

Culture of Advocacy - Realty in Zimbabwe

Challenge

More effective dialogue between citizens and government is needed in Zimbabwe as a way to increase the competition of ideas in the political and economic governance of the country. Throughout the 1990's, a wide spectrum of civic organizations began to emerge as an increasingly articulate public voice for the aspirations of citizens. However, these groups had little experience or weak capacity for channeling advocacy efforts to achieve policy change through the legislative process.



Photo:PACT/Rene Hansen

Elizabeth Matare, Director of Zimbabwe National Association for the Mentally Handicapped, speaks at the launch of the Mental Health Advocacy program.

“The USAID program is enabling networking and a high level of understanding of advocacy in Zimbabwe.”

- Member of the Advocacy Panel

Results

Zimbabwean civil society organizations are now networking with each other to share best practices and improve the impact of their advocacy work. At the outset of the USAID program, very few organizations targeted policymakers. In 2003, more than 90% of participating groups had structured and systematic engagement with Parliament; nearly 70% made presentations on the national budget; five organizations have had their staff appointed as experts to Parliament on their respective advocacy issues; and another five organizations had motions passed in Parliament which they drafted, or have had their issues put on Parliament's work plan. USAID's program is helping to create a culture of civic involvement in government where in the past there was none.

Initiative

During the past five years, USAID has helped to spearhead an effort to strengthen the capacity of fifteen local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to articulate the aspirations of citizens and advocate for favorable policy change through the legislative process – an activity that local organizations had not previously undertaken with the Parliament.

USAID also supported the establishment of a peer panel to assess the performance of CSOs. Comprised of leaders in Zimbabwean civil society, the panel reviews the work of the participating organizations on a yearly basis and makes recommendations on how they can improve their advocacy efforts.

As part of a comprehensive assessment process, the peer panel evaluates the effectiveness of CSO advocacy efforts based on eleven factors, such as the level of resources set aside for advocacy on a particular issue. USAID provides CSOs with training and assistance in response to the peer panel's recommendations.