Making the Most of Research:
The influence of IDRC-supported research on policy processes

by

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Paper for the International conference

**"African Economic Research Institutions and Policy Development:
Opportunities and Challenges"**
Dakar, January 28-29, 2005

organized by the

Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa

(SISERA)

Dakar, January 2005

Abstract

To better understand the role of research and its influence on public policy, the International Development Research Centre (Canada) undertook a study of the influence of IDRC-supported research on public policy. Through a series of document studies and 22 case studies of IDRC-supported research, the project explored the nature of policy influence, its key characteristics and the contexts in which influence occurs. The intent of the study was a) to define what IDRC means by policy influence, b) to identify cases where policy influence has taken place and c) to articulate the factors that support, and those that inhibit, policy influence.

Résumé

Pour mieux comprendre le rôle de la recherche et de son influence sur les politiques publiques, le Centre de recherches pour le développement international (Canada) a entrepris une étude du poids qu'exercent les travaux qu'il finance sur l'élaboration des politiques. Au travers d'une série d'analyses de documents et de 22 études de cas qui témoignent de la recherche à laquelle le CRDI apporte son soutien, le projet a cerné la nature de cette influence, ses caractéristiques clés et les contextes dans lesquels elle se réalise. L'étude avait pour dessein a) de définir ce que le CRDI entend par influence des politiques, b) d'identifier les cas attestant de cette influence et c) d'articuler les facteurs qui la confortent, et ceux qui l'entravent.

Introduction

Ladies & Gentlemen, Colleagues: I would first like to thank Dr. Elias Ayuk & his colleagues at SISERA for inviting me to participate in this event. For me it is an important opportunity because in my view the strengthening of research centres is crucial to the sustainability of research. Researchers are important but without a "home" & support base it is very hard for an individual researcher to make a significant contribution - it is especially hard in the field that is the subject of this Conference and of my talk: what I call "the influence of research on public policy."

I call my paper, ***"making the most of research"***. The idea of creating a direct link between research and policy influence is still controversial to many researchers, who feel quite strongly that research should not be limited and directed by the demands of a society, but that more is accomplished when research is unfettered & free to follow its own directions. This is a valid position & free research should be an important part of research in any field.

At the same time, research guided by & focused on the development needs of a society is equally legitimate. As the then Minister of Environment in Indonesia said, *" here, we have to build the boat and sail it at the same time."* (private communication 1989). This situation is further compounded by the fact that social science comes up with competing findings and it is also recognized that findings do not necessarily hold over time and space. As Carol Weiss noted many years ago,

> And since social scientists acknowledge the fragility and time- and situation-bound character of most research, there are serious questions about what it is that we expect government officials to plug into their decisions.[1]

So, here we are concerned about how research influences the policy process. How is knowledge used? How do researchers bring ideas to decision makers? And how do decision makers get access to ideas?

Recognizing that this is a complex and multi-faceted set of questions, I am going to focus on one aspect of this which is quite important and on which a recent IDRC study sheds some interesting light. But before I get into that, I would like to provide you with some background on the study that I led, why we decided to carry it out and generally how it was conducted so that you have picture of the context in which we were working.

Background to the Study

In the strategic program document of The International Development Research Centre (Canada) we find the phrase,

> IDRC will foster and support the production, dissemination and application of research results leading to policies and technologies that enhance the lives of people in developing countries.[2]

This means that the Centre sees the influence of research on policy processes as an important contribution to development. Because of the diverse nature of Centre programming – from trade policy research with senior researchers and government decision makers, to farm level decision making in research about community-based natural resources management, and including a variety of other approaches, the Centre has not developed a common language for thinking about influencing policy. So, when we talked about policy influence, we were talking about many different things.

We wanted to find out what the Centre meant by policy influence, where the research it has supported has had influence and, what are the key factors in that influence. I should note that we started with an extensive literature review[3] that, while completed several years ago now, remains an important documentation of the literature in this domain as it pertains to development work. A key point noted in the review is that there were no examples of research on this topic in the developing world until the last several years. This is the first study initiated with a set of case studies and a primary focus on the use of research for policy influence in the South. There are now several other studies underway, notably at the Overseas Development Institute[4] in the United Kingdom and also through a project of the Global Development Network[5] that met here earlier this week.

