



Process and Partnership for
Pro-Poor Policy Change Project



In collaboration with ECAPAPA

ECAPAPA

Eastern and Central Africa Programme
for Agricultural Policy Analysis

Guiding Principles for achieving impact through policy change A resource for researchers

[Draft version only – not for quotation]

This version of the 'Guiding Principles' paper has been prepared ahead of the Process and Partnership project's regional workshop on March 27th-28th. It draws mainly on the project case studies and wider work by ODI.

However, the discussions during the workshop will provide a vital input into the final version of this paper, to become a resource for researchers seeking to have more effective engagement with policy processes. This should therefore be considered very much a '**work in progress**', and it is distributed ahead of the workshop as a stimulus for the discussions, and as a 'template' to structure exercises during the workshop.

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1. Introduction:

1.1 What this document attempts to do:

This paper is a short, preliminary version of a publication which aims to support researchers and research organisations in playing a more effective role in poverty reduction through policy-level changes. It has been produced as a ‘work-in-progress’, ahead of a regional workshop to be held in Nairobi in March 2007. The outputs from this workshop will then be used to further develop and expand this paper into a booklet entitled *Impact through Policy Change: How researchers can play a role*. The booklet is intended to be a resource for researchers to use for practical support when devising and implementing activities which aim to have some or all of their poverty-reduction outcomes working through policy change. It will complement other resources produced by ODI which are aimed more at civil society actors and public sector actors. However, as effective linkages seem to underlie most successful policy influences, and recognising that an understanding of the perspectives of the different actors is critical for all concerned to be more effective, this should also be a resource for other actor-types, in the same way as the other resources provide useful insights for researchers.

1.2 Who this document is for:

Policy and practice should be informed by research-based evidence. Many types of organisation are involved in research¹ and the use of evidence in policy engagement. Many civil society organisations actively engage in policy-influencing activities, as do private sector actors, using evidence to back up their activities. However this publication is predominantly targeted at development-focused research organisations – meaning organisations whose prime activity is systematic investigation and evaluation of data related to development practice and policy. This can include a wide range of research approaches, such as action-research and consultations, as long as evidence is collected in a rigorous and systematic way.

This document will also be relevant for civil society organisations and public policy makers amongst others. But a number of resources have been recently produced which are tailored more specifically to the needs and activities of these actors in relation to policy engagement. [See the list of Resources at the end of this document.]

It is meant to be very accessible to people whose normal prime activity and focus is not necessarily on policy engagement, so the aim is to give general guiding principles on how to work in ways more likely to result in policy change, rather than providing a complex recipe book detailing all the steps which should be followed in particular circumstances. Indeed a key finding from our work in this area is that there can only

¹ We adopt a very general, though widely accepted, definition of research as ‘any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge’ (OECD 1981; see Court et al, 2006, and Sutcliffe & Court, 2006, for further discussion). This may include 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 towards the enhancement of direct practice and ‘voice and consultations’. The key is that evidence is collected in a rigorous and systematic way.

really be general guidance, because policy processes are so context-specific, varying depending on country, sector, individuals and actors involved, and any number of internal and external factors, so that prescribed approaches are unhelpful. However, it is hoped that by following these guiding principles, and then selecting appropriately from links to a range of tools and approaches that can help both understanding of, and engagement in policy processes, the booklet will help researchers ensure that their evidence can indeed play an effective role in informing policy and practice in these complex processes.

1.3 Guiding principles:

The guiding principles for effectively achieving policy-related outcomes are based on the findings of a series of case studies carried out in East Africa by a collaborative ILRI/ODI project, backed up by a wider body of research conducted by ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme. Using research approaches designed to capture as much of the complexity of policy change processes as possible, and an analytical framework developed by RAPID to systematically analyse and understand these processes, the guiding principles have been found to be fairly consistent across a range of contexts and scales.

In order to actually apply the guiding principles in the real world, of course, specific actions must be taken. There are therefore some links to a number of 'tools' and approaches that may be appropriate, listed at the end of the document. These collections of tools and approaches are predominantly outputs of the RAPID programme. By referring to these more detailed sources, including 'toolkits', it should be possible to turn the 'guiding principles' into concrete strategies and action.

