

Chapter 5

Bridging Research and Policy in International Development: Context, Evidence and Links

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Introduction

Reducing poverty and meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will require improved policies around the world (UNDP, 2003). However, policymakers and other stakeholders often don't know which policies are most suitable and how they can best be implemented in different contexts. Research is one way for policymakers and other stakeholders to enhance the processes of policy formulation and implementation.

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

There has been particular interest in these questions in the international development sector. Work for the International Institute for Environment and Development identified a six-point programme for improving impact (Garret and Islam, 1998). The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has been researching research-policy linkages since 1999, with an early report providing a 21-point checklist of what makes policies happen (Sutton, 1999). ODI set up the cross-cutting Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme focusing specifically

on the uptake of research into policy.¹ The link between research and policy has been a key issue for the Global Development Network (GDN) since its inception in 1999. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has recently completed a major review of work as part of its effort to develop a new research policy (Surr et al, 2002).

This is the context for the ODI Bridging Research and Policy project. To guide the research, the project completed a literature review (Vibe, Hovland and Young, 2002) and developed a framework for understanding research-policy links (Crewe and Young, 2002). The framework clusters the issues around three broad areas:

- Context: Politics and Institutions,
- Evidence: Approach and Credibility, and
- Links: Influence and Legitimacy.

The project then completed detailed episode studies on research-policy linkages with the objectives to test the integrated framework; increase understanding of the linkages between development research, policy and practice; promote evidence-based international development policy; and guide further research.

The research project includes four case studies of specific policy changes which assess the relative influence of research on the policy change. The four case studies are:

- The adoption of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) initiative by the IMF and World Bank in September 1999 (Christiansen with Hovland, 2003).
- The launch of the Sphere project in 1996 to strengthen the accountability of international humanitarian agencies in the wake of the much-criticised response to the Rwanda crisis (Buchanan-Smith, 2003).
- The reluctance to legalize private para-professional livestock services in Kenya, despite their spread on the ground and good evidence that paravets can provide an effective, cost-efficient, and safe service. (Young, 2003).
- The emergence and adoption of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) in DFID's 1997 White Paper as a guiding principle of UK development policy less than a decade after it originated (Solesbury, 2003).

The approach taken focused on a clear change in policy and then worked back to assess the

¹ <http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/>

key issues that lead to the policy change and the relative impact that research played. This was done by constructing an historical narrative of key policy decisions and practices, along with important documents and events, and identifying key actors. This approach is different from the common approach of evaluating the impact of individual research projects, which tend to focus specifically on the research rather than other issues that may matter in influencing policy.

This chapter provides a synthesis of the findings from the ODI episode studies. It is structured as follows. Section two outlines the framework used for investigating the links between research and policy and discusses the methodology. Section three provides an outline of the four case studies assessed in this work. Section four provides a discussion of the emerging themes and highlights interesting findings that relate to the main streams of theoretical thinking on research and policy. Section five discusses issues around how the framework can be applied and makes some recommendations for researchers. Section six highlights a few conclusions regarding the framework, method and emerging lessons.

2. The Framework and Method

Definitions

In preparing the episode studies, the project decided to use relatively open definitions of research and policy. This was important given the preliminary nature of the work, the diversity and complexity of the study topics and the relative lack of existing case studies.

Like others, we thought it was difficult, and often unhelpful, to provide an overly specific definition of research since the exact meaning will depend on the context. For the case studies in the ODI Bridging Research and Policy project we considered research as “any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge”². This included therefore any systematic process of critical investigation and evaluation, theory building, data collection, analysis and codification related to development policy and practice. It includes *action research*, i.e. self-reflection by practitioners oriented toward the enhancement of direct practice.

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

Policy also has a wide range of definitions. In collecting case studies, we considered policy to be the “course of action” including declarations or plans as well as actions on the ground. We also adopted a broader view in assessing the impact of research on policy change – one that went beyond impact on formal documents or visible practices. The cases were thus intended to explore how research can influence policy-makers horizons, policy development, declared public policy regimes and policy implementation or practice (Lindquist, 2003). Following Carol Weiss (1977), it is widely recognised that although research may not have direct influence on specific policies, the production of research may still exert a powerful indirect influence through introducing new terms and shaping the policy discourse. The case studies included the impact of research on public policies, changes in practice on the ground and examples of including new issues into policy discussions.