Before I describe the IDRC study, let me make one conceptual point. Note that I talk about policy **influence**, not policy **impact**. This is important to us because, in our view, while external agents such as a

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[1] Weiss, Carol H. "Knowledge Utilization in Decision Making: Reflections on the terms of the discussion", in Research in Sociology of Education and Socialization, 1982, vol. 3: 21.
[2] International Development Research Centre, Corporate Strategy and Program Framework 2000-2005, p. 7.
[3] Stephanie Neilson, IDRC-Supported Research and its Influence on Public Policy. Knowledge Utilization and Public Policy Processes: A Literature Review. IDRC 2001. This and other documents related to the study are available at www.idrc.ca/evaluation/policy.
[4] See the website of the RAPID project at www.odi.org.uk.
[5] See the website of the Bridging Research and Policy project of GDN at www.gdnet.org.

donor may have an influence, impact is only created by those who work and live within a system. By the time **impact** occurs, anything we have done is so mixed in with so many other things that it is impossible to tease out our impact – nor is it desirable that we see ourselves as having an impact. Our role is to support the research process, challenge, introduce new ideas, and so on. But our role is not the uptake of those ideas nor do we have to live with the results. In terms of measurement it is impossible to measure impact. So we focus on influence we may have had by looking at what has happened in the projects which may have changed how the researchers behave or what they do so that over time they may have an impact within their own systems.[6]

We set out to find out what had happened in IDRC around policy influence. First we developed a framework[7] of what we thought policy influence was in very general terms. This framework, developed in consultation with IDRC staff, identified three different types of influence. These were explored in the project. The three types were:
1. Expanding policy capacities
2. Broadening policy horizons
3. Affecting policy regimes

Without going into these in detail, let me say that what they indicate is that policy influence of research goes far beyond changing policies themselves. It includes building the capacities of those involved – both researchers and decision makers – in using research in the decision process; it includes expanding what we look at in the policy and research processes – knowing that policy is not usually made within a narrow domain of study, researchers need to have a much broader understanding of society and must bring other factors to bear on the findings they are putting forward.

We used a case study approach. In order to do this effectively, we developed a set of guidelines and a common framework that was used to develop 25 rich case studies of IDRC-supported activities that were thought to have had an influence on public policy (delimited here to public policy as part of setting some boundaries on what we did).[8] Of these 25 case studies, 22 were completed in time to include in the cross case analysis.

The case studies were selected from a sample of projects suggested by staff. They were projects where the staff asserted that there had been an influence on policy of some sort. This positive sample was chosen because we wanted to understand the nature of influence, we did not want to find out overall how successful IDRC has been in obtaining influence. They covered the regions in which the Centre works and the domains of work we support. They were in many cases projects with a significant history, either from more than a decade ago, or else projects that had been supported through several phases of activity.

These case studies were analyzed, first collectively in a rough way by staff and researchers supported by the Centre. Out of these initial consultations, the project team developed a set of key issues of most importance to IDRC and its partners and used those to conduct an in-depth cross case analysis. It is this that forms the basis for my discussion.

The findings

The categories for analysis that emerged from our consultations with staff & researchers[9] were defined around how the Centre supports research and how that research is delivered when policy influence is at issue. Three main categories emerged where findings were explored:
    i.   what we do;
    ii.   where we do it; and
    iii.   how we work.[10]

What we do refers to the guiding values and principles behind our support. Concretely, that is reflected in the nature of **inputs** we make, the **intent** of the research and the **role** that IDRC assumed in the relationship (as funder, technical adviser, leveling the playing field. and so on). We looked at these

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[6] For a more detailed discussion see Chapter 1 of: Earl, Sarah, Fred Carden and Terry Smutylo. Outcome Mapping. Ottawa: IDRC, 2000.
[7] Evert Lindquist, Discerning Policy Influence: Framework for a Strategic Evaluation of IDRC-supported research. IDRC. 2001.
[8] Fred Carden, Issues in assessing the policy influence of research, pp 135 – 151, International Social Science Journal, No. 179, March 2004.
[9] Odilia Maessen, Influence of Research on Public Policy, Workshop #1, Johannesburg 8-9 November 2002; Odilia Maessen, Influence of Research on Public Policy, Workshop #2, Montevideo, 5-6 December 2002; Odilia Maessen, Influence of Research on Public Policy, Workshop #3, Bangkok, 13-14 January 2003; and Evaluation Unit, Cases, Concepts and Connections: The Influence of Research on Public Policy, Ottawa, 24-25 March 2003. All reports are available at www.idrc.ca/evaluation/policy.
[10] I would like to acknowledge the important contribution to the design of the analytical approach by Professor Carol H. Weiss, and to the analysis by Professor Weiss and her researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education - Svetlana Karuskina-Drivdale and Shahram Paksima.

issues first because in our view the values that guide how we work are a central factor in understanding the nature of our successes and failures.

