

Diversity and tension in knowledge production and dissemination: a closer look at the activities of 10 civil society organizations in Ghana

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This paper presents the results of a multiple case study research on the activities of 10 civil society organizations (CSOs) engaged in knowledge production and dissemination. The conceptual framework utilized to guide this study included concepts related to contextualized research and research dissemination and utilization models. The findings revealed the diversity of approaches to knowledge production and dissemination, a great source of both richness and tensions related to differences in the quality of the knowledge produced and in the level of effectiveness of the dissemination strategies adopted. The study also highlighted the limited space given to the same CSOs to engage in policy discussions. These findings have implications for the participation of CSOs in evidence-based policy debates. First, the processes through which stakeholders determine what is relevant knowledge are rarely exempt from power issues. In such a context, the temptation to disqualify the evidence produced by CSOs on the basis of quality could become irresistible for those who have the most influence on determining what is an acceptable source of evidence. Second, these findings can help CSOs and other development partners develop dissemination strategies to make the most of the knowledge produced.

Keywords: knowledge production; civil society organizations; research; policy; dissemination; evidence; Mode 1; Mode 2; Ghana

Introduction

For many years, the development field has witnessed the increasing involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the production and dissemination of development-related knowledge (Korten 1987). This is mainly a result of an increasing shift from service delivery to advocacy, a function that needs to be supported by appropriate evidence (Chowdury et al. 2006). This increased engagement of CSOs in knowledge production and dissemination is also part of a broader trend towards the diversification of knowledge production sites, conceptualized by some authors as the social distribution of knowledge (Gibbons et al. 1994), whereby an increasing number of non-university organizations are producing and disseminating knowledge. However, beyond these generalities, there is little data available on the knowledge production and dissemination activities of CSOs and, in particular, of southern CSOs.

This paper presents the findings of a multiple case study research conducted in 2007-2008 on the knowledge production and dissemination activities of a sample of 10 endogenous CSOs in Ghana. The purpose was to generate a better understanding of their engagement in the production and dissemination of knowledge. More specifically, this research sought to contribute answers to the following questions: What research methodologies do they utilize? What is the scope of their research? Why are they engaging in knowledge production? How do they disseminate knowledge and to who? Why are their funding agencies supporting these activities?

The first section presents the main definitions and concepts underpinning the research. The second section shares a brief overview of the methodological framework utilized to conduct the research. Next the main findings are presented and followed by a brief comment on their implications for policies and programs. The paper concludes with a summary of the main contributions of the study.

Defining knowledge production and dissemination

For the purpose of this study, knowledge production was defined as research ‘that deals with the current social, economic, political and/or cultural situation in developing countries’ (Spaapen 1997: 223). The activities included in this broad definition include:

[...] any investigation towards increasing the sum of knowledge based on planned and systematic enquiry. This includes any systematic process of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, data collection, analysis and codification relevant to the social world. (Court et al. 2006: 5).

The knowledge dissemination activities studied were defined as:

... those interventions which involve presenting or circulating research findings in more or less tailored form. This includes both written materials, such as summaries or guidelines, and oral presentations, such as seminars or workshops. (Walter et al. 2003: 4).

Conceptual framework: the new production of knowledge

In 2008, there were 30 Ghanaian CSOs engaged in knowledge production and dissemination, a strong indication of the diversification of knowledge production sites in Ghana. Knowledge is now being produced by CSOs, private sector enterprises, policy research think tanks and many other types of organizations. This phenomenon and its impact on the type of knowledge being produced have been conceptualized in *The new production of knowledge* (Gibbons et al. 1994), in which the authors discuss the evolution of the relationship between science and society and the emergence of a new mode of research.

The emergence of Mode 2 research

Gibbons et al. (1994) posit that, as a result of this social distribution of knowledge, we are witnessing the emergence of a new mode of knowledge production, referred to as Mode 2 research, that coexists alongside Mode 1 research, the traditional model of scientific research.

