexity and ambiguity of the term, attempts to build such frameworks have not (yet) been very successful (Shula and Cousins, 1997).

Other contributions of the early work on evaluation use include the description of the different factors or 'predictors' contributing to evaluation use, the assignment of weights to these different factors, and the development of corresponding classification schemes (Shula and Cousins, 1997). However, to contribute to the elaboration of a theory of Evaluation Use, classifying the different types of use and listing contributing factors is not enough. During the 1980s, researchers started to think more thoroughly about the role of context in the utilization of evaluation findings (Shula and Cousins, 1997), which somehow contributed towards the establishment of an evaluation use theory.

The increasing focus on participatory approaches to evaluation and organizational learning is considered as one of the biggest changes in evaluation practice that occurred during the "golden age" (Preskill and Caracelli, 1997). This change towards more participatory evaluations also had consequences for the role and required skills of the evaluator, who now had to strike a balance between increasing the usefulness of evaluations through engaging with the stakeholders, and maintaining autonomy to avoid possible biases or co-optation. The trade-off between usefulness through increased involvement and autonomy is still a pertinent issue today. During the late 1980s the concept of **process use** of evaluation started to emerge, partially influenced by the work on participatory evaluation models (Kirkhart, 2000). Some researchers, for example, found that stakeholders who were participating in evaluation practices showed greater confidence in the quality of the generated information and also experienced a sense of ownership over its results and application (Shula and Cousins, 1997: 198). Until then, evaluation use was only studied with regard to the findings of an evaluation, but now attention was also

being paid to the effect or influence of participating in the evaluation process itself. "Process use is defined by whether influence is triggered, in the language of logic models, by evaluation activities rather than by evaluation outputs (i.e. findings)" (Mark and Henry, 2004: 44). Similar to the different types of data-based evaluation use, process use also has a cognitive, affective or political dimension (Green, 1988). Patton (1997) is one of the most important researchers working around the concept of process use of evaluation. In his 1997 work, Patton described several possible consequences of evaluation use, one of which suggests that the evaluation process can lead to organizational learning. This finding, in turn, has stimulated reflection and research around the relationship between evaluation activities and organizational learning/development. Although the distinction between data-based and process-based evaluation is useful in theory, in practice there is often an overlap between both or a combination of different types. In addition, many evaluation theories only focus on data-based evaluation use.

4.2.2. From evaluation use to evaluation influence

As mentioned previously the term evaluation use or utilization was first used to indicate the data-based influence of evaluation, and was later broadened to also include process use. In recent years, following an article by Kirkhart (2000), some researchers have argued for a shift in terminology from evaluation use to evaluation influence. The overall argument for this shift is that the evaluation language itself shapes our understanding and conceptualization of the impact of evaluations. Because Kirkhart (2000:7) considers that both the terms use and utilization are too instrumental and unidirectional to capture, she argues for a "broader construct than use alone [...] one that does not privilege results-based use over influence stemming from the evaluation enterprise itself [process use], one that does not chronologically limit our vision of the effects of evaluation, one that looks beyond the sightline of our intentions". Kirkhart (2000) further points out that influence not only makes it possible to study the unidirectional, episodic and intended and instrumental effects of evaluation, but also the multidirectional, incremental, unintentional and non-instrumental effects. Evaluation Influence can thus be defined as "the capacity or power of persons or things to produce effects on others by intangible or indirect means" (Kirkhart, 2000: 7). To explain the different aspects of evaluation influence, Kirkhart (2000) developed the Integrated Theory of Evaluation Influence discussed below.

The Integrated Theory of Evaluation Influence is built around three dimensions: time (immediate, end-of-cycle and long-term), source (process or results) and intention (intended and unintended). The source dimension has already been covered in the previous paragraphs when explaining the difference and overlap between process-based and data-based evaluation use. Regarding the time dimension Kirkhart (2000) mentions that the influence of evaluation can occur at different points in time. Both process and findings-based use [10] of evaluation (source dimension) can intersect with the time dimension and thus occur at the three different points in time. The long-term influence of evaluations is rarely investigated because usually the evaluation process ends with the writing up of the report. Long-term influence is also difficult to investigate as attribution becomes more complicated over time. Most research focuses thus on immediate or end-of-term effects. Intention, the third dimension of the model, refers to the need to consider both intended and unintended effects when trying to determine the impact of evaluation. Unintended influence is understood both in terms of "unexpected pathways" and

[10] Data-based evaluation use, and findings-based evaluation use are used interchangeably and refer to the use of the evaluation findings, not the process. Throughout the literature different authors have used different terms.

"unforeseen impacts of evaluation on individuals and systems" (Kirkhart, 2000: 11). Intended uses of evaluation are often visible in the Terms of Reference or can become clear through discussion with the different stakeholders involved. Sometimes, it is hard to 'uncover' the intentions of evaluations because they are latent or covert. To illustrate, Kirkhart (2000) gives the example of the manifest intention to use evaluation to demonstrate accountability and efficiency to donors, while the latent intention is the reallocation of funds and the downsizing of programmes. Depending on the situation, the three dimensions of Kirkhart's Integrated Theory of Evaluation Influence are combined in a different way. With this theory she wants to offer a framework that moves away from a "linear, simplistic representation of the relationship among evaluation, user, and affected person or system" (Kirkhart, 2000: 18).

Within the evaluation community, there is no consensus on the proposed switch from evaluation use to evaluation influence. Some authors such as Alkin and Taut (2003) have rejected the switch from use to influence and argue both concepts refer to different processes. According to their proposal, the term use should be kept to refer to intended and unintended uses of evaluation of which the evaluator is aware, while the term influence should be used for unintended evaluation effects of which the evaluator is not aware. Although the same authors largely agree on the three dimensions (time, source and intention) proposed by Kirkhart (2000) they suggest changing the intention dimension to awareness dimension to reflect this point of disagreement. On the other hand, authors such as Christie (2007) and Mark and Henry (2003) are supporting Kirkhart's proposal and are endorsing the concept of evaluation influence. While they acknowledge that the concept of use [11] contributed greatly to the field of evaluation and remains important, they argue that it has become so 'loaded' and complex that it has lost its appeal for empirical research. Mark and Henry (2004) explain why and how the concept of use is overgrown, citing as the most important points the overlap between the multiple forms of use, the absence of indicators to measure the different types of uses, and the confusion between use as descriptive versus normative concept. Moreover, the ambiguity surrounding the concept of use has made it difficult to distinguish between use and misuse. To resolve this overuse, the authors propose to switch to the concept of evaluation influence, but, additionally they emphasize the need "to develop a more detailed and more specific framework and terminology of influence" (Mark and Henry, 2004: 39). The next section will explain in more details this specific framework proposed by Henry and Mark (2003) and Mark and Henry (2004).

