

Knowledge, policy and power

Six dimensions of the knowledge– development policy interface

Nicola Jones, Ajoy Datta and Harry Jones
with ebpdn partners



Knowledge, policy and power

Six dimensions of the knowledge– development policy interface

Nicola Jones, Ajoy Datta and Harry Jones

with Nuning Akhmadi, Eric Boa, Norma Correa, Nguyen Hang,
Naya Sharma Paudel, Lucía Schumacher and Roberto Telleria

About ODI and RAPID

ODI is Britain's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues. Our mission is to inspire and inform policy and practice which lead to the reduction of poverty, the alleviation of suffering and the achievement of sustainable livelihoods in developing countries. We do this by locking together high quality applied research, practical policy advice, and policy-focused dissemination and debate. We work with partners in the public and private sectors, in both developing and developed countries.

The Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme at ODI works with partners in developing and developed countries at the intersection of research, policy and practice to ensure better outcomes for the poor. We do this by focussing broadly on two main areas: understanding the role of knowledge in policy and practice, and the skills and capacities needed for researchers and organisations to effectively translate knowledge into action. Find out more at www.odi.org.uk/rapid

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people for their valuable contributions to this synthesis product: participants in online discussions on the Evidence-based Policy in Development Network (<http://www.ebpdn.org>); Shreya Mitra and Laura Gisby for their valuable research assistance; Jeff Knezovich and Joanna Adcock for their work on layout and design; Loitt for the cartoon illustrations (<http://loitt.blogspot.com>); Roo Griffiths for her copy-editing work (<http://www.griffiths-saat.org.uk>); and Norma Correa, James Keeley, Sandra Nutley, Nguyen Hang, John Young and Vanessa Weyrauch for their very helpful comments.

ISBN 978 0 85003 914 6

© Overseas Development Institute 2009

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publishers.

Photo credits: © GennadiyRatushenko/World Bank (cover, left); © Simone D. McCourtie/World Bank (cover, top); © Ami Vitale/World Bank (cover, right); flickr/Foreign and Commonwealth Office [www.flickr.com/photos/foreignoffice/3272608283/] (page 2); flickr/Dr Davida De La Harpe [<http://www.flickr.com/photos/davida3/3528437591/>] (page 5); flickr/Edwin Velasquez [<http://www.flickr.com/photos/fotosdeedwin/2961458269/>] (page 15); flickr/symmetry_mind [http://www.flickr.com/photos/symmetry_mind/3763037135/] (page 19); flickr/Jeff Knezovich [<http://www.flickr.com/photos/knezovjb/2822483593/>] (page 34).

All flickr photos released under the Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic Creative Commons license and with express permission of the photographer. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0> for more information.

Contents

Executive summary	1
1. Introduction	3
2. Types of knowledge	6
Introduction	6
Research-based knowledge	7
Project and programme knowledge	7
Participatory knowledge	8
Multiple knowledges	8
3. Political context	10
Introduction	10
A wave of governance changes	11
Opportunities for voice in the policy process	11
The role of external forces	12
Unexpected windows of opportunity	14
4. Sectoral dynamics	16
Introduction	16
Technical expertise	17
The role of economic interests	17
Issue contestation	17
Internationalisation of debates	18
5. Actors	20
Introduction	20
Civil society organisations	20
Think tanks	21
Networks	22
Donors and international agencies	22
Legislators	23
6. Innovative frameworks	24
Introduction	24
Complexity theory	25
The importance of practical tools	25
Innovation systems	26
7. Knowledge translation processes	28
Introduction	29
Knowledge generation	30
Knowledge translation	30
The role of intermediaries	30
Capacity building	31
8. Conclusion	34
References	36
Acronyms	39

Figures and boxes

Figures

Figure 1: The RAPID research-to-policy framework	3
Figure 2: Knowledge generation and translation cycle	29

Boxes

Box 1: Key definitions	4
Box 2: Shaping social protection policies through multiple knowledge sources in Indonesia	9
Box 3: The role of knowledge in policy at the decentralised level in Bolivia	13
Box 4: Democratising the forestry sector in Nepal and competing knowledge claims	18
Box 5: Think tanks take many shapes and forms	22
Box 6: Promoting and protecting child rights in Argentina	23
Box 7: Building plant health services using an innovation systems framework	27
Box 8: Knowledge translation innovations in Peru	31
Box 9: Six key lessons on capacity building for knowledge translation	32
Box 10: Empowering legislators in decisionmaking in Vietnam	33

Executive Summary

The critical importance of knowledge in strengthening policy is increasingly recognised in development circles. While there is considerable value in academic knowledge in terms of shaping the thinking of policy actors and practitioners over time, policy research can also have far-reaching impacts on programme design and budget allocations, with tangible impacts for the poor and marginalised. This paper explores the six key areas of the knowledge–development policy interface listed below with the aim of stimulating more nuanced debates and the development of tailored tools for actors involved in knowledge translation processes – including knowledge generators, brokers or users.

- 1. Types of knowledge:** Moving from an analysis of ‘research’ or ‘evidence’, as previous frameworks have emphasised, to ‘knowledge’ more broadly allows an examination of the political and epistemological dynamics in the production and use of such knowledge, while still including (but also reframing) the insights gained into evidence and research. Seeing the value of incorporating different types of knowledge (from evaluations to participatory research, moral principles to programmatic knowledge), and the practicalities of doing so is crucial to understanding and improving the knowledge-policy interface.
- 2. Political context:** Political context has consistently been identified as the most influential factor in determining the importance attached to knowledge in policy spaces. While a wave of political liberalisation and democratisation in the 1980s and 1990s around the world led to a general rise in participation in policy processes, non-state actors still face barriers to input. Nor has greater participation necessarily led to greater use of evidence, or quality of dialogue or debate – in some cases, there may exist unexpected opportunities for the influence of new knowledge in decision-making processes in authoritarian, fragile state and crisis contexts.
- 3. Sectoral dynamics:** Knowledge–policy dynamics differ across policy sectors due to divergent actors, demands for new knowledge and capacities to use such knowledge. Some sectors, like trade, require highly technical expertise, while others, like education and natural resource management, involve increasingly extensive consultation processes. Vested economic interests might play more of a behind-the-scenes role in certain sectors, as might international debates. More contested sectors might also find less room for evidence, like in the reproductive health arena.
- 4. Actors:** NGOs, international agencies and civil servants are often key players in the knowledge–policy nexus, but they should not be privileged in analytical work or policy-influencing efforts at the expense of an understanding of the potential role of other actors, including think tanks, legislators, political parties, intermediaries, the media, private sector actors and networks.
- 5. Innovative frameworks:** Insights from Complexity and Innovation Systems frameworks highlight that any work with actors at the knowledge–policy interface should be embedded within an understanding of the broader system in which they work, and the relationship between the supply of and demand for knowledge on development policy issues.
- 6. Knowledge translation:** Knowledge translation and intermediaries play an important role in bringing together knowledge and policy processes. Knowledge translation goes beyond disseminating research and the isolated production of communication products to critically engaging with users of knowledge.

Our synthesis of recent research, as well as practical insights derived from our international partnerships, underscores the fact that the knowledge–policy interface is too complex to encapsulate in any single framework. While the RAPID framework remains a useful analytical entry-point, it is critical that those seeking to engage in evidence-informed development policy dialogues also use additional tools and frameworks to deepen their analysis.



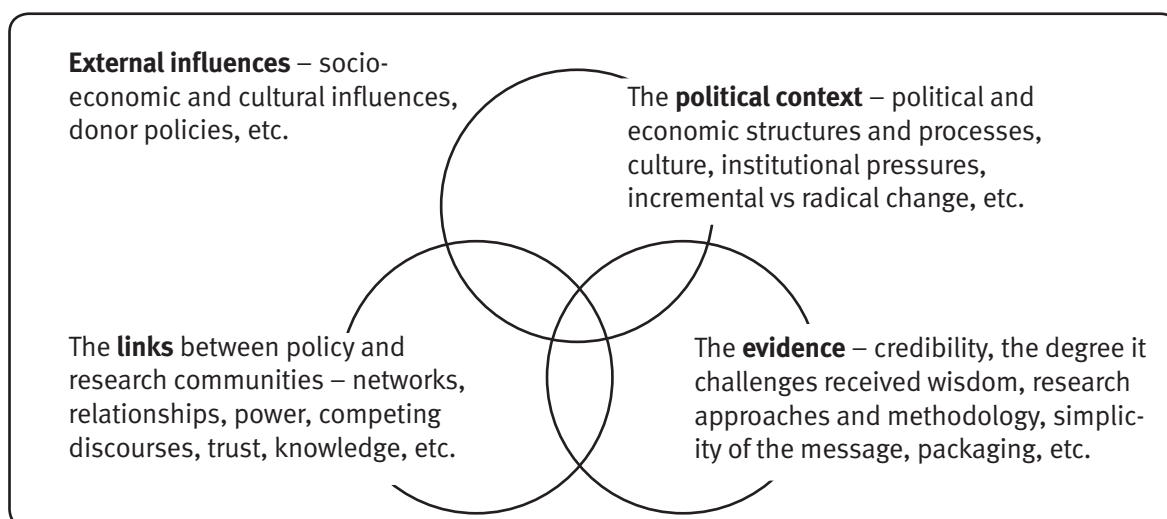
Identifying what accounts for successes in diverse contexts is critical to ensuring that research contributes towards more informed pro-poor policy dialogues.

Introduction

The critical importance of knowledge in strengthening policy and practice is increasingly recognised in development circles. While there is considerable value in academic knowledge in terms of shaping the thinking of policy actors and practitioners over time (e.g. Surr et al, 2002), policy research can also have far-reaching impacts on programme design and budget allocations, with tangible impacts for the poor and marginalised. A case in point is the rigorous evaluation work carried out around Mexico’s conditional cash transfer programme, Progresa/Oportunidades. These findings have been utilised to secure greater investments in the programme, not only at the national level but also in similar programmes across Latin America, as well as in parts of Asia and Africa, now reaching millions of households around the globe (World Bank, 2009). Such cases of successful evidence-informed policy influencing are not the norm, however (Carden, 2009). Identifying what accounts for such success in diverse contexts is a critical challenge if we are to ensure that the millions of pounds invested annually in research contribute towards more informed pro-poor policy dialogues.

Our collective understanding of the dynamics of knowledge translation and knowledge use in the policy sphere in developing country contexts is still in a fledgling state. This synthesis paper takes the research-to-policy framework of the Overseas Development Institute’s (ODI’s) Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme as its starting point (see Figure 1). This emphasises: i) the importance of political context; ii) bridging often isolated policy and knowledge communities; and iii) framing research evidence into politically palatable and memorable messages. The paper seeks, however, to explore six key areas of the knowledge–policy interface in greater depth. Our aim is to provide a summary of emerging insights on the linkages between knowledge and development policy, in the hope that this synthesis will help to stimulate more nuanced debates and the development of tailored tools for actors involved in knowledge translation processes – as knowledge generators, brokers or users.

Figure 1: The RAPID research-to-policy framework



Source: Adapted from Court and Young (2006).

The key dimensions we explore are as follows:

1. What role do different **types of knowledge** (like research-based, participatory and project knowledge) play in evidence-informed policy processes?
2. How do the characteristics of the knowledge–policy interface differ across **policy contexts**, from developmental states to fragile states?
3. To what extent do knowledge–policy–power dynamics differ across policy **sectors**, from highly technical policy areas such as trade policy to more inclusive debates on primary education?
4. What role do **different actors** (civil servants, legislators, think tanks, academics, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), donors) play in evidence-informed policy processes?
5. What can new **theoretical frameworks** add to debates on knowledge, power and policy – from complexity theory to innovation systems?
6. What do we know about **knowledge translation** processes, and can we identify good practice that could be adopted more broadly?

In each of these six areas we present a brief overview of the latest thinking and literature, including new research findings from ODI’s RAPID programme, and illustrate these theoretical insights with complementary case studies undertaken by our Evidence-based Policy in Development Network (ebpdn) partners around the globe.

Box 1: Key definitions

Policy: is a plan of action, usually based on certain principles and decided on by a body or individual, designed to administer, manage and control access to resources. In discussions on evidence-informed policy processes, policy typically refers to the explicit (and sometimes implicit) plan of action prepared by international, regional, national or sub-national inter-governmental or governmental bodies. In other words the focus is on public rules and regulations. While NGOs or private sector organisations also have policies, these are excluded from our discussion because they are not public in nature.

