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http://www.anthempress.com/product_info.php?cPath=96&products_id=274&osCsid=icd69j s77l634iqvoni0t6vk67

From development research to pro-poor policy: evidence and the change process

Julius Court and John Young[1]

Better utilization of research in development policy and practice can help save lives, reduce poverty and improve economic performance. But bridging research and policy is harder than it looks. How can policy makers best use research for evidence-based policy? How can researchers promote their findings in order to influence policy? How can the interaction between researchers and policy makers be improved? These are challenges of growing practical and scholarly interest, in both North and South. This chapter provides a synthesis of the findings of recent work in ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme. It outlines an analytical framework for understanding the links between evidence and policy change, and highlights key issues in four areas: political context and the demand for evidence in policy processes; the quality and relevance of evidence; the importance of links and communication; and the role of external actors in developing countries. The chapter concludes with some practical guidelines for researchers who wish to enhance the policy impact of their work.

1 Introduction

Better utilization of research and evidence in development policy and practice can help save lives, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life. Since the publication of the 1998/99 World Development Report, *Knowledge for Development*, there has been greater acceptance that generating knowledge (i.e. research) is one key part of the efforts to reduce poverty.[2] A study by DfID cataloguing the value of research for development forcefully supports this view.[3]

Sometimes, however, it seems that researchers and policy makers live in parallel universes. Researchers cannot understand why there is resistance to policy change despite clear and convincing evidence. Policy makers and other stakeholders, on the other hand,

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2 World Bank (1999).

3 Surr *et al.* (2002).

often do not know what research exists, which policies are the most suitable, or how they can best be implemented in different contexts. They often 'regard *research* as the opposite of *action* rather than the opposite of *ignorance*',[4] and bemoan the inability of many researchers to make their findings accessible, digestible and available in time for policy decisions. However, policy makers may also be unwilling to act on the evidence, as has been the case with the HIV/AIDS crisis in some countries.[5]

Improving the use of research and evidence and the context in which they are used can enhance the ability of all stakeholders to influence policy, and in turn improve the effectiveness of development policy itself. Although research and evidence obviously matter, there is no systematic understanding of when, how and why they inform policy in international development. There are surprisingly few studies focusing on the development arena, despite the increasing emphasis on the need for evidence-based policy. Only in the last year have more focused and substantial studies emerged on the topic.[6]

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines the context for recent and ongoing studies on bridging research and policy in the field of international development. Section 3 provides definitions of research and policy, and describes the analytical framework developed by the RAPID programme at ODI. Section 4 synthesizes the main findings of the RAPID programme, drawn from literature reviews, case studies, synthesis workshops, evaluations and in-country workshops, and section 5 outlines some priorities for future research. Section 6 provides some practical guidelines for researchers who wish to enhance the policy impact of their work, and section 7 presents our main conclusions.

2 Research and policy in international development

Researchers in many OECD countries have focused on the links between research and policy.[7] In 1977, Carol Weiss published the results of her seminal research on 'knowledge creep' and 'percolation', the process in which research findings and concepts are gradually filtered through various policy networks.[8] During the 1980s, the golden age of studies on knowledge utilization in the USA, it was recognized that although research may not have a *direct* impact on specific policies, the production of research may still exert a powerful *indirect* influence by introducing new terms and shaping the policy discourse. Since then, substantial investigations into research–policy linkages and evidence-based policy making have been carried out in OECD countries.

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4 *Ibid*.

5 The HIV/AIDS crisis has deepened in some countries because of the reluctance of governments to implement effective control programmes despite clear evidence of the causes of the disease and how to prevent it spreading.

6 Court *et al.* (2005), Court and Maxwell (2005).

7 See OECD (2001).

8 Weiss (1977).

The failure to enhance the utilization of research and evidence in international development policy and practice is significant. Apparently, the diversity of cultural, economic, and political contexts makes it especially difficult to draw valid generalizations and lessons from existing experience and theory. Since the late 1990s, however, change has been in the air. For example, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) identified a six-point programme for improving the impact of research on policy making.[9] The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) examined research–policy linkages, and provided a 21-point checklist of what makes policies happen.[10] The Global Development Network (GDN) is currently conducting a major study on the issue of the links between research and policy. The Canadian International Development Research Center (IDRC) has conducted a strategic evaluation of the influence of IDRC-supported research on public policy.[11] Over the last few years the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has been measuring the policy impact of its research programmes, and how it can be improved.

