

How to increase likelihood of policy impact

Key lessons from the case study on SDP's experiences in influencing dairy policy in Kenya

Collaborative approaches:

The experience of SDP showed how collaborative approaches can increase opportunities for achieving policy impact, but also showed how much investment is needed, both in time and money, to make such collaborative approaches work. With SDP, this collaboration itself rested on years of previous collaboration, leading to trust and understanding between key individuals in the partner institutions. Collaboration with civil society organisations for advocacy was critical (see separate section below).

People matter:

Individuals can be very important. In the right place, they can be quietly but persistently influential. The SDP project manager's position within the Ministry of Livestock meant findings and implications were continually fed into the formal policy process throughout the project. Conversely, individuals can block processes, and require careful 'wooing' or circumvention. Early recognition of key individuals, and the positive or negative roles they can play, is important for developing a strategy to increase policy influence.

Quality and range of research evidence:

When evidence was used to influence policy, the quality of the research conducted by SDP enabled it to stand up to coordinated and well resourced attack. SDP's experience shows the value of high quality and robust evidence, especially when a broad range of evidence combines together to make a complete and highly policy-relevant story.

Communication of evidence:

Packaging of evidence and its presentation in appropriate ways for different audiences widens the reach of the evidence. SDP's evidence was packaged appropriately for a range of audiences, and used at every opportunity. Use of the media, production and use of policy briefs, and a video complemented more comprehensive research reports. However, the production and active use of such materials involves considerable cost.

Every opportunity was taken to present evidence at a wide range of fora, throughout the project. When unexpected opportunities arise, preparedness with appropriate materials ensures that such opportunities are not missed.

Working with civil society:

SDP's strategic partnership with NGOs was crucial for making the evidence heard and acted upon at high level. Such links between research and NGO actors are not common, and were shown to be highly effective. As well as providing avenues for research evidence to be delivered straight to key policymakers, the NGOs links with the grassroots enable the evidence to be used by farmer advocacy organisations. However, such links require significant investment in time to be successful, and are only likely to work when all parties share a common vision, and appreciate each other's specific role.