



ODI/INASP Research-Policy Symposium

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Summary

The ODI-INASP research policy symposium followed on from the CSPP and INASP's respective annual meetings. It brought together 20 partners of the Civil Society Partnership Programme (CSPP) with 55 members of the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Periodicals (INASP), from a diverse mix of organisations around the world. The two networks share a lot in common, and their purposes could be seen as complementary – while [INASP](#) works to make important research and information freely available in the public domain, the [CSPP](#) and [RAPID](#) are looking to get that evidence and research to be the foundations of public policy.

The first day included a series of overview presentations of the research-policy interface:

- **Dr Syeda Tanveer Kausar Naim** – a consultant with COMSTECH, Pakistan, talked about the work she was involved with in reforming Pakistani higher education;
- **Duncan Green** – Head of Research, Oxfam UK, presented his experience of using research to influence policy at Oxfam;
- **Nicolas Ducote** – Director of Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth, Argentina (CIPPEC), described the key factors in play when looking to promote evidence based policy processes;
- **Buhle Mbambo-Thata** – University of South Africa Library Services, spoke on evidence-based information practice (EBIP) in developing countries;
- **Dylan Winder** – DFID, UK, talked about the extent to which DFID's policy is evidence based.

...case studies about how people have used evidence to inform specific policy issues:

- **Dra. Concepción Díaz Mayans** – Cuban Ministry of Higher Education, outlined the influence of research on measuring research and innovation in the Cuban Universities;
- **Bola Fajemirokun** – Development Initiatives Network, Nigeria, spoke on gender mainstreaming and realising women's rights;
- **Rashed Titumir** – Unnayan Onneshan, Bangladesh, presented research surrounding trade negotiations and livelihoods;

expertly facilitated by **Tony Dogbe** from Participatory Development Associates in Ghana.

...an 'open mic' session where participants shared the lessons learned from their work, and discussed the emerging themes surrounding these issues.

...all pulled together at the end of the day by **Andrew Barnett** the Director for The Policy Practice, in Brighton, Brighton.

The second day provided an opportunity for participants to take part in three different workshops to learn about some of the tools for (i) understanding political context, (ii) research tools to generate influential evidence, and (iii) methods to ensure that local content reaches policymakers.

There was a feeling that this symposium contributed to participants' understanding by providing new perspectives on various issues with which they work everyday.

The main lessons shared in the symposium were:

- A large amount can be achieved when your organisation is backed by influential political actors. To achieve this backing it is important to work to build trust, be aware of informal relationships and channels of influence among powerful figures, and to understand the main pressures which move them (e.g. globalisation).
- It can often be useful to 'talk the language' of the policymakers and governments, and adapt your message to highlight those factors which are most likely to move them. However, this can sometimes be not desirable or even not possible as it may dilute or lose the force of your message.
- CSOs must work hard to retain their independence in the face of seeking funding for their research: to do this, it may be necessary to bargain with funding agencies based on the fact that *they* need *you* to carry out the study, and be prepared to turn work down if it would not be possible to carry out a fair and unbiased job. Another way of enhancing independence is to look to diversify funding sources and other ways of bringing funds in (e.g. consultancy, training).
- In contexts without freedom of information laws, it is important to form relationships and build trust. You need to patiently explain your purposes in order to get the required information.
- Building up a reputation for solid research puts your organisation in a strong position, making it more likely that your message be taken seriously.
- The timing of presenting evidence is extremely important. CSOs must make strategic use of policymaking entry points, and other opportunities for enhanced influence.
- Since politicians and journalists' timetables often mean there isn't time to prepare research after you have been invited for a meeting or an interview, it can be useful to have ready a stock of knowledge on important topics to 'take off the shelf' for these opportunities.
- To fit your work around influential groups' timetables you may need to be prepared to target your activities to their way of working, for example carrying out training for the media at the weekend, or holding meetings with politicians late in the evenings.
- For enhanced media impact it is important that academics/researchers have a unified voice over an issue.
- When packaging research for the media it is useful to use narrative research and 'killer facts'.
- In all cases it is important to consult with communities, to harness their understanding and knowledge of their own situation and use your research to amplify their needs and concerns.