Also, within the case studies, particular approaches also provide useful illustrations of the specific approaches that have proved successful in that context. These can serve to illustrate the sort of approach that could be considered, with the proviso that although it seemed to work in that particular context, it may or may not be appropriate in another one.

2. Background and analytical framework

2.1 Background

Research-based evidence can and does play a key role in poverty-reduction and international development. But whilst few actors would deliberately set out to develop policies and institutions that were not based on evidence, the experience of many people is that apparently ‘good’ evidence is ‘ignored’ in policy processes, or that policies are developed based on pressures/interests that go against the evidence, or that despite attempts to influence policy based on research evidence, nothing changes.

This is partly explained by the realisation that conventional understanding of the role of evidence in policy processes has been shown to be vastly oversimplified. The traditional ‘linear model’ of research evidence, commissioned to address a problem, feeding into policy processes in order to solve the problem through a policy change, has been superseded with a range of alternative models, of increasing complexity. These have been well reviewed by de Vibe et al (2002) and Crewe and Young (2002).

There are now a growing number of initiatives seeking to understand the role of evidence in policy processes, and to inform the different actor types on how to play more effective roles in them. The Process and Partnership for Pro-Poor Policy Change (PPPPPC project) is one such project, implemented collaboratively by ILRI and ODI.

What do we mean by ‘pro-poor’ policy change?

The term ‘pro-poor’ is often used to describe intended (occasionally achieved) outcomes including policy changes. The term is not easy to define, and harder to evaluate whether it has been achieved. For this project, the term was to indicate that the policy changes studied should be of benefit to poor peoples’ livelihoods (directly or indirectly). The concept of poverty however is broad, going beyond income poverty to include concepts of vulnerability and broader livelihood issues.

A difficulty in assessing ‘pro-poor policy change’ is that the impacts on poor people’s livelihoods are likely to follow some time after the actual change. And when a change has occurred some years previously, the influences on the change may be harder to determine – especially given the complexity of most policy processes. For most of the case studies conducted, the policy change has been relatively recent, and the actual impacts on the poor have not been evaluated. Case studies were however selected, following wide consultation, to cover policy changes which were expected to have positive impacts on the poor, based on evidence from the research leading to them or broader evidence of the importance of particular sectors for the poor. This was because the objective of the project was to understand the change process itself. The links between the policy change and impacts on the poor requires its own analysis, which was beyond the scope and resources of this project. Such an analysis is however being done separately for two of the case studies – the Kenya dairy example (ongoing ILRI case study) and the Kampala urban agriculture example (ongoing KUFSAALCC/Urban Harvest study).

The background to the PPPPPC project was in seeking to learn lessons from an apparently successful engagement in policy change in Kenya, so that other researchers

within the institute could benefit from the experiences. But the project developed into a wider activity to carry out a number of case studies in different East African countries, broadening the basis for the lessons, and also the target audience.

Four case studies were eventually carried out, looking at the following areas:

1. Changes in dairy marketing policies in Kenya
2. Development of new City Ordinances on urban agriculture in Kampala
3. Development of a state-level policy of distribution of communal hillside land to individuals to manage in Tigray, Ethiopia
4. Attempts to rationalise and harmonise regional policies on (i) seed trade and (ii) dairy marketing in East Africa

[For more background and information on this project, go to www.pppppc.org.]

In carrying out these case studies, and drawing out lessons, the research team were able also to draw on the more extensive work that ODI's RAPID programme have been carrying out. The RAPID programme has been working since 2002 on some key issues around evidence in policy processes:

- How can policy-makers best use research, for evidence-based policy-making?
- How can researchers best use their findings in order to influence policy?
- How can the interaction between researchers and policy-makers be improved?

In addressing these issues through research, advice and debate, the programme has been working on four main themes:

1. The role of evidence in policy processes;
2. Improved communication and information systems for policy and practice;
3. Better knowledge management and learning for development agencies;
4. Approaches to institutional development for evidence-based policy.

[For more information on the RAPID programme, go to www.odi.org.uk/rapid.]

