

Networks in Peru: Achieving and supporting change

This report looks at the roles that research policy networks are playing in Peru. We ask what the Peruvian economic and social research community is doing to affect a larger impact on pro-poor policy processes in Peru. Within this we focus on the role that research policy networks play; specifically, we study their strategies and try to identify and comment on some best practices.

Understanding networks is difficult when one considers that networks are, in essence, relations between two or more people or institutions. A clear-cut definition of a research policy network is therefore hard to come by. Networks are very different from each other, have different objectives, very different members and work in even more different ways. Describing networks, on the other hand, seems a more realistic way of trying to understand them. To describe them in a useful way, however, we consider the functions that networks are designed to (or intent to) carryout. We consider that research policy networks can have two overarching 'supra-functions' that define their *raison d'être*: Agency networks which are themselves the agents of policy change; or Support networks which assist their members to achieve change themselves.

Within these supra-functions, networks can carryout one or more of the following 6 functions:

1. Filtering to 'decide' what information is worth paying attention to and organise unmanageable amounts of information.
2. Amplifying helps take little-known or little-understood ideas and make them more widely understood.
3. Convening to bring together different people or groups of people.
4. Investing/Providing networks offer a means to give members the resources they need to carry out their main activities.
5. Community building to promote and sustain the values and standards of the individuals or organisations within them.
6. Facilitating to help members carry out their activities more effectively.

We argue that these functions can help us understand what networks do. How (well) they do it will depend of their structure, which in turn is partly determined by the choise of functions.

Using this framework we studied seven networks in Peru: CIES, CONVEAGRO, Foro Educativo, Foro Salud, Participa Peru, the Mesa (for the wellbeing of the elderly) and Peru 2021. We interviewed some of their officers and members and gathered basic information about the networks' functions and structure using a questionnaire, secondary evidence and their own comments.

Main barriers to policy influence: According to the networks interviewed, they face barriers to policy influence that are similar to those faced by networks in other contexts. The main challenges identified by the networks are:

1. High turnover of policy makers: difficult and costly to establish long term working relations with the public sector; which makes the use of evidence relatively more expensive
2. The government is still closed to participation and receptivity depend on a few individuals with close ties to CSOs

3. Lack of understanding or interest of the key issues among the media: difficult to use it to raise awareness and communicate complex issues
4. Lack of policy analysis: research is fragmented making it difficult to address specific policy issues that often require a holistic and practical approach
5. CSOs have no institutional memory: know-how is held by only a few individuals or institutions
6. CSOs carryout mostly ad-hoc policy influence activities: most CSOs lack the technical and financial capacity to plan ahead and be ready for windows of opportunity

Emerging themes: Networks have to make many choices regarding their functions and structures:

1. Institutional vs. individual membership: this affects the degree of Agency or Support of the secretariat or network entity
2. Policy influence alone vs. policy influence through empowerment: this affects the investment in community building functions
3. Partnership vs. sub-contracting relations: this affects the degree of inward looking functions such as filtering and community building
4. Centralised vs. decentralised: this affects the strength and freedom of action of the secretariat (or one of the members)
5. Legitimacy via representation vs. credibility: this affects the investment in community building functions vs. other more research oriented ones
6. Creating networks to fill gaps and develop strategic partners: this affects the adoption of functions to coordinate efforts with the new ones
7. Research capacity at the secretariat vs. the members: this will affect how much the network's members and their opinions are part of the agency process
8. Managing change: this affects the way and order in which functions are incorporated into the network

Best practices: Regardless of the internal and external challenges faced by networks, there are excellent examples of best practices among them that could be applied in other contexts:

1. Plan medium to long term communication strategies
2. Link the grassroots with the policymakers
3. Go after key individuals in the policy process
4. Create spaces for debate
5. Use the system and the spaces for policy engagement that it provides
6. Be media savvy and employ media experts
7. Create new or expand the networks to provide strategic support and agency

Recommendations: Based on the challenges faced, their best practices and the structural choices with which networks are faced we suggest some recommendations for them to follow:

1. Define the purpose of the network (Agency and/or Support)
2. Find the right structure for the network; given the functions it aims to fulfil
3. Carryout holistic short/long term policy influence strategies: strategic opportunism
4. Develop living institutional memories by introducing knowledge management tools
5. Strengthen internal relations (member to member)
6. Develop inter network relations
7. Integrate consultation with the members and policy influence
8. Use affordable and friendly social technologies to enhance the network's capacities
9. Make sure that members are constantly motivated to participate in the network