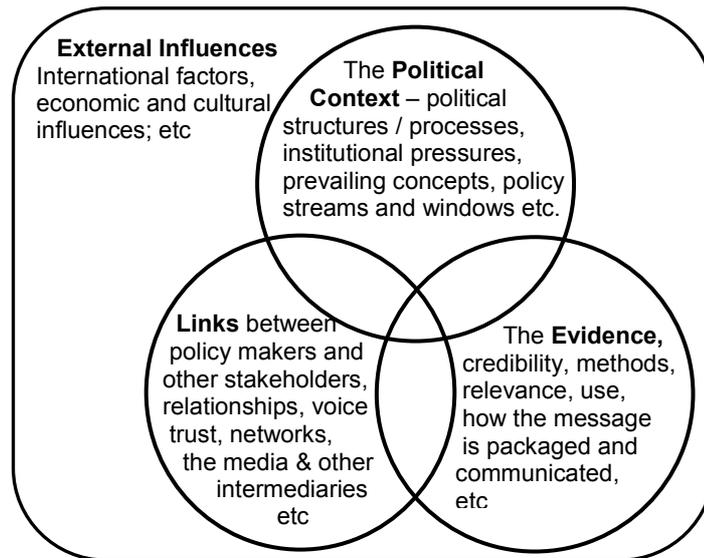
The RAPID Framework

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

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

The case studies were addressed through the lens of the RAPID framework (Crewe and Young, 2003), as shown in Figure 1. This framework should be seen as a generic, perhaps ideal, model. In many cases there will not be much overlap between the different spheres or the overlap may vary considerably.

Figure 1 The RAPID Framework: Context, Evidence And Links



The political context

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

The evidence and communication

Experience suggests that the quality of the research is clearly important for policy uptake. Policy influence is affected by topical relevance and, as importantly, the operational usefulness of an idea; it helps if a new approach has been piloted and the document can

clearly demonstrate the value of a new option (Court and Young, 2003). A critical issue affecting uptake is whether research has provided a solution to a problem. The other key set of issues here concern communication. The sources and conveyors of information, the way new messages are packaged (especially if they are couched in familiar terms) and targeted can all make a big difference in how the policy document is perceived and utilised. For example, marketing is based on the insight that people's reaction to a new product/idea is often determined by the packaging rather than the content in and of itself (Williamson, 1996). The key message is that communication is a very demanding process and it is best to take an interactive approach (Mattelart, A and M Mattelart, 1998). Continuous interaction leads to greater chances of successful communication than a simple or linear approach.

Links

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

Method

ODI applied the framework to three case-studies of policy change, within areas where the institute already has substantial research and policy experience (PRSPs; Humanitarian Accountability; and Animal Health in Kenya). ODI also worked with the Evidence Network to prepare another case-study (Sustainable Livelihoods). The case studies were developed separately by their authors, but the same basic process was followed in each case and there were regular meetings to report and discuss the findings.

Each case constructed an historical narrative leading up to the observed policy change in each case study. This involved creating a timeline of key policy decisions and practices, along with important documents and events, and identifying key actors. The next step was to explore

why those policy decisions and practices took place and assess, using the framework, the relative role of research in that process. This was done through interviews with key actors, reviewing the literature and cross-checking conflicting narratives.

The approach is distinct in current debates since it starts from the clear policy change and then works backwards to assess the key issues that made a difference. It is argued that this gives a more realistic view of the broad range of factors other than research that influence policy than the normal approach, which tend to start with an individual research project and then track how the research outputs have been used (see Ryan chapter in this volume). Tracking forward probably overemphasizes the importance of research vis a vis other factors.

However, the approach also has drawbacks and limitations. 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 isolate the impact of research. The standard challenges of unconscious selection of informants and memory are ones that are common to case studies; we believe they have been ameliorated by seeking the views of a wide range of informed stakeholders. Moreover, inputs were drawn from a range of other sources including literature reviews, workshops and authors' own experiences. The process was iterative in preparing each episode study; key facts and / or inconsistencies were cross-checked with key informants. The study authors report that the approach allowed them to capture, in depth, the range of issues that mattered in the four cases. In sum, we do feel that the cases allow us to draw meaningful conclusions about research-policy linkages.