2.2 Analytical approach

The complexity of policy processes provides a challenge to attempts to understand them and the influences on them. In the course of its initial work, the RAPID programme developed an analytical framework that sought to capture the important dimensions of policy change processes, and in particular the role of evidence. This 'context-evidence-links' framework has been used for the analysis of the PPPPPC project case studies, and also as the basis for categorising the lessons and guiding principles that have emerged. [See ILRI/ODI (2007)]

RAPID also worked with ILRI to develop a research approach to collect data for the case studies. The approach combined elements of three established methodologies:

1. Episode studies – tracking back from a policy change to identify and evaluate key influences and events.
2. Case study analysis – tracking forward from activities to assess their impact on policy change.
3. Outcome Mapping – looking at factors influencing behaviour of key actors.

Together these have been developed into the RAPID Outcome Assessment, or ROA, where information collected through literature review, interviews and workshop exercises can be assembled into a visual tool which illustrates influences and linkages in the process leading to policy change. There is a strong emphasis on the role of behaviour change of key actors, in addition to key events and activities. [More on the ROA and its application in these case studies can be found in ILRI/ODI (2007).]

3. The case studies:

The four PPPPPC project case studies are described in a series of case study briefs and in the full case study reports. A brief outline only is given here of each case, before the key lessons and guiding principles are illustrated with examples from the cases.

N.B. The workshop will include short presentations and discussion on each of the four case studies. The case study briefs and full case study reports will also be available for participants.

Case study 1: Dairy marketing policy change in Kenya

Since 2004-5, there has been a significant change in policy and practice affecting dairy marketing in Kenya. This has significant relevance to the poor, as Kenya's dairy industry is based on smallholder production from almost 1 million households. Based on consumer demand for fresh 'raw' (unpasteurised) milk, the vast majority of milk has been marketed through small-scale traders, including mobile traders, who nonetheless operated outside the formal regulated market, and were regularly harassed and arrested. This caused significant problems for the majority of farmers, traders and consumers alike, affecting incomes and assets at all levels.

Based on an extensive array of relevant technical, marketing and policy evidence from a collaborative research and development project, the Smallholder Dairy Project (SDP), the consistent and innovative communication activities carried out by the project, and the advocacy efforts of a coalition of civil society organisations linked to the project, major changes in the approach of the regulatory bodies have occurred, including licensing and training of small-scale traders. Changes in written policy are also in progress, in this case following the changes in practice rather than preceding them.

In this case a major role in influencing policy change was played by a single research and development project, based on real and diverse collaboration, participatory research approaches, consistent and innovative communication and a degree of opportunism, in a sector that was thoroughly understood by the project.

Case study report (published): Leksmono et al. (2006) *Championing urban farmers in Kampala; Influences on local policy change in Uganda*.

Case study 2: Urban agriculture policy change in Kampala, Uganda

In 2005, Kampala City Council passed a set of new City Ordinances which promoted the practice of agriculture within the city whilst still controlling the potential health and nuisance hazards associated with the practice. This was a significant change for a practice which, whilst being a hugely important livelihood strategy for the urban poor, especially women, is at best only tacitly accepted and usually actively discouraged in most developing country cities.

The process leading to this change is complex, and based on a number of influences. Research evidence that quantified the practice and its importance, and persistent efforts of some government and non-government actors to support those whose

livelihoods depended on it, kept the issue ‘live’ to the mid 1990s. But the key change of decentralisation and devolved law-making ensured that this awareness was backed up by popular pressure for change. Nonetheless, real concerns about public health and other perceived risks meant that little changed until a coalition of NGO, research and government actors pushed through a broad participatory consultation process that led to review of draft ordinances and the recently passed evidence-based new Ordinances.

This case demonstrates the importance of political context in providing the environment for change, but also shows the key role that can be played by coalitions of diverse actors, collecting and communicating evidence (both research-based and field-experiences) and how relevant evidence can be linked to popular pressure, supported by timely funds to overcome ‘bottlenecks’ in formal policy processes.

Case study report (published): Hooton et al. (2007) *Championing urban farmers in Kampala; Influences on local policy change in Uganda*.

