Bridging Research and Policy: The RAPID approach

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

Clay and Schaffer's book 'Room for Manoeuvre' in 1984 described agricultural policy processes in developing countries as "... a chaos of purposes and accidents ... not at all a matter of the rational implementation of decisions through selected strategies." That may be putting it extremely, but there is growing recognition that policy processes are complex, multidimensional and unpredictable and there is an urgent need to find mechanisms to promote the use of research-based and other forms of evidence in development policy. Theoretical and case-study research and practical work carried out by ODI's RAPID (Research and Policy in Development) programme and the GDN Bridging Research and Policy project over the past three years has led to the development of a practical approach designed to help with this. The approach includes an analytical framework to help unpack the complex range of factors which can influence research uptake including the 'political context', the credibility of the 'evidence' and the 'links' between policy and research communities.

Résumé

Il est de plus en plus admis que les processus d'élaboration des politiques sont complexes, multidimensionnels et imprévisibles et qu'il est urgent de trouver des mécanismes favorisant l'utilisation des résultats de la recherche. Les analyses théoriques, la recherche étayée par des études de cas et les travaux de terrain menés dans le cadre du programme RAPID (Research and Policy in Development) de l'ODI et dans le cadre du projet ''Bridging Research and Policy'' du Global Development Network (GDN) au cours des trois dernières années ont conduit au développement d'une approche pratique conçue à cet effet. La démarche comprend un cadre analytique aidant à la décomposition de l'ensemble des facteurs complexes susceptibles d'influencer l'exécution de la recherche, y compris le « contexte politique », la crédibilité des preuves apportées et les liens qui se nouent entre les instances de décision et le milieu de la recherche.

Introduction

Better utilization of research and evidence in development policy and practice can help save lives, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life. For example, the results of household disease surveys in rural Tanzania informed a process of health service reforms which contributed to over 40% reductions in infant mortality between 2000 and 2003 in two districts (Nielson & Smutylo 2004). On the other hand, the HIV/AIDS crisis has deepened in some countries because of the reluctance of governments to implement effective control programmes, despite clear evidence of what causes the disease and how to prevent it spreading. Donors spend around US$3 billion on development research annually, but there has been very limited systematic understanding of when, how and why evidence informs policy.

Although research clearly matters, there remains no *systematic* understanding of what, when, why and how research feeds into development policies. While there is an extensive literature on the research-policy links in OECD countries, from disciplines as varied as economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, international relations and management, there has been much less emphasis on research-policy links in developing countries. The massive diversity of cultural, economic, and political contexts makes it especially difficult to draw valid generalizations and lessons from existing experience and theory. In addition, international actors have an exaggerated impact on research and policy processes in developing contexts. ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme aims to better understand how research can contribute to pro-poor policies and improve the use of research and evidence in development policy and practice.

RAPID has developed a framework for understanding research-policy links based on an extensive literature review (de Vibe, Hovland and Young, 2002), conceptual synthesis (Crewe and Young, 2002) and testing in both research projects and practical activities (Court and Young, 2003; Court and Young, 2004).[1] The framework clusters the issues around four broad areas: Context: Politics and Institutions; Evidence: Approach and Credibility; Links: Influence and Legitimacy; and External Influences. This paper will present some of the evidence behind the framework and approach itself, how it has been used in different "political contexts", and some of the communication tools that can be used to strengthen 'links' between researchers and policy makers.

Definitions

First, though, some definitions. In our work, we use relatively open definitions of evidence, research and policy. While much recent work on evidence-based policy focuses on scientific research-based information, in reality people make decisions based on a much wider range of information including beliefs and practical experience of what works and doesn't work. We define research as "any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge"[2]. This includes therefore any systematic process of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, data collection, analysis and codification related to development policy and practice. It includes action research, i.e. self-reflection by practitioners oriented toward the enhancement of direct practice. Policy also has a wide range of definitions. In collecting case studies, we considered policy to be a "course of action" including declarations or plans as well as actions on the ground. We also adopted a broader view in assessing the impact of research on policy change – one that went beyond impact on formal documents or visible practices. Following Carol Weiss (Weiss, 1977), it is widely recognised that although research may not have direct influence on specific policies, the production of research may still exert a powerful indirect influence through introducing new terms and shaping the policy discourse. Overall, we explore how research can influence policy-makers horizons, policy development, declared public policy regimes, funding patters and policy implementation or practice (Lindquist, 2003).