Where we do it refers to the environment in which the research was undertaken. As is often noted, context is key. Without understanding the environment, it is difficult to influence it. One can look at environment and its affects in many different ways. Here we took a look at the environment particularly from the perspective of how the policy and knowledge processes intersect. I will come back to this in some detail as this is the aspect of our findings that I would like to share today.

How we work is the final category of analysis. By this, we refer to what happens in the projects themselves. By making use of the network modality for example, we achieve certain types of successes.

General conclusions:

Before I come to the details on context, the where we work section of analysis, I would like to outline several key points that emerge from the analysis. The first is that there are no "best practices" when it comes to research influencing public policy. Rather, it is about the confluence of factors that interact in a variety of ways leading towards, or away from, influence. These factors, which are outlined later, work together. Each of them is dynamic and the relationships among them are dynamic. What this suggests is that policy influence requires an ongoing awareness of how the factors evolve, an assessment of their relative importance over time, and changes in strategies according the how the situation is unfolding. This is small comfort to those who seek a simple planning tool, but it is reflective of the reality of policy influence:

Reality **is** complex and evolution manifests in the increase of this complexity. Greater complexity (which is not the same as greater complicatedness), therefore means a more realistic attitude taken to planning.[11]

The second general conclusion is that projects are both successes and failures depending on when and from what perspective they are viewed. The purpose of the strategic evaluation was not to assess the overall success or failure of each project but to look at them through the lens of whether and how they had an influence on public policy.

The third important point to keep in mind is that policy influence is a means, not an end. This may seem obvious, but it is easy enough to forget this point and to look upon success at influencing policy as the end. As soon as we do this we lose sight of our objectives and begin to build what we do around the intent to influence policy rather than at using influence as a tool to support development. The objective towards which the IDRC-supported research projects are working is an improvement in the lives and living conditions of people in third world countries. Influencing public policy is one of the practices in which these projects and researchers engage in order to enhance their contributions.

The fourth point is that relationships are critical. No matter what systems are in place or how well or poorly governance systems function, the relationships which the researchers have with decision makers play a key role in their opportunities to influence. These are more than personal relationships. They are built on professional reputation, quality of work, the experience of past efforts to provide policy advice, and the work of the researchers or research groups over time.

A final overall comment on the analysis is that the findings need to be understood in the context of the nature of relationships between IDRC and its projects. The Centre operates on the philosophy that local ownership of research processes and research findings is critical. Therefore the support the Centre provides is intended to provide the impetus for locally driven research and locally generated use of the research. The findings we present emerge from these conditions. As noted in another analysis of these case studies,

Providing support to the research community to engage with policy does not always assume specific linkages; but rather over time, builds… capacity to engage.[12]

Context

Context matters. This is not surprising and is an important element of consideration in most of what is done in development and development research. The functioning of systems and the development of relationships are central. The nature of economy, the nature of society – including its political processes of continuity and change – and the nature of change all play critical roles. Here, we will look at context from two

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[11] Jantsch, Erich. The Self-Organizing Universe, NY: Pergamon, 1981: 267.
[12] Carden, Fred and Stephanie Neilson, "Confluence and Influence: Building Policy Capacities in Research Networks", in Global Knowledge Networks and International Development. Stone, Diane and Simon Maxwell, eds., Milton Park: Routledge. 2005: 150.

perspectives. The first is a deeper understanding of the relationship between context and the policy influence undertakings. That is, there are elements of context that are seen as manageable, elements which the project can understand and respond to, elements which can be tracked and mapped over time so that the project uses the conditions as part of building its capacity for influence. This leads us to a discussion of five different contexts that emerged in the 22 case studies. These contexts help inform what and how the research project functions, the nature of the research process to be followed and the supporting elements which need to be considered.

The second aspect of context that remains important is an ability to understand and grasp the situation at play in any policy context. These additional factors do not appear to be consistently related with any of the policy contexts we describe but can play a role in any of them.