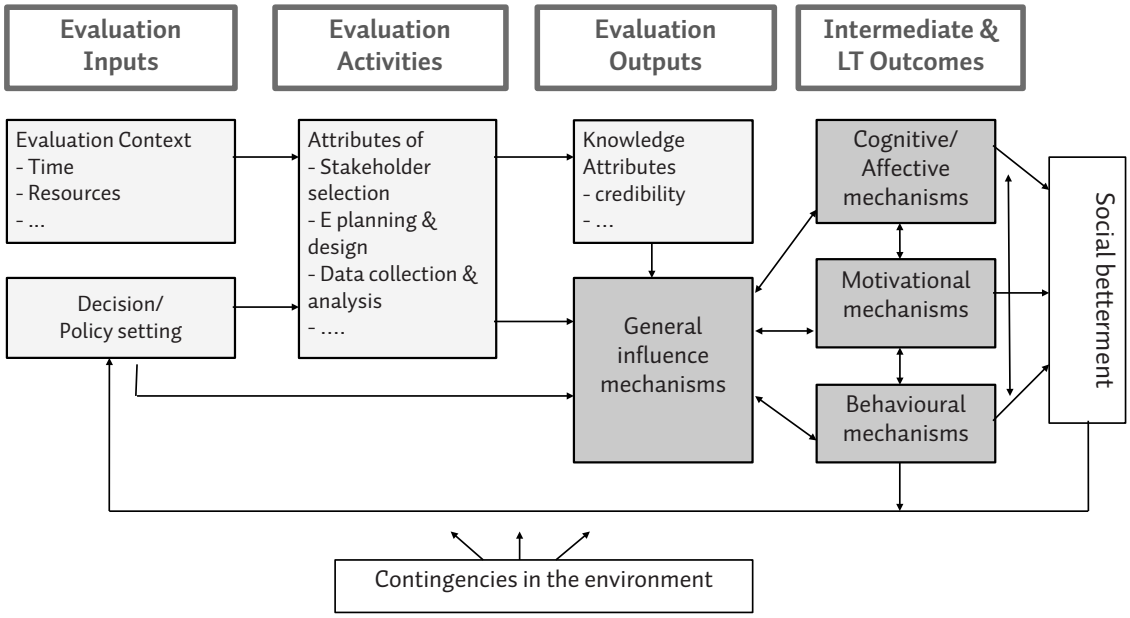
4.2.3. Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Evaluation Influence: understanding the underlying mechanisms

Despite the lack of direct evaluation use in practice, a survey carried out in 1997 amongst members of the American Evaluation Association suggested that improving programmes and providing information for decision-making were still considered the main purpose for carrying out evaluations (Preskill and Caracelli, 1997). The theories and models of evaluation use highlight the different 'types' of use, but they fail to explain why and how evaluations can influence or not policy-making. Kirkhart's (2000) Theory of Evaluation Influence constitutes a step in the right direction, but too little remains known about the "underlying processes that may mediate the effects of evaluation on attitude and action" (Mark and Henry, 2004:

[11] Interestingly, the basic taxonomy that was proposed in 1981 is still valid and widely used today. Unlike the other models and variations that have emerged over the years, the three basic evaluation uses (conceptual, instrumental, symbolic) have survived and still appear robust.

35). Therefore, Henry and Mark (2003) and Mark and Henry (2004) propose a Comprehensive Theory of Evaluation Influence (*see figure 2*). For the purpose of clarity, the figure used here only represents a simplified version of the framework; the details of the theoretical framework are discussed more extensively in Mark & Henry (2004).

Figure 2: A Comprehensive Theory of Evaluation Influence



Source: Simplified version adapted from Mark & Henry (2004: 46)

The Comprehensive Theory of Evaluation Influence can be considered as a programme theory that draws on existing theories of change to explain the link between evaluation inputs and the ultimate outcome of evaluation, which is social betterment (*see figure 2*). As with other programme theories "a theory of evaluation influence can be developed to connect evaluation activities and outputs with evaluation outcomes, identifying potential linkages between immediate, intermediate, and long-range outcomes that are indicators or precursors of the specific long-range social goals that motivate evaluation" (Henry and Mark 2003: 296). In a nutshell, elements of the evaluation context (*evaluation inputs*), such as available resources and time, will influence the attributes of the different *evaluation activities*, such as its design, the selection of stakeholders, amongst others. The policy setting in which the evaluation takes place will also affect the subsequent evaluation activities. These evaluation activities, in turn, will affect the *evaluation outputs*, which refers to the knowledge produced by the evaluation and certain attributes of this knowledge (the quality, credibility, timeliness). The theory also shows how the policy setting, the attributes related to the evaluation activities and the knowledge attributes all have an effect on the general influence mechanisms [12]. These general mechanisms, together with the cognitive/affective, motivational and behavioural mechanisms constitute the central aspect of the theory (see dark grey shaded boxes in figure 2). Because these underlying mechanisms, called the *framework of mechanisms*, form the basis of the Comprehensive Theory, they will be explained in more details in the next section (*see table 2*).

[12] Mark & Henry (2003, 2004) use the terms mechanisms and (underlying) processes interchangeably.

4.2.3.1 Framework of mechanisms

The framework of mechanisms within the Comprehensive Theory thus explains the different underlying processes through which evaluations can have an effect (Mark and Henry, 2003). The effect can result from both the evaluation process and the findings, to take up Kirkhart's (2000) source dimension. To explain these underlying mechanisms, the authors have relied on established research from social and behavioural sciences, which "can be a powerful source of methods, measures and hypotheses" (Mark & Henry 2004: 51). The framework of mechanisms distinguishes between three levels of analysis, indicating the locus of the change process: the individual, interpersonal and collective level, and four mechanisms or types of processes: general influence, cognitive & affective, motivational and behavioural (See column and row headings of *table 2*) (Mark and Henry, 2004: 39).

Table 2: A model of alternative mechanisms that may mediate evaluation influence

Types of Process/ Outcomes	Level of Analysis		
	Individual	**Interpersonal**	**Collective**
General influence	Elaboration Heuristics Priming Skill Acquisition	Justification Persuasion Change Agent Minority-opinion influence	Ritualism Legislative hearings Coalition formation Drafting legislation Standard Setting Policy consideration
Cognitive and Affective	Salience Opinion/attitude valence	Local descriptive norms	Agenda-setting Policy-oriented learning
Motivational	Personal goals & aspirations	Injunctive norms Social Reward Exchange	Structural Incentives Market Forces
Behavioural	New Skill Performance Individual Change in practice	Collaborative change in practice	Programme continuation, change or cessation Policy Change Diffusion

Source : Mark and Henry (2004: 41)

The entries in the table can be both outcome of evaluation and mechanism leading towards other outcomes. "Because the elements [...] can play the dual roles of an outcome of evaluation and mechanisms that stimulates other outcomes, we often refer to them as processes" (Mark and Henry, 2004: 43). Evaluations usually start by generating general influence mechanisms, which, in turn, influence cognitive, motivational and/or behavioural mechanisms. Through the framework different processes/outcomes can be described and analysed that are leading towards changes in the behavioural aspect, which is the most 'visible' aspect. In this way, the framework has the potential to highlight the complex linkages and chains of influence that exist and to "describe the **pathways** through which evaluation achieves its eventual influence" (Mark and Henry 2004: 48).