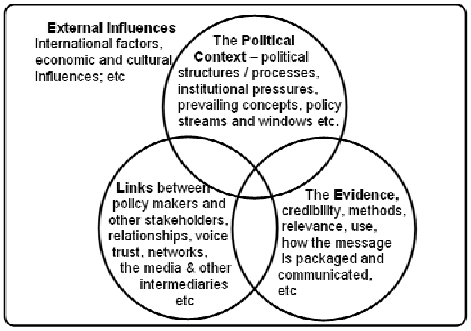
[1] For information on RAPID research and practical projects, see: www.odi.org.uk/rapid

[2] This was based on and remains similar to the OECD definition – 'creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications' (OECD, 1981).

The RAPID Framework

Traditionally, the link between research and policy has been viewed as a linear process, whereby a set of research findings is shifted from the 'research sphere' over to the 'policy sphere', and then has some impact on policy-makers' decisions. At least three of the assumptions underpinning this traditional view are now being questioned. First, the assumption that research influences policy in a one-way process (the linear model); second, the assumption that there is a clear divide between researchers and policy-makers (the two communities model); and third, the assumption that the production of knowledge is confined to a set of specific findings (the positivistic model).

Figure 1 The RAPID Framework: Context, Evidence and Links



Literature on the research-policy link is now shifting away from these assumptions, towards a more dynamic and complex view that emphasises a two-way process between research and policy, shaped by multiple relations and reservoirs of knowledge (see for example Garrett and Islam, 1998; RAWOO, 2001). This shift reflects the fact that this subject area has generated greater interest in the past few years, and already a number of overviews of the research-policy linkage exist (e.g. Keeley and Scoones, 2003; Lindquist, 2003; Neilson, 2001; Stone, Maxwell and Keating, 2001; Sutton, 1999).

The RAPID framework (Crewe and Young, 2003) is shown in Figure 1. The framework clusters the issues around four broad areas: Context: Politics and Institutions; Evidence: Approach and Credibility; Links: Influence and Legitimacy; and External Influences. This framework should be seen as a generic, perhaps ideal, model. In many cases there will not be much overlap between the different spheres or the overlap may vary considerably.

ODI has used this framework extensively:

- to analyse four major policy events: the adoption of PRSPs; the development of an ethical charter by humanitarian agencies; animal health policies in Kenya; the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach;
- to analyse 50 summary cases studies as part of Phase I of the GDN Bridging Research and Policy Project (Court and Young, 2003); and
- workshops and seminars with researchers, practitioners and policy makers in Botswana, Morocco, India, Moldova, Kenya, UK and USA.

The Political Context

The research/policy link is shaped by the political context. The extent of civil and political freedoms in a country clearly makes a difference for bridging research and policy. The policy process and the production of research are in themselves political processes, from the initial agenda-setting exercise through to the final negotiation involved in implementation. Political contestation, institutional pressures and vested interests matter greatly. So too, the attitudes and incentives among officials, their room for manoeuvre, local history, and power relations greatly influence policy implementation (Kingdon, 1984; Clay and Schaffer, 1984). In some cases the political strategies and power relations are obvious, and are tied to specific institutional pressures. Ideas circulating may be discarded by the majority of staff in an organisation if those ideas elicit disapproval from the leadership.

Evidence

Experience suggests that the quality of the research is clearly important for policy uptake. Policy influence is affected by topical relevance and, as importantly, the operational usefulness of an idea; it helps if a new approach has been piloted and the document can clearly demonstrate the value of a new option (Court and Young, 2003). A critical issue affecting uptake is whether research has provided a solution to a problem. The other key set of issues here concern communication. The sources and conveyors of information, the way new messages are packaged (especially if they are couched in familiar terms) and targeted can all make a big difference in how the policy document is perceived and utilised.