I will not address a most obvious factor in any process of change: the severe and sudden change brought on by political, economic, environmental or social turmoil, processes over which we have little or no control and for which we cannot simply adjust what we do. This occurred in few of our case studies (such as the Guatemala case), but we recognize of course that this is a factor in the context that cannot be ignored.

Our 22 case studies presented us with five different settings in which policy influence occurred to a greater or lesser degree. These five contexts reflect the level of receptivity of the policy process to the use of research findings, or the integration of researchers into the decision process. More than simply a description of the policy context, they provide insights into what the research needs to consider as part of its interest in having an influence. It informs the research process about the nature of communication of research findings; it informs about the nature and level of advocacy which is required, about the nature of leadership required of the research team; and finally it informs about what needs to be done to ensure that the policy process has a home in the decision system, or the nature of institutionalization required. We will review the key aspects of these features of the research-to-policy process before we describe the five contexts.

I. Research Relationships: project advocacy, communication, leadership and institutional structures for implementing policy proposals.

The analysis of contextual factors revealed that in order for IDRC-sponsored research to have some impact on policy making, there should exist either a strong desire among decision-makers for such research or there should be effective advocacy by project staff for the relevance of the research to policy. If there is weak desire for research among decision-makers, there needs to be strong project advocacy; a strong interest in the research by decision makers needs little promotion of the research. In either of these situations, institutional structures need to be available to implement recommended policies. The level of interest among decision makers affects the nature of communication. Where there is a high degree of openness to influence, communication is straightforward and requires limited thought by the researchers: they need to provide the findings and the data for the decision makers to use. Where there is less openness, more thought needs to be given to the nature and format of communication, as well as to the audiences – indeed, sometimes influence is through other interest groups, not directly with decision makers. Finally, where there is a high degree of openness to influence, there is generally a home for the policy in the decision system; that is, the decision is largely ready to be taken about the policy, a group has been designated responsibility for the decision (and presumably its implementation). However, where the decision makers are not completely prepared to take a decision, it may well be that there is nowhere in the system which has primary responsibility for taking action. As a consequence, in presenting findings, the research team needs to think about the necessary processes of institutionalization as part of how they present the research: it is not simply a knowledge question, but a question of how to use it which is important. Characterizing these relationships is useful for helping to answer the following questions:

- Should the project focus primarily on knowledge generation to aid a decision process of policy-makers or can it be less constrained in its choice of research areas?
- What type of leadership is demanded of the project?
- What is the nature of the advocacy connected with the research and affecting its potential to influence?
- What is the nature of communications connected with the research and affecting its potential to influence?
- To what extent does the project have to address the implementation of research findings as part of its policy influence objective?

Five types of relationships between decision-makers' desire for research *and* research project advocacy are proposed. In each of these five types of relationships outlined below, the factors above each play a slightly

different role and take on a different importance. It is also noteworthy that these are dynamic types. With the exception of the first category, projects seldom stay only in one of the categories, but move over time as they achieve more or less success in their efforts to influence. Later in the paper, I will outline the movement of the cases over the course of project implementation.

1. Clear demand from policy makers:

> *Open window of policy influence. Policymakers want research results for decision-making purposes and are ready to act on them*

In this case there is a government desire for knowledge in a decision process. To make an effective contribution, the researchers generally need to have built a relationship of trust with the decision-makers and have a reputation for high quality research and timeliness. The researcher or research group needs credibility but not necessarily an agenda of its own. Policy-friendly presentation of findings may be less important here given the policy-makers' intention to act.

There is little or no need to consider institutionalization of the issue as the decision-makers are determined to proceed and are considering how to do so. This is illustrated by the MIMAP-Senegal case[13] where the research group was asked by the government to play a central role in the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The research team was brought in based on the reputation and the relationships of the lead researcher and made a significant contribution to a government decision process.

Policy influence was also achieved in Acacia projects in Africa and in the information technology (IT) policy development project in Nepal, where IDRC initiatives were responsive to the governments' search for ways to use IT to promote economic growth. Similarly, in Viet Nam, IDRC-funded economic research projects were started at the request of the head of one of the central economic research institutions in the country and produced results that appeared to serve as a basis for many economic policy decisions in the country[14]. In sum, in cases where decision-makers want the type of research offered by IDRC projects in order to make policy decisions, the likelihood of impact on policy is high. In this welcoming context, project staff may not need to exert its own efforts on dissemination of research recommendations, nor on advocacy around their findings.