Turning to the three levels of analysis, it is beyond the scope of the paper to discuss every entry of *Table 2* in detail, but some relevant processes at each level will be discussed. Changes at the **individual level** refer to "evaluation processes or findings [that] directly cause some change in the thoughts or actions of one or more individuals or [...] within an individual" (Henry and Mark, 2003: 297). ***Elaboration***, which is considered a general influence process, is an important part of opinion formation, which can then lead to cognitive processes such as atti-

tude change. ***Salience***, which is a cognitive/affective process, refers to the importance of an issue, and it is linked to the attention a certain issue is likely to receive in the future. At the individual behavioural level, ***new skill performance*** is what evaluations often seek to achieve: "behaviour change at the individual level appears to be an important outcome in some evaluation theories, including some participatory and empowerment approaches" (Henry and Mark, 2003: 301).

The **interpersonal level** of analysis refers to "a change brought about in interactions between individuals, or more precisely, to a process or outcome that predominantly takes place within interactions among individuals" (Henry and Mark, 2003: 298). An example of a general influence process is ***justification***, which refers to the use of evaluation to justify one's position. This type of influence process has been documented in empirical studies such as the one completed by Shulock (1999) and from its description, justification appears closely related to symbolic use. The last mentioned general influence mechanism at the interpersonal level is ***minority-opinion influence***. This mechanism refers to the process whereby those in minority (regarding opinion, not demographics) or those who advocate alternative opinions can overturn the views/opinions held by the majorities by relying on the information they gathered through evaluations. This process can be relevant in the context of CSOs 'defending' the rights of the poor and minorities (Henry and Mark, 2003).

As pointed out by the authors, the column of **collective level** is important for understanding the effects of evaluation on public policy, but the other columns are explaining the processes leading up to this. At the collective level, different actors, including CSOs, are trying to influence policy-making through a variety of different ways. The collective level refers to "the direct or indirect influence of evaluation on the decisions and practices of organizations" (Henry and Mark, 2003: 298). Skipping the explanation of the general influence processes, one important cognitive process/outcome described is ***agenda-setting***. The authors mention the importance of media coverage for public opinion formation about the importance of an issue, as well as its role in reporting research results and evaluation findings. "More and more we observe evaluations being reported in the media in an attempt to trigger a chain of related actions that lead to evidence-based policy change" (Henry and Mark, 2003: 303). Borrowing from public policy analysis, the issue-attention cycle theory (Downs, 1972) also attributes a key role to media for bringing certain issues on the public agenda. ***Policy-oriented learning*** involves "coalitions of advocates who are actively seeking to have their policy preferences adopted" (Henry and Mark, 2003: 304). The authors take over some elements of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999), but they fail to link the elements of the ACF with evaluation influence in a convincing way. **Policy change**, on the other hand, is one of the most common goals of evaluation. Nevertheless, it is often difficult to pinpoint the exact influence of evaluations on policy change, as evaluations are only one element amongst several others that are influencing policy. The last mechanism, **diffusion**, refers to instances where the evaluation process or findings in one jurisdiction are influencing the adoption of policy, programme, and practice in another jurisdiction. Both diffusion and policy change are examples of behavioural/instrumental use of evaluation.

The types of evaluation use discussed earlier are also represented in the framework of mechanisms. Conceptual use corresponds to changes in cognitive/affective and motivational processes at the three levels of analysis. Instrumental use, on the other hand, corresponds to behavioural processes occurring at the three levels of analysis. Symbolic use has received less

attention in this framework, and is reflected amongst the elements of the 'general influence' row. Part of the reason for the lack of attention to symbolic use is because it not well researched in general (Mark and Henry, 2004). An alternative explanation could be that symbolic use is more related to fulfilling legitimacy and accountability needs than learning and feedback needs, on which the framework is mainly based.

4.2.3.2. Advantages and limitations of the Comprehensive Theory of Evaluation Influence

Some advantages and limitations of the Comprehensive Theory of Evaluation Influence are pointed out in Mark and Henry (2004), while others have emerged during concrete applications of the framework. It is important to keep in mind that the volume of literature on evaluation influence is rather small compared to the volume on use and utilization, and that until now only two published studies (Christie 2007, Weiss et al. 2005) are available that have applied Henry and Mark's framework to analyse evaluation influence. Using the D.A.R.E programme as a case study, Weiss et al. (2005) analyzed the different types of evaluation use and the underlying processes leading to them. Some of the challenges and advantages Weiss et al. (2005) encountered when applying the Framework of Mechanisms [13] are discussed. In the second case study Christie (2007) uses the framework of Mark and Henry (2003) [14] to analyse the (potential) influence of three types of evaluation information (case study data, large-scale study data and anecdotal accounts) on decision-making in the context of a simulation study. Christie (2007) only focuses on the first level of analysis of the framework, the individual level; more specifically the behavioural mechanisms are examined, which are important to understand instrumental use. She was able to study the influence of evaluation information on the individual, behavioural level, but not how these changes at the individual level linked to other levels of the framework. No specific difficulties with the use of the framework were reported in her article.

The first reported limitation is that the Comprehensive Theory is still work in progress and more details and fine-tuning of the different linkages are necessary to be able to answer questions of why a certain evaluation did or did not produce the desired outcomes. The current model, for example, does not pay much attention to the links between evaluation and organizational learning. On the other hand, because it is still work in progress, it can easily be adapted to provide the foundations for context-specific, local theories of evaluation influence (Mark & Henry, 2003). Second, additional contextual factors should be added to the pathways to give a more accurate picture. Advocacy groups and partisan politicians, for example, are sources of influences that are operating beyond the evaluation process and that sometimes "engage in influence processes that pull in a different direction than evaluation" (Mark and Henry, 2004: 50). The framework acknowledges the existence of external factors, through "contingencies in the environment", but it does not offer a complete and detailed explanation. Third, applying the framework to study the influence of evaluations that have occurred some years before appears quite challenging, as discussed by Weiss et al. (2005). Because the events had occurred between two and eight years before the interviews, only the behavioural processes could be studied. For the cognitive, affective and motivational processes only a partial picture could be drawn that was heavily dependent on the informants/interviewees and their interpretation of

[13] Weiss et al (2005) concentrate on the application of the framework of mechanisms, not on the overall theoretical framework.

[14] Christie (2007) also concentrates on the application of the framework of mechanisms, but an earlier version of it discussed in Mark & Henry (2003).

the events.

Besides the limitations of the framework, the authors also mention several reasons why their theoretical framework may be useful. First, the framework facilitates the detection of the first link in the chain of influence. As with programme theory, if these first processes are not occurring then it is unlikely that the desired outcomes will be achieved at the end. It is difficult to expect behavioural/instrumental use if influence processes at the cognitive and motivational level have not occurred. Second, the framework supports a variety of (future) qualitative and quantitative research on evaluation influence. The framework is built in such a way that indicators and linkages are testable and the generation of hypotheses becomes easier. Third, the fact that the framework was built with elements from other social sciences may also stimulate the use and development of new methods and hypotheses. To give an example, there is substantial overlap between studies about agenda-setting in public policy analysis and studies about public perception and salience of an issue, following evaluations (Henry and Mark, 2003: 308). Fourth, the framework draws attention to the importance of incentives (motivational factors) pushing certain stakeholders to pay attention to evaluations. For example, Weiss et al. (2005) found that districts were taking evaluations more into account, partially because of the growing importance of accountability and results-oriented thinking within the public sectors. Last, the framework not only contributes to research on evaluation influence, but also to the practice of evaluation influence. By understanding the different influence processes of evaluations the evaluator can adjust his or her expectations and start planning to maximize evaluation influence (Mark and Henry, 2003: 53).