3. The Case Studies

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers³

In September 1999, the World Bank and IMF adopted a new approach to aid – Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). PRSPs are official documents that define the national strategy for poverty reduction. They are important because preparation of a PRSP is an eligibility criteria for low income countries for concessional lending from the World Bank (IDA) and IMF (PRGF programme), as well as being one of the criteria for access to debt

³ See Christiansen with Hovland (2003)

relief under the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) programme. How did the idea of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) come to be adopted? What was the role of research in this process – both ‘academic research’ in general and the ‘applied policy research’ within the World Bank and IMF? The case study traces the various factors, including the role and relative influence of research, that contributed to this far-reaching policy shift.

Accountability of Humanitarian Aid⁴

After the varied and sometimes poor performance of NGOs in response to the Rwanda refugee crisis in Rwanda in 1994, it was not a surprise that there were efforts to strengthen the accountability of humanitarian agencies and find ways of improving performance in humanitarian response. But even after the immediate crisis had passed and media attention had moved on, what led to the policy shift represented by the publication of the ‘Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for Disaster Response’ in 2000 (Sphere, 2000)? This case study assesses the range of issues that led to the decision to launch the Sphere project in 1996 and the nature of the policy shift as well as implementation during the first year of Sphere’s existence. Specifically, how important was the research – particularly Study 3 of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR), which was critical of some NGO performance in the Rwanda crisis?

Livestock Services in Kenya⁵

Livestock services were among the first sectors targeted for privatisation under structural adjustment programmes, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The veterinary profession however was very slow to respond, and the increasing financial constraints effectively paralysed government services in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Given the problems, non-governmental organisations introduced a new model of community-based livestock services (similar to barefoot doctors, but for vets). Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) was one of the early pioneers in the mid 1980s, and adopted an action-research approach with a clear objective to use the results, if positive, to influence the policy environment to allow the approaches to be widely replicated. Despite the outstanding success of the new decentralised community-based animal health care (DAHC) approaches and their proliferation throughout the arid and semi-arid parts of Kenya, there remains no legislation

⁴ See Buchanan-Smith (2003).

⁵ See Young (2003).

relating to the approach. It has been over 15 years and community-based livestock services remain illegal. The case study explores why key policy decisions and practices took place and assesses the role of research in that process.

Sustainable Livelihoods⁶

In 1997, the White Paper on international development made the ‘sustainable livelihoods approach’ (or SLA) a core principle of the strategy for poverty reduction of the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID). This case study offers an explanation of how the SLA concept, which had first appeared in research literature in the 1980s, became such a core development issue in UK development assistance policy. How did the idea of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach come to be adopted? The study focuses on the interactions between research, policy and practice, highlighting the different types of individuals and institutions that enabled the uptake of the approach.

4. Cross-cutting Issues

The key question is: ‘Why are some of the ideas that circulate in the research/policy arenas picked up and acted on, while others are ignored and disappear?’ We structure our discussion around the three arenas in the RAPID framework. Our analysis illuminates some of the key theoretical strands of theory in the literature pertinent to the four ODI case studies.

Context: Politics and Institutions

The ODI cases certainly support the literature and the findings of other studies (Court and Young, 2003) that the political institutional context is the most important arena affecting the uptake of research into policy. Political contestation, institutional pressures and vested interests matter greatly. In certain political contexts, research may be completely ignored. So too the attitudes and incentives among officials, history, and power relations greatly influence policy processes.

Kingdon (1984) argues that that ‘political streams’ – the wider political environment including issues of government changes and public opinion – are a key influence on the agenda-setting process. This is clearly reflected in the Sustainable Livelihoods case. SLA was

⁶ See Solesbury (2003)

in tune with wider international shifts towards sustainable human development rather than economic growth. There was also an imperative at the institutional level as DFID strove to redefine its role and mark the change of government in 1997.