2. Government interest but leadership gap

> *Partially open window of influence. Policy makers consider the issue important but do not have the necessary structures or activities in place, through which research recommendations can be implemented,*

In this context, the issue is well known to the government, and it is clear that there are public policy implications. But there is no clear decision process in play. Government is not yet taking the lead in determining what to do. In this situation, there is a need – and an opportunity – for the project to play a leadership role. The research team needs to think carefully about its communication strategies with decision makers. It should also consider the institutional structures that are available to implement the recommendations (or implications) of its research. If there is no system in place to implement the proposed recommendations, the research findings may never be acted upon. The TEHIP case study is instructive. The challenge was how, and at what point, to institutionalize the TEHIP tools within the central Ministry of Health. A lack of coordination among the various players in the health sector led to a slowdown of the project after its pilot phase. In the Philippines, the need to increase poverty monitoring in order to address the poverty gap was articulated by the MIMAP researchers; and their work resonated with policy makers. However, as with TEHIP, the challenge here appeared to be moving beyond the local level contribution and institutionalizing the poverty monitoring system at the national level. MIMAP-Bangladesh, on the other hand, is an example of successful institutionalization of research activities within government institutions. The project staff worked from the very beginning to train officials in the Bureau of Statistics and in the National Planning Commission in the use of the economic analysis tools, thus placing the weight of the project implementation on their shoulders. Since the staff at one of these institutions was also involved in designing a national economic development plan as well as the PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) for the country, they drew on the MIMAP research in formulating these documents.

These and other cases suggest that government interest in research is not a guarantee of its influence on policy. It seems crucial that decision-makers have a plan for implementing the lessons from the research within government structures or current activities.   When such a plan is missing the project team may need to

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[13] This, and all other cases can be found on the Policy study page of our website at: www.idrc.ca/evaluation/policy. The full set of case studies is listed at the end of this paper.
[14] It is hard to trace with certainty the effect of specific projects on policy decisions in Viet Nam, since political decision-making is an opaque and secretive process.

demonstrate leadership in working with relevant decision-makers on developing it; for example, they may decide to train government staff as in the MIMAP-Bangladesh project.

3. Research interest

Partially open window of policy influence. The government has been working on the issue before and acknowledges the need for such research but has more pressing priorities and/or a shortage of resources to engage with it.

In this context, the issue is generally well known and is not disputed as a topic of concern. However, leadership clearly resides within the research project, not within the decision making systems. The government is interested in addressing the issue in the future, or would like to address it now but does not have the resources or has more important priorities to take care of. The links to decision processes are generally weak. In this context the project staff should first of all be concerned with research capacities and especially with *moving the issue up on priority list* of the policy makers, before thinking about undertaking the research in a resource-scarce policy environment. An example of a project doing well in such a context is the Environmental Management Development in the Ukraine (EMDU) program. Local researchers carried out research on water quality long before the IDRC project was initiated. However, the work was under-funded and technologies were out of date. The IDRC project strongly advocated the use of new water testing technologies and bringing data and evidence to policy formulation on water management. The staff also worked on creating popular support for the project, which helped reinforce policy makers' attention to the research. To make its work practical and advance it implementation, the project offered cheaper technology solutions for environmental testing and trained government officials in maintaining and updating the databases on water quality. In this context, the project played a strong role in advocating the importance of using data and evidence in policy formulation and decision-making, and in bringing forward issues the government saw as important but for which it did not have the resources.

4. Emergent issues

Partially open window of policy influence. Policy makers are not interested in the research program but there is a strong research agenda.

In this context, there is no government involvement or interest in the issue, and so a strong research agenda and advocacy are needed to obtain influence. While individuals in the government may know of the issue, it may be controversial or not yet have affected a key political constituency. The research group has to promote the agenda in the policy and public domains and draw attention to the issue. Here, advocacy is central; further, the communication and dissemination of the issue to diverse audiences is important. It is important to note that the audiences are diverse, it is not simply a matter of communication to decision makers, but to those with a range of interests in the issue, groups and individuals who may influence decision makers in their own ways. The project team has to work on creating even an initial interest in the issue. As in earlier cases, it might also establish the structures to move the issue forward. The potential for failure is high in this environment. A high number of IDRC projects fall into this category. It is worth noting that none of the 22 case studies stayed in this category; they were either somewhat successful in creating the change they sought, thus opening the policy window, or they failed and the policy window closed (see the table later in this paper). The fact of high risk is not a reason not to operate in this environment: the issue is recognition of the nature of the environment and the risks that accompany it.

