

**Evaluation of The Consumer Unity and Trust Society
(CUTS) Project:
Linkages between Trade, Development and Poverty
Reduction**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

- CUTS is an international organisation based in the South. It is one of a small number of Southern NGOs with the capacity to undertake high quality policy work on trade and development issues.
- CUTS is widely respected for its wide-ranging network of contacts, and its ability to bring together key actors from all stakeholder groups for dialogue, research and analysis.
“I have worked with CUTS on many projects.... Its main strengths are its great organisational capacity and the ability to draw in different actors from different parts of the world into their projects and meetings. Having offices in Africa, Geneva and London really helps this.”
- CUTS expansion into S E Asia, Africa and Europe is generally viewed as a positive step but has increased the challenges faced by the organisation.
- CUTS plays an important role in helping to strengthen the capacities of Developing and Least Developed Countries on trade, development, investment and competition issues through providing in-depth analysis based on national level research undertaken by local organisations. These governments appreciate CUTS emphasis on using local research experts and consulting with governments as this results in research that captures realities often missed by external consultants.

The Trade Development and Poverty Project

- The Trade Development and Poverty (TDP) project was large and complex in its design and implementation. It covered 13 countries and involved 19 partner organisations.
- The project outputs included 39 national research papers, two synthesis volumes, 3 advocacy documents, 25 articles, 18 briefing papers and in excess of 14 international and regional conferences. The difficulties faced by CUTS CITEE in implementing the project should be seen in this context of this impressive quantity of products.
- However, the outcomes from the project were undermined by changes in its design and failure to address to strategise for sustained influencing of policy makers and other key actors.
- The TDP project has allowed CUTS to become well known in many Asian and African countries, and to position itself as a significant actor able to support Developing and Least Developed Country governments and civil society organisations.

Poverty Focus in the Research

- The TDP project has delivered a substantial body of information on trade development and poverty issues. This provides a good knowledge base for further analysis and for the formulation of a research based influencing strategy.
- The poverty focus in sectoral studies is variable in quality and overall would have benefited from being informed by existing analytical frameworks for the investigating the links

between trade and poverty. Without this guidance, some studies fail to give sufficient attention to poverty impacts.

- Greater attention to the different effects on men and women and on marginalised sections of society would have produced more nuanced insights into who gains and who loses from changes in trade and other policies.
- The relevance and value of the TDP studies is that they contribute to a very limited literature on how trade, development and poverty impact on specific sectors and on poor and marginalised women and men.

South-South and North South Linkages

- The project logframe indicates that linkages were key to building networks able to undertake mutual learning; act as a foundation for strengthening the capacity of developing countries in relation to the international trading system; advocate on behalf of the poor with a focus on women; and ensure appropriate pro-poor policy responses were developed.
- The limited opportunities for partners to get to know each other - mostly at regional and international events organised by CUTS and via email exchanges - proved to be an insufficient basis for building strong South-South relationships and networks. North-South linkages were also weak.
- The structure of the relationships between those involved in the project was very much a spider-web with CUTS at the centre and in direct communication with everyone. Horizontal communication between partners and others involved in TDP was limited and occurred most often in South Asia. Here long-term partners also share relationships beyond the project, for example, as members of the SAWTEE network.
- The result was that the networks that were supposed to be formed through links created by the TPD project did not materialise. Neither did the basis they were intended to create for the provision of policy support to southern governments. This leaves effective influencing in the hands of individual organisations and CUTS.
- A strategy for network formation would have produced better results.

Partnership

- Working with 19 partner organisations in 13 countries stretched the capacity of CUTS CITEE. As a consequence, too much attention was focused on the implementation of project activities rather than securing outcomes in terms of partnership development, let alone changes in policy or practice.
- The need for some partners to be provided with targeted support and capacity building was underestimated in the design of the project, and did not get priority during project implementation.
- Partner organisations were able to have some influence on project design at the project launch meeting (once the project proposal had been agreed with donors) and at a later stage

were allowed to choose the focus for sectoral research. Partners did not have a major say in the changes in project design and other decisions during project implementation.

- There is a noticeable difference between long-term (mostly South Asian) and short-term (mostly African) partners. Interviews with newer “partners” revealed that they felt their relationship with CUTS was more functional than a genuine partnership.

Influencing and Advocacy

- No clear advocacy strategy was developed at the start of the project to accommodate the diverse interests of participating countries. This reduced the project’s ability to impact on policy making.
- The CUTS CITEE website and its TDP section both require serious remedial work to make the research generated by the project easily available. Without this, and without any ongoing advocacy, much of the value of the project will be lost.
- There have been some advocacy successes as a result of the project and there may be more in the future. In general these were achieved through partners using their own initiative and skills to pursue policy changes in ways that went beyond what the project required.

Management and organisation

- CUTS has grown rapidly over the last decade. Despite this, it has been able to maintain an organisational culture that is characterised by professionalism, discipline and dedication.
- In the future some core organisational strengthening is needed to ensure that CUTS does not lose its effectiveness and impact.
- The organisation has a stable team of senior managers but there frequent changes of junior and middle level staff which, for the TDP project, resulted in a continuous loss of experience and discontinuity in relationships with partners.
- Management of the complex TDP project proved to be a major challenge for CUTS. Insufficient staff time was allocated to the project in its original design and as a consequence, inputs from CUTS CITEE were spread too thinly.
- In the future, it would be good for projects to have monitoring and evaluation systems that demand an explicit focus on outcomes and an account of how these outcomes will be assessed.
- The financial management system in place seems satisfactory from the point of view of accountability, but less so from a project management perspective with insufficient information being given to project managers and expenditures being allocated against budgeted costs, not against actuals.
- CUTS is dependent on project funding to cover its core costs in addition to project activities. This seems to result in an emphasis on project implementation and outputs at the expense of a strategic perspective regarding the organisation’s overall aims and programmes. *“There is a need for CUTS to focus on real outcomes. Does the project deliver something, however small, that improves even indirectly the lives of poor communities?”*

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY FOR THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was commissioned by DFID and MINBUZA and took place between March and June 2009. An independent evaluation of the project, commissioned by CUTS, was carried out by Ace Global consultants based in Delhi in late 2008 and the report was received by DFID in late February 2009. An analysis of this evaluation in relation to the interests expressed in a draft terms of reference drawn up by DFID and MINBUZA for their own evaluation revealed a number of gaps. It was decided that understanding more about CUTS overall approaches and strategies would be important in the light of future grants.¹

This evaluation addresses these gaps and focuses on the following five areas of CUTS work:

- i. the extent to which project papers focus directly on the impacts of trade on poor and marginalised people and communities
- ii. the links made between Northern and Southern actors, including donors to the project, and outcomes from these relationships
- iii. CUTS partnership philosophy/approach and framework for capacity building and institutional development
- iv. CUTS influencing strategies at national and international levels and how it expects to move from research to policy change
- v. TDP project management issues, including human resources, monitoring and evaluation systems, financial accounting and reporting plus CUTS overall strategic approach including future expansion and growth

