GDN Bridging Research and Policy Project:
A Study to Map Existing Initiatives

1. Background

The link between research and policy is of great current interest, to both researchers and policy makers. It was the theme of a series of panel discussions at the Bonn and Tokyo meetings of the Global Development Network (GDN), and of a follow-up workshop held at the University of Warwick in June 2001. Discussions have centered around three key questions: how can policy-makers best use research, and move towards evidence-based policy-making; how can researchers best use their findings in order to influence policy; and how can the interaction between researchers and policy-makers be improved?

The Tokyo discussions and the Warwick workshop demonstrated a strong-felt need for more work on these questions, building on past work, but focusing especially on the link between research and policy in development situations. In response to this need, leading development researchers and policy makers from developed and developing countries have come together to develop the Bridging Research and Policy project. Driven by policy makers in developing countries, the project will improve understanding of the research-policy nexus in order to produce and provide practical advice to both researchers and policy makers.

The purpose of this study is to inform research being undertaken by providing a preliminary mapping of projects and initiatives that have already begun to explore this issue. The study, conducted during January 2002, includes some general findings regarding existing research initiatives. It goes on to identify and offer a profile of those organizations and networks that have begun to investigate the research-policy linkage. These include both initiatives based in developed countries that focus on domestic policy making, and those that explore the link between research and policy in developing countries.

2. General Findings

A broad survey of past and current initiatives that examine the link between research and policy reveals that only a limited amount of work on this topic is taking place. While available resources focus on research and dissemination on the one hand, or the policy process on the other, little attention has been devoted to the link between the two. However, projects that do explore this link appear to be responding to some common needs and challenges.

First, much of the work in this area to date has emerged out of a concern among developed country policy makers regarding the effectiveness of government expenditures. This is of particular importance as policymakers seek to justify expenditures on overseas development assistance to taxpayers at home. As expressed by the Chair of the Commission on Development-Related Research in Denmark: "Political legitimacy of political programs – such as development aid – depend not only on whether they are well intended, but whether they will work and whether public

resources are frugally used"[1]. This concern has motivated a number of developed country governments to explore the topic further.

In the area of international development, the link between research and policy seems to face particular challenges. This is due to the fact that numerous disciplines with their own approaches to research, dissemination and utilization, not to mention numerous policy levels are involved. This makes the subject particularly complex. [2] In addition, researchers in developing countries have expressed concern that their work has little impact as their own country governments place little priority on the use of research findings.[3]

Finally, those working in this area have highlighted the importance of examining the issue from the perspective of both the researcher and the policy maker. Yet the availability of policy makers is extremely limited.[4] Their ability to devote time and energy in order to share insights from the policy making perspective is restricted by the demands of their profession.

These represent some of the challenges that research on research-policy links seeks to meet. While the demands are great, only a limited number of organizations have, so far, addressed this need directly.

3. Organizations working on research-policy linkages

The organizations working on research-policy linkages may be divided into two categories:

A. those based in developed countries and examining the input of research into domestic public policy

B. those that examine the input of research into policy making in developing countries.

A complete list of organization websites follows.

Category A

The Australian Public Policy Research Network
This initiative, based at the University of Canberra, aims to foster innovative public policy based on research. The Network offers a common space for policy analysts to discuss the formulation of innovative public policy and works to promote policy research intended to contribute to innovative policy making. These objectives are pursued through both on-line and face-to-face exchanges including a conference planned for April 2003.

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[1] Chairman's Preface, available at
www.um.dk/danida/partnerskab2000/partnershipattheleadingedge/preface.asp
[2] Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council: 2001
[3] Ibid
[4] GDN e-discussion, available at http://www2.ids.ac.uk/gdnet/subpages/projects_underresearch.html

Centre for Management and Policy Studies
Housed within the Cabinet Office of the British government, the Centre for Management and Policy Studies was established with the goal of capturing and absorbing the best in research evidence. This goal comes out of a desire to create a world class Civil Service whose policies and actions are based on sound evidence. The Centre is divided into four directorates, including one focusing specifically on Policy Studies. The Policy Studies Directorate coordinates knowledge management initiatives and develops Knowledge Pools in order to support evidence-based policy making; promotes excellence in policy evaluation; identifies and promotes best practice in policy making; and supports government priorities on service delivery by identifying, acquiring, analyzing and disseminating good practice and developing good practice tools.