Session 1: Introduction

John Young welcomed participants to the symposium, introduced ODI and the CSPP and outlined the topic of bridging research and policy. Sarah Gywnn (INASP) welcomed participants, commenting that the INASP and CSPP communities had a lot in common.

Session 2: Keynote addresses

John introduced the keynote speakers as experts at translating research into policy and practice, in very different contexts. Dr. Syeda Tanveer Kausar Naim, a consultant who has worked as advisor to the Pakistan government, and Duncan Green, the Head of Research for Oxfam UK.

Dr. Naim made a presentation about the work she was involved with in reforming Pakistani higher education (see [presentation](#)). It is increasingly clear that knowledge, information and learning are crucial for development; however, in Pakistan as in many developing countries there were a number of large challenges faced. The strong political will to reform the system, including the personal interest of President Musharraf, saw the higher education budget increased 1200%. A higher education commission was formed in consultation with the government, the provinces and education experts. Some of the factors used to persuade the government included highlighting the economic growth of other Asian countries which bore similarities to Pakistan before they increased their spending on higher education. One key factor helping to drive the reform was the placement of a group of top scientists in the planning division, which was headed by a 'friendly technocrat'. Looking to build the system from the bottom up as well as taking a top-down view, the reforms resulted in a large number of programmes and achievements, including a digital library programme set up in partnership with INASP.

Duncan Green outlined his experience using research to influence policy at Oxfam (see [presentation](#)). Sound research can provide an INGO with credibility with decision makers and influentials, and a coherent campaign narrative, as well as confidence in the validity of their message. Most of Oxfam's work is secondary 'narrative' research, looking to bridge the journalist-academic divide, using literature reviews and case studies to help provide 'killer facts' and recommendations for decision makers, backed up by strong media launches. Duncan outlined key lessons for successful campaigning, arguing that when governments do take on board NGOs' messages it is usually because they 'talk their language', adapt their message to the various timetables the government must work to, move and motivate the public, and spot emerging issues before civil servants. Constraints for NGO's research use include the prevalence of policy-based research and that to talk in the language of many of the institutions you are trying to influence can often mean losing the force of your message.

Q & A

- *Carlos A:* (to Dr. Naim) How did you get the government to commit to a 10 year plan?
- *Dr. Naim:* The president's interest and commitment was key, as was the commitment of the Minister of Planning.
- *Sin:* How did you get the time with the president and how did you get him to agree?
- *Dr. Naim:* He already 'wanted to listen', he is good personal friends with a top scientist. Also, the team of scientists placed in the Ministry of Planning was important, as was highlighting the advantaged conferred to Korea by their investment in higher education, which helped move the president due to the globalisation pressures he faces.

Session 3: Plenary presentations – State of the art approaches to evidence-based policy processes

The first presentation in this session was made by Nicolas Ducote, Director of the Centre for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC), Argentina (see [presentation](#)). He described the key factors in play when looking to promote evidence-based policy processes. Evidence should be used because it can improve policy, enhance public debate and allow for more rigorous testing of social hypotheses. It can be used by CSOs, the media, the

private sector, government, etc., to gain access to policy processes, to provide legitimacy, sustain credibility, and to translate policy into peoples' everyday concern. The main challenges faced are the lack of capacity, time, funds or knowledge, and inaccessible or corrupt policy processes. Lessons are emerging about the packaging of evidence, the power of collaboration and of a thorough understanding of political context. Nicolas recommended organisations concentrate on legitimacy and reputation, sustainability of efforts, strategic use of policymaking entry points, effective research management, and strategic and permanent communications.