During the evaluation, a review of TDP project documents and research was carried out, alongside an investigation of the CUTS website and an email survey of CUTS readership. The consultants met with staff, partners and others familiar with CUTS' work in the India, the Netherlands, England and Switzerland. In addition, partners and other contacts were interviewed by telephone.

i. The extent to which project papers focus directly on the impacts of trade on poor and marginalised people and communities

The first round of TDP project studies undertaken by partners focused on the links between national trade and development policies. These are fully discussed in the Ace Global evaluation (see summary extract in Appendix One). Most of the studies focus on reforms in national level trade and development policies and provide information relating to overall growth in GDP alongside trends in the incidence of poverty. Some give an overview of sectoral impacts. The papers contribute to the theoretical debates on the relationship between different forms of trade and overall economic growth and on whether and how growth links to poverty alleviation. But they do not explore in any detail how reforms have affected the lives of poor and marginalised communities. A good summary of these debates is contained

¹ For further information see the inception report: "Evaluation of Linkages between Trade, Development and Poverty Reduction (TDP) The Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) Project, Inception Report DFID-BERR TPU/MINBUZA, 31st March 2009.

in the first chapter of CUTS' Trade-Development-Poverty Linkages Volume I, as well as in the first TDP advocacy document.

The second round of sectoral/perception studies by partners explored specific sectors and looked more closely at how the changes in trade and development policies were impacting on chosen sectors and on the lives poor people and communities including women. The choice of the sectors was left to the partners, something which they appreciated greatly. CUTS sometimes tried to influence the selection but often partners followed their own preferences. This resulted in an interesting mix of studies (see below). The advantage of allowing the choice of sector to take place at national level was that this ensured greater local ownership and ideally would mean that the sector selected was relevant to current national reform agendas. The disadvantage was that comparisons were more difficult to make. However, since the geographical, economic, trade and poverty contexts in participating countries are very different comparisons would in any case need to be made with care.

Table One: List of Sectoral/Perception Studies

COUNTRY	FIRST SECTOR	SECOND SECTOR
Bangladesh	Readymade garments	Cell phones
Cambodia	Garments	Fisheries
China	Agriculture	Home appliances
India	Oilseeds	Carpets
Kenya	Telecoms	Cotton textiles
Nepal	Garments	Tea
Pakistan	Telecoms	Cutlery
Sri Lanka	Garments	Textiles
South Africa	Clothing	Tourism
Tanzania	Fisheries	Cotton and Textiles
Uganda	Dairy	Maize
Vietnam	Shrimp	Footwear and garments

No specific terms of reference were formulated for the studies. Partners were made aware of the need to focus on the relationship between trade and poverty and provided with guidelines that stated that one of the sectors chosen should represent an instance where changes in trade policy had resulted in improvements in the lives of poor people, while the other should represent an instance where their welfare had been adversely affected. In addition, it was made clear that the partners were expected to gather the perceptions of different sector stakeholders, including poor people, regarding the social and economic factors and policies that had influenced positive and negative changes in the sector and in their lives.

These guidelines were outlined in a general Service Contract between CUTS and its partners that limited the length of the papers but did not stipulate the inclusion of, for example, executive summaries, key messages, references or lists of those consulted.

According to CUTS staff, the supervision and quality control of the studies was limited. Theoretically, this was the responsibility of the project coordinator but, in practice, it was provided mainly by the Director of CITEE. Generally, contact was by e-mail. In a number of cases, partners had to be reminded repeatedly of the need to complete their work.

However, it would have been useful for CUTS to establish an effective means of quality control as this might have reduced the large variation in the numbers and range of poor people consulted and the attention paid to the different impacts on men and women. In addition, it would have been helpful to provide advice on the scope expected and on methods that could be used to gather information from, and assess the different interests of, poor and marginalised people.

Clearly within the funding and time constraints of the project, it would not have been possible to carry out comprehensive surveys of the perceptions of poor people across a range of geographical regions. Nor to address all the implications of gender inequality and other forms of discrimination and exclusion. However, the studies would have benefited from being informed by a more rigorous analytical framework. And, since trade reforms take place alongside other macro-economic changes in policy and practice, from an attempt to disaggregate these different drivers. A number of frameworks² could have been employed by partners to strengthen their studies and might have resulted in greater coherence. As it is, the collection of sectoral/perception studies is very diverse in style and quality and while some are excellent, others could have focused more closely on the impacts on poor women and men.

While some of the sectoral studies can be criticised for being descriptive rather than analytical and others for consulting with rather small numbers of stakeholders, taken together they make a valuable contribution to the literature and a useful exploration of the direct impacts of policy changes on specific sectors.

² For example: Bird, K., Anderson, E., Gillson, I., 'Assessing the impact of trade liberalisation on children: a conceptual framework.' May 2005. Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London; Bird, K., Kamau, P. and Odhiambo, W., 'Trade-Poverty Linkages in Kenya.' 2004, Overseas Development Institute, London; Bird, K., 'A framework to analyse linkages between trade policy, poverty reduction and sustainable development, March 2004, London; Fontana, M. and Wood, A., 'Modelling the Effects of Trade on Women, at Work and at Home', 2000 in *World Development* 28.7:1173-90; Hertel, T. W. and Winters, A. L., eds, *Poverty and the WTO: Impacts of the Doha Development Agenda*, 2006, World Bank and Palgrave Macmillan UK; Perry, G. and Olarreaga, M., *Trade Liberalization, Inequality and Poverty Reduction in Latin America*, Paper presented at ABCDE, January 2006, San Petersburg; Winters, L.A. "Trade Liberalisation and Poverty: What are the Links?", September 2002, *The World Economy*, Vol. 25, Issue 9, pp.1339-1367.

The relevance of the studies has been increased by the fact that many of them have been updated in the course of the preparation of Volume II of Trade-Development-Poverty Linkages. This contains an analysis and synthesis of the findings which also can be found in the 2nd advocacy document and provides useful pointers for policy makers.

ii The links made between Northern and Southern actors, including donors to the project, and outcomes from these relationships

The thinking behind wanting to create linkages between stakeholders in the South and between them and stakeholders in the North is evident in the project logframe. This refers repeatedly to the building of networks able to share and learn from each others experiences; create a foundation for strengthening the capacity of developing countries in relation to the international trading system; advocate on behalf of the poor with a focus on women; and ensure appropriate pro-poor policy responses are developed.