For example, marketing is based on the insight that people's reaction to a new product/idea is often determined by the packaging rather than the content in and of itself (Williamson, 1996). The key message is that communication is a very demanding process and it is best to take an interactive approach (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1998). Continuous interaction leads to greater chances of successful communication than a simple or linear approach.

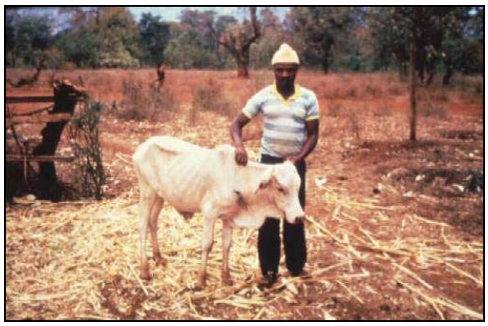
Links

Third, the framework emphasises the importance of links; of communities, networks and intermediaries (e.g. the media and campaigning groups) in affecting policy change. Some of the current literature focuses explicitly on various types of networks, such as policy communities (Pross, 1986), epistemic communities (Haas, 1991), and advocacy coalitions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999). While understanding remains limited, issues of trust, legitimacy, openness and formalization of networks have emerged as important. Existing theory stresses the role of translators and communicators (Gladwell, 2000). It seems that there is often an under-appreciation of the extent and ways that intermediary organisations and networks impact on formal policy guidance documents, which in turn influence officials.

External Influences

Fourth, the framework emphasises the impact of external forces and donors actions on research-policy interactions. While many questions remain, key issues here include the impact of international politics and processes, as well as the impact of general donor policies and specific research-funding instruments. Broad incentives, such as EU Accession or the poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) process, can have a substantial impact on the demand for research by policymakers (Court and Young, 2003). Trends towards democratization and liberalization and donor support for civil society are also having an impact. Much of the research on development issues is undertaken in the North, raising issues of access and perceived relevance and legitimacy. A substantial amount of research in the poorest countries is funded by international donors, which also raises a range of issues around ownership, whose priorities, use of external consultants and perceived legitimacy. As policy processes become increasingly global, this arena will increase in importance

An Analytical Framework



One of the ODI case studies (Young, 2002) examined the complete failure of animal health policy development in Kenya where despite good evidence of the value of local, community-based animal health services, accumulated over a 20 year period, and their development on the ground across much of Northern Kenya, do such services remain illegal. Why? Why has the government not changed its policies and practice to accommodate and promote them – especially in the more remote regions of the country?

Prior to independence in 1963, clinical veterinary services in Kenya were provided by private veterinarians on the white-owned farms, and by Veterinary Scouts - local farmers with a bit of on-the-job training living in the villages employed by local councils - in the African smallholder areas. Veterinary services were controlled by the Veterinary Surgeons Act, borrowed more or less unchanged from the UK, which made it illegal for non-veterinarians to treat animals other than their own. After independence many of the private vets left the country. In the early post colonial period the government made great efforts to africanise and professionalise the service, setting up a veterinary school for vets and technical training colleges for diploma-level animal health assistants. These staff were deployed throughout the country in the major centres, often many miles from livestock keeping areas. Even these clinical services to livestock keepers more or less vanished due to lack of funds under the structural adjustment programmes of the early 80s.

It was in this context that a few NGOs began to experiment with paravet projects. These are community-level services based on the Chinese bare-foot-doctor model. Although

illegal, the approach spread rapidly, especially in the more arid northern part of the country, largely invisible to the veterinary department. At more or less the same time, international donors were encouraging the veterinary department to set up veterinary privatisation schemes in which government vets would be encouraged to set up private practices with an interest free loan. While initially unpopular, Kenyan vets gradually realised that privatisation schemes offered the only job opportunities for veterinary graduates, no longer being employed by the government, and regarded the burgeoning community-based services as a threat to both their professional prestige and their ability to make a living by charging for their services. The situation boiled over in January 1998 when the Kenyan Vet Board published a letter in the national press denouncing community-based services as illegal and threatening legal action against anyone involved in them.