In sum, several elements of the main theories presented in this subchapter are important for understanding the role and influence of CSO-led M&E in the South. First of all, it is essential to adopt a broader perspective than just direct use or influence when studying the influence of M&E evidence gathered by CSOs. Adopting a too narrow and technocratic perspective would obscure the array of other ways in which this type of knowledge influences broader processes. Unfortunately, many discussions about the role of M&E in developing countries are adopting this narrow view. It is often assumed that as long as the information gathered through the M&E system is reliable, timely and useful, programme and policymakers will take this information on board. "Donors must have a more elastic view of the many pathways to policy influence, which points to images more like an ongoing 'dance' than a pronounced series of impacts in a short period" (Lindquist, 2000: 236). Second, the Comprehensive Theory of Mark and Henry (2003, 2004) draws attention to the underlying processes behind evaluation use and influence. Understanding how the information gathered by CSOs is influencing at the personal, interpersonal and collective level is crucial. Several empirical studies on the links between knowledge and policy in the South have emphasized the importance of personal relations, and interpersonal processes like building trust, communicating, exchanging ideas (Carden, 2009; Trostle et al., 1999). These processes are contributing to the acceptance of the work carried out by these CSOs. The downside of the Comprehensive Theory is its challenge to study these underlying processes in reality, especially retroactively, where psychological processes such as recall biases can interfere with the results. Last, the literature on Evaluation Use and Influence remains silent on the link between the type of actor carrying out the evaluation study and its influence. Within developed countries, professional evaluators or specific units within government mostly carry out evaluations. In developing countries, this situation is somewhat different because additional actors, such as external experts, CSOs and others can play an important role. Is there something different about the M&E information gathered by southern CSOs that would lead to

different underlying processes or different pathways through which the information can be useful? Are some processes more likely than others are? In addition, wider contextual factors that have not been discussed extensively in this subchapter are different in developing countries. The next subchapter will pay more attention to these contextual factors and present the literature on the research - policy links within developing countries.

4.3. Understanding research – policy interface in developing countries

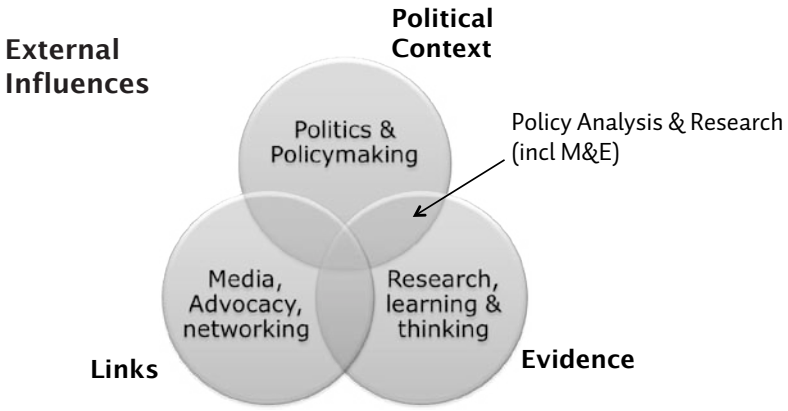
The existing literature on evaluation use and influence just discussed has not yet been studied in the context of developing countries. To understand better which factors are mediating the relationship between M&E and policy in developing countries, this subchapter will adopt a broader perspective and discuss existing research – policy interface frameworks. Although most of the research –policy literature is also written from the perspective of developed countries, literature on this topic in the context of developing countries is growing, especially under the impulse of the RAPID group at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (Chowdhury et al., 2006; Court and Cotterrell, 2006; Court and Young, 2003; Court and Young, 2004; Jones et al., 2009). In addition, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is working on the development of a new framework based on a long-term cross-country study about the influence of research findings on policy processes (Carden, 2004; Carden, 2009). Both researches are valuable to understand the different factors that contribute to the uptake of knowledge/ research into policies and programmes and will be presented in this section of the paper. As CSOs generate M&E evidence/knowledge using techniques and methods from social sciences, these frameworks are helpful to increase our understanding of the feedback function of M&E. More specifically, these frameworks could be useful to explore the case of CSOs carrying out independent M&E activities, as they have to develop strategies to bring the M&E evidence to the attention of policymakers.

4.3.1. The RAPID framework

The RAPID framework was established following an extensive literature review on research - policy links (de Vibe et al., 2002), and a number of studies in which the framework was applied to analyse a broad range of cases (Chowdhury et al. 2006; Court & Young, 2003). To reflect the non-linear, complex and dynamic character of the research – policy interface, the RAPID framework drew inspiration from multidimensional models, such as the one developed by Kitson et al.(1998) [15] (Crewe and Young, 2002: 4). The RAPID framework (see figure 3) identifies four broad areas that are important for understanding why some research is able to enter the policy-making arena, while other research fails to do so (Court and Young, 2003; Court and Young, 2004): the political context, the evidence, the links between the policy and research community, and a fourth area related to external factors. Court and Young (2003: 2) further emphasize that "the framework should be seen as a generic, perhaps ideal, model" for studying and understanding research – policy links.

[15] Kitson et al. (1998: 150) proposed a three-dimensional formula and framework to explain the successful implementation (SI) of evidence in practice: SI = f (E, C, F), where f= function of, E= Evidence, C = Context, and F= Facilitation

Figure 3: The RAPID framework



Source: Adapted from Court and Young (2004: 2)

Figure 3 shows the combination of RAPID's conceptual framework, at the outside of the circles, and its practical framework, at the inside of the circles. Creating links, for example, translates into the practice of building network and coalitions, working with media, and undertaking advocacy work, amongst others (Young, 2007). The process of policy analysis and research, which includes M&E, is located at the intersection of the evidence and the political context circles. The practical framework is a useful tool for stakeholders who want to influence certain policies, but for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on explaining the conceptual framework.

Within a developing context, the **external influences** refer to the influence of international agreements and declarations, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the PD and the AAA, on national policy processes. The influence of the donor community and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) also falls within this category. Although there is a move away from the strict policy conditionality that characterised the SAPs, the donor community is still able "to encourage and enforce changes in policy content and processes" (Jones et al. 2009:12). Some examples include the elaboration of PRSPs as a condition for debt relief, and the 'imposed' broad-based participation within policy processes as a condition for receiving aid (Molenaers and Renard, 2006: 7). Policymakers in the South, usually have less autonomy despite the prevailing discourse of ownership (Carden, 2009: 4). On the other hand, although the PRSP process can be criticized on various points, it has also provided a window of opportunity for (some) CSOs to access and engage in policy processes (Oxfam, 2002).