Lindquist (1998) describes routine, incremental, fundamental and emergent policy processes – each of which has different implications for the uptake of research. Most policy decisions are routine policy processes (merely modifying previous decisions) and there is little scope for research uptake. Incremental processes deal with selective issues as they arise, may make use of whatever analysis is close at hand, but are unlikely to involve a comprehensive review of all the associated issues. However, many of the ODI cases describe situations where more fundamental or emergent policies are being made⁷ or what Kingdon (1984) calls policy windows where more radical solutions are needed. Policy windows provide opportunities where research can have a substantial impact, but they tend to occur suddenly by chance or due to an external crisis.

All the ODI cases tended, to different degrees, to have a general context where it was increasingly apparent that change was needed and then where specific issues spurred the policy change (or not). Thus, in addition to literature above, the cases also seem to reflect the argument by Gladwell (2000) that social change is brought about by tipping points, a relatively minor occurrence which galvanises trends that have been building up ‘beneath the surface’. In the Sphere case it was the general concerns about accountability, highlighted dramatically by the response of humanitarian agencies to the Rwanda crisis. In the Kenya case, evidence about the spread of Paravets contributed to the alarm of the Kenya Veterinary Board (KVB), resulting in their letter in the national press threatening to punish livestock owners and veterinarians involved in Paravet programmes. This was clearly the ‘tipping point’. Beforehand there was a long period where community animal health workers (CAHWs) schemes gradually proliferated, generating powerful evidence of their value, and providing an issue around which different groups of stakeholders, supporters and antagonists could form formal and informal networks. The letter brought the work of all the different actors, including the KVB itself, into focus and resulted in a process where all stakeholders came together to develop a new policy framework with emphasis in favour of the approach.

⁷ It is important to note that the process of collecting cases probably underemphasizes the importance of routine and incremental decisions and overemphasizes the importance of fundamental or emergent ones.

The degree of policymaker demand is one of the main issues that distinguishes cases of research uptake, from those which have little impact. Demand, in various ways, was critical to the emergence of Sphere. By the first half of the 1990s, there was no longer an unquestioning acceptance of the activities of humanitarian agencies in emergency situations. However, it was the scale and intensity of the humanitarian crisis in Rwanda in 1994 – and the spotlight on the response by the agencies – which created the demand for major changes. The same is true in the PRSP case. The 1997 Asia Crisis and the continued weak economic performance in sub-Saharan Africa led to a widespread sense of there being ‘a problem’ with international development policy and spurred questions about the roles of the IMF and World Bank. There was a backdrop of substantial external pressure building up around the debt issue, particularly from the NGO movement such as Jubilee 2000 and from the US administration to ensure that resources freed up by debt relief would be ‘well spent’.

It is not just demand, however, but also consensus. This was most notable perhaps in the Sphere case study, where the high profile failures in Rwanda and the pressures for reform – plus the credible solution proposed – made building a consensus much easier. The PRSP case study concludes that the most important contextual factor was the major convergence of debates and controversies in the field of international development. Poverty reduction had become a central concern for the UK Department for International Development (DFID). There was also the need to operationalise the new conceptual framework for aid put forward by World Bank President James Wolfensohn – the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) – in early 1999. The case study notes that: *“The simultaneous recognition of similar sets of problems and similar ideas for solutions by various actors in the international development field in the late 1990s is probably the reason why the PRSP idea, which was a substantial challenge to current practice, took hold relatively easily and rapidly.”*

The lack of consensus on legislation for the Animal Health sector in Kenya was glaring. The need for reform – and the widespread use of an approach that provided a solution – was not enough to spur legal reform due to the troubled political context. The animal health policy process had become the sort of complex, highly politicised process described by Sutton (1999) and Keeley and Scoones (2003), with increasingly polarised views developing in the

different camps, and no mechanism for dialogue and resolution. Personalities and personal relationships were at least as important as any formal relationships and structures.

