Bridging Research and Policy in Development

Bridging Research and Policy in Development:
Evidence and the Change Process

Compiled and edited by

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Foreword

by Simon Maxwell

This book is for researchers, policy makers and practitioners in the field of international development. Though entering the field from different corners, these groups share a commitment to the shaping of a better world. That may seem an obvious statement, but it is not. Research, for example, can be an intellectual game, an abstract pastime pursued for its own sake or for the academic plaudits that elegant findings attract. Researchers in our field are no less passionate about ideas than others, and no less likely to be seduced by the blandishments of publishers or conference organizers. However, for the vast majority of researchers these factors are not their primary motivation. There are few who do not carry searing memories of personal encounters with the very poorest people in the world; very few whose lifetime work is not informed by a determination to understand and act against poverty. The same is surely true for policy makers and practitioners: it is no accident that the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) is the one of the top choices among graduates entering the civil service.

That level of commitment makes the field of development studies an exciting one, but it also imposes a special responsibility to write and implement policy to the highest standard. We expect researchers to be policy-relevant in their work and to make sure that their findings reach policy makers in a form that is accessible and useful. We expect policy makers to find research-based evidence, to think about it, and to use it.

Can we say, collectively, that we do those things? Sadly not, or at least we do not do those things well enough. We all know why. Researchers find it hard, often impossible, to abstract sufficiently from their case material to be useful, and to avoid equivocation. Policy makers find it hard, often impossible, either to read research or make it count in the political cauldron of policy formation. Both sides struggle with shortage of time, under-funding, information overload, poor channels of communication and competing priorities.

But we can do better, and at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) that is our central purpose. Our mission statement describes us deliberately as a think-tank rather than a research institute, and goes on to explain what that might mean: our mission, it says, is to 'inspire and inform policy and practice which lead to the reduction of poverty, the alleviation of suffering and the achievement of sustainable livelihoods in developing countries. We do this by locking together high-quality applied research, practical policy advice and policy-focused dissemination and debate'.

The ODI mission statement recognizes that good research is the foundation of our enterprise, but also challenges us to carry research findings into the public domain and into dialogue with policy makers. A range of 'products' is needed to do that. ODI publishes two academic journals and a variety of research reports and working papers. It also publishes briefing papers and opinion pieces, arranges private briefings

and public meetings, manages a busy website and participates in public debate through the press and other media. ODI staff are also much engaged in providing policy advice to governments and aid agencies across the world.

A typical project, then, certainly involves research: the reading, number crunching, interviews, fieldwork, thinking, that are the stuff of intellectual engagement. Our projects certainly also involve producing research for publication in professional outlets. But, in a way, that is the least of it. We also expect that a research project will generate concise briefing papers written for policy makers. We hope that there will be one or more public meetings for an audience of parliamentarians, parliamentary researchers, NGO policy staff, civil servants and the media. There might be an opinion piece, written for the op-ed page of a national newspaper. There might be a private briefing for senior policy staff in development agencies. And it is quite likely that the researcher will be asked to carry out advisory work somewhere in the world.

This diversity of activity certainly makes for a lively working week, but it also requires staff to make difficult choices about priorities, and to deploy a complex and demanding set of skills. For instance, is it best to write a journal article, briefing paper, or newspaper article? Or would it be better to spend the time on the telephone to an MP or to the clerk of a parliamentary select committee? Or perhaps the best course of action would be simply to travel to the relevant developing country and just conduct the research? If research findings challenge accepted policy, is it best to 'publish and be damned', or perhaps nuance the presentation of findings in order to win over the policy-making establishment? How does that decision affect the likelihood of funding for future work?

Being able to answer questions like these ought to be the key shared competence of all those who work in international development research – and to an extent it is. Some people are natural 'policy entrepreneurs': fluent, practical, well networked, and politically astute. Others have learned. Many, probably most of us, are learning.

On the other side of the fence, the same is true. Civil servants, for example, are increasingly judged by their success in delivering performance targets or development results. In agencies like DFID, what counts is not just managing aid projects successfully – indeed, there are few traditional projects in the DFID portfolio – but rather achieving change in the policies of developing countries or the policy and practice of international organizations. This 'influencing agenda' overlaps with the mission of the think-tanks, although civil servants and politicians with budgets at their command can easily out-gun researchers whose only weapon is the power of ideas. Similar questions arise, however, about how to use resources and how to induce change.

There is more to do. As the authors of this book point out, the science of international development policy making is still in its infancy. Policy making has been studied in developed countries, but there is much less literature in developing countries. Furthermore, there is

precious little anywhere on policy change across national borders, when many actors are involved.