An understanding of research–policy linkages in international development needs to take into account the wide range of contexts in which development policies are formulated. A number of emerging global trends are affecting both the generation of research and its use in policy processes. In the macro-level political context, four key challenges are democratization, markets, civil society and ICTs.

Democratization has been one of the most striking developments of the last decades. In 1901, no country could be considered democratic, according to the current definition of the term,[12] whereas in 2003 there were estimated to be more than 121 electoral democracies.[13] Between 1976 and 1999 the number of democratic regimes more than doubled, from under 40 to over 80, providing new entry points to the policy-making process. It is thought that democratic contexts better enable research to be conducted and communicated (due to freedoms), and provide greater incentives for policy makers to use research (due to accountability mechanisms).

Yet many developing countries, even if they appear to be democratic in form, still have unrepresentative political systems and weak structures for aggregating and arbitrating interests in society.[14] Policy-making processes tend to be centralized, and thus remote and inaccessible, with limited scope for wider inputs or participation except at the implementation stage.[15] Political leaders often view civil society inputs as illegitimate or inefficient, with the result that policy makers tend to increase their power whilst simultaneously isolating themselves from society. Policy formulation becomes responsive to the needs of elites rather than the majority, or the poor.

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9 Garret and Islam (1998).
10 Sutton (1999).
11 Lindquist (2003).
12 Democracy is defined as a political system with institutionalized procedures for open and competitive political participation, where chief executives are chosen in competitive elections and where substantial limits are imposed on powers of the chief executive (see Gurr *et al.*, 2001).
13 Freedom House (2003).
14 See Hyden *et al.* (2004); Grindle (1980).
15 Grindle (1980: 15).

Markets are spreading and economies are increasingly open. Twenty years ago only 2.9 billion people lived in what could be termed a market economy, compared with 5.7 billion in 1999.[16] What does this increasing economic openness mean for research–policy linkages? Most obviously, it brings new actors into political processes. It also creates increased demand for research that can be accessed by those outside academia. Both firms and governments need research in order to be able to cope with a wide range of technical issues involved in economic policy formulation and regulation.

Civil society is generally considered to be opening up in many countries. The number of civil society organizations (NGOs, the media, think tanks, etc.) is growing, and their role in shaping national priorities is expanding. A theme common to many countries is the increasing importance of non-state organizations as actors in governance, although the input of civil society into public policy is still quite limited.[17] Civil society and the state often live rather separate lives, with governments continuing to set the policy agenda much on their own. There is still a tendency for many governments to silence or intimidate citizens who propagate views different from those in power.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have incredible potential to transform the generation and sharing of information. The poor are poor not just because they are marginalized or excluded from economic and political processes, but also because they are marginalized in information flows in society. ICTs can make information accessible to a far wider audience than before, and this information can potentially act as a catalyst for action, even for groups that have traditionally been marginalized. ICTs do not represent a miracle cure, however. The information gap is widening, and the need to be 'plugged in' to information networks in order to be able to influence policy may also exclude groups that fall outside the information society.

3 Analyzing research–policy linkages: a framework

In order to enhance *systematic* understanding of what, when, why and how research feeds into development policies, ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme has developed a cohesive framework for analyzing research–policy linkages.

In the context of this framework, *research* is defined as 'any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge'.[18] Research therefore includes any systematic process of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, data collection, analysis and codification related to development policy and practice. It also includes action research, i.e. self-reflection by practitioners oriented toward the enhancement of practice.

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16 Estimates included in a speech by World Bank President James Wolfensohn in 1999 (www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/am99/jdw-sp/jdwsp-en.htm).

17 Edwards (2004), Hyden *et al*. (2004).

18 This is based on the OECD's definition of research: '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).

Policy is defined as a 'purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors'.[19] The focus is on *public policy*, with the understanding that this is not restricted to government policy. International organizations, bilateral agencies and NGOs also have policies, and often influence government policies. What makes policies public is not that they are adopted and implemented by government, but that they also affect or are visible to the public. Within the concept of public policy, there are a number of *sub-components of policy* that research may impact.[20] These are the agendas, arguments and policy horizons of policy makers, their policy objectives and their strategies to achieve them. Others include laws and regulations, institutions and their spending patterns, policy implementation activities, and policy capacities at different levels.

