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Policy Research And The Policy Process:
Do The Twain Ever Meet?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a time of tight government budgets, donors and clients want to know whether the research they fund makes any difference to public policy choices and, ultimately, to people's lives. Yet the methodologies for evaluating the impact of social science research on policy choices and policy outcomes are not well-developed. The complexity of the policy process and the general nature of much policy research makes it difficult to attribute policy decisions or policy outcomes to specific research findings. This paper contributes to the development of these methodologies by first summarising what we know about the policy process and the use of information in policymaking, and then relying on that review to suggest ways to assess the impact of research on policymaking.

Most importantly, the paper suggests that policy research can have significant impact on policymaking, just not necessarily on discrete choices nor in the linear sequence that researchers and donors would like to see. Research is only one of many competing sources of information, which, as suggested by a descriptive review of the policy process, is itself only one of many factors that affect the final policy decision. In this milieu, policymakers frequently use research less to dictate specific solutions than to help them think about issues and define the scope of problems and possible responses. Thus, research information provides a diffuse 'enlightenment' function, providing an understanding and interpretation of the data and the situation that is critical to the policy decision.

Faced with the near impossibility of tracing a precise pathway from specific research effort to policy choice and outcome, this paper recommends that evaluations of the impact of social science research institutes should:

- Evaluate the quality and timeliness of research output, the contribution of research to the policy debate, including the effectiveness of a proactive communications strategy, and the potential impact of the research (rather than its actual impact) on policy outcomes.
- Evaluate contributions of the research to 'enlightenment', and not only to policy change.
- Take into account the diverse ways in which research findings enter and influence the policy process.
- Perform evaluations over time to capture the different ways and different points in time at which research influences policy actors and policy processes.

In sum, the paper recommends a mixed-method approach to evaluation that looks at output, processes, and potential outcomes, rather than focusing on actual policy outcomes. This would better reflect how researchers produce their findings and policymakers actually use research and would help to identify how the organisation could improve its effectiveness.

POLICY RESEARCH AND THE POLICY PROCESS: DO THE TWAIN EVER MEET?

James L. Garrett & Yassir Islam

Policy research organisations fulfil their mandates primarily through the provision of information to policymakers. Yet, especially in a time of tight government budgets, donors and clients want to know whether the research they fund makes any difference to public policy choices. They also want to know if the research has an impact not only on a government's decisions but, ultimately, on people's lives. As donors look at the allocation for foreign aid, for instance, they ask why they should commission and fund research on and in developing countries if it does not have a demonstrable impact on poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, or environmental sustainability.

An impact assessment exercise would seem the most logical course to help a research organisation gauge its effectiveness and to identify strategies to increase its impact on policy decisions. The assessment could also respond to concerns of clients and donors. But the methodologies for the evaluation of the impact of social science research on policy choices and policy outcomes are not yet well developed.

This paper contributes to the development of these methodologies by first summarising what we know about the policy process and the use of information in policymaking, and then suggesting what these insights imply for ways to assess the impact of research on policy choices.

What is 'impact'?

Even before asking how to measure impact, we must determine what we mean by 'impact'. For example, do we evaluate the format and quality of information that the research organisation produces (*output*), or how the organisation provides information to policymakers and whether that actually influences policy choices (*process*), or whether the policies pursued by a government to which the organisation provides in-form-ation actually affects final outcomes, by reducing poverty for instance (*outcomes*)?

The very phrase 'impact assessment' can be problematic, as it conveys an impression that we intend to evaluate the effect of a clearly identifiable action on a clearly defined target. This leads many to think that research only has impact if there is a clear, direct link between research and policy outcomes. The 'problem-solving' model of policymaking and research use that underlies this perspective implies that if a report is not read and the policy not immediately changed, the research was not useful and had no impact. It assumes that each instance of information use is a discrete event for which there is a well-defined problem and solution and that the government acts as if it were one person, a "unitary actor" (Feldman, 1989).

This paper argues that an approach to assessing the impact of policy research that relies on the problem-solving model is inappropriate because it ignores what we know about the policy process and how research information is produced. Although certainly the most striking examples of impact result when a policymaker takes up research recommendations wholeheartedly, this does not happen frequently; the impact of research on policy choice is more likely not to be direct or linear. Rather, a research organisation's greatest influence probably occurs by contributing high-quality policy-relevant information to a pool of knowledge that policymakers can access when they need it and use as they see fit. Focusing only on cases of direct impact because these are the easiest cases to identify and because they fit with preconceived notions of 'impact' would fail to account fully for the many ways in which research influences policymakers.