Mode 1 is a form of knowledge production, located within university settings, where priorities are established on the basis of the researchers' interests and research is conducted within disciplinary boundaries. The knowledge produced is disseminated after the research is completed, mostly through publications. In Mode 1 research, the phases of the knowledge cycle - production, dissemination and utilization - are implemented in a linear fashion. In contrast, Mode 2 research is conducted by teams composed of stakeholders from various backgrounds, located either inside or outside university settings. It is characterized by open exchanges between the researchers and the wider society, which generate feedback loops between the context of knowledge production and that of its utilization. Thus, Mode 2 research 'transcends disciplinary boundaries. It reaches beyond interdisciplinarity to transdisciplinarity' (Nowotny et al. 2001: 89) through '...specific clusterings and configurations of knowledge which is brought together on a temporary basis in specific contexts of application.' (Gibbons et al. 1994: 29). Unlike what happens in interdisciplinary science, in Mode 2 research the integration of the various types of knowledge is not done by one of the disciplines involved but is guided by the needs of the context of application (Nowotny et al. 2001 : 223). Due to this openness towards society, the context within which the findings of Mode 2 research are utilized extends beyond their immediate context of application to reach the 'context of implication', defined as '...those further entanglements-consequences and impacts that research activities continue to generate' (Nowotny et al. 2001: 159). In addition to being valid and reliable, Mode 2 knowledge must also be socially robust: it must be tested for validity with a wide range of experts and potential users who must extend their knowledge beyond their own areas of expertise to try and '...integrate what they know with what others want to do, or should, know and do.' (Nowotny 2003: 155).

From weakly to highly contextualized knowledge

With the emergence of Mode 2 research, science has become '...more integrated into its social context' (Nowotny et al. 2001: 96) but it can present different degrees of contextualization. There are three main criteria to assess the extent to which it is contextualized (Nowotny et al. 2001: 96-120). First, we need to consider the extent to which the frontiers between research and society dissolve through interactions between the researchers and various stakeholder groups, often on a continuing basis and not only for the purpose of a single research project. Second, this openness toward society influences the choice of research agendas, topics and methods, all selected via a more open process through which the priorities of groups other than the researchers are also considered. Third, the extent to which stakeholders participate in the design, implementation and utilization of the research is also an indicator of the degree of contextualization of the knowledge produced. On the basis of these criteria, research can present three main degrees of contextualization, presented below.

Weakly contextualized research is conducted within one given discipline, done mostly by university researchers, and supported through publicly financed programs. Researchers disseminate their findings through peer-reviewed journals with little dissemination to stakeholders outside of the scientific community. Weakly contextualized research corresponds closely to Mode 1 research.

Contextualized research of the middle range involves the participation of stakeholders, who may enter the process at different stages from the identification of research priorities to the development of questions to the conduct of the research. Within such environments, the ongoing participation of a broad range of stakeholders usually requires negotiations to establish the rules of engagement. The researchers usually control the process and thus the extent to which the 'society' can speak to and be heard by 'science' depends very much on the resolution of such power issues (Nowotny et al. 2001: 50-65). Lastly, when knowledge is highly contextualized the contributions of all stakeholders are fully integrated and are incorporated into all phases of the knowledge cycle (design, production and dissemination). This strong integration of all contributions is when knowledge production truly becomes transdisciplinary (Nowotny et al. 2001: 223; Gibbons et al. 1994: 29). The production of knowledge to generate a capacity for action is assuming increasing importance, becoming a strong feature of highly contextualized knowledge. But the authors admit that it is not easy to 'identify unequivocal examples of strong contextualization' (Nowotny et al. 2001: 134).

These nuances between the three degrees of contextualization are key in understanding the difference between the knowledge activities of the CSOs. The next section presents an overview of the main criticisms towards the proposals of Gibbons et al. (1994) and Nowotny et al. (2001).