The RAPID framework for analyzing research–policy linkages is based on an extensive literature review, conceptual synthesis, and testing in both research projects and practical activities.[21] The framework consists of three spheres in which the issues to be taken into account for the analysis are clustered (figure 1). The first sphere, '*context*', clusters all issues pertaining to *politics* and *institutions*. The second sphere, '*evidence*', groups the questions that highlight *approach* and credibility, and the third, '*links*', brings together the concerns regarding *influence* and *legitimacy*. These three spheres are embedded in an environment and are affected by '*external influences'* such as international politics, economic developments and cultural factors.

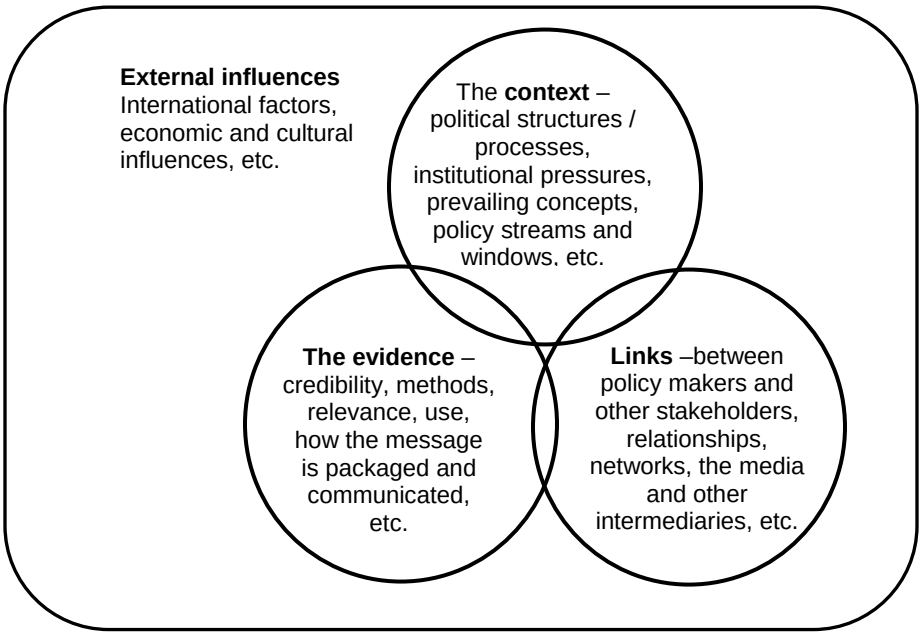

Figure 1. The RAPID framework: context, evidence and links.

19 Anderson (1984).
20 Weiss (1977), Linquist (2003).
21 See de Vibe *et al.* (2002), Crewe and Young (2002), Court and Young (2003; 2005). For more information about RAPID research and projects, see www.odi.org.uk/rapid

The framework should be seen as a generic, perhaps ideal, model. In many cases there will be little overlap between the different spheres, while in others the overlap may be considerable. The core of the analytical framework, then, should be viewed as a trio of floating spheres of variable size and degree of overlap, rather than as a solid mesh in which context, evidence and links are held as equally important, and equally overlapping, in every case.

Research–policy linkages are shaped by their *political context*. The policy process and the production of research are themselves political processes, from the initial agenda-setting exercise to the final negotiation involved in implementation. Political contestation, institutional pressures and vested interests matter greatly, as do the attitudes and incentives among officials, their room for manoeuvre, local history, and power relations.[22] In some cases the political strategies and power relations are obvious, and are tied to specific institutional pressures; in others the pressures are more vague, and are tied to broad discourses or paradigms that may exert a powerful influence on which ideas are noticed and which are ignored.

The framework suggests that the nature of the *evidence* is important for policy uptake. The research approach and methodology are important, as are the credibility of the evidence, simplicity of the message, how it is communicated and the degree to which it challenges received wisdom. The sources and conveyors of information may be as influential as the content; for example, people accept information more readily from researchers they trust. But the hypothesis is that good quality research, local involvement, accurate messages and effective dissemination strategies are important if the aim is for more evidence-based policy making.

Another set of issues concerns how evidence is *communicated*. The way new messages are packaged (especially if they are couched in familiar terms) and targeted can make a big difference in terms of how a policy document is perceived and utilized. For example, marketing is based on the insight that an individual's reaction to a new product/idea is often determined by the packaging rather than the content in and of itself.[23] The key message is that communication is a very demanding process and that it is most effective to take an interactive approach.[24] Continuous interaction is more likely to lead to successful communication than a simple or linear approach.

