



## The Voice for Change Partnership in a nutshell

Civil society plays a crucial role in mobilising citizens' voices and ensuring that the interests of low-income and marginalised communities are included in government and business policies and practices. The Voice for Change Partnership (V4CP) empowered civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage with decision-makers and voice their views more effectively by taking an evidence-based approach to advocacy. This brochure presents the V4CP's capacity development strategy and outlines the most effective advocacy approaches for opening the civic space required for CSOs to stimulate and support systems change and drive solutions at scale.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS) has a long tradition of supporting CSOs operating in low and middle-income countries. In 2016, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) established the V4CP under a DGIS framework that focused on strengthening civil society's capacity for lobbying and advocacy.

Between 2016 and 2020, the V4CP enhanced 51 CSOs' capacities for leadership, the use of evidence and thematic knowledge, advocacy skills, and organisational sustainability. A key component of the programme's success was its emphasis on using verifiable and credible evidence to support advocacy in order to secure the effective provision of services by governments and the private sector and contribute to solutions that work for communities.

## Overview of V4CP approach

Three intervention areas were used to enhance the V4CP CSO partners' overall effectiveness and influence:

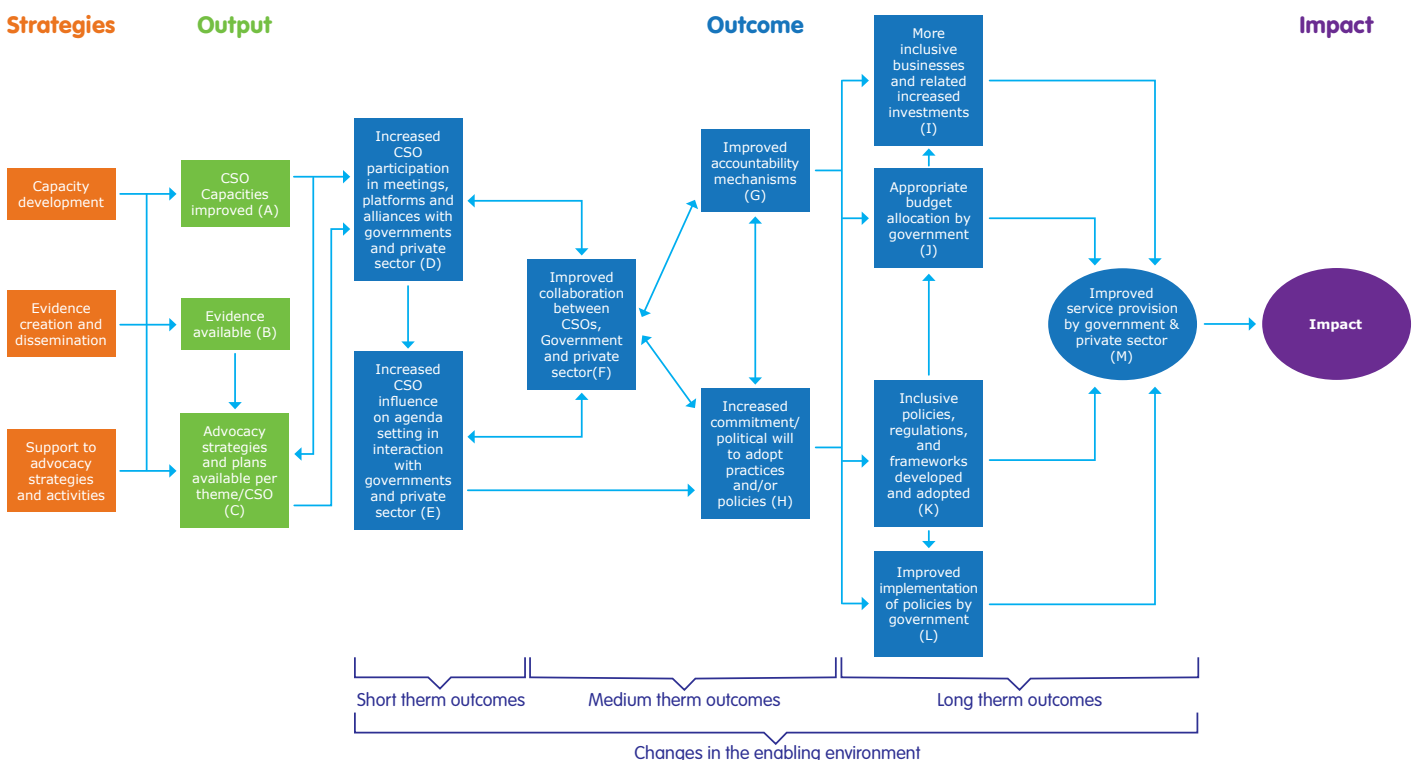
- **Strengthening capacity:** Partner CSOs were offered capacity development packages. These included modules on training, external coaching, on the job coaching by SNV advisors, and peer-to-peer learning. The aim was to increase leadership, improve advocacy approaches and skills (including the use of evidence), build thematic knowledge, and to strengthen organisational sustainability.
- **Building evidence:** High quality evidence was developed through IFPRI and other renowned research institutes to empower the CSOs to build stronger cases for their proposed sectoral changes. The CSOs were encouraged to contextualise research results to support their advocacy. Communications capacity was built so that they could present the evidence and advocacy messages optimally and disseminate it widely by participating in platforms and alliances, and engaging with the media.