However, it seems that there was no specific strategy for network creation, coordination and maintenance. For example, partners and other stakeholders had the opportunity to meet one another on the side lines of regional and international meetings but there were no special activities designed to ensure relationships were built and common interests shared. Aside from the pre-meetings for UNCTAD XII, there is no evidence of partners and others engaging in joint analysis of TDP findings to produce shared policy positions that might have provided the motivation for more continuous contact between them. The comment of one partner reflected the views of many: *“the time involved when meeting with other stakeholders was too short. Maybe you were just presenting a paper at a meeting then listening to others speak, or being asked questions in the breaks. This is not enough to form a long-lasting relationship.”*

Networks

- A network can be defined as any group of individuals or organizations who on a voluntary basis, exchange information or goods or implement joint activities and who organise themselves for that purpose in such a way that individual autonomy remains intact.
- Successful network formation is based on potential members perceiving a mutual interest and/or a common concern. Interests can include skills building, achieving organisational aims, interacting with a new people and organisations, giving exposure to their own work, etc.
- Effective networks need to have
 - clear aims and objectives
 - clear roles and responsibilities for members
 - explicit decision-making processes
 - a coordinator/chair/convenor (may be voluntary or paid)
 - dispute resolution processes
 - clarity on the sharing and ownership of intellectual property
 - clear processes for deciding on activities, influencing positions, public statements, etc.
- The structure a network decides to adopt is shaped by the motivation and the way in which the network was formed, as well as the purposes for which it was established or evolved.
- The type of networks envisaged in the TDP logframe must have not only the capacity for mutual learning and support but also be able to act as a platform for action in order to promote research and

influence government policies.

- Members of such a network would need to be able to:
 - decide what information is worth paying attention to and organise unmanageable amounts of information
 - undertake or access quality research
 - develop and implement communications and advocacy strategies
 - take little known or little understood ideas and make them more widely understood
 - understand how to bridge the research and policy gap
 - manage logistics, finances and IT
 - manage changes in both its internal and external environment
 - bring together stakeholders or groups of stakeholders.

Nevertheless, long-term partners of CUTS appreciated the opportunities provided by TDP to strengthen their relationships with one another. Those partners engaged in the first round of country case studies exchanged drafts and provided each other with feedback and this helped to further build relationships that had been established through previous projects. These partners also appreciated the opportunity to get to know organisations outside South Asia that *“may be followed up later”*. And *“working across and learning from different regions was one of the most interesting things for us”*.

However, while all partners interviewed welcomed the opportunity to get to know organisations and individuals from different countries and continents during interviews no one, including partners in South Asia, was able to identify a new relationship that had been formed, sustained or resulted in concrete action as a result of their involvement in the TDP project.³

The same was true for relationships and networks arising from North-South links forged at international meetings. In the original project proposal a key vehicle for forming such links was the Producer-Consumer Dialogues. When it became apparent that organising these dialogues was not feasible, they were replaced by a series of meetings in Europe on Aid for Trade organised by the London Resource Centre. Where TDP partners were invited to these meetings they were able to meet stakeholders and policy makers from the North. But in interviews it was participants from the North who seem to have engaged in the most productive networking, often building on existing relationships with e.g. DFID TPU staff, WTO officials, academics, and NGOs engaged in trade issues. However, as one interviewee commented, *“the same crowd turns up at all the events, so it is not difficult to build networks.”*

One aspect of North-South linkages that could have been strengthened were relationships between partners and the project’s donors, not least since the latter are considered to be influential in setting national policy frameworks. The reasons why this was facilitated are not clear but it was a missed opportunity.

³ CUTS points to the links it has fostered between partners in South Asia and an independent organisation South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM) as well as the relationship it has helped to develop between SANEM and SAWTEE an independent South Asia network. This was not commented on by South Asian partners, perhaps because the majority of them are SAWTEE members, or because they did not see new relationships as having emerged from the TDP project.

In a brainstorming about areas which should be improved in future projects, CUTS CITEE staff the need to work on further strengthening of South-South and North-South linkages. In contrast, another member of CUTS staff emphasised that the linkages between CUTS, its partners and other actors involved in the TDP project have strengthened CUTS's position in multilateral trade circles. For example, CUTS is now asked to give presentations at the OECD from time to time because it is seen to have a more representative view of issues facing developing countries.

The expanded South- South linkages created between CUTS and the countries participating in the TDP project also have impacted on CUTS thinking by broadening the minds of its staff. They no longer see trade issues from an Indian or South Asian perspective instead recognising that the issues in Africa and South East Asia are different. This means CUTS is more careful in adopting advocacy positions and aspires to having a more holistic insight into issues.

iii. CUTS partnership philosophy/approach and framework for capacity building and institutional development

Effective partnerships with different actors (including research organisations, advocacy organisations, international organisations, national governments, sector organisations and donors) were key to the effective implementation of the TDP project. CUTS CITEE selected 19 partners in 13 countries. In seven countries it had one partner that was able to deliver both research and advocacy. In six countries this combination of competencies could not be found and CUTS CITEE selected different research and advocacy organisations.

Partnership

A partnership is a voluntary arrangement between independent organisations. The concept of partnership has been the subject of much debate among NGOs and has often been used carelessly in development jargon.

A very diverse set of relationships with very different characteristics have been described as "partnerships". For example, a "partnerships" might be a funding-only relationship, or it could describe a relationship based on policy dialogue and cooperation only with no funding involved. Again, some donor-recipient "partnerships" involve full control of recipient partners, while others are based on unconditional trust. Finally, "partnership" may be based on relationships between two strong autonomous organisations of equal capacity, or between one stronger, more experienced partner and one with limited capacity.

For the purposes of this evaluation, genuine partnership between two organisations in a context where one funds the other is assumed to be characterised by:

- shared vision and objectives
- acceptance and accommodation of differences, approach, values, result orientation; mutual respect and appreciation of each others' capabilities
- long-term relationships that go beyond time-bound and discrete interventions such as the classic development project

- solidarity that goes beyond financial aid and/or a functional engagement designed to achieve the aims of the donor organisation
- effective communications, regular contacts and good personal relationships
- a style of work in which the indirect power and influence conferred by control over funding and/or by unequal size and capacity is addressed explicitly in an effort to create more equal relationships and mutual ownership of activities
- provision of capacity building support to build organisational and operational strength
- a systematic and consistent approach to feedback mechanisms concerning individual partnership relationships and safe, formal processes for recipient/smaller partners to give feedback on the performance of donor/larger ones.
- greater mutuality in the negotiation of partnership agreements based on consultations between donor and recipient partners during planning and policy processes
- reciprocal accountability and full transparency on all areas of work between partners
- involvement of partners in agenda setting and, for well established partners, in decision-making
- sustained commitment to achieve common objectives

In many countries where the TDP project operated, especially South Asian countries, partners had already worked with CUTS, or were known to CUTS. In Africa more new partners were involved and the choice of partners was restricted by the small number of institutes working on trade and development. No formal organisational assessment of partners was done and the main criteria for selecting partners seems to have been prior knowledge of their work, or web-based research to assess their professional competence. The focus of partners on poverty alleviation issues was not a significant criterion in the choice of partners, although all the organisations (Africa based and others) had been working on poverty related issues in some manner prior to their selection.

