

The RAPID Context, Evidence, Links Framework for Analysis

The RAPID framework can be used as a conceptual framework to help researchers and policy entrepreneurs understand the role that evidence-based research plays, amongst other issues, in influencing policy. The four components of the framework can provide the user with in-depth and valuable information regarding policy windows, key policy actors and networks, gaps in the existing evidence, alternative means of communication and trends and changes in the external environment. Unfortunately, addressing all these issues can prove a daunting task. This tool can be used to ease the process. Thus, it presents some of the key questions that the researcher or policy entrepreneur should answer.

Detailed outline of the process

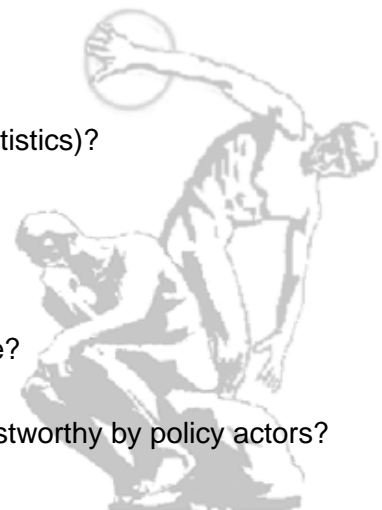
This is a very flexible tool. The questions provided are only intended to guide the user in the process. It is the user who must assess whether the answers to these questions paint the whole picture or if other important questions remain unanswered.

Context

1. Who are the key policy actors (including policymakers)?
2. Is there a demand for research and new ideas among policymakers?
3. What are the sources of resistance to evidence-based policymaking?
4. What is the policy environment?
 - a. What are the policymaking structures?
 - b. What are the policymaking processes?
 - c. What is the relevant legal/policy framework?
 - d. What are the opportunities and timing for input into formal processes?
5. How do global, national and community-level political, social and economic structures and interests affect the room for manoeuvre of policymakers?
6. Who shapes the aims and outputs of policies?
7. How do assumptions and prevailing narratives (which ones?) influence policymaking; to what extent are decisions routine, incremental, fundamental or emergent, and who supports or resists change?

Evidence

1. What is the current theory or prevailing narratives?
2. Is there enough evidence (research based, experience and statistics)?
 - a. How divergent is the evidence?
3. What type of evidence exists?
 - a. What type convinces policymakers?
 - b. How is evidence presented?
4. Is the evidence relevant? Is it accurate, material and applicable?
5. How was the information gathered and by whom?
6. Are the evidence and the source perceived as credible and trustworthy by policy actors?
7. Has any information or research been ignored and why?



Links

1. Who are the key stakeholders?
2. Who are the experts?
3. What links and networks exist between them?
4. What roles do they play? Are they intermediaries between research and policy?
5. Whose evidence and research do they communicate?
6. Which individuals or institutions have significant power to influence policy?
7. Are these policy actors and networks legitimate? Do they have a constituency among the poor?

External Environment

1. Who are main international actors in the policy process?
2. What influence do they have? Who influences them?
3. What are their aid priorities and policy agendas?
4. What are their research priorities and mechanisms?
5. How do social structures and customs affect the policy process?
6. Are there any overarching economic, political or social processes and trends?
7. Are there exogenous shocks and trends that affect the policy process?

Once the questions have been answered the researcher or policy entrepreneur should consider what roles can the different policy actors (including him or herself) play. For instance:

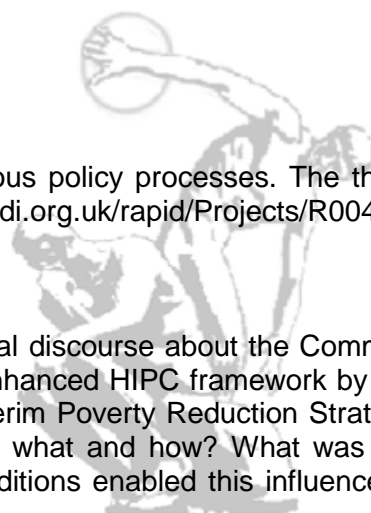
- Is there a need for more and/or different evidence? How can this new evidence be produced? Should NGOs, grassroots organisations or think tanks and research centres be doing things differently? If there is sufficient evidence, does it need to be re-packaged and presented differently?
- Are the existing networks sufficient to carry research findings into the policy process? How can they be supported to improve their impact on policy? What new roles should these and new networks play?
- Are policymakers and policy structures supportive of evidence-based policymaking? If not, how can they be made to be so? What capacities and skills do they need to use evidence and link with researchers? How can policymakers promote the production of more and more relevant and useful research?
- How can the external forces be used to promote evidence-based policymaking? Should the support networks and/or CSOs promote the supply of evidence? Or should they work with policymakers to promote the demand of evidence?

A good example

The RAPID programme has used this tool in its analysis of various policy processes. The three examples below can be read at the following link: <http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/Projects/R0040a/Summary.html>.

Poverty Reduction Strategies

The case study aims to answer how, during 1999, the international discourse about the Common Development Framework became linked to the adoption of the Enhanced HIPC framework by the G8, and then translated into the process of preparing the first interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. What happened in between? Who influenced whom, on what and how? What was the specific contribution of research-based knowledge, and what conditions enabled this influence to be exercised in such a striking way?



Humanitarian Aid

One of the most significant policy shifts in the international humanitarian sector in the last decade has been the move to strengthen the accountability of humanitarian agencies and to find ways of improving performance in humanitarian response. One of the key policy initiatives, representative of this shift, was the decision to launch the Sphere project in 1996, in the wake of the much-criticised international humanitarian response to the Rwanda crisis. Sphere resulted in the publication of a 'Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards for Disaster Response' in 2000. This case study explores the process that led up to this policy initiative. For example, how significant was the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda? What were the other key factors that triggered the launching of Sphere? How significant was the policy context, in which humanitarian agencies were subject to harsh and public criticism?

Livestock Services

This is an interesting case study because it is one in which a policy change was absent, even when evidence wasn't. Livestock services have long been regarded as an easy target for reform and privatisation, first under structural adjustment programmes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and more recently, as part of re-orientating agricultural services under poverty reduction strategies. Veterinarians and governments in most countries, however, have been very reluctant to liberalise the policy framework to allow private and especially para-professional services to flourish, despite good evidence that paravets can provide an effective, cost-efficient and safe service. This research identifies the critical factors and the relevance of research in the evolving livestock service policies particularly in Eastern, and the Horn of Africa.

Further information and resources

RAPID has produced a series of resources that can be accessed through its website at <http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/>. RAPID's Briefing Paper on bridging research and policy offers a good introduction into the subject. On page four, the Briefing Paper presents a table that can help move from the questions to an action strategy – it is available in English, French and Spanish (http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/Publications/RAPID_BP_1.html). Similarly, other institutions working on similar issues can offer alternative and complementary frameworks to understand the links between research and policy (<http://www.odi.org.uk/rapid/Links/>).