The making of public policy

A research organisation's influence on policymakers comes about primarily through the provision of information. It usually has control over the process of collecting data and transforming it into research information, but turning this information into policy is the prerogative of government decisionmakers. Indeed, the policy process is complex and subject to political, economic, and social pressures over which the research organisation has little control. Some people even feel that, although it may be possible to identify the indirect impact of research on the policy, the idea that policy research can have direct impact should be dropped, not least because the responsibility of government officials for their own actions should be recognised.

Can, then, a donor or client realistically hold a research organisation responsible for government actions in an evaluation of that organisation's impact? Perhaps not directly, and examining the process more closely illustrates the difficulty of trying to do so. Still, at the same time such an examination offers some insights into what elements *can* form the basis of an evaluation of the impact of a social science research organisation.

The actors

The fundamental observation about policymaking is that decisions are not made by a single person. Even in a dictatorship, decisions are not made and implemented in isolation. Although politicians and bureaucrats as a group make up the state, functionally they need not, and often do not, act as a unit, a single rational actor. A state does not make decisions; people do. Policies and programmes are the cumulative result of conflict and co-operation among many government actors, principally politicians and bureaucrats, as well as members of external interest groups. Of course, these inter-actions can result in policy stasis as well as policy change.

In this process, policymakers do not simply react to pressure from interest groups inside or outside the government. Through judicious use of available resources, including those provided by outside interest groups, policymakers can advance their own agendas and shift discussion to a setting where they have greater control over resources that influence the

decision making process, widening the range of feasible policy options – their 'policy space' – from that which is first apparent (Grindle and Thomas, 1991).

This process does not have to follow precise analytical stages or otherwise be linear. Policymakers at different levels can be making decisions about the same issue at the same time, and also be interacting with others inside and outside the policy space. The process is dynamic, but it is not haphazard. Formal and informal rules and procedures determine which individuals participate in the policy process. Formal arrange-ments may be embodied in a document like a constitution, and are often supplemented (and even supplanted) by informal ones, including well-known but unwritten 'rules of the game' (Allison, 1971).
Even the characteristics of policy reform can change over time, as the issue moves through the hands of different policymakers and as the policy environment changes. For instance, in many countries the discussion of 'safety nets' as a means to alleviate the negative effects of structural adjustment programmes has become a basis for a broader discussion of the role of social assistance programmes in alleviating poverty.

Different policymakers see different faces of an issue. These 'faces' determine how a policymaker analyses an issue and shapes a response. Different faces of the same issue can enhance an issue's appeal to a policymaker or make it appear as a threat. The face policymakers see depends on their ideological inclination, professional expertise, even on their personal affinity or antipathy for other players, as well as how the issue affects the agency's clientele or its influence within the bureaucracy (Allison, 1971; Grindle and Thomas, 1991). For example, in designing a national nutrition plan, the physician who heads the Ministry of Health may see it as a health intervention and focus on improving health facilities. The agricultural economist in charge of the Ministry of Food may think only about increasing agricultural production.

Interest groups outside the state can also exert significant influence on policy choices. The impact that a group has depends on how powerful the group is. As with government actors, the power of an external interest group is determined by its control over resources and access to information, its skill in using these advantages, including generation of media coverage, and other players' perceptions of these characteristics, including perceptions of their credibility (Allison, 1971).

Powerful interest groups need not be rich or large. A decision maker's interest in advancing a group's cause may be sufficient to give the group access to the policy process. The decision by policymakers to take up, champion, or oppose an issue depends to a large extent on whether they believe furthering a particular group's concerns will advance their own interests (See Box 1).

Box 1. Agricultural policy in Zimbabwe

The observation that policymakers have their own agendas cautions against assuming "the powerful get what they want, so those who get what they want must be powerful."

Herbst (1988) describes how the government of independent Zimbabwe acted on behalf of small producers, who were poor and poorly organised and who, by cruder measures of power, should have had little influence over government decisions. At times, the government even purposely discriminated against supposedly politically powerful white growers.