Role of partners in the project

The project began with a launch-cum-inception meeting held in India to discuss and agree what would be covered by the project. Partners views were heard and within the constraints of what had been agreed with the project's donors, some changes were made. *"It was a good meeting, because we changed the ToRs and increased the budgets – which otherwise wouldn't haven't covered the work needed. CUTS had underestimated the costs of this work in Africa."*

Notwithstanding their inputs at the inception meeting, none of the partners had a significant role in project wide decision-making once the project was launched, nor is it clear that they were consulted when major changes to the project design were made. All research partners were invited to comment on the first set of country case studies, but many opted not to do so, and final decisions were made in Jaipur.

In general long-term partners, mainly in South Asia, felt most involved in the project. For some newer partners, including those in Africa, the relationship was more like that between a donor and recipient, than between equals engaged in a common venture. As a consequence,

the project was perceived as a CUTS initiative and these partners had a limited sense of ownership.⁴

Nevertheless, partners are positive about the logistical support by CUTS. *“We got all the information we needed from CUTS in good time and there were no delays at either end on the project. The only delivery delays were due to late transfer of funds.”* Responses to queries were usually prompt, the professional capacity of CUTS and the freedom left to the partners were appreciated. *“We are very happy with the management side of it, they’ve kept us in touch, checked up on things, asked for our opinions. We had to familiarise ourselves from scratch but that was OK.”*

Capacity building for partners

As highlighted in the sections on research and advocacy, substantive guidance in these areas was limited. The project proposal included four regional capacity building workshops involving key policy makers, civil society representatives, UNCTAD, regional institutions and other stakeholders. It is assumed that these workshops would have combined influencing on project findings with implicit capacity building of project partners on the issues. But in the event, these workshops were replaced by two regional CSO meetings in preparation for UNCTAD XII.

Capacity building during project implementation was limited to ad hoc advice on project activities, disseminating research papers to partners, and participation in some international events. CUTS CITEE staff feel that it became increasingly clear that the research and advocacy capacity, specially in African countries, was less than expected (although this is not fully borne out in terms of what was achieved). The project design did not include targeted skills building but capacity constraints both in CUTS and in some partners have hampered project implementation.

One of the key strengths of CUTS is its international network of trade related organisations. This network has been used to promote the objectives of TDP. This network, however, has not been fully utilised by the partners in the TDP project.

Role of donors in the project

Apart from funding the TDP project and the brief but significant role played by a DFID Nairobi staff member with the Kenya TDP network, donors played a minimal role during project implementation. Participation in national events was sporadic and disappointing, with some exceptions, such as the Netherlands meeting in 2006. Donors rarely provided any support or guidance and when deviations from project plans were proposed in reports, no substantive reaction was given. Even major changes in the project design such as dropping

⁴ In its defence CUT’s argues that it signs “equal partnership agreements” with its partners and encourages them to share their opinions. However, contracts are not sufficient to guarantee ownership of projects. Furthermore, it seems no structured system has been developed for regular feedback from partners on CUTS performance.

plans for national reference groups or producer-consumer dialogues, failed to generate serious comment from the donors.

iv CUTS influencing strategies and how it expects to move from research to policy change, at national and international levels

CUTS approach to advocacy

CUTS CITEE's statement on advocacy⁵ states that "advocacy backed up by research is crucial for making changes happen". It describes the main features of advocacy as being: sensitisation of CSOs; advocacy with other stakeholders - business chambers, farmers' organisations, trade unions, etc.; advocacy with policy-makers – trade negotiators, trade policy-makers, parliamentarians, sub-national governments, etc.; and partnerships at different levels. It will be seen that these statements focus on potential targets for influencing not on the approach to advocacy or the tools to be used. However, the statement does say that "our policy is to conduct collective advocacy with like-minded organisations."

The TDP project proposal itself, which distinguishes advocacy from other forms of outreach, and from networking, gives emphasis to the fact that the organisation "develops its advocacy points after background research and thus, it is information-based advocacy". CITEE staff note that the influencing strategy for TDP was mainly based on developing background material on trade issues and was "supply-driven". They said the pre-conditions for effective advocacy included:

- effective filtration of messages: user friendly language
- understandable and clear analogies
- communication through many different channels
- not be seen to impose
- facilitating contacts with policy makers

They believe that these pre-conditions were mainly met in the case of TDP

While all these statements are true, for CUTS CITEE's advocacy, this adds up to a fairly rudimentary conceptual framework. For the TDP project whose aims included "To advocate development-oriented trade policies" it would have been helpful to develop a basic influencing strategy but this was not done. The lack of a strategy turned out to be a significant weakness. It allowed major shifts in the design of the project to take place without CUTS recognising their negative impact on advocacy and without any alternative activities being developed that would ensure successful influencing.

Components of a basic influencing strategy include:

- Explicit aims and objectives for the influencing work and criteria for assessing these
- Clear recommendations about what needs to change in terms of policy and practice based on research and analysis. (For multi-country it is useful to identify country specific recommendations as well as

⁵ For the purposes of this report, the terms advocacy and influencing are used interchangeably.

recommendations that apply to all developing and/or least developed countries.)

- An understanding of the solutions being proposed by other stakeholders
- A demonstrated understanding of national and international policy making processes and at what stages effective interventions could be made
- An analysis of relevant decision-making spaces – identifying who and when decisions are made in the key institutions and leading to the identification of primary and secondary ‘targets’ for policy influencing, that is those who can make the decision and those who can influence the decision makers
- Identification of the opportunities that exist to influence the issue
- Identification of potential allies for the influencing work
- A review of the arguments that will be used by potential opponents and how these will be handled
- An analysis of the institutional capacities of CUTS CITEE and the TDP partners to undertake the influencing and the human and financial resources needed, accompanied by a plan to address any weaknesses
- A timetabled plan of action, setting out objectives, methods, approach and tone and identifying which components in the advocacy toolbox will be used in which contexts

Discussions with CUTS staff, partners and potential influencing targets reveal that the CUTS approach to advocacy is one of constructive engagement and dialogue based on research carried out by partners and CUTS itself. In the event, the main advocacy tools used by the TDP project were meetings/conferences, dissemination of reports and briefings, and media work. In addition, most participating countries produced a “campaign kit” which was intended to provide user-friendly information for CSOs, the media and members of the public.

CUTS has a record of successful advocacy in India on such issues as establishing a national Inter-State Trade Council; getting pro-development, pro-poor objectives into the national Foreign Trade Policy; and becoming the first NGO representative on a government delegation to a WTO Ministerial. Internationally, CUTS was part of the successful lobby for a tripartite model involving governments, donors and civil society to be employed in Aid for Trade activities.