- **Supporting advocacy:** Assistance with the design and implementation of advocacy plans, activities and approaches was provided. Plans were continuously updated during the capacity development and learning events, and care was taken to ensure that all advocacy efforts were aligned with, and complimented, other programmes and initiatives.

Three approaches to advocacy were encouraged:

- **Collaborative:** Emphasis was given to the value of working together, developing joint solutions, building upon trusted relationships and bringing together stakeholders and decision-makers across government, business, knowledge institutes, and civil society.
- **Evidence-based:** The merits of developing robust evidence to build a convincing case for sectoral change were underlined, as were the advantages of presenting it in an understandable and accessible way, and of sharing it widely.
- **Solution-oriented:** The benefits of providing clear, feasible and tailor-made solutions that address concrete problems and provide potential improvements in the enabling environment were highlighted.

Figure 1: Generic Theory of Change



## Results: Capacity strengthening and empowerment

Overall, CSO capacities in leadership, thematic knowledge, advocacy and organisational sustainability significantly improved between 2016 and 2020.

CSOs are now more conversant with their respective issue areas. They are using evidence to influence agendas and feel more confident about their organisations' future sustainability.

### Success factors:

An external evaluation, conducted by INTRAC in 2020, found that the V4CP programme was implemented effectively, has been relevant in the country context and has empowered partner CSOs to trigger sectoral change.

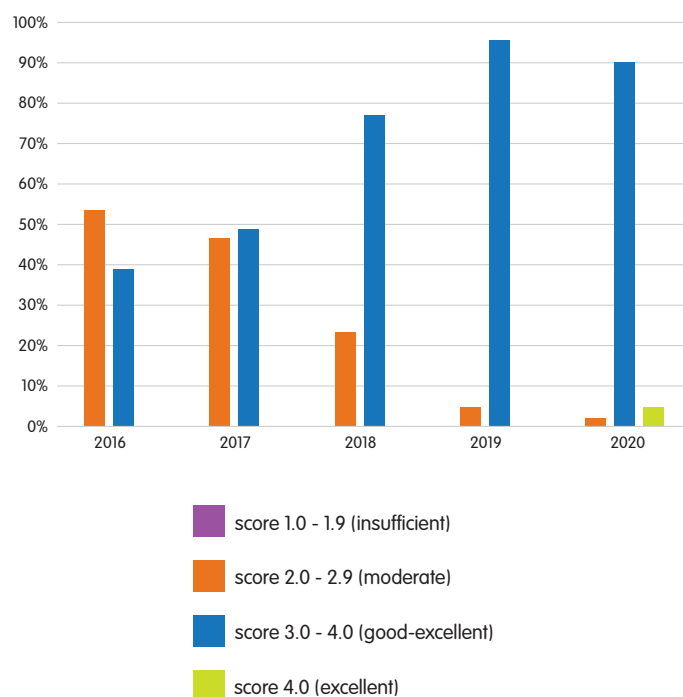
*".. the evaluation has found robust and validated evidence to conclude that partner CSOs have achieved a number of significant changes to policy and practice at a range of levels." - Final Evaluation, INTRAC.*