However, policy is not just about statements and laws; it is also about implementation. The work of Lipsky (1980) on how ‘street level bureaucrats’ have an enormous influence on how policies are implemented is also very relevant. Street level bureaucrats are the employees of an organization who are responsible for implementation and, Lipsky argues, ultimately decide how policy is to be translated into practice. All the cases indicate that paying attention to how the policies will be put into practice is an important element of policy change. The Kenya case provides a powerful demonstration, where effective community based approaches to animal health care were adopted by practitioners across the arid Northern region despite the fact they were actually illegal. Vets in the field, finding themselves with virtually no operational budgets, adopted the new approaches as the only way they could continue to provide any services at all. The SLA case also particularly highlights how the role of ‘developers’ were crucial to the eventual adoption of the approach.

It is interesting that all four cases give an indication that new actors – in this case NGOs – are playing an unexpectedly significant role in developing policymaking. In the Sphere case this was obvious since it was all about NGOs. In the Kenya case, however, ITDG, church groups and local Kenyan actors played a key role. In the PRSP case there was increasingly sophisticated analysis by development charities and the advocacy coalition around the debt campaign. The SLA approach highlighted a range of think tanks, NGOs and Foundations. Many would argue that this is a positive step in its own right, facilitated by the fact that policymaking regimes are becoming more open. The cases suggest that the increase in actors tends to translate into greater use of evidence in development policymaking. But more work is needed to better assess where, how and to what degree these new actors actually make a difference.

Evidence: Credibility and Communication

Three sets of issues emerge regarding the research or evidence – the key dimensions seem to be relevance, credibility and providing solutions. A first issue that emerges from the case studies is that research appears to have a much greater impact when it is topically relevant. For an impact in the near term, research needs to relate to the policy issue of the day. In the

Sphere case, a key reason Study 3 of the Joint Evaluation had an immediate impact on policy-makers was because it was directly related to a crisis that had dominated news reports.

But there are often time delays. The PRSP case emphasizes how ‘academic’ research through the 1970s, 80s and 90s had an indirect influence by shifting the international development discourse towards poverty reduction, participation, and aid effectiveness. This research highlighted problems with development practices and set the stage for the policy reviews of the 1990s. In this sense, the case can be seen as an example of the ‘percolation’ model described by Weiss (1977), where certain research gradually percolates into policy networks and influences the general policy framework. As highlighted above, the SLA case is also one where research ‘filtered’ into the policy arena – and then was substantially assisted to influence a specific policy orientation.

The quality of the research is very important for policy uptake. All the cases emphasize the issue of credibility. In the SLA case, the credibility of some of the key researchers, their clarity in expressing complex processes and often personal means of communication combined with the diverse sources of the evidence that helped foster uptake within DFID. In the Sphere case, the independence of the Evaluation ensured that the sometimes-unpopular findings were protected from censure. But credibility depends on the user. As the PRSP case put it: *“It (research) was considered most credible when it was commissioned by the IFIs themselves or other donors, demonstrated analytical rigour, and was communicated in a language that was accessible and relevant to World Bank and IMF staff and other donor agencies.”* In the Kenya case, it was action research that was convincing; formal, academic research had little impact.

At another level, it is extremely clear that operational usefulness is critical. Research that had an operational orientation or action research seemed to have a great impact in the cases. The fact that researchers in the Rwanda evaluation had practical experience was emphasized. The Kenya and SLA cases highlight that it was important that a new approach has been piloted and researchers and communicators could clearly demonstrate the value of the new option. In the PRSP case, ‘applied policy research’ in the late 1990s, the HIPC review for example, focused more on providing policy recommendations and operational solutions. In addition, the positive experience of undertaking the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) had a

strong influence in convincing policymakers in the IFIs of the value and feasibility of PRSP-type strategies.

A critical issue affecting uptake is whether research provided a solution to a problem. The CAHW approach in Kenya was the solution for how to provide services in arid areas in a climate of minimal funding. The PRSP was the solution to a variety of problems faced by the IFIs and donor governments. As the case study notes: *“In summary, the PRSP was an operational solution that solved several internal problems and provided an answer to external pressures, particularly for the IFIs but also within different bilateral organisations.”* The Sphere process was the solution to the conundrum of the accountability of humanitarian agencies. The SLA provided the answer to DFID’s search for an innovative approach to development assistance. This reflects the marketing literature, e.g. Lambin (1996), which suggests that people buy products that provide a solution to a problem.