The organisation’s founder and Secretary General, Pradeep Mehta, is recognised internationally as an effective lobbyist with a huge network of contacts who works well with governments and multilateral institutions. Atul Kaushik and Rashid Kaukab at CUTS’ Geneva Resource Centre also have excellent reputations for effective influencing.⁶ And Gideon Rabinowitz from the London Resource Centre has established a name for himself in Europe. However, few other CUTS staff seem to be well versed in advocacy, or have experience

⁶ CUTS has a very good reputation in trade circles in Geneva and is seen as an organisation that occupies the middle ground and tries to provide practical, alternative solutions to difficulties. It enjoys a close relationship with the WTO especially the Development Division and is respected by Least Developed Country delegations who appreciate its expansion into Africa. “CUTS is very important in enabling the full participation of LDCs because our capacities are weak. They provide in-depth analysis to inform our decisions and their research is very important to us.” WTO delegate

of influencing outside their own countries. Greater efforts are needed to share the experience and skills of CUTS leading advocates with other staff and partners.

Advocacy Support to Partners

Partners were provided with guidance from CUTS CITEE on the activities and outputs expected in relation to advocacy, for example, producing a media brief, preparing a campaign kit and meeting with target audiences, etc., but little advice on how to go about this. Without capacity building and support from CUTS, the success of national advocacy depended wholly on the quality of the research and the advocacy skills of the partners.

For partners who were experienced in advocacy this was not a problem, for those less experienced guidance on how to conduct advocacy activities would have helped them succeed.

Linking Research to Policy Change

Staff recognise that there were some difficulties in effectively linking research to policy change. The project design required the formation of multistakeholder national reference groups that would act as advisory boards to partners, discuss policy issues, and promote attendance of key decision-makers at national dialogue meetings where research findings would be presented. Together with the international advisory board, these national reference groups were a central plank of the original project design that should have delivered effective advocacy at national and international levels.

Regrettably these groups never got going, possibly because insufficient staff time was allocated for the work considerable effort required to convene, coordinate and support multistakeholder groups. Without regular meetings of a national reference group within which strong relationships could be built, there was no continuity of engagement that would deliver successful policy influencing at the annual national dialogue meetings. What is surprising is that no one seems to have noticed that a major component for successful advocacy was missing, so no alternatives were sought.

Influencing through meetings and conferences

The project convened an impressive number of meetings. These included annual national dialogues in each participating country, plus regional and international meetings.⁷ However,

⁷ Regional and international meetings included for example: Project Launch Meeting, March 18-19, 2005, Jaipur; International Symposium exploring the linkages between Trade, Development and Poverty Reduction, November 2005, Netherlands Trade Policy: Searching for a development perspective, the Hague, February 2006; Geneva; Regional Conference on Linkages Between Trade, Development and Poverty Reduction, Nairobi, October 2006; Regional Conference on Linkages Between Trade, Development and Poverty Reduction, Bangkok, November 2006; International Conference on Linkages Between Trade, Development and Poverty Reduction, Nairobi, March 2007; ; Civil Society Organisations and Aid for Trade: Roles and Realities, Nairobi, March 2007; Making the Integrated Framework a Tool for Development, Geneva, October 2007; Pre-UNCTAD XII Civil Society Forum, Nairobi, March 2008; Pre-UNCTAD XII Civil Society Forum, Hanoi, March 2008; Aid for Trade - (What) can it deliver for development?, June 5th 2008, London;

meetings alone are rarely sufficient means to achieve influencing objectives. As one interviewee put it, *“Big conferences with big names can sometimes be useful in setting new agendas but in general don’t achieve that much. Small meetings where in-depth discussions can be held are better if you want to achieve real outcomes.”*

Meetings require concerted follow up with the key decision-makers to ensure that ideas turn into action. Although this did not happen everywhere, in countries where experienced advocacy organisations were involved they often took the initiative to go beyond the project’s listed activities in order to achieve genuine outcomes.

Some Examples of Successful TDP Advocacy

In Kenya, initial meetings of the TDP network were strengthened by the participation and guidance of a DFID Nairobi staff member. Once the research on textiles and cotton was completed, advocacy began targeting the civil service, legislators, the media and those women and men cotton farmers who were directly affected by changes in policies. The Campaign Kit provided background information and was the source of some of the lobbying messages. This work sparked a national debate and the issues were taken up by government. Many cotton farmers received the help they wanted and the Ministry of Agriculture has adopted some other recommendations from the research paper, including the development of fast growing varieties.

According to interviewees, the success was due to the advocacy in Kenya going beyond project requirements (having a dialogue, and sending information to the media and policy makers) with lots of additional follow up activities including meetings with cotton farmers and ginnery owners and the Kenya Industrial Research Institute. *“We believe that much more is going to happen and want to develop a TDP network in Kenya that includes more stakeholders, especially the private sector. Of course, results from advocacy take time and it may take another 5 years to get everything done.”*

In Pakistan, the national advocacy partner formed networks around TDP involving the private sector and national government as well as local government. In the process it exceeded the agreed number of national dialogues. Influencing at the South Asian Chamber of Commerce ahead of the SAARC heads of state conference in 2008⁸ resulted in development related measures being included in the final declaration. The partner also organised a parallel CSO meeting at SAARC on the role of trade in poverty reduction which forced participants out of their usual ideological boxes and made everyone question their thinking on the issue. As a result of the partner’s influencing, the Foreign Trade Institute of Pakistan has renamed itself the Pakistan Institute of Trade and Development in recognition of the need for a greater focus on the links between trade, development and poverty. *“The only regret is that DFID Pakistan only engaged once despite being a major donor to the project. DFID has a strong influence on national policy and its presence at national dialogue meetings would have helped us to get government to take them more seriously.”*

In South Africa, the production of research papers was delayed by internal problems in the original partner organisation. Another partner took over and their research met with a good reception from unions, NGOs and government *“as people could see that the papers expressed in a structured way what they had already been thinking.”* At the time of writing this report, advocacy is on hold while the new government settles in, but the partners are confident that there will be policy space for influencing

⁸ South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation - the umbrella body overseeing, amongst other matters, the South Asian Free Trade Agreement.

during the next year.

In Nepal the interim national plan (2006 - 2009) talks about linking development, poverty and trade. The partner was able to persuade the Ministries of Finance, Supplies and Foreign Affairs as well as the National Planning Commission to participate regularly in the national dialogues and their continued support is seen as a sign that they are receptive to the ideas being presented. The media has also taken up the issue and are taking the line that, unless Nepal has good trade rules and a strong export sector it will not be possible to lift poor people out of poverty.