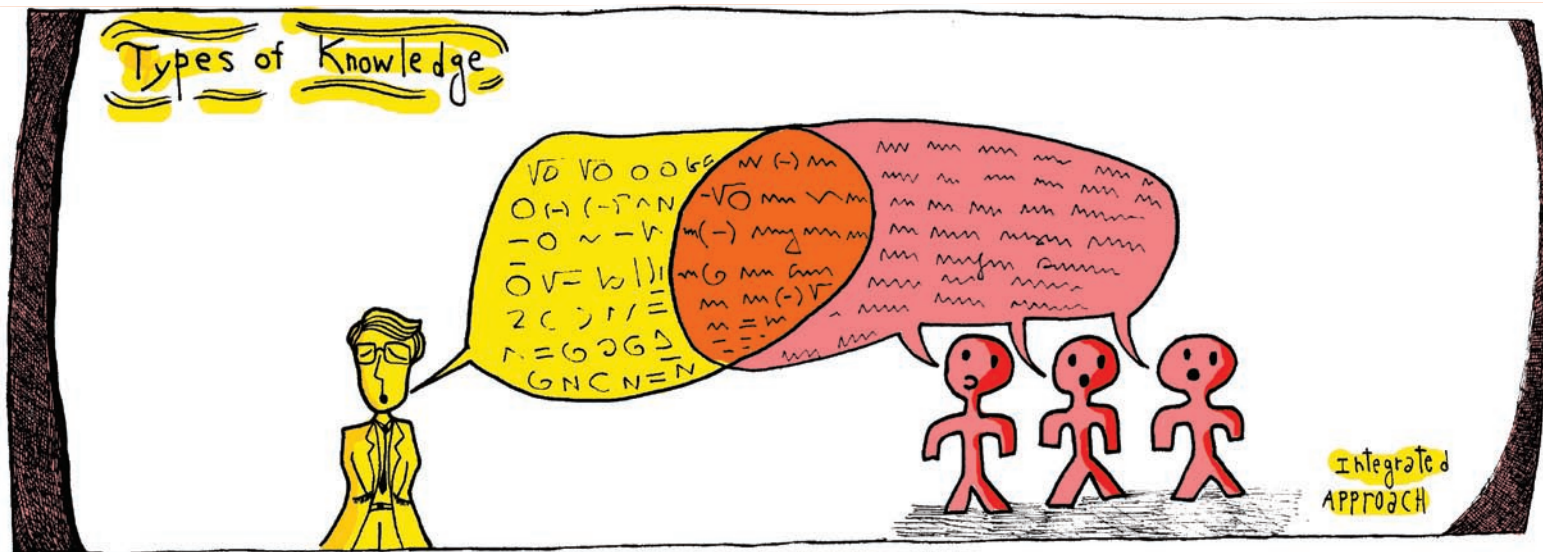
Research: “aims to investigate, learn and produce knowledge by: gathering information, contemplation, trial, and/or synthesis. In an international development context, this may involve action research or academic study ranging, as examples, from a pilot project to a laboratory experiment, a consultation exercise, a quantitative survey, a literature review, participant observation or a participatory evaluation. Beneficiaries, development practitioners or academics from scientific and social science disciplines might lead research.” (Court et al., 2005, p 26)

Knowledge: implies a practical or theoretical understanding of a topic, and is therefore a broader concept than that of research. While it includes technical and scientific research, it may also refer to formal and informal sources of understanding, like experience. It can be theoretical as well as empirical and context-specific. As Foucault famously emphasised, the construction, communication and use of knowledge is heavily imbued with power relations, and this needs to be considered in any efforts to shape the policy process through research-informed and other types of evidence.

Power: operates at many different levels and can be defined along a number of lines. First, the conventional understanding of power emphasises the control over material resources negotiated through formal rules and structures, institutions and procedures. Second, power can be hidden, operating through dominant values and discourses which, in turn, shape individual preferences and identities. Third, power is produced by social relations – the ways in which people relate to each other and the way they see those relationships. These may be consensual and positive, helping those involved work together to achieve a goal. Or they may be contested and negative, whereby the legitimacy of power holders is called into question.



Much work calls for citizens to be directly involved in policy processes, or to have their views and voices incorporated into policy.



It is crucial to draw on multiple knowledge sources to inform policy, as traditional research is often ill equipped to deal with the complex problems that characterise international development.

Introduction

To understand how to strengthen the link between knowledge, policy and practice, it is important to look at how different types of knowledge can contribute. Early work on the link between knowledge and policy focused predominantly on the rational role of science and research; models then began to incorporate an understanding of the pragmatic and often opportunistic ways in which policymakers draw on different sources, with the nature of evidence used to inform decisions the central focus; moving to 'knowledge' more broadly allows us to examine the source of the influences guiding policy and to investigate the political and epistemological dynamics in the production and use of such knowledge, while still including (but also reframing) the insights already gained into evidence and research. Many types of knowledge have a role to play in improving policy and practice: scientific research, impact assessments, community voices, and moral principles and judgements are just a few. Each of these has strengths and weaknesses, potential benefits and also downsides. This theme focuses on understanding how different types and sources of knowledge are put to use, and the opportunities and challenges for mobilising these types of knowledge.

Types of knowledge

Research-based knowledge

Many advocate the use of research in policymaking processes (Court et al., 2005). Research can be scientific in nature, involving rigorous investigation to enhance the stock of knowledge about the world. While this tends to focus on academic questions, understanding gained through this work will often spill over into policymaking circles through ‘enlightenment’, gradually shaping assumptions and policy ideas (Weiss, 1977). Although scientific research is often perceived as highly credible in the policy process, the more direct influence of scientific work faces a number of obstacles. For example, the timescales involved in producing research are frequently long in comparison with the pace of policy debates, or research can be too narrow in scope in relation to the broad issues of concern to policymakers (Jones et al., 2008).

Research can also be policy oriented, using systematic methods to examine problems for formulating and implementing policy. One aspect of this is scoping studies and systematic reviews of existing knowledge in priority areas that are often commissioned by public bodies. For example the Cochrane Collaboration carries out such activities in the field of healthcare, and the Campbell Collaboration performs a similar role for areas such as education, criminal justice and social care. On the other hand, policymakers can be directly consulted for key problems requiring further research. While these approaches are more likely to provide relevant and timely inputs, there are concerns that, in some contexts, research carried out in a ‘consultancy’ mode cannot be truly independent work and may be susceptible to political interference or depoliticisation (Jones, 2009). One way to combat this is through the promotion of critical research and advocacy, where organisations such as CSOs problematise and critique prevailing trends and discuss the values and ideology behind policy (Livny et al., 2006). This may often be difficult to carry out, however, especially in contexts with limited political freedoms.

Project and programme knowledge

Knowledge generated during the implementation of development projects and programmes (and more generally from public policies of the state and other actors) can be another valuable source of policy advice. Generally focused on learning and/or accountability, such knowledge can inform policymakers about the viability of a development model, give implementing agencies a means of monitoring progress or generate solutions to a specific problem. This sort of ‘feedback’ is critical to ensuring the effectiveness of development work (Ramalingam and Jones, 2008). Generating such knowledge can focus on the process of implementation, monitor ongoing activities or be based on approaches such as impact evaluation (IE), which look at the effects of development intervention outside the immediate work of the programme.

Nevertheless, getting project- and programme-derived knowledge into policy debates is not without its challenges. These include the capacity requirements and time constraints placed on project staff, who may often be more focused on action rather than analysis, and the wider difficulties of embedding a new working culture and providing the right incentives for learning and accountability. Knowledge of this nature is also often relatively context specific, and faces barriers to being immediately more widely usable. Use may also be hindered by power structures in development agencies, with pressures for staff to filter, regulate and fit information into prevailing management processes and frameworks (Mosse, 2006). Moreover, information about ‘failed’ projects is rarely

published. For example, a recent study found that IEs tend to be used to legitimise funding rather than for improving programmes, with the vast majority of published studies showing ‘positive’ impact (Jones et al., 2009a). However, the potential this sort of knowledge has to improve development programming can be seen in the cross-regional influence which IEs of Mexico’s Progresa, the first conditional cash-transfer social protection programme, have enjoyed, and the increasing interest in participatory impact assessment for humanitarian projects.

Participatory knowledge

Much work calls for citizens to be directly involved in policy processes, or to have their views and voices incorporated into policy. Participation is instrumental, as experiential knowledge can provide an important perspective on issues, and local understanding is often key to effective interventions. Drawing on participatory knowledge can also be valuable as a way to redress power imbalances, enabling citizens to hold governments responsible for their actions (Goetz and Jenkins, 2005). A recent participatory governance assessment in post-conflict Nepal highlighted the different governance reform priorities held by citizens at the grassroots level as compared with government officials in the capital and international agencies (Jones et al., 2009d). There are a number of obstacles to incorporating voice into policy processes. It can be hindered by power imbalances between the government or development agency and the citizens. This can result in participation merely being a cosmetic label, with many efforts falling far short of stimulating a genuine autonomous discourse (Mohan and Hickey, 2004). Moreover, without careful attention, existing power relations among citizens (e.g. gender dynamics, racial or spatial inequalities) can be reproduced and reinforced by participation processes. The lobbying and advocacy capacities of CSOs are therefore a key consideration in efforts to amplify the voices of vulnerable groups.

Multiple knowledges

It is crucial to draw on multiple knowledge sources to inform policy (see Box 2). Traditional science and research are often ill equipped to deal with the complex, multidimensional and dynamic problems that characterise international development. ODI’s experience resonates with the calls for multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary research, orienting fields of study around the problems faced rather than disciplines, and utilising a range of theoretical perspectives. This poses a number of practical problems, as the ‘silos’ in academia can mean that professional incentives run against such efforts, and people’s mindsets and ways of understanding the world may clash and conflict (Brown, 2007). Perhaps more important, however, is a growing recognition that research can provide only one of many inputs. This means that decision-making processes must be carefully designed to draw on and integrate the various types of knowledge, using deliberative processes and participatory fora (Jones, 2009; Jones et al., 2008).

It is also important to ask how different knowledge, concepts and ideas are used and interact to shape policy. One avenue for this work is the role that different ‘paradigms’, taken-for-granted descriptions and assumptions, play in shaping policy (Jones, 2009). Many studies approach this problem from the perspective of how disciplinary biases effect ideas of how change happens in development, and how they are sustained (Krznaric, 2007; Rao and Woolcock, 2007). Another approach looks at how development policy paradigms can better fit Southern contexts. Kelsall (2008), for example, argues that slow progress of the ‘good governance’ agenda owes to Western institutions and approaches sitting ill alongside certain traditions, core ideas and values in sub-Saharan Africa. Development must learn to ‘go with the grain’ of these ideas around power, accountability and social morality, such as the role of extended families and ‘big man’ paradigms of leadership. Another example is the role of moral knowledge and values. These play a role both as a ‘framework’ for policy, restricting action through what is seen as appropriate and what is not, and steering policymakers towards particular goals and aims. They also serve as a ‘repertoire’, a set of ‘boundary concepts’ that enable communication between people with different rationales that can also be used strategically to legitimate one’s position (Scholtes, 2008). One important avenue for future research lies in understanding which (groups of) actors play a role in shaping these norms, and under what situations policymakers are more likely to stick closely to the ‘moral’ course of action.

Box 2: Shaping social protection policies through multiple knowledge sources in Indonesia

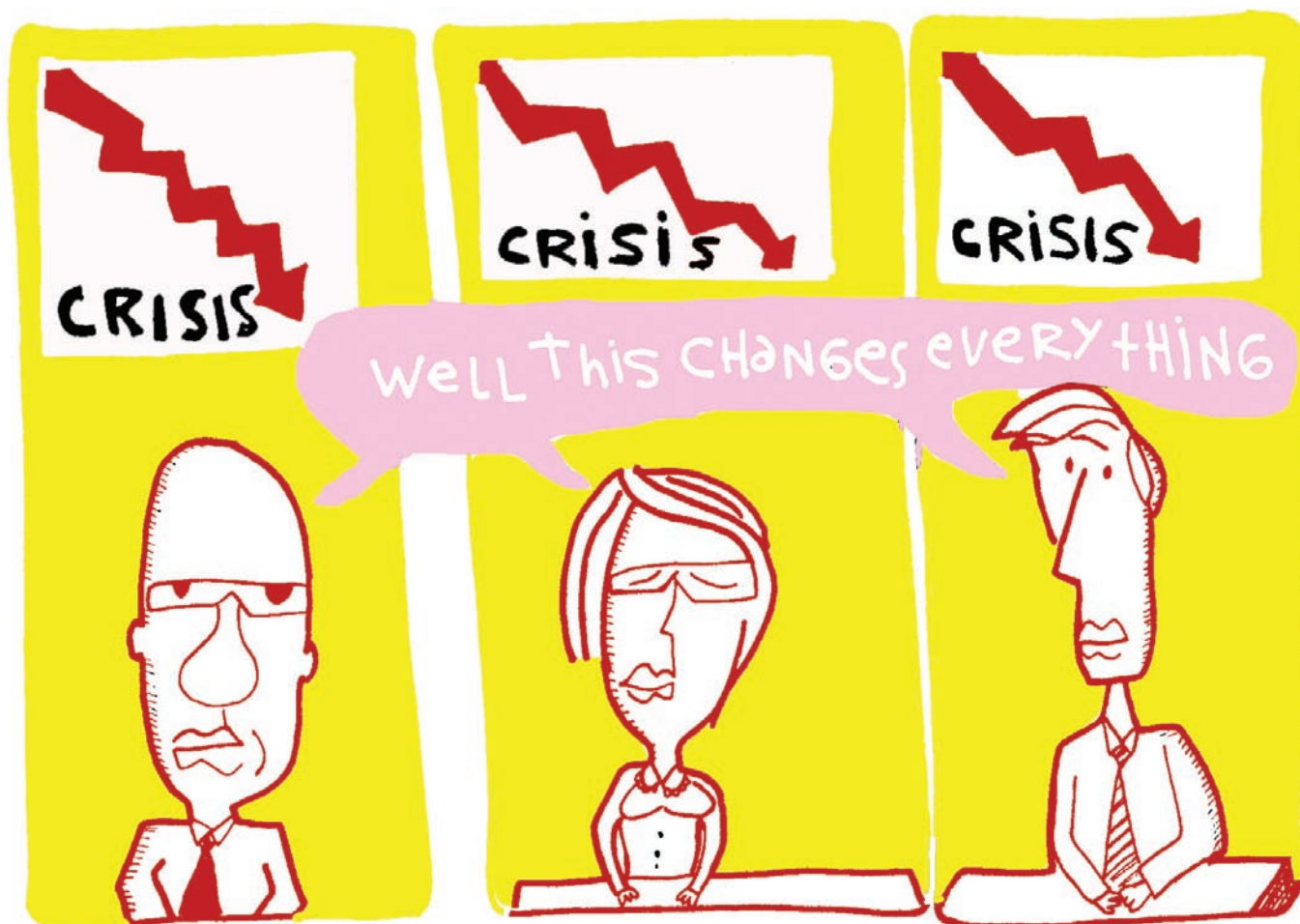
The involvement of SMERU, an Indonesian policy research institute, in the evaluation of a cash transfer programme in Indonesia provides a good example of the way in which multiple knowledge sources can effectively influence policy design and implementation.

The government of Indonesia implemented the Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) programme in October 2005, designed as a means of social protection to mitigate the impact of a fuel subsidy reduction. The UCT was aimed at 15.5 million poor households and was managed by the Ministry of Social Welfare, with targeting carried out by BPS (Statistics Indonesia) and implementation by PT Pos (the Indonesian Postal Company) through its local branches. Following the SMERU Research Institute's own initiative to conduct a rapid appraisal on the newly implemented programme, the government's National Development Planning Board (Bappenas) requested SMERU to conduct a wider-reaching evaluation of the programme. The study was funded by the World Bank, involving qualitative elements such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, as well as quantitative work using data collected by BPS and SMERU's own field data.

