



# **Public Policy Influence of International Development Networks: Review of IDRC Experience (1995-2005)**

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## Abstract

Since the early 1990s IDRC has committed attention and resources toward ensuring that IDRC-supported research results are better utilized, with a particular emphasis on “research for policy-making.” IDRC-supported networks have played an important role in expanding policy capacities, broadening policy horizons, and undertaking policy advocacy. To be most effective, however, networks must pay careful attention to developing their governance and membership models in order to engage policy makers. Furthermore, networks must develop comprehensive influencing strategies which encompass three interwoven strategies dealing with: relationship management, knowledge management, and opportunities management. Such strategies are built on a solid understanding of the non-linear nature of policy development and acknowledge the existence of informal policy advocacy coalitions within a given policy community. While windows of opportunity to influence policy open and close over time and depend on factors external to a network, networks need influencing strategies in place which will prepare them to take advantage of these policy windows when they open.

## 1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

For research to have an impact, it must be used. Since the early 1990s, the International Development Research Center (IDRC) has committed attention and resources toward ensuring that IDRC-supported research results are better utilized (IDRC 1995), with a particular emphasis on “research for policymaking” (IDRC 2000). One approach to increasing research for policymaking has been to support networks, based on assumptions that a network can provide the weight of numbers and range of perspectives necessary to produce a louder voice in the policy forum — thus creating a capacity to work in constructive ways and on a more equal footing with existing power structures. Especially for civil society and the informal sector, in the early 1990s, networks were anticipated to become the tool of choice for both instigating and managing the changes which would better reflect their needs.

But networks were also seen by those holding the power as potentially valuable mechanisms to improve their own efforts toward reflected exchange:

*for policy-makers, like everyone else, networking is a way to sit down and think about where we're going — in the right direction? too fast? are our children being sacrificed for rapid economic development? Networks should and can allow for informal interaction to give policy-makers the time and opportunity to reflect for their own countries and across the region. (SEARRAG co-ordinator)*

In a similar manner, networking was becoming the mechanism of choice for donors and others as a way to explore new research and policy issues and linkages. Putting policy-makers and researchers together in a common activity, or cross-linking researchers from diverse disciplines, are seen as forms of “forced sorting”, to generate lateral thinking and cross-fertilized practice.

From 1995-2005, IDRC has supported networks intended to improve the utilization of research in policymaking by enhancing policy capacities, broadening policy horizons, and supporting advocacy work. IDRC has always recognized the importance of networks in supporting development research, but now it has begun to systematically consolidate its understanding of these structures. Because the Centre's inventory of knowledge on networks has been scattered and buried in extensive documentation and in the tacit knowledge of staff and partners, this learning has been difficult to muster and to apply.

In 2003, a group of IDRC staff voluntarily came together to form a learning community on networks. The network working group (NWG) was made up of staff from across the Centre which met periodically to learn from one another's experiences, hosts a listserv, and share electronic and print resources. In 2004 IDRC decided to bring to light the collective knowledge that, in company with its partners, it had assembled and stored. The Centre aimed to become more aware of the rich experience it has gained in working with networks during the past decade, and to share this experience more widely. A strategic evaluation conducted with the assistance

of the IDRC Evaluation Unit helped to unlock this information and to provide a resource that will nourish more profound discussions and effective networks in future.

The first stage in IDRC's evaluation was a straightforward document review that pulled together a wide sample of the knowledge about networks that is stored within the Centre's literature. The study concentrated on three core issues: the intended results of IDRC-supported networks, the sustainability of these networks, and the coordination and governance of these networks. Papers reflecting the documented IDRC knowledge and case studies on each topic were published by IDRC in late 2004 by Abra Adamo, Tricia Wind, and Ingrid Schenk respectively. All drew heavily on the last corporate evaluation work done on the topic – Anne Bernard's IDRC Networks: An Ethnographic Perspective (1996) as well as programme documents and publications published since that time.

The second stage of the process involved testing the "official" perspectives against IDRC's recent experiences through conducting key informant interviews and learning sessions with IDRC programme staff. Interviews were carried out in late 2004 by a staff member in IDRC's Evaluation Unit. Thirty-five people were interviewed covering 20 networks with 20 program staff, 3 project leaders, and 12 network coordinators. The interviews confirmed observations from previous studies regarding network evolution; member ownership and participation; the role of evaluation; and social relations. They also led to the development of a preliminary framework for network planning by Terry Smutylo. In April 2005, IDRC 175 programme staff and collaborators met at the Annual Learning Forum in Ottawa to discuss the results of the first two stages, focusing primarily on the public policy influence of networks and their sustainability.

The third stage of the study was commissioning a telephone survey of network coordinators and members. The survey, conducted by Decima Research Inc in May 2005, sought to provide a profile of network coordinators and networks from 1995-2005; to assess the effectiveness of IDRC support for networks; and to examine network outcomes in contributing to the development of individual careers, member organizations and the society at large. In total, 110 network coordinators, from 80 networks, completed the survey providing a representative sample for the 1995-2005 period. Unfortunately, few survey questions addressed policy influence; those that did relied on subjective assessments of achievement and did not probe into the actual mechanisms by which policy was influenced.

The fourth - and final - stage of the evaluation has been the writing of four analytical papers by external experts on international networks. These analytical papers seek to make the findings of the various components of the strategic evaluation of networks more useful and digestible to IDRC programme staff, project partners, and others interested in supporting international networks. They provide an analysis of the findings, draw conclusions, make recommendations and raise additional questions for the future.

As one of the four analytical papers, this report focuses on the **Public Policy Influence of IDRC Supported Networks**. Key sources of information for this paper included IDRC-commissioned papers by Evert Lindquist (2001), Byron Gillespie (2003), Abra Adamo (2004), Carden and Neilsen (2005), and Bruce Currie-Alder's review of recent project completion reports (2005). To preserve the readability of this report, credits for some analyses and examples from these key texts have been included in an endnote rather than included in the main text.

This report also drew heavily from IDRC's ongoing strategic evaluation on its public policy influence. Beginning in 2001, IDRC's Evaluation Unit began to examine whether and how the research the Centre supports in the South influences public policy and decision making. The strategic evaluation looked at three key issues:

- What does IDRC mean by "policy influence"?
- How has IDRC-supported research influenced public policy?
- What factors support or hinder (potential) policy influence?

Complete details about the study and its results are available online at [http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-26606-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-26606-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html) as well as in an upcoming book by Fred Carden.

While all IDRC program areas are actively supporting projects that seek to influence policy, the experiential foundation underlying this paper is clearly skewed. More established programs areas on social and economic equity as well as natural resources management have more policy-related projects than the newer ICT4D

program area. Similarly, IDRC has been more focused on African policy influence in recent years, with nearly 50% more policy-oriented projects there than in either Asia or Latin America. Finally, IDRC-supported projects have tended to focus on national policy influence. This provides a very different focus than the global public policy networks about which IDRC has previously published (Reinicke and Deng 2000)

**Despite the Centre's interest in both networks and policy influence, this review has found very little documented knowledge on the confluence of the two areas of work. Given this, this paper can not provide a definitive understanding of how development-oriented networks should organize themselves to ensure public policy influence.** Rather, based in IDRC's experiences and research, this paper seeks to provide network coordinators and supporters with:

- A basic primer on public policy and policy influence;
- Several short case studies demonstrating the variety of network policy approaches; and
- Lessons learned on planning and supporting networks and network activities which intend to influence policy.

It is important to recognize that IDRC's formal corporate understanding of governance and policy influence as outlined in the primer is relatively recent. It has not served as the basis for project development during 1995-2005 nor has it significantly influenced the development of IDRC's general policy influence framework (e.g. section 3.1). **If IDRC wishes to increase the policy influence of its supported networks in the future, it is essential that it better align its understanding of building policy capacities, broadening policy horizons, and undertaking policy advocacy with the need to effect systemic shifts in large portions of a broad-based policy community.**

## 2 PRIMER ON PUBLIC POLICY MAKING FOR NETWORKS

Policy, like many aspects of development, is not tightly defined. Most definitions tend to focus on the relationship between decisions and actions. For the purposes of this paper, public policy will be defined as policy (Birkland 2001):

- made in the name of the "public";
- generally made or initiated by government;
- interpreted and implemented by public and private actors;
- what the government intends to do; and/or
- what the government chooses not to do.

Public policy is expressed in the body of laws, regulations, plans, programs, decisions and actions of government - or in the lack thereof.

### 2.1 *Who Makes Policy?*

Public policy used to be considered primarily the realm of governments, with perhaps some influence applied by special interests, business and other types of associations, lobbyists, think tanks, and university-based research centres. However, in the early 1990s, people began to notice a fundamental shift in how decisions were made and implemented - a shift from government to governance (Stoker 2006). Essentially, the context for decision-making in many locales has increasingly shifting from a command-and-control style of public administration to a more complex networked style of shared decision-making and leadership.<sup>1</sup> **This shift towards governance means that when talking about policy influence, we are no longer talking just about lobbying governments, we are talking about influencing large portions of a policy community to effect a systemic shift.**

As Evert Lindquist (2001) notes, a wide range of actors may now be involved in policy-making, and they include:

- governmental actors such as ministers, senior public servants, and relevant departments and bureaus either at the national, provincial, local, and international levels.
- non-governmental actors such as firms and associations, labour groups, nonprofit and civil society organizations.
- a multiplicity of actors inside and outside the government involved in producing and disseminating policy inquiry pertinent to policy debates (academics, think tanks, university research centres, policy units, labs, media and journalists, etc.).

The concept of “policy communities”, developed by Paul Pross, embraces all of the actors with an interest in a broad policy area such as health or transportation. The distinction between the subgovernment and the attentive public allows us to differentiate between actors with and without access to levers of power.

Chart 1. The Policy Community



Adapted from P. Pross, "Pressure Groups: Talking Chameleons" in M.S. Whittington and G. Williams (eds.) *Canadian Politics in the 1990's*.

Increasingly, we are beginning to recognize the role of policy entrepreneurs who introduce, translate, and help implement new ideas into public practice. These individuals may be either inside or outside of the formal government structures.

## 2.2 How Does Policy Making Happen?

The general public tends to believe that policy-making is a rational, linear process. According to this perspective, policies develop through a series of steps which are repeated periodically as policies are reviewed and updated. Various members of a policy community will be involved in each step (Sutton 1999):

- Problem Recognition - Problems that may potentially make their way onto the public policy agenda are recognized.
- Agenda Setting - Problems that are deemed worthy of attention are placed on the agenda.
- Policy Formulation - Various policies are crafted to deal with the problem that has been set on the agenda.
- Policy Adoption - An official policy is agreed upon.
- Policy Implementation - The public policy that has been officially agreed upon is put into action.
- Policy Analysis and Evaluation - The implemented policy is evaluated for its effectiveness.

1 Locales which demonstrate the shift towards governance tend to be those most affected by the following factors: Economic development and the associated globalization of the world economy; More demanding and sophisticated consumers, taxpayers and citizens; Technological developments particularly around the management and transmission of information; The overarching diversity and complexity of society.

As Sutton indicates, this model assumes that policy makers approach the issues rationally, going through each logical stage of the process, and carefully considering all relevant information. If policies do not achieve what they are intended to achieve, blame is often not laid on the policy itself, but rather on political or managerial failure in implementing it. There is much evidence to suggest that this model is far from reality.

As IDRC staff and consultants pointed out at the IDRC Policy Influence Workshop in March 2003, policy-makers have considerable knowledge of their own based on their experience, their education, the information and advice they get from everyone around them, and models of policy from other jurisdictions (IDRC 2003). They are also inevitably subject to influence by the mass media and all the other sources of information. “One research study is not necessarily going to sway their beliefs and make them see things a different way. Nor should it,” Weiss commented. As a consequence of recognizing these kinds of factors, some of those who study research influence have been shifting their focus: “Instead of concentrating solely on the effect of research on individuals in policy-making positions, they have begun to take the policy-making system as their canvas, or as much of it as they can encompass.” They recognize the importance of the context, the topic area, institutions, history, and the kind of research. “All of these factors lead to a focus that goes beyond the choices made by individuals and sees the policy-makers in their multidimensional setting,” Weiss stressed. Systemic models of who is involved in dynamic and complex policy-making are increasingly wide-spread (ODI 2005). Two of these models were identified by Everet Lindquist for IDRC as particularly useful for networks, in that they advance the concept of policy communities and examine how different groups of people interact in the policy-making process: the Policy Networks model and the Policy Advocacy Coalitions model.

### ***2.2.1 Policy Networks Model***

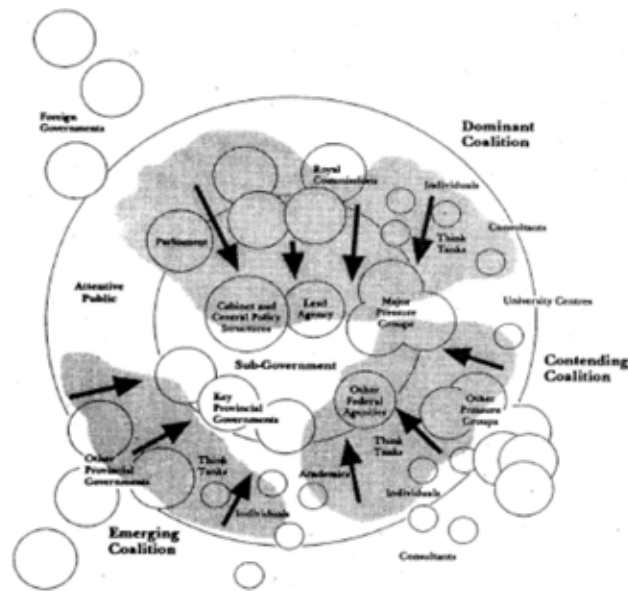
While policy communities may exist at the broad level of an issue (e.g. health, transportation), it is important to identify the particular relationships among the actors with authorities and expertise on specific policy issues. Although all involved in the “health” issue, the actors involved in “nutrition” may be quite different from those working on AIDS-related programs. We call these smaller issue-based clusters “policy networks.” These “policy networks” are informal academic constructs and should not be confused with formalized development networks working on policy issues. Some actors in a policy community will be involved in many of the issues around which specific policy networks have formed and can be identified, but observers need to determine how central those issues are to the mission of that actor. Conversely, there will be certain actors who limit their involvement to one issue.