The government realised they had to do something to resolve the situation. It was clearly not realistic to establish private veterinary services in the arid northern areas. But although a multi stakeholder process developed a new policy framework and draft legislation encompassing private vets in the high potential areas and community-based services elsewhere, the veterinary profession has continued to block progress and it has not yet been passed.

The case study used the RAPID Framework to examined how factors in the political context, evidence and links have evolved over the last 20 years, and why the evidence was somehow never sufficient to convince veterinary policy makers to change the law to legalise the services.

The Political Context

The political context for veterinary services, and in particular, the "climate" for establishing policies to allow community-based services has fluctuated dramatically over the last 30 years. The move towards professionalisation not only removed the vet scouts from the villages where they were providing a useful service, but also and encouraged veterinary staff to regard themselves as the only people who could treat sick animals. Structural adjustment programmes then constrained veterinary department budgets to such an extent that they could only pay staff fees, and had very little left for services. The Director of Veterinary services at the time recognised this, and was becoming convinced by the early results of some of the paravet projects of the need to policy reform. Then the realisation that their only realistic long term future lay in privatised services, made the veterinary profession regard community-based services as a threat, rather than a potential ally. A new Director of Veterinary Services appointed at this time, previously head of the vet school, and never actually in practice, was very concerned to ensure the ethical integrity of the profession, and opposed to the idea of community-based, or para-professional services. Nevertheless community-based services continued to expand in the more arid parts of the country, and eventually into marginal areas where newly trained vets were trying to set up private practices. Their growing concern at what they perceived to be a threat to their livelihoods led to the Kenya Vet Board letter in the press. The multi-stakeholder process to develop new policies and legislation which included the veterinary profession, vet school, government and NGOs involved in community-based services, was very successful and resulted in draft policies and legislation agreed by all parties. But leadership in Kenyan veterinary bodies changes annually, and the new leadership no longer supports the new policies and has blocked adoption of the new legislation to put them into practice.

Evidence

Evidence from formal research seems to have played a relatively minor role in the evolution of animal health policies in Kenya. International research and discourse about service provision (the chinese bare-foot vet model), participation and indigenous technology inspired the NGOs to test community-based services in Kenya in the mid 80s. It also stimulated much interest in the World Bank which undertook some research into paravet programmes in the mid 80s. The ITDG projects were established as an action-research programme to "develop and test" the approach, and if they "proved the case", to "use the results to promote a climate in which they could be replicated more widely". ITDG gathered much systematic information, both about the need for livestock services in rural areas, and about the value and impact of the new community-based services that were established. Some was published, but much more was shared informally through workshops and seminars. Little of this though reached the government. The only formal research into

alternative forms of animal health services in Kenya was commissioned as part of the multistakeholder process. The Hubl study was undertaken by a team including members from the Department of Veterinary Medicine at the University, the Ministry of Livestock, and a well-respected international consultant – Dr Hubl. The study involved a series of studies and multi-stakeholder workshops in various parts of the country, and provided convincing evidence of the need and value of community-based services.

Links

Shortly after setting up its first decentralised animal health projects, ITDG organised the first, of what were to become annual "vets workshops" which became the focus of a network of people involved in paravet projects. A conscious effort was made at the start to invite senior government veterinary staff to participate to convince them of the value of the approach. Many NGO and bilateral project staff who were already involved in, or wanted to start decentralised animal health projects, were keen to join the network, and it increasingly focused on practical issues. While this contributed to the rapid spread of the approach across northern Kenya, it neglected to involve senior government policy makers. Dr Kajume, then Provincial Head of Veterinary Services heard about one of these workshops by accident, checked with the Director of Veterinary Services in Nairobi, and was instructed to attend the workshop, tell the participants it was illegal, and close it down. But instead, he became convinced of the value of the approach and persuaded the Director to allow the projects to continue. So paravet projects continued to spread across northern Kenya, deliberately ignored by the Director of Veterinary Services, until the publication of the Kenya Vet Board letter brought matters to a head, and he was forced to do something about it. At which point, Dr Kajume, now Deputy Director of Veterinary Services persuaded him to support the process of multi stakeholder workshops and commission the Hubl study which led to the development of a new policy framework.