The V4CP's capacity development packages proved particularly successful and were the most highly valued programme intervention amongst the CSOs. The different support activities, such as training and mentoring events, have enabled them to develop more structured and focused advocacy plans in which learning features highly. A vast majority of CSOs have increased capacity for leadership, thematic knowledge, advocacy and organisational sustainability since 2016.

*"I appreciate how the skills gotten through V4CP have enabled my organisation to develop a more robust strategic plan with clear goals and objectives to be attained in the next five years and how the organisation will attain these." - NDIZEYE Damien, Executive Secretary, the Rwanda Consumers' Rights Protection Organisation (ADECOR).*

Peer-to-peer learning was particularly highly regarded in the CSOs' capacity development process, with the mix of different portfolios, mandates and specialities enriching their partnerships. Throughout the programme, the CSOs increasingly conducted joint planning,

**Figure 2: Change in CSOs' capacities 2016-2020**



implementation and reviews of advocacy activities. By sharing information, experiences and expertise they nurtured the cross-pollination of ideas and inspired motivation, while promoting accountability and learning. This created an atmosphere of trust and mutual support for project objectives.

Capacity building in the generation and dissemination of evidence has strengthened the legitimacy of the CSOs' advocacy and helped them inform policy makers. Sourcing verified, concrete data and transforming it into clear and accessible information significantly improved the quality of interventions and strengthened the CSOs' influence over key discussions, policies and outcomes. Research findings were frequently published in the media, resulting in widespread dissemination to the public.

The CSOs' ownership of evidence generation and products increased throughout the programme, thanks to their enhanced research and analytical skills. This increased their collaboration with key stakeholders, including the government and the private sector. The development of these relationships was supported by SNV and IFPRI,

which acted as 'conveners' and lent the CSOs credibility while they were establishing their own connections and reputations.

*"The partnership with IFPRI in the process of food and nutrition budget tracking has enabled my organisation to gain more knowledge and credibility in our advocacy work both at central and local level. RDO is now recognised as one of the key CSOs when it comes to tracking the government budget, we were even requested by the Ministry of Finance to train other CSOs on budget formulation and tracking." – RWIBASIRA Eugene, Executive Secretary, Rwanda Development Organisation (RDO).*



A livestock sale yard in Kenya. Photo credit: SNV/V4CP Kenya

## Results: Evidence-based advocacy

Evidence-based advocacy proved to be an effective way to inform and influence actors. With timely and compelling evidence, policy makers were more willing to make sectoral changes. Clear progress was observed in the adoption and implementation of new or adjusted inclusive policies during the V4CP programme. The following examples highlight some of the results.



### Improved collaboration – WASH – Ghana

The V4CP was at the heart of the formation of the national Alliance for WASH Advocacy, which aims to trigger sustained changes in the sanitation sector. As a result, partner CSOs increased their legitimacy and influence and managed to inspire the national government to step up efforts to improve Ghana's outdated sanitation governance structures, policies and processes.