There are many different configurations of groups in policy networks. Canadian researchers who pioneered the study of policy networks sought to account for variations in the relative capacities and autonomy of actors inside and outside government, and their ability to coordinate, develop coherent strategies across actors, and mobilize and sustain action. Lindquist (1992) summarized the possibilities according to whether the relative organizational capacity of government and non-government actors was high or low, or, in other words, whether government and non-government were dominant, or an equal match for each other in developing, designing, and implementing policy.

### ***2.2.2 Policy Advocacy Coalitions Model***

Rather than focus on structures and relative capacities, Paul Sabatier and his colleagues in the United States sought to understand policy communities in terms of beliefs and values, and to model important structures – advocacy coalitions – flowing from the bonds and relationships of actors who share similar values and beliefs. These coalitions, which may be tightly or loosely coupled, are comprised of government agencies, interest groups, associations, think tanks, academics, university research centres, journalists, and prominent individuals who more or less share common world views and generally agree on policy solutions.

Figure 2: Policy Advocacy Coalitions within the Policy Community



Sabatier predicts that two to four advocacy coalitions can be found in every policy community, with one emerging as the dominant coalition controlling the important levers of power at any particular point in time. The difference, however, between his notion of the dominant coalition and Pross' sub-government is that the former also includes actors located in the attentive public. Thus, certain think tanks and academics, for example, will have greater currency when like-minded individuals assume positions of importance in the central institutions controlled by the dominant coalition, whether they are local, national or international organizations. At the centre of Sabatier's formulation is the idea that advocacy coalitions are formed around a core set of beliefs and values that are very stable and not easily shaken. These core beliefs comprise a fundamental orientation towards the world, and form the basis for beliefs about problems and a favoured program of interventions in particular policy fields.

A distinctive feature of Sabatier's framework is the potentially significant role he sees for researchers in facilitating policy learning. He suggests that, **while conflict is pervasive in policy communities, research findings can have a moderating influence on what otherwise might be shrill and non-productive debates.** Research can assist advocacy coalitions to produce better arguments, and conversely, can be used to test the claims of opponents. An important issue for Sabatier, and later Lindquist (1992), is whether the right fora for reviewing research findings and testing the claims of advocacy coalitions actually exist, particularly as policy challenges evolve and require new forms of expertise. Indeed, an important role for IDRC, international organizations or donor agencies might be to stimulate and sponsor the creation of such forums. Likewise, the fora for debate and policy transfer (Ladi 2000) could be located outside the country in question, and an objective would be to link designated individuals or organizations with international epistemic communities.

The advocacy coalition approach should be used in combination with the policy network approach; it is possible to see contending coalitions, however well organized, grappling with the issues associated with specific policy networks. Competing values and beliefs, however, cannot be the whole story; equally important are the interests and capacities of policy actors in policy networks. Observers must understand those concrete realities, but also see how beliefs and values, or at least the policy programs flowing from them, can change over time. **The goal of funding may not be to directly influence public policy, but rather, to improve the quality of debate and evidence, or, more specifically, to strengthen the analytic capabilities of a particular non-dominant advocacy coalition by supporting certain individuals or organizations.**

### *2.3 What Kinds of Knowledge do Policy Makers Need?*

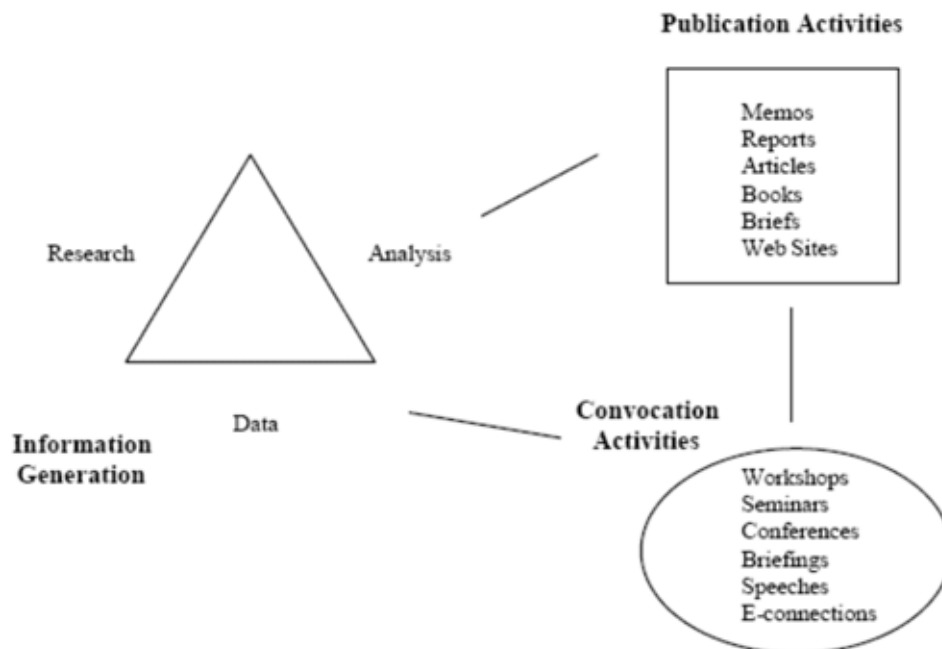
**Political approaches to understanding the policy process not mean that information and knowledge are not important in policy-making. Rather, it means that information and knowledge interact with the policy-making process in non-linear ways.**

All policies are justified by evidence - the question is more whether the evidence itself, and the processes through which this evidence is put to turn it into policy options, are of sufficiently high quality. Many critics have argued in the past that policy decisions were too often driven by inertia or by short-term political pressures.

When we think of evidence we tend to think of hard facts (UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2006). In a policy-making context, it is easy to think of it in the same way - like statistical data or scientific knowledge; but evidence is more than that. We can say that evidence is any information that governments can use to turn their policy goals into something concrete, achievable and manageable. It can take many forms: research, analysis of stakeholder opinion, economic and statistical modeling, public perceptions and beliefs, anecdotal evidence, and cost/benefit analyses; as well as a judgment of the quality of the methods that are used to gather and synthesize the information.

Organizations wishing to increase the evidence base of policy-making undertake knowledge activities far beyond information generation. They also seek to publish their results, facilitate the transfer of ideas from other jurisdictions or policy fields, or, more fundamentally, build capacity to conduct research sometime in the future. Moreover, a critical function of many research-related organizations – such as think tanks, government policy shops, and university research centers – is to foster the exchange and dissemination of ideas. As indicated in the figure below, this broader constellation of activities can be thought of as “policy inquiry”.

Figure 3: Beyond Research to Account for the Range of Policy Inquiry



But, what types of knowledge do policy inquiry activities seek to develop and to transfer? What evidence do policy-makers need for development decisions? Knowledge for development is of two kinds: knowledge of why, and knowledge of how (Katznelson 1996, cited in Gross Stein 2003). Both kinds of knowledge can be either formalized (written and codified), or informal. These four types of knowledge are important in development - and hence to policy-making.

Formal knowledge of why includes much of the knowledge used in development — environmental, medical, economic, and technical. Research is focused increasingly on the interconnections among processes, locally and globally, and the coordinated strategies that must be put in place to create thresholds for developmental processes. The push in development comes from multiplying and deepening the connectivity among processes.

Informal knowledge of why is contextual knowledge, referring to the “contextual surroundings... that are imbued with and shape collective values, normative behaviour, roles, customs... expectations of events.”(Bellanet) This kind of knowledge shapes the understanding and interpretation of formal knowledge of why. Indeed, it often reshapes formal, generic knowledge, by modifying it through culture and norms, and extracting what is relevant to and consistent with community traditions and practices.

Formal knowledge of how to do things includes knowledge of the instruments and policies that are likely to generate the developmental outcomes that the best-intentioned public policymakers would want.

There is also informal knowledge of how<sup>2</sup> outcomes can best be accomplished gained through learning by doing or trial-and-error experimentation. Informal knowledge of how is generally based in communities and relies on an accumulation of many partly redundant signals, as people routinely consider multiple indicators that form a pattern. Trial-and-error experimentation does not seek the elegant simplicity of formal knowledge, but richness and redundancy to guard against serious error.

**In seeking to infuse policy with better evidence, members of development-oriented networks often concentrate on the why at the expense of the how. In so doing, they risk undermining the effectiveness of the policies they seek to promote.** Policy-makers respond to the experience of making things happen, since that is what they do all the time. This kind of knowledge helps policymakers design the redundancies and the reversibility they need to insulate against the unexpected, and to build in mid-course corrections based on experience. Scientific reasoning needs to engage deeply with other kinds of logic if research is to change policy.

## ***2.4 When Can You Influence Policy Making?***

All moments are not created equally for policy influence. Some times and places are more open to new thinking, new ideas and new evidence that can change the course of policies in ways both large and small. Understanding the concepts of decision modes, windows of opportunity, and agenda streams can help networks identify times when they should be prepare to act.

### ***2.4.1 Decision Modes***

Lindquist (1988; 1990) has argued that organizations or governments, for that matter, are often in different decision modes – routine, incremental, fundamental, or emergent. Each involves a different level of scrutiny and debate over the integrity of its policy underpinnings:

- *routine* decision regimes focus on matching and adapting existing programs and repertoires to emerging conditions, but involves little debate on its logic and design, which is built into the programs and repertoires;
- *incremental* decision-making deals with selective issues as they emerge, but does not deal comprehensively with all constituent issues associated with the policy domain; and
- *fundamental* decisions are relatively infrequent opportunities to re-think approaches to policy domains, whether as result of crisis, new governments, or policy-spillovers. Where fundamental decisions are concerned, it is important to note that that they are anticipated and followed by incremental or routine regimes.
- *emergent* decisions are those that occur when a “policy network” and a “decision regime” of one kind or another may not already exist. Work at this level may involve identifying new niches or building capacities or networks where none previously existed.

Different modes of decision-making should have implications for the number of actors in the policy community (in the subgovernment and attentive public) actively involved in addressing issues associated with that policy area, and the receptivity for different types of information produced by actors inside and outside government.

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2 Informal knowledge of how has been called “practical” knowledge, “technical” knowledge by some development theorists, and “local” knowledge. These terms confuse the kind of knowledge with the source of knowledge.

Figure 4: How Consensus on the Policy Base, Number of Actors, and Type of Information Should Logically Change for Different Decision Regimes

Decision Regime	Routine	Incremental	Fundamental	Emergent
Status of Consensus On the Policy Base	Intact	Policy base largely intact but marginal issues arise	Core principles of policy base open to scrutiny	No consensus – the field is wide open and open to development of a broad vision
Number of Actors Involved in Decision Processes	A few actors with responsibility to implement policy by policymakers	A few policymakers with a stake in the marginal issue	All policymakers and actors potentially affected or concerned about a significant change	Relatively small number at the outset
Type of Information Sought	Data that can inform existing routines, and analysis to determine when to switch to other routines.	Analysis on selected issues – the method of successive limited comparisons for the issues at hand.	Information on fundamental variables, and that probes underlying assumptions. Will also require analysis, data of considerable scope.	Inquiry at a broad level for perspective, but work proceeds on selective issues

The implications of this formulation are important. **If one believes that the vast majority of decision-making in a policy area over time is routine or incremental, then there is a built-in bias against the use of research by policy-makers.** There will be greater interest in useful data and analysis that deals with incremental issues as they arise, and the findings from ongoing research must achieve influence through enlightenment and percolation. Conversely, the greatest demand for, and receptivity to, research comes in anticipation of fundamental policy decisions, or following sharp regime shifts. We should not be surprised, then, that many policy-makers often indicate that, in the normal course of their duties, they do not find research or policy inquiry that grapples with big questions all that relevant. However, as the pace of change accelerates in many policy areas, it is not surprising that we see more policy-makers calling for research and analysis that challenges or embraces clusters of issues in a given policy domain. **When reviewing how IDRC-sponsored projects led to policy influence, it is important to identify “defining moments” or fundamental decisions, and what mode of decision-making existed as a project was designed.**

This approach, though, presumes that a “policy network” and a “decision regime” of one kind or another already exists. IDRC projects often involve identifying new niches or building capacities or networks where none previously existed. Accordingly, Figure 4 has been expanded to embrace the possibility of an “emergent” decision regime.

### 2.4.2 Windows of Opportunity: External Forces

Windows of opportunity emerge primarily in response to external factors, although the policy advocacy networks model also points to how ongoing internal competition within a policy community can push new ideas ahead. Kingdon’s model of agenda streams brings these ideas together by examining how problems, policies and politics intertwine to bring about policy windows which networks should seek to construct and to take advantage of.

There appears to be a general consensus in the literature that, unless external pressures force dominant interests to change policy, the status quo will prevail. External pressures that may provide an important impetus for change in policy communities include the following.

- *Changes in government.* New governments have effects extending beyond a particular policy network. However, in exercising the prerogatives of power, new governments portend the arrival of new political leaders (ministerial and agency head appointments) and often at the most senior levels of public sector bureaucracies. New governments will bring a different ideological cast towards a broad range of issues, and attach different degrees of importance to specific issues; this may lead to openness to change and willingness to entertain different ideas. Similarly, new governments may turn to different sources of policy advice, and thus increase the influence of certain bureaus inside government as well as groups

and researchers outside the state. Finally, the arrival of new governments may influence the trajectory of negotiations among levels of government within a jurisdiction, as well as with international organizations and donor agencies.