Criticisms of research contextualization

Three main criticisms, all of them related to power issues, were voiced about the authors' theoretical proposals on contextualization: 1) the preexisting power relationships between stakeholders can be reproduced even during Mode 2 research (Weingart 1997: 591-613); 2) there is a danger of instrumentalization of the process by powerful stakeholders (Audétat 2001: 950-956; Pestre 2003: 245-261; Caswill and Shove 2000:154-157); and 3) research could produce knowledge of dubious validity, having been the subject of interference by various stakeholders who are also interest groups (Ziman 1996: 751-754). To these it is possible to add a fourth, which is the limited integration of research dissemination and utilization into their framework. By applying the focus on knowledge production, the authors (Nowotny et al. 2001; Gibbons et al. 1994) implicitly take for granted that dissemination and utilization would occur either through researchers 'pushing' their research findings to potential users (in Mode 1) or through their gradual absorption by the stakeholders who take part in the research (in Mode 2). But researchers often do more than just "push" their research results to potential users: they engage with them in dialogue, albeit irregularly, and disseminate knowledge beyond the context of its production to reach stakeholders not identified at the onset of their research.

To address these conceptual limitations, the models of research dissemination and utilization presented below were added to the conceptual framework for this study.

Models of research dissemination and utilization

The models classifying the knowledge dissemination strategies include: science-push, demand-pull and interactive (Landry and Lamari 2001). Unsurprisingly, many authors have found that the degree of interaction between the knowledge producers and potential users before, during and after the research is one of the most promising predictors of research utilization (Nutley et al. 2007: 119-120; Callon 1999; Huberman 1990: 363-391).

The models of research utilization present three main ways in which new knowledge can influence public policy and practice (Nutley et al. 2007: 33-60; Weiss 1979: 426-431). First, the instrumental use of knowledge refers to its direct utilization for decision-making with regards to policies, programs or professional practices. Second, knowledge can be utilized conceptually to influence a change in the attitudes, knowledge and behaviors of specific groups. Finally, knowledge can also be used in a strategic way to support a position or to counter a position adopted by opponents.

Although it was beyond the purview of this research to identify the extent to which potential users have utilized the knowledge produced by the CSOs, the models of research dissemination and utilization mentioned above were helpful in understanding knowledge dissemination objectives and activities.

Methodology: a multiple case study research

The chosen methodology for this research project was case study research, defined as:

[...] an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. (Yin 2009: 18).

A case study can be intrinsic, when the purpose is to learn about the particular case, or instrumental, when aimed at understanding a particular phenomenon through studying one or several cases (Stake 1995: 3). The study presented in this paper was instrumental.

The research objectives and methodology were presented to the 30 Ghanaian CSOs engaged in the production and dissemination of knowledge, and ten of these organizations agreed to participate. All ten indicated they were engaged in research and knowledge-based advocacy since their establishment (between 1974 and 2000). However, they articulated these two aspects of their mission in three different ways: three of them conducted research supported by what they described as advocacy (hereafter research-based organizations), three others had an advocacy mandate and produced knowledge through research to support their advocacy work (hereafter

advocacy-based organizations). The last four were primarily program-delivery and advocacy organizations who produced knowledge to support their advocacy work (hereafter program delivery organizations). The table below presents the profile of the participating CSOs (Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of the participating CSOs

	Research-based organizations	Advocacy-based organizations	Program delivery Organizations
Priority Themes	Macroeconomic policies, parliamentary affairs, the role of civil society in Ghana's development, youth unemployment.	Women's rights, gender equality in local governance structures, free market economy, the use of ICT for development.	Education, nature conservation, the impacts of mining activities on rural communities, women's rights.
Funding Organizations	Multilateral and bilateral development organizations.	International CSOs, multilateral and bilateral development agencies, European and American private research think tanks.	Multilateral and bilateral development agencies, international CSOs and private sector businesses (mining and forestry sectors).
Annual Budget (in Canadian Dollars, 2006)	1- 1.5 million	1 million (only one organization provided the information)	350 000 to 1.6 million
Number of employees	14-25	4-10	16-45

The data were collected from May 2007 to May 2008 through 33 semi-structured in-depth interviews held with 21 CSO representatives; 11 interviews with representatives of 9 funding organizations (5 development agencies, two international CSOs and two private sector businesses); and two focus group discussions, one with a team from a multilateral agency and the other with a research team from a participating CSO. The participants located in Ghana were interviewed in person while those representing funding agencies located outside Ghana were interviewed via telephone.