It collected evidence on a number of different issues and dimensions: implementing institutions; information dissemination of the programme; constraints and technical issues in the targeting mechanism; delivery and distribution mechanism; complaints and problem solving; funding utilisation; and early indications of programme impact. This resonates with important lessons about research incorporating different sources of knowledge: the study overall focuses on generating knowledge about the process of implementation, such as monitoring the accuracy of the targeting and use of funding. It also involves knowledge about the effects and impact of the intervention, and incorporates participatory knowledge through looking at the level of satisfaction of programme recipients and the mechanisms for addressing feedback and complaints.

The study was used as an input for improvements in the ongoing programme implementation, to communicate the strengths and weaknesses of the 2005 UCT programme, as a reference for other research institutes and practitioners working on similar issues and as part of SMERU's contribution towards better-informed public involvement in policy processes. SMERU was also invited to contribute to the planning and implementation of a 2008 UCT programme. This integrated view of the UCT programme helped contribute to the use of SMERU's work in policy, as the mixture of methods and types of knowledge provided tangible and credible evidence. Other factors associated with facilitating the influence of research played important roles: the initial rapid appraisal provided extremely timely information; in-depth research built on this, building up the evidence in an area in the political limelight; easy-to-understand products (policy briefs, memorandums) were produced to help communicate the findings to non-academic audiences; and SMERU's work to build trust with policymakers and maintain its good reputation helped minimise knowledge politicisation.

Source: Based on analysis by Nuning Akhmadi, SMERU Institute, Indonesia (2009).



Crises have a strong impact on policy-making processes, either positive, providing a 'policy window', or negative, severing existing links.

Introduction

ODI's work has consistently identified political context as being the most influential factor in determining the importance attached to evidence in policy spaces (Court et al., 2005). The political context comprises a range of factors, including the nature of the political system (e.g. authoritarian or democratic) as well as the level of democratic competition; the strength of government leadership; the relative strength of interest groups; incentive structures within policymaking organisations; capacities of both policymakers and institutions; and the level of influence of external actors (such as donors and international institutions). Together, these factors shape who is able to participate in the policy process, on what terms and how the process is structured.

Political context

A wave of governance changes

The relationship between the nature of a country's political system and the importance given to knowledge in policy processes is very complex. A wave of political liberalisation and democratisation, in the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America and Eastern Europe, as well as in parts of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, impacted processes of governance and participation in development (Garcé and Uña, 2007; Johnson, 2000; Kimball, 2000; Mendizabal and Sample, 2009). In many cases, authoritarian regimes were brought down, allowing for the proliferation of viewpoints in policymaking. These events were often inspired by civil society with, in some cases, support from the international community. The development of poverty reduction strategies (PRS) in the late 1990s, although criticised as being donor imposed (Cling et al., 2002), encouraged the participation of CSOs in policy processes and spearheaded new forms of knowledge generation (such as citizen score cards). Similarly, in Latin America the international community played a key role in generating incentives for the development of policy-oriented CSOs.

Even contexts with enduring one-party systems have seen increased plurality in policy processes. For instance, while China may not be seen as intellectually 'open' of a society as some liberal democracies in the West, the Chinese policymaking arena is open to experimentation and more receptive to debate than is usually assumed. Paradoxically, the Chinese political system strengthens the role of Chinese intellectuals, owing to the lack of alternative sources of influence such as opposition parties, civil society groups, independent trade unions and a free press. Furthermore, rather than focusing on electoral processes, Chinese thinkers view China as implementing democracy by promoting the use of public consultations, expert meetings and surveys to inform decision making. This is in contrast with the West, where such initiatives are generally seen as supplementary to elections rather than as an essential part of the democratic experience (Leonard, 2008).

Opportunities for voice in the policy process

Despite this wave of democratisation, non-state actors often have difficulties getting involved in, and having an impact on, policymaking outside of elections. In some contexts there may be official windows for non-state actors to participate through elected bodies at national and local levels, but in many others, especially those still undergoing democratic transitions, formal mechanisms and institutionalised spaces for an open, inclusive policy debate, let alone real contestation of policies, are weak (Livny et al., 2006). Governments often display a low level of trust in CSOs and, even when there is interaction because government actors recognise the need to tap into CSO expertise in certain domains, CSOs tend to be treated more as 'subcontractors' than as equals (Chowdhury et al., 2006). Moreover, political space for civil society in some contexts appears to be contracting, as governments look to reaffirm their dominance within decision-making processes. For instance, laws are being proposed or implemented in Zambia, Uganda, Ethiopia and Nicaragua to curb the scope of NGO policy advocacy work.

Greater participation has not necessarily meant (nor should it necessarily mean) greater use of evidence, or quality of dialogue and debate. In Bolivia, for example, increasing social movement participation has arguably fostered greater inclusion, especially of marginalised groups, in the policy process. It has also allowed new and relevant

issues to be put on the public agenda. However, the involvement of previously disenfranchised social groups by the Evo Morales administration has also resulted in high levels of political uncertainty and decision-making taking place under short time horizons, in part because capacity deficits in terms of knowledge consumption and uptake as well as public management have not been systematically addressed. On the other hand, while less competitive political systems may appear to have fewer incentives to be open to new knowledge, this is not always the case. In the Southern Cone of Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, technocrats (with neo-liberal values) often had substantial power in authoritarian regimes, most notably a group of Chilean economists known popularly as the Chicago Boys (most had studied at the University of Chicago Department of Economics). The same was true in Peru for left-wing technocrats during the Velazco authoritarian regime. However, such expert knowledge was fed into policy processes often at the expense of knowledge generated by excluded groups, such as women and minorities, as illustrated by the UN Children's Fund's (UNICEF's) seminal paper 'Structural Adjustment with a Human Face' in the mid-1980s (UNICEF, 1987).

In the same vein, rising levels of political will towards the application of policy research in contemporary Vietnam stems more from the need to address increasingly complex policy issues, which have resulted from the growing integration of the country into the global economy as part of the Doi Moi reform process. In other countries characterised by limited political competition, such as Malaysia and China, the number of think tanks has risen sharply, for similar reasons.

The level of authority – of central or sub-national governments, for example – at which policy processes are played out is another critical dimension in assessing knowledge–policy dynamics. For instance, Box 3 illustrates that more opportunities may exist for evidence-based policy dialogues at the sub-national level owing to a demand for new knowledge to help improve local livelihoods. Although evidence for this is sketchy, a recent ODI study on science–policy linkages found that evidence-informed dialogues were easier at decentralised levels, as local actors had less access to research, so were more likely to use it if it were tailored to their needs. National-level actors often complained of 'information overload' (Jones et al., 2008).

Political leadership can also determine the extent to which evidence is used to formulate and implement policy. In relation to HIV/AIDS, strong political leadership was a key factor in the promotion of evidence-based policymaking in Uganda and Senegal. Here, politicians were quick to utilise research suggesting HIV was more than a health issue and required a response involving a multi-sectoral and multi-level approach. However, the problem is often not so much political leadership as limited institutionalised channels for policymakers to interact with the research community. This may owe to a lack of technical skills, overstretched resources and poor quality and lack of policy relevant research (Hennink and Stephenson, 2004; Livny et al., 2006).

The role of external forces

External factors, such as a country's level of dependence on international donors and international financial institutions (IFIs), are also influential, as they can encourage and enforce changes in policy content and processes, affecting the autonomy of national policymakers. For example, despite research illustrating the need for better social services in Zambia, conditionalities meant that the government was hampered in its efforts to improve the quality of school education. Zambian schools experienced a shortage of about 7000 teachers, despite having 12,000 trained teachers who could not be put on the payroll because of a ceiling on expenditure stipulated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Other international influences may have a positive effect, however. For instance, international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have placed much-needed attention on important dimensions of poverty and vulnerability. In the human rights field, transnational advocacy networks have driven a 'boomerang pattern' (Keck and Sikkink, 1998): a triangle whereby domestic actors seek alliances with international actors to put pressure on their national governments. Powerful examples include commitments to mainstream gender equality in policies and programmes around the world and, increasingly, acceptance of principles of environmental sustainability.

Box 3: The role of knowledge in policy at the decentralised level in Bolivia

In recent years, Bolivia has experienced its most turbulent political changes since the dictatorship that ended in 1981. With inequality and poverty perceived to be higher than at any time in the past, in 2005 the indigenous movement, along with the urban poor and unions, headed by the leader of Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) (Movement for Socialism), Evo Morales, brought an end to a neo-liberal-inspired government that had ruled the country since democracy was instated in 1982.

Prior to Morales' election victory, policy debates involved a narrow group of stakeholders, including officers from Bolivian ministries in charge of economic and social policymaking, World Bank and IMF representatives and officers from decentralised public institutions and some local, professionalised NGOs. Research studies, drawing on scientific evidence with technical recommendations, were often considered in defining policy.

The Morales administration appears to have avoided consultation processes with the above-mentioned stakeholders and de-prioritised scientific-based recommendations to define economic and social policies. Government officials, many of whom were union leaders and activists, appear less interested in evidence and more interested in socialist ideology, while their limited academic credentials mean they suffer from lower levels of research literacy. While there are legitimate concerns about the quality of research in the country owing to the poor quality of higher education, even the most credible and robust evidence struggles to be incorporated into policy decisions, as policymakers appear to have prioritised satisfying their own and their supporters' interests.

Despite this, the UK Department for International Development- (DFID-)funded Comercio y Pobreza en Latino América (COPLA) (Trade and Policy in Latin America) programme has enabled Brazil nut producers at the 'grassroots' to generate and utilise evidence to influence policy processes. The Brazil nut inter-institutional platform – comprising producer associations, dealers, factories and municipalities that operate independently of the government and are from the Bolivian Amazon region – was created with the objective of supporting their members to influence policymakers. More specifically, COPLA has promoted an enabling environment for evidence-based policymaking through: i) generating analyses on Brazil nut production and policies; ii) raising awareness among platform members on Brazil nut policies; iii) convening meetings with government officials and iv) strengthening organisational structures of the platform and its members.

The programme has enabled the poorest segment of the Brazil nut platform – harvesters – to generate non-technical knowledge. For example, they highlighted the inequity of the *habilito* system (which consists of an in-kind advance payment provided by factory owners to harvesters on the condition that harvesters hand over all nuts harvested) and the way in which it underestimates the international price of Brazil nuts, on which the size of the *habilito* is estimated. They suggested an alternative local method to estimate the *habilito* size, which would result in higher prices, which was in turn included in the proposals the platform conveyed to policymakers. As a result, the government encouraged factories where Brazil nuts are cleaned and packed to increase the price paid to harvesters. Unfortunately, however, in light of the global recession, the in-kind advance payment provided by factory owners in 2009 has decreased owing to lower global Brazil nut prices, underscoring the important role that context and timing have in influencing the uptake of research-based policy proposals.

Source: Based on analysis by Roberto Telleria, GNTP (National Working Group for Participation), Bolivia (2009).

Unexpected windows of opportunity

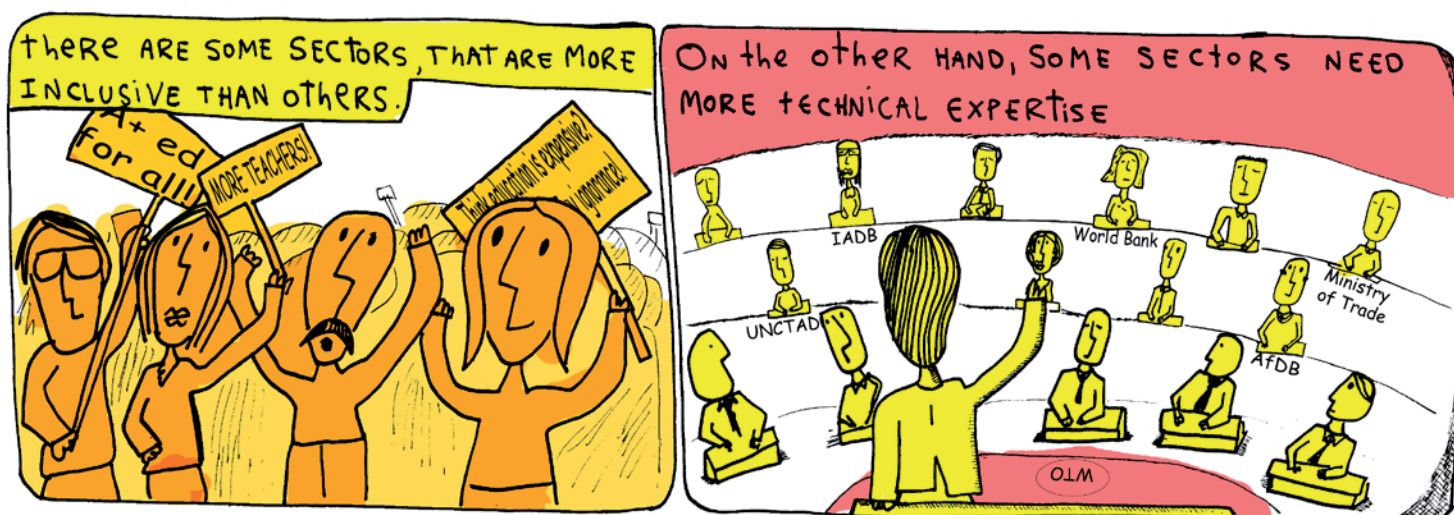
Fragile and post-conflict states are increasingly in the international spotlight, especially since the launch of the so-called War on Terror. Although they tend to lack institutional capacity and pressure from civil society, they function as a 'blank slate', with often fewer competing interests and actors. As such, these contexts may offer unique opportunities for knowledge-informed policymaking. For example, Kao (2000) in Jones et al. (2009b) shows that new governments that suffer from weak knowledge capacity may show enthusiasm for the advice of think tanks in order to fill in knowledge gaps. In post-conflict societies, such as Cambodia, socioeconomic reconstruction and rehabilitation are high on the political agenda and policymakers have favoured problem-solving research (Jones et al., 2008). Nevertheless, lack of institutional pressure can lead to prioritisation of short-term goals and vested interests, resulting in the maintenance of the status quo (Macdonald, 2008).