- *Changes in the economy and technology.* We take for granted that a more global economy and information technologies are profoundly affecting different sectors and regions of the domestic economy. Some of these changes may get accelerated due to government decisions to introduce freer trade regimes and to regulate sectors in different ways, sometimes at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and other international actors. Expansionary or tight fiscal policies will affect the extent to which resources can be allocated to specific policy domains. If there are dramatic shifts in the international and domestic economy there could well be significant implications for a particular policy network, which may alter the capacities and relative power among key interests, and lead to policy change. The proliferation of information technology has significantly lowered the cost of transmitting information and ideas around the world, and even though members of all advocacy coalitions should have more or less the same access, sustained exposure to ideas and experience elsewhere may shift, over time, the conventional wisdom within policy communities.
- *Policy spillovers.* Pressures for change in policy networks can also arise from developments in other policy domains (Kingdon 1984). For example, structural adjustment agreements negotiated with international lending institutions can have profound impacts on public policies in areas that are not the focus of negotiations. Another possibility is that trends in other policy domains are sufficiently significant so as to have economic, social, or technological implications for related policy networks. A third possibility is that the reforms and experience of other jurisdictions with similar policy challenges can serve as models to emulate or avoid. Finally, Hoberg and Morawski (1997) have shown that policy networks can “converge” or collide as issues start to overlap or merge with others. This suggests the interesting possibility that the cultures of previously unrelated networks could clash, and lead to uncharted and perhaps uneasy relationships among key actors.

External influences may occur in combination with other forces, so it will be important for observers to parse out how, over time, different influences manifested themselves in each of the policy networks. In other words, observers should be careful not to attribute influence to one factor if other, more fundamental, forces were at work.

### **2.4.3 Windows of Opportunity: Internal Forces**

Although key contributors to the literature agree that external forces are the most likely cause of policy change within networks, they do not believe that this is the only source of change. Indeed, the advocacy coalition framework developed by Sabatier and his colleagues was designed to model how, without significant external perturbations, research might be utilized in environments of ongoing conflict, learning, and policy change in policy networks.

Sabatier argues that the actors comprising advocacy coalitions have competitive urges to continually search for new evidence, new arguments, and new strategies and tactics that can translate their beliefs and proposed programs of action into government policy. His view, though, is that such manoeuvring will typically be countered by reactive as well as anticipatory responses from competing coalitions. Sabatier argues that such struggle will not sway opponents in the other advocacy coalitions from core beliefs and broad programs for change. However, there may be movement on “secondary” issues, where perhaps there is not strong and wholesale agreement among coalition members about the need to continue with the status quo, or there may be new evidence or experience that will lead to the softening of previously hard positions. When such change occurs, it suggests that a degree of policy learning has occurred.

The advocacy coalition approach puts considerable emphasis on competition and conflict as the drivers for investing in new evidence, arguments, and strategies in policy networks.

However, Lindquist (1992) has suggested that there may be evidence of co-operative strategies across advocacy coalitions in response to critical events (such as a disaster or scandal) or in anticipation of significant change. This would not mean that the difference in interests would disappear, but rather, that they would be surmounted for a time or that there might be new forms of debating and resolving conflicts.

#### 2.4.4 Agenda streams

When thinking about the impact of IDRC-sponsored projects, it is important to bear in mind that there are many other problems and causes seeking the attention of governments and the public. Accordingly, part of the framework should embrace how issues associated with specific projects may move up or down the agenda of local or national governments. We have acknowledged that external and internal forces are at play, but what really determines whether alternatives to existing policy regimes get serious attention by policy-makers, and indeed, whether new policies actually get adopted?

Perhaps the most useful contribution on this subject is the work of John Kingdon (1984) that models the agenda-setting process, which should be seen as distinctive from, though related to, policy-making. In addition to acknowledging internal and external sources of influence on policy networks, Kingdon argued there is always an element of chance and randomness in the policy-making process, and that a complete model should explain not only why some alternatives do not move higher onto the agendas of governments and the public, but also why, even when they do, they might not get adopted as policy. Kingdon identifies three streams of activity that attempt to move alternatives higher on the agenda. They include:

- *the problem stream.* This stream of activity embraces the work of citizens, groups and journalists who seek to have issues recognized as genuine social problems of importance. Problems are ever-present, but some may already be monitored, so that significant changes in the number or rates associated with a given problem may be sufficient to spark concern in the media. Critical incidents – such as a death, scandal or a failure to secure a major opportunity – may trigger interest in the problem. Finally, other problems which garnered considerable attention may get resolved, or lose the interest of the public and the media. Energy may thus be directed to other problems which, though not having worsened, nevertheless move more easily up the agenda.
- *the policy stream.* Ideas about what constitutes a significant problem, and what might provide the best solution, are always in state of flux. Kingdon suggests that the leading experts on policy inside and outside government regularly debate and keep informed about the latest developments and possibilities on the national and international stage. There is a rolling – though always evolving – sense of what stands as the best advice at a given time. Thus, when governments take power, or external events demand new strategies, it is these general conclusions that will be offered and considered, even if there is not unanimity among experts.
- *the political stream.* Elections are regular occurrences in democratic states, and thus there is always a shifting balance in power. Moreover, the stock of government and political leaders wax and wane, as does the public interest in certain issues. Political leaders are always seeking new issues and causes to champion, which may make better sense at different stages over the life of a government. When a political leader puts their shoulder behind a problem and alternative, an issue can more quickly move up the policy agenda.

Kingdon argues that a single stream rarely single-handedly moves an issue to top of the policy agenda and result in a policy decision. Rather, he argues that there must be a *confluence* of at least two of the streams in order for a policy to obtain; there needs to be sufficient political interest and energy available to match a suitable alternative to a problem and to convert an alternative into a decision. Kingdon ascribes considerable importance to the opening, however briefly, of “policy windows” – such as budgets, government crises, international agreements, or priority-setting exercises – can provide the occasions for a new alternative to get very seriously considered and for decisions to be taken quickly.

In short, timing and chance are critical factors in this formulation; problems may worsen objectively, but without saleable solutions or leaders and a public willing to embrace the cause, the problems are unlikely to receive more than passing attention. Important “problems” can be shunted around and “decisions” taken in very different sites. The possibilities include the office of political leaders, cabinets, central agencies, agreements with international organizations or donor agencies, regulatory agencies, courts, international tribunals, and intergovernmental conferences. The point is that which site emerges for critical decisions itself can be quite random, and even more interestingly, their interest in research can vary enormously. This perspective is not inconsistent with the idea that external influences can have significant impacts on the trajectory of

policy networks. On the other hand, it could be equally possible that, due to the larger swirling of events, ideas generated from within a particular policy network may receive greater exposure if they seem to address an emerging problem or challenge, or fit the needs of a government at a certain time.

Models of agenda-setting are important for this study because the opening of “policy windows” – large or small – occur relatively infrequently, but they can constitute decisive opportunities. It confirms what a lot of policy advocates and entrepreneurs know: they ready themselves for opportunities that may arise, but often do not occur (Felman 1989). Readiness, rather than achieving impact with each event or study, may be a more important goal. For those sponsoring policy inquiry and building capacity in developing countries, an objective is to increase chances so that supported individuals and organizations can take advantage of policy windows, or to identify ways to create windows, which, in turn, highlights the critical role of policy entrepreneurs.

### 3 IDRC’S APPROACHES TO POLICY INFLUENCE

The theoretical literature and document reviews conducted by IDRC provide very few ideas on how to influence policy. Fewer still have explicitly dealt with how networks can influence policy. Two frameworks for understanding IDRC’s efforts have emerged: one based on IDRC’s strategic evaluation of policy influence and one emerging from Carden’s additional analysis of network policy influence.

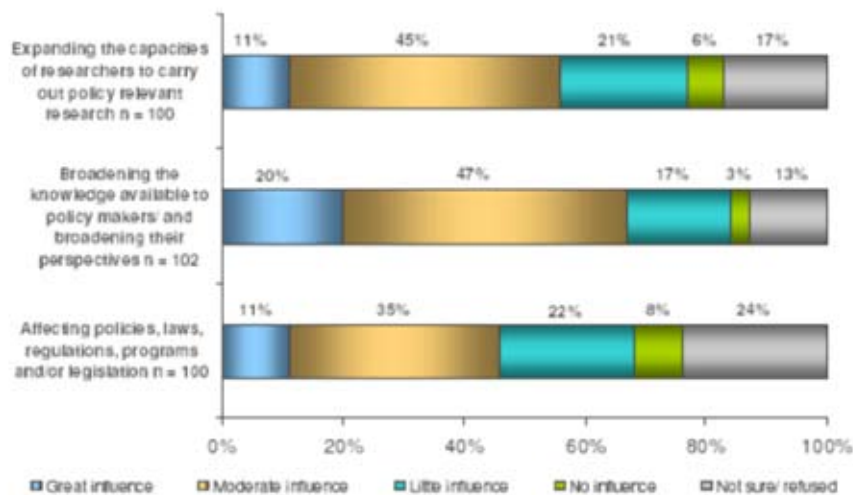
#### 3.1 IDRC General Policy Influence Framework

Based on a review of IDRC projects which intended to influence policy, Everett Lindquist suggested in 2004 that the Centre’s projects and networks tended to function on three levels:

- Expanding policy capacities
- Broadening policy horizons
- Policy advocacy

The IDRC/Decima network survey in 2005 confirmed that these categories of policy influence resonated with IDRC-supported networks. Networks felt that they had achieved reasonable successes in all areas, although coordinators seemed to feel more confident of the two indirect forms of policy influence than they did of any direct policy advocacy.

Figure 5: Success of Network in Influencing Policy (Source: Decima 2006)



The following sections examine what IDRC means by each of these forms of policy influence, with an emphasis on how IDRC-supported networks exhibit these approaches. It is important to note, however, that this framework for policy influence is ultimately an analytical, rather than action-oriented, one. Individual project activities (e.g. undertaking research, holding a policy workshop with government decision-makers) will likely achieve multiple types of influence.

### 3.1.1 Expanding Policy Capacities

IDRC seeks to expand policy capacities, that is, to improve the institutional framework surrounding policy-making. **Capacity building is not just about building the capacity of researchers to do research. It is also about building researcher capacity to carry out policy relevant research and to communicate the findings effectively to policy and decision makers.** This ultimately increases the quality of the research produced; when policy makers begin to recognize the quality of the research they become more accepting of the research. Almost half the networks polled felt they had expanded the capacity of researchers to carry out investigations that are relevant to policy. Higher success rates were reported by those networks where IDRC has been very involved and by those that focus on economic issues.

Expanding policy capacities includes activities which:

- develop new talent for doing issues-based research and for analyzing practical problems;
- enhance researchers' capacities to work on problems or issues as being distinct from carrying out disciplinary work;
- enhance their capacities to communicate knowledge and ideas to diverse audiences; and
- enhance the capacities of policy makers to use research in policy making.

Given that many research communities in the South are small, fragmented and significantly under-funded, networks are useful and viable mechanisms that enable researchers to **carry out their research, particularly innovative research in new topic areas**, as well as provide them funding opportunities, information sharing and mutual learning, technical support, and training (Guilmette 2004).

Networks enable more comprehensive approaches to capacity strengthening which serve not only to **build the skills of individual researchers, but whole professions within a region**. Networks are intended to build a critical mass of researchers and expertise that is often not available within individual countries, to encourage mutual learning among them, and to foster more coordinated, collaborative research efforts through which to produce research of a quantity and quality far greater than would otherwise be possible. The implications for policy influence are expressed well in the proposal for the Agricultural Policy Research Network for West and Central Africa:

*Considering the relative scarcity of experienced policy researchers in the West and Central Africa region, the network will provide an opportunity to draw on their expertise across national boundaries and give rise to research output of a quality that would be difficult to achieve on a national level (RP 65305 Proposal, 1998).*

Similarly, building the capacity of researchers and negotiators in Latin America was a primary goal for the Latin American Trade Network. As the author of its review explains,

*In the face of [some] challenges, the larger countries have some capacity of their own to undertake research and analysis as a prelude to adopting positions. On the other hand, the smaller and medium sized countries that have no such capacity could benefit from a regional mechanism that would provide them with an ordered set of ideas on the main issues of the multilateral agenda (Macadar 2003).*

Yet despite the capacities of the larger Latin American countries, they “were not organized or prepared to respond to the proposals of the North, which seemed to be backed by abundant research and strong political support” (Macadar 2003). By supporting researchers throughout the region, the LATN project enabled researchers to both strengthen their skills as well as their positions in the debates.

The project documentation reviewed suggests that **coordination of research agendas and efforts** has the potential to ensure better coverage of the full range of researchable policy issues, to improve inter-institutional debate, exchange and cooperation and greater professional consensus on leading policy issues (see, for example, project proposals and PADs for RP 50292, RP 60050, RP 65305).

Networks also serve to enhance the **quality of research by enabling greater interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral collaboration**. The Regional Research Program on Social Policy Assessment (RP 50140), for example, employs a network approach in order to address the segmentation found in the social policy field in Latin America. It seeks to bring together a series of leading research institutions working in the areas of employment, health, education, social security and retirement systems, shelter and anti-poverty programs in order to develop their capacity to formulate a common research agenda based on a deeper, shared understanding of social policy challenges in the region (RP 50140 PAD). This not only has the potential to expand policy capacities by enhancing partners' capacities to work on problems in a more integrated way, it also serves to broaden policy horizons by enhancing the comprehensiveness of knowledge, and providing a more holistic understanding of social policy issues and their interconnections.