These interviews were complimented by the analysis of 379 documents. As presented in Table 2, the documents analyzed were collected from three main sources.

Table 2: Types of documents

Source	CSOs (312)	Funding Agencies (43)	Other Sources (24)	Total
Type of Document	-Research: 92 -Advocacy: 129 - Management: 91	-Project management: 25 -Studies/ Concept papers: 18	-Third party research/reports: 15 -Public documents: 9	379

The diversity of documents reviewed in terms of formats, topics, purpose and quality created challenges for their analysis but their large number assisted in triangulating and corroborating the data collected.

The coding of data was completed with the help of Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. The initial coding involved the use of a list of codes developed on the basis of the key dimensions of the conceptual framework: degree of research contextualization, types of dissemination strategies, dissemination objectives, linkages between research, advocacy and, when applicable, service delivery. New codes emerged during the initial coding of interview transcripts and documents: level of stakeholder's participation, degree of interaction of dissemination activities, type of research protocols utilized, the use and sources of secondary data and the use of knowledge to support the empowerment of vulnerable groups. The initial set of coded documents were coded a second time to capture data related to the new codes. Following the coding, the ten, mostly descriptive, individual case studies were completed. A cross-case analysis within each of the three CSO categories followed to identify similarities and differences in their activities.

The main limitation of this study is the obvious fact that it is not possible to generalize its results. There was no prior study on this topic and the intent was to paint a general portrait of what one would find through a closer look at the activities of endogenous CSOs involved in knowledge production and dissemination.

Findings

Diversity in knowledge production and dissemination

The knowledge production activities, as presented in Table 3 below, covered a wide range of topics, both focused and broad based.

Table 3: Overview of research activities

Focused	Broader Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacles to access of ICTs for marginalized groups. • Experiences of women elected to sit at District Assemblies. • Challenges experienced by female Liberian refugees living in a camp in the Accra area. • A census of specific flora and fauna species. • Use of ICTs to improve farming yields. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional disparities in the incidence of poverty. • Impact of pharmaceutical patents on Ghanaians' access to basic drugs. • Effects of decentralization policies on basic service delivery. • Impact of macroeconomic policies on poverty levels. • The quality of basic education in various districts.

The participating CSOs all produced knowledge on priority topics because it was not available from other sources. The scarcity of data was particularly acute in the case of groups advocating for gender issues looking for sex-disaggregated data.

The main data collection techniques utilized included: surveys, macroeconomic analysis, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, life stories and testimonies. All participating CSOs used secondary data produced in Ghana by Ghanaian researchers, combined with a small amount of data produced by foreign

organizations. One of the ten CSOs did not use primary data but rather used secondary data produced by research think tanks located in the UK and USA to support its advocacy claims.

The data analysis did not lead to the identification of common patterns of knowledge production and dissemination. Even within each of the three initial CSO categories, there were more differences than similarities in how the CSOs produced and disseminated knowledge. The varying patterns of knowledge production and dissemination found among the sample of ten CSOs are indicative of the various degrees of knowledge contextualization, illustrated with examples in the section below.

Degrees of knowledge contextualization: three examples

Three CSOs produce weakly contextualized knowledge, while two others have an average contextualization level and the knowledge produced by the remaining five present a strong degree of contextualization. The three examples below illustrate the main degrees of research contextualization, found among the sample of 10 CSOs.

Weak Contextualization

One research-based organization produces research on macroeconomic issues through the use of secondary data produced by Ghanaian and other organizations. The production of knowledge occurred within both disciplinary and physical boundaries: all researchers were trained economists and thus no other discipline was represented on their team. The researchers used quantitative methodologies to conduct surveys and macroeconomic analysis. They did not engage with stakeholders before and during the conduct of the research. A research on the steep increases in the cost of fuel presented quantitative data but contained no reference as to how this situation affected the various segments of the Ghanaian population. Once research was completed, reports were distributed and public presentations were delivered to policy makers and university students. The frontiers between the researchers and the stakeholders of their research are rather tight, leaving little room for input from other disciplines or groups and there was limited interaction involved in the dissemination of their findings. For these reasons, this CSO produces weakly contextualized knowledge which closely corresponds to Mode 1 research.