The RAPID framework emphasizes the importance of *links* – within and among communities, intermediaries (e.g. the media and campaign groups) and networks (policy communities, epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions, etc.[25]) – in effecting policy change. Issues such as trust, legitimacy, openness and the formalization of networks are important in relation to the speed and degree of research uptake. While some theory

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22 Kingdon (1984), Clay and Schaffer (1984).
23 Williamson (1996).
24 Mattelart and Mattelart (1998).
25 Pross (1986), Haas (1991), Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999).

appreciates the roles of translators and communicators,[26] it seems that there is often an under-appreciation of the extent and ways that intermediary organizations and networks impact on formal policy guidance documents, which in turn influence officials.

Finally, the framework emphasizes the impacts of *external forces* and donor actions on research–policy interactions. While many questions remain, the key issues here include the impact of international politics and processes, as well as the impact of donor policies and research funding instruments. Broad incentives, such as EU membership or the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process, can have a substantial impact on the demand for research by policy makers.[27] Increasing democratization, market 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, 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 concerning ownership, whose priorities are being addressed, the use of external consultants, and perceived legitimacy. As policy processes become increasingly global, this arena will increase in importance.

The findings in this chapter are based on reviews of the literature and various studies conducted by the RAPID programme at ODI. These include:

1. extensive literature reviews, studies relevant to developing country contexts, analyses of communications issues and the influence of civil society organizations;
2. a synthesis of 50 case studies conducted as part of phase I of the GDN Bridging Research and Policy project;
3. four detailed case studies of the influence of research on specific policy changes: the adoption of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) initiative; the impact of the Sphere project on the performance of international humanitarian agencies; the spread of para-professional livestock services in Kenya; and the emergence and adoption of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) in DfID's 1997 White Paper;
4. strategic advice to phase II of the GDN Bridging Research and Policy project;
5. a sector study of the GDN Bridging Research and Policy project on HIV/AIDS in developing countries;
6. evaluations of the impact of research/policy papers on bilateral donor policy and practice, carried out for the SDC (Switzerland) and DfID (UK); and
7. workshops and seminars with researchers, practitioners and policy makers in Botswana, Morocco, India, Moldova, Kenya, the UK and the USA.[28]

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26 Gladwell (2000).

27 Court and Young (2003).

28 (1) de Vibe *et al.* (2002), Hovland (2003), Court and Pollard (2005); (2) Court and Young (2003); (3) Court *et al.* (2005); (4) www.gdnet.org/rapnet; (5) Court (2004); (6) Piron and Court (2004); (7) see www.odi.org.uk/rapid/meetings.

4 A synthesis of findings

This section starts with a note on method and overarching principles, and some broad points about what our work says about existing models of research–policy linkages. We then discuss the three spheres in the RAPID framework – context, evidence and links – and the external influences. As we proceed, we indicate where our analysis supports some of the key strands of theory in the literature.

Method and overarching principles

The study of research impact and research–policy linkages is simply not amenable to a single conventional means of analysis. Nevertheless, there is a growing body of experience that indicates the value of using context-specific, triangulated combinations of qualitative and quantitative methods. The challenge is to find the middle ground between factors that are so context specific as to be irrelevant elsewhere, and those that are too generalized to be meaningful.

There are many methodological challenges in undertaking a study of research impact and research–policy linkages. It is difficult to define impact, since research can impact on policy in many different ways. Attribution is also difficult. Since policy processes are complex, multi-layered and change over time, it is difficult to identify the key factors that caused policy to change (or not) and to isolate the particular impact of research. Much of the evidence is qualitative and subjective. The issue of time complicates the analysis.

In the design of methodological approaches, two principles were adopted. First, triangulation – i.e. the use several research approaches to investigate an issue – would be required to ensure that the findings were robust. Second, the main findings of each part of the study would be peer reviewed both by researchers to assess the policy impacts of specific pieces of research, and by policy makers to assess the role of research in clear policy shifts.

Context: politics and institutions

Our work indicates that the political and institutional context is the most important sphere affecting the uptake of research into policy. Power relations, political contestation, institutional pressures and vested interests matter critically in all cases. The attitudes and incentives among officials and the local historical context also influence policy processes. In many political contexts in developing countries, the findings of research are often completely ignored. Our cases confirm the findings of Kingdon, who highlighted the importance of ‘political streams’ such as changes in government and public opinion, as well as of ‘policy windows’ – key moments when research can influence policy

processes.[29] It is crucial to understand the political context in order to bridge research and policy.