Though not discussed in the project documentation reviewed, expanding policy capacities may also improve the utilization of results **by enhancing the visibility, credibility and reputation of the network and the research it produces**. As policymakers recognize the quality of the research (and associate it with the identity of the network) they are likely to become more accepting of research results and inclined to use the information in developing new policies (Guilmette 2004).

The review finds that comparatively less attention is given to enhancing the capacity of policymakers as a means to influence policy. Lusthaus and Neilsen's (2005) in-depth examination of the data from Massen's report suggests that only one quarter (22%) [of the capacity building projects that received funding from 2002-2004] clearly target "policy/decision makers" (including local/national government, policy makers, decision makers, Ministry people/Governors, local authority/village leaders). This is, however, inconsistent with the review of program level documents (PI prospectuses), which suggests that, in terms of whose capacities, 67% of PIs target "policy/decision makers". The great difference in data suggests that either PIs are not targeting policy-makers through projects as much as they believe they are or that PIs are creating a small number of projects specifically targeting policy-makers, rather than involving them in broader policy projects. Though the reason for this is not explained, it may reflect a sense that research networks are better placed to address capacity building issues in the research sector than in the policy sector.

### **3.1.2 Broadening Policy Horizons**

IDRC uses networks to *broaden policy horizons*, that is, to improve the intellectual framework surrounding policy-making. Two-thirds of the networks felt they had helped broaden the perspective of government policy-makers and increase the knowledge available to them. Coordinators working for an international organization or for a non-governmental organization were the ones most likely to report progress on this kind of important groundwork.

Networks help to:

- increase both the stock of policy-relevant knowledge and its comprehensiveness;
- introduce new ideas to the policy agenda;
- check that knowledge is provided to decision-makers in a form they can use;
- alleviate deficiencies in the research process, such as when research fails to address pressing issues, or when its results arrive too late to be useful;
- nourish dialogues among researchers and decision-makers, particularly at the outset of projects to ensure that the work will be relevant and timely.

Networks also broaden policy horizons by **introducing new concepts, approaches or "ways of thinking" into research and policy fora**. The goals of Regional Equity in Health Research Network (EQUINET, RP 04378) in Southern Africa, for example, are to support research intended to refine concepts and issues around "equity in health" in the region, to promote dialogue on the critical dimensions of equity in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, and to promote policies that address equity within and across the region (RP 04378 PAD). The concept of equity in health constitutes a significant paradigm shift in health research and policy and as such, EQUINET has the potential to both expand the policy capacities of researchers and broaden policy horizons in the health field. In a recent external evaluation of EQUINET, Blair Rutherford explains:

*... it is important to note that networking helps to expand policy capacities as EQUINET participants improve their knowledge of ideas and actors and broadens policy horizons as researchers, policy-makers, and policy entrepreneurs are provided with new opportunities and concepts to frame debate and learn about equity in health (Rutherford 2004, 12).*

Networks like MERCOSUR (RP 50292) and the Economic Research Forum (RP 60050) are intended to consolidate the dispersed efforts of researchers and institutions in order to **increase the quantity, quality and comprehensiveness of their research** and, in so doing, to increase the stock of policy relevant knowledge available to inform policy. As one IDRC staff member noted during the Annual Learning Forum, “the greatest benefit of networks may not necessarily be policy influence; the key may be knowledge production, for example providing good data and building capacity for doing country comparisons that can generate policy influence.”

For example, as the Minister of Fisheries in Vietnam reported, an article presented to him from the Asian Fisheries Social Science Research Network (AFSSRN), “helped him to better understand fisheries management issues in neighbouring Southeast Asian countries and assist in developing new policies in the Fisheries Sector Plan for Vietnam” (Pomeroy 2002). This example also illustrates the transnational character of the research and knowledge generated of this particular knowledge network. Government officials from other countries in the region find the research useful, even if it is not necessarily carried out in the context of their own country.

Networks also seek, however, to address concerns about the relevance and responsiveness of research by **more effectively integrating members of the policy community in the research process**. According to IDRC’s corporate strategy *Empowerment Through Knowledge*, efforts to ensure that research results are better utilized must include intended beneficiaries of research taking a more active part in the research process, determining what research is required, and, if appropriate, deciding on the research process itself (IDRC 1991). Many of the IDRC-supported networks reviewed aim to facilitate greater dialogue among researchers and policymakers from the outset of their projects in order to increase the “exposure” of researchers to policymakers and to policymaking needs and processes.

To more effectively link research and policymaking, the Agricultural Policy Research Network for West and Central Africa, for example, proposed to:

*... create a research forum through which key agricultural policy issues will be the focus of research whose output will be utilized by policymakers. It will also provide an opportunity to enhance the policy debate on related topics. The proposed governance structure was designed to reflect the variety of stakeholders who stand to gain from implementation of appropriate agricultural policies. ... In addition to the regular research program of the network, expert groups will also be set up on an ad hoc basis to address key issues identified by the Conference of Ministers that need to be researched in response to urgent policy changes (RP 65305 PAD).*

**By opening space for inquiry, networks can influence policy by connecting people, testing new ideas and generating new norms.** Networks connect stakeholders across different organizations and connect people located in different locations. Networks create a platform for people to share information, discuss new ideas and generate shared knowledge. For example, the Eastern and Central Africa Program on Agriculture Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA) used a variety of tools to coordinate research and connect members, including electronically “pushing” information out via an email list, “pulling” people together in-person via policy-related workshops, and building social recognition and capital via a directory of stakeholders.

Projects started by a particular organization, such as a government agency or NGO, are seen to be ‘owned’ by that group; yet networks are shared entities that are perceived to be more **politically neutral**. In Cambodia, one network provided an informal opportunity to coordinate support for community forestry among different government agencies, a feat that would have been more challenging working through more official channels of the bureaucracy. The project was able to create and sustain partnership between key national agencies responsible for forests. But the project also networked a growing set of international NGO project teams scattered across Cambodia. These various partnerships opened space for new types of thinking and discussion by senior line ministry staff and helped commit international NGO project staff (and over time their grounding in the problems of specific communities) to advocacy for change.

Finally, though rarely expressed as such, a key defining purpose of networks is their ability to **create margin for risk-taking; to provide the intellectual, emotional, professional and policy space for people and institutions to engage in new, uncertain or in some way out-of-the-norm activity without the need to commit “too far”**. According to a group of Asian network activists<sup>3</sup>, this idea appears as the catalytic function of networks:

*providing the critical mass for moving beyond simply sharing, to be able to advocate, lobby and operationalize change. They allow cross-sectoral perspectives into the policy debate... give protection in expressing alternatives... provide a space within and for professionals and policy-makers to move, explore and create together, within a context of “suspended responsibilities”. They’re a venue to encourage lateral thinking, to develop new agendas which might eventually make it into the mainstream. They free members from institutional limitations.*

As another PO notes in a rPCR, however, members of a network can be reluctant to articulate more with the policy process. In the case of one network focused on economic integration in MERCOSUR, members resisted pressures to adopt a more demand-driven approach to research.

*...the project concluded with a well-functioning but ‘closed’ network, capable of producing relevant and high-quality research outputs but still weakly integrated with the policy process...in the case of this project a combination of an entrepreneurial project coordinator and strong conditionality by IDRC appear to have overcome some initial reluctance by researchers to engage in the often time-consuming and frustrating process of dialogue with decision-makers and civil society groups.*

### 3.1.3 Policy Advocacy

Finally, IDRC and its research partners use networks to *undertake policy advocacy*. IDRC advocates suggest that research findings can support the case for modification of laws, regulations, programs, or structures. In actual fact, such a process is rare and normally circuitous, and only in a few instances can change be attributed, visibly and directly, to the inspiration of research alone. Nevertheless, almost half the IDRC-supported networks surveyed stated that they actually have affected policy, programs, laws, legislation, and regulation. Among the characteristics of particularly effective networks – those that say they have had “great influence” – are a focus on economic policy, a single geographic interest (especially in Southeast Asia), a large number of individual and organizational members, a closed membership structure, and an active communications system.

Networks seek to affect policy regimes through the

- Modification of existing programs or policies
- Fundamental re-design of programs or policies
- Development of new policy regimes in emergent areas, such as ICT

Advocacy includes, for example, efforts to promote changes in traditional concepts, paradigms, attitudes, and behaviours of policy communities in developing regions. The SUB-supported, NGO-based South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture (SANFEC) seeks to engage government officials and people’s representatives (politicians) in all five countries of the region on issues related to regional stability, food security and biodiversity-based agriculture:

*The purpose will be to influence the discourse on food and agriculture and specific policy debates linked to food security, bringing to bear both farmer perspectives and regional analysis by the network (RP 101681, Proposal).*

In new areas of research and advocacy, information may not need to be comprehensive and complete in order to have impact. One rPCR suggests:

3 Brought together for a Network Review Workshop in Singapore, January 1994; including academic, government and NGO networkers from Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia

*The obvious question ... is whether the quality of the research has much relationship to the success of the policy influence. This project would suggest not necessarily... in an area that was almost completely terra incognita for their policy audience ... even identifying issues and getting them on the policy radar screen was a successful accomplishment.*

In most cases, it appears that advocacy efforts are directed at “promoting policy dialogue” of different kinds (though, interestingly, most of the projects expressing this intent do not explain what this is meant to involve and the intended results it is expected to yield). For example, the SANFEC network takes an interesting approach to advocacy; contrary to “confrontational approaches to political advocacy”, the network promotes policy dialogue that builds on farmer-based cultural events and presentations, “to make a more direct appeal to the popular imagination and to contribute to the formation of an alternative social discourse” (RP 101681, Proposal).

Though advocacy is important to ensuring the utilization of research in policymaking, the experience of EQUINET in Southern Africa, suggests that, in some cases, research networks may not be best placed, or even inclined, to engage in direct policy advocacy. Rather than assume responsibility for advocacy efforts itself, EQUINET engages with established advocacy groups to ensure that research results might more directly inform and influence health policy in SADC countries. The experience of EQUINET suggests that networks provide unique opportunities to include a range of stakeholders in network activities, in which each takes on those roles for which they are most capable and best positioned. It emphasizes the usefulness of including civil society stakeholders in research networks as a means to both enhance the research process itself (drawing in new stakeholder perspectives, experiences, ideas), while capitalizing on the strengths of civil society groups who are often better positioned and therefore better able to take research results and use them to influence policymaking. Moreover, in policy environments that are deeply fractured and/or where policy issues are highly contentious, EQUINET’s experience suggests that devolving responsibility for policy advocacy to civil society stakeholders might be a useful strategy to maintain the identity, credibility, and effectiveness of the network.

### **3.2 Mechanisms for Network Policy Influence**

A 2003 review by Byron Gillespie of network projects concerned with influencing policy, however, reveals some additional understandings of the types of roles networks play in influencing policy. The mechanisms that they used to do so were principally:

- bringing a critical mass of researchers (and research) around a particular set of policy questions;
- creating communicative links between policy stakeholders;
- disseminating research and information to wide range of policy stakeholders; and
- building or augmenting the capacity of targeted groups of policy stakeholders to participate in policy processes.

One way of presenting how networks influence policies puts an emphasis on their ability to produce and disseminate research. In this view, IDRC-supported networks themselves do not constitute policy influence, but are instead structures that allow researchers to be responsive to policy concerns. Networks also provide wide communicative links through which research can pass. This view is consistent with descriptions of research-centred networks that seek to build a critical mass of research around particular policy issues. It is also consistent with the view presented in the literature review for the policy study (Neilson 2001). Neilson notes that in this view, networks can be seen more as a route to policy influence rather than as a source of influence: “for the most part network models are somewhat rational in nature and, as a result, do not explain the complexities outside of the actors’ environment, particularly in a developing country context.”

Another, “less systematically understood” (Stein et al 1999) way of interpreting the work of networks relates to how they structure social interactions for the “intersubjective production of meaning” (Stein et al, 1999; Stone, 2003). This view seems more consistent in the civil society focused networks, as well as networks like EQUINET that seek to thicken the links between researchers, policy makers and civil society. In this view, networks not only function to transmit information, but they also provide fora in which the values underpinning policy and research are discussed, and in this context, the meaning of particular policy issues are brought into

focus and reframed. It is in generating new meaning given to policy matters that is seen as the impetus for change (Stone 2003).

IDRC similarly supports networks as a means to increase the utilization of Centre-supported research, particularly in policymaking. Networks are used to expand the policy capacities of researchers to carry out and create policy relevant research. This includes supporting capacity building initiatives at different levels, and promoting greater coordination of research efforts in order to build a critical mass of researchers and expertise in a particular field and encourage greater interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral collaboration. The latter is intended both to expand policy capacities and to broaden policy horizons by increasing the quantity, quality and comprehensiveness of research and the stock of policy relevant knowledge available

## **4 THREE NETWORK CASE STUDIES**

As part of the IDRC Strategic Evaluation on Policy Influence, 25 field cases were undertaken. Three were network case studies. All were transnational in character: two are regional and one is global. Summaries of these cases are provided below to give an example of the variety of approaches and contexts confronting networks seeking to have policy influence.

### ***4.1 The Technical Support Service Project to the Group of 24 (G-24)***

Since 1972, the Group of 24 (G-24) has represented developing countries and is organized to provide Third World input into issues of global financial reform. It was established as a representative group by the larger group of developing countries, the Group of 77. In order for them to provide input into the reform process, the G-24 quickly recognized the need to have a research function. IDRC became involved in 1988, after the initial period during which time the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) supported the G-24 research program. During its earliest involvement, the Centre worked with the group to create the “Technical Support Service Project”, administered by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The Centre has supported the Technical Support Service project for 15 years, and has contributed nearly CAD\$1 million. Unlike the other two network projects, the G-24 Technical Support Service project was not designed or established as a formal network structure, but came into being as an informal mechanism as a result of its collaborative, transnational research efforts.