Dissemination of Research and Briefing Papers

The second main plank of CUTS advocacy was to disseminate research reports, briefing papers and “advocacy documents”. In Africa, some research partners were selected because they were known to be trusted by policy-makers. The choice of such partners was usually made by the regional resource centres (Nairobi and Lusaka) as a deliberate strategy to increase the likelihood of having a policy impact. This worked very well in relation to Tanzania where government officials are well aware of the research.

Without this link, the dissemination of research reports is no guarantee that they will be read, and dissemination alone can only be one element in an influencing process. This is because of the information overload experienced by those involved in policy issues. In this context, reading materials are subjected to fierce prioritisation with top priority usually going to items directly relevant to work currently underway. Assessment of relevance usually is done by scanning titles, executive summaries, abstracts or lists of policy recommendations. It is considered good practice for these insights into a document’s content to be placed right at the front of the text. Regrettably, none of the major TDP papers or books contains an executive summary or abstract, or recommendations for policy makers.⁹

Obviously, where research is to be the basis for advocacy, it is essential that this can be accessed easily. Unfortunately, some basic communications protocols have been omitted in relation to TDP research documents. For example, there are no references or web links in the synthesis volumes or advocacy documents that would enable readers to find the original versions of the research papers, despite the fact that these have been summarised and much detail has been omitted. Furthermore, CUTS has missed an opportunity to publicise the range of TDP studies by routinely cross referencing them in each individual paper.

One route for accessing CUTS research is being on their mailing list. A simple email survey of a random circular sample of people on CUTS e-list was undertaken to assess the extent to which the contents of TDP research are being absorbed by readers. The results of the survey appear in Appendix Three. Unfortunately, only 18 of the 748 people mailed responded so all findings are anecdotal rather than statistically significant. Overall, readers said they found CUTS papers very or quite useful and almost all respondents were aware of TDP papers and 17 had read two or more of these. Asked how CUTS could improve the communication of its

⁹ Note, abstracts and executive summaries are not the same as introductions or overviews.

research, the two main areas mentioned were providing references in documents to papers by CUTS or other organisations on similar topics and ensuring each paper has an abstract or an executive summary.

If potential readers are not on this mailing list it is almost impossible to find TDP research papers because popular internet search engines cannot locate it. Even if a researcher knew to look at the CUTS website, finding the TDP research papers would prove very frustrating.¹⁰ These problems are elaborated in Appendices Four A and B. The consequence is that one of the key outputs of the project is not readily available, something that requires remedial action as soon as possible.

iv. TDP project management issues, including human resources, monitoring and evaluation systems, financial accounting and reporting; and CUTS overall strategic approach including future expansion and growth

CUTS was established in 1983 and has grown into a respected organisation with some 95 staff. Its headquarters is in Jaipur, India but it also has offices in Kolkata, New Delhi and Chittogarh and five resource centres outside India in Zambia, Nairobi, London, Geneva and Hanoi. The organisation is split into four programme centres (CUTS CART, CUTS CITEE and CUTS C-CIER in Jaipur and CUTS CHD).

The Centre responsible for the TDP project, CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics and Environment (CUTS CITEE) was established in 1996. Its mission is “pursuing economic equity and social justice, within and across borders, by persuading governments and empowering people”. CUTS CITEE operates in three programme areas, WTO issues, regional economic cooperation, and development, including trade, environment and pro-poor growth.

Overall, CUTS is an organisation with capable professional staff, who demonstrate a high level of motivation for their work. A key organisational characteristic of CUTS is its disciplined and orderly structure. Decision-making is decentralised to the programme centres and resource centres, but even in this decentralised structure it is very clear that the founder and current Secretary General is very influential in relation to important decisions, as well as for most of the non-India based advocacy work.

Nevertheless, the organisation shows strains of the rapid growth over the last few years. The work load of (especially senior) staff appears considerable. They are involved with many different projects simultaneously which makes focusing difficult. Rapid growth of the organisation has also contributed to a certain “loss of control” over some processes. For example, no one seems to have overall responsibility for organisational wide matters like communications, hence the problems with the website, nor for monitoring and evaluation or organisational learning which has allowed a slip in focus from outcomes to outputs.

¹⁰ TDP project staff have been advised of the problems with the website and are addressing these straight away so that, hopefully, by the time this report is made public they will no longer exist.

All main activities are funded through projects. Currently there are some 20-25 projects, mainly supported by international donors (DFID, NORAD, Oxfam/Novib, IDRC, etc.), plus some by the Indian Government.

At the time of the SIDA Organisational Assessment in 2006, CUTS CITEE was responsible for some 75% of CUTS total income and was operating with a staff complement equivalent to some 15% of the total CUTS staff. Apart from the TDP project, the main projects under CUTS CITEE are GRANITE (Grass Roots Reach Out and Network in India on Trade and Economics) supported by Oxfam/Novib and the Norwegian Embassy in Delhi and MINDEV (Mainstreaming International Trade and Development in India and Bangladesh) supported by the Norwegian Embassy in Delhi.

Staff

CUTS has approximately 95 permanent staff and 10 interns, both from India and from abroad. Its group of approximately 15 senior staff are responsible for the management of the different centres and programmes as well as for the supporting units. This group of staff, mostly men in their 40s and 50s, appears to be stable and many have worked with CUTS for a substantial number of years.

The remainder of the professional staff of CUTS is composed of middle level and junior level officers, often 30 – 35 years of age. They are usually highly educated. This group changes frequently. One reason for this is that the solid reputation of CUTS makes them attractive for other organisations that can offer substantially higher salaries. Another is that many perceive Jaipur as a less attractive place to work than, say, Delhi or Mumbai.

CUTS CITEE has approx 15 staff and 3 interns based in Jaipur. The TDP project was implemented by the head of CUTS CITEE, his deputy, and one of CUTS CITEE programme staff, who acted as project coordinator. The intellectual leadership of the project was assured by the head and deputy head of CUTS CITEE. The project coordinator is responsible for the day-to-day management and the logistics of the project.

The head and deputy head of CUTS CITEE did not change during the project period, but TDP had six project coordinators during its four years implementation period. Most staff who left the position of project coordinator also left CUTS, usually because of attractive offers elsewhere or for personal reasons. In addition to the staff of CUTS CITEE, the resource centres played an important role in the implementation of the project.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The project proposal states that the “following criteria will be used for monitoring the quality of implementation”

- Feedback received from the partner organisations and other stakeholders
- Outreach of the project
- Contribution to the policy debate and policy coherence agenda

It does not provide criteria or indicators against which these areas will be assessed.

The logframe offers additional indicators but these are weak. For example, regarding the indicator in Table 2 below, when the project started there were already dozens of CSOs in Europe and Asia working on TDP linkages. At minimum this would require the indicator to say “*demonstrated by an increase in the number of active civil society organisations working on issues of linkages that have been influenced by CUTS research and advocacy*” but how this would be measured is not clear. The style of the logframe also does not promote a strong differentiation between outputs and outcomes and nor force project designers to think about the long term changes they are hoping to achieve. For the TDP project the logframe text does not consider how outputs will lead to long term outcomes for poor people.