Middle range contextualization

One advocacy-based CSO's mission is to promote gender equality within local governance structures. It produced research through the use of participatory methodologies, as illustrated by their study on the experience of women who had been elected to sit in a District Assembly (DA), Ghana's local governance structure. Consisting of 76 testimonies collected through lengthy in-depth interviews, the main research publication presents a vivid account of the obstacles that Ghanaian women had to overcome to run for office and to participate in DA's deliberations. The findings were validated with the participants before being packaged in different formats for dissemination to various audiences – a research report, contribution to the National Manifesto on Gender Equality and training programs for female candidates in District Assembly elections. These efforts helped make the most of the knowledge

produced through reaching various audiences in order to influence public opinion on female candidates, empower these candidates and support the CSO's position on the role of women in local governance structures. In this example of contextualization of the middle range, society speaks to science but not very loudly: the main stakeholders, the elected female DA members, did not take part in the design of the research nor did they participate in the choice of topics or issues being addressed through data collection. Rather, the researchers controlled the process and the stakeholders were involved in validating their findings once the research was completed. This limited involvement of the key stakeholders in the choice of research topic and in the design and conduct of the research and in the dissemination of its findings qualifies this research as an example of contextualization of the middle range.

High contextualization

One research-based organization conducted research on the involvement of civil society in shaping development policies and programs. Their researchers involved the stakeholders in all steps of their research (design, implementation, analysis and identification of priority actions to be undertaken on the basis of the knowledge produced) through the organization of public forums during which the participants were invited to come and share the priority issues that they thought should be addressed by the researchers. The knowledge produced was shared with stakeholders before, during and after the knowledge production process, through the distribution of research reports and the organization of public discussion forums involving a wide range of stakeholders engaged in discussing the findings and their implications. This CSO also succeeded in gaining access to an international donors' conference during which it presented its research findings on the involvement of civil society in public policy making. These practices correspond to those of highly contextualized research because the researchers maintain an ongoing dialogue with the stakeholders during and after the research which impacts on the questions addressed through the research and on the utilization of the findings. This openness to the outside environment is also part of what we have defined above as the context of implication, which extends beyond the application of the findings. The next section presents the findings as regards the dissemination objectives and strategies of the ten CSOs.

Dissemination objectives and strategies

The knowledge dissemination strategies adopted by the CSOs varied in terms of objectives pursued, activities implemented and degree of interaction with potential users. Table 4 presents the range of strategies used to reach the potential users of the knowledge produced.

The participating CSOs all said that their main dissemination objective was to influence policies, thus echoing a widely held view that research should directly influence policy or program decisions (Nutley et al. 2007: 307). But seven of them (those involved in contextualized research) pursued a diversity of objectives through a mix of one-way and interactive dissemination strategies. For example, a program delivery organization was doing research on legal issues related to support to the increasing number of Ghanaian children born out of wedlock. Their dissemination

strategies were aimed at influencing the opinions and attitudes of local leaders, legal advisors and policy makers (conceptual), empowering the mothers of these children (emancipatory), advocating in favor of these women’s rights (strategic) and, ultimately, changing policies to ensure more protection for these children (instrumental). They wrote policy briefs to be distributed to key national level decision makers, travelled to several districts to meet with local chiefs, legal advisors and the population through private and public meetings during which they shared their findings and published a research report.

Table 4: Knowledge dissemination strategies

One-Way Strategies		Interactive Strategies		
Document Distribution	Public Presentations	Networking	Training	Dialogue
Newspaper articles Scientific publication Briefing and other short documents Research reports	Conferences University Lectures Radio or television interviews Public demonstrations	Transfer of knowledge to key people Provision of knowledge to gain the support of influential people: traditional chiefs, senior officials	Delivery of training	Sensitization workshops Various forms of dialogue with stakeholders: durbar, theatre, songs, open lines on the radio or television, video presentations followed by discussions, frequent visits to the same groups.

