

Research for Development: Research-to-Policy Linkages

Lauchlan T. Munro,
Director, Policy and Planning Group
International Development Research Centre
PAN Localization Conference
Thimphu, 22 January 2007

PAN Localization: A View from Ottawa

- IDRC strongly supports localization
- Localization is important for many reasons
 - Access for speakers of “non-UN” languages
 - Local identity in cyberspace
 - Maintaining pluralism in digital world
- An easy-to-sell project to IDRC’s funders

Research To Policy Linkages : Basic Principles

The move from research to policy influence is rarely simple, linear or direct. Getting research into policy is inherently risky. Pathways from research to policy influence are long, circuitous, context-specific and hard to discern.

It is often difficult to demonstrate how 'outputs' such as research, affect outcomes, such as policy impacts, due to the multiplicity of actors and the complex dynamics of the policy process.

Research To Policy Linkages : Context Matters

Contextual considerations include societal, economic and government organizations at different levels and scales

- The 'landscape' of policy actors including:
 - Coalitions - dominant, contending or emerging.
 - Individuals, private sector, think tanks, governments, pressure groups, NGOs

- The type of decision regime:
 - Routine – from 'business as usual' to tinkering with policy
 - Incremental - seeking small changes at the margins
 - Fundamental - the questioning of core principles

- Opportunistic policy windows: find and/or create them: e.g. Mobile telephony

Research To Policy Linkages : Mechanisms of Influence

- Research and knowledge generation
- Dissemination of research outputs
 - Through academic channels and/or mass media
- Capacity building of researchers, policy makers and civil society
 - e.g. through training activities, supporting mentoring and peer review, convening people
- Facilitating and improving policy dialogue
 - e.g. via working groups and task forces, policy dialogues, networks bringing policy makers and researchers together, possibly with advocates

Research To Policy Linkages : Types of Policy Influence (1)

- Expanding policy capabilities
 - Improving researcher capacity to conduct and create use for policy research
 - Supporting new research, new fields of research
 - Enhancing researcher capacity to work on problems/issues as distinct from disciplinary research
 - Enhancing research capacity to communicate to diverse audiences

Research To Policy Linkages : Types of Policy Influence (2)

- Broadening policy horizons
 - Increasing the stock of relevant knowledge
 - Developing new technologies
 - Introducing new ways of thinking into policy arena
 - Making knowledge available to policy makers in useful forms
- Affecting policy regimes
 - Changes in attitude/behavior of policy-relevant actors
 - Increased capacity of policy-interested actors
 - Changing the rules of the road
 - Changing mindsets

Facilitating factors

- Meaningful involvement of government officials or other influential decision makers
- High quality and relevance of research to active policy processes
- Visibility, reputation and positioning of researchers and/or their institutions
- Novelty of approach or structure (though novelty is not always welcome)
- Presentation of viable alternatives
- Presence of supportive policy and commercial environment
- Alliance building, especially to overcome entrenched interests. Know your enemy! (OS vs. proprietary)

Research To Policy Linkages : Factors Affecting Policy Influence (2)

Inhibiting factors

- Poorly targeted and structured activities that fail to reach or incorporate policymakers and their ideas
- Project delays
- Resistance of powerful interest groups to reforms
- Lack of supportive policy environment
- Weak governance structures
- Missing the boat