<https://snv.org/update/unify-amplify-collaborating-change-story-change>



### Improved collaboration – Renewable Energy – Honduras

The partner CSOs put cleaner cooking firmly on the national government's agenda and united efforts to stimulate market demand by driving a seismic shift in public attitudes to cleaner cookstoves. Key to their success was their formation of an Interinstitutional Platform for increased adoption of clean cooking, a powerful vehicle for participative generation and dissemination of evidence that became the driving force behind the National Strategy for clean cooking.

<https://snv.org/update/story-change-joining-hands-pioneer-improved-stoves-honduras>



### Increased influence – FNS – Indonesia

The partner CSOs contributed to the emerging national movement to reduce stunting and helped transform a neglected issue into a political priority. The V4CP's blend of local insight, international expertise and evidence-based advocacy helped to scale action on stunting horizontally across districts and vertically from provincial to national level. The CSOs also mobilised the voice of millennials in this effort.

<https://snv.org/update/millennials-voice-emerging-movement-better-nutrition-indonesia-story-change>



### Increased influence – FNS – Ghana

Through evidence-based advocacy and the support of V4CP coaching, partner CSOs facilitated the establishment and strengthening of nutrition coordination structures in four districts in northern Ghana. By 'localising' national FNS policies in regions that were lagging behind on key indicators through community-based nutrition committees and other initiatives, they improved the implementation of the National Nutrition Policy.

<https://snv.org/update/story-change-how-national-nutrition-policy-was-translated-local-action-ghana>



### Enhanced accountability – Renewable Energy – Burkina Faso

To revitalise demand, partner CSOs advocated for RE to be prioritised by government institutions and included in the national vocational curriculum. As a result, there have been fundamental changes in educational institutions and a rewiring of attitude within the ministries responsible for technical and vocational training. This will increase the number of qualified RE technicians and support the services and standards required to make it a viable and attractive energy option in the country.

<https://snv.org/update/power-people-advancing-solar-energy-burkina-faso-story-change>



### Enhanced accountability – Resilience – Kenya

Thanks to the issue knowledge and advocacy skills developed under the V4CP programme, partner CSOs were in a position to collaborate with the national and local government on the review of Kenya's National Climate Change Action Plan. Having become members of the review task force, they could ensure that the voices of vulnerable pastoral communities were heard and included in the country's new climate strategy.

<https://snv.org/update/story-change-including-pastoralists-voices-formulating-climate-related-policies-kenya>



### Inclusive policy development – FNS – Rwanda

Partner CSOs formed the National Fortification Alliance with diverse actors from the private and public sectors, media and civil society. This influential alliance managed to bring about the systemic changes required to increase the production of - and access to - fortified foods and successfully advocated for the adoption of a food fortification law. The multi-stakeholder approach taken by the CSOs will have a positive effect on Rwanda's economy in the longer term. Not only will it contribute towards a healthier and more productive population, it will also stimulate private investment and markets.

<https://snv.org/update/new-law-fortify-food-story-change>



### Inclusive policy development – WASH – Kenya

Having interpreted budgetary data to expose inadequate resourcing for sanitation, the V4CP trained local CSO networks on how to push a winning advocacy agenda. By conducting pre-budget hearings and creating 'Alternative Budget' memos, the CSO networks managed to influence key county government's budget-making processes. Their proposals were taken up in the county's financial year budgets, the Five-Year County Integrated Development Plans and Annual Development Plans. This will help ease access to sanitation facilities for Kenyan citizens.

[https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/snv\\_booklet\\_-\\_adres\\_group\\_-\\_screen\\_view\\_compressed.pdf](https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/snv_booklet_-_adres_group_-_screen_view_compressed.pdf)

## Lessons from V4CP: Effective advocacy approaches

To strengthen the voice of civil society in policy development and implementation, it is important for CSOs to build their reputations and legitimacy. Several approaches can be effective. They are interlinked and can be adjusted to a specific context, the status of the sector, or aligned to the aptitude of stakeholders in order to open civic space and enhance the enabling environment.