When Does Evidence Influence Policy?

It seems in the Kenya case that the political context was more important then anything else, fluctuating between moderately supportive to absolutely hostile. While convincing for people directly involved in the projects, the practical evidence of the value of the new services became increasingly invisible to policy makers as the ITDG paravet network lost its policy edge, and ITDG's workshops and publications aimed at practitioners rather than policy makers. Professional sensitivities, personalities and personal relationships were at least as important as any formal relationships and structures. The Director of Veterinary Services in Kenya more or less controls policy development and implementation, and successive Directors through most of the period were more influenced by donors promoting privatisation and disgruntled veterinarians, than by people supporting decentralised services. The crisis caused by the KVB letter in 1998 clearly provided a tipping point, or policy window when something had to happen. Dr Kajume, the movement's key champion in government, was discovered by accident, although the structure of the workshop he attended, planning to close it down, which allowed livestock keepers and field vet staff to demonstrate the value of the approach helped to convince him not to. The final multi-stakeholder process which included collaborative policy research by a team credible to all sides, and wide-ranging discussions generated the new policy framework, which may soon be adopted.

Results from this and the other studies seem to indicate that research-based and other forms of evidence is more likely to contribute to evidence-based policy if:

i. it fits within the political and institutional limits and pressures of policy makers, and resonates with their assumptions, or sufficient pressure is exerted to challenge them;

ii. the evidence is credible and convincing, provides practical solutions to current policy problems, and is packaged to attract policy-makers interest;

iii. researchers and policy makers share common networks, trust each other, honestly, represent the interests of all stakeholders and communicate effectively.

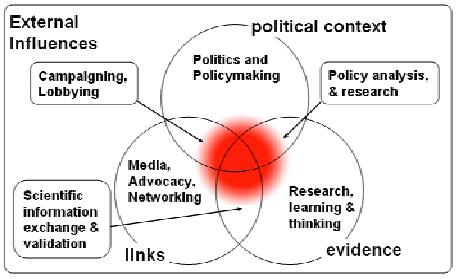
But these three conditions are rarely met in practice, and although researchers and practitioners can control the credibility of their evidence and ensure they interact with and communicate well with policy makers, they often have limited capacity to influence the

political context within which they work. Resources are also limited, and researchers and practitioners need to make choices about what they do. By making more informed, strategic choices, researchers can maximise their chances of policy influence.

A Practical Framework

An interesting thing about the RAPID framework is how well it maps onto real-life activities. The political context sphere maps onto politics and policy making, evidence onto the processes of research, learning and thinking, and links onto networking, the media and advocacy. Even the overlapping areas map onto recognisable activities. The intersection of the political context and evidence represents the process of policy analysis – the study of how to implement and the likely impact of specific policies. The overlap between evidence and links is the process of academic discourse through publications and conferences, and the area between links and political context is the world of campaigning and lobbying. The area in the middle – the bulls-eye – where convincing evidence providing a practical solution to a current policy problem, that is supported by and brought to the attention of policymakers by actors in all three areas is where there is likely to be the most immediate link between evidence and policy.

Figure 2 - A Practical Framework



So, if you are a researcher, policy maker or development practitioner with the desire to promote a particular policy you need to know about:

- the external environment which might influence how people think or behave: who are the key external actors? what is their agenda? And how do they influence the political context?
- the political context you are working in: is there political interest in change? is there room for manoeuvre? how do policy makers perceive the problem?
- the evidence you have, or could get: is there enough of it? is it convincing? is it relevant? is it practically useful? are the concepts familiar or new? does it need re-packaging?
- and the links that exist to bring the evidence to the attention of policy makers: who are the key organisations and individuals? are there existing networks to use? What's the best way to transfer the information: face-to-face or through the media or campaigns?