Similarly, crises have a strong impact on policymaking processes, either positive, providing a 'policy window', or negative, severing existing links between research and policy (Court and Cotterell, 2006). The greater the level of crisis, the stronger the chance research will influence not just policy changes but also underlying discourses and values. Crises can break stalemates or increase willingness to take painful but necessary steps (Drazen and Grilli, 1993 in Court and Cotterell, 2006). The link between crises and reform is a very strong theme in the economics literature. For instance, Rodrik (1996) in Court and Cotterell (2006) notes that 'the confluence of economic crisis with reform has led to the natural supposition that crisis is the instigator of reform'.

Further, regime changes can present opportunities for reform, as interests associated with the old regime can be discredited and disorganised. Strongly promoted before the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s, a culture of compliance with the developmental state was seen to be central to the success of the Asian Tigers. However, after the crisis, this approach was seen as insular, outmoded and irrelevant to a burgeoning knowledge-based economy. For example, in Singapore the state is now promoting a more creative, entrepreneurial attitude to knowledge generation and use (illustrated through its support in the biomedical sciences industry), and has redefined its role as one of promoting an enabling environment rather than prescriptively controlling development (Holden and Demeritt, 2008).



The involvement of previously disenfranchised groups by the Morales administration in Bolivia has occasionally resulted in high levels of political uncertainty and decisions made under short time horizons.



The dynamics of participation in policy dialogues vary markedly across sectors. Some sectors rely on very specific technocratic and legal evidence while others increasingly involve extensive consultation processes.

Introduction

The dynamics of participation in policy dialogues vary markedly across sectors. In the case of trade policy, decisions are often largely taken behind closed doors based on very specific technocratic and legal evidence (e.g. Newell and Tussie, 2006); on the other hand, policy development in, for instance, the education or natural resource management sectors increasingly involves extensive consultation processes and draws on multiple sources of evidence, including experiential knowledge of beneficiaries such as parents or subsistence farmers (e.g. Jones and Pellini, 2009) (see also Box 4). These distinctions have received only limited attention in the evidence-based policy literature to date. Yet understanding how the relationship between knowledge and policy-making varies according to the characteristics of a policy sector is critical for designing appropriate knowledge translation and uptake strategies.

Recent work by ODI has developed an analytical framework to understand these specificities (Pomares and Jones, forthcoming). Key variables, which we explore in more depth below, include: i) the level of technical expertise required to participate in policy debates ii) the relative influence of economic interests in shaping policy dialogues, iii) the level of contestation in the sector, and iv) the extent to which policy discourses are internationalised. These factors are also shaped by broader political context factors such as the capacity of knowledge producers to generate and communicate research that resonates with policymakers, the relative strength and density of ‘issue champions’ (or prominent supporters of a particular issue who may straddle both policy and practitioner worlds), the stage in the policy cycle at which change is sought (agenda setting vs implementation vs M & E) and the type of desired policy change (discursive vs procedural or legal or policy vs behavioural shifts).

Sectoral dynamics

Technical expertise

Policy sectors require differing levels of technical expertise, which influences who can and cannot access and shape policy debates. As the need for specialised expertise grows in response to growing complexity in a particular sector (e.g. climate change), demand for knowledge from policymakers and the call for policy advice of ‘experts’ also increases. A related implication is that technical expertise often entails the monopoly of a single profession, such as lawyers or economists, leading to the establishment of a clear hierarchy of knowledge (e.g. Weiss, 1999). This is often reinforced by closed knowledge communities. While recognition of the importance of rigorous evidence is welcome, an emphasis on a narrowly defined set of expertise can also be potentially harmful. It risks overlooking important cross-sectoral linkages and missing out on potential synergies derived from insights based on a broader array of multi- or trans-disciplinary knowledge inputs (Faundez, 2005). Moreover, technical arguments also play a key role in depoliticising public debate, and as such they are often deployed by policymakers in order to advance their policy positions. Claims made on the basis of technical data are presented as ‘objective evidence’ and, hence, are more difficult to contest. For instance, in India recent policy debates around equity in the education sector have focused largely on numbers of scholarship quotas for excluded social groups rather than on the more challenging dimensions of revising curriculum content and teaching practices.

The role of economic interests

Although economic interests are present in almost any policy decision, in some policy areas (such as trade, social security or environment) economic actors are arguably more prominent. It is thus essential to acknowledge the asymmetry of power between research institutions and economic actors as well as the influence of economic interests in shaping research production and uptake. For example, although there is strong evidence about the limited effect trade liberalisation alone has on poverty reduction, the strong role of large private sector players in trade policy has made it difficult for pro-poor NGO actors to gain access to decision-making channels in many developing country contexts. “The policy-making process on a ‘high-politics’ issue such as trade has tended to be much more secretive and less accessible to non-state actors, particularly those with fewer established ties and points of access to the ministries involved.” (Newell and Tussie 2006, p. 15).

This example highlights that, in sectors where powerful and competing groups contest possible policy options, not only does the evidence base required for action need to be substantial, but also links to a credible messenger are vital.

Issue contestation

Research is more likely to be applied to policy-making if there is a strong consensus about the need for policy change than if the area is highly contested. For example, research on reproductive health issues is often dismissed as the area is highly contested and value-driven, and moral arguments typically carry greater weight (e.g. Lambright, 2008). In such cases, knowledge often becomes a source of ‘political ammunition’ (Timmermans and Scholten, 2006). Equally, tackling global warming first required a broad agreement on the existence, extent and speed of climate change, before the debate could be focused on how to promote more sustainable development approaches.

Internationalisation of debates

Demand for research evidence is also shaped by the level of internationalisation of sectoral issues. In the case of environmental protection, gender equality and HIV/AIDS, many domestic actors have enjoyed greater success in influencing policy once they began working with international players (such as international NGOs) (Keck and Sikkink, 2008). Similarly, in the governance sector, international actors and discourses have been key drivers in human rights and anti-corruption initiatives, especially in post-conflict settings where these issues are often highly emotive (e.g. Jones et al., 2009b).

Box 4: Democratising the forestry sector in Nepal and competing knowledge claims

Following the end of a decade-long violent struggle between the Maoists and the Nepalese government in April 2006, the new Minister of Forest and Soil Conservation formed a multi-stakeholder taskforce to recommend comprehensive restructuring of the forest sector as part of the political transition process and broader efforts to build a 'New Nepal'. Many civil society actors called for a paradigm shift and extensive reforms: reforms to address the problem of continued deforestation, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity and the exclusion of forest dependent communities from accessing forests, particularly in the politically tense Terai border area. Widespread corruption, mismanagement, illegal extraction and encroachment, as well as tenure confusion and the absence of institutional arrangements to manage the forests were recognised as key underlying causes.

In the context of unfolding political optimism, civil society organisations began to engage in policy dialogue with the new coalition government through lobbying, informal meetings, submitting demands in writing and initiating various policy forums. However, the process was quick to become derailed because of the highly contested nature of the sector. The Federation of Community Forest User Groups of Nepal (FECOFUN) and Mr. Gopal Rai, the Minister of Forest and Soil Conservation reached an agreement to expand community forestry in the Terai, but this threatened the interests of the advocates of Collaborative Forest Management (CFM), who lobbied political leaders from the Terai and used political party channels to reverse the decision. Feeling trapped by both sides, the Minister established a taskforce in August 2006 comprising government officials, professional organisations and civil society actors to investigate the issues in greater depth and on this basis provide timely policy recommendations.

A wide consultation process led by the Nepal Foresters Association was developed. This included tapping into the knowledge of a broad range of stakeholders through country-wide focus group discussions with specific interests groups; expert consultations with universities and research institutes; development of thematic papers on various aspects of the forest sector; and a national workshop to present and discuss the thematic papers. Overall, it was a long, rigorous process involving both conventional and participatory research methods that not only generated and consolidated current knowledge in the forest sector but also sought to secure legitimacy by involving relevant stakeholders.

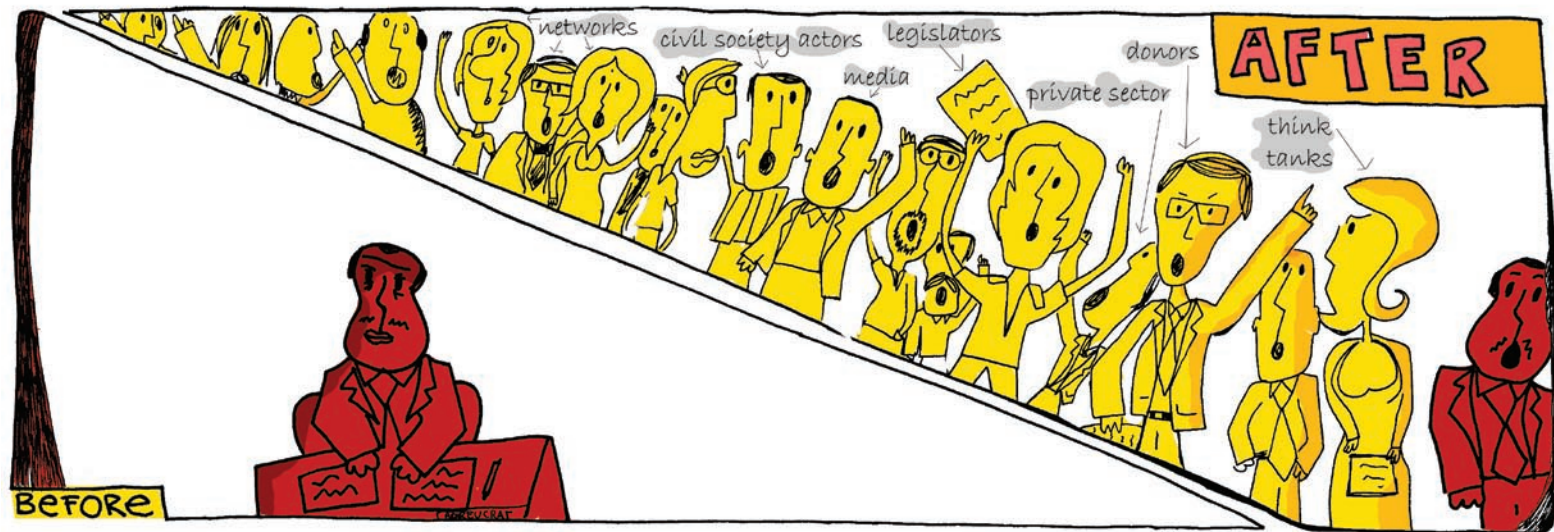
Nevertheless, conflicts and contestation became visible through the taskforce process as stakeholders adopted specific tactics to control the outcomes of the reports. The selection of facilitators to lead focus group discussions, the identification of focus group participants, the selection of experts for preparing the thematic papers, and the drafting of the report by the committee all became contentious issues. As social inclusion was high on the agenda during this time, the Taskforce also faced a dilemma in deciding whether to be inclusive or to focus on the professional quality of these various groups.

During the process the value of knowledge was compromised at various points. In the end, the reports from the Focus Group Discussions were scarcely consulted by the thematic experts while preparing thematic papers, and government representatives sought to influence the language and tone of the report for their own interests without giving sufficient attention to thematic papers or field reports. In fact, the structure and language of the report became a battlefield of conflicting interests resulting in a negotiated set of recommendations that were overly generic. Despite initial high hopes for extensive reforms, ultimately the report was 'left on the shelf', with the knowledge generated through mobilising significant human and financial resources neither adequately appreciated nor utilised for any policy change. This case highlights the contested nature of knowledge production and tensions that are often present between technocratic expertise and community sources of knowledge. Even when sectors, such as the forestry sector in Nepal, have a significant degree of community involvement, ordinary people's knowledge may be discredited or ignored if powerful vested political and professional/economic interests are at stake. Moreover, there is too often a disjuncture between community generation of knowledge and their ability to shape knowledge translation and use processes.

Source: Based on analysis prepared by Naya Sharma Paudel, Forest Action, Nepal (2009).



Policy development in the natural resource management sector increasingly uses consultation processes, as in this community forest in Nepal.



The range of actors linking knowledge and policy over the past 20-30 years has become increasingly diverse.

Introduction

Policy actors have varying abilities to critically engage with new knowledge. They also face many opportunities and challenges when bringing evidence to the table during policy discussions. Work in this area has shown that, in many developing country contexts, the range of actors linking knowledge and policy over the past 20-30 years has become increasingly diverse, and that these actors are playing more fluid roles (Culpeper, 2008; Stone, 2008). Non-state actors (such as political parties, interest groups and the media), in both the private and not-for-profit sectors (Ahmed, 2005; Stone, 2004), are increasingly involved at the regional and international levels in the context of globalisation (Lee et al., 2005; Miller, 2007), as well as at the national and sub-national levels as power and resources are decentralised (Scoones et al., 2006). ODI's work focused initially on CSOs, civil servants and donors, but has expanded recently to include think tanks, political parties (Datta et al., forthcoming; Jones et al., 2009b; Mendizabal and Sample, 2009) and legislators (Hudson and Wren, 2007; Jones and Tembo, 2008).

Civil society organisations

In many contexts CSOs have experienced a gradual shift in their role from service delivery on behalf of the state towards advocacy and holding government to account. This has led to their increasing engagement at the knowledge-policy interface (Tembo and Wells, 2007). With often good links to the grassroots and policy implementation

Actors

processes, CSOs are powerful actors that can play a key role in giving voice to marginalised groups and generating new knowledge (Sumner, 2009). However, the extent to which they are able to influence policy depends very much on the type of policy spaces afforded to civil society actors in different contexts and sectors (see previous sections). Gaventa (2004), for instance, distinguishes between closed, invited and demanded policy spaces. In some contexts, CSOs have often had antagonistic relationships with governments and have been seen as criticising public policies more than proposing constructive alternatives (Curran, 2005), or as being agents for international donors. Jones et al. (2008) argue that policy spaces have been relatively closed to civil society actors. Box 6, however, highlights how civil society networks in Argentina can be invited to engage with government in the development of legislation to promote and protect child rights. In other instances, civil society actors can successfully demand that policy spaces be opened so that they can participate and set the agenda, rather than only inputting into consultation processes where there is limited scope for debate.