In the case of financing education reform in Guatemala, it was not the government's priority to focus on ethnic and gender differences in educational spending; the country was undergoing political and economic turmoil at the time, recovering from a lengthy and divisive civil strife and so the priority of the government was to create unity rather than recognize diversity and special needs. This was an essential condition for the research team to address; without it, however strong their advocacy work, however careful they were with timing of release of their findings, however careful they were in reaching the right people, the message was not in sync with the government's view of its necessary message of the day.

Successful examples of strong advocacy by a project in the face of the lack of government interest are SRISTI and the Peru Copper Mining project. SRISTI created awareness among policy makers of the importance of its work and was able to institutionalize its activities through government structures. It accumulated convincing evidence, tailored its appeals to specific decision-makers, and proactively created networking opportunities for government officials and project staff. Similarly, the Peru Copper Mining project was able to influence government and private industry by gathering evidence, building relationships with officials as well as members of the community, and through generating wide publicity. These and other cases indicate that in the

context of little or no government interest in the issue, the project should not only produce, but also engage in, advocacy for implementation.

4. Government disinterest/hostility

Closed window of policy influence. Policy makers are explicitly pursuing other priorities and there are no interested publics to change their views.

In this environment, the public policy system is actively disinterested and may be hostile to the issue (while we saw no cases of outright hostility, one can anticipate that strong disinterest leads to hostility over time). The research team must therefore have a strong sense of purpose and a clear recognition that the project is risky from a policy influence point of view. Here, the research team may be ahead of the game, either in terms of the research it is carrying out or in terms of attempting to use research to influence policy in a decision making system that is closed to external inputs. Where innovation is valued as it is in the research process, it is highly likely that at least some projects fall into this category. Over time, one could envisage an issue, heretofore ignored or hidden, finding its way to the fore.

A good example of this situation is found in the High Altitude Mining case. Here, researchers found that mining at high altitudes in Peru adversely affected the health of miners and their families. However, the national Ministry of Health was not receptive to these results as they challenged the traditional belief that people adapt to living and working at high altitudes. Shortly after the project was completed, the Peruvian government underwent political and economic reforms. This resulted in a new policy agenda and further hampered any kind of influence the research might have had. In addition to decision makers, this traditional belief is widely held in the population so there was little opportunity, at least in the short term, to rally interested publics to advocate for change.

Summary

The above analysis suggests that the ideal condition for policy influence is policy-makers' strong interest in research for the purposes of policy creation. However, interest alone is not enough; policy makers should have structures and procedures to implement research recommendations. Future IDRC-sponsored projects may benefit from the analysis of these contextual factors before engaging in action. The project teams should ask: How much interest is there in this type of research among policy makers? Are there structures and procedures in place that enable policy makers to implement policy recommendations of the research? The answers to these questions will inform the project staff about 1) how seriously they should engage in advocacy work for their project; and 2) how much effort they should put in working with policy makers on implementing the policy proposals stemming from research.

II. Additional Contextual Factors Relevant to Policy Influence

In addition to the five contexts for influencing decisions processes outlined above, there are some common factors which cut across all of these and which were found to be important in our case studies. These are factors that neither facilitate nor impede policy influence in themselves, but inform the process of influence. These factors are external to the project, relating to the situation in the country and in its decision-making bodies. Therefore, not much usually can be done about these factors, except for, perhaps, focusing efforts on those countries where fewer external barriers exist and where external facilitating factors are present. I will not go into these in any length here, but raise them as factors that should be further explored.

A. Stability of relevant decision-making institutions

In several of the case studies, low policy influence appears to be a result of instability in the policy-making structures involved. In most cases this instability became apparent after research had already been carried out and it was time to implement the recommendations. For example, in the case of the High Altitude Mining project in Peru, budget cuts led to the elimination of the government institute dealing with occupational health risks that could support policy proposals based on the study. While research on health hazards of working in the mountains had been produced, lack of a relevant government agency impeded use of the results. In another case, in Guatemala, the government went through drastic structural changes, with decision-making powers moving from the executive to the legislative branch. The project staff was not ready for these changes and thus was not able to lobby the new structures. Instability in the national policy-making structures was also a

challenge for the research activities of LATN, as well as for the EMDU Program in Ukraine. However, in the latter case, the project staff was to some extent able to overcome these challenges by addressing its research-based messages to a much wider audience (e.g., through TV programs) as well as to more stable governmental structures (e.g., the president of the country). LATN dealt with instability in decision structures by working at the third level of the bureaucracy that tended to be the level at which stability was most present and thus where continuity across regimes was assured. In some cases, less fluid decision-making structures may be found at regional or local levels. Relying on provincial decision-making structures that appeared to be quite stable was one of the factors in the success of institutionalizing the Poverty Monitoring System in the province of Palawan in MIMAP-Philippines project.