### Increase citizens' capacities & participation

CSOs play a crucial role in accelerating systems change because they can mobilise a wide range of citizens, such as community champions and youth advocates, and different consumer groups, district advocacy teams and civil society networks. Increasing their capacities, accountability, transparency and relations with their constituencies can help ensure that citizens' interests are represented across multiple levels of governance, management and decision-making.

*"Citizens' participation in the district development process is very crucial. We have had planning*

*mistakes when citizens are not consulted or involved in planning and decision making. For example, we have seen a milk collection centre established in a village where there are no cows while farmers were complaining of not having one in villages with many cows. So, we appreciate the organisation of district dialogue on citizens' participation in district development process which will definitely change the way things used to be done." - Mr Emmanuel Niyitanga, President of the Farmers' Cooperative (COAGI) of Gitoki sector, Gatsibo District in Eastern Province, Rwanda*

### The use of evidence to influence policy development

The use of contextualised, inclusive and up-to-date evidence, including local data and examples of best practice, is essential to influence policy processes effectively. It increases the credibility of advocates, educates decision-makers and forms a basis for policies that sufficiently consider the needs of marginalised groups. The engagement of local universities and renowned research institutes in evidence generation ensures high quality products, enhances the credibility of findings and

can open doors for CSOs, particularly at higher levels of government. Actively involving citizens can help validate the societal need for sectoral improvements, while helping to build a strong local constituency. The value of adapting the same evidence for different audiences, and disseminating it effectively, builds a shared understanding and helps motivate action.

### Increase sector alignment through multi-stakeholder processes

Societal changes are more easily achieved when the stakeholders involved align their vision and strategies, harmonise their efforts and join forces. Taking a complimentary approach towards a common goal helps move policy processes forward and ensures that sector input is incorporated into plans, strategies and regulations. A unified, multi-stakeholder approach facilitates the exchange of valuable data and experiences between different programmes or initiatives and can improve coordination, thereby amplifying advocacy and action. It can also enhance mutual accountability, ownership and commitment, values that are particularly crucial in difficult contexts where lack of trust is prevalent.

CSOs, and especially sector alliances, can play a vital role in the facilitation of multi-stakeholder platforms (including civil society, public and private sector representatives), by encouraging key actors to collaborate and ensuring the sustainability of changes. Sector alignment and policy changes take time, however, so long-term, sustained support and effort are required.

*“For me, over the period, we [the alliance] have done well. Together, we assessed the WASH policies, developed our position papers and this helped to highlight the WASH policy issues that ought to be targeted under the SDGs. These policies, given that their time of implementation had been long overdue, have to be reviewed. As a contribution by the alliance, the Ministry is now looking at reviewing the Environmental Sanitation Policy and the other policies.” – Mr. George Yorke, Head of Policy, WaterAid Ghana*

### Engage with local governments to develop & implement inclusive policies

CSOs’ voices can play an important role in reminding governments that they are often the



WASH CSOs at an exchange event in Indonesia. Photo credit: SNV/V4CP Indonesia

main duty bearers, responsible for ensuring that effective and inclusive policies are in place within their jurisdictions. Engaging with local authorities helps ensure that targets and activities are incorporated in local or regional policies and plans, which is especially vital in decentralised political systems. It can also be an effective way to ensure that plans are developed, budget is allocated, and activities are effectively implemented, while addressing the need for stronger gender equality and social inclusion lenses to tackle power asymmetries, especially at the local level.

### Increase coordination and collaboration with government

Engagement frameworks, such as Memorandum of Understanding or Terms of Reference, across and between government, development partners and local CSOs helps ensure that policies are implemented properly, avoids duplication and pools resources. Activating or re-vitalising existing government task forces can enhance accountability, performance and willingness to collaborate. When responsibilities are shared by various government agencies, it is important to advocate for improved coordination.