Over the first four phases of the Technical Support Service project, there were two key Research Co-ordinators, each with their own vision of what the primary purpose of the technical support group was, who they targeted for the purpose of influence, and how this should be done. The first of these leaders saw the main objective of the G-24 research as providing a “voice for the underdog” (Tussie, 2003: 8). This objective was sustained by the strong relationships between the first Research Coordinator and IDRC, as well as between the Research Coordinator and the G-24. Always keenly aware of the budgetary constraints of the Group, he took the approach of supporting a small number of high quality papers by renowned researchers on issues targeted to influence the research agendas of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). This pushed the IFIs to pour money into research on these issues and topics.

Throughout his tenure, the first Research Co-ordinator targeted the Executive Directors (EDs) of the G-24 as the main audience of the research results. Much of the focus was on publishing the research papers through UNCTAD. Perhaps one of the most important internal factors affecting policy influence was the idea that “the research agenda must come from the G-24 and be seen to come from the G-24, which is best positioned to know its own needs, which often arise unforeseen, and at short notice” (Tussie, 2003: 19). Some of the G-24 countries were skeptical of the research coming out of the World Bank and the IMF, so as the reputation of the G-24 researchers grew, some of the Country Directors requested research on issues of importance to developing countries from a developing country perspective. The first Research Coordinator stressed the need to give a voice to the underdog, but on his retirement in 1999, his successor highlighted the need to “bring about a paradigm change” in order to “change the environment in which policies are framed” (Tussie, 2003: 11). As a result, the research studies were published with the intent to influence public policy at a global level. This resulted in a shift away from the EDs as the primary target audience to an effort to influence wider international discussions on financial and monetary issues in political and intergovernmental as well as academic circles (Tussie, 2003). Although this shift gave more focus to the technical support group, it also created tensions among some of the key actors involved.

Most policy makers and academics have discarded the linear notion of research directly influencing policies and policy processes. Yet, findings from Tussie's review indicate that some aspects of the G-24's influence on international finance were in fact linear in nature. This occurred primarily with respect to "short-term influence via policy briefs on specific issues and targeted to policy makers with the ability to make decisions" (Tussie, 2003: 17). On the other hand, the enlightenment of policy makers is more often associated with "more academically oriented papers on systemic issues intending to alter the prevailing paradigm over a longer period of time in which a constellation of other actors in the broader policy community are harnessed in parallel efforts" (Tussie, 2003: 17). In effect, the approaches of both the two former Research Coordinators have achieved some level of success in terms of influencing policy. Using Lindquist's framework the type of policy influence can, for the most part, be described as "broadening policy horizons".

Closely linked with "enlightenment" as a means to influence policy, the resulting form of influence is often in terms of new concepts being introduced to frame debates, new ideas on the agenda, and researchers and others educated to take up new positions with broader understanding of issues. [Some interviewees] especially highlighted the importance of this form of policy influence, as many finance ministers today are less critical in their analytical approaches [than previously]... this has led to the belief that "good economics" means that economics should be specific to the conditions in which they are to be implemented... (Tussie, 2003: 18).

In the end, the reviewer contends that the influence the project researchers achieved was most effective by harnessing a range of other actors to carry their messages to the international financial reform discussions. They did this by influencing the research agendas of the IFIs, through the powers of persuasion of renowned researchers involved in the project as well as through the high quality of their research papers, and sometimes through the personalities and personal contacts of both the Research Coordinators. The G-24 has not broken the policy monopoly of the US. However, it is an institution that is successful in placing developing country concerns on the table and inserting developing country issues into the global financial reform agenda.

## **4.2 The Latin American Trade Network (LATN)**

The Latin American Trade Network (LATN) was initiated in March 1998, and was formed in response to the increasing complexity of the international trade agenda.

Initially, the main objective of LATN was to develop and establish a mechanism to help Latin American countries "position themselves more effectively in international trade negotiations" (Macadar, 2003: 14).

Central to understanding LATN is the notion that it is a network of individuals not institutions. It brings together researchers, policy makers and civil society organizations from several Latin American countries and international institutions that are interested in looking at trade issues from a Latin American perspective. Initially, the network was created with the premise of generating and producing knowledge; however, over the course of its initial phase this objective was refined and now its primary function concerns organizing, filtering and synthesizing existing research into a form that is more easily understood and digested by trade negotiators and policy makers (Macadar, 2003: 17). By focusing on already existing research, the network enables researchers to provide policy makers with various different options and positions for negotiations.

Of particular note in relation to policy processes in Latin America is that individuals fulfill various roles (as researchers, negotiators, government advisors) "either simultaneously or rotationally over time" (Macadar, 2003: 8). Consequently, LATN's target audience is constantly changing.

*At a given moment, the target person may be a researcher, at another moment he may be serving as an advisor to some important official, or he may even have become a senior official himself. Indeed, a single member of the policymaking community may combine all these roles. (Macadar, 2003: 26).*

The rotational nature of the different roles for individuals can be useful for the purpose of gaining recognition and influence with senior level officials, since some of them actually become senior officials and hence can influence from within. However, it can also make targeting specific audiences and individuals extremely challenging as these targets constantly change. To address this challenge, the Coordination Unit chose to target "middle management". These individuals generally remain the same, even as governments come and go. And as the author points out, this points to a further interesting notion within the Latin American policy process –

“it is the middle ranks that control the data and process information, and this gives them important power, even with the Minister and his advisors” (Macadar, 2003: 26).

The “power of the negotiating bureaucracy” (Macadar, 2003: 22) also means that, during times of instability and volatility, the middle ranks

*... also have the power to determine the policy formulation process. They exercise this power by throwing up obstacles, employing delaying tactics, and rewriting the final resolutions for implementing the decisions. They have a very high measure of discretion and, depending on the circumstances, they can even modify the principle decision in part. (Macadar, 2003: 23).*

By targeting the middle ranks, the network’s Coordination Unit was able to have access to those who have the power to influence even during times of instability and changes in government. This targeting is central in a region where governmental instability is frequent thus making policy influence an enormous, and at times daunting, task.

The case finds evidence of all three types of influence as defined by Lindquist and also finds that uptake of the research and results are promising. Early indications of this include: evidence that various Latin American governments (e.g., Argentina, Paraguay, Peru, and several Central American governments) and organizations in the region have approached LATN for assistance on trade negotiations, the World Bank has worked with LATN to customize its policy training courses for the region, and UNCTAD and World Trade Organization (WTO) representatives see LATN as a vehicle for organizational collaboration (Macadar, 2003: 14).

The review asserts that one of the key factors to this influence is the “LATN approach and its trademark” (Macadar, 2003: 46) of independence. The regional approach to these issues addressed by the network’s researchers and Coordination Unit is one that transcends governments, international agencies and national interests, which has “helped to give it legitimacy” (Macadar, 2003: 47) as well as providing a common vision for the region.

### **4.3 Asian Fisheries Social Science Research Network (AFSSRN)**

The Asian Fisheries Social Science Research Network (AFSSRN) was established to address the overexploitation of fisheries and environmental degradation of coastal resources. The Centre supported the network for 14 years, from its inception in 1983 until 1996. It continues today as a branch of the Asian Fisheries Society, with support from the International Centre for Living Aquatic Resources Management - now known as the World-Fish Center. It was established originally as a three-country network of three institutions, but later expanded to include more countries and many more institutions. When the network was initiated, fisheries faced many challenges throughout Asia. In spite of the importance of the fishery, the resources have been very poorly managed and fishers remain among the poorest people in the region.

Concerns in the region about environmental degradation and overexploitation of the fisheries were treated as biological problems. In the early 1980s, it was being recognized that the problems were more socio-economic, institutional and political in nature. There was serious concern because of an almost complete lack of social scientists working on fisheries issues, with no systematic programs of economic and policy research being undertaken. Thus the overriding objective of the AFSSRN was to build national research capacity that enabled researchers to address important social science issues in the development and management of fishery resources in the region. This was achieved through the development of professional and graduate programs in resources management and in fisheries and aquaculture economics.

In the first phase of support to the AFSSRN, the University Pertanian Malaysia emerged as the leader in building capacity. It developed the first graduate program in the region on resource economics. The network funded graduate program development, scholarships, research projects, training programs and supported the building of professional working relationships. The primary focus of Phase I was building the stock of trained fisheries economists who could both carry out research and train others in the region.

In each of the subsequent phases, the network expanded to a larger group of institutions and also modestly expanded to include a fourth country, Indonesia. There was a deliberate choice by the network not to expand the number of countries but rather to secure membership among existing country-members. This was done by increasing the number of institutions involved within each country.

Building the network as a mechanism of exchange among researchers began to take shape by the third phase of activity. In Phase III (1988-1993), there were 14 teams in the network from the four countries. It was only at this stage when there were sufficient active researchers that there was an understanding of the merits of the network to support knowledge generation and problem solving. At this stage the network began to function more effectively and to move beyond serving as a training network to operate as a network used by its members to address issues, to exchange ideas and to work on problems in their countries. As the network strengthened its capacities, it started to build linkages and relationships with non-network institutions. As a result, the network was able to develop and consolidate its identity and began to see itself as a force in the domain of fisheries and resources management policies.

The strength and value of the network was such that when Centre funding was terminated at the end of Phase IV, network members determined to continue and found a means to function as a section within the Asian Fisheries Society. It did so with modest funding from its host institution – the WorldFish Center – and continues today with a well-read column in their newsletter and in conjunction with other fisheries society meetings. In Phase IV and beyond, membership has spread from the four countries to include fisheries economists and resource management specialists from Viet Nam and Sri Lanka.

There was a clear focus on building capacity in the early stages of network development, and a clear understanding that until there was a stronger research and professional base, it would not be possible to conduct policy relevant research that would have legitimacy. It was not until Phase IV of support that the network developed explicit activities around policy relevant research. At that point, many of its members were seen as highly qualified and their views began to be sought by their governments. They contributed to expanding the range of issues taken into consideration in the formulation of fisheries policies. And researchers also became more adept at identifying issues of import to policy makers:

*Originally, I would just do research for research's sake. My audience was not the policy-makers. Now being in government I better understand the need for good research to inform my decision-making and I better understand why the AFSSRN was pushing through training, the need for us to do policy relevant research. I request our researchers, both in government and in academe, to do research which I can use to support or not support decisions. (Dr. V. Nikijuluw, Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, Indonesia, quoted in Pomeroy, 2003).*

## **5 NETWORK MEMBERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE FOR POLICY INFLUENCE**

IDRC's experience demonstrates that networks must pay attention to membership and governance issues which will determine their effectiveness in influencing policy. These issues are at the core of why networks need to consider policy influence from their earliest stages -- if membership and governance structures do not take them into account, it is frequently difficult to change them radically at a later stage.

### **5.1 Leadership**

Public policy influence usually requires strong leadership and coordination in the form of a policy champion. However, as an IDRC PO commented during the Annual Learning Forum, the network leader and coordinator would not necessarily be the same person; leaders tend to emerge naturally around the issues. For example, in the Ukraine such a champion was found in the Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Nuclear Safety, who was later promoted into the position of Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Economy. This contributed greatly to the level of policy influence.

### **5.2 Ownership**

The notion of ownership is very closely linked to capacity building. The Centre supports programs and projects that build the capacity of researchers and policy makers to use their own research/researchers. This encourages the uptake of research within, and therefore influencing policy from within. Both the Asian Fisheries Network and the Latin American Trade Network are examples that highlight how building the capacities of researchers provides new opportunities for policy and decision-makers, and other practitioners and research users, to use the research and research results produced from within their own countries or regions – that is to say, to use their own evidence for policy making. This uptake of research from within encourages an increase in demand from within, as well as encouraging the influence of policy from within.

In addition, the G-24 illustrates a good example of local ownership since the demand for research to better inform the G-24 representatives came from within the G-24 member-countries. As Stiglitz explains,

*If the developing countries are really to be 'in the driver's seat', they have to have the capacity to analyse the often difficult economic issues they face. Local researchers, combining the knowledge of local conditions – including knowledge of local, political and social structures (with the learning derived from global experiences) provide the best prospects for deriving policies that both engender broad-based support and are effective. That is why locally based research institutions are so important (Stiglitz, 2000).*

“Ownership” of the research can also affect the perceived (potential) effectiveness of policy influence. In the G-24 case, under the leadership of the first Research Coordinator and with the support of IDRC, important steps were taken to “increase G-24 ownership of the research program” (Tussie 2003). The first was that G-24 members began to contribute to the trust fund themselves in response to IDRC's request for parallel funding. The second was the creation and establishment of the Technical Group. These two mechanisms “offered a more defined process for the functioning of the research project, [and] to some extent, it may have provided the G-24 with a greater sense of ‘ownership’ of the programme”. Building on these mechanisms for effective policy influence, the G-24 representatives requested “soundly argued policy briefs to influence the policy debate”.

The new Research Coordinator who was more focused on a longer term effort of changing the paradigm instead chose “a style and strategy that targeted the broader policy community as a whole rather than the [Executive Directors] more particularly” (Tussie 2003). This created a tension in the group, particularly in terms of accountability: a different target audience led to the question of who is the research program of the G-24 accountable to – the G-24 or UNCTAD? This is an important and significant question since it also touches upon ownership of the research agenda, which is currently managed by the G-24 representatives. The issue of ownership also suggests a challenge for donors in terms of their level of involvement and role within a project.

### **5.3 Researchers vs. Civil Society**

As Byron Gillespie found in a review of IDRC projects with an intent to influence policy, some networks appear to seek a broad constituency of members in order to thicken the communicative links between research, policy, and civil society around policy issues, while other networks involve either researchers or civil society as the central members (Gillespie, 2003). Researcher-centred networks seem to function in order to generate critical masses of research around policy questions. Civil society centred networks appear to be looser forms of networks, and often depend on ICTs as the medium through which discussion around particular issues.