Case study 3: Communal natural resource management in Tigray

In the highlands of Ethiopia, there are major problems related to land degradation and lack of productive land for a growing population. A huge amount of research has been conducted over the years seeking to address this, with often disappointing results. But in 1997, the Tigray regional government put forward a new policy promoting the subdivision of previously communal degraded land (predominantly hillside land) and its allocation to individuals to manage. These individuals, primarily landless youths, are able to benefit personally from the trees and crops they grow on this previously communal land.

Despite the huge amount of research that has been done into issues of management of common property, land degradation and increasing population, the stimulus for this change was a community-level initiative, with no apparent outside influence. Acutely aware of the problems they were facing in terms of both landlessness and land degradation, the initiative was started in one village (supported by the local administration) before spreading within the *woreda* (district). As more people became aware of the success of the initiative, it became the subject of internal case studies by the government agricultural offices, and fed into formal processes of strategy development. Ultimately the approach became a cornerstone of the 1997 Guidelines on hillside management, and having started as a completely ‘bottom-up’ initiative, started being promoted in a more ‘top-down’ way throughout the region.

This case as shown how small, local innovative ideas and initiatives can work through the existing community and local government structures to lead to policy change. In this case, research that had been conducted on these issues for many years seemed to have little if any influence on change at that level. The key influence is that a practical approach on the ground was seen address some major challenges faced by both communities and government. And as decisions on land use in Ethiopia are made by communities themselves, conventional communication of research evidence to ‘higher-level’ fora of government actors and researchers would seem to have limited relevance to the policy process.

Case study report (draft): Hooton & Hagos (2007) *Influences on natural resource management policy: How a community initiative led to new regional policies in Tigray*.

Case study 4: Regional seed trade and dairy marketing policy changes

A short case study was also done into initiatives conducted by the Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA) aimed at both rationalising and harmonising regional policies on seed trade and on dairy marketing. In both cases, significant constraints had been identified that prevented actors in those sectors from maximising their productivity and marketing success. The approach taken by ECAPAPA was basically one of systematic evidence gathering, backed with facilitation of regular meetings between the range of key actors in the sectors. Some significant changes in seed trade policies have occurred, reducing the time taken for variety release and certification, and reducing barriers to cross-border trade. Likewise for dairy marketing, there have been regional agreements on training and licensing of small-scale traders, broadly reflecting the changes in Kenya described above.

In both these cases, the sensitive ‘facilitation’ offered by ECAPAPA has proved a major influence in allowing the key actors to discuss and agree change, in a way that would be difficult or impossible without such facilitation. Actors came from private and public sector organisations, who were initially mutually suspicious. And exposing these key actors to robust and relevant evidence (even if much of it was not actually new), including allowing them to view practically the changes that had been piloted in individual countries, seemed to stimulate change once there was a degree of mutual respect and understanding.

Case study report (draft): Hooton (2007) - *Regional policy change processes in dairy marketing and seed trade policy in East Africa: An analysis of influences.*

From Case Studies to Guiding Principles

These four case studies reflect different levels of policy-making, from local, in the case of Tigray and Kampala, to national in the case of the Kenya dairy story, to regional in the seed trade and dairy case. The policy processes in these different levels are significantly different – most notably in the ‘closeness’ of people who are most affected by the policies. There are also major differences in political and economic context in the different countries and sectors. And approaches in all four case studies, all of which resulted in significant policy change, have been very different. However, through applying the context-evidence-links analytical framework, and through having applied the broad-based research approach to capture diverse perspectives, the case studies do seem to suggest some key guiding principles.

The links between the research results, analysis and the emerging lessons, which have led to these guiding principles, are explained in detail in the case study reports, and readers are directed to these to fully understand the analysis and the links to the principles. For the purposes of this paper, the key guiding principles are now outlined, and illustrated by some specific examples from the case studies. The guiding principles also draw on the wider experiences captured by the RAPID programme.

Whilst the analysis and lessons drawn from the case studies cover all actors and influences, the guiding principles outlined below have been presented from the perspective of research organisations, and the particular role that research evidence has (or has not) played in the case studies and wider RAPID work.

4. Guiding principles for influencing policy change

These guiding principles are structured in line with the analytical framework, relating to Context, Evidence, Linkages and External environment. There is obviously some degree of overlap between the principles, and therefore cross-reference between sections.