This book moves us forward. Naturally it provides a detailed literature review and a conceptual framework: this is a research report, after all. There are four case studies, which range from the local to the international and from theory to practice. The authors have synthesized the lessons learned. The power of the book lies in these case studies. They demonstrate the importance of cultures and structures, of people and places, of timing, of the interplay between strategy and serendipity. This is how policy making really is. But the actors – that's all of us – are not simply 'blowing about in the wind'. The point of the book is that there are things to do differently on Monday morning, both in analysing policy environments and in managing them more effectively.

This book is a staging point, not a conclusion. Research needs to continue, as the authors demonstrate. In addition, however, and in the spirit of the work on which the book reports, there is a need for briefing papers and opinion pieces, meetings and briefings, advisory work and training. ODI's RAPID programme is already much engaged in this kind of programme. There will be more.

Preface

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 we improve the interaction between researchers and policy makers? Despite the substantial funds that go into research on international development and the usual contention that research informs policy change, there remains surprisingly little systematic understanding regarding the links between research and policy. Our aim is to provide a contribution towards filling this gap in the literature – and to suggest ways that researchers might have a greater impact on efforts to move towards evidence-based pro-poor policy.

This volume presents the first cohesive and consolidated reporting of the work carried out under the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). The RAPID programme aims to improve the use of research and evidence in development policy and practice through research, advice and debate. The RAPID programme has four principal themes.

- The use of evidence in policy identification, development and implementation.
- Improving communication and information systems for development agencies.
- How better knowledge-management can enhance the impact of development agencies.
- Promotion and capacity building for evidence-based policy.

The volume draws, in particular, on a project entitled 'Bridging Research and Policy', funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). The specific aim of the project was to improve understanding of the links between research and policy in international development through in-depth analysis of selected case studies. To guide this research, the project completed a literature review and developed a conceptual framework for understanding links between research and policy: the 'context, evidence, links' framework. The project then applied the framework to four detailed case studies of specific policy changes: the adoption of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) initiative; the impact of the Sphere Project on the performance of international humanitarian agencies; the spread of para-professional livestock services in Kenya; and the emergence and adoption of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) in DFID's 1997 White Paper.

We are extremely grateful to partners and colleagues around the world who have helped in developing the framework, undertaking the case studies and reviewing our work. Simon Maxwell and Diane Stone encouraged work in this area and have provided guidance throughout the various stages of the research. Conversations with Desmond McNeill were instrumental in developing the framework and we greatly appreciate his advice. We would also particularly like to thank the case

Acronyms

ACT	Action by Churches Together
AfDB	African Development Bank
Afrodad	African Forum and Network on Debt and Development
AHA	African Humanitarian Action
AHITI	Animal Health Training Institute
AHT	animal health technician
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ASAL	arid and semi-arid lands
ASMP	Agriculture Sector Management Project
CAFOD	Catholic Fund for Overseas Development
CAHW	community animal health worker
CAS	Country Assistance Strategy (World Bank)
CDF	Comprehensive Development Framework (World Bank)
CSO	civil society organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DAH	decentralized animal health
DC	development committee
DELIVERI	Decentralized Livestock Services in the Eastern Regions of Indonesia Project
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DGLS	Directorate General of Livestock Services (Indonesia)
DRI	Debt Relief International
DVO	district veterinary officer
DVS	Department of Veterinary Services
EC	European Commission
ESAF	Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (IMF) (replaced by the PRGF)
ESCOR	Economic and Social Research programme (ODA)
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (United Nations)
FAR	*Forces Armées Rwandaise*
FARM Africa	Food and Agriculture Research Mission for Africa
G7	Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, USA, UK
G8	G7 and Russia
GDN	Global Development Network
GTZ	*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (the international development agency of the German government)
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Project
HIPC	heavily indebted poor countries
HIPC1	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative
HIPC2	Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank Group)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	information and communication technology
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDA	International Development Association (World Bank Group)
IDRC	International Development Research Centre (Canada)
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IDT	international development target

IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	international financial institution
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development (Canada)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMFC	International Monetary and Financial Committee
IPRSP	Interim PRSP
ITDG	Intermediate Technology Development Group
JEFF	Joint Evaluation Follow-up, Monitoring and Facilitation Network
JSA	joint staff assessment
KALT	Kenya Association of Livestock Technicians
KFC	Kamujini Farmers Centre
KVA	Kenya Veterinary Association
KVAPS	Kenya Veterinary Association Privatisation Scheme
KVB	Kenya Veterinary Board
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MSF	*Medecins Sans Frontières*
NCDDR	National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research
NGO	non-governmental organization
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NRAC	Natural Resources Advisory Committee
NRPAD	Natural Resources Policy and Advisory Department
NSI	National Systems of Innovation
OAU/IBAR	Organisation of African Unity (became African Union in 1999) /International Bureau for Animal Resources
ODA	Overseas Development Administration (became DFID in 1997)
ODG	Overseas Development Group
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFDA	United States' Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID)
PAF	Poverty Action Fund of the Ugandan Budget/PRSP
PARC	Pan Africa Rinderpest Campaign
PARC-VAC	participatory and community-based vaccination project
PDR	Policy Development and Review Department (IMF)
PE	public expenditure
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan (Uganda)
PFP	policy framework paper (IMF/World Bank)
PIP	policy institutions and processes
PPA	participatory poverty assessment
PREM	Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (World Bank)
PRGF	Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (IMF)
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PVO	private voluntary organization
RAPID	Research and Policy in Development
RAWOO	*Raad voor het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek in het kader van Ontwikkelingssamenwerking* (Netherlands' Development Assistance Research Council)
RPF	Rwandese Patriotic Front
RRN	Relief and Rehabilitation Network
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme

SAPRI	Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative
SAPRIN	Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network (formerly SAPRI)
SARN	South Asian Research Network
SCF-UK	Save the Children Fund UK
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
SID	Society for International Development
SLA	sustainable livelihoods approach
SLRG	Sustainable Livelihoods Resource Group
SLSO	Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (Ethiopia)
SNV	Netherlands Development Organization
SPA	Strategic Partnership with Africa
TRVTT	thermostable rinderpest vaccine technology transfer
UEA	University of East Anglia
UK DEL	UK delegation to the Boards of the IMF and World Bank
UN	United Nations
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UN DHA	United Nations Department for Humanitarian Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VOICE	Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies
VSF	*Veterinaires Sans Frontières*
WDR	World Development Report
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WRI	World Resource Institute
WTO	World Trade Organization

Part I
Background and theoretical framework

Chapter One
Research and policy in international development: introduction

JULIUS COURT, INGIE HOVLAND and JOHN YOUNG

Background

The challenge of evidence-based policy making

Better utilization of research and evidence in development policy and practice can help save lives, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life. For instance, the results of household disease surveys informed processes of health service reform which contributed to 43 and 46 per cent reductions in infant mortality between 2000 and 2003 in two districts in rural Tanzania.[1] A recent study by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), as part of its effort to develop a new research policy, forcefully catalogues the value of research for development (Surr et al. 2002). However, researchers frequently do not see influencing activities as a priority once the research is completed. Policy makers and other stakeholders often do not know what research exists, which policies are most suitable, or how they can best be implemented in different contexts. Or, as is illustrated (with devastating consequences) by the lack of response to HIV/AIDS in some countries, policy makers may be unwilling to act on the evidence.

Major investment goes into research on international development – from stakeholders in the South (government and non-government) and from governments in the North and international agencies. While an exact figure is difficult to arrive at, we estimate that Northern and international sources provide around US$3 billion for international development research. If we are to reduce poverty in the South and meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the key questions are: When and why does development research make a difference? Why do some research findings influence policy and practice while others do not? And how can we promote more informed international development policy?

Despite the importance of research–policy questions in the international development sector, very little relevant academic work exists on the topic. Studies on evidence-based policy have mainly focused on policy processes in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries, paying particular attention to the national medical and educational sectors in these countries. In the USA, the 1980s has been termed the golden age of studies on knowledge utilization, following Weiss's (1977) seminal research on 'knowledge creep' and 'percolation'. In the UK, evidence-based policy is the central theme of the Centre for Management and Policy Studies, established by the

Cabinet Office in mid-1999. In the same year, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) established the Evidence Based Policy and Practice Initiative, a collaborative network of seven research units aiming to bring social-science research nearer to the decision-making process.

Analytical reflection on the many different contexts and factors influencing research–policy processes in countries outside the OECD is much more rare.[2] This is no small challenge, as 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 several countries in the South. Alongside these analytic gaps, there is a lack of relevant case-study material to illustrate and highlight successful and unsuccessful practices.

There has been some interest in these questions in the international development sector over the past few years. In 1998, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) identified a six-point programme for improving the policy impact of research (Garrett 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). Impact assessments by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) have focused increasingly over the last few years on measuring the policy impact of its research programmes, and how it can be improved. The link between research and policy has been a key issue for the Global Development Network (GDN) since its inception in 1999. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) (Canada) is currently completing a strategic evaluation of the influence of IDRC-supported research on public policy.