Think tanks

Think tanks are increasingly seen as an influential player in shaping development policy and practice. Donors are investing in them on a large scale. For instance, the Hewlett Foundation has set aside \$100 million for its think tank programme over the next 10 years (Young, 2008). Think tanks are traditionally seen as independent institutes which aim to undertake policy-relevant research (see McGann, 2001). However, there is often a trade-off between independence and policy impact. Financial and intellectual independence may even prove to be counterproductive as the alternative civil society channel of impact may be weak (Mendizabal, 2009). For example, the Vietnamese Academy of Social Science (VASS) – a government-affiliated think tank in Vietnam – has proximity to elites as well as presence in the policy process, which gives it substantial direct policy influence. Moreover, think tanks come in a number of different guises: NGOs, academic institutes, consultancies (which often undertake commissions from national and international agencies), business-affiliated associations (which have vested interests and strong financial capacity for policy advocacy) and state- and party-affiliated think tanks – see Box 5.

Think tanks can play several roles or functions, such as setting the agenda and seeking support for policy alternatives, legitimising policies, creating spaces for debate and/or providing financial channels for political parties, as well as acting as a potential pool of policymakers and politicians (Datta et al., forthcoming). Their organisational arrangements in addition to their priorities and channels for influence are often affected by their origins, the evolution of their context and the changing interests of political leaders. In Chile, think tanks emerged in opposition to prevailing regimes, first to the right-wing dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s, then to the centre-left democracy in the 1990s and 2000s (ibid). In Vietnam on the other hand, rather than emerging in response to changes in the context, think tanks have been part of the policymaking architecture. For example, each line ministry and some provincial authorities have an affiliated think tank or research and development unit. An understanding of the context in which think tanks have evolved and the roles they play in the political system is therefore critical in forging any partnership with think tanks.

Box 5: Think tanks take many shapes and forms

Although the think tank model was pioneered in the US, think tanks are becoming increasingly global and emerging in a range of shapes and forms.

In some contexts a number of NGOs act as think tanks. For example, GNTP in Bolivia addresses the challenges raised by civil society participation in defining and implementing policies on a local and national level.

Another common form is that of academic think tanks, such as the School of Economics at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. The School of Economics houses a number of policy-focused research units – including the Applied Fiscal Research Centre (AFReC), the AIDS and Society Research Unit (ASRU), the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) and the Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU).

In other contexts, profit-making consultancy models are more common. Daima Associates in Tanzania is an example of such a think tank, offering professional services in development policy and business management in Tanzania and the Eastern and Southern Africa region.

In environments with limited political competition, think tanks are often government affiliated. A good example is that of VASS in Vietnam, which is a state-affiliated organisation with 30 affiliated research institutes undertaking both pure and applied research.

Finally, in Latin America in particular, think tanks are often affiliated with political parties or are embedded within party organisations. For instance, the Instituto de Pensamiento Liberal (a liberal-oriented think tank) in Colombia is affiliated with the Partido Liberal (the Liberal Party). Think tanks and political parties have a number of overlapping roles, including providing a forum for the deliberation of citizen demands, presenting a strategy for governing which articulates a particular prioritisation of these demands and providing technical and expert cadre for the state.

Source: Mendizabal and Sample (2009).

Networks

Networks are increasingly important for development policy research. They promote information flow, knowledge sharing and communication between actors who might otherwise not be in touch (see Mendizabal, 2008). They can also promote sustainability and give their members a single, credible voice that can be heard in the policymaking process. BRIDGE, for example, raises gender mainstreaming issues in diverse policy sectors among policymakers and development practitioners. It also hosts Siyanda, a searchable database of gender information and a space where gender practitioners can share ideas, experiences and resources. Networks may also coordinate and implement policy impact activities that go beyond communications. For example, agricultural policy networks played a major role in shaping agricultural trade liberalisation during the Doha and Uruguay Rounds (Ulrich, 2004).

Donors and international agencies

The role of donors and international institutions at the knowledge–policy interface cannot be underestimated. They can have a positive impact by providing good ideas and funds, building research capacity and encouraging the development and implementation of engagement strategies (Court and Young, 2006; Hennink and Stephenson, 2005; Jones and Young, 2007; Jones et al., 2008; Wangwe, 2005). But they can also have negative effects by, for example, promoting increased visibility of think tanks at the expense of long-term substantive influence or weakening other actors such as political parties and hence political systems. Funds are neither necessary nor sufficient for research to impact on policy (Court and Young, 2006) and capacity building can have limited advantages, as research tends to be carried out by Northern organisations and external consultants (Young, 2005). Some donors can also be unrealistic in their demands, insisting on recipient governments implementing evidence-based policies when their own aid policies (for example, conditionality, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and the programme versus project aid debate) are not well founded empirically (Killick, 2004).

Box 6: Promoting and protecting child rights in Argentina

In December 2004, the local government of Buenos Aires passed a law shifting from a needs-based to a rights-based approach to child protection. The policy process involved a diverse range of actors, including international, national and local level policymakers, legislators, CSOs, networks, law associations, judges and academics.

The ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by Argentina in 1990 provided a space and a mandate for different actors to advocate for legislative reform on child rights. It also called for a change in culture. Whereas the needs-based approach had guided policies for children and promoted an interventionist approach, the UNCRC set out a new perspective based on the human rights of all children, requiring the active participation of children and families and increased responsiveness of the state.

Following ratification of the UNCRC, UNICEF helped develop a body of knowledge promoting rights-based approaches to child protection by commissioning research and creating spaces to share regional and international learning and best practice. It also produced guidelines for provincial authorities (together with the Ministry for Human Development) on protecting child rights and raised public awareness. In addition, UNICEF funded technical assistance for provincial and national legislative chambers, study tours for legislators and rights protection services delivered by local CSOs.

In the 15 years it took to enact legislation, political consensus was built at the national and provincial level for the need for change. Knowledge creation and dissemination helped to bring legislators into the process, but the political will and commitment of the executive, rooted in personal beliefs and ideology, particularly of Juan Pablo Cafiero, the Minister of Human Development, were arguably more crucial. For example, the will of policymakers was clearly illustrated at the provincial level, when CSOs were invited into a space for dialogue and a bill was tabled based on these consultations. By the time legislation was passed, apart from the judiciary, which saw a new law diverting some of its powers to local administrations, there seemed to be little contestation about the proposed changes.

The ratification of the UNCRC and support for child rights promoted the formation of national networks of child-focused CSOs, such as the *Comité de Seguimiento y Aplicación de la Convención Sobre los Derechos del Niño (CASACIDN)* (Committee on the Follow up and Implementation of the UNCRC) and the *Colectivo de Derechos de Infancia y Adolescencia de Argentina* (Collective on the Rights of Infants and Adolescents in Argentina), as well as provincial level networks such as the *Foro por los Derechos de la Niñez, la Adolescencia y la Juventud* (Adolescence and Youth Rights Forum) in Buenos Aires. These networks served as key intermediaries, translating and amplifying knowledge generated by grassroots child-focused organisations to policymakers, the media and the judiciary. They promoted learning and sharing experiences among members, built their capacities to engage with issues more critically, and provided their members with a powerful single voice in the policy process.

Periodismo Social (Social Journalism) Children's Chapter, part of the *ANDI* (Media Agency on Children's Rights) network, played a key role in enabling the media to promote a more informed public discussion about the complex legislative process and its outcomes, through building capacity of journalists, monitoring media coverage of children's issues and raising public awareness.

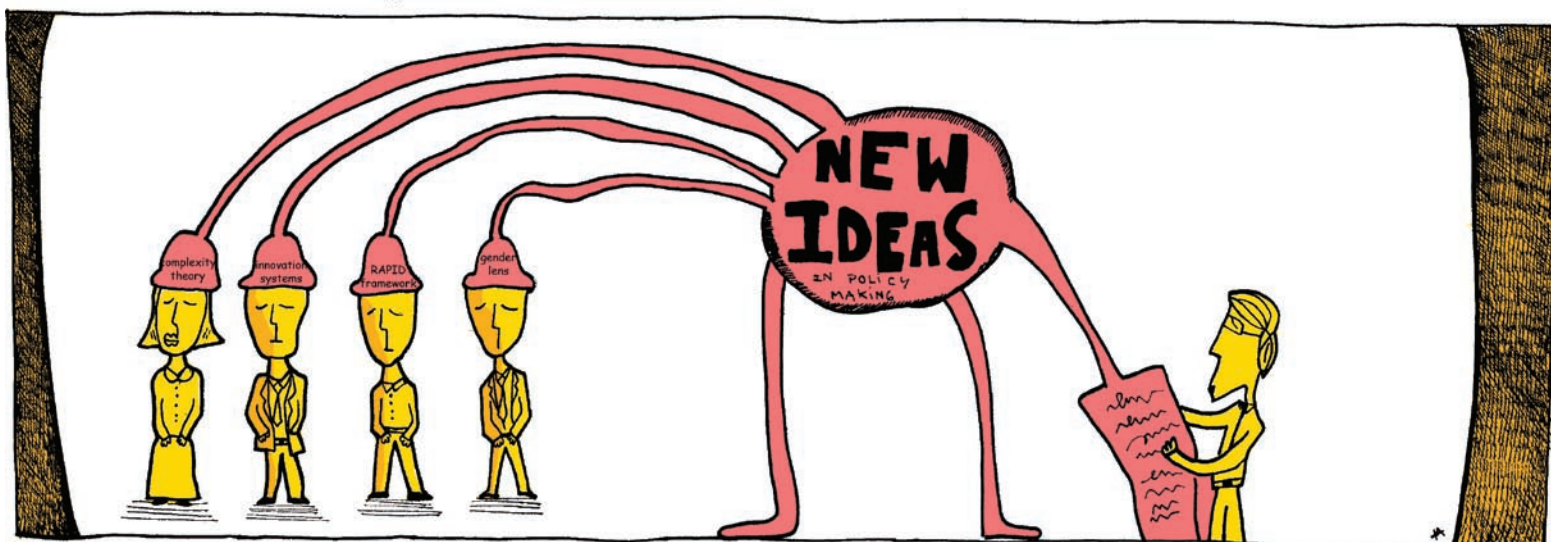
Despite the passage of the Child Protection Law, challenges remain in its enforcement. There is disparity in the capacity of provincial authorities to implement legislation. Some are more professionalised than others. *Fundación Sur*, a human rights NGO is playing a key role in assessing the adequacy and implementation of the law through research, dissemination and training seminars with journalists.

Source: Based on analysis by Lucía Schumacher, CIPPEC, Argentina (2009).

Legislators

Legislators are another group of actors becoming more visible in the knowledge economy. They have the potential to play an important role in improving governance practices by representing citizen interests, developing evidence-informed legislation and providing oversight of implementation. However their access to knowledge and expertise is often limited. Developing their capacity to source and critically consume new knowledge is essential to promote adequate checks and balances (Datta et al., forthcoming).

Efforts to improve researcher–legislator links have included the IDRC-supported Research to Policy (RTP) Project in Vietnam. This project aimed to improve policy engagement between researchers and legislators, particularly those in the Economic Committee of the National Assembly (ECNA). Through building researcher capacities and using various channels of communication, such as policy briefs, dialogue, meetings, workshops and economic briefs, the RTP project has provided evidence-based analysis for legislators, which has helped shape their ability to make decisions based on independent information sources as well as improving their working procedures (see Box 10).



There is a need to take account of the complex environments in which stakeholders at the knowledge–policy interface operate.

Introduction

The RAPID framework was developed to enable understanding of and improvements to the influence of research on policy, building on the insights of a range of analysts (Court et al., 2005). Through our work with partners and capacity development work with various knowledge and policy actors, however, we have increasingly recognised the need to take account of the complex environments in which stakeholders at the knowledge–policy interface operate. Therefore, RAPID has been engaging with other analytical approaches, including complexity theory and innovation systems, with a view to exploring their potential for broadening understanding of the field and improving policy and practice.

Innovative frameworks

Complexity theory

Complexity theory (or the complexity sciences) is a set of concepts, principles and ideas that emerged and clustered together over the course of the 20th century. Complexity theory is the study of interdependent, dynamic living systems and draws on work on ecosystems, maths, physics, and artificial intelligence, as well as a growing body of work on social, political and economic phenomena (Ramalingam and Jones, 2008). Complexity poses a challenge to existing biases in policy processes towards linear, reductionist approaches. Recognising that the problems faced in development are multidimensional, messy and interconnected, and that change is dynamic, uncertain and context specific, runs counter to some trends and tendencies in policymaking. Policy can be overly reliant on simplistic narratives of the problem at hand, policy solutions are sometimes constructed in the mould of ‘blueprints’ to be rolled out across varied contexts and implementation is frequently inflexible to changing circumstances.

In order to respond to these challenges, a number of dimensions of the knowledge–policy interface need to be strengthened:

- Because problems can be unpredictable and evolving, it is crucial to enhance feedback processes in development interventions (Ramalingam and Jones, 2008). This necessitates improving flexibility, capitalising on knowledge generated in the process of development interventions through a continual learning processes (Jones, 2009). For example, the outcome mapping methodology emphasises regular meetings for implementing staff to reflect on progress so far, on strategies employed and their theory of change (Earl et al., 2001).
- The difficulty of dealing with context-specific problems requires strengthening mechanisms for guiding interventions based on the knowledge of local people and those affected by problems. This is embodied by many participatory approaches to planning development interventions, and efforts to incorporate such knowledge further ‘upstream’ (such as the World Bank’s Voices of the Poor project).
- Multidimensional problems need policy to incorporate knowledge from a variety of sources, including transdisciplinary research but also integrating this with other perspectives including key individuals, the affected communities and influential organisations, in a holistic focus for decision-making (Brown, 2007). For example, workshops in South Africa were used to combine the knowledge of different user groups of local water resources, along with assessments of a hydrological surveyor, in order to help plan water usage and to engage with outside agencies (Leach and Scoones, 2006).