Evidence Network – The UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy
An initiative of the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, the Centre seeks to bring social science research nearer to the decision making process. The Council's Research Resource Board launched this 3 year project operating with seven network 'nodes' conducting research on public health, children, economics, ethnic health, neighborhood research, social care and research utilization. The primary objective of the Centre is to support exchange of research-based evidence between policy researchers and practitioners, and to develop methods of appraising and summarizing research results relevant to policy and practice. To do this, the Centre focuses on developing its knowledge base through the Network Nodes, builds access pathways for diverse user communities, disseminates research findings, and is developing some useful tools and approaches[5].

Evidence-based Policy & Practice (EPPI-Centre)
The Social Science Research Unit of the University of London's Institute of Education supports research synthesis aimed at informing policy and practice of social interventions through support of the EPPI-Centre. To meet this goal, the EPPI-Centre undertakes work in three inter-linked areas of work: health promotion, education and user involvement. In particular, the work on user involvement examines the generation and use of evidence of effectiveness by people using health and education services.

Policy Research Initiative (Canada)
Housed within the Canadian government, this initiative pursues three main objectives: to develop cross-cutting, long-term policy research agenda; to build a policy research capacity; and to strengthen a culture of partnership across the policy research community. The PRI has played an important role fostering collaboration within the bureaucracy and promoting enhanced policy research capacity. As such, it offers a model for entrepreneurial activity within a federal public service setting, fostering collaboration between policy researchers from different sectors.[6]

Category B

Council for Health Research for Development (COHRED)
In the field of health, the importance of linking research and policy has been addressed by numerous initiatives. Many medical research units, working on health issues in both

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[5] Pawson 2001
[6] Curtain 2000

developed and developing countries, have explored this topic. One organization that has undertaken important work in this field over recent years has been COHRED. Currently, COHRED has two working groups examining the link between research and policy in some detail. The analytical working group has released a number of publications on this topic including "Lessons in Research to Action and Policy: case studies from seven countries" and "Forging Links for Health Research. Perspectives from the Council on Health Research for Development". The former presents experiences from different countries in case study form, while the latter offers one chapter focusing specifically on the link between research, policy and action. Currently, COHRED is using the experience of the working groups to look at development of effective national health research systems and the use of communications to improve linkages between researchers, users of research and funders.[7]

Demanding Innovation – articulating policies for demand-led research and research capacity building
This international seminar, organized by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Centre for Development Policy Management, was held in Maastricht, The Netherlands on October 10-12, 2001. It served to bring together researchers, research policymakers, research users from the South, academics and representatives of donor agencies to jointly consider three main issues. These included the lessons learned from donor-initiated, demand-led research capacity building initiatives in the South; the formulation of proposals to strengthen demand-led research and capacity building policies in the South; and the identification of clear objectives and initiatives for improving South-North policy dialogue.

Department for International Development (DFID)
DFID is undertaking a study to examine the impact of international development research on development policy and how it can be improved. The study will be completed during May 2001 – April 2002.[8]

International Development Research Centre (Canada)
A public corporation created by the Canadian government, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) helps communities in the developing world find solutions to social, economic, and environmental problems through research. On the topic of research and policy links, IDRC has and is currently conducting several initiatives.

Within individual research projects, steps have been taken to identify policy implications coming out of research results. A workshop on Linking Local Research to Public Policy was held for partners working in Asia on the topic of community-based natural resource management. The workshop served to review case experiences to identify mechanisms researchers could use to help them have a greater policy impact. Participants conclusions were shared on the recent GDN Bridging Research and Policy e-discussion.[9]

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[7] Based on email correspondence with Sylvia de Haan, COHREd, 02/12/2002
[8] See Policy Impact Consortium: www.polisyimpact.org
[9] Contribution by Stephen Tyler on 11/09/2001, available at
http://www2.ids.ac.uk/gdnet/subpages/projects_underresearch.html

In addition, IDRC has recently launched a small exploratory initiative entitled Research on Knowledge Systems. The objective of the program is to "explore, from a developing-country standpoint, the ways in which knowledge is produced, communicated, and applied to developing problems, and to investigate the policy and institutional frameworks that govern this process."[10] The project will support research, policy dialogue and networking on policy issues in the field of science, research and knowledge production. The centerpiece of the program is an annual research competition focusing on a variety of themes. The competition may focus specifically on research-policy linkages in the future.