Political context refers to a broad range of factors organized around the clusters of *'politics'* and *'policy-making'*. The underlying idea is that all these factors will influence, directly or indirectly, the 'room for manoeuvre' of non-state actors within policy processes [16]. Some examples include: "the nature of the political system, the level of democratic competition, the strength of government leadership, the relative strength of interest groups, incentive structures within policy-making organisations, capacities of both policymakers and institutions, the level of influence of external actors" (Jones et al. 2009: 10), "political freedoms, academic and media freedoms; pro-poor commitment of the elite or government and culture of evidence use" (Court

[16] The idea that different elements within the political context can facilitate or inhibit access to the political system is also at the heart of political opportunity or political process approaches. Political context, however, offers a more general concept than political opportunity (Kriesi, 2004: 69) and is therefore adopted in this paper.

and Cotterrell, 2006: vii). From a practical point of view, for several of these indicators data is already available and published periodically; for example, the Freedom of Press Index as a proxy for media freedom within a particular country and the governance indicators published by the World Bank [17]. Some factors within the political context area are linked more specifically to *policy processes*. Chapter three of the paper already outlined some general characteristics of policy-making in the South, but a few additional points will be presented here: First, within a certain policy domain, there are different policy regimes or decision regimes. Lindquist (1990: 43) proposes the following broad typology of regime types: routine decisions, when there is "significant consensus on prevailing policy"; incremental decisions, when there is "substantial consensus on the policy base but there is the presence of selective issues that merit the attention of interested policymakers", and fundamental decisions, "when a significant departure from the policy base is considered or occurs", for example in the case of new policy areas. The type of decision regime will induce preferences for certain types of knowledge at the expense of other types. For example, in routine and incremental decision regimes, information that slightly challenges or modifies existing policy preferences will be more easily accepted. "Routinists prefer information that reinforces preformed opinions and expectations, incrementalists only want to know what will get them through another day or controversy" (Carden 2009:22). The type of information policymakers are seeking in this situation is focused information, or ' data and analysis', to take up the terminology of Lindquist (1990: 44). In contrast, research that is innovative or that challenges the underlying values and logic of the existing policies are more likely to be considered in open decision regimes such as "fundamental decision regimes" (Lindquist, 1990; Carden, 2009).

Second, there are differences in 'openness' across policy domains. Some sectors, such as the education sector, are more open to participation and to multiple sources of evidence; others such as macro-economic policies are more closed to participation (Jones et al. 2009: 16). The same authors have identified certain key variables to explain these variations across sectors: "i) the level of technical expertise required to participate in policy debates, ii) the relative influence of economic interests in shaping policy dialogues, iii) the level of contestation in the sector, and iv) the extent to which policy discourses are internationalised" (Jones et al. 2009: 16). A related concept that helps to explain the different sectoral dynamics is the distinction between 'high' and 'low' politics. "The term high politics is used to relate to important policy decisions, such as, whether a currency should be devalued. In these cases, the policy-making process is closed, with only a small group of influential people consulted, usually from within certain epistemic communities. In issues of low politics, which are of less importance to nation states, a wider set of groups are considered, incorporating various societal bodies" (Sutton 1999: 16). Besides the variations in openness between different policy sectors, the venue at which decisions are taken also changes, some decisions are taken at the central level, while others are taken at the decentralized level (Carden, 2009). In practice, CSOs should be aware of these differences when trying to bring certain issues to the attention of policymakers.

Factors related to **evidence** refer to both the characteristics of the evidence [18], and the communication strategies employed (Court and Young, 2003; Court and Young, 2004). Because the RAPID framework has been elaborated based on a sound body of theoretical and empirical work, a broad understanding of evidence is adopted. Not only academic research

[17] These indicators are available on the following website: www.govindicators.org

[18] In a similar way, the importance of knowledge attributes for policy influence has also been recognized in Mark and Henry's Comprehensive Theory (see 4.2.3).

but also other types of knowledge are represented within this 'evidence circle', including M&E knowledge. The physical location of M&E knowledge within the RAPID framework is indicated with the arrow (*see figure 3*). Attributes of the evidence, such as its credibility, quality, timeliness, and the like, will facilitate or inhibit the uptake within policy-making. Interestingly, within developing countries, the high credibility and quality of research does not always link to publishing in peer-reviewed journals, but can be based on reputation of the individual researcher or the institutions he/she belongs to (Trostle et al. 1999). Neilson (2001: 41) further suggests that there might be a trade-off between the production of "high quality research by outsiders" and "indigenous research that may be of lower quality" and therefore has less impact. Factors related to the way in which researchers/organisations communicate their findings also influences policy uptake. Because communication strategies have been discussed more extensively by Carden (2009), they will not be presented here, but in section 4.3.2.

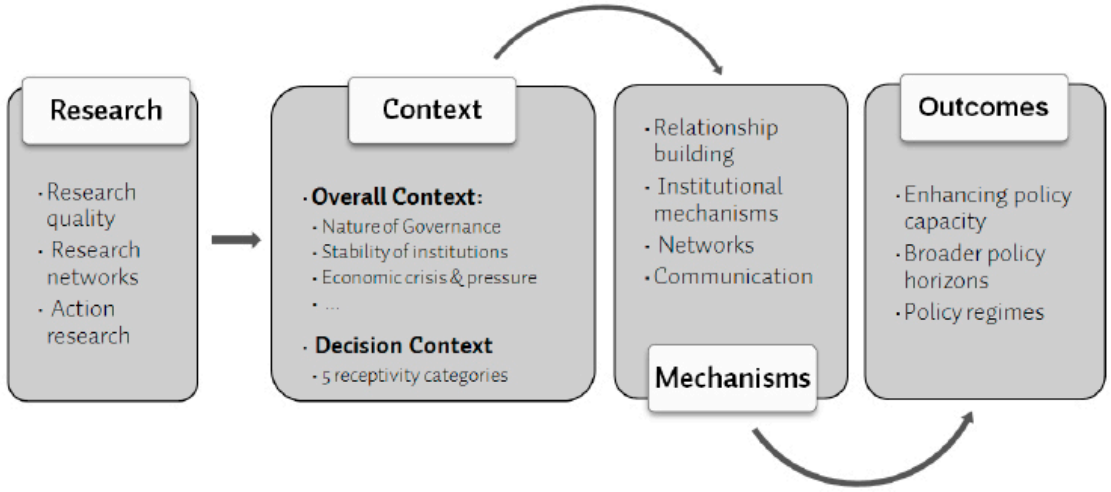
The last group of factors, **links**, relates to the key stakeholders involved from both the research and the policy community, and the existing and emerging links between them. When analysing the different stakeholders involved and the links between them, both influence and legitimacy issues should be considered. Jones et al. (2009: 20) point out that the range of actors involved in policy-making has increased and diversified during the past decades (Jones et al. 2009: 20). Besides CSOs and INGOs, networks and think tanks have received growing attention in the last years. The proliferation of think tanks in developing countries can be partially attributed to the shift towards evidence-based policy-making and the increasing support of donors to this type of organisations as a way to bridge policy and research (Lindquist, 2000; Stone, 2000). Policy network approaches (for example epistemic communities, advocacy coalition frameworks and others), which have been explained in the third chapter, are able to shed light on some of the ways in which policymakers and researchers are linked. Another approach is to study how network characteristics influence research – policy interactions (Mendizabal, 2006). The structure of a network, for example, will facilitate or inhibit interactions with other organisations, and policymakers, and consequently their ability to influence policy. Networks also have advantages in terms of information flows, knowledge sharing and communication (Jones et al. 2009). Case studies carried out by the IDRC (Carden, 2009) suggested that networks, consisting of both policymakers and researchers, appeared more successful in integrating research into policy-making. Thus, the involvement of government policymakers and bureaucrats within the network seems to contribute to stronger research – policy linkages.