The demand from policy makers is one of the main factors that determines whether research will be taken up or will have little impact. However, it is not just the demand for a solution to a problem that matters, but also consensus on the nature of the solution. In our PRSP case study,[30] for example, the most important contextual factor was the convergence of debates and controversies in the field of international development. The ODI and GDN case studies emphasize the problems for research–policy links when contexts become complex, highly politicized processes,[31] with increasingly polarized views developing in the different camps, and no mechanism for dialogue and resolution.

Policy is not just about statements and laws; it is also about implementation. RAPID's work certainly supports the view that 'street-level bureaucrats' (the employees of an organization responsible for implementation) can have an enormous influence on how policies are implemented.[32] All the cases indicate that paying attention to how new policies will be put into practice is an important aspect of policy change to which researchers often pay scant attention. The RAPID study of animal health policy in Kenya provides a powerful example of how street-level bureaucrats may be forced to deal with new problems, draw on available evidence, and therefore go through the process of policy adaptation before high-level policy makers. In this case, animal health care practitioners across Kenya's arid Northern region, finding themselves with virtually no operational budgets, adopted effective community-based approaches even though they were actually illegal, since they were the only way they could continue to provide any services at all.[33]

Evidence: credibility and communication

The findings for three sets of issues regarding research or evidence appear particularly robust. First, research appears to have a much greater impact when it is topically relevant. For an impact in the short term, research needs to relate to the policy issue of the day. Second, the perceived credibility of research is crucial for policy uptake. Many of our cases emphasize the importance of the credibility of key researchers or research organizations, and the approach used. Also, research that pulls together evidence from diverse sources can often help to foster uptake. But credibility also depends on the user. Third, it is clear from the case studies that the operational usefulness of research – whether it provides a solution to a problem – is critical. Research that had an operational orientation or action research seems to have an impact. Critical for uptake in many cases is that applied policy research focuses on providing recommendations for specific

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29 Kingdon (1984).
30 Christiansen and Hovland (2003).
31 Sutton (1999), Keeley and Scoones (2003).
32 Lipsky (1980).
33 Young *et al.* (2003).

organizations. As formulated in the literature on marketing,[34] people buy products that provide solutions to problems.

But it is not just the content of the evidence that matters. How findings are communicated is crucial, since policy makers cannot be influenced by research unless they are actually aware of its existence. Our work confirms that the nature of communications efforts and the format of the research outputs matter critically for policy impact. Researchers could provide more clarity in expressing complex processes. Interestingly, the issue of credibility concerns not only the quality of the research but also the way it is packaged to make it palatable to policy makers.

It is hard to overemphasize the importance of targeting the message for a specific audience. Research needs to be communicated in a language that is accessible and relevant to the intended audience. Our findings emphasize the importance of communicating in different ways for different audiences. For non-specialists, reports need to use clear prose and graphics, as well as brief case studies, whereas technical guidance sheets are more appropriate for practitioners. The ODI cases also demonstrate the power of visual images. As has often been emphasized, 'seeing is believing'.[35]

There is evidence to support the view that it is best to take an interactive approach to communication.[36] It seems that continuous interaction leads to greater chances of successful communication than a simple or linear approach. The importance of interactions between researchers and policy makers is also emphasized in many cases.

The cases indicate how evidence can help to change the policy context. In our PRSP case, research evidence helped create a context in which the prevailing narrative was 'there is a problem with development policy'. This evidence, and the campaigns that used it, helped to influence the political contexts in a number of countries and at the international level. The evidence and operational research it spurred eventually resulted in a new policy context and policy shifts.

Links: influence and legitimacy

Much of the literature on bridging research and policy emphasizes that the links between researchers and policy makers are critical. Key issues include dialogue, feedback processes and collaboration between researchers and policy makers; the role of networks and policy communities; and issues of trust, legitimacy and participation. However, it is also apparent that many questions remain unanswered in this arena.