Finally, the Evaluation unit has begun a study on IDRC's experience of linking research to policy. The study is meant to develop a clear understanding of what is meant by the policy process and what IDRC has accomplished so far in terms of producing research that influences the public policy process.[11] The study will include a background literature review, a review of internal IDRC program materials looking at past experiences and case studies in each of the regions in which IDRC is working.

International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)
Working on the issue of food needs in developing countries, IFPRI conducts research in a number of different areas. One of its main goals is to then make its research results available to those in a position to use them. In order to ensure that research efforts were having the desired impact on policy, IFPRI launched a coordinated impact assessment. Launched in 1996, the resulting papers "examine how to measure the benefits of policy research, how policymakers and others use research results, and how IFPRI's research influences both the countries where the research is conducted and others. The studies show that policy research can promote actions that improve the lives of the poor".[12] The impact assessment initiative resulted in commissioned research on the topic, a Symposium held in 1997 and a number of workshops held as follow-up to the Symposium.

Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council (RAWOO)
A series of lectures and a seminar were organized by RAWOO from 1998 – 2000. This initiative emerged out of the increasing awareness that the relationship between research and development policy is not straightforward. It is particularly complex in the area of development cooperation where there are many different approaches to research, dissemination and knowledge utilization. The sessions succeeded in gathering different speakers from a wide range of disciplines, institutions and countries with the goal of promoting interest and dialogue.[13]

Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Commission on Development-Related Research (CDRC)
The CDRC was established to learn what could be done to improve learning for policymaking. It emerged from the strong belief that policymaking should be based on solid knowledge. With regards to political programs, such as development aid, the Commission points out that legitimacy depends not only on whether policies are well intended, but on whether they will work and whether public resources are frugally used.

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[10] See IDRC website: http://www.idrc.ca/
[11] Neilson 2001
[12] See IFPRI webiste: www.ifpri.org/about/about.htm
[13] RAWOO 2001

The Commission undertook a study of research funded by the Minister of Foreign Affairs/Danida to determine

- The utility of research initiatives in relation to needs in Denmark and developing countries
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses, problems and opportunities facing the sector
- Recommend research priorities and organizational framework for future development

As a result of investigations, the Commission was able to identify problems that prevented research from being translated into policy. The Commission produced a number of papers on the topic and arranged a conference that was held during November 2000 for Danish researchers, policy-makers, NGOs and members of the private sector.

Internet Resources

Australian Public Policy Research Network:
http://governance.canberra.edu.au/welcome.htm

Centre for Management and Policy Studies: www.cmps.gov.uk/psd.asp

Council on Health Research for Development: http://www.cohred.ch/

Demanding Innovation – articulating policies for demand-led research and research capacity building: http://www.demanding-innovation.org/

Department for International Development (DFID): http://www.dfid.gov.uk/

Evidence Network – The UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy:
www.evidencenetowrk.org

Global Development Network: www.gdnet.org
Bridging Research and Policy:
http://www2.ids.ac.uk/gdnet/subpages/projects_underresearch.html

Institute of Education, University of London: www.ioewebserver.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/index.html
Social Science Research Unit:
        http://ioewebserver.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/cms/get.asp?cid=807&807

International Development Research Centre (IDRC): http://www.idrc.ca/
Research on Knowledge Systems: http://www.idrc.ca/research/xroks_readmore_e.html

International Food Policy Research Institute: www.ifpri.org

Netherlands Development Assistance Research Council (RAWOO):
http://www.rawoo.nl/home.html

Policy Research Initiative (PRI): http://policyresearch.gc.ca

Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.um.dk/english/
Partnerships at the Leading Edge: A Danish Vision for Knowledge, Research and Development available at http://www.um.dk/danida/partnerskab2000/forskningsrapport/

UK Cabinet Office: http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/

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