The characteristics of farming groups, supposed determinants of power, had changed little in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but the Zimbabwean political landscape had been overturned. The settler regime had given way to a new black government. The favour accorded the small growers resulted from a traditional concern of the now-ruling party with the welfare of the rural poor, not because the poor were inherently 'powerful'. They became powerful because the ruling party chose to grant them access to the policy process.

The policy environment

The particular cultural, political, and economic environment in which decision making takes place can define issues and determine the range of policy choices. Cultural conventions can define acceptable group or individual action and the limits of permissible policies. Macro political structures, such as the constitution or type of government, can expand or lessen policymakers' room to manoeuvre. Economic conditions can force action and restrict choices. For instance, society may expect the state to maintain key macroeconomic variables, such as unemployment and inflation, within a commonly accepted range. External actors with no direct connection with the specific policy issue at hand, such as international financial institutions, can also affect this environment and thus the policy space (Figure 1).

Using information to influence the agenda

Before policymaking can begin, the issue must come to the attention of the policymakers and policymakers must decide to act on the issue. How does this happen? Moments of change in the cultural, political, or economic environment are important in providing 'windows of opportunity' for research to influence the policy agenda and policy choice (Kingdon, 1984). If information is readily available when policymakers need it, it can help frame the debate and affect the choices that policymakers make (See Box 2).

Figure 1. The 'Amoeba' model of policymaking
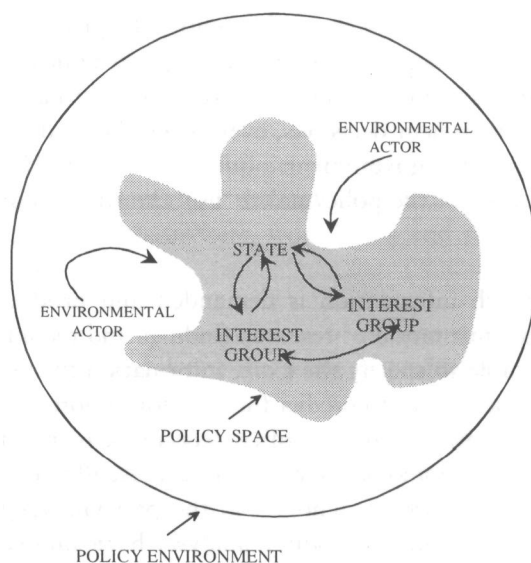
Box 2. IFPRI and creation of the IMF cereal import facility

Reacting to the 1972-1974 world food crisis, researchers at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) began to analyse responses to world food insecurity, focusing on the costs and benefits of a cereal import facility to stabilise food supplies. However, not until the collapse of efforts to establish an international grain reserve in 1979 did the research become 'useful' to policymakers. Then, as policymakers faced mounting pressures to take at least some action, they latched on to the research, largely because the research on this policy option had already been done and was available (Adams, 1983).

Of course, this implies that the research was done earlier, before change occurred or policy decisions seemed so urgent. Policy researchers must look ahead to identify critical areas for research, and must, in some instances, acknowledge that their work will have an impact only in the longer run.

Research as enlightenment

In a neat, linear world, a policymaker would identify the problem and the knowledge gap. Research would be done, solutions presented, and policies chosen. Sometimes this happens, but most of the time policy research does not have such an immediate or direct impact on government decisions, even when the studies are explicitly commissioned to answer

specific government inquiries (Weiss, 1977; Weiss, 1991). Why should this be? Why doesn't the policymaker 'use' the study and follow the report's recommendations?

First, the ways in which information is demanded and produced militate against direct uptake and implementation of research findings and recommendations. Often, policymakers are not able to specify the exact information they need far in advance. The inability of the policymaker to predict future information needs weakens the link between research information and the policy decision. On the other hand, it is the policy analysts on the decisionmaker's staff who are usually charged with interpreting research and providing specific choices to the policymaker for action, not the researchers themselves. Because the policy analysts have limited time available to gather information, they tend to develop an inventory of information which they can draw upon when needed (Feldman, 1989). Research findings in this inventory will tend to be general, rather than context- or situation-specific. By its nature, such research will not have an immediate, direct, easily observable impact on policy choice.