Following several of these guiding principles are boxes that describe how these principles were found to have been applied in some of the project case studies. These are illustrative only, showing how in that particular context, a particular approach did or did not work. However they should not be taken as a model for applying the principles.

N.B. During the **project workshop**, the ‘guiding principles’ will be further explored, including drawing also on participants’ own experiences to develop the principles. This section is therefore meant to be a starting point for one of the main workshop activities.

4.1 Principles related to Political Context:

Effective engagement in the policy process requires a good understanding of the political context, so appropriate strategies can be utilised.

This may seem a self-evident statement, but in reality a good understanding of the political and economic context is not easy to achieve. It seems especially challenging in the context of research activities, which are often led by actors with specialisms in narrow fields, who may be less aware of ‘bigger picture’ issues. The political and economic context itself may have a significant influence over what are the most relevant research questions to address. Thus understanding the context, and involving key actors in the early stages of research design is critical. Policy makers want practical answers to real issues that they face, and these issues are frequently (usually) more complex than the apparent technical or simple policy constraints that the research may aim to address.

In addition, understanding this political context, and possible strategies for engaging in it, may involve approaches and expertise that are very different from the skills of researchers in particular technical specialities. [This highlights the relevance of the ‘linkage’ principles described below]

However, a number of tools are available that can help to map political context (see the list of toolkits in the Resources section). Relevant approaches can be selected and applied early on in research project design.

Important issues are likely to include:

- How does the subject area fit with **wider political context and priorities**?
- Who are the ‘policy makers’ and what are their **incentives, roles and power**?
- How can **linkages** with them be made?
- Who can work with you?

- What are the **policy opportunities** ('policy windows' etc.)?
- How do international, regional, national and local policy processes, actors etc differ? How are they linked?
- How free to operate are various actors?

Linking activities and evidence to ongoing and/or high-profile political strategies can be an effective way to get a new policy narrative on the agenda. If politicians are espousing certain principles (e.g. employment generation, or a focus on women in poverty) and your evidence has something to say about these, it can provide a platform for the wider story to be told.

In the Kenya dairy case study, the new government's Economic Recovery Strategy stressed employment generation as the cornerstone of growth. This provided an opportunity to show how important the small-scale milk market was for supporting jobs. The Minister of Labour became a target for influencing and the issue of dairy broadened beyond a purely agricultural interest.

Building credibility and being a regular and constructive part of policy dialogues can help organisations stimulate demand for them to be part of a process. This can put research organisations in a very effective position. But it is likely to take time, rely on taking advantage of all available opportunities, and retaining a reputation for being objective and unbiased experts.

In the Kampala case and the Kenya dairy case, both KUFSAALCC and SDP became key actors that policy makers and sector stakeholders would proactively seek out to involve in consultations and other activities. In both cases the credibility of the coalitions had built up by providing robust, relevant contributions to sector discussions over months and years.

In many cases, grass-roots pressure from voters and stakeholders can be hugely important in policy processes. This may be direct, or indirect through different civil society organisations. Linking evidence to grass-roots organisations, usually indirectly through CSOs, can make the evidence work very effectively. [See 'linkage principles' below]. But the role of grass-roots organisations and CSOs is likely to vary between countries and contexts, so this again requires an understanding of the way civil society operates in the particular country and sector context.

The three country case studies provide very different examples of this grass-roots linkage. The Tigray case showed how communities can directly influence a policy-making body that itself has links to the grass roots – the BOARD. CSOs played little role. In the Kenya dairy case, CSOs played a vital role in linking farmer organisations into policy dialogues with policy makers who were quite removed from the grass roots. In Kampala, the closer linkages between politicians and their communities increased the impact of grass-roots pressure, though NGOs still played a key role in making these linkages more effective.

4.2 Principles related to Evidence

4.2.1 Relevance of evidence:

Evidence obviously needs to be relevant to be influential. This implies a need to understand the real policy needs that can be addressed through research before and during the research activity.