But understanding the context, evidence and links is just the first part of the process. Our case studies also identify a number of practical things that researchers need to do to influence policy and practice, and how to do it:

- In the political context arena you need to get to know the policymakers, identify friends and foes, prepare for regular policy opportunities and look out for policy windows. One of the best ways is to work with them through commissions, and establish an approach that combines a strategic focus on current issues with the ability to respond rapidly to unexpected opportunities.
- Make sure your evidence is credible. This has much more to do with your long term reputation than the scientific credibility of an individual piece of research. Provide practical solutions to policy problems in familiar language and concepts. Action-research using pilot projects to generate legitimacy seems to be particularly powerful.
- Make the most of the existing links by getting to know the other actors, working through existing networks and building coalitions and partnerships. Identify the key individuals who can help. You need people who can network with others, mavens to absorb and process information, and good salesmen who can convince the sceptics. You may also need to use informal "shadow networks" as well as more formal channels.

With the benefit of hindsight, distance and the results of this study, it is possible to suggest some changes in what was done, that might have accelerated the process of animal health reform in Kenya. ITDG should have made more effort to understand the political context – the legal and policy framework, the key actors, their attitudes and influences, and

other reform processes. The project should have involved policy makers from the start, especially non-veterinary staff, and parliamentarians, and encouraged government staff, especially those opposed to the idea, to visit working CAHW schemes and learn about them at first hand. More empirical data, to counter the fears of critics and convince policy makers, and greater efforts to get to know the key players – the Director and Deputy Directors of Veterinary Services in Nairobi – and figure out how best to influence them – might have been more effective than working with like-minded organisations. Work to convince the bilateral and multilateral donors - who were promoting the privatisation schemes – might also have helped convince them to support, and encourage Kenyan policy makers to support the decentralised service approach for more arid parts of the country.

The RAPID approach to maximizing the policy influence of research is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: How to influence policy and practice

What you need to know	What you need to do	How to do it
Political Context:		
▪ Who are the policymakers? ▪ Is there policymaker demand for new ideas? ▪ What are the sources / strengths of resistance? ▪ What is the policy-making process? ▪ What are the opportunities and timing for input into formal processes?	▪ Get to know the policymakers, their agendas and their constraints. ▪ Identify potential supporters and opponents. ▪ Prepare for opportunities in regular policy processes. ▪ Look out for unexpected policy windows.	▪ Work with the policy makers. ▪ Seek commissions. ▪ Line up research programmes with high-profile policy events. ▪ Reserve resources to be able to move quickly to respond to policy windows. ▪ Allow sufficient time & resources
Evidence:		
▪ What is the current theory? ▪ What are the prevailing narratives? ▪ How divergent is the new evidence? ▪ What sort of evidence will convince policymakers?	▪ Establish credibility over the long term. ▪ Provide practical solutions to problems. ▪ Establish legitimacy. ▪ Build a convincing case and present clear policy options. ▪ Package new ideas in familiar theory or narratives. ▪ Communicate effectively.	▪ Build up programmes of high-quality work. ▪ Action-research and Pilot projects to demonstrate benefits of new approaches. ▪ Use participatory approaches to help with legitimacy & implementation. ▪ Clear strategy for communication from start. ▪ Face-to-face communication.
Links:		
▪ Who are the key stakeholders in the policy discourse? ▪ What links and networks exist between them? ▪ Who are the intermediaries and what influence do they have? ▪ Whose side are they on?	▪ Get to know the other stakeholders. ▪ Establish a presence in existing networks. ▪ Build coalitions with like-minded stakeholders. ▪ Build new policy networks.	▪ Partnerships between researchers, policy makers and communities. ▪ Identify key networkers and salesmen. ▪ Use informal contacts.
External Influences:		
▪ Who are main international actors in the policy process? ▪ What influence do they have? ▪ What are their aid priorities? ▪ What are their research priorities and mechanisms?	▪ Get to know the donors, their priorities and constraints. ▪ Identify potential supporters, key individuals and networks. ▪ Establish credibility. ▪ Keep an eye on donor policy and look out for policy windows.	▪ Develop extensive background on donor policies. ▪ Orient communications to suit donor priorities and language. ▪ Try to work with the donors and seek commissions. ▪ Contact (regularly) key individuals.