But it is not just the evidence that matters – how findings are communicated is crucial, since policymakers cannot be influenced by research unless they are actually aware of its existence. Interestingly the issue of credibility does not just concern the quality of the research but also the way that research is packaged to make it palatable to policy-makers. The evidence from the case studies does support much of the existing literature that the format of the research outputs also matters for policy impact. The Sphere cases specifically emphasised that the Evaluation “findings and recommendations were clearly presented, and were often targeted at particular groups of actors.” The SLA case emphasized similar points, but also the power of visual images. This very much supports the literature which emphasizes that, frequently, ‘seeing is believing’ (Philo, 1996). In the Kenya case, evidence generated by working CAHW schemes, communicated directly to visitors by livestock owners and the animal health staff directly involved in them, seems to have been much more important than research reports. Early on, this evidence contributed to the rising popularity of such programmes with donors and field veterinarians.

The cases also provide evidence to support the literature (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1998) that, it is best to take an interactive approach to communication. It seems that continuous interaction leads to greater chances of successful communication than a simple or linear approach. This seems to be most evident in the SLA case, where key individuals had extensive discussions over periods of time. Evidence of the conceptual and practical use of

the SLA approach accumulated over the decade preceding the 1997 White Paper. Solesbury notes that: in the SLA case, *“the conventional view of research informing policy which frames practice: Research → Policy → Practice could be better represented as a triangle where all components inform each other.”*

Links: Influence and Legitimacy

Much of the literature on bridging research and policy emphasizes that the links between researchers and policymakers are critical. Key issues include feedback, dialogue and collaboration between researchers and policymakers; the role of networks and policy communities; and issues of trust, legitimacy and participation. However, it is also apparent that there are many issues that remain unanswered in this arena. This section focuses on relevant issues in this area that emerge from the four ODI case studies.

Kickert et al (1997) and Robinson et al (1999) describe how networks play a vital role in policy change. They regard policy making as a series of negotiations about competition, coordination and cooperation which can be completed efficiently through formal and informal networks. The Sphere case is probably the best example here. It highlights how the links between researchers and policy-makers were *“institutionalised in the structure put in place for the Joint Rwanda Evaluation... Thus, a critical and cooperative link was established right at the beginning between those who commissioned the ‘research’, and the policy-makers at whom the findings were directed.”* This maximised the sense of ownership and buy-in in conducting the evaluation and implementing the findings.

However, all the other three cases also demonstrate the importance of networks. The PRSP case study describes the “high level of contact” and “multitude of links” among policymakers, researchers and NGOs. As one informant noted: *‘none of the players is more than two handshakes away from any of the others’*. The Kenya case highlights that the first ITDG Vets Workshop in 1988, which brought together decentralised animal health (DAH) practitioners from several projects around the country, marked a significant increase in interactions between researchers/practitioners and policy-makers in Kenya, and ITDG’s international DAH workshop strengthened the emerging international network of practitioners and links between policy-makers and practitioners.

The cases also reflect much of the literature regarding the ways networks can facilitate knowledge sharing, coordination and cooperation. But a key question that remains is: what are the characteristics of networks that best enable them to act as a bridge between research and policy. Hass (1991) describes how ‘Epistemic Communities’ - colleagues who share a similar approach or a similar position on an issue and maintain contact with each other across their various locations and fields - create new channels for information and discussing new perspectives. Such communities are believed to be particularly effective if they include a few prominent and respected individuals. Epistemic communities did seem to be important in the SLA, PRSP and Sphere cases.

In “The Tipping Point”, Gladwell (2000) describes why some individuals are trusted more than others, and are effective ‘salesmen’ of ideas, and how salesmen, networkers and ‘mavens’ (people who collect information) all contribute to the spread of ideas through ‘social epidemics’. Individual contacts between researchers and policymakers also emerge from the ODI case studies as an important aspect of bridging research and policy. For example, the Sphere case describes two key policy entrepreneurs as salesmen and networkers; two other people played critical connector roles.