The next speaker was Buhle Mbamba-Thata of the University of South Africa Library Services, who gave a presentation on evidence-based information practice (EBIP) in developing countries (see [presentation](#)). Evidence-based librarianship is a relatively new concept, especially in developing countries; although there are a number of definitions, the most useful is possibly 'a means to improving the information practice by asking questions as well as finding, critically appraising and incorporating research evidence from library science into daily practice and decision making'. Improving the level of practice within libraries is one aspect of the approach, but the improving of information practice within a given field (e.g. agriculture) is most relevant to the symposium topic. There is a call for EBIP in developing countries, however there is very limited evidence of it, possibly because it is not an area of activity, or possibly because it is off the print radar and not being documented where it is occurring. What is clear is that EBIP is required, as it is important for policy formulation and decision making, particularly in situations with scarce resources. The main challenge faced by the information professional involves working to tap indigenous and tacit knowledge. However there *are* some documented applications and a number of possible intervention strategies, and it is important for the information profession to inform policy processes.

The third presentation was made by Dylan Winder of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), about the extent to which DFID's policy is evidence based (see [presentation](#)). Recent developments at DFID have moved the organisation to focus more on research, with an internal think tank for informing policy and a larger research budget than the World Bank. Against the background of policymakers receiving training to be more effective consumers of science and evidence, DFID is looking to make its policy research more demand led (around events such as PRSPs). However, a select committee report into the use of science in DFID was critical and highlighted clear room for improvement; DFID has responded to this by involving Southern researchers and using the chief scientific advisor as a champion within the organisation. Dylan continued by outlining the Central Research Department's strategy for ensuring policy-relevance of their work, which includes a minimum budget level for communications in every research project to help ensure that research is accessible, and collaborations with international organisations to strengthen the context for using research.

Session 4: Case Studies 'chat show'

This session began with introductions from the host, Tony Dogbe, followed by the three participants presenting their case studies. Dra. Concepcion Diaz Mayans of the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education outlined the influence of research on measuring research and innovation in the Cuban Universities (see [presentation](#)). Research and technical innovation is one of the key results areas of the ministry's strategic planning, and the Division of Higher Education devised a project to produce new tools for the assessment of institutional performance of universities and research centres, which resulted in an improved system of indicators. The context behind this policy change is the government national scientific policy, which sets guidelines for Cuban scientific institutions, and the need to improve strategic planning for this using better measurement of the efficiency in the fulfilment of these aims. The research involved a review of international experience, and seminars and workshops held with experts and policymakers, and it resulted in the design of a system of indicators which are now being implemented.

The second speaker was Bola Fajemirokun of the Development Initiatives Network (DIN), Nigeria, who spoke on the topic of gender mainstreaming and realising women's rights (see [presentation](#)). DIN recognised that they are not strong in advocacy, so they formed a partnership with the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre, an advocacy NGO, to help communicate their policy analysis,

which was carried out to coincide with the launch of phase 1 of the country's PRSP. The research focused on what actions are necessary to improve women's economic position in Nigeria, and focused on national policies, social and related legislation, institutions and poverty reduction programmes. This resulted in gender targets being specified and gender mainstreaming being promoted in the new phase of the PRSP, although there was no evidence of mainstreaming occurring in the various institutions. One of the key challenges was the absence of freedom of information laws and the lack of availability of up-to-date sex disaggregated data from public institutions; the lack of female involvement in political decision-making was also influential.

The third presentation was made by Rashed Titumir of the Unnayan Onneshan – Centre for Development Alternatives, Bangladesh, on research surrounding trade negotiations and livelihoods (see [presentation](#)). The organisation held dialogues with communities to allow them to set the agenda for the research, which resulted in research being carried out into the impact of the World Bank and government policies on communities and farmers. The key messages coming from this research were that the shrinking government support was threatening the livelihood of small farmers; that growing subsidies in exporting countries is marginalising small farmers; and that a fundamental shift was needed in the World Trade Organisation. In this ongoing project, the research is being disseminated using letters and briefings to policymakers, working with the media, social mobilisation and holding consultation meetings. One key lesson which can be drawn from this study at present is the difficulties faced due to the need to 'talk the language' of the policymakers one is attempting to influence – in the World Bank, for example, it is unlikely for an organisation to be influential if talking of 'fundamental shifts' and 'transformations' as opposed to 'adjustments' – however, it is clear that a transformation is what is required in this situation.