#### ***i. Researcher-Centred Networks***

Four projects studied described networks that were structured arrangements of specialized groups of researchers working on common sets of problems. These were:

- MIMAP Finance Network (#100473),
- Global Financial Governance Initiative (#100471)
- Asia Development Research Forum (#100709),
- CBNRM and the farmer-centred research network, China (#100732)

In each case, the separate groups of researchers in the networks are housed and administrated by a university or research institution, and research activities are structured according to common research agendas.

In the first three of these research projects (MIMAP, Global Financial Governance Initiative, and the Asia Development Research Forum) influence on macro-level economic and development policies is sought through building a critical mass of research around particular thematic issues, and then seeking to stimulate and/or create spaces for discussion on these issues. Thus, while researchers generate specialized knowledge, the influence of that knowledge on policy is described as deriving from subsequent critical engagement of a wider audience of policy actors (such as media, civil society etc) with that research.

The fourth of these researcher-centred networks, (CBNRM's Farmer-Centred Research Network), is a variation on this theme. This network involves a narrower range of targeted policy actors (researchers and government agencies) and the ultimate goal is not to shift macro-development policies through influencing a broad con-

stituency of policy actors, but rather to influence China's national agricultural research agenda. In this case, the network was created as a vehicle to scale up the lessons and experiences of participatory action research from projects occurring throughout the Southeast Asian natural resource management research community. It does this by disseminating CBNRM experiences amongst researchers and government agencies throughout the region.

## *ii. Civil Society Centered Networks*

Four network projects were centrally concerned with drawing civil society interests together around a broad range of policy questions.

- South Asian Civil Society Network (#100472),
- OLISTICA (#100584),
- Global ICT Policy Monitor (#100505),
- Virtual Information Centre on the Altiplano (#4026)

In the project objectives and abstracts given, these projects differ from the researcher-centered networks both in terms of structure and intent. In contrast to the highly coordinated research conducted within research institutions and guided by agendas, these networks appeared of having much less formal structure. Instead of describing specific disciplines and the research expertise that will be brought to bear on policy questions, the descriptive emphasis of these projects is more on enabling communication and sharing of knowledge amongst civil society members.

In Bernard's (1996) terms, all of these projects are projective networks in that they provide spaces in which multiple perspectives come to bear on an issue, from those spaces, alternative research programs can emerge. They are also platforms for action in that they form both a loose organizational center from which advocacy activities can be organized, as well as supply information for advocacy activities that are geographically widely dispersed. In its abstract, the South Asian Civil Society Network (project 100472) aptly describes how such networks take advantage of what it calls "the new phenomenon of the internationalization of the public interest civil society" and the effects that this is having on policy making.

*With the rapid flow of information across the globe at extremely low costs the civil society is better placed than ever before to understand and talk to each other. This is having a direct impact on international policy making, as well as at the national and regional levels.*

Indeed, all four civil society projects appear to be tapping into this trend, and all highlight the benefits of ICTs for making communication possible with a wide variety of actors over vast distances. In two of the four projects (*Global ICT Policy Monitor and Virtual Information Centre on Water in the Altiplano*), Internet technologies are the focus of the projects as well as the principle means of holding the network together, and perform a function described in both projects as being a "web-based information clearinghouse"

IDRC continues to pursue, however, working models of networks which include both the research skills of university-based organizations and the advocacy skills of civil society organizations. An IDRC PO reflecting on the difficulty of combining research and advocacy in a single project notes that a project failed to strengthen the research skills of advocacy groups involved in promoting biodiversity and community rights. Rather than attempting to build a capacity for both research and advocacy within a single partner organization, he posits that future projects could attempt to link researchers and advocates in different organizations.

While there are few examples of success in this area, IDRC has worked to at least link the work of research and advocacy networks dealing with the same issue area. Dina Crassati describes how just such an approach was used in Palestine to create a platform for participants from different networks, focused on research and advocacy, to discuss policy issues and interact with the policymaking process.

*Palestinian NGOs are in dire need for a networking structure that will strengthen their linkages, coordination and collaboration around policy issues. Although there are diverse research and advocacy networks, as well as several donor-supported efforts to strengthen the NGO community in Palestine, the (project) represent(s) a pioneering effort in orchestrating several activities within a policy research conceptual framework: the production and combination of academic, applied and policy-relevant research, the*

*creation of a platform for discussion, networking and for influencing the policy-making process around research results, and not the least, the institutionalization of a process of capacity-building in policy research.*

#### **5.4 Policy Maker Membership**

The potential of a network to influence policy depends, in part, upon the mixture of people involved and their commitment to the network. The potential for policy influence is greater when policymakers are included as network members. Evidence flows into policy and practice much more quickly when policymakers are members of the network, almost from its inception, when they participate actively throughout the process leading up to policy recommendations. Policymakers then have the opportunity to review the research, to engage with the pragmatic knowledge of experienced community members, and participate in the design and formulation of recommendations. As they participate, their policy frames mutate and their experience is enriched. Under these conditions, “transfer” becomes moot.

The experience of the Eastern and Central Africa Program on Agriculture Policy Analysis (ECAPAPA) (055024) suggests that involving different stakeholders in the process of designing the network enhances their participation in the network’s activities and their sense of ownership in the outputs. Another PO suggests that having policymakers participate in the network and actively share in the learning process is a more effective means of policy influence than simply sending them the final results. Finally, other IDRC staff have found that including policymakers in the network helps to identify additional audience for disseminating research findings and additional opportunities to influence policy.

Participants in the 2005 ALF (IDRC) indicated that involving policymakers in the research process is a way to secure research relevance; however, it can also be risky, as the research may become at the mercy of the ideology of whoever is in power at the time. It is essential to ensure diversity and ideally have a balance between policymakers and researchers. However, this type of situation may prove turbulent and difficult. Turnover in ministry staff may cause a project to fall off the agenda or require a major change in strategy. Regardless, another participant said efforts must be made to highlight the different roles of policymakers, business, community, and practitioners/researchers.

Discussing the ways in which structure can reflect power relationships, one PO noted that it makes a difference whether a network is horizontal or hierarchical in structure. For example, in the international water sector, there are a number of international organizations involved in a network (including researchers, policymakers and international agencies). The tendency is to ignore the different levels of power that exist inside such networks.

#### **5.5 Managing Conflict**

Networks dealing with policy issues will inevitably engage in discussions which bring forward value differences amongst members. However, these competing interests are not frequently discussed in network evaluations or studies.

**Networks seeking to engage in policy influence will need to establish guidelines for policy advocacy which seek to promote thorough discussion of issues, high quality research, and a respect for differing perspectives. They will also require the involvement of a skilled facilitator able to bring diverse stakeholders together within the network in pursuit of areas of common interest.**

As Sylvain Dufour noted during the ALF, great conflicts in the world have been defused via the work of scientific networks. He referred to the controversies over the Ganges and Nile Rivers. Scientific networks provide a neutral form of networking to influence policy.

#### **5.6 Structures for Capacity Building**

Older analyses of networks suggest that networks are generally not as effective as institutions at building capacity (Bernard 1996). Bernard reasons that this is due to the fact that networks are loose associations, generally without their own administrative functions and seldom have the organizational capacity to coordinate focused capacity building activities. She also suggests that networks also tend to have a high turnover in their membership, meaning that skills and individual capacities built within the network tend to be lost over time. However, more recent research into communities of practice indicates that mutual capacity building is

critical. Through peer learning, each of the parts becomes stronger.

In IDRC's experience, however, when networks do have capacity building as their goal, they tend to have institutions as the unit of membership rather than individuals. These findings predict two adaptive responses to networks that take on capacity building as a goal: networks for building capacity will tend to either be *networks of institutions* or the networks will solidify to become more *institutionalized*.

### *i. Network of Institutions*

The *Network for Equity in Health in Southern Africa* (EQUINET) (#100954) is a network that in its current phase has undertaken activities to build the capacity of its member institutions to engage in policy discussion.

In the initial phase of the project, a network of institutions was created in Southern Africa to begin promoting policies for more equitable provision of health care. Towards this end, it fostered the creation of productive relationships between professionals, civil society organizations and policy makers through various activities such as conducting research, initiating conferences, workshops, participating in Internet discussions, and providing input into the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Forums. A later phase of the project (2001-2004) stated that it intended to build on the achievements of its previous work through a number of activities, including a program of peer-reviewed small grants and commissioned papers relating to equity and health. Small grants and commissioned papers are ways of building capacities of individuals, and are also ways of initiating networks of researchers (Bernard, 1996). The intention of these activities appears to be to thicken the web of relationships between researchers and member institutions, but for such activities to be successful, institutions should be the focus of these activities.

### *ii. Networks that have been Institutionalized*

The institutional direction taken by the *Towards a Genetic Resources Policy Institute project* and the already institutional structure of the *Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies* (TIPS) network also seem to support Bernard's predictions. The unit of membership in both of these networks, unlike EQUINET, is a conglomeration of individuals and loosely configured groups. As such, it seems that both TIPS and the *Genetic Resources Policy Institute* have tended to gravitate towards stronger, more institutionalized structures. Again, both are focused on building capacity through networks, and both require stable institutional structures to do so.

*Towards a Genetic Resources Policy Institute* (100647) describes itself as a follow-up to SUB's Crucible II project. Crucible was a project that engaged multiple stakeholders in discussions around genetic resources, and was reputed to be very successful in bridging the gap between the concerns of local indigenous users of genetic resources and broader policy issues. The main contribution of the project is said to have been in clarifying the various points of view of the main players in this area, analyzing the legal and strategic issues, and to putting together a set of recommendations for decision makers.

The current project involves sustaining and maintaining the network created in the Crucible project group by institutionalizing an independent initiative on genetic resources policy. The intention is that this will be supported through the creation of a Secretariat housed within IDRC. The overall objectives of this initiative is to build the analytical and technical capacity of southern actors engaged in genetic resource related law and policy development, by i) assessing the demands made by developing country policy actors made for different research and capacity building services; ii) acting as a knowledge broker, linking demand with existing resources and iii) supporting recommendations for national law and policy where southern actors demands cannot be met by existing supply.

The second example of an institutionalized network arrangement is the former Corporate Project *Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies* (101039), which has since become the Trade and Industrial Policies Secretariat. Throughout both periods, TIPS has existed as a non-profit organization in South Africa, with the stated mission of helping South Africa meet its economic policy challenges. It seeks to do so by i) serving as an information clearinghouse for policy makers and researchers, ii) building capacity outside of government for applied policy research, and iii) increasing the absorptive capacity of policy makers for policy research.

## 6 LESSONS LEARNED

IDRC's review of networks engaged in policy influence indicates that networks are not all that different from other types of institutions seeking to influence policy. Much of what IDRC has learned in other contexts still holds true.

**If influencing policy is intended, then policy influence should be part of the network design, not an add-on at a later stage.** In both the G-24 and the LATN networks, the researchers and donors set out with the deliberate intention of funding research that would be of interest to policy makers. They sought ways to identify issues of importance, consulted with the policy and decision-makers throughout the project, and tried to seize policy windows as they emerged.

These are important lessons for all networks seeking to influence policy. To be most successful, the network will need to develop an influencing strategy that clearly outlines its activities over the next time period. Such a strategy should include - at a minimum - details on:

- What objectives the network hopes to achieve in terms of policy orientation, content and implementation
- Which policy-makers and members of the policy community the network will seek to engage to achieve these objectives
- What these policy community members currently know/believe; how they fit within existing formal and informal policy advocacy coalitions; what their decision-making context is
- What kinds of knowledge/research these policy-makers need in order to shift their thinking
- Timing of opportunities (e.g. events, policy processes, trainings, study tours, publications) to engage these policy-makers; while this includes traditional communications and dissemination activities, it also extends to knowing when and how to engage policy-makers in the planning and prototyping of the network's policy research
- Monitoring and evaluation plan to assess progress towards objectives and to enable revisions of the influencing strategy

**In effect, the influencing strategy will encompass three interwoven strategies dealing with: relationship management, knowledge management, and opportunities management. While windows of opportunity to influence policy open and close over time and depend on factors external to a network, networks need influencing strategies in place which will prepare them to take advantage of these policy windows when they open.**

The following sections outline some lessons learned through IDRC-supported networks regarding various aspects of an influencing strategy. It is important to note, however, that *these lessons do not necessarily reflect the most important aspects of an influencing strategy*. While there was little documented learning, for example, on how to undertake a policy stakeholder analysis - this is in fact a critical step in developing an influencing strategy. Similarly, there are few documented lessons regarding how to develop a research plan which takes emerging windows of opportunity into account. Knowing which projects to undertake when is a critical component of success. In LATN, a preoccupation is identifying issues that are likely to come to the fore so research is carried out before it is needed. And as another successful project noted:

*The...timing was exactly right for research-policy influence ... (and) clearly points to the opportunistic nature of policy influence: the research results matured at a time when governments at several levels in China were motivated ... and were willing to consider significant reforms and investment programs.*  
(Stephen Tyler - 040410)

### 6.1 Understand Your Network Members' Capacities

The types of policy influencing activities a network undertakes will strongly depend on the capacities of network - or potential network - members. Both the AFSSRN and the LATN projects were networks initially designed to build national research capacity in Latin American and Southeast Asian countries, given the low levels of pre-existing capacity to undertake these tasks. The AFSSRN began as a network of institutions created to build the national research capacity in several countries in Southeast Asia but by its fourth phase,

member researchers had shifted their focus to policy-oriented research and policy analysis:

*With this skill base in social sciences, maturity in conducting research, career advancement, confidence in themselves as researchers, and more acceptance of social science research by policy makers, Network members became more knowledgeable and experienced in how to conduct policy analysis and began to influence policy. This was especially true in Phase IV of the Network which emphasized policy analysis (Pomeroy, 2002: 39, emphasis in the original).*

By first attending to the issue of building research capacity, the IDRC-supported network was able to strengthen the skills of the researchers and the quality of the research produced. As policy makers recognized the quality of the research they became more accepting of the findings and could see how to use the information for developing new policies.