In some situations, the characteristics of the research limit its impact. Findings may be inconclusive, limited in scope, out-of-date, or contradicted by other studies. Research reports may be written using technical jargon ill-suited to a broader audience, may not be available when needed, and may not take into account political and administrative feasibility. The actual policy decision may itself convey an ambiguous message, because it may to a large extent reflect compromises among the principal actors, making a direct connection between a research finding and policy decision difficult to find (Feldman, 1989; Webber, 1983; Weiss, 1977).

Alternatively, policymakers may indeed be using the research, just not in the way the researcher may prefer and not to inform policy choice. For instance, they may be using it to further their own interests, delay decisions, mark and occupy turf, or to enhance organisational credibility (Alderman, 1995; Feldman and March, 1981; Jenkins-Smith and Weimer, 1985; Porter, 1995; Rein and White, 1977).

An 'enlightenment' model of research use

While the cases of immediate and direct influence of research findings on specific policy choices are not frequent, this is not to say that policy research–and social science more generally–has little influence on policy choice. The evidence suggests that policy studies do have significant influence, just not necessarily on discrete choices nor in the linear sequence that researchers and donors would like to see (Alderman, 1995; Weiss, 1982).

Research is only one of many competing sources of information, which, as suggested by the above description of the policy process, is itself only one of many factors that affect the final policy decision. Information on which policymakers base their decisions comes to them via a number of different pathways and a number of different sources. Policymakers get information through the media, from interactions with their staff or consultants and researchers, from briefs and reports, and conferences and workshops.

Policymakers thus frequently use research less to dictate specific solutions than to help them think about issues and define the scope of problems and possible responses. Much of this use is not deliberate or direct and does not correspond to specific pieces of research. Rather, bits of information have seeped into the mind, uncatalogued, without citation. Information serves, cumulatively, over time, a diffuse 'enlightenment' function, providing an understanding and interpretation of the data and the situation that is critical to the policy decision (Feldman, 1989; Weiss, 1977).

Ideas from policy research can bring new insight into the policy process, altering the way people conceptualise issues and frame problems. Research can change people's perceptions about what elements in a situation are most important, which can be changed and which cannot. As ideas from research become absorbed into conventional wisdom, they shape people's assumptions about how things work, about what needs to be done, and what solutions are likely to achieve desired ends. The details and nuances of the research findings disappear and become transmuted into a simple 'story'. 'Rules of thumb', the generalised findings rather than the results of specifically commissioned research, guide their policy decisions (Weiss, 1991).

Characteristics of useful research

Weiss (1980) suggests that the characteristics of research that policymakers find useful cluster around four factors:

1. Research quality
2. Conformity to expectations
3. Action orientation
4. Challenge to the *status quo*.

The first two provide a basis for trust in the research. How well does the research adhere to the accepted canons of research? Are the findings congruent with previous experience and prior knowledge?

Policymakers also found research that suggests a particular course of action useful, as was research that challenged existing assumptions or institutional arrangements, even if it called for major changes in philosophy, organisation, or services, because it raised new issues or ways of looking at problems. These two aspects of useful research are not mutually exclusive. Findings that challenge existing assumptions may still not be out of line with the decisionmaker's own beliefs. The fact that such information was useful even when it recommended action that did not seem politically feasible somewhat goes against conventional wisdom, but it confirms that decisionmakers pursue their own agendas and do not merely react to interest group pressure. Armed with knowledge, decisionmakers can alter the policy space or hold onto findings and wait to use them in a moment of change. Other analysts have found that organisations are more receptive to information if it is produced internally. A legitimate inside sponsor can improve the likelihood that the information will be accepted and acted upon (Porter, 1995).

The need for effective communication

Research is most likely to have impact by enlightening a policymaker and putting workable policy options in his or her hands. Research information that has been packaged for distribution to and for use by policymakers can be conceptualised as a research product. Identifying the message of the *product* and its audience are important first steps in developing a communications strategy and enhancing the impact of policy research.

Content and packaging are two key dimensions of the research product. The content of the product is the message the researcher has identified as important and wishes to transmit to the policymaker. We can evaluate content using the four characteristics that enhance the usefulness of research information described above. These attributes will influence whether policymakers will use a particular piece of research.