There is often still a tendency for research proposals to be based on (i) research institutes' or individuals' interest, expertise or previous work, or (ii) donor priorities. Both of these are important factors, but it is still critical to ensure that the direction of the activity is informed by the real policy needs. This implies an understanding of the policy situation ahead of proposal writing (made easier through appropriate networks and partnerships) and a further deepening of this understanding early in the activity. In this way there can be flexibility in changing the focus during the activity if necessary.

In the case of Kampala, the original PhD research done by Maxwell back in the early 1990s was informed by meetings with the Ministry of Agriculture and public health officials, who had identified areas they were interested in – namely the economic importance of the practice of urban agriculture, and nutritional benefit to children. By answering these key questions, in addition to the land and labour issues that were the focus of the research, the work became widely read amongst officials.

Evidence is most relevant when it forms a complete picture – in particular linking the ‘why change?’ answers (often based on socio-economic evidence) with ‘how to change?’ answers (based on more technical or policy-related evidence). Together, these can be more powerful and convincing for policy makers and policy implementers.

In both the examples from dairy in Kenya and Kampala urban agriculture, evidence on the importance of a practice for employment and incomes ensured that discussions were seen as relevant. But there were still perceived to be major technical (mainly public health) risks to both the practice of urban agriculture and permitting of trade in raw milk. The technical evidence, quantifying risks and identifying ways of minimising or eliminating them, then showed that these concerns could indeed be addressed. Either ‘type’ of evidence without the other would not have made this complete picture, and would arguably not have resulted in changes that occurred.

Evidence also needs to be of the appropriate ‘type’ for the situation. Robust **empirical** evidence can be very important in many situations, especially when convincing people such as public health officials. **Action-research** type evidence and **field visits** to show on-the-ground experiences also play a key role – both with politicians and with regulators, who are able to see with their own eyes how approaches may work in practice.

The cases from Ethiopia, Kampala and Kenya all demonstrate the importance of such visits. Farmers visiting the distributed hillsides saw the benefits for

themselves, and could ask relevant questions of the farmers in the initiating communities. Field visits were used for officials and regulators in Kampala (to see the social benefits of supporting agriculture) and in Kenya (to see activities training and certifying traders). It certainly seems true that “seeing is believing” in these cases.

4.2.2 Credibility of evidence:

Research organisations generally do well on the ‘credibility’ of their evidence, compared for example with the perception that many CSOs advocate based on predominantly anecdotal evidence. **But it is important to take advantage of this situation to make the evidence really work, and also to take care not to have credibility weakened.** This is a particular risk in controversial situations, where those opposing the policy direction implied by the evidence may spend significant effort trying to discredit it.

It is also important to stress the importance of credibility of evidence with partners who may want to use evidence too early, or to ‘stretch’ the implications etc. Whilst other actors may be advocating based on the evidence, a key role for researchers is to ‘defend’ attacks on the credibility of the evidence – and by implication their own credibility.

Credibility may need building over time with relevant policy process actors.

Consistently being part of debates and always presenting relevant, robust evidence builds this credibility. And an unbiased and ‘non-advocating’ role may be important to maintaining the credibility of a research organisation in policy processes. This may mean making linkages with other actors (e.g. CSOs) who can advocate – and supporting them to use the evidence well to do so – leaving the research organisation out of controversial/contested areas.

In the Kenya dairy example, during the controversial ‘milk wars’ there was considerable pressure from the CSO partners for SDP to rapidly publish and distribute results and analyses. This pressure helped increase the speed of communicating results, but the researchers still insisted that figures and interpretations had to be accurate and the underlying methodology sound. This turned out to be hugely important as opponents spent considerable effort in trying – unsuccessfully – to discredit the evidence.

4.2.3 Communication of evidence:

Communication of evidence is critically important. This needs to be not only to ‘decision makers’ but also to whatever range of actors may play some influencing role. Here, research organisations often have a poor record, with communication somehow not being seen as priority/responsibility. Communication should be prioritised from the beginning of the research – not something done at the end.