## **6.2 Understand Your Context**

Developing an influencing strategy requires undertaking a political analysis of the context within which the topic exists. For any network, the context changes over time and evolves, and a network can exist simultaneously in more than one context space.

### **6.2.1 Level(s) of Policy You Need to Influence**

Existing and new networks need to analyse their issue area to understand whether to focus their efforts at the local, state/provincial, national, regional and/or global level. The level of policy -- and number of policy units (e.g. # of countries, # of local governments) to focus on will depend on the political structures existing to deal with the issue as well as the openness of decision-makers at the different levels to change (see section 5.1.3). It is possible to focus on multiple levels of policy; however, this requires the development and resourcing of influencing strategies at each level.

Knowledge infuses policy most effectively through processes of social learning (Gross Stein 2003). Social learning, led by policy communities, or groups of networked experts that operate across boundaries and between the public and private sectors, has worked best at the global level. Global policy communities have played an important part in shaping the global agenda around protecting the environment, promoting global public health, advancing human rights, and redefining the terms of trade and investment. They have actively created both the demand for and the supply of knowledge and moved institutional agendas (Wapner 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Networks of women, for example, operating globally, created new knowledge of the status of women, the obstacles that they confront, and strategies that have succeeded in improving the rights of women. Operating as knowledge and advocacy networks, they engaged the United Nations to create a new global policy agenda.

The larger challenge is to move agendas down from the global to the local level where change happens and, here, policy communities have generally been less effective. Although global demand is likely to remain strong throughout the rest of the decade, the existing “supply” of knowledge comes directly up against local and national constraints. Beyond these constraints, governments with limited resources and competing demands are generally unreceptive to new evidence that requires significant policy change. Policy communities tend to cohere in response to situational factors, when they see a policy window about to open. Particularly in those developing countries where resource constraints are acute and growing, policy windows are likely to be tightly closed.

However, the lack of progress in influencing local policy can also be interpreted as the result of donor pressure. Some networks note that there is increasing pressure from funding agencies:

*forcing people in networks to take the macro level too seriously. The micro level is getting neglected. When really the main objective of networking is to improve impact at the micro level... you remove the ultimate motive of networking.... Especially more senior researchers are feeling forced to do work at this international or policy level, rather than at the grassroots; they can't work with local groups and organizations on local problems and also do research at this higher level. More are thinking of abandoning this level and going back... the opportunity costs are very high. (Asian Network Workshop)*

## 6.2.2 *Levels of Openness*

IDRC strategic evaluation on policy influence proposes five general contexts in which researchers and research networks find themselves in relation to government policy makers (Kavangh 2005).

### **Government demand**

In this welcoming context, policymakers want knowledge and are ready to act on it. There is an open window of policy influence. The primary concern is effectively communicating accurate results to the right decision-makers who are ready to act but need additional clarification. Usually this happens over a relatively short time frame and there is already a relationship of trust between the researcher or network and the policymakers. The network must provide information in a timely manner but is less concerned with how results are communicated, such as format and length. In addition, project teams or networks may not need to exert efforts on dissemination of research recommendations or on advocacy around the findings. In such cases, the likelihood of influence on policy is high

### **Government interest, leadership gap**

Here, the window of influence is only partly open. The issue is well known to the government and is considered important, but the structures to implement the research recommendations are not in place. Government has not yet taken the lead in deciding what to do, and no clear decision-making process is evident. Here, project team or network members must play a leadership role. They must pay special attention to their communication strategies with decision-makers, and cast about for institutional structures that can bring the recommendations to life. Otherwise, the research findings may never be taken up. In other words, a government's interest in research does not in itself guarantee its influence on policy. Giving the example of AIDS research in Africa, one IDRC staff member noted that some policymakers ask for research and then shelve the results. The political dimension must be taken into consideration.

### **Government interest, resources gap**

Again, the window of policy influence is partly open. The government does not dispute the issue and it acknowledges the need for the research. At this time, however, it has more pressing priorities, or a shortage of resources, be they human, technical or financial. In this case, leadership clearly resides within the project team or network. Before the team considers undertaking research in a resource-scarce environment, the staff should aim to move the issue up the official priority list. To move ahead a network must be very well funded so that it can build the capacity of both researchers and policymakers while conducting research at the same time.

### **Government neutral, research interest**

Once more, the window of influence is only slightly ajar. Either policymakers are simply not interested in the research program, or the issue may be controversial, or the issue may be “emergent” and yet to affect a key political constituency. Researchers, on the other hand, are keenly interested in proceeding with the project. In this context, vigorous advocacy is needed. The research group must promote the agenda, not just among decision-makers, but also among diverse audiences with a range of interests in the issue. The project team may also need to establish new institutional structures to move matters forward. Significant communication, creativity, and advocacy are required to put forward the issues and findings and present them effectively to both policymakers and the public. In this environment, the risk of failure is high. Many of the IDRC cases fell into this category. For example, Andres Ruiz (050292) noted that a lack of interest limited the influence of research on economic integration in Mercosur. In this project, the disinterest of policymakers prompted the project to target civil society rather than government.

### **Government disinterest, research interest**

Here, the window of influence is definitely shut. Policymakers are busy pursuing other priorities—in fact, may even be hostile to the issue—and no lobbyists or other groups are likely to change their views. In this environment, it may be said that the research team is ahead of its time, and therefore it must have a strong sense of purpose and a cold-eyed recognition that the project, from a policy influence viewpoint anyway, is risky.

### **6.2.3 External Factors**

As determined by a survey of IDRC projects, five dimensions of the research context that are external to projects and networks seem to impact the process of policy influence (Kavangh 2005). These factors relate to the situation in the country and in its decision-making bodies and to a large extent underlie the level of openness of a policy system. Not much can be done to change these factors, but taking them into consideration may help when deciding where and when to concentrate efforts.

The stability of decision-making institutions - In several cases, low policy influence appears to result from instability in the policy-making structures—for example, budgets are cut, or agencies are eliminated or restructured. In most instances this instability became apparent only after the research had been completed and it was time to implement the recommendations. Sometimes it may be possible to identify more stable decision-making structures—for example, higher or lower levels of government—and to focus energies on collaborating with these bodies.

The capacity of policymakers to use research - Policy influence may be less pronounced, or slower, where policymakers either need basic training to understand the research findings or they are torn by competing interests. It has happened that some policymakers provided with IDRC-funded research were unfamiliar with concepts used in it, and therefore could not use it. In such cases, researchers may have had to devote attention to the basic education of these officials. It has also happened that officials from developing countries that depend on the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank were timid in using research findings to propose changes in international financial policy-making.

Decentralization versus tight government control - Whether decentralization helps or hinders policy influence depends on whether the project aims speak to the level at which official decisions on the issue are made; that is to say, the project's overall framework should mesh smoothly with the country's basic constitutional structure. Likewise, tight central government control can be either beneficial or detrimental for policy influence depending on the nature of the project. The research team should take this into account in planning strategies and relationships. Instead of blueprinting the level of policy influence to be obtained in a project, it may be useful to investigate initially what level of influence can reasonably be expected given the circumstances.

Economic pressures on the government - In most cases where the government expressed strong interest in the research findings, it was responding to economic pressures. These examples suggest that the likelihood of research influence is greater if the project is linked to the economic interests of the country. When this is not so, the project team has to be ready to undertake advocacy work to prove the project's significance to policymakers.

Special opportunities in countries in transition - Two projects were carried out in countries in transition from communism: Ukraine and Viet Nam. These projects were effective not only in generating policy-relevant research and affecting policy, but also in teaching local researchers and policymakers new approaches to collaboration and decision-making. For example, IDRC partners in Ukraine observed that IDRC staff had brought with them a new culture of management characterized by open information sharing, consultation with stakeholders, and decision-making based on research evidence. It appears that IDRC-funded research has a potential to affect not only what policies are made but also the way they are made.

### **6.3 Establish a Communications and Dissemination Plan**

Research dissemination through networks is often intended to expand the marketplace of ideas where research findings become, for example, a vehicle for further innovation elsewhere or a catalyst for policy dialogue at home.

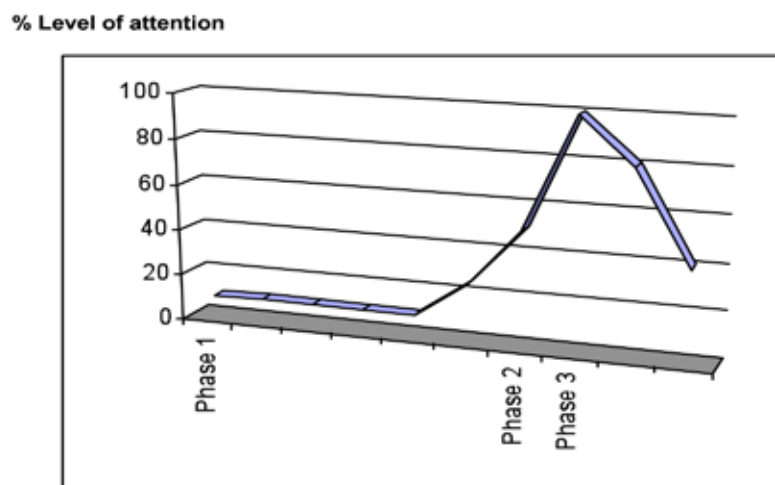
Policy-makers have limited time and attention, so evidence must be presented in attractive, easily understood packages, which speak to shared policy frames and experience. Networks that want to capture the attention of public policy leaders need to plan and budget for these kinds of activities, not only at the end of a process, but regularly throughout the process so that relationships with public policymakers develop and deepen (Seely Brown and Duguid 2002).

Through workshops, seminars, and the production of case studies and policy briefs networks can package and target research outputs to inform and influence policy-making. Especially where the credibility and

identity of networks are well established, networks may have far greater convening power than individual institutions further enhancing the reach and policy influence potential of its research results through conferences, workshops and other face-to-face opportunities. Even then, if the evidence has politically troubling consequences or contradicts established frames and experience, the evidence is often not reflected quickly in policy-making. Over time, however, cumulating evidence begins to have an impact, especially when leaders are reasonably accountable and policy-making processes are reasonably transparent

While it can be challenging to ensure that the media presents a balanced and refined view of research, media involvement can help to increase the influence of a network on policymakers. The greatest difficulty in using mass media to its best effect is working within the context of issue attention cycles. As noted in the upcoming GEO Resource Book (IISD, 2008), social attention to global environmental risks has tended to lag years and even decades behind scientific and technical developments. At some point, it rises relatively rapidly, remaining high for a short period of time, and then drops off again. When developing a media strategy, it is important to be aware of where the issue lies with respect to the attention cycle.

Figure 6: Phases of an Issue Attention Cycle (adapted from Social Learning Group 2001).



If the issue is in the first phase, in which most attention is in the scientific and technical realm, it will take more concerted effort to gain the attention of the general public, private and political interests. The media will thus likely not be very interested. During the second phase in which there is a rapid rise of public and political attention to the issue, there is a “window of opportunity” in which you can consider reframing the issue and attracting new people to become involved in dealing with the issue. If the issue is in the third phase, where the issue is on both the scientific and political agendas and there is considerable interaction between these communities, a mass media strategy may have its greatest results. Keep in mind, though, that a strategy developed at this stage will be less effective. The strategy must be developed early; it will just have its greatest impact at this stage by possibly mitigating the falling off of public attention and shortening the issue cycle by moving a relevant issue back into the public eye more frequently.

Findings from the IDRC case studies are consistent with the well-documented difficulties researchers face in their ability to communicate their findings in formats that enable policy makers to easily understand and absorb the information. Packaging, marketing and communicating solutions to complex problems and issues appears to be a skill that many researchers and development donors have overlooked. Yet researchers are expected to do more than just research: they are expected to be able to communicate and disseminate their findings to policy and decision-makers. As was noted by a researcher at a workshop to discuss the LATN and G-24 case studies, IDRC is now asking researchers to “be like Erin Brokovich... you have to have the legs, the looks, you have to be smart, you have to do the research... dissemination work, strategy work, publication work” (Maessen 2003).

## 6.4 Monitor and Revise Your Policy Influence Strategy

Lessons from implementation analysis suggest that networks are most effectively managed where they “plan for unpredictability”; when they attempt to reconceptualize:

*where boundaries and standards should be, rather than (to measure) mechanical achievement of existing standards. It means that management takes responsibility for the overall performance of a system of policy [or innovation] negotiation rather than for the success of individual activities. Failure is less of a risk... if policy making is seen as a series of experiments, where occasional failures are an acceptable fact if they are accompanied by reflective learning. (Armstrong 1995)*

Fortunately, IDRC has a great deal of experience with Outcome Mapping - an evaluation methodology particularly suited to planning and monitoring complex non-linear development policy interventions. Outcome mapping focuses on monitoring identified boundary partners for observable changes in their actions resulting from their interactions with a network or project. These changes are ranked by level of difficulty in achievement from expect to see, like to see, to love to see. When working with policy audiences, it is reasonable:

- to expect to see policy makers accessing information and research from a network,
- to like to see a level of interaction and relationships forming with and between members of the policy community which provides the social context for learning and change, and
- to love to see policy makers advocating for policy change based on the evidence available.

Outcome mapping can help networks to determine when and how to change the mix of activities in order to achieve their goals. It can also be useful in reminding networks of the centrality of policy stakeholder analysis through periodic updating of boundary partners and boundary partner clusters.