This volume aims to enhance understanding of how research can contribute to pro-poor policy and practice. We believe it is a useful contribution for a number of reasons. First, it presents a cohesive framework that can be used to understand and analyse research–policy linkages. Second, it provides evidence from four systematic and in-depth case studies. The approach is innovative in that each case details instances of policy change and then does a 'tracer' study backwards in time to chart the different factors – including research – that led to the policy shift. We believe the approach is valuable in that it highlights the range of factors that affect policy uptake of research. Third, through comparison across the four cases, we draw out themes that will be relevant to those involved in development research or policy and who wish to use evidence to contribute to pro-poor policy making. In particular, we provide suggestions for how researchers might enhance the policy impact of their work.

The global context

An understanding of research–policy linkages in international development needs to take into account both the wide range of different

contexts that development policies appear in, and the key challenges of the macro-level political context. There are a number of notable global trends here.

Democratization has been one of the striking developments of the past decades. In 1901, there were no nations that could be considered democratic – even according to the most basic definition. Now there are estimated to be more than 121 electoral democracies (Freedom House 2003). From 1976 to 1999 the number of democratic regimes has more than doubled, from fewer than 40 to more than 80 (Gurr et al. 2001).[3] This provides new entry points to the policy-making process. It is thought that democratic contexts would better enable research to be conducted and communicated (due to freedoms), and that there would be greater incentives for policy makers to use research (due to accountability mechanisms).

But many developing countries remain undemocratic and many countries have deficits in these areas even if they are seen as democratic in form (Hyden et al. 2004). Political systems are less representative and have weaker structures for aggregating and arbitrating interests in society, even in countries seen as democratic (Grindle 1980; Hyden et al. 2004). Policy-making processes tend to be more centralized and thus often remote and inaccessible with limited scope for wider input or participation except at implementation stage (Grindle 1980: 15). Often political leaders may view input from civil society as illegitimate or inefficient. The result is to increase policy makers' power whilst simultaneously isolating them from society. Policy formulation becomes responsive to the needs of élites rather than the majority – or the poor.

Markets are spreading and economies are increasingly open. Twenty years ago, only 2.9 billion people lived in a market economy, compared to 5.7 billion people today.[4] What does this mean for research–policy linkages? Most obviously, it brings new actors into political processes. It also creates increased demand for research that can be accessed by those outside academia. There is demand for research by private companies; and there is demand for research by governments – so that they are able to cope with technical issues around economic policy formulation and regulation.

Civil society is generally thought to be blossoming in an increasing number of nations. The number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is growing. The role played by civil society (NGOs, the media, and think-tanks) in shaping national priorities is expanding. A theme common to many countries is the increasing importance of non-state organizations as actors in the governance realm (Edwards 2004). An apt example is the role played by civil society through consultations and follow-up in national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) processes. Nevertheless, many challenges remain (Hyden et al. 2004). The input of civil society into public policy is still quite limited. Civil society and state often live rather separate lives, with governments continuing to set the policy agenda largely on their own. There is still a

tendency for governments to arrest or intimidate citizens who propagate views different from those in power.

The rapid development of **information and communication technology (ICT)** has incredible potential to transform the generation and sharing of information. The poor are poor not just because they are marginalized in economic and political processes, but also because they are marginalized in information flows in society. Widespread dissemination through ICTs can make information accessible to a far wider audience than before, and this information can potentially act as a catalyst for action – even for groups that have traditionally been marginalized. However, ICTs are no miracle cure. The information gap is widening, and the need to be 'plugged in' to information networks in order to be able to influence policy may also exclude groups that fall outside the information society.

There is increasing concern that the '**war on terror**' is leading to an increased politicization of aid and is diverting attention from poverty reduction (Christian Aid 2004). It is too soon to confirm the implications for research–policy links, but it appears that there is less emphasis on ensuring freer political contexts (important for collecting and communicating evidence) and on using evidence to encourage pro-poor policies in developing countries. The worry is that progress may stall in terms of the increasingly favourable context for pro-poor policy making that was evolving in many countries over the past two decades. These factors provide a broad outline of the context in which we wish to situate this study.

Conceptual framework

This global context raises the question of research–policy linkages. How can we understand research and policy in international development today? In this section, we provide a brief introduction to our approach to these concepts, and the way we have used them in the conceptual framework that guided the case studies.

Definitions: research and policy

In preparing the case 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 Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) project we considered research as 'any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge'.[5] 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, self-