Discussion:

- *Tony (to Dra. Mayanz):* You have given us a study about government seeking to improve its policy through making it more evidence-based; what room is there for independent research?
- *Dra. Mayanz:* The important thing is the quality of the research – if research is of a high quality then it will influence policy regardless of its source.
- *Tony (to Bola):* It is interesting that you partnered with an advocacy organisation, how did this work? Also, you mentioned that your work focused on Lagos, do you have plans to extend your research to rural areas?
- *Bola:* We carried out policy review and analysis, and a survey, and they took charge of campaigns and dissemination – media briefs and workshops. We did not have the funds to carry out extensive research in rural areas, and we were able to cover 10% of the country's populations through our work in Lagos.
- *Tony (to Rashed):* What debate was there at regional level, and were there any difficulties in bringing the lessons from Bangladesh to this level?
- *Rashed:* There were trade negotiations at a multilateral level. These collapsed post-Hong Kong, which meant that a shift in policy must be brought about elsewhere. At the regional level there is the South Asia free trade agreement, which has two levels of obligations and commitments, for developed and for developing countries. We are on the committee for market access and provide research for this, but it is always reactive.
- *(To Bola):* You mentioned that when you tried to contact the only female Member of Parliament, she did not want to listen. Why was this?
- *Bola:* We are not sure. Many politicians are ignorant of their own government's commitments.
- *(To Bola):* Was it crucial for you to engage with the government and the ministry?
- *Bola:* It is very important to retain your independence, but to be able to carry out any of the research we required access to various bits of information, for which we needed to make our case to government workers and come to an understanding.
- *Nicola:* What experience has the panel had of broad coalitions around a common issue?
- *Bola:* We have worked with a large body of NGOs working on gender.
- *Rashed:* We carried out interest mapping to determine which lobbyists we could work with, although we needed to describe our work as 'perspective building and policy literacy' instead of advocacy work, to be taken seriously.
- *Carlos:* Bola, it is important to understand the plight of women, but 'gender' includes men as well – did you look at what effects men more than women? Rashed, what evidence did you

base your conclusions on and Dra. Mayanz how can you keep a high standard of research in Cuba without significant political freedom?

- *Bola*: Yes, gender does not just mean women, our research was a *comparison* of the plight of men and women, so we did consider them.
- *Rashed*: We studied the markets, and it was clear that farmers needed *cash*.
- *Dra. Mayanz*: When research is methodologically sound, it will be used by the government. Also, there are many different institutions with different interests carrying out research in Cuba.
- *Charles*: Understanding and working to take advantage of policymaking spaces and windows is very difficult. It is also hard to separate institutional and personal values and perspectives. What we need is cross-professional discourse e.g. journalists talking to doctors etc.
- *Manish (to Rashed)*: You mention that Bangladeshi farmers are worse off than in India, but several papers show that agriculture in India is (overall) taxed rather than supported.
- *Rashed*: Our research is based on the statistics of a respected Indian economist.

Session 5: 'Open Mic' Q & A session

John Young invited questions and experience sharing.