Also important to prove the legitimacy of policy advice based on research are the ‘downward’ links to the populations and communities that will be affected by the policies (Fine et al, 2000). Recent work for the Rockefeller Foundation (Figueroa et al, 2002) emphasizes that social change will be more sustainable if the affected community owns not just the physical inputs and outputs, but also the process and content of the communication involved. The issue of legitimacy is most emphasized in the Sphere case. In the Rwanda evaluation and Sphere process, great effort was given to inclusion and the legitimacy this conferred seems to have contributed enormously to the project’s impact. The Kenya case demonstrates that, although it takes a great deal of time work with local communities to develop effective and sustainable examples of new approaches, this is essential to prove their effectiveness and acquire the legitimacy to advocate for change.

Two of the cases particularly emphasize the importance of three-way feedback processes between researchers, policymakers and practice. The SLA case does this most emphatically, highlighting the role of a number of individuals and institutions who worked as ‘testers, developers, champions, communicators, interpreters and advocates’ of SLA to facilitate its

adoption within DFID. So too the PRSP case highlights the interactions between academic researchers, policy researchers, donors, the Boards of the IFIs and street-level bureaucrats within the Bank and IMF.

Finally, it is worth noting that all the cases involve an element of the trans-national interactions of researchers, policymakers and donors and the utilization of research by international policy communities. This is most noticeable in the PRSP case, which focused on an international policy process but also emphasized the role of the Jubilee Debt Relief campaign, very much a Trans-national Advocacy Network as described by Keck and Sikkink (1998). The humanitarian sector portrayed in the Sphere case represents a global public policy network (Reinicke and Deng, 2000). In the Kenya case, it was an international NGO, ITDG, which facilitated the transfer of an idea across sectors and continents. While these were not cases of pure Knowledge Networks, the set of associations in each case clearly were crucial to the transfer of knowledge internationally.

5. Applying the Framework and Recommendations for Researchers

It is worth commenting on the validity of the RAPID framework. All the cases conclude that the framework provides a useful guide for organising analysis of policy change in a systematic way. There seem to be two particular strengths that emerge. The first is comprehensiveness. Much existing theory on bridging research and policy provides a narrow insight on a single aspect of research and policy processes, rather than an overarching way to approach the problem as a whole. As important, perhaps, the framework was useful as a tool which facilitated comparisons between different instances of policy change. This allows the framework to be used to suggest recommendations in a middle ground between very specific issues (that may only be applicable in a certain time and place) and very general (and thus banal) suggestions. This leads us to believe that the framework is worth commending to others – with the provisos below.

The project suggests that the configuration of the three spheres in the framework seemed to vary according to the case. In the PRSP case, for example, there was a great overlap between the *'links'* sphere, where policy-makers, researchers and NGOs were in frequent contact with each other, and a *'political context'* where similar sets of problems and ideas for solutions were emerging from

various actors simultaneously. This was in contrast to the case of Livestock Services in Kenya, where the *'links'* between livestock owners and veterinarians were advancing successful DAHC practice on the ground, but were far removed from the underlying *'political context'* of policy-making and legislation, which was largely unaware of its existence. The analytic framework then, should be viewed as a trio of floating spheres of variable size and degree of overlap, rather than a solid mesh with *'context'*, *'evidence'* and *'links'* held as equally important, and equally overlapping, in every case.

The SLA case in particular highlighted two elements which fall outside the framework: time and chance. In terms of time, the adoption of the SLA in the 1997 White Paper occurred over a decade after the conceptualization of the SLA approach. Time is also a particular issue in two of the other cases – in terms of the filtering of academic research in the PRSP case and the extensive time lag in Kenya between the initiation of a new approach and its formal policy adoption (still pending). The SLA case also notes, akin to the findings of Clay and Schaffer (1984), that chance plays a role through a number of “lucky encounters, overlapping diaries, and external decisions”. This idea also reflects the ideas of Stacey (1995), who draws on chaos theory to describe the *'nonlinearity'* of networks and their impact on the policy process. Clearly people using the framework must guard against determinism. The framework is a useful tool to cluster and simplify identification of the key issues that matter at a particular time. Applying the framework at different points during a policy process will highlight different issues. Within many policy processes there will be particular times when chance creates a particular constellation of factors which facilitate change.