However, in addition to outcome mapping, networks will still need to undertake a continuous process of environmental and contextual scanning to determine their upcoming research plans. These scans need to include not only emerging issues within the policy area, but an understanding of the other factors which contribute to the degree to which the policy area itself is a priority on current policy agendas.

## 6.5 Stick With It

The notion of persistence is strong within the Centre: building capacity to do research takes a long time and that it's not a single project effort. Short term, rapid results are seldom seen. As the Asian Fisheries case illustrated, persistent support over 14 years provided network members the experience, expertise and confidence to conduct policy analysis research. It also implies that support needs to go beyond “the project trap”, when donor agencies regard aid and support as individual projects. In terms of programming, donors might consider persistence in terms of strategic funding – looking for projects that collectively build upon each other and which aim at particular policies but from different angles, or sectors.

Another aspect of persistence is the changing roles of researchers. As researchers gain skills and knowledge, and as they become more aware of and connected to the policy process in their field, demand for their input increases. Over and over, the evaluator of AFSSRN found evidence of researchers who had become policy makers and continued to use evidence in their policy decisions. Providing support to the research community to engage with policy does not always assume specific linkages; but rather, over time builds their capacity to engage.

## 7 CONCLUSION

Research networks can and do influence policy. However, influence is not straightforward, cannot be assumed from the beginning, and demands strong leadership and vision in research and research capacity building. ‘Hurry up and wait’ seems a good slogan. Be ready when the policy windows open by maintaining strong networks which pull in ideas from other policy regimes, be ahead of the decision makers in issue identification and build a strong cadre of researchers who understand and rally to these policy issues.

The challenge for the Centre, as well as for others who support and carry out research, is to deepen its understanding of the interrelated issues about capacity building, its view of project life cycles, and the intent to influence policy. At the beginning of this study, some Centre staff and management questioned whether or

not there was a trade-off between building capacity and influencing policy. So far, its findings suggest that this is not the case – building the capacity of researchers to better understand policy and decision-making processes leads to research that policy makers can use to make informed decisions, or use the evidence or knowledge produced in the formulation of policies.

The question for IDRC may not be one of ‘trade-offs’ but rather timing – short term duration of projects with one-time funding versus thinking of projects more strategically in terms of being a long-term investment. As the AFSSRN case illustrates so well, capacity building does have legitimate and valid policy influences, and can lead ultimately to policy changes; either through policy makers better understanding of the issues and of the research, or through researchers becoming policy makers themselves.

There is no formula, no recipe for knowledge utilization in the policy process. Sustaining networks requires considerable time, effort and resources. It also requires a membership that has a need for the network and is able to use it for some purpose.

In addition, **there is a disconnect between the way donors think about policy influence, and the way IDRC designs and funds projects.** The former is clearly seen as multi-path, uncertain and changing over time. The latter is still fundamentally linear in process.<sup>4</sup> That is, when a project is granted support, there is a tendency to “wait and see” if the research is going to be of sufficient quality and then find the funds needed for communication and dissemination activities. As a result, dissemination is often too late for policy influence.

This approach comes from years of experience and the knowledge that in research and innovation not all efforts are going to be successful. But it is also the legacy of a project management approach that comes from infrastructure systems where first you build the infrastructure and then you use it. In the implementation of research for development the issues evolve over time and change as IDRC proceeds. It is not a linear process of research-findings-dissemination-change. Rather, researchers need to be engaging with new methods of project support that need to be explored and which allow the elements of the research to be exposed to the relevant communities on an ongoing basis. This might be as simple as creating multi-year flexible budgets and making communication and dissemination funding available from Year One. But it is the mindset and assumptions behind the project management approaches in use that are much more complex to change.

Developing appropriate support systems and project management systems that ensure accountability - but that are also agile in their ability to seize opportunities as they emerge - is not an easy undertaking.

The way forward:

- IDRC needs to adopt an action-oriented framework for developing policy influencing strategies. This could be based on ODI’s policy entrepreneur work, IISD’s influencing strategies, or Everett Lindquist’s Evaluation of Policy Influence. It then needs to undertake a serious programme of capacity building for its staff and partners to implement this framework across all networks and projects.
- IDRC needs to understand the differences between simply creating policy-relevant research, influencing policy, and supporting policy implementation. In a world of increased information flows, simply creating policy-relevant research is not good enough. IDRC-supported networks must aim higher towards policy influence and possibly beyond. Some staff have noted that once a policy is changed it is up to the country to implement the change. Often times, they do not have the resources to do so, and the program, project, or policy fails. Each programme area will need to determine which of these policy approaches is best suited to the issue context.
- IDRC’s research partners need a better understanding of their own governance systems and government processes. IDRC often does not understand those systems and processes well enough itself, or at all, and that by training or supporting research partners, IDRC would also benefit.

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4 This issue was brought up for discussion at a 2-day retreat that was held for the Advisory Committee (February 20 & 21, 2003)

<sup>i</sup> In order to preserve the readability of this analytical review paper, credits for analyses and examples from several key papers have been included here rather than cited each time in the text. Many thanks to these authors for their excellent and intensive literature and project reviews

Lindquist (2001):

- Section 2.1: Figure and analysis of Pross drawn from p 6-7
- Section 2.2.1 -2.2.2: Analysis drawn from p 9-13
- Section 2.3: Figure and analysis of scope of policy inquiry drawn from p 4-5
- Section 2.4.1: Figure and analysis drawn from p 20-21
- Section 2.4.2: Analysis drawn from p 15-16
- Section 2.4.3: Analysis drawn from p 16
- Section 2.4.4: Analysis drawn from p 17-19

Gillespie (2003)

- Section 3.2: Analysis drawn from p 32-33
- Section 5.3: Analysis and some examples drawn from p 28-30
- Section 5.6: Analysis and some examples drawn from p 30-33

Adamo (2004):

- Section 3.1.1: Examples drawn from p 29-30
- Section 3.1.2: Some examples drawn from p 30-32
- Section 3.1.3: Some examples drawn from p 32-35

Currie-Alder (2005)

- Section 3.1.2: rPCR examples drawn from p 3
- Section 3.1.3: rPCR examples drawn from p 4
- Section 5.3: rPCR examples drawn from p 5
- Section 5.4: rPCR examples drawn from p 4

Carden and Neilsen (2005)

- Section 4.1-4.3: Case summaries drawn from p 150-154
- Section 5.2: Analysis drawn from p 156-157
- Section 6.5: Analysis drawn from p 157
- Section 7: Analysis of support systems drawn from p 159-160

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## APPENDIX B: ACRONYMS

<b>AFSSRN</b>	Asian Fisheries Social Science Research Network
<b>ALF</b>	Annual Learning Forum
<b>CAD</b>	Canadian Dollar
<b>CBNRM</b>	Community-Based Natural Resource Management
<b>ECAPAPA</b>	Eastern and Central Africa Program on Agriculture Policy Analysis
<b>ED</b>	Executive Director
<b>EQUINET</b>	Regional Equity in Health Research Network
<b>G-24</b>	Group of 24
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technologies
<b>IDRC</b>	International Development Research Centre
<b>IFIs</b>	International Financial Institutions
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>LATN</b>	Latin America Trade Network
<b>MERCOSUR</b>	Southern Common Market
<b>MIMAP</b>	Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic Policies
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Government Organization
<b>NWG</b>	Network Working Group
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>OLISTICA</b>	Observatorio Latinoamericano del Impacto Social de las TIC
<b>PI</b>	Programme Initiative (IDRC)
<b>PO</b>	Programme Officer (IDRC)
<b>SADC</b>	South African Development Community
<b>SANFEC</b>	South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture
<b>SEARRAG</b>	Southeast Asian Research Review and Advisory Group
<b>SUB</b>	Sustainable Use of Biodiversity
<b>TIPS</b>	Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization

## APPENDIX C - LINDQUIST FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATION OF POLICY INFLUENCE

An evaluation framework for assessing the policy influence of IDRC projects should be expanded beyond a narrow focus on research, anticipate the complexities and dynamics of policy-making at the national and local levels, and identify the full range of actors involved in policy deliberations. The framework should inject realism about role and impact of research in particular in policy debates and political processes. There are many actors, often very well resourced and positioned, seeking to influence policy-makers – and this does not include the advocates of many other worthy issues competing for the attention of governments, citizens, and the media. Moreover, policy inquiry proceeds in a conflictual, value-laden environment.

We should have realistic expectations about the potential for influence. Ultimately, whether in developed or developing countries, supporting policy inquiry is an act of faith: we build policy capacity not because we believe that there will be measurable and unambiguous impacts on government policy, but rather, because we believe that having more rather than less policy inquiry is better for furthering dialogue, debate, and the sharing of ideas from elsewhere. The majority of the ideas or innovations generated will never become policy or will get “out-competed”, for whatever reason, by other ideas or imperatives.

Assessing policy influence, then, is typically about carefully discerning intermediate influences, such as expanding capacities of chosen actors and broadening horizons of others that comprise a policy network. As suggested by the work of Pross, Sabatier, and others, this requires developing a full view of the range of actors involved in a project’s “domain”, the nature of relationships among those actors, and a very good sense of how that network and policy field has evolved over time.

Displaying a framework for strategic evaluation, he noted that the quality of the case studies was amazing. This framework lists questions under three headings:

- Describe the policy problem and the nature/evolution of the associated network.
- Describe the intention and scope of the IDRC project.
- Describe the project cycle, key outputs and events, and policy influence.

In order to better manage projects, one must be clear about the objectives, resources, and expectations. The continued “layering on” of additional expectations to already crowded agendas is frustrating. Key questions to consider regarding goals and inputs include the following:

- Do you intend to have any policy impact?
- What is the level of funding?
- What people will you involve?
- Do you plan to engage elites or communities?
- Do you plan to be a broker of some kind, or throw in your lot with a coalition of interests for a given project?
- What is your time horizon (2–20 years)?
- Are these new partners, or is this a well-developed relationship?
- How can contracting rules be structured at the beginning of the relationship so you can goals can be better accomplished?

Lindquist then displayed a comprehensive outline for “making the most of research.” Considerations include goals and inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. He noted that there has been some concern that IDRC’s interest in assessing policy impact reflects a desire to move away from research and focus more on policy. It is important to be clear that IDRC is still focused on promoting high-quality research.

He then outlined key project dimensions and possible elements, noting that it is important to be aware of the tradeoffs in each area:

**Research:**

- Experienced researchers
- Training junior, local ones
- Building receptor capacity
- Tapping into or generating original research?
- Building epistemic communities: local, regional, international?
- Pilot projects to test concepts, and new approaches

It is difficult to balance efficiency with appropriate investment in capacity. Also, it should be anticipated that some talented and experienced people will join government. In fact, this ought to be a goal

**Data:**

- Researchers, communities, government agencies?

Reliable data is a separate enterprise. Research can tap into existing data sources or may need new material; but investing in new streams of data is a tradeoff.

**Convocation:**

- Workshops and conferences
- Researchers, communities, decision-makers?
- Formal versus informal events and discussions

What is the purpose of involving researchers in this type of communication? How much time should they spend on it? How formalized is the process?

**Communications:**

- Planning (ex ante, in parallel, ex post, emergent)
- Targets (elites, researchers, communities, etc.)
- Capacities (researchers, partners, IDRC, etc.)

There is a tradeoff between doing a project perfectly and sponsoring more work. Is there a role for a partner institution (e.g. one that may take the research in an unexpected direction)? Should there be a planned ex ante? All these decisions are planning decisions at the front end.

**Leadership and management:**

- Entrepreneurial, flexible
- Engenders trust, builds credibility
- Consultative, builds networks
- Project management

Many case studies look at projects over a period of time. Leaders come and go, and the fortunes of the projects wax and wane. There have to be appropriate expectations. Although IDRC is good at attracting quality people, it should not set up a regime that counts on them always being there. IDRC's expectations of its leaders are quite high: it expects them to build networks on the ground, to build epistemic networks with other researchers in other countries, and to develop informal networks in tricky political circumstances. Are people with these skills also good systematic researchers? Do they have the time to do a solid five-year project? There are many tradeoffs to consider.

**Policy windows:**

- Regularity: anticipated versus unanticipated?
- Locus: national, local, international?
- Policy-making: clear or murky?

Lindquist then discussed outputs, noting that these can include events, studies, options, researchers, officials, communities, and Web sites.

This model still evaluates the project on its own terms, but it provides the tools for a good discussion about expectations for policy impacts.

**Critical perspectives include:**

- The importance of time: What are the time horizons? What is the minimal amount of time needed to roll out a project?
- The question of “fit”: How will the mix of these elements work in different countries at different times? The answer will change IDRC’s strategy, which should change its expectations.
- Network management: Is IDRC a reflective practitioner when it comes to network management? Are program officers learning from each other as much as possible and being supported by their institution?
- International dimensions
- IDRC capabilities
- Tradeoffs, choices, and risk

There are potential tradeoffs in improving research, Lindquist noted. One priority can be to train and sensitize researchers who don’t know a lot about the policy context. Other projects focus on building the technical capacity to generate better researchers. These are distinctive exercises. With a limited budget and time frame, one has to make choices.

Lindquist concluded with some strategic improvements to consider:

- Develop realistic expectations for research.
- Identify the requisite roles for desired policy impact.
- Better structure contracts at the outset.
- Ensure that project officers/leaders are good network and system facilitators.
- Provide policy/process training to research teams.
- Maintain commitment to high-quality research.
- Build communications into research planning (have stories ready to tell Treasury Board that go beyond the numbers).
- Engage target audiences as early as possible.
- Cultivate informal networks at all levels.
- Do regular scanning for policy and other “windows.”
- Tap into regional/international networks and resources.
- Question if short-term research projects should be done at all. Opportunistic short-term projects should be weighed against the need for longer-term projects.
- Cultivate trust and open communication.
- Balance “forays” with sustained “investments.”
- Continue to facilitate learning across projects