The instability of relevant decision-making structures may be detrimental to policy influence of the IDRC-funded projects. Fortunately, project efforts suggest that it is possible to identify the decision-making structures that are more stable and to focus energies on collaborating with these structures.

B. Capacity of policy makers to use research

In several cases, and especially in the LATN and G-24 projects, the policy makers who were the recipients of the IDRC-funded research had low capacity for research utilization. In the case of LATN, government officials appeared to be unfamiliar with basic concepts of trade negotiations. In G-24, the finance ministers of the developing countries were initially skeptical of the econometric models generated by the research group. In both cases, the research staff had to devote more attention to basic education of government officials than it had initially planned. In addition, the government officials from developing countries in the case of G-24 were frequently in a position of dependency on IMF/WB funding, and thus tended to be timid and conservative in using research findings to propose changes in international financial policy-making. These examples suggest that in the cases where policy makers either need basic training before they can benefit from research findings or are torn by competing interests, policy influence may be less pronounced or slower. These factors may need to be considered by project designers. For example, additional time may be allocated early in the project to educate government officials about the basic ideas behind specific research and its relevance to policy. Partnership and collaboration with others may be an essential ingredient for success in working in such a situation.

C. Decentralization versus tight government control

Whether the country has a centralized or decentralized government does not seem to be unequivocally associated with particular policy outcomes. Whether decentralization is a help or a hindrance to policy influence depends on the nature of the project, specifically on whether the project aims to have an effect at the same level at which the decisions on the issue are made. For example, the MIMAP-Philippines project was aimed at institutionalizing poverty monitoring tools throughout the country. However, this project was conducted under conditions of decentralized responsibility for poverty monitoring and poverty eradication. MIMAP systems of poverty monitoring were successfully instituted in one of the provinces of the Philippines, but project staff encountered difficulties in trying to institutionalize such systems nationwide, since the relevant national institutions did not feel they had the authority to dictate to the provinces. In the TEHIP project, for example, the government was interested in promoting decentralized decision-making by health workers at the district and local levels. The pilot project carried out through IDRC was valuable for learning how to do so. Similarly, in the case of the Acacia projects, the governments were interested in using IT to facilitate the decentralization of decision-making, and the projects were quite successful in helping them. The projects provided tools that could support the process. Over all, it appears that when the projects were trying to exert policy influence in line with the government decision-making structure, they were able to have greater policy impact.

Tight central government control over the country and over research priorities can be either beneficial or detrimental for policy influence depending on the nature of the project.   It appears to be beneficial for national level policy effects when the research is aligned with country interests. Thus, economic studies carried out by IDRC-trained researchers in Viet Nam were of great interest to the government as it strove to re-orient itself from a central to a market-based economy and needed well-researched economic reform proposals to attract donor funding. As a result, IDRC-funded research was supported by major research centres in the country. The results of the studies were in the air in the policy-making arena. On the other hand, in Syria, with its equally strong central control of decision making, the focus of the Brackish Water project was not a priority for the government. Even though an internationally renowned research institution carried out the project, the research results were never utilized for policy purposes.

In sum, it appears that IDRC-funded projects have a chance at policy influence when the intended level of influence corresponds to the decision-making structure in the country. If the project aims to have a national

effect while the decisions are made locally, policy effect is less likely. Instead of pre-planning the level of policy influence in IDRC projects, it may be useful to conduct some initial investigations into what level of policy influence is actually possible in a given case.