Having understood the actors in the policy process from early analyses, there should ideally be specific efforts to communicate with each of the key stakeholder groups. In reality, to be most effective, this may require a range of communication materials

Effective communication of evidence is a subject in itself, and this is an area where researchers can usefully buy in professional help, to turn the research outputs into materials that capture attention and effectively communicate the message to the range of actor types. Appropriate communication means are needed for different audiences **Language** will need to be more or less technical depending on the audience (politicians, technical implementers, advocacy partners, general public through media etc.). The **form** will again vary depending on audience. Meetings (small or large, targeted or general), briefs or various kinds, audio-visual, electronic media, or field-visits may all be appropriate in different situations. More conventional research reports and papers are still important for supporting these other means, and for credibility.

One critically important aspect of communication is the way linkages are made from the beginning of an activity. Effective linkages not only aid communication but represent a communication strategy in themselves. The importance of linkages is described in the following section.

All case studies show the importance of effective communication, and all demonstrate the diverse ways of communicating depending on the audience. Written materials, meetings, field visits, audio-visual face-to-face meetings – these all played roles.

N.B. A range of materials are available to help researchers communicate with policy makers: see the toolkits in the Resources section.

4.3 Principles related to Linkages

Effective linkages in research and communication activities seem to be extremely important in achieving policy change outcomes. Given the complexity of policy processes, and the number of different actors involved, this is no surprise. Yet research organisations often seem to perform poorly in terms of policy-relevant linkages. This may be owing to issues of incentives, time, and/or partnering ‘skills’.

However, the success stories from the case studies all seem to be predominantly about effective linkages.

If policy influencing is an objective, research organisations need to understand who are the relevant actors in the policy process, both in terms of the targets for influencing and in strategic partners to work with in influencing. This should be done early in a process, so effective linkages can be built – based on mutual benefit for strategic partners (bringing in additional capacity as necessary – political position, communication advantages etc.) and based on ‘interest’ for ‘targets’.

Particular rewards can come from effective linkages between civil society organisations and research organisations. When the capacity and skill for pro-poor advocacy of NGOs, together with linkages to grass-roots stakeholders, is backed up by robust research-based evidence, these can result in considerable pressure for change. These linkages may be sought by NGOs wanting to improve their evidence base, or by research organisations trying to ensure their evidence achieves better impact. But there are particular challenges faced by such collaboration. The nature of NGOs and many research organisations, in terms of focus, background of personnel and incentives for example, can be quite different, as well as differences in the way research and evidence approaches are viewed.

Building and maintaining linkages requires time, resources and skills. These should be factored in and budgeted for at the beginning of any activity, or experience shows that the linkages are unlikely to be successful.

Once established, maintaining partnerships can also be difficult – different values, approaches, accountability etc. can strain partnerships. When involved in influencing or advocacy, sharing a vision can be key to maintaining partnerships between diverse organisations.

The time, resources and skills necessary for forming and maintaining effective partnerships cannot be underestimated, but experience from these case studies and others indicate that this is time and money well-spent.

Once built up, linkages – whether respected membership of appropriate networks or more focused linkages – can be built upon for further activities.

Different linkage ‘models’ may be appropriate in different circumstances, depending on context, individuals etc. In some cases more formal partnerships may be appropriate, whereas in others a looser alliance based on common interest may be effective. Whilst the Kampala and Kenya case studies are both examples of highly effective collaboration, they are very different approaches.

Personal relationships can be hugely important in making effective linkages, but time and effort should be made to ensure that these are also reflected in institutional ownership and memory so that linkages don’t ‘die’ when individuals move on.

The Kampala case study shows an example of a highly effective coalition between organisations which was to a large extent in reality a coalition of individuals. The advantage in the beginning was that collaboration was possible even when parent organisations may have been reluctant to set up formal linkages. There were also very flexible but highly effective ways of working together throughout the collaborative activities, which could have been more difficult if constrained by formal linkages. However, one initial partner organisation, the National Agricultural Research Organisation, was effectively lost from the coalition when the key individual involved died, without there being effective inter-organisational linkages to maintain the role.

Nonetheless, as well as a coalition of individuals, there have been considerable and successful efforts to institutionalise the linkages within parent organisations. This has been easier following the recognised success of the group, and the high profile of urban agriculture since it received top-level political support.