The case studies highlight the vital role of networks in policy change. As such they support the view of policy making as a series of negotiations that can be completed

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34 E.g. Lambin (1996).
35 Philo (1996).
36 Mattelart and Mattelart (1998).

through formal and informal networks.[37] Many of them emphasize how such links maximize the sense of ownership and 'buy-in' in conducting evaluations and implementing the findings. They show how networks can facilitate knowledge sharing, coordination and cooperation. But a key question that remains is: what are the characteristics of networks that enable them to act as a bridge between research and policy? Epistemic communities – colleagues who share a similar approach or position on an issue and maintain contacts across their various locations and fields – can create new channels for information and discussion of new perspectives, and are particularly effective if they include a few prominent and respected individuals.[38] Such individuals can play an important role in bridging research and policy. Many of our cases describe how such individuals have been crucial in promoting pro-poor policies based on research.

The cases also repeatedly draw attention to the issue of the legitimacy of researchers and the research process. Researchers' links to the populations and communities that will be affected by the policies can also be important as a basis for legitimacy.[39] A recent paper for the Rockefeller Foundation emphasizes that social change will be more sustainable if the affected community owns not just the physical inputs to and outputs of policy implementation, but also the process and content of the communication involved.[40] Our work demonstrates that although it takes a great deal of time and work with local communities to develop effective and sustainable new approaches, this is essential to ensure their effectiveness and to acquire the legitimacy to advocate change.

External influences

In much of the work on developing countries, a set of factors has emerged that has had a decisive influence on the policy change in question and also on the spheres of context, evidence and links. These factors, loosely grouped under the heading 'external influences', include the impacts of international politics, the policies of donors, and the specific research funding approaches taken by donors.

In our PRSP case study it is clear that pressures felt by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have an impact not only on the institutions themselves, but also on most bilateral donors and, in turn, on all loan- or aid-receiving national governments. In other words, changes within these institutions form an external influence that can have substantial and far-reaching impacts on national policy processes and the use of evidence in policy processes. The effect of this external influence will be greater for recipient governments in the South than for others.

External influences also have a direct effect on the production and dissemination of research within international development. Broad incentives, such as EU membership or the PRSP process, can have a substantial impact on the demand for research by policy

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37 Kickert *et al.* (1997), Robinson *et al.* (1999).
38 Haas (1991); see also the chapter by Sunil Mani in this volume.
39 Fine *et al.* (2000).
40 Figueroa *et al.* (2002).

makers.[41] The processes of democratization and liberalization and increasing donor support for civil society are also generating demand for comparative analyses and for evidence-based recommendations. Donors are funding both research and communications and networking activities.

The increasing importance of international policy processes throws up a set of new research questions concerning transnational knowledge networks. Many of the RAPID studies involve fascinating elements of the transnational interactions of researchers, policy makers and donors. For example, the case of para-vets in Kenya involved the translation of a Chinese idea (barefoot doctors) into a different sector (animal health) in a different part of the world. How did this series of transnational interactions come about? Was there something about this sector that made it open to an idea transmitted across borders? Why did it occur in Kenya rather than somewhere else?[42] In a globalizing world, transnational knowledge sharing, both formal and informal, is becoming increasingly important.[43]

5 Some unanswered questions

Our work confirms that the political context has a critical impact on the uptake of research into policy. There is, however, very little evidence in the literature about the impact of democracy and good governance on the uptake of research into policy in the South. Much of the existing theory is from OECD countries and is based on assumptions of political and civil freedoms – especially academic and media freedoms. There is surprisingly little systematic evidence from contexts where these freedoms cannot be taken for granted.

We are left with some key questions: Do countries or organizations with good governance (accountability, transparency and responsiveness) use research more than others? Our work does suggest that democratic countries share a greater incentive, and are more likely, to use research in policy processes. The reasons why democracies would be more effective at taking up research into policy include factors on both the supply and demand side (and the relationship between them). In terms of supply, open political systems allow evidence to be freely gathered, assessed and communicated. In terms of demand, democracies imply a greater accountability of governments and therefore a greater incentive to improve policy and performance. Democratic contexts also imply the existence of more open entry points into the policy-making process. In contrast, autocratic regimes tend to limit the gathering and communication of evidence and have weak accountability mechanisms.[44]

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41 Court and Young (2003).

42 For a discussion of this case see Court *et al.* (2005).

43 Stone and Maxwell (2005).

44 For example, a case study from Uruguay charted the negative effect of the dictatorship on the use of research in health policy (Salvatella *et al.*, 2000).