The importance of practical tools

A number of issues as to how aid agencies do things are also crucial: complexity has implications for leadership and strategy, organisational learning and change, M&E, partnerships and networks, innovations and engagement with poor people. Policymakers, practitioners and other stakeholders will need practical tools to deal with these problems. For example, the (currently dominant) logical framework approach for planning and strategy appears

inadequate, as it presumes higher powers of foresight than are realistic when working in open, complex systems. Simplistic models of cause and effect inherent in many counterfactual approaches of impact evaluation (IE) also appear unsuitable for complex systems, which may involve the nonlinear interaction of a number of important forces to produce outcomes.

Developing different approaches will require more than just the existence of alternative tools such as outcome mapping and participatory impact evaluation. Often, linear assumptions and models are highly embedded and, as such, institutional change is needed, including trialling new organisational forms. In turn, this presents a challenge for power structures: certain interests served by the status quo may make it difficult to voice concerns about prevailing paradigms, or to find room to trail new approaches.

Innovation systems

Innovation systems (IS) approaches emerged partly in response to earlier ‘linear’ models of the ways in which knowledge is used or taken up in policy processes or the economy, which saw the relationship as essentially problem solving and knowledge driven (Jones et al., 2009c). Rather than focusing on research and researchers as the primary knowledge producers or policymakers proceeding in rational and sequential stages of decision making, IS focuses on the processes and drivers behind innovation, the use and uptake of new or existing knowledge. IS is informed by a number of schools of thought, including institutional economics and systems theory, and is formulated in a number of different ways, although some general themes can be described:

- It emphasises the importance of not just the supply but also the demand for knowledge, and the need to strengthen the demand side through amplifying the voice of knowledge users (e.g. farmers, small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) owners) and providing knowledge services;
- The importance of tacit knowledge as well as explicit and codified knowledge (e.g. experiential knowledge of local ways of doing things along with information in manuals and from instructional videos);
- The fact that, often, structural factors and national context shape the use of knowledge, such as the social value placed on entrepreneurship or the strength of basic infrastructure, functioning as prerequisites for successful innovation;
- The importance of networks and linkages as channels for increasing the uptake of knowledge, and the need to facilitate trust and interaction between a diverse range of actors;
- The need for actors carrying out ‘intermediary functions’ to facilitate continuous exchange between the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ for knowledge. (Barnett and Whiteside, 2008)

The IS approach presents a number of implications for our understanding of the knowledge–policy interface. First, its starting point is to problematise a more ‘knowledge-driven’ view of the policy process, highlighting the way in which policy decision-making involves pragmatic decisions (taken under real-world constraints on accessible information, with limited lead times and using cognitive shortcuts rather than in a ‘perfectly rational’ mould of optimisation and full cost-benefit analysis) taken in contexts of uncertainty and ambiguity. Rather than the starting point being research-based knowledge, or ‘problems’ needing to be solved by researchers, it is necessary to take a step back. The starting point must be the whole system that affects the process of knowledge production and use. It is key to undertake a diagnosis of the ‘system’ in order to determine barriers and constraints, as well as identify opportunities where intervention is most feasible and likely to promote innovation (Jones et al., 2009c). For example, strengthening the interface between knowledge and policy in the agricultural context may require building roads so that farmers can take products to markets, before it is worth (or in conjunction with) sponsoring new research on new crop varieties (see also Box 7 opposite).

Box 7: Building plant health services using an innovation systems framework

CABI is a science-based development and information organisation. Over six years from 2003, CABI scientists led a Global Plant Clinic (GPC), facilitating the development of plant healthcare networks, funded by DFID and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida). These clinics involved local ‘plant doctors’ giving diagnoses and recommendations to farmers. Clinics were set up in a public place, where large numbers of farmers circulated (e.g. agricultural markets), and farmers were encouraged to bring samples. Plant doctors were trained in techniques and how to interview farmers, and were linked to expert sources of technical support and national diagnostic laboratories. Information on clinic clients and their problems was shared, as well as the recommendations given by the plant doctors.

Although the GPC was not designed explicitly using an innovation systems framework, it serves to explain certain key factors in their success. For example:

- IS emphasises the importance of both the ‘supply push’ of the research community and the ‘demand pull’ of the users of new knowledge. The plant healthcare networks facilitate an interaction between users and suppliers by providing a direct link between the two. Demand pull is a fundamental component of the clinics as they respond to farmers’ queries rather than promoting particular research outputs, and intelligence on pests and diseases causing problems to communities was fed back to scientists and policymakers. The ‘supply’ was important as well, through experts (usually researchers from universities) backstopping plant doctors.
- IS suggests it is important to increase the incentives and reduce the disincentives that motivate people and organisations that do, should or could play a role in innovation. A key objective of the GPC was to provide incentives to encourage participation while minimising the use of financial incentives that could not be maintained. The focus was put on enabling partners to do their job more effectively and providing training to boost confidence, which was then reflected in the way that participating plant doctors began to achieve recognition and job satisfaction, and through monthly meetings of plant doctors who relished the idea of expanding their professional network. Senior staff were engaged in order to give individuals the organisational mandate to carry out their duties, and CABI scientists were incentivised by the need to demonstrate the relevance of their work, and by allowing them to travel, applying knowledge and learning new things.

Source: Based on analysis by Eric Boa, CABI (2009).

Second, interpreting IS more specifically in the context of policy processes, it seems most relevant for understanding the role of knowledge in the ‘implementation’ stage of policymaking, since it focuses on the spread and use of knowledge on the ground in practice. This may provide particularly important insights in developing country contexts, where the implementation phase may often be the most crucial aspect of the policy process (Grindle and Thomas, 1990). For example, IS highlights that successful policy implementation may be very heavily reliant on amplifying the voice, demands and concerns of those working in implementing agencies, building their capacities to engage with and articulate such knowledge and linking that up with the supply from the ‘policy’ side, which may in turn require that explicit intermediary functions be carried out (e.g. the role of ‘champions’, or individuals representing implementing agencies could be included in policymaking circles). Another possibility is that scaling up or rolling out a successful pilot project may require supportive networks and interaction with peers and experts in order to help practitioners adapt ideas and principles to their local contexts.

Finally, the emphasis of IS on the need to strengthen the ‘demand side’ points to the possibility for bottom-up change rather than top-down policy implementation. Such a framing may provide insights into how the interface between knowledge and policy can be strengthened to help promote such processes. This may include facilitating institutional change to support the quality and inclusiveness of social learning processes (e.g. gendered barriers to innovation may need to be challenged). However, as it stands, IS may first need to be better adapted to developing country contexts, which would require complementing current frameworks with insights from sociology and political science. This way the frameworks can better fit the contexts through incorporating an understanding of power imbalances, cultural dimensions, social capital and the role of discourse in shaping the demand for new knowledge (Jones et al., 2009c).



It's Not **JUST** what you say, It **NOW** you say it.

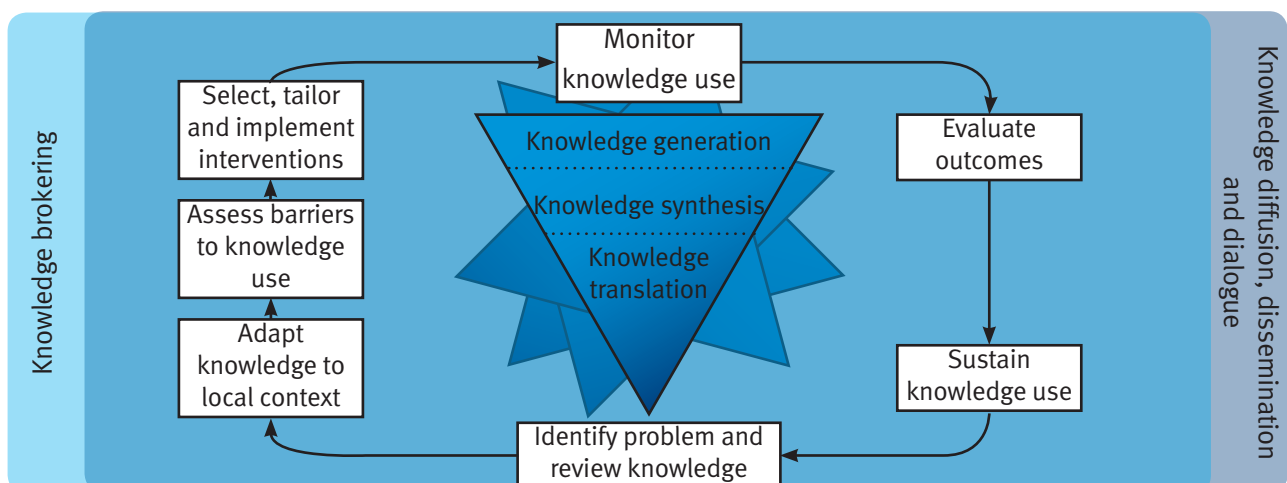
Knowledge translation processes

Introduction

In many policy fields there is already a substantial body of existing knowledge, but often it is not easily accessible to decision makers. For instance, considerable research exists on the effects of past economic crises on human development outcomes. However, the practical value of these research results may not be obvious to policymakers and practitioners deliberating over appropriate responses to the current global financial, fuel and food price crises. Hence, research may need to be ‘translated’ into a language and format that policymakers can readily grasp and apply. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) have referred to knowledge translation as ‘a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically sound application of knowledge’. Knowledge translation thus goes beyond disseminating research and the isolated production of communication products such as policy briefs and working papers, to critically engaging with users of knowledge in different ways.

The knowledge generation and translation cycle model (Figure 2) is adapted from the CIHR knowledge-to-action cycle. The knowledge ‘funnel’ in the centre conveys the idea that knowledge needs to be distilled before it is ready for application. Synthesising existing information to contextualise and integrate the findings of an individual research study within a larger body of knowledge is essential. The processes in the action cycle surrounding the knowledge creation funnel reflect the importance of knowledge brokering and knowledge diffusion, dissemination and dialogue, as well as M&E processes. Best practice findings also highlight the complex, iterative and dynamic nature of the interactions between knowledge generation, translation and brokering. These should not be conceptualised as neat sequential steps but rather as interdependent activities with ongoing feedback loops. For example, it is increasingly recognised that policy research will be more likely to be integrated into policy formulation if policymakers are consulted about their views and knowledge gaps and priorities at the outset of a project, rather than presented with a completed research report over which they have little sense of ownership.

Figure 2: Knowledge generation and translation cycle



Source: Adapted from the CIHR knowledge to action cycle at www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/39033.html.

Knowledge generation

At the knowledge generation end of the ‘funnel’, IS approaches to policymaking emphasise the need for interaction between knowledge producers and policymakers to encourage both communities to understand the challenges they each face and to ensure knowledge generation that is policy relevant. Potential users of new or existing knowledge thus need to be able to articulate their knowledge needs to producers more effectively and systematically. The Agricultural Research Centre in Ethiopia, for instance, helps to foster IS and effective knowledge translation, by linking national and regional-level governmental, researcher and practitioner stakeholders in developing and implementing research.

Knowledge translation

Knowledge translation refers to the process of repackaging knowledge to make it more accessible to potential users. This is achieved by synthesising results in a way that fits with an audience’s way of seeing the world and promoting activities to encourage knowledge sharing and exchange, as well as the ethically sound application of knowledge. In other words, it is informed by a desire to bring about positive developmental changes rather than assume that knowledge is merely out of the creator’s hands once it is published. Knowledge translation strategies therefore need to be tailored to specific audiences, contexts and stages of the policy process. For example, science-oriented ministries use scientific knowledge primarily for agenda setting and policy formulation, whereas non-science ministries rely on such knowledge more at the implementation and evaluation stages (Jones et al., 2008). Developing ‘sticky’ messages through the creation of policy narratives and telling stories are also often emphasised as key ingredients for policy influence. Box 10 illustrates how developing researchers’ capacity to translate research findings into clear messages and policy recommendations helped a key committee within the Vietnamese National Assembly to draft legislation in response to the economic crisis.

However, knowledge translation is more than just creative packaging of research findings. It also entails creating the conditions for policy dialogue among key actors with the aim of strengthening the quality and rigour of policy thinking, identifying the most context-resonant framing of a particular issue and exploring ways in which new knowledge can empower end users (see Box 8).

The role of intermediaries

Intermediaries such as networks, the media, NGOs and communication teams within research institutes play an important role in translating knowledge for different audiences. These intermediaries enable the suppliers of knowledge to interact iteratively with the users of such new knowledge. They have an ability to interact with key research and policy actors, solve problems, facilitate learning and innovate (Fisher and Vogel, 2008; Lomas, 2007). A good example of such an intermediary is the Philippines Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), which collates research sources from different organisations in order to inform debates on social and economic policy bills going through Congress.

Information communication technologies (ICTs) often play a key factor in effective knowledge translation strategies. Rather than trying to bring audiences into an organisation’s own space, ICTs have enabled them to take its messages to the audience. Readers no longer have to visit corporate websites but can browse through their previously selected RSS feeds. ODI’s efforts to stream public meetings (which take place in its offices in London) live on the internet, its page on Facebook, a prominent online social networking site, the production of short research summaries and its continued updating of Wikipedia based on its research findings, for example, are ways in which ODI is attempting to establish its presence in important ‘knowledge spaces’ and to democratise access to knowledge across North–South divides.

Box 8: Knowledge translation innovations in Peru

In the past three years, the Consorcio de Investigación Económica y Social (CIES) (Economic and Social Research Consortium), a Peruvian umbrella organisation with 44 institutional members, including think tanks, research centres, NGOs, private consultancies and public agencies, has institutionalised two initiatives that aim to establish a sustained, autonomous and proactive relationship between research and policy spheres. One of these is the Public Sector Consultative Group (PSCG), formed by approximately 15 representatives of line ministries and other key institutions, such as the Central Bank, regulatory entities and Parliament. It meets twice a year to identify the major knowledge needs of each participating entity and establish a transversal research agenda relevant for all sectors. A similar space has been created for the private sector.