4.4 Principles related to External Environment:

Factors external to the policy process (and the key actors) can play important roles – both in a positive and negative way. It is difficult to generalise on the basis of a handful of case studies, but such factors can include donor influences. These are considered here as external factors, although clearly there can be close linkages with some key actors in a process.

Donors can play an important role in encouraging and supporting actors who are ‘reluctant’ to get involved in policy influences. This may be especially true for research actors, concerned about crossing the ‘boundary’ between research and development. This may be down to a lack of skills or confidence in such engagement, whilst donors may regularly act at this level.

In the Kenya dairy case, DFID’s positive engagement with the project during its implementation not only persuaded the project staff to get more engaged in policy influencing, but positively supported this through skills development and providing additional personnel.

Donors can also play a key role through providing funds in flexible ways when ‘bottlenecks’ occur in policy processes. By the very nature of these complex processes, potential bottlenecks are difficult to predict, yet can totally halt progress towards change.

In the Kampala case, DFID provided money from a research budget firstly to support a community consultation, and then to support the internal harmonisation and rationalisation process within the City Council. This was clearly not research, and yet without this innovative funding and support, it is likely that the research evidence would ultimately have failed to result in the change that did occur.

4.5 Applying the principles:

For many readers who have been involved in poverty-focused research and development activities, few of these guiding principles will come as a particular surprise (although it is hoped that the links to approaches and tools, and descriptions of successful approaches may help address the problems in new ways). The importance of collaborative approaches, effective communication etc. are repeatedly flagged up, in relation to achieving impact through any route, not just through policy change. Some of these general principles take on particular dimensions and importance when the route of impact is expected to be through policy change – the challenge of communicating with policymakers and technocrats, or those that are in a position to lobby them, is different from the challenge of communicating with farmers, for example. And the external environment influences that must be

considered at policy level bring in dimensions of international norms, politics and trade issues amongst others.

However, the unfortunate reality is that common sense or not, these principles seem in most cases to be poorly applied. Effective linkages between key actors – for example between research organisations and NGOs – seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Whilst almost always flagged up at the beginning of activities (and usually a necessity for successful proposals) many people seem to experience partnerships as being more of a burden than a bonus, and being a drain on time – interfering with the work that needs to be done. Likewise, communication with ‘policy makers’ is often still an end-of-project activity based on presenting findings and recommendations – often the first time that people outside a project have heard about the work. And communication materials still seem to be minimally altered from the sort of researcher to researcher technical communications that many are most comfortable with. Good use of the media and effective communication of potential ‘solutions’ to decision makers is not common.

The reasons behind these failures will be explored during the upcoming workshop, and as potential ways forward to address constraints are identified, these will be incorporated into the final version of the booklet. Ultimately, effectively addressing the constraints is likely to involve institutional-level change in research organisations, the research community in general, and in the way research organisations are linked to the wider systems of policy processes at local, national and international levels. It is hoped that the final output of this work will be a useful resource to address these challenges.

N.B. This section on ‘applying the principles’ will be expanded based on the workshop discussions on this. In fact it is one of the key areas that we will explore. What is it that is preventing the different actor types from working in ways that could improve policy-level impact? And how can such constraints be addressed?

Also, how can resources, such as the booklet intended from this paper, be made most relevant and useful to support actors in their efforts?

We will also try to develop a list of organisations/activities working on this issue, and links to the range of resources and tools being developed to support better evidence-based policy making.

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Resources:

This 'Resources' section will be considerably expanded for the final version of the booklet

RAPID Tools:

**These Toolkits are all available to download for free from:
www.odi.org.uk/rapid/publications**

Nash, Robert, Alan Hudson and Cecilia Luttrell (2006) *Mapping Political Context: A Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations*, RAPID Toolkit, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London.

Ramalingam, Ben (2006) *Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A guide for development and humanitarian organisations*, RAPID Toolkit, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London.

Sutcliffe, Sophie and Julius Court (2006) *A Toolkit for Progressive Policymakers in Developing Countries*, RAPID Toolkit, Overseas Development Institute (ODI),

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Hovland, Ingie (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, RAPID Toolkit, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London.

Start, Daniel and Ingie Hovland (2004) *Tools for Policy Impact: A Handbook for Researchers*, RAPID Toolkit, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), London.

Other Resources:

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