In addition to general democracy and governance factors, some other issues are relevant here. Academic freedom is likely to be critical for research–policy linkages at specific policy level as well as the national level.[45] In some countries, for example, it is more feasible to conduct economic research than it is to undertake research on democracy or human rights. Media freedom is presumably a key factor influencing the communication of ideas into policy and practice. Freedom of information may be valued in its own right, but information and press freedoms have also been linked to the state's willingness to intervene in areas such as famine prevention, particularly in India.[46] However, there is no systematic data on the links between these issues and of the policy influence of research.

Civil society plays a part in most political systems – it is where people become familiar with and interested in public issues and how rules tend to affect the articulation of interests from society. Theories of social capital emphasize the importance of local associations in building trust and confidence both in institutions and among people.[47] Key issues here include the conditions under which citizens can express their opinions, organize themselves for collective action and compete for influence. There is also evidence to suggest that civil society is an important link between research and policy.[48]

Given the importance of external influences on Southern policy contexts, a further pertinent question concerns the effects of uneven access to international research/policy networks for Southern institutions. Much of the research on development issues is undertaken in the North, raising issues of perceived relevance and legitimacy. Perhaps even more important, there is an imbalance between the relatively low priority given to research capacity building in Southern institutions in comparison to the research budgets spent by Northern-based institutions. Also, a substantial amount of the development research that is undertaken in the poorest countries is funded by international donors, which also raises a range of issues around ownership, whose priorities are being taken into account, the use of external consultants and, again, perceived legitimacy. As policy processes become increasingly global, this arena will increase in importance. In this situation, new questions emerge. Whose interests will guide research funding? And how will donor funding of research be evaluated?

Finally, we know that networks matter, but how and why? Out of the arenas in our framework, our understanding of such links remains the most limited. Although it is relatively simple to draw a 'family tree' of the key individuals and partnerships involved in a particular policy 'episode', it is harder to understand how more diffuse networks influence the research–policy process. The theoretical literature provides myriad typologies of 'formal and informal networks', 'epistemic communities', and 'downward links', all of which seem to be evident and important in the case studies. They do not, however, add up to a comprehensive analytical tool for understanding what makes links function. What are the characteristics of networks that enable them to act as a bridge between research and policy? Where, how and to what degree do networks actually make

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45 For various pertinent aspects search www.aaup.org/
46 Sen (1999).
47 Putnam (1993).
48 Court and Young (2003); Court and Maxwell (2005); Pollard and Court (2005).

a difference to policy making? Networks have not been regularly evaluated until recently, which means there is a lack of comprehensive data on their roles and effects. Different assessment models are being developed to address this issue,[49] but the area remains in need of further research.

6 Towards practical guidelines for researchers

Although researchers can often control the credibility of their evidence and try to interact with and communicate with policy makers, they may have limited capacity to influence the political context within which they work, especially in less democratic countries. Resources are also often limited, and researchers need to make choices about what they do. The table below suggests what researchers and others with a stake in development research and policy need to do if they wish to improve research–policy linkages.

7 Conclusions

The work of the RAPID programme in the international development sector highlights the *indirect* influence of research on policy, through processes similar to the 'percolation', 'enlightenment' and 'knowledge creep' identified by Weiss. For example, the RAPID study of PRSPs emphasizes how academic research in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s had an indirect influence by shifting the development discourse towards poverty reduction, participation and aid effectiveness. That research highlighted problems with development practices and set the stage for the policy reviews of the 1990s that led to the adoption of PRSPs by the IMF and the World Bank in 1999.

It often takes a *long time* for research to have an impact on policy. This was the case with the PRSPs, and with HIV/AIDS. In the latter case, by the time policy makers became aware of the significant number of deaths due to AIDS, the disease had already spread through much of the population. The key is that policy makers must understand the epidemiology of the disease in order to respond appropriately. The cases included in this study support Gladwell's arguments that changes in context and the influence of key individuals can lead to a '*tipping point*' when a relatively minor event galvanizes trends that have been building up 'beneath the surface'. In many cases there seems to have been a general context where it was increasingly apparent that change was needed, and where a specific issues then spurred a policy change.

[49] Church *et al.* (2003), Provan and Milward (2001).

