WAYS OF WORKING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IIED'S EXPERIENCE

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International
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WAYS OF WORKING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IIED'S EXPERIENCE

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Our particular thanks go to the internal and external reviewers of this paper who have provided insightful and helpful advice.

As ever, the blame rests with us for any misunderstanding and misconstruing.

We are like drops of water
we can control where the water drops,
the speed and the quantity
but we cannot control where the ripples reach out to.
Mary Hobley

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Introduction

IIED works at the crossroads of policy, research and advocacy, with the aim of furthering sustainable development internationally. But to what extent does IIED really contribute to this ambitious goal? An obvious, but ultimately unsatisfactory way to answer this question would be to focus solely on the outputs and outcomes of IIED's work, and assess their impacts. This would be unsatisfactory because the impacts of individual outputs and outcomes are often impossible to judge, and because, in a perverse way, requiring an organization like IIED to demonstrate its impact would be likely to reduce its effectiveness.[1] A less obvious but more satisfactory approach is to focus on the ways IIED claims to be working, whether these are the most effective ways for IIED to work towards achieving its goals, and whether IIED is indeed working in these ways. This paper represents a first step in this latter approach.

The term 'ways of working' implies a focus on the process through which something is done rather than just on the output or outcome. It has become increasingly popular in discussions of policy research. This is in recognition of the problems with monitoring and assessing policy-related research and information initiatives in terms of their formal outputs and outcomes. It also emphasises the importance of examining how research is carried out, the relationships that are developed, and the lessons that are learned along the way.

This paper considers what ways of working means within IIED and considers the diversity of spaces IIED occupies and actors it works with in order to help contribute to the achievement of its mission. It attempts to:

1. clarify what IIED's ways of working are both for internal and external communication;

2. illustrate the positive effects of ways of working on sets of issues while recognising the difficulties of attributing measurable impacts to any one initiative or organisation;

3. identify key elements of IIED's ways of working in order to provide the basis for monitoring the quality of IIED's work.

It draws on several pieces of work already undertaken within IIED in addition to drawing on ideas from the literature and from other organisations' experiences. The paper is as much for IIED staff as it is for partners, donors and other organisations with an interest in monitoring and evaluating the activities of policy research institutes.

Why look at ways of working?

As actors working on environment and development issues crowd the institutional landscape, there is growing pressure on the organizations working in this area to identify where their comparative advantage lies. Our contention is that IIED's distinguishing characteristics lie more in its ways of working than in the specific environment and development issues it works on or the types of outputs it produces. Thus, describing IIED's ways of working should help IIED to identify its place in this institutional landscape more clearly, and to respond to demands for differentiation.

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Perhaps more important, identifying the ways of working that IIED aspires to, and providing an initial basis for determining whether these aspirations are being met, should help IIED to improve its effectiveness. It has been argued that 'optimising the right mix of relationships in the real world is a cornerstone of effectiveness' (Fowler, 2000:16). If this is true, IIED's ways of working – the ways in which it engages with issues, institutions and builds relationships and capacity – are central to determining its potential for influencing policy change. As such, it is not only important for IIED to discuss and identify its preferred ways of working, but also to ensure that its monitoring and evaluation procedures reinforce these ways of working – a task that this paper is meant to initiate.

Finally, IIED's ways of working are themselves a response to perceived shortcomings in existing efforts to promote sustainable development internationally. For example, IIED places emphasis on developing partnerships with local researchers and practitioners working with low-income groups in Africa, Asia and Latin America. This is based in part on the perception that international research and policy debates undervalue local knowledge and initiatives in the 'less developed' parts of the world, and in part on IIED's own experience with various types of collaborative arrangements and how they can support policy changes favouring sustainable development. More generally, IIED's ways of working are central to its mission and its effectiveness, and are more than simply a chosen specialisation.

Since policy change is often used as an important indicator of effectiveness, perhaps we should consider what IIED means by policy change.

What does IIED mean by policy change?

"Policy has content – in the form of policy statements and policy instruments – and it has process – policy making, implementing and reviewing…. 'Real world' policy, (in contrast to formal policy documents) is the net result of a tangled heap of formal and practical decisions by those with varying powers to act on them".