The research agenda is currently being used to make CIES research initiatives more responsive to knowledge demands faced by end users. For example, the CIES Annual Research Competition is now dedicating up to three research awards to projects that address knowledge demands identified by the PSCG. In 2008, a special award was given to a proposal on the poverty impacts of population dispersion. Priority topics identified by the 2009 PSCG include natural resource management for sustainable development, decentralisation and state responsiveness to social demands. Furthermore, the public and private consultative groups have been included in the CIES governance structure to maximise plurality and give sustainability to these spaces. So far, implementation of the groups has been successful. The public sector group usually gathers up to six ministries per session and has maintained its convening capacity, despite various Cabinet changes.

The Presidential Academic Dialogue Programme involves a series of evidence-based debates on key policy topics. The first dialogue was on microfinance and the next will be on decentralisation. After the President proposes the debate topic, CIES summons a plural and multidisciplinary team of researchers, technical experts and practitioners to carry out analysis and identify key policy messages and recommendations. The dialogue is then organised as a closed meeting at the Government Palace, chaired by the President and gathering a selected group of high-level public sector officials and experts. Note that the aim is not to achieve any specific policy changes, so as to avoid vested interests, lobbies or particular agendas.

The two experiences described above are contributing towards strengthening the knowledge and policy interface in Peru, while also being valuable learning processes for CIES. Their implementation has required the constant development of networks of trust between CIES and key decision-makers, which have opened up new opportunities for constructive engagement between researchers and policymakers. This has also meant it has been necessary to manage the inherent complexity of these processes. As an umbrella organisation, CIES cannot take a position that might compromise its associate base. The institution has had to learn how to turn this apparent limitation into one of its major political capitals: its plurality is now seen as an asset when engaging with top policymakers, since it is perceived as a guarantee of its neutrality and independence.

Source: Based on analysis by Norma Correa Aste, CIES, Peru (2009).

Capacity building

A key pillar of ODI's work has been developing capacity for knowledge translation among a wide range of actors. Capacity building interventions are commonly divided into individual, institutional and system-level approaches (see Blagescu and Young, 2005). At the individual level, capacity building has focused on improving the skills or abilities of: i) researchers and policy analysts, often through 'off-the-job' postgraduate and 'on-the-job' training, mentoring and coaching or small research grants; and ii) think tank leaders, through training in leadership, management and entrepreneurship (Datta and Mendizabal, 2008). ODI has run several practical policy entrepreneurship training workshops and seminars, for instance those targeting researchers at CAF in Vietnam and Participatory Development Associates (PDA) in Ghana (ibid). These have helped influence the mindsets and strengthened the commitment of individual members to evidence-based policymaking, among other things (Gavrilovic et al., forthcoming) (see Box 9).

At the organisational level, capacity building focuses on structures, processes, resources and management and governance issues. ODI has worked with a range of partners on collaborative action research projects, in which it has provided funding, technical support and mentorship throughout the life of the project. ODI has also provided partners with: small grants to undertake research projects and/or staff training; advice to think tanks facing governance challenges; and human resources development such as staff exchanges and secondments. To deliver this support, ODI facilitates two global networks or communities of practice: the ebpdn (www.ebpdn.org), which promotes evidence-based policies across Asia, Africa and Latin America; and the Outcome Mapping Learning Community (www.outcomemapping.ca), which provides a platform for outcome mapping practitioners to share learning and good practice (Datta and Mendizabal, 2008). As a result, over time partners have been able to strengthen their strategic capacities, including systematic planning, management and monitoring of policy-influencing programmes. At the systems level, capacity building focuses on improving the environment for national and regional innovation, focusing on both the supply and the demand of policy research. The emphasis here is on developing coherent strategies and policies and effective coordination within and across sectors and among different policy actors. ODI has contributed to system-level development through the DFID-funded trade and poverty project in Latin America (COPLA – www.cop-la.net). Here, it has fostered linkages between diverse actors such as representatives of CSOs (for example SMEs and smallholder farmers), NGOs, researchers in think tanks and academia, the media, local

Box 9: Six key lessons on capacity building for knowledge translation

ODI's work, especially with members of the ebpdn to improve capacity of Southern CSOs to translate knowledge to promote more evidence-informed policy debates, have yielded six key lessons.

First, core capacities for knowledge translation must be addressed in an integrated way. The ability to translate and broker knowledge successfully relies on a range of different but closely related types of capacity development interventions, such as postgraduate training, capacity development workshops, technical assistance and collaborative research projects.

Second, a targeted approach is needed to ensure linkages are created between capacities at different levels. Successful capacity development is based on integrating interventions at the individual, organisational and system levels. Too often, opportunities are lost with one-off training rather than facilitating the scaling-up and scaling-out of capacities to other levels.

Third, knowledge translation relies on both supply- and demand-side capacities to promote research uptake. While efforts to develop capacities to generate and translate research are important, equally important are the interventions that target creation of demand for effective knowledge translation.

Fourth, tailoring initiatives to local contexts is critical for their success, thus a good understanding of the political context is crucial. For example, in Africa capacity demands are mainly concerned with research generation, whereas in Latin America demands revolve around knowledge management and information exchange.

Fifth, strengthening capacities for policy influence is about encouraging a culture of continuous learning and reflection, which requires developing relationships strong enough to challenge unequal power dynamics. For example, CUTS International (Consumer Unity & Trust Society), in its efforts to engage with parliamentarians and other policymakers, has undertaken both external and internal initiatives. Senior staff have regular meetings with key policy actors to track the political context and enhance policy dialogue. These are documented and circulated within the organisation for comments and suggestions. They also have Friday seminars internally, to share knowledge among staff, and prepare newspaper articles. All this helps to develop understanding and create a sound basis on which to take action (see Djuric et al., forthcoming).

Finally, addressing motivations and incentives is key to strengthening capacities for knowledge translation. Turning a researcher into a policy entrepreneur or a research institute into a policy-focused think tank is extremely difficult (Young, 2005). While the functional capacities are important, the motivation to change is a crucial aspect, one which can facilitate or obstruct capacity development. Leadership is a key factor here. For example, the Director of CAF in Vietnam – a leading institute within VASS – has had a strong interest and a readiness to inspire and effectively manage the necessary organisational changes to better generate, translate and broker policy advice.

mayors, ministerial actors in the trade and social policy sectors, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the Organization of American States (OAS) (Gavrilovic et al., forthcoming).

Funders have a key role in building capacity for knowledge translation, by providing incentives (see Box 9). An assessment of the research environment commissioned by DFID and conducted by ODI suggested that capacity building should not be viewed as a simple add-on to existing research funding initiatives (Jones and Young, 2007). Nevertheless, although taking an institutional approach to capacity development is key, funders should not forget that training skilled people through MA and PhD scholarships is also crucial. DFID and IDRC are good examples of large funders that have identified research communication and utilisation as priorities. For example, DFID insists that research policy consortia (RPCs) spend 10% of their budgets on communications, and also provide communication guidelines and organise a stakeholder consultation during the inception phase of the programme to establish early engagement with stakeholders.

Box 10: Empowering legislators in decisionmaking in Vietnam

Faced with the economic crisis in 2008, which was manifested by high inflation, a high trade deficit and a fragile banking sector, socioeconomic research and related policy recommendations generated by members of the Vietnam Economic Research Network (VERN) helped the Vietnamese ECNA formulate relevant decisions to respond to the crisis. Despite difficulties in assessing uptake by the executive, key policy recommendations have been reflected in policies such as the tightening of monetary policy, budget cuts and removal of fuel subsidies. Further, legislators within ECNA appear to have more trust in VERN researchers as a result of the process, drawing on their research in addition to their main sources of analysis, namely, reports from government ministries, media accounts and feedback from constituencies.

The improvement in researcher–legislator links and knowledge translation practices was a result of the RTP project funded by IDRC. With technical support provided by ODI’s RAPID Programme, the project improved the capacity of VERN to translate knowledge for legislators and enabled legislators to receive relevant research on demand.

While each ministry within the executive branch can draw on analysis from its own think tank, the legislative arm (National Assembly) has only the Centre for Information, Research and Library, which has limited capacity to service the needs of all members of the National Assembly. Legislators often rely on government reports for analysis, detracting from their effectiveness in holding the executive to account.

The project has enabled researchers to produce research drawing on quantitative/statistical data, in response to the requests of ECNA. Under pressure to choose quickly from a number of policy options in challenging socioeconomic circumstances, evidence-based recommendations have played a decisive role in helping policymakers to make the ‘right’ decisions. Effective knowledge translation has contributed to the success of the RTP project. This has comprised training in translating research into well-understood messages and the production of policy briefs, accompanied by presentations at meetings/seminars and the actions of intermediaries (such as the advisory board of the project). Given their tight schedules and lack of economic literacy, easy-to-read policy briefs have enabled legislators to understand key policy issues very quickly. Presentations and testimonies enable researchers to provide clarification, further evidence and answer related questions that legislators may have. The Advisory Board includes policymakers and leaders of research institutes, who help to amplify key policy messages to broader policymaker audiences and key stakeholders.

Effective knowledge translation and high levels of trust between researchers and legislators have been promoted by personal links, such as those between the Vice-chairman of ECNA and VERN’s Director, the high level of expertise that researchers have in the form of PhDs and the academic background of some legislators.

IDRC provided condition-free support and promoted ownership of the project by VERN in the management of its funds and provided VERN with flexibility in meeting the needs of policymakers in a timely manner. In addition, ODI’s knowledge and experiences of bridging research and policy and of the local context ensured advice and tools were locally appropriate and relevant.

Source: Based on analysis by Nguyen Hang, Centre for Analysis and Forecasting, Vietnam (2009).



It is critical to strengthen not only the quality of knowledge generation, but also recognise the role that knowledge translation and intermediaries play.

Conclusion

While the RAPID framework remains a useful analytical entry-point, it is critical that those seeking to engage in evidence-informed development policy dialogues also use additional tools and frameworks to deepen their analysis. Our synthesis of recent research, as well as practical insights derived from our international partnerships, underscores the fact that the knowledge–policy interface needs to be considered from the following six perspectives:

- 1. Types of knowledge:** A critical first step entails broadening our analytical lens to consider the relative contribution of different types of knowledge-to-policy processes. In contrast to (explicit and implicit) hierarchies often used to frame policy making, many policy problems will need the integration of many different types and sources of knowledge.
- 2. Political context:** Conditions are likely to be more favourable to the uptake of multiple knowledge sources in the policy process in democratic contexts, but there may also be unexpected opportunities for the influence of new knowledge in decision-making processes in authoritarian or fragile state contexts.
- 3. Sectoral dynamics:** Within a given political context, it is likely that knowledge–policy dynamics will differ across policy sectors due to divergent actors, demands for new knowledge and capacities to use such knowledge. It is therefore important that policy–sector dynamics are more carefully explored (both within and across countries) in order to tailor influencing strategies accordingly.
- 4. Actors:** NGOs, international agencies and civil servants are often key players in the knowledge–policy nexus, but they should not be privileged in analytical work or policy-influencing efforts at the expense of an understanding of the potential role of other actors, including think tanks, legislators, political parties, intermediaries, the media, private sector actors and networks.
- 5. Innovative frameworks:** Insights from Complexity and Innovation Systems frameworks highlight that any work with actors at the knowledge–policy interface should be embedded within an understanding of the broader system in which they work, and the iterative relationship between the supply of and demand for knowledge on development policy issues. This includes developing a more nuanced understanding of the role that values and beliefs play in the construction and application of knowledge.
- 6. Knowledge translation:** Finally, in order to enhance synergies between new knowledge and development policy decision-making processes, it is critical to consider carefully approaches to strengthen not only the quality of knowledge generation and knowledge uptake, but also the critical role that knowledge translation and intermediaries play. Empirical research on intermediaries is urgently needed given the high level of demand for such a brokering role by analysts, policymakers and practitioners alike, as are efforts to assess and share lessons with regard to new approaches to capacity building.

More detailed examples and success stories as well as descriptions of tools and approaches for working with this complexity can be found on the ODI (www.odi.org.uk/rapid) and ebpdn (www.ebpdn.org) websites. The RAPID programme and ebpdn partners will continue to work together to explore these issues in more detail and develop practical frameworks, approaches and tools to promote greater use of research-based evidence in development policy and practice.