Table 1. What researchers need to know, what they need to do, and how to do it

What researchers need to know	What researchers need to do	How to do it
***Political context*:** Who are the policy makers? Is there policy maker 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 policy makers, their agendas and the constraints under which they operate. Identify potential supporters and opponents. Keep an eye on the horizon and prepare for opportunities in regular policy processes. Look out for – and react to – 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 and resources
Evidence: What is the current theory? What are the prevailing narratives? How divergent is the new evidence? What sort of evidence will convince policy makers?	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 respected programmes of high-quality work. Action-research and pilot projects to demonstrate benefits of new approaches. Use participatory approaches to help with legitimacy and implementation. Clear strategy and resources for communication from the start. Real communication – 'seeing is believing'.
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 the constraints they operate under. Identify potential supporters. Establish contacts with key individuals or networks. Establish credibility. Keep an eye on donor policy and look out for policy windows.	Develop extensive background on donor policies. Orient communications to priorities and in donor language. Try to work with the donors and seek commissions. Contact (regularly) key individuals.

While some of the existing theory does apply, our work indicates that care must be taken when applying such models to developing countries. There is a need to adopt a broader

framework than one that might be used in the OECD countries. The social, economic and political contexts may be different and more varied, and basic assumptions about political and academic freedoms may not apply.

Research *does* matter. Our work shows that the quality of evidence is crucial for policy uptake, although its influence can be slow and indirect. Academic research is more likely to have an indirect 'percolation' effect on policy language and the policy environment over time, while applied or policy-oriented research is more likely to have a direct and more immediate influence on policy. Impact can be enhanced and accelerated if research is topical and operationally relevant – and if communicated to different audiences via the most appropriate communicators, channels, style, format and timing. For impact, research communication needs to go far beyond the dissemination model that often prevails. Research is more likely to contribute to evidence-based and pro-poor policy making if researchers understand the political and institutional limits and pressures of policy makers, and is oriented to resonate with their ideological assumptions, or sufficient pressure is exerted to challenge them.

The political context is crucial, and many developing countries do not have contexts conducive to the uptake of research into policy. The level of demand for change, the extent of contestation and openness to new ideas are critical in terms of policy change and usually have a greater degree of impact over and above other factors. All stakeholders interested in enhancing research–policy linkages need to understand the political context and knowledge systems in which these interactions occur. In many cases, research–policy linkages will be enhanced by interventions in non-research components of systems. However, it is clear that whilst the political context at the moment of policy shift is a critical factor, the cases do not suggest that this context is immovable, unstoppable or deterministic of policy outcomes. Researchers, civil society groups and international actors can change the policy context. While policy processes in developing countries rarely conform to the classic policy cycle, making them more structured, transparent and predicable would help foster better uptake of research-based evidence.

The links between researchers and policy makers are critical. Key issues include feedback, dialogue and collaboration; the role of networks and policy communities; and trust, legitimacy and participation. Our work suggests that researchers are more likely to be influential if they interact with policy makers – as individuals, via mediators or through networks. It is worth noting the prominent role of 'policy entrepreneurs' – such as the connectors and salesmen identified by Gladwell. While we know that networks matter, we are not yet in a position to indicate clearly how and why.

In many developing countries, particularly smaller and poorer ones, international factors have a significant impact on research–policy linkages. Some of the major policy processes – such as the PRSPs – have led to an increase in the use of evidence in policy making. AIDS provides an interesting case: while the huge international push regarding HIV/AIDS has led many African leaders to 'speak the right language', the responses on the ground in terms of funding and activities to fight the disease have been mixed.

Our findings, although tentative, suggest that donor (or indigenous) initiatives to improve democracy and good governance as well as to promote civil freedoms have positively influenced the context for bridging research and policy. Our work is much clearer regarding the ways that donor research funding priorities affect the research undertaken in developing countries; for many countries, international sources provide a substantial share of research funding. It is less clear, however, whether this is more likely to feed through into policy. In some cases, international research enhances impact; in others it may hinder policy uptake. One clear conclusion is that donors should ensure that research is truly focused on the needs of a country (to enhance growth or reduce poverty), implying a greater emphasis on needs assessments. They should also ensure that research influences policy, implying engagement with policy processes and research as part of a package of measures (networks, capacity building, communications) rather than stand-alone. One way is to build local capacities around specific problem topics – of researchers, policy makers and mediators, depending on the subject and the context.

This chapter has provided a sketch of the critical factors, and the interactions between them, that influence whether some research findings are taken up and acted upon, while others are ignored. The analysis of the theory and the work in this area aimed to provide some useful insights and ideas, both analytical and practical, for researchers, practitioners, policy makers and others who wish to further evidence-based and pro-poor policy in their own work. While there will always be an element of unpredictability and surprise, these observations may help to maximize the impact of research on policy and practice in international development.

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