Research attributes alone do not determine whether a piece of research is actually used; the *packaging* of the research output also needs to be examined. *Format* and *style* are two key aspects of packaging. Format refers to the form or layout of the research product. Is the product a hefty report, a policy brief, or a video? Style is the way in which the material is presented. Clarity of exposition, use of technical jargon, and comprehension level are all aspects of style. Format and style must be geared to satisfy the intended, and clearly identified, audience. The packaging will determine how 'user-friendly' the product is perceived to be, and hence the likelihood that it will attract the attention of the audience.

Channels of communication

How the product is packaged will determine the channel through which it is best communicated. Examples of channels are newspapers, radio, the internet, a lecture, or a training course. The choice of channels will also depend on the size and nature of the intended audience, as well as the message to be communicated. Two important facets of communication are time and timeliness. How much time does the user have to absorb the information provided? Does the user have time to read a report, glance at a policy brief, watch a video, or attend a one-day workshop? *Timeliness*[1] refers to whether the information was provided in a timely manner at the 'right place' and 'right time'.

A communications strategy

Because many other sources of information are competing for the attention of decision makers, an effective communications strategy will attract their attention, deliver the product to them, and bring about the desired policy change. The key elements of a communications strategy are shown in Figure 2. Essentially, the *message* is embodied in a product emanating from the *source* (the research programme), and is communicated through various *channels* to the *audience* (primarily policymakers), which then takes *action*.

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1. This is different from the timeliness of the research itself, which refers to the relevance of the research topic and findings to the problem at hand or the interest of the policymaker.

Figure 2. Key components of a communications strategy
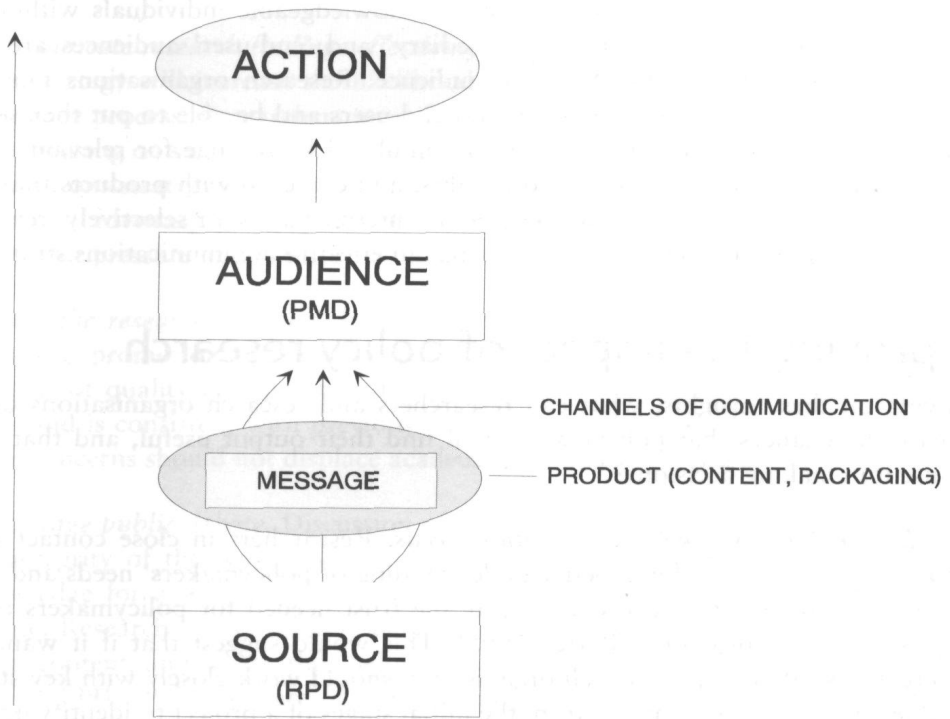
Because the policymaking process involves many different actors who are all potential audiences, there is seldom one single audience for a pro-duct. The key target audiences need to be identified, and the product adapted as necessary. In some cases, a particular audience may act as an intermediary between the com-municator (the research organisation) and the end-user (the policymaker). These intermediaries, inclu-ding the general public, news media, interest groups, and government com-mittees, can be thought of as 'retailers' of information. Retailers identify and extract information that they want to convey to the end-user from a wide variety of sources. Sources of basic information such as research organisations can be thought of as 'wholesalers' of information. But these wholesalers often have no idea of how retailers repackage their products and sell them to the policymakers (Zilberman, 1997).