- *Nicola (to Dylan)*: How are DFID going to monitor and evaluate the policy impacts of their research?
- *Dylan*: This is being done at the individual project level using log frames. Communication and policy engagement indicators need to be decided on a project-by-project basis, although we are synthesising the results from our projects' communications strategies.
- *Priyanthi (to Dylan)*: What work is DFID doing to consult with constituencies before setting out to do research, and to get Southern partners more involved?
- *Dylan*: We have tried to do this but need to do it better and more.
- *(To Dylan)*: Do academics respond badly to being required to have 10% of the research budget spent on communications? Also, what determined the figure of 10%, don't some projects need more?
- *Dylan*: 10% is a minimum, so projects can have larger communications budgets if needed; also, this is only a first attempt at making the research more effective.
- *Rashed*: Has anyone received money from Rockefeller or the Ford Foundation?
- *Nico*: We received funding from Ford for work involving sitting with 25 civil servants and 25 CEOs of the biggest NGOs, working to understand their prejudices. A report of this will be published.
- *Carlos A*: My organisation has been working heavily with the media. We have found that to link research to the context it is important to use a stock of knowledge on 'hot topics'. If you are offered an interview there is rarely the time to prepare new research in time, so it is important to have some knowledge to 'take off the shelf' to use in the interview. Also important is giving out media packages, and recognising journalists' timetables e.g. training them on the weekends.
- *John (to Carlos A)*: How did you find the resources to synthesise the material into press packs?
- *Carlos A*: We have a professor of journalism who is trained in social issues working for our organisation.
- *John*: Talking about communications, I carried out a brief comparison of the amount spent on communications between DFID and IDRC (Canada); IDRC spent 40-50% of their budget on non-research activities.
- *Robert Walgate*: Speaking as a journalist, I see a need for researchers to combine their messages. In my experience in Tanzania, there was no policy influence of research until there was a single unified voice coming from the academic community over the issue.
- *Nuning*: In difficult situations, a proven track record of solid research methods is crucial.
- *Rashed*: We all find funding a serious problem. How should we remain independent when we are paid for research?
- *John*: In ODI, since we are a charity, all our work must be published in the public domain. We also benefit from receiving funding from many different sources, and have built a reputation for credibility and independence. We are always looking to improve this situation, however.

- *Andrew Barnett*: Remember that these funding organisations often are in the position of needing something from you; this can mean you are in a position to lay down the rules of your engagement with them to afford yourselves some protection.
- *Priyanthi*: My organisation has had some problems in this area. It is very important to diversify funders and ways of raising funds. We have found it particularly hard with the World Bank, but never forget that they need you to do the study, so you can negotiate with that, and you must be prepared to turn down projects too.
- *Enrique*: Can anyone contribute their experiences on managing information? What about Google Scholar?
- *Buhle*: It is complex, we have been experimenting with engines which search across many databases. Google Scholar is pretty good, more synthesised and targeted.
- *(To Buhle)*: Health information services are under-funded and under-emphasised in decision making. How do you keep the emphasis on evidence-based decisions?
- *Buhle*: You need a good quality librarian.

Session 6: Summary and round-up

Andrew Barnett finished off the first day of the symposium by giving a summary and round-up of his views of the main themes emerging from the day (see [summary](#)). He outlined three themes of issues as he saw them: (i) the nature of evidence, (ii) conceptual models of evidence and policymaking, and (iii) new policy process models.

Many presentations raised issues about the nature of evidence – does any output of research count as evidence, or anything that convinces policymakers? Often policy impact correlates with simplicity of message, but we should be careful, because often so does lack of insight and falsity, and we should be careful when ‘spinning’ evidence. For the second theme, it is important to find a way of talking about the different types of knowledge and the processes surrounding its production, perhaps we should see it as a ‘food chain’, with organisations such as Oxfam at the top, and ‘heavy lifting’ researchers at the bottom. Here we should ensure that all parts of the chain are properly functioning, and we should look after the supply side, but also the demand side of knowledge production, and take advantage of ‘policy windows’ etc. Thirdly, it is important to note the ‘new’ policy models, with one model talking about complexity and long term perspectives, which contrasts with the political processes which appear to be short term and overly responsive to single issue lobbyists and knee-jerk responses. Do we really want governments basing decisions on a single killer fact? Is this inevitable?

Andrew’s four take-away messages for the workshop were the power of engagement with all parts of the knowledge ‘food chain’; the importance of recognising the differences between different contexts, policy processes and types of evidence; the need to build ‘policy literacy’ of researchers and policymakers; and, that we should pay attention to the issue of accountability, particularly of lobbyists.

Session 7: Evidence-based policy processes and tools

John Young began the second day of the symposium with a presentation giving an overview of evidence-based policy processes and identification of tools (see [presentation](#)) as an introduction to the theme of the following workshops.

Session 8: Workshops

The remainder of the second day provided an opportunity for participants to take part in three different workshops to learn about some of the tools for (i) understanding political context (see [Workshop 1](#)); (ii) research tools to generate influential evidence (see [Workshop 2](#)), and (iii) methods to ensure that local content reaches policymakers (see [Workshop 3](#)).