In practice, the TDP project has demonstrated a good standard in relation to monitoring of activities and outputs. But the first two years of the project management seems to have been more reflective than the final two years during which an emphasis on delivering outputs appears to have detracted from a focus on what the project was expected to achieve.

Table 2: Excerpt from the TDP Project Logframe

Structure of the Activity	Indicators of Achievement	How Indicators can be Quantified and assessed	Assumptions, Risks and Conditions
<p><u>Objectives</u></p> <p>Facilitate cross-fertilisation of experiences and lessons learnt on linkages between trade, development and poverty reduction in the developing countries to develop appropriate policy responses</p>	<p>Formation of a network of civil society organisations and other stakeholders from the South and the North who can advocate on behalf of the poor, with a focus on women</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Active and better-informed civil society in the North and the South, demonstrated by the number of active civil society organisations working on issues of linkages between trade, development and poverty reduction 	<p>Sustainability of interest of the network partners (mainly civil society organisations in the North and the South) in doing advocacy and outreach on issues of trade, development and poverty reduction</p>

Financial management

CUTS has a Finance and Administration Department in Jaipur which was responsible for budgeting and bookkeeping for the TDP project. TDP was funded by MINBUZA (directly to the foreign currency bank account of CUTS in Jaipur) and by DFID (channelled through the London Resource Centre).

In 2006 Oxfam/Novib reviewed the financial management arrangements of CUTS and concluded that these were satisfactory. The 2006 Organisational Assessment prepared on behalf of SIDA observes that CUTS CITEE does not receive regular financial reports. Instead CUTS CITEE is alerted if/when need arises. CUTS staff confirmed that this is still the case. No regular financial overviews are provided, and in consequence it is impossible for CITEE staff to have the information needed for comprehensive project management. CUTS CITEE does not make any detailed financial plans as a centre, nor at project level.

In all its contracts with external donors, CUTS asks for permission to shift funds between budget lines. That permission appears to have been granted by the donors for the TDP project allowing CUTS to easily shift funds between different activities. CUTS CITEE staff point out that this was always mentioned in the progress reports. In the interests of transparency, changes could perhaps have been highlighted more clearly and accompanied by a note of the implications for the overall project. As no objections from donors were found, it seems that all changes were accepted by them. Many of the TDP project expenditures were based on lump-sum contracts with partners. For other, CUTS based expenditures it is not very clear to what extent actual expenditures have been invoiced, or if invoices were based on the original budget allocations.

One problem for the TDP projects was with the disbursement of resources. A number of partners complained that although there were rigid demands regarding deadlines, CUTS could be very slow in making payments. "We had to spend the money and then get reimbursement, sometimes this took a very long term and this caused us real difficulties. CUTS said they had foreign exchange restrictions but these could have been anticipated."

Strategic perspectives

CUTS makes 4 year strategic plans. These plans are the basis for two-year business plans and a monthly planning and reporting system. The 2006 – 2010 strategic plan could not be made available to the evaluation team until the very end of their work and the version received was a draft. This suggests that the strategic plan is not a document that is in regular use within CUTS CITEE.

The organisational assessment of 2006 made the following observations on the 2006 – 2010 strategic plan: *"The strategic plan is, as it should be, a high level plan defining capability (including mission), goals, purpose, functional areas, SLOT – analysis, a logical framework analysis, risk analysis, HR development, future work programme and financial planning. A possible weakness with the strategic plan is that it is relatively complex with a high number of objectives to achieve and rather detailed when it comes to what and how to do things, issues that run the risk of becoming obsolete over time"*.

As mentioned above, CUTS and CUTS CITEE is a project driven organisation, dependent on external (national or international) funding for each individual project that it operates and for funding its core services and activities. Coherence between the strategic perspective on the

one hand and the day-to-day project perspective on the other would be a major challenge for any organisation.

A key strategic direction for CUTS is to expand its geographical coverage. It recently opened an office in Hanoi to cover South-east Asia as well as in Geneva in 2008. Its Lusaka office opened in 2001 and the Nairobi office in 2004. The rationale behind the expansion into Africa is that, especially in the field of trade development, there is a need for support to national governments to be provided by an organisation from the South. This view was supported in conversations with government officials. Moreover, India positions itself as a representative of developing countries in multilateral trade negotiations, and CUTS considers that this provides a basis to use its experience in such countries.

CUTS has expanded rapidly over the last seven years, so it is surprising that expansion figures only in a very small way in the strategic plan. Rapid expansion requires a major strategic effort so it would be expected that a rationale for this move and an assessment of the challenges and benefits it could bring would be a major feature in the strategic plan.

Information provided by partners in African countries and observations of CUTS CITEE staff indicate that working in Africa has indeed been challenging. It appears that CUTS is not (yet) sufficiently familiar with the local culture, research capacities and the political process in many African countries to operate with a satisfactory level of relevance and effectiveness. This is understandable since it takes time to gain a sufficient level of understanding of the overall situation in African countries, and to find an effective way of working with professionals in Africa. Nevertheless, a well-thought out plan for how CUTS will develop this understanding and improve its relevance and effectiveness in relationship to African CSOs and governments would be beneficial.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Overall CUTS is a more capable and effective organisation than the weaknesses in implementation of the TDP project would suggest.
2. Through the TDP project it has established new relationships with some intellectually sophisticated organisations working on policy issues, especially in Africa and South East Asia .
3. It has also produced a large body of new research that will make useful contribution to the literature on trade, development and poverty.
4. There are few Southern-based research, policy and influencing NGOs that are trusted by Southern governments and able to work across regions and continents, and are committed to poverty issues, CUTS deserves continued support, albeit on the proviso that future projects have sound strategic foundations (e.g. for advocacy, capacity building and a clear poverty focus) as well as more realistic ambitions and staffing levels.
5. CUTS management needs to demonstrate its willingness to address these organisational challenges and to complement an emphasis on systems and outputs with a focus on the skills, strategies and outcomes needed to deliver genuine change.

Research

6. Overall, the project was extremely ambitious in relation to its research aims both in terms of the scope of the individual studies and in the terms of the number of countries and partners that were involved.
7. The successful delivery of such a large and complex research project requires not only a sophisticated knowledge of the issues, but exceptional competence in research management. This would be a test for any institution. CUTS seems to have underestimated these demands but should have learned valuable lessons for the future.
8. Some of the studies lack quality and others fail to give sufficient consideration the poverty impacts on poor women and men both within and beyond the immediate confines of the sector studied. The lack of clear analytical frameworks for the research meant an opportunity to move forward on the vexed issue of TDP linkages was lost.
9. Nevertheless, CUTS is to be commended for delivering all the promised outputs and contributing to the TDP literature.