*“[CSOs] are helping the government to take more responsibility for its citizens. For an effective and efficient food and nutrition security intervention and the better use of state resources, we need to*

*rethink the food and nutrition security coordination model and under which ministry it would fall. Our government is committed to supporting this. The president himself underscored the importance of this undertaking.” - Mr. Simon Compaore, Minister of State, Burkina Faso*

### Engage and collaborate with the media

The media can be a powerful vehicle for disseminating evidence, informing citizens and influencing government. By promoting specific messages, objectives and goals, it can amplify advocacy and fast track action by decision makers. Establishing good relationships with media partners facilitates publicity that can inspire social debate and help galvanise widespread support, while holding decisions makers publicly accountable for promises or commitments made. Social media can be a particularly effective tool for spreading stories and inspiring engagement.

### Scale up to drive systemic change

CSOs are often more effective at initiating change at local and regional levels because they are usually more visible and influential in sub-national policy development. Yet policies at this level exert great influence over national and provincial level policies. Sharing cases for policy change, as well as solutions and lessons learned across districts and all levels of government, can deliver positive changes to the greatest number of people with maximum efficiency.

### Consolidate successes and build a supportive institutional framework

Behind each successfully adopted policy lie hundreds, even thousands, of CSO working hours devoted to generating critical evidence, engaging key actors and to changing course when initial goals are not met. Yet a promising change can evaporate in a moment of political controversy, or a shift in policy priorities. Maintaining relationships with government is crucial in order to ensure that commitments made are followed through. Engagement can be effectively maintained through increased accountability mechanisms, such as participation in technical committees. Alternatively, CSOs can be supported to maintain their relationships with government so that they can continue to advocate for inclusive and effective policy changes.

*“To be honest with you, as a newly established entity [food fortification] this was not on our list of first priorities. But because ADECOR kept pushing we had to listen to them and now here we are with the regulation. I congratulate them for the courage and patience.” - Dr. Charles Karangwa, Director-General, Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority*

### Towards the future

By developing capacity and tailoring advocacy approaches to meet local needs, the V4CP has sought to empower its partner CSOs to be the owners of change so that they can continue to increase civic space, build on their achievements and stimulate and support systems changes beyond the end of the programme.

The influence and reputations the CSOs have built within the public and private sectors, and across civil society, has strengthened the voice and positioning of civil society in sectoral policy processes and implementation. In doing so, it has enhanced the potential for citizens to contribute to inclusive, relevant and sustainable development solutions.

*“Today all our voices are echoing like one louder voice. We better understand the government and moreover, we have learned from other organisations and networked with them.” - Mrs. Clarisse Nebie, the Albert Schweitzer Ecological Centre of Burkina Faso (CEAS).*



CSO representatives from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Honduras and Kenya participate in an exchange visit to Kenya. Photo credit: Rianne Teule/SNV



## Voice for Change Partnership (V4CP) at a glance

**Aim:** To strengthen CSOs' capacity and increase their voice in policy development and implementation in the interests of low-income and marginalised communities

**Focus areas:** Food & Nutrition Security (FNS), Resilience for Pastoralists (RES), Renewable Energy (RE), Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH)

**Countries:** Burkina Faso, Ghana, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Rwanda

**Partners:** DGIS, Embassies of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, SNV, IFPRI, and 51 CSOs in six countries

**Duration:** January 2016 - December 2020



## SNV

SNV is a not-for-profit international development organisation that makes a lasting difference in the lives of people living in poverty by helping them raise incomes and access basic services. We focus on three sectors and have a long-term, local presence in over 25 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Our team of more than 1,300 staff is the backbone of SNV.

## IFPRI

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) provides research-based policy solutions to sustainably reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition in developing countries. Established in 1975, IFPRI currently has more than 600 employees working in over 50 countries. It is a research center of CGIAR, a worldwide partnership engaged in agricultural research for development.

## Cover photo

Burkinabé CSOs working on FNS on exchange visit in Benin.  
Photo credit: SNV Burkina Faso

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