The content and packaging of a product must be adapted to each audience's level of understanding and interest in the message. The behavioural changes desired by the communicator must be identified (additional ideas added to the public debate? actual policy change?). These specific behavioural changes can provide strategic and definable goals useful in focusing and evaluating the communications strategy.

This discussion highlights the importance of knowledgeable individuals within the organisation who know who the 'intermediary' and 'end-user' audiences are and develop

appropriate strategies for each audience. Research organisations must be aware of the links between its research and end-users and be able to put themselves in a position to delve into their store of accumulated knowledge for relevant situation- or context- specific research and insights, and come up with products that can be strategically and proactively 'wholesaled' to intermediaries, or selectively 'retailed' directly to the policymaking audience through an effective communications strategy.

Improving the impact of policy research

Drawing on these insights, what can researchers and research organisations do to increase the chances that policymakers will find their output useful, and that they will use it in making decisions?

- *Understand policymakers' information needs*. Researchers in close contact with policymakers can develop a better understanding of policymakers' needs and constraints. Positive interactions can create the trust needed for policymakers to be open to new information (Porter, 1995). This would suggest that if it wants to increase its influence, a research organisation should work closely with key stakeholders inside the government from the initial stages of a project to identify important research problems. The organisation should also be prepared to take advantage of any windows of opportunity by identifying critical gaps in policy knowledge and producing leading-edge research to help fill these gaps.

- *Understand the policy process*. By definition, policymaking is an inherently political process. Consequently, even 'objective' researchers must recognise that the information they provide will be used by somebody somewhere for largely one of two reasons: to provide ammunition or to build coalitions. That is, the information will probably be used in some current policy battle or to help raise consciousness about an issue that, in the future, may attract policymakers' attention. If they distance themselves from the policy process, researchers simply ensure the adoption of policies that do not take their analyses into account. Researchers thus must have a good grasp of the policy process and of the political environment in which they work.

- *Target findings to key audiences.* An understanding of the policy environment can help researchers anticipate which faces of the issue are likely to be salient in the policy debate. This foresight, combined with substantive knowledge of an issue, can suggest key areas for policy research. From their understanding of the policy process, researchers can also identify key actors inside and outside the government to whom they need to communicate their findings. A principal challenge to researchers is to present the face of the issue most likely to attract the attention of these policy actors and prove most useful to them (Kelman, 1987).

- *Communicate research findings effectively*. An effective and proactive communications strategy will increase the likelihood of the information finding its way into the policy process. Researchers must find ways to make their information distinctive, focusing on such aspects as style, format, and timeliness of delivery. The communications strategy may target actors in addition to policymakers, including beneficiaries, advocacy

groups, and the media, because these actors are important sources of pressure and of information for the policymaker.

- *Ensure the research exhibits characteristics that make the research 'useful'*. This proactive promotion of ideas need not, and indeed should not, come at the expense of quality or reputation for objectivity. Research that confirms expectations and is consistent with previous research can solidify the case for action, but these concerns should not displace academic and analytical rigour.

- *Encourage public debate*. Discussion of ideas in public forums can help to protect the integrity of the work and can ensure the information increases the pool of knowledge for a wide range of audiences with potential to influence the policy debate. Researchers can actively determine how findings are presented, including form, content, and venue, thus helping to ensure that the evidence is not distorted (Weiss, 1991). Public debate of research findings is also important because it can shed light on whether a policy option is politically, economically, or socially feasible. Public debate can even help a policy option become politically feasible by elucidating a particular face of the issue that captures public attention, or by, over time, building up a consensus of opinion for action.

Implications for evaluating research impact

What specific suggestions for how to evaluate the impact of social science research on policymaking does this analysis provide?