These CSOs were thus able to make the most of their research dissemination through open dialogue with key stakeholders, a key feature of Mode 2 research. But these new opportunities also bring challenges not experienced by researchers engaged in Mode 1 research. The next section is devoted to three such challenges generated by the engagement of the Ghanaian CSOs in Mode 2 research.

Moving to the context of implication: tensions generated by Mode 2 research

In the case of the seven CSOs engaged in Mode 2 research, the openness to the context that is characteristic of this research mode leads to the emergence of the context of implication. Located beyond the direct application of findings, the context of implication refers to all interactions, implications and consequences that a given research can generate, often unbeknownst to the researchers at the onset of a project. This more open environment is being shaped by the research, which is in turn being influenced by these interactions with the society (Nowotny et al. 2001: 159-165). As regards the knowledge work of the Ghanaian CSOs, the context of implication may include the mutual influence between the research, advocacy and program activities of the program-delivery organizations, the actions of youth to pressure the central and local governments to address some of their obstacles in finding employment or the mobilization of a community affected by the negative impacts of mining, identified

through participatory research. The section below presents three challenges related to the context of implication within which these seven CSOs engage in Mode 2 research.

Relationships with development partners and other decision-makers

The research conducted by the seven CSOs engaged in Mode 2 research opens new opportunities for interaction with development partners and other decision makers. The CSOs' capacity to support their advocacy claims with research findings increases their legitimacy as development stakeholders. In fact, that is why development partners are funding some of these CSOs, so that they can take part in policy dialogue on development issues (Boesen 2007; Lawson et al. 2007). But all participating CSOs shared their difficulties in entering the various types of policy forums that they would like to influence, including issue-based forums, national policy debates or discussions between government and donor partnersⁱ. They cited two main reasons for this. First, their funding agencies did not offer financial support to their dissemination activities, thus revealing little understanding of the importance of such activities. Second, they were not able to access policy dialogue forums, where they could have presented their findings and engaged with the other stakeholders. It seems that their funding agencies did not have the capacity or willingness to facilitate their participation in national development policy dialogues.

However, development partners do invite CSOs to take part in forums whenever they feel it is appropriate. It was even reported that in some Ghanaian policy forums, CSOs engaged in research outnumber and even replace university-based researchers, to the point that some Ghanaian researchers have complained about the potentially negative outcomes that this poses to the development of the postsecondary education sector (Manuh et al. 2007; Aryeetey 2005; Sawyer 2004: 213-242). This points to potential impacts on the relationships between the universities and these CSOs and, by extension, on the knowledge production sector.

Clearly, the CSOs have little power in deciding when and how they can take part in development forums to share their research results and advocate for change on behalf of their constituencies. These tensions, due to the modalities of donor support to Ghana's knowledge production organizations, result in lost opportunities for making the most of available research and for strengthening knowledge production in Ghana.

Moving beyond the instrumental use of knowledge

These seven CSOs engage in comprehensive dissemination strategies pursuing various objectives. Their strategies address the many factors that can influence the impact of new knowledge on decision-making: power issues, the timing of the research, its relevance to current debates, the background of researchers and the capacity and willingness of those targeted to make use of the knowledge available (Nutley et al. 2007: 61-90). In addition, some of them were addressing controversial issues, like domestic violence, for which some form of social consensus must be built before policy options can be considered, thus making it even more important to use a mix of dissemination strategies and objectives.

Given this complexity, it is to be expected that direct influence of knowledge on a given policy would be a rare occurrence (Weiss 1979) and that the main use of knowledge is very often indirect, diffuse and difficult to identify precisely:

[...] the main area of utilization consists of an indirect (bound to undergo further decision processes), diffuse (taken into account to various degrees and at different positions), difficult to localize utilization responsibility (distributed over various decision levels) and possibly delayed discursive processing of the results[...] (Knorr 1977: 165-182)

But by asserting that their sole objective was to affect change in policies, these CSOs could not see all the richness contained in their dissemination strategies, most likely because of the influence of the discourse on the instrumental use of knowledge, which might lead them to believe that the only result worth considering is a direct change in policy. There were many examples like this one where knowledge producers were indeed speaking to society in a very effective way to facilitate various types of change and not only policy change. Recognizing the richness of these comprehensive strategies is key in recognizing the potential of knowledge to affect change.