In sum, the RAPID framework draws attention to a wide variety of factors that are relevant for understanding the relation between research and policy in developing countries. From a practical point of view, it also provides entry points for researchers and CSOs who want to increase the influence of their work on policy. The next section will present work in progress by the IDRC that partially overlaps with the RAPID framework, but also complements it by focusing on strategies researchers/research organisations are adopting to influence policy within a particular context.

4.3.2. The IDRC research on the influence of research on policy

Based on the results of a long-term cross-country evaluation, the IDRC research team is developing a framework to better understand the influence of research on policy (Carden 2004, 2009). A realistic evaluation approach (Pawson and Tilly, 1997) was adopted to analyse and evaluate 23 best practice cases, using the context-mechanisms-outcomes (CMO) configuration [19] to explain policy influence (*see figure* 4) (Carden, 2010). As was the case with the RAPID framework, a broad conceptualization of the term policy influence, beyond actual changes in programmes and policies, was adopted in the IDRC research. The typology used at the **outcome** level in the figure is based on Lindquist (2001:24) who discerns three types of policy influence: expanding policy capacities, broadening 'policy horizons', which is similar to enlightenment, and affecting policy regimes, which refers to the actual change of programmes or policies. The large-scale IDRC evaluation study illustrates the two-way interaction between the strategies researchers/research organisations are adopting to influence policy and the context in which they operate. Depending on the context, certain strategies or mechanisms [20] will be more or less successful in achieving a certain outcome, in this case policy influence. The results of the research can be considered as a starting point for studying the strategies that CSOs are adopting to bring M&E results to the attention of policymakers, and ultimately improve programmes and policies.

Figure 4: Realist perspective of policy influence



Source: Adapted from Carden (2010)

Within the **context**, Carden (2009) distinguishes between overall and decision context. Several factors related to the overall context, have been mentioned previously in this paper, especially when discussing the political context of the RAPID framework. Decision context, on the other hand, refers to five possible 'receptivity' categories that were constructed based on

[19] The realistic evaluation approach understands causality in the following way "to infer a causal outcome (O) between two events [in the IDRC case: research and policy influence], one needs to understand the underlying mechanisms (M) that connects them and the context (C) in which the relationship occurs" (Pawson et al., 2005: 21 - 22).

[20] In Figure 4, the term mechanisms is used in line with the terminology of Realistic Evaluation. However, in the IDRC study, these mechanisms correspond to strategies researchers and their organisations have adopted to influence policy. Within this section, the term strategy will be adopted.

the results of the large-scale IDRC evaluation. The receptivity categories represent the 'openess' of policymakers towards research (Carden, 2009: 23). In the first situation, the policy window is wide open for research with a clear demand of government. This situation occurs with "familiar and recurring issues", or, conversely, in very new and unfamiliar situations. In the next two situations, the policy window is half-open; governments are interested in research but either leadership or (human and financial) capacity is missing to respond to the research and implement it. In the fourth situation, which is the most common in developing countries according to the author, new and exciting research is available and has the potential to solve development problems, but policymakers are not interested. The last situation refers to the case in which government has a hostile or disinterested attitude towards research or in which "the window of influence is tightly closed" (Carden 2009: 24). Importantly, the different receptivity scenarios are dynamic and can evolve towards a more open or closed situation during the lifespan of the research carried out.

The IDRC research suggests that "each of these classes of receptivity calls for definable strategies by which researchers and research advocates can maximize their prospects of influencing public policy and development action" (Carden 2009: 25). Nonetheless, the relationship between receptivity and policy influence is not perfectly linear as other contextual elements are at play. The **mechanisms** box in *figure 4* contains the main strategies employed by researchers/research organisations, but in the discussion of the IDRC evaluation results (Carden, 2009), a wider range of adopted strategies are identified. In the first receptivity category, when the demand side for research of the government is high, trust appears to be the most important strategic asset of the researcher/research organisation. Trust usually goes hand in hand with reliability, reputation and with *building and consolidating relationships* with policy community actors. In situations where the policy window is half-open and leadership is missing (category two), researchers and networks need to play an active role in strengthening *institutional mechanisms* to ensure implementation of the proposed recommendations. At the same time, *communication* with decision-makers is also crucial (Carden 2009: 29). When the policy window is half-open and capacity is missing, researchers that engage in capacity building and create broad popular support for the research (project) through advocacy, education and communication, appear to be more successful in influencing policy. When receptivity for research is low (fourth category), a more complex strategy is required on three fronts; first, the evidence gathered should be of high quality and credibility; second, a coherent advocacy plan should be developed to bring the issue to the attention of the policymaker, and third, popular support for the research (project) should be gathered through different channels (radio, meetings) with as goal to "transform official indifference into attentive deliberation and action" (Carden 2009: 30). The idea is to try to create a small window of opportunity for policy influence. When the window is tightly closed, as in the last situation, patience and persistence are the main message to researchers/research organisations.

In several frameworks and approaches, including the ones developed by ODI and IDRC, communication is considered a key strategy to increase the uptake of research in policy. Having a good communication plan tailored to the needs of the different users, is also a popular recommendation in M&E handbooks. The two frameworks just discussed highlight the many different ways, through both formal and informal channels, in which research can be communicated. First, communication goes beyond mere dissemination and involves the 'translation' or 'repackaging' of the knowledge into a language that is better understood by policymakers and that is more accessible to them (Jones et al. 2009: 29). Second, the establishment of a per-