References

- Ahmed, M. (2005) 'Bridging Research and Policy'. *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 17, Issue 6, pg. 765-773.
- Barnett, A. and Whiteside, M., (2008) 'Innovation: current thinking of the Research into Use (RIU) Programme, Research Into Use Programme: UK.
- Blagescu, M. and J. Young, (2006) 'Capacity Development for Policy Advocacy: Current Thinking and Approaches among Agencies supporting Civil Society Organisations', Working Paper 260, ODI: London, UK.
- Brown, C. (2007) 'Collective Decision-making Bridging Public Health, Sustainability Governance, and Environmental Management', in C. Soskolne (ed.) *Sustaining Life on Earth: Environmental and Human Health through Global Governance*, Lexington Books: Lanham, MD.
- Carden, F., (2009) *Knowledge to Policy: Making the Most of Development Research*, Sage: New Delhi and IDRC: Ottawa.
- Chowdhury, N., C. Finlay-Notman and I. Hovland (2006) 'CSO Capacity for Policy Engagement: Lessons Learned from the CSPP Consultations in Africa, Asia and Latin America', Working Paper 272, ODI: London, UK.
- Cling, J.P., M. Razafindrakoto and F. Roubaud (2002) 'The PRSP Initiative: Old Wine in New Bottles?', Paper for the ABCDE-Europe Conference, Oslo, 24-26 June.
- Court, J. (2005) 'Bridging Research and Policy on HIV/AIDS in Developing Countries', ODI: London, UK.
- Court, J. and L. Cotterrell (2006), 'What Political and Institutional Context Issues Matter for Bridging Research and Policy? A Literature Review and Discussion of Data Collection Approaches', ODI: London.
- Court, J. and J. Young (2006) 'Bridging Research and Policy in International Development: An Analytical and Practical Framework'. *Development in Practice*, Vol. 16, Issue 1, pg. 85-90.
- Court, J., I. Hovland and J. Young (2005) *Bridging Research and Policy in Development: Evidence and the Change Process*, ITDG Publishing: London, UK.
- Culpeper, R. (2008) 'Research, Practitioners and the Public Good: Danger Signs'. Remarks delivered at the 2008 ISA Conference, San Francisco, 26 March.
- Curran, Z. (2005) 'Civil Society Participation in the PRSP: The Role of Evidence and the Impact on Policy Changes', PPA Synthesis Study, Accessed from: <http://www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0002121/index.php>
- Datta, A. and E. Mendizabal (2008) 'Lessons Learnt in Think Tank Development'. Report for the Gates Foundation.
- Datta, A, N. Jones and E. Mendizabal (forthcoming) 'Assessing Think Tank Policy Linkages'. Working Paper, ODI: London, UK.
- Djuric, M., N. Jones and N. Chowdhury (forthcoming) 'Knowledge Translation in Development Policy Processes: A Review of RAPID's Capacity Development Work', ODI: London
- Earl, S., F. Carden and T. Smutylo (2001) *Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programmes*. IDRC, Ottawa.
- Faundez, J. (2005) 'The Rule of Law Enterprise: Promoting a Dialogue Between Practitioners and Academics', *Democratization*, Vol. 12, Issue 4, pg. 567-586.
- Fisher, C. and I. Vogel (2008) 'Locating the Power of In-between: How Research Brokers and Intermediaries Support Evidence-based Pro-poor Policy and Practice', Background Paper to the Power of In-between Conference, Pretoria, 1-2 July.
- Garcé, A. and G. Uña (2007) *Think Tanks and Public Policy in Latin America: Global Dynamics and Regional Realities*, IDRC and KAS, Editorial Prometeo: Buenos Aires.
- Gaventa, J. (2004) 'Towards Participatory Governance: Assessing the Transformative Possibilities', in: Hickey, S. & Mohan, G. (eds) (2004) *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation*, Zed Books: London.
- Gavrilovic, M., N. Chowdhury, I. Hovland, N. Jones and J. Young (forthcoming). Knowledge translation in development policy processes: a review of RAPID's capacity development work. ODI Report: London.
- Goetz, A. and R. Jenkins (2005) *Reinventing Accountability: Making Democracy Work for Human Development*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.
- Grindle, M. and Thomas, J. (1990) 'After the Decision: Implementing Policy Reforms in Developing Countries', *World Development*, Vol. 18, Issue 8.
- Hennink, M. and R. Stephenson (2005) 'Using Research to Inform Health Policy: Barriers and Strategies in Developing Countries'. *Journal of Health Communication*, Vol. 10, pg. 163-180.
- Hickey, S. and G. Mohan (eds) (2004) *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development*, Zed Books: London.
- Holden, K. and D. Demeritt, (2008) 'Democratising Science? The Politics of Promoting Biomedicine in Singapore's Developmental State', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 26, Issue 1, pg. 68-86.
- Hudson, A. and C. Wren (2007) 'Parliamentary Strengthening in Developing Countries', Final report for DFID, ODI: London.

- Johnson, E.C., (2000) 'Think Tanks in Sub-Saharan Africa', in J.G. McGann and R.K. Weaver (eds) *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*, Transaction Publishers: London and New Brunswick.
- Jones, N. and J. Young (2007) 'Setting the Scene: Situating DFID's Research Funding Policy and Practice in an International Comparative Perspective'. Scoping Study commissioned by DFID Central Research Department.
- Jones, N. (2008a) 'Knowledge Management as Knowledge Translation', Presentation at KIT Annual Research and Planning Week, Amsterdam.
- Jones, N. (2008b) 'Policy Engagement in East and Southern Africa: Civil Society Organisations and Legislators', *Capacity.org* 25, December.
- Jones, N. and F. Tembo (2008) 'Promoting Good Governance through Civil Society–Legislator Linkages: Opportunities and Challenges for Policy Engagement in Developing Country Contexts', Sub-theme on Global Civil Society and Democratic Cultures.
- Jones, N., H. Jones and C. Walsh, (2008) 'Political Science? Strengthening Science–Policy Dialogue in Developing Countries', Working Paper 294, ODI: London.
- Jones, H. (2009) 'State-of-the-art Literature Review on the Link between Knowledge and Policy in Development', ODI-IKM: London.
- Jones, N., H. Jones, L. Steer and A. Datta, (2009a) 'Improving Impact Evaluation Production and Use', Working Paper 300, ODI: London.
- Jones, N., A. Pellini and J. Pomares with A. Datta (2009b) 'The Role of Evidence-based Policy in Governance Debates: A Synthesis Paper with a Particular Focus on Post-conflict Environments', Report commissioned by UNDP Governance Centre, Oslo.
- Jones, N., D. Romney, H. Jones, D. Walden, S. Mitra, N. Efa and J. Fish (2009c) 'Innovation Systems Approaches and Their Use in Understanding Pro-poor Innovation in the Renewable Natural Resources Sector'. Conceptual Review for the Impact Evaluation Component of the Research Into Use (RIU) Programme.
- Jones, N., with Bhatta, B., Gill, G., Pantuliano, S., Singh, H.B., Timsina, D., Uppadhaya, S. and Walker, D., (2009d) 'Governance and citizenship from below: Views of poor and excluded groups and their vision for a new Nepal', ODI Working Paper 301, ODI: London.
- Keck, M.E., and Sikkink, K. (1998) *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca.
- Kelsall, T. (2008) 'Going with the Grain in African Development?' *Africa Power and Politics Programme Discussion 1*, ODI: London.
- Killick, T. (2004) 'Politics, Evidence and the New Aid Agenda', *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, pg. 5-29.
- Kimball, J. (2000) 'From Dependency to the Market: The Uncertain Future for Think Tanks in Central and Eastern Europe', in J.G. McGann and R.K. Weaver (eds) *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*, Transaction Publishers: London and New Brunswick.
- Krznaric, R. (2007) 'How Change Happens: Interdisciplinary Perspectives for Human Development', Oxfam: London.
- Lambright, W. H. (2008) 'Government and Science: A Troubled, Critical Relationship and What Can be Done about It', *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 68, Issue 1, pg. 5-18
- Leach, M and Scoones, I., (2006) 'The Slow Race: Making Science and Technology Work for the Poor', Demos: London.
- Lee, R.E., W.J. Martin, H.R. Sonntag, P.J. Taylor, I. Wallerstein and M. Wiewiorka (2005) 'Social Science and Social Policy: From National Dilemmas to Global Opportunities', Reference Paper for the International Forum on Social Science-Policy Nexus, Buenos Aires and Montevideo, 5-9 September.
- Leonard, M. (2008) 'China's New Intelligentsia', *Prospect* 144 (March), Accessed from: www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=10078
- Livny, E., A. Mehendale and A. Vanags (2006) 'Bridging the Research Policy Gaps in Developing and Transition Countries: Analytical Lessons and Proposals for Action', Synthesis of findings from the Global Development Network's Bridging Research and Policy Project.
- Lomas, J. (2007) 'The In-between World of Knowledge Brokering', *British Medical Journal* 334(7585), pg. 129-132.
- Macdonald, C.M. (2008) 'The Fragile State of Evidence: The Role of Evidence in the Policy Processes of Fragile States and Donor Engagement Strategies with Fragile States', Master's thesis, Department of War Studies, Kings College, London.
- McGann, J. (2001) 'Globalization and the Growth of Think Tanks', Accessed from: www.eldis.org/fulltext/globtt.pdf
- Mendizabal, E. (2008) 'Supporting Networks: Ten Principles', *Opinion* 105, ODI: London.
- Mendizabal, E. (2009) 'The Global Go-To Think Tanks: What Works Where?' Paper presented at ODI public event *The Global Go-To Think Tanks: What Works Where?*, London, 10 March.
- Mendizabal, E. and K. Sample (2009) *Díme a Quien Escuchas y Te Diré Que Haces: Think tanks y Partidos Políticos en América Latina*. IDEA International and ODI: Lima.
- Miller, C.A. (2007) 'Democratisation, International Knowledge Institutions and Global Governance', *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, Vol. 20, pg. 325-257.
- Mosse, D., (2006) 'Anti-social Anthropology? Objectivity, Objection and the Ethnography of Public Policy and Professional Communities', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 12, Issue 4, pg. 935-956.

- Newell, P. and D. Tussie (2006) 'Civil Society Participation in trade policy-making in Latin America: Lessons and Reflections', Working Paper 267, IDS: Sussex, UK.
- Pomares, J and Jones, N., (forthcoming) 'Evidence-based policy processes: a systematic review of the knowledge-policy interface across policy sectors', ODI: London.
- Osbourne, S.P., (2008) *The Third Sector in Europe Prospects and challenges*, Routledge: UK
- Ramalingam, B. and H. Jones with T. Reba and J. Young (2008) *Exploring the Science of Complexity: Ideas and Implications for Development and Humanitarian Efforts*, Working paper 285, ODI: London.
- Rao, V. and M. Woolcock (2007) 'The Disciplinary Monopoly in Development research at the World Bank', *World Governance*, Vol. 13, pg. 479-484.
- Scholtes, F. (2008) 'Moral Knowledge in Development: A Concept for the Analysis of Norms and Values in Developmental Policymaking', Paper prepared for 12th EADI General Conference: Global Governance for Sustainable Development, Geneva, 24-28 June.
- Scoones, I., M. Leach and K. Cockburn (2006) 'Science and Citizens: Global and Local Voices'. IDS Policy Briefing, IDS: Sussex, UK.
- Stone, D. (2004) 'Transfer Agents and Global Networks in the "Transnationalisation" of Policy', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 11, Issue 3, pg. 545-566.
- Stone, D., (2008) 'Transnational Philanthropy, Policy Transfer Networks and the Open Society Institute', Working Paper 41/08, GARNET: Coventry.
- Sumner, A. (2009) 'What is Pro-poor Policy Influence? (And How to Get It?)', Presentation to UNDP-sponsored workshop on the role of evidence-based policy in governance debates
- Surr, M., Barnett, A., Duncan, A. and Speight, M., (2002), 'Research for Poverty Reduction', DFID Research Policy Paper, DFID: London.
- Tembo, F and A. Wells, (2007) 'From Multi-donor Support to Civil Society and Engaging with "non-traditional" Civil Society: A Light-touch Review of DFID's portfolio', ODI: London.
- te Velde, D.W. (2008) 'The Global Financial Crisis: Financial Flows to Developing Countries Expected to Fall by One Quarter', ODI Blog, Accessed from: <http://blogs.odi.org.uk/blogs/main/archive/2008/11/13/5701.aspx>
- Timmermans, A. and Scholten, P., (2006) 'The Political Flow of Wisdom: Science Institutions as Policy Venues in The Netherlands' Manuscript prepared for EJPP, Institute of Governance Studies: The Netherlands.
- Ulrich, H. (2004) 'The Impact of Policy Networks in Agricultural Trade Liberalization During the Uruguay and Doha Rounds: The Role of Ideas, Interests and Institutions'. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, 2 September.
- UN Children's Fund (1987) *Structural Adjustment with a Human Face*, UNICEF: New York.
- Wangwe, S. (2005) 'A Review of How External Agencies Can Influence Research Agendas and Influence Policy Links', Economic and Social Research Foundation: Tanzania.
- Weiss, C. (1977) 'Research for Policy's Sake: The Enlightenment Function of Social Science Research', *Policy Analysis*, Vol. 3, Issue 4, pg. 531-545.
- Weiss, C. H., (1999) 'The Interface between Evaluation and Public Policy', *Evaluation*, Vol. 5, Issue 4, pg. 468-486.
- World Bank, (2009) 'Conditional Cash Transfers: Reducing Present and Future Poverty', World Bank Policy Research Report Series, Development Research Group, World Bank: Washington D.C.
- Young, J. (2005) *Strategies to Enhance Research Impact*, ODI: London.
- Young, J. (2008) 'The 21st Century Think Tank', in ODI (2008) *Annual Report*, ODI: London.

Acronyms

AFReC	Applied Fiscal Research Centre (South Africa)
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ASRU	AIDS and Society Research Unit (South Africa)
BPS	Statistics Indonesia
CAF	Centre for Analysis and Forecasting (Vietnam)
CASACIDN	Committee on the Follow up and Implementation of the UNCRC (Argentina)
CFM	Collaborative Forest Management (Nepal)
CIES	Economic and Social Research Consortium (Peru)
CIHR	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
CIPPEC	Centre for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (Argentina)
COPLA	Trade and Policy in Latin America (DFID)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CUTS	Consumer Unity & Trust Society
Danida	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DPRU	Development Policy Research Unit (South Africa)
ebpdn	Evidence-based Policy in Development Network
ECNA	Economic Committee of the National Assembly (Vietnam)
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest User Groups of Nepal
GNTF	National Working Group for Participation (Bolivia)
GPC	Global Plant Clinic (CABI)
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IDRC	International Development Research Centre (Canada)
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IE	Impact Evaluation
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IS	Innovation Systems
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAS	Movement for Socialism
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OAS	Organization of American States
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PDA	Participatory Development Associates (Ghana)
PIDS	Philippines Institute for Development Studies

PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PSCG	Public Sector Consultative Group (Peru)
PT. Pos	Indonesian Postal Company
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development programme (ODI)
RPC	Research Policy Consortium
RTP	Research to Policy project (CAF)
SALDRU	Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfer programme (Indonesia)
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
VASS	Vietnamese Academy of Social Science
VERN	Vietnam Economic Research Network

ISBN 978 0 85003 914 6

Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD

Tel: +44 (0)20 7922 0300

Fax: +44 (0)20 7922 0399

Email: publications@odi.org.uk

Website: www.odi.org.uk

Printed on glives 55, produced with 55%
recycled fibre from both pre- and post-
consumer sources together with 45%
virgin ECF fibre from sustainable forests.