Putting it into practice

In early 2004, ODI ran a workshop for stakeholders in a project aiming to improve access to groundwater for poor farmers in India. Groundwater management falls within the remit of three sectoral policies in India: water, watersheds and forestry. The three sectors have a historical legacy of poor coordination which result in poor implementation on the ground. Many of the policy measures are based on narratives with no science base, including the strong belief among policymakers that planting trees protects water resources. Political considerations and vested interests provide resistance to improved management of land and water conservation measures in watershed projects. The project faced the dual challenge of developing new policy recommendations, and over-coming this resistance to new approaches.

A wide range of researchers, policy makers and practitioners were invited. They used the framework to develop a new strategy for the final phase of the project. In place of further research, this emphasised the evidence they had already generated from pilot project sites and used existing links and networks to convince key policy makers of the need to change their policies.

Specific activities included:

- Engaging with the key policy makers, and determining how best to convince them
- Capitalising on political opportunities offered by the new government and bilateral projects
- Taking policy makers to visit the research / demonstration project sites
- Collaborating more closely with national programmes
- Arranging workshops, seminars and meetings with key stakeholders
- Generating appropriate communication materials.

But doing all of these things requires a wide range of skills beyond those required for the research itself . Researchers who want to be good policy entrepreneurs also need to be:

Figure 3: Policy entrepreneurs

- Storytellers: Practitioners, bureaucrats and policy-makers often articulate and make sense of complex realities through simple stories. Though sometimes profoundly misleading there is no doubt that narratives are incredibly powerful.
- Networkers: Policy-making usually takes place within communities of people who know each other and interact. If you want to influence policymakers, you need to join their networks.
- Engineers: There is often a huge gap between what politicians and policy-makers say they are doing and what actually happens on the ground. Researchers need to work not just with the senior level policy-makers, but also with the 'street-level bureaucrats'.
- Fixers: Policy making is essentially a political process. Although you don't need to be a Rasputin or Machiavelli, successful policy entrepreneurs need to know how to operate in a political environment - when to make your pitch, to whom and how.

There are a wide range of well known and often straightforward tools that can provide powerful insights and help to maximize your chances of impact on policy (Start 2004). We've already seen how ODI's RAPID Framework can help you to understand the context you are working in and how you could use the Policy Entrepreneur Questionnaire to figure out what you are good at. Other useful tools to help to understand the policy context include Stakeholder Analysis, Forcefield Analysis, Writeshops, Policy Mapping and Political Context Mapping. This is vital in terms of developing an influence strategy. There is a wide set of research tools – from case studies to action research – that can help generate new or better

evidence to support your case. The key communications questions are: Who do I want to convince? What do I want them to do? What will convince them? What relevant material do I have? A SWOT analysis can help to focus a communications strategy on the key messages and targets, and using the media can help you to reach a wide audience. Many tools have also been developed by organisations involved in lobbying, advocacy and campaigning for pro-poor change.

Conclusions

While policy processes remain complex and context specific, an improved understanding of the role of evidence in policy making and the application of some simple well-known communication and policy advocacy tools can greatly increase the impact of development research on policy and practice. As is demonstrated dramatically in the Tanzania case.

The RAPID Framework provides both an analytical tool, and a practical framework to help researchers, policy makers and practitioners decide what to do to maximise the chance that research or the results of pilot projects do influence policy and practice, and that policies are evidence-based.

There is a growing body of experience in this area, which provides much useful information and advice to researchers wishing to improve the policy impact of their work. Of particular note are the recent Policy Impact Study by IDRC (IDRC,2004) and the IFPRI work on the Impact of Agricultural Research on Poverty (IARP).

Much more information about ODI's research and practical work in this area, and links to related work by other organisations is available on the RAPID website as www.odi.org.uk/rapid.

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