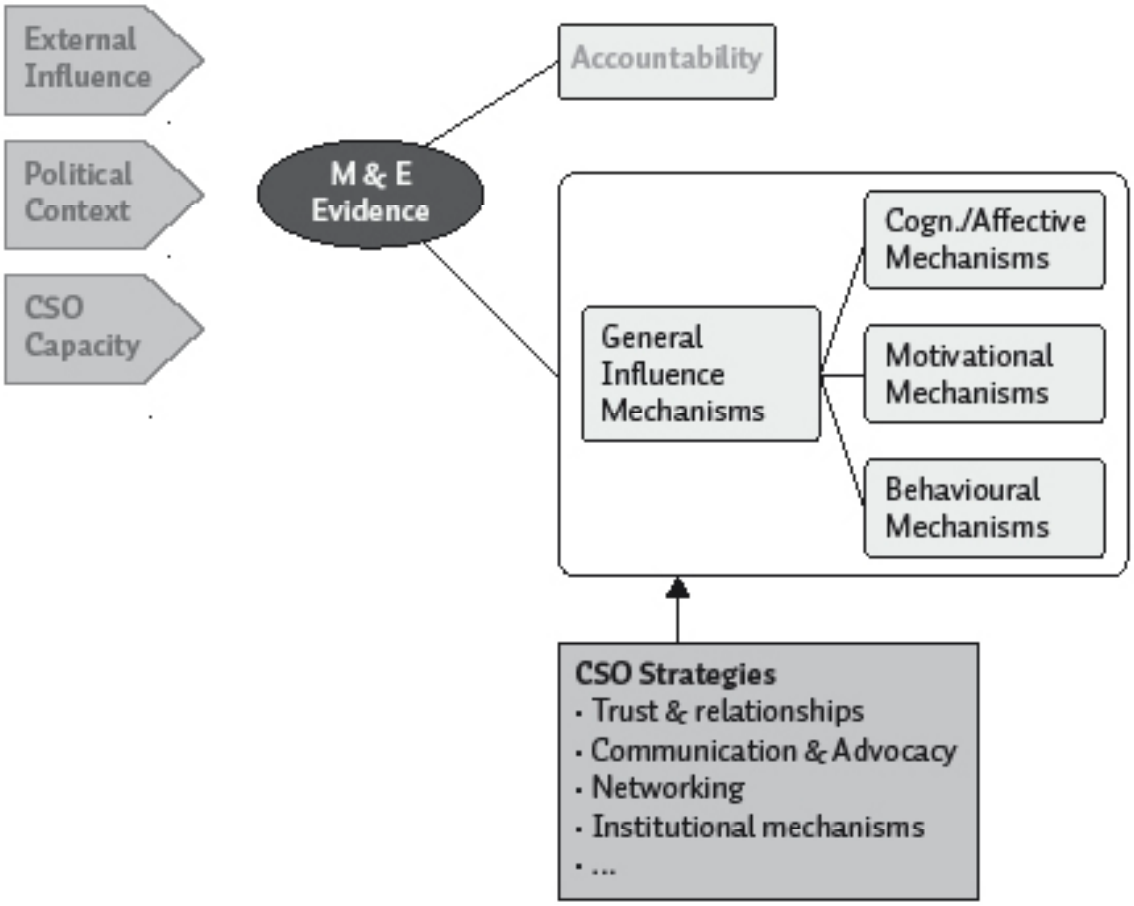
manent dialogue or forum for exchange contributes to a continuous exchange of information between researchers/research organisations and policymakers, which is conducive to policy influence (Carden 2009). The need to establish a permanent dialogue between CSOs and government officials is also recognized as a strategy to strengthen domestic accountability (as discussed in chapter 2). Third, within developing countries, professionals switch more easily between academic/research, political and non-profit careers (Carden, 2009: 46; Trostle et al., 1999:10). Lindquist (1990) already noticed that this mobility may increase even more because of the limited number of highly qualified professionals in developing countries. Thus the high professional mobility becomes an informal channel through which knowledge can be shared and transmitted between the different spheres. Last, the formation of formal and informal *networks* is also recognized as a crucial channel for communication, as mentioned previously, and this across the different receptivity categories. Carden (2004, 2009) thus encourages researchers in the South to take a more pro-active stance, when trying to influence policy-making, by establishing relations and trust, developing sound communication strategies and building networks. Porter and Hick (1995: 9), in a different study, go a step further by suggesting that researchers and analysts should abandon their 'neutrality mask' and take up a more active and committed role if they want to have an impact on policy-making that goes beyond enlightenment.

In sum, while the RAPID framework provides a useful tool for taking into account different groups of factors when studying the uptake of evidence within policy processes, the research by IDRC sheds light on possible influence strategies Southern organisations are adopting depending on the context. For example, in situations where government displays a low receptivity for M&E evidence that has been gathered independently by CSOs, one can assume that CSOs are more likely to adopt a complex combination of strategies to maximize the influence of their M&E evidence.

The feedback dimension of the proposed conceptual framework (see *figure 5*) takes up some of the elements that were presented in the comprehensive fourth chapter. It builds further upon Mark and Henry's (2004) framework but complements it with elements of the research carried out by ODI and IDRC to adapt it to the context of developing countries. As mentioned in the short summary following the section on evaluation use and influence, one of the most important contributions of this literature has been a broadening of the understanding of the ways in which evaluation/research can influence policy, and the attention towards the underlying mechanisms explaining this influence. Therefore, the feedback function box of the proposed framework has been opened up to include the broad categories of underlying mechanisms that mediate M&E use and influence, as explained by the Comprehensive Theory of Evaluation Influence (Henry and Mark, 2003; Mark and Henry, 2004). The work of ODI and IDRC, on the other hand, focuses on understanding contextual factors that increase the uptake of research into policy-making and on highlighting some of the strategies researchers and CSOs are using to respond to challenges and opportunities in the context. The important contextual factors are represented in the framework by the boxes external influence and political context. This way, they compensate for the weaker point of Mark and Henry's framework, which was the lack of attention to contextual factors. A third box, CSO capacity, was added to capture the effects of internal capacity and contraints CSOs are facing when they engage in M&E activities and produce M&E evidence. As in the RAPID framework, the 'M&E evidence circle' refers to attributes of the gathered evidence (credibility, timeliness, etc) and the way in which the M&E evidence is communicated towards potential stakeholders. By adopting certain strategies, taken from the

IDRC research, CSOs can actively bring the evidence they gathered through M&E activities to the attention of policymakers. In a way CSO strategies have the potential to increase the occurrence of some of the underlying mechanisms identified in the framework. Thus CSOs involved in M&E are adopting a more proactive stance than is the case with professional evaluators carrying out evaluations in developed countries.

