

## **2004 DSA Annual Conference workshop report**

### **1.5 Promoting Evidence-based Development Policy**

Coordinator: John Young (ODI)

Panel: Diane Stone (CEU) (Chair); Dylan Winder (DFID); Dominic Furlong (IDS); Naved Chowdhury (ODI)

Participants: around fifty people attended the workshop

#### **Introduction**

Diane Stone introduced the workshop: first, John Young will give a brief presentation of the RAPID Framework – an analytical tool developed by the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) group at ODI, designed to promote understanding of how evidence can be bridged into policy. In particular, researchers hoping to influence policy are encouraged to use the framework to answer questions such as: who to target; how to work; and how to cooperate in a Southern context. The presentation will then be followed by brief feedback statements from the three other panellists. Time will be allowed for questions and comments at the end of the session.

#### **John Young – Introduction to the RAPID Framework**

JY first presented definitions for

- *research: a systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge;*
- *policy: a purposive course of action.*

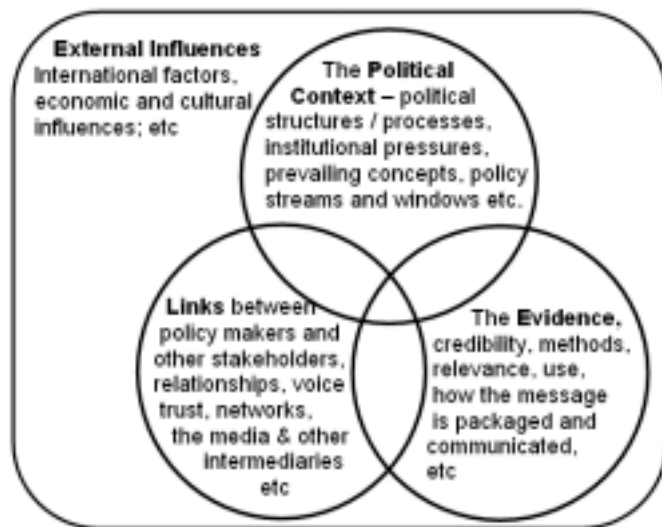
Taking these very broad definitions and focusing on developing country contexts, he then addressed the question: how do research and evidence feed into policy processes?

Existing theory on the issue of Bridging Research into Policy (BRP) is predominantly Northern. Nevertheless, there are several concepts from this theory that may also be relevant in a Southern context, in particular: “policy narratives”; “street level bureaucrats”; and “social epidemics”.

The issue is highly complex, and there are so many factors to consider that it is difficult for researchers to plan a clear strategy for how to influence policy. Hence, the RAPID Framework is produced as a practical tool for conceptualising where you stand as a researcher – it is hoped that this can then act as a basis for planning a specific, context-relevant strategy.

The RAPID Framework identifies four key factors that influence the policy process: the political context; evidence; links; and external factors. The interplay of these factors can be drawn in a diagram as follows:

## The RAPID Framework



Real life processes can also be mapped onto the framework. For example, policy analysis falls between *evidence* and *political context*; scientific exchange falls between *evidence* and *links*; and campaigning falls between *links* and the *political context*. Researchers aiming to influence policy should aim to stand somewhere in the middle of this interplay.

RAPID has been developing the applications of this framework through workshops and case studies. It is important to acknowledge that every situation is different and that this is an ideal model. However, it has been possible to draw together some general points of advice for researchers. For each of the four key factors in the framework, JY presented key points with regard to three questions: what researchers need to know; what researchers need to do; and how to do it.

In conclusion, JY noted that research does matter, but perhaps not as much as you may think. The process of policy influence is multi-faceted, lengthy and complex, and researchers need to acknowledge and engage with all four key factors in the RAPID Framework. This presentation has only been a brief overview of the work at RAPID, but for further detail, please consult the RAPID website<sup>1</sup> and the recently published book: *Bridging Research and Policy in Development: Evidence and the change process* Court, Hovland and Young eds. (2005) ITDG Publishing.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.odi.org.uk/rapid](http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid)

## Feedback from panellists

**Dominic Furlong:** DF presented a response to the RAPID Framework from his experience from both the donor perspective and also with regard to communications services.

For donors, he called for:

- Greater consultation with stakeholders
- Making research funding more open to the South (for example, by better advertising).
- The production of best practice guides for researchers aiming to influence policy. These guides should be issued alongside calls for research proposals.
- More thorough monitoring and evaluation of how successfully research findings are disseminated.
- Improving the accessibility of the DFID website.