Evaluate research output, processes, and potential outcomes

Policymakers seldom apply findings produced by research organisations directly. Generally, research contributes to an accumulation of knowledge. It is this knowledge base, rather than any particular report, on which a policymaker usually relies when making a policy decision. Furthermore, many other factors in addition to research information determine policy choice and affect whether the policy is actually implemented and successfully achieves its policy objectives. Consequently, measuring 'impact' of research by looking only at visible policy choices or policy outcomes, such as reductions in poverty or environmental degradation, would be misleading and should not be the principal metric for judging the impact of a research institute. However, a research institute *can be* evaluated in terms of the *quality* of its output and the *process* by which it carries out and communicates research findings to key audiences:

- *Process*. An impact assessment, in addition to assessing technical quality of research, should examine whether the research had an impact on policy debates and whether the organisation has done all it can to increase the probability that a policymaker uses the information. In such an assessment, case studies and other qualitative methods, as well as quantitative methods, can be used to identify what information was available before, during, and after the research; to enumerate an inventory of research products; and to identify to whom these products were directed, how, and with what effect. The resulting integrated analysis could show that certain insights, views, and arguments were not present in policy deliberations before the research took place but were

afterwards. From this, we should be able to tease out the contribution that the research made to public debate and policy choice.

This emphasis on the impact of the research on public debate highlights the importance of designing and evaluating a communications strategy. An evaluation of the communications strategy should assess whether key questions and audiences were correctly identified and whether the strategy used to reach important policy actors was the most effective one possible. Were the channels of communication and the intensity of exposure appropriate? Was the information packaged well? Was the information clearly expressed, easy to understand, and easy to use?

- *Potential Outcomes.* Some may argue that such an approach to assessment is insufficient because it does not get at the crucial issue of whether the organisation actually affected final outcomes such as food insecurity or malnutrition. It is likely to be extraordinarily difficult to quantify the effect of research on improvements in social indicators, not least because of the time lags involved between information and action and because of the intervention of other factors. Nevertheless, ways to get at this question do exist.

The potential of the research to reduce poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition can be gauged by estimating what would happen to the poor *if* the government implemented the research findings, just as agricultural research can be evaluated by assessing what potential yield would be *if* farmers had used new technologies. Quantitative economic analysis is particularly suited to this kind of 'what if' assessment. Considering the potential impact of the research in this way makes the connection between research and the ultimate outcomes explicit, and also helps with the prioritisation and selection of areas for research.

This observation highlights another useful parallel with agricultural research. We do not hold the biological research institute responsible and call its new hybrid useless if all farmers do not have access to all the inputs they need, but we can question whether the new seed it developed is appropriately adapted to the agronomic, technical, and economic constraints in the field. Likewise, we cannot expect a policy research institute to make sure a policymaker has all the necessary political and financial resources to implement a particular recommendation, but we can ask whether the research at least made a serious attempt to consider how expected political, economic, and social factors would affect the policy recommendations.

Evaluate how research contributes to 'enlightenment', not just policy change

An evaluation that attributed policy change *only* to research would overestimate the impact of research, because factors in addition to the research almost certainly also affected the policy decision. Conversely, an evaluation that considered the impact of research *only* on a single policy change would underestimate the impact because it would omit the indirect effect of 'enlightenment' on others. Policy research has effects beyond its initial target audience, which is usually a specific policymaker or agency. Impact assessment should thus

take into account the fact that policy research is often responding both to policymakers in specific situations and to information-users around the world who are adding the information to their inventory. In most cases, the direct and unique contribution of research (especially of a specific finding or recommendation) to a policy decision will be difficult to discern. Still, some sense of that contribution can be gained through the methods discussed above.

Recognise the different ways in which research information affects the policy process

Research findings get to policymakers and other policy actors via conferences, training courses, publications, and the media. An evaluation of the impact of research should be careful to account for the diverse ways in which (and the diverse actors through which) research findings enter and influence the policy process.

Assess overall impact over time

Evaluations should take place at different points in time to capture the different ways that research influences policy actors and the policy process over time. For example, an evaluation of research outputs (their quality, their appropriateness and relevance) and of the communication strategy can be made during and at the end of the project. A case study a year or more after the end of the project can see how the research has affected the national policy debate. Bibliometric analyses or case studies of the policy debates can be done to see what impact the research has had on other researchers, donor and implementing agencies, and other governments around the world. All evaluations should be reconciled with the initial objectives of the research programme.

In sum, a mixed-method approach to evaluation that looks at output, processes, and *potential* outcomes (rather than a sole focus on *actual* outcomes) would be comprehensive and flexible enough to capture most aspects of the use of information by policymakers and to gauge the overall impact of research on policy choice. It would, that is, better reflect the ways that researchers produce their findings and that policymakers actually use research and would help to identify actions the organisation could take to improve its effectiveness.

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