"One of the key elements of a policy process that 'stays alive' is its ability to link directly to experiments with new ways of making things work on the ground….but they only become useful on a significant scale if they seize the attention of at least some of the current power brokers or policy-holders" (Mayers and Bass, 1998, p.v)

Policy is not the monopoly of government, and as indicated by the quotes above, not even government policy is well represented by formal policy documents. Policy can be defined in simple terms as "a programme of actions adopted by an individual, group, or government, or the set of principles on which they are based".[2] In practice, however, forming, changing and implementing policies are complex and indeterminate processes. They take place locally and globally, in informal settings and in giant bureaucracies. They involve negotiation, debate, inspiration and, all too often, conflict and disillusionment.

The goals of sustainable development are now widely accepted, but the policy changes needed to achieve them are not. For a policy research institute, it is tempting to treat the challenge as one of identifying and studying policy options, and providing advice to 'policy-makers', who then decide which policies to implement. It is now widely accepted, however, that this expert-driven model of policy-making is misconceived, and is based on an overly narrow understanding of how knowledge is generated, who should contribute to policy research, and how policy regimes change. There are three main issues to be considered:

The goals of sustainable development are now widely accepted, but the policy changes needed to achieve them are not. For a policy research institute, it is tempting to treat the challenge as one of identifying and studying policy options, and providing advice to 'policy-makers', who then decide which policies to implement. It is now widely accepted, however, that this expert-driven model of policy-making is misconceived

1. Knowledge: Practical experience and local non-specialist knowledge can contribute just as much as conventional research to the knowledge base for sustainable development policies.

2. Stakeholder engagement: Those affected by sustainable development policies deserve to have their opinions and views taken seriously, whether or not this adds to the knowledge base, narrowly defined.

3. Impact: Policy change is not the rational and linear process sometimes depicted in old-fashioned textbooks – simply conveying research results to government officials is a very ineffective way of influencing policy, particularly if the goal is to improve rather than just affect policy.

The first two considerations hold for low-income areas, whose residents' have little voice in most international and many local policy debates, even though experts and researchers are comparatively ignorant of their local environmental conditions, and they are almost invariably cited as primary beneficiaries of sustainable development.

There are circumstances when government officials are looking for evidence of successful new policies, or what has come to be known at IIED as 'policies that work'. In recognition of this, IIED often works in collaboration with long-term partners to research and/or document new ways of doing things on the ground and to generate understanding on 'policies that work' for more equitable and sustainable development, with a view to using that understanding to generate positive change.

Most programmes within IIED have carried out research in different country contexts to identify policies that work, most particularly in forestry, agriculture and bio-diversity. IIED also recognises, however, that the demand for evidence of successful policies can actually inhibit improvements, particularly when unsuccessful policies are over-promoted, or potentially successful policies are promoted in the wrong context. Thus documenting 'policies that work' involves careful assessments of where and why such policies work, and combining a research focus on underlying principles, with a pragmatic focus on what 'policy-makers' are looking for.

Less often but equally importantly, a real or perceived crisis creates a demand for radical shifts in the way environmental issues are treated in certain policy arenas. IIED's sustainable agriculture and environmental economics programmes, for example, were initiated at a time when the international development community was crying out for approaches to agricultural policy and to economics that took environmental issues seriously. A recent example of this is the Corporate Responsibility for Environment and Development (CRED) programme established to support development of a private sector more responsive to sustainable development issues. On the other hand, IIED also engages in "myth busting," when crises are being fabricated or misrepresented for the sake of provoking a reaction. Examples include the study that culminated in the book entitled "Beyond the woodfuel crisis" (Leach and Mearns 1989), which played a critical role in convincing donors that deforestation in low-income countries is only rarely the result of rural fuelwood use (at the time it was often presented as one of the major causes of deforestation). Similarly, recent work in the Human Settlements Programme has demonstrated that, contrary to some global water crisis narratives, the problems low income households face gaining access to water have little to do with global or even national water stress.