North South Linkages

10. The objective of building robust networks to provide a vehicle for supporting Southern governments in developing pro-poor trade and economic policies was not achieved.
11. South – South and South – North relationships, especially those not involving long-term partners in South Asia, were mostly routed through CUTS and horizontal contacts between participating organisations in the South were too limited to result in the formation of networks.¹¹

Partnership

12. Long term partnerships have developed between CUTS and organisations in some countries, mainly in the South Asian region. The relationships between CUTS and organisations in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal mostly are characterised by equality and respect. In contrast, newer relationships with organisations especially in Africa are not yet genuine partnerships in many respects (see box on page 10). A number of these organisations operated essentially as grant recipients who implemented CUTS activities.
13. Capacity building has been limited to partner organisations gaining access to a lot of information through papers or CUTS meetings. With one or two exceptions no training was provided to partners.
14. Partners mostly operated at the national level in their own country, and were not given meaningful access to the international networks of CUTS. By itself, participating in meetings where international actors are present is not sufficient to ensure meaningful access without deliberate steps to support the development of lasting relationships.

Advocacy and Influencing

15. Advocacy successes often happened despite stipulated project activities rather than because of them.

¹¹ This echoes the findings of the Ace Global Evaluation

16. CUTS CITEE has a fairly rudimentary conceptual framework regarding advocacy and should give more thought to how to move from research to policy change and the development of basic advocacy strategies.
17. Dissemination of research papers is not a substitute for effective influencing.
18. CUTS does not wish to become, and should not become a research institute. To avoid this it needs to increase its internal capacity in advocacy and increase the number of its own staff actively engaged in influencing nationally and internationally. This would provide the basis for building the advocacy skills of its partners and encouraging their engagement in regional and international advocacy fora.

Management

20. Management of a project as complex as TDP would be a challenge for any organisation.
21. CUTS has grown rapidly over the last decade and the organisation shows the strains of this expansion.
22. The organisation has a good record of recruiting senior managers with excellent knowledge of the substantive issues addressed by CUTS research, as well as specialists in finance, administration and human resources
23. It has given less attention to developing other cross-cutting specialisms essential for a research and advocacy organisation, including for example, organisational outreach and communications, knowledge management, monitoring and evaluation, influencing strategies, partnership approaches and network development.
24. In expanding into new countries and cultures, CUTS should try to avoid the past errors of Northern NGOs in mistaking difference for lack of discipline or capacity, or assuming that the way your organisation does things is the best way. It is important to invest time and thought into developing work in new contexts.
25. The input of senior staff into the TDP project appears to have been too fragmented. Day-to-day management suffered from frequent staff changes, and the financial management system is not fully adjusted to the needs of project management.

Strategic deficits

26. The scope of the TDP project was very ambitious: its geographical coverage was wide and diverse, as were the activities included in the project and the number and type of partners involved. Such a project requires clear and consistent strategic choices, to maintain its focus. In this respect TDP shown a number of shortcomings:
 - a. Insufficient attention was paid to conceptualising the methodological frameworks necessary to enable the research consistently address the complexities of macro-micro linkages and the experiences of different groups of poor people.
 - b. There was no clear influencing strategy that could link advocacy to the research being done and the policy processes it was supposed to address.
 - c. As the project progressed, a focus on outcomes was lost in favour of concentrating on completing all the activities and outputs outlined in the project proposal.
 The result was that although much valuable work was done, not enough attention was paid to communicating the research results in policy fora or to decision-makers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall

1. Despite the shortcomings noted in this evaluation, CUTS fulfils an important role in supporting Developing and Least Developed Countries in the field of trade and development issues, and has established a solid base for future work in this field. It is therefore recommended that support to CUTS is continued so it can build on the TDP project achievements.
2. Future support should be conditional on CUTS demonstrating its willingness to consolidate its strengths while addressing the organisational weaknesses that are emerging following a period of rapid growth.
3. Addressing the serious underlying problems currently facing the organisation would have enormous benefits for the organisation's ability to achieve its full potential. One option could be for donors to focus support on a facilitating a strategic review and reflection process followed by appropriate capacity building and organisational strengthening.

Focus and strategies

4. Geographical expansion into new areas should wait until existing partnerships have been strengthened (or dissolved), the scope and capacity of existing regional resource centres has been consolidated, and an in-depth understanding of local cultures and contexts has been developed by staff at all levels.
5. While pride in its organisational reputation and achievements in natural, CUTS should give time to reflecting on what it is trying to achieve in terms of medium and long-term outcomes in relation to poor and marginalised people. It is this aim that should drive strategies and plans.
6. CUTS should develop an overall communications strategy that can be an umbrella under which each project has its own specific influencing and advocacy strategy. These strategies should be formulated either during the development of project proposals, or during the inception phase of the project. CUTS staff should be provided with advocacy capacity building to enable them to be involved in the design and implementation of such strategies.
7. The website requires a considerable reform improvement to make it accessible to external users. Hopefully, a donor will provide the funds to support a re-design of the site and the re-loading of CUTS research and briefing documents.

Links and Networks

8. Networking needs to become a consciously planned and properly resourced activity.
9. For sustainability, networks formed as a result of CUTS' activities should be encouraged to develop their own aims and (SMART) objectives, as well as plans for delivering on these.

Research

10. CUTS should provide fuller guidance to partners regarding research tasks. This should refer them to relevant analytical frameworks and methodologies for their

consideration. Special attention should be paid to frameworks and methods for assessing poverty impacts.

11. Guidance should also stipulate the need for executive summaries and recommendations as well as the provision of references for all facts, figures and papers consulted, etc.
12. For the purposes of successful policy engagement, it is recommended that partners consider working on sectors/issues that are on the current national reform agenda.

Partnership

13. For future projects CUTS should carefully assess the strengths and weaknesses of potential partner and be prepared to provide support and capacity building where required.
14. Ideally, partners should be capable of undertaking both research and advocacy.
15. Some of partners should be “strategic partners”, having a significant role in project design, and decision making during project implementation.

Management

16. CUTS needs to strengthen its project management and to ensure that a senior staff member is involved in the management of large projects on a (almost) full time basis.
17. Financial management of grants should be improved. Project managers should receive regular financial reports enabling them to track actual expenditures and make conscious, strategic adjustments as necessary.
18. Reporting to donors should be strengthened to include not only clear milestones and indicators but also clear accounts of changes to project design and their implications. Where possible presentations and verbal reports should accompany written ones to allow a genuine dialogue to take place.

Role of Donors

19. To successfully implement projects, CUTS needs not only financial support, but also a more meaningful engagement from its donors. This could include, inter alia, making assistance available during the development of project proposals (prior and during inception), supporting organisational development and internal capacity building, regular engagement during project implementation and being involved in any changes to project design.