Epistemological dissonance and research quality

The triangulation of data coming from various sources (plans, data collection tools, raw data, reports and other publications) revealed some inconsistencies between the research design and the official publications produced to disseminate the findings to various groups, including their funding organizations. For instance, research conducted with participatory methodologies or research that relied on the use of life stories was sometimes presented in reports to funding agencies as having been carried out through the use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Another common source of epistemological dissonance is the presentation of the results of qualitative research involving a small sample of participants in quantitative formats, thus resulting in a loss of richness combined with an inability to portray a statistically significant set of results. Another example is the report and article published by a program delivery organization on a study that was described as ‘participatory’. But a review of the research proposal and project report revealed that the ‘participants’ were in fact assistants who provided logistical support to the researchers. In addition, no research report prepared on the sole basis of secondary data discussed the validity and reliability of the data utilized to produce findings.

If the methodologies utilized and the issues of research quality are not presented explicitly in the publications, these inconsistencies may result in epistemological dissonance for the interested reader. It will make it difficult to reconcile the research findings with the methods utilized to produce them and may lead to questioning the overall quality of the research being presented in support of advocacy claims. By operating in this way, the CSOs undermine the potential effectiveness of research that can be of very good quality. The present research did not allow for a thorough investigation of this phenomenon. However, one possible explanation for this situation could reside in what the CSOs seemed to perceive as acceptable

methodological accounts to be presented to their funding agencies and broader audiences.

Implications for policies and practice

Using evidence to inform policies: a potential opportunity for the CSOs

The use of evidence to inform policy and practice has become a key topic of interest in the international development sector. But there are power issues in determining what is an acceptable source of evidence and these are key in enabling the CSOs to engage effectively in the utilization of knowledge to support advocacy. Nothing guarantees that even the most solid research findings will contribute to policy formulation. But when these CSOs are not explicit enough about the methodologies utilized to produce evidence they place themselves in a vulnerable position in such policy forums. Many research projects reviewed for this study were conducted by highly skilled researchers and their findings were of great quality. The development community must be more proactive in diversifying the sources of knowledge utilized for decision-making. Provided they could be more explicit on the strengths and limitations of their research methodologies, the CSOs can significantly contribute to this process of diversification, which could enhance the relevance of both national development policies and development programs.

Looking at knowledge production as a sector

If offered as a substitute for support to research by postsecondary education institutions, donor support to research conducted by CSOs can have a number of long-term negative impacts on a country's capacity to produce development-relevant knowledge. These can include an impoverishment of intellectual life through researching a narrow range of development-related topics, chosen on the basis of the funders' priorities; missed opportunities to train young researchers; and lack of continuity in research programs in favour of short-term *ad hoc* research projects. But the diversification of Ghanaian knowledge production sites appears to be a lasting phenomenon. The stakeholders should engage in dialogue on how to make the best of Ghana's 'social distribution of knowledge' while keeping in mind the country's long-term knowledge needs.

Conclusion

This study has shown that not all CSOs produce and disseminate knowledge in the same way and that it is important to understand these differences to be able to fully appreciate the contribution of these CSOs to changes in attitudes, behaviours and, ultimately, policies. It has also provided an empirical contribution to the conceptualization of contextualized research by integrating research dissemination and utilization into the analysis. The international development community would learn a great deal by looking more closely at how these organizations implement their

knowledge activities and by utilizing some of their research findings to diversify the sources of evidence utilized to develop policies and programs.

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ⁱ Because of the limited evidence available for the other types of funding organizations this section discusses only the role of the five multilateral and bilateral development agencies that have taken part in the study.