D. Special opportunities in countries in transition

Two research projects were in countries whose institutions were in transition from communism. The projects on environmental management in Ukraine and on economic restructuring in Viet Nam were effective not only in generating policy-relevant research and affecting policy, but also in teaching local researchers and policy makers new approaches to inter-institutional collaboration and decision-making. These countries were undergoing transition to more liberal approaches to governance (Ukraine) and economy (Viet Nam), and thus were attuned to new ways of functioning. For example, IDRC partners in Ukraine observed that IDRC staff had brought with them a new culture of management characterized by open information sharing, consultation with all relevant stakeholders before decision-making, and basing decisions on research evidence. It appears that in countries that are undergoing transitions IDRC-funded research has a potential to affect not only *what* policies are made but also *the way* they are made and the way research is utilized.

E. Economic pressures on the government

In most of the cases where the government expressed a clear need for and an interest in the project, it was responding to economic pressure. For example, MIMAP projects appeared to be successful largely because there was pressure on the governments to produce Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in order to receive donor funding, and the data generated by the projects could be used. Similarly, in Viet Nam the politicians needed to attract donor funding and thus were interested in producing feasible economic proposals. Finally, in Acacia projects and in the Nepal IT policy development case, the governments felt the need to develop their economy and saw IT development as an effective strategy. These examples suggest that the likelihood of project influence is higher if it is linked to the economic needs of the country. When this is not the case, the project has to be able to undertake advocacy work to prove its worth and significance to policy-makers. SRISTI is a good example of such a process, as described in the section on partnerships.

The cases and the contexts: evolution over time

The table below presents an analysis of our 22 case studies that looked at them from the perspective of the environment at the beginning of the project and the environment at the end of the project. Because we started by looking for cases of successful influence in order to better understand processes of influence, not surprisingly, a significant number of the cases (half) fall in the top two categories at the beginning of the research. Again, for the same reason, we see significant movement over time, with four more cases moving into these two categories. What is particularly striking is that no research stayed at the level of emergent issue. While this would not hold for pure research, the cases suggest that where there is intent to influence policy, when you start from a relatively risky position in terms of weak relationships with the decision process, the research either finds a way to become more relevant or it falls away from the decision process – again this does not reflect the validity of the research enterprise; nor does it reflect on the quality of the research itself. Rather, it reflects the ability of the research idea and the research team to bring the issue to the decision table.

Context	At beginning of project	At end of project
1. Clear Demand	MIMAP-Senegal Nepal ICTs Viet Nam Acacia-South Africa Acacia-Mozambique Acacia-Uganda	MIMAP-Senegal Nepal ICTs Viet Nam Acacia-South Africa Acacia-Mozambique Acacia-Uganda *AFSSRN* *SRISTI*
2. Leadership Gap	TEHIP MIMAP-Bangladesh MIMAP-Philippines LATN G-24	TEHIP MIMAP-Bangladesh MIMAP-Philippines LATN G-24

Context	At beginning of project	At end of project
		Copper Mining Peru *Jordan Water*
3. Research Issue	Ukraine	Ukraine *Arsaal (local)*
4. Emergent Issue	High Altitude Mining ECAPAPA Arsaal AFSSRN SRISTI Jordan Copper Mining Peru	
5. Government Disinterest	Syria	Syria Arsaal (national) *ECAPAPA* *High Altitude Mining*

Concluding Remarks

What I have tried to do here is give a snapshot of a key part of a very complex - and changing - process. I have not addressed the "what" or the "how". These are addressed in our full report that will be published soon. I have chosen to outline our findings from the case studies on the relationship between research and decision processes because it is in my view a key component to all research-to-policy processes. How you deal with the relationships will be affected by your values & operating principles, but you will have to deal with the decision environment in some way. It presents a way to think strategically about change and how to maximize opportunities for influence.

What is made clear in this examination of 22 cases of efforts to influence policy is that it is a complex and changing process. There is no single factor that is key; there is no single condition that is essential. Rather there is interplay of capacities, contexts and conditions that we must map and monitor on an ongoing basis if we are going to understand how to use knowledge to inform policy. As policy windows open and close, we need to be aware of these changes in order to seize opportunities.

But all is not chance and circumstance. What this investigation has given us is a way to start looking at efforts to influence public policy and try to situate them and assess what should be done if we want to increase the potential of the findings reaching the policy process.   We must remember that our findings come out of 22 specific cases. They are not automatically generalisable and universal. What remains to be tested is how these findings resonate with current activities and projects.

What this study gave us is a framework for considering the influence of research on policy and decision processes for planning, monitoring and evaluation. It is a tool that we think can be use throughout the process of trying to influence policy processes. But it also needs to be tested, refined, revised and strengthened through use in a variety of settings.

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