Figure 5: Conceptual framework – feedback dimension

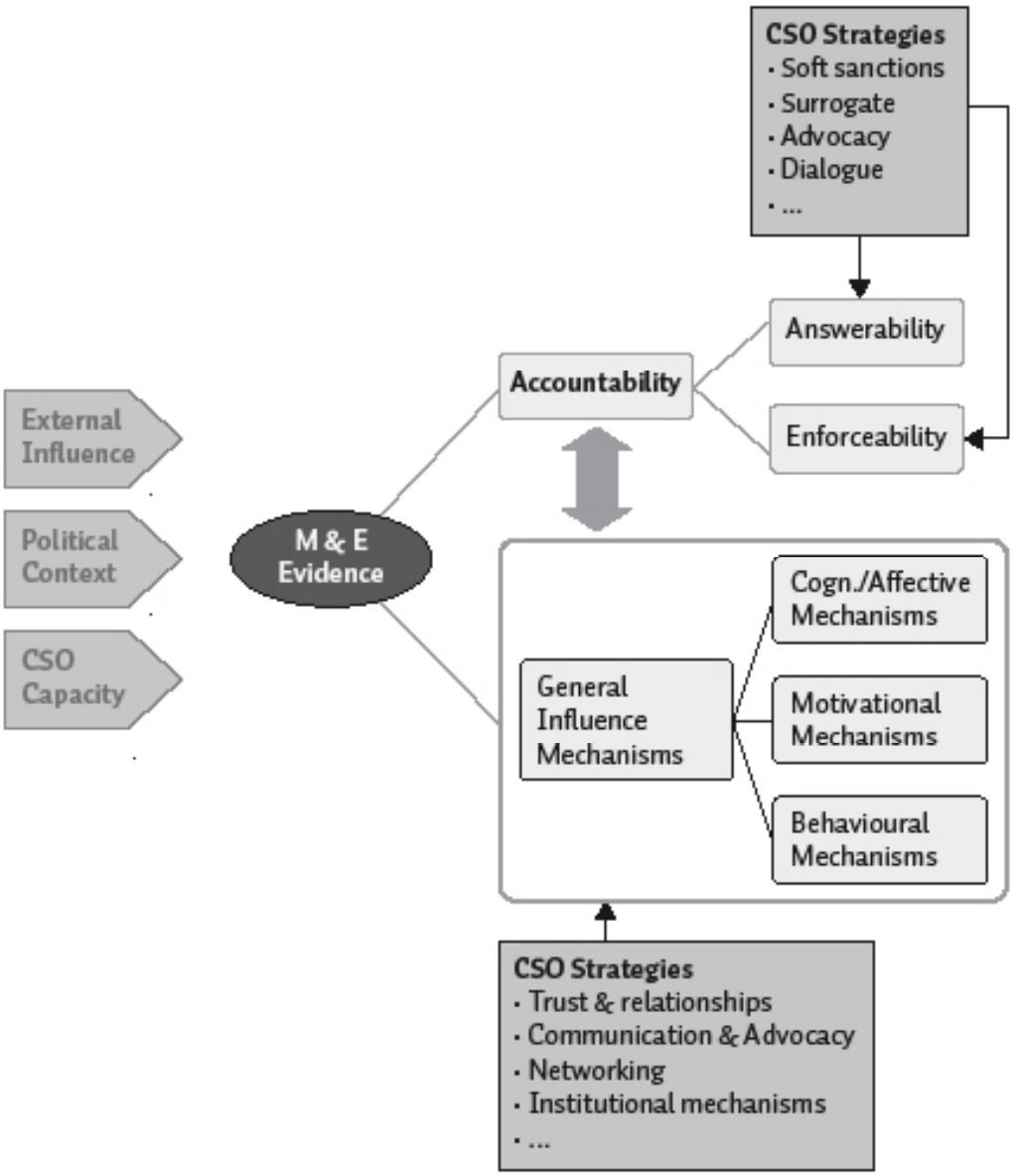


The last chapter of this paper will present the complete conceptual framework and discuss some of its strenghts, limitations and implications for future research.

5. Conclusion: Towards an Understanding of CSOs' Involvement in M&E

The present paper has attempted to unpack the two main functions of M&E, which are accountability and feedback for improved programmes and policy, by relying on a broad range of literature across disciplines. More importantly, key elements from the literature discussed were combined to create a conceptual framework (see *figure* 6) that aims to increase our understanding of CSOs' involvement in M&E in the current development context. As mentioned in the introduction, most research on CSO-led M&E has focused on obstacles and opportunities CSOs are facing when they carry out various M&E activities. The outcome of such activities in terms of strenghtening (domestic) accountability and influencing programmes and policies in the broad sense of the word, has not yet been studied extensively. The proposed framework could help with the generation of specific research questions and testable assumptions to increase our understanding of this topic.

Figure 6: Understanding CSOs' involvement in M&E



Some of the most important elements from each chapter are summarized below. In a way, these elements can be considered as the building blocks for the proposed conceptual framework. In the second chapter, the two dimensions of accountability, which are answerability and enforceability, have been highlighted and discussed. In addition, the concept of social accountability has proved useful to understand how CSOs can strengthen domestic accountability, especially those CSOs that are involved in various M&E activities. The literature has also highlighted some of the obstacles and opportunities CSOs are facing when trying to demand answers from government or, more importantly, create the right incentive structure for government to take action. The two dimensions of accountability, and the strategies CSOs are employing to turn M&E evidence into a tool for domestic accountability are represented in the framework. The third chapter emphasized the complex and non-linear character of policy-making, and the multitude of actors involved in policy processes in both developed and developing countries. From the literature it appears that most policy changes consist of small (incremental) changes, and that fundamental policy changes are rather rare. The importance of crisis and policy windows for policy change is also underlined. The fourth chapter focused on explaining the feedback function of M&E by relying on the literature about evaluation use and influence, and knowledge/research – policy interface literature discussed in the context of developing countries. The literature on evaluation use and influence broadens the understanding of the concept 'evaluation use and influence' beyond instrumental/behavioural changes. Most evaluations do not result in concrete programme/policy changes, but generate important changes at the conceptual/cognitive level that have the potential to result in concrete changes at a later stage. In addition, the Comprehensive Theory of Evaluation Influence offers a framework to examine the different underlying processes through which evaluations influence broader outcomes at the cognitive, motivational and behavioural level, which should ultimately result in social betterment. The underlying mechanisms of the Comprehensive Theory of Evaluation use are also represented in the proposed conceptual framework. Finally, the literature on knowledge/research – policy interface draws the attention to the different factors that play a role in knowledge/research interface, as well as strategies CSOs are using to bring M&E evidence to the attention of the policymakers. The proposed framework takes into account the importance of context, as identified in chapter three and four, for understanding the environment in which CSOs are carrying out M&E activities, the type of M&E they are carrying out and their capacity to transform the gathered M&E evidence in a tool to increase accountability and influence (pro-poor) programmes and policies in the broad sense of the word.

The framework draws its strength from the fact that it reflects elements from a broad range of literature, and takes into account both the accountability and the feedback function of M&E. As the framework is still work in progress, however, future research and fieldwork on CSO-led M&E are necessary to fine-tune some of the elements of the framework. First, the paper was structured in such way that both main functions of M&E were discussed separately. Nevertheless, as indicated by the dark grey arrow in the figure (see *figure* 6), dynamics and trade-offs between both functions exist. CSOs that are engaged in expenditure tracking, for example, to ensure the good use of resources of a certain programme, may be able to introduce improvements in that programme through a combination of their M&E evidence, advocacy and dialogue. Additional research, especially empirical research, is needed to further explore the interaction between both functions. Second, the framework also chose to take M&E evidence generated by CSOs, as a starting point for studying accountability and feedback. As a consequence, the 'process use' of M&E receives less attention in the framework. Being involved in M&E activities

itself, independently of the knowledge gathered, can also have an influence on CSOs and possibly on broader political processes. In the same line, the paper chose to focus on the 'external' feedback function for improved programmes and policies, at the expense of studying the use of M&E evidence for 'internal' organizational learning. Despite these two challenges, the proposed framework is a good starting point to study CSO-led M&E in different settings, and, hopefully, a source of inspiration for further research on the topic.

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