So what should researchers do if they want to achieve policy impact? Evidence from ODI's work so far suggests preliminary recommendations in three areas. First, there are some things researchers need to know about the political context, issue area (evidence) and key actors and networks (links). Second, there are some things researchers need to do in each of these areas. Third, evidence is emerging about the most effective way to go about things. Some of these are summarised in Table 1. We emphasize that this is not a blueprint but a menu of options for review and consideration based on specific contexts.

Table 1: Impact on Policy: what can Researchers do?

What researchers need to know	What researchers need to do	How to do it
<p>Political Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who are the policymakers? ▪ Is there policymaker demand for new ideas? ▪ What are the sources / strengths of resistance? ▪ What is the policy-making process? ▪ What are the opportunities and timing for input into formal processes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get to know the policymakers, their agendas and the constraints they operate under. ▪ 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with the policy makers. ▪ Seek commissions. ▪ Line up research programmes with high-profile policy events. ▪ Reserve resources to be able to move quickly to respond to policy windows. ▪ Allow sufficient time & resources
<p>Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is the current theory? ▪ What are the prevailing narratives? ▪ How divergent is the new evidence? ▪ What sort of evidence will convince policymakers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 & implementation. ▪ Clear strategy and resources for communication from start. ▪ “Seeing is believing”.
<p>Links:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get to know the other stakeholders. ▪ Establish a presence in existing networks. ▪ Build coalitions with like-minded stakeholders. ▪ Build new policy networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnerships between researchers, policy makers and communities. ▪ Identify key networkers and salesmen. ▪ Use informal contacts.

6. Conclusions

Although too early to make extensive recommendations, the analysis of the theory and preliminary case studies undertaken so far already provide some useful insights for policymakers, researchers and donors to promote more evidence-based policy. We wish to highlight six conclusions below.

First, we believe the RAPID framework provides a useful tool to analyse research-policy issues. The four case studies demonstrate how the three spheres – ‘political context, evidence and links’ – functioned as a useful structure onto which specific instances of influence on policy could be mapped. Applying the framework to these case studies has provided a more holistic understanding of research-policy processes, and indications how they may be refined as a tool for promoting evidence-based policy.

Second, the method employed is worth consideration by others in this field. Rather than tracking the impact of research, the approach was to focus on a clear change in policy and then assess the key issues that lead to the policy change and the relative impact that research. While it suffers limitations of case study work, we believe these can be minimized to provide researchers in this area with an additional approach that can help generate a comprehensive and accurate understanding of research-policy processes.

Third, our work suggests that ‘Context is key’. Political Context – especially the level of demand for change, the nature of contestation and openness to new ideas – has emerged as critical in terms of policy change and has a degree of impact over and above other factors. Importantly however, it is very clear that whilst ‘political context’ at the moment of policy shift is a critical factor, we are not suggesting that this context is immovable, unstoppable or deterministic of policy outcomes. Chance may create policy windows, otherwise contexts change slowly. In either case though, it is possible to maximise the impact of research through a proper understanding of how the ‘context’ can be influenced by ‘evidence’ and ‘links’.

Fourth, we believe that we have the clearest understanding of the ‘evidence’ arena. The influence of evidence depends on credibility (including analytic rigour and / or person doing

research), relevance, and whether research is the solution to a problem. The way evidence is communicated is also vital (with the importance of packaging and an interactive approach to communication).

Fifth, our understanding of the ‘links’ arena 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 current 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 analytic tool for understanding what makes links work. Further research needs to be done to address serious outstanding issues: what are the characteristics of networks which enable them to act as a bridge between research and policy? and ‘where, how and to what degree do networks actually make a difference to policy making?’.

Sixth, all the cases involve fascinating elements of the trans-national interactions of researchers, policymakers and donors. While focused around specific events in Washington, D.C., the PRSP case included a global cast of researchers and policymakers in a process of policy change that spanned the globe. The Kenya case involved the translation of a Chinese idea (barefoot doctors) into a different sector (animal health) in a completely different part of the world (arid Kenya). There was also an international dimension to the transfer of knowledge in both the SLA and Sphere cases. In a globalizing world, trans-national knowledge sharing is increasingly important, but our knowledge remains limited. More effort to understand more systematically the formal and informal processes at work makes a great deal of sense.

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