With regard to communications systems for research reporting, he highlighted key points from his experience working with ID21. ID21 aims to promote the dissemination of research by using a variety of channels that are easily digestible and encourage feedback, in particular:

- The production of *Research Highlights* – summaries of UK-funded development research. These summaries are quality checked by authors.
- Insights – a world-wide regular print product.
- Email news alerts.

**Dylan Winder:** DW presented his feedback from a DFID policy-maker's perspective. First, he pointed out that DFID is starting to implement many of DF's recommendations for donors. He encouraged people to read through DFID's new *Research Funding Framework*<sup>2</sup>, which addresses many issues relevant to this debate. He commented that the RAPID Framework was a very useful tool.

He identified two key issues:

- Opportunism – for example, it is important to capitalise on the fact that right now Science and Technology are high up on both the domestic and international agendas.
- Communication – the new Funding Framework stresses the need to improve communications throughout the research process, especially in developing country contexts.

Furthermore, he commented that:

- It is important to improve developing country access to research.
- It would be useful to develop a new action research programme in order to develop our understanding of the links between policy-making and the grassroots level.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/research/newresearch.asp>

- DFID wants to engage more with civil society. It is currently looking at ways to scale up successful communications initiatives.
- Horizon Scanning is perhaps a useful approach when developing new research strategies.
- In many developing countries, the policy-makers' commitment to Science and Technology is weak.

He concluded that promoting the use of research-based policy was a big opportunity to improve the lives of the poor. However, the underlying issue remains problems of governance.

**Naved Chowdhury:** NC presented his feedback from a Bangladeshi perspective. First, he identified several reasons why BRP often does not work at ground level:

- Research outputs remain within academic circles and do not reach the ears of policy-makers.
- Research outputs are too complex and are not tailored to meet the needs of policy-makers.
- Researchers are not respected by policy-makers.
- Many politicians are in fact not policy-makers. Researchers need to be more strategic about which individuals they target.

Research itself is often poor, and there is a need for capacity-building of researchers. At present, key problems are identified as: researchers are resource-poor; research appointments are often political; research conducted by NGOs is often not very rigorous; international donors tend to sponsor training that is not relevant to the specific developing country context; the brightest and best individuals are often enticed to work in the private sector.

Despite, this rather gloomy picture, there are still success stories – for example, the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute. NC concluded that researchers need to be consistent, persistent, strategic and patient, and also that there should be mutual respect between researchers and policy-makers.

### **Key Questions and Comments from the floor**

- Active participation in BRP initiatives is not optional, it is a duty for both researchers and policy-makers.
- The issue of capacity seems to be missing from the framework – it is crucially important, especially within a developing country context.
- The RAPID Framework presented here is too simplistic – the reality is more dynamic, with individuals constantly shifting roles between the various spheres.
- There should be more incentives for academics to disseminate their research.
- Donors should devolve more of their budgets to researchers in developing countries.

- A narrow strategic focus on achieving the MDGs entails the risk of overlooking other important research issues.
- In the case of Uganda, policy-makers and researchers are clearly working in isolation. As in Bangladesh, key problems with research relate to low funding, low prestige, and over-complex packaging.
- It is important to be highly sensitive to the political context. For example, in a 2-party democracy, politicians may be keen to maintain their mutual differences – donors pursuing a consensus must be aware of this sort of situation.
- DFID has recently been looking at Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) as component of commissioning research. PSIA encourages a focus on participation and on developing capacity.
- Researchers in Development Studies do not want to stay in an ivory tower. By default, researchers in this field are interested in making a change.
- Are there methods and tools to help measure the various components of the RAPID Framework?
- The task of policy influence is very complex and daunting for an individual researcher, but as a community, it is possible to address these issues.
- There is a general assumption in this debate that BRP is a matter of helping researchers (academics) to influence policy-makers. But in fact much research takes place *within* governments – how good is this data?

### **Final comments from the panel**

NC: It is telling that the Uganda experience reinforces the Bangladesh experience.

DW: There is a need to fund a full range of capacity-building initiatives for Southern researchers.

DF: There is indeed a need to improve incentives for researchers to disseminate their research. In view of these BRP issues, researchers should question their identity as “researchers”.

JY: This morning’s presentation of the RAPID Framework was only a very brief, simplistic overview. RAPID does indeed take account of the dynamic and complex nature of policy processes, and furthermore respects the fact that every case is different.

Regarding the comment that capacity is not in the framework: yes it is – capacity is a quality of all four of the key factors.

Regarding the question about tools and methods to measure the various components of the framework: so far, we have used a case study approach and also historical episode studies; now we are looking at using “Outcome Mapping”, a tool developed by IDRC. Please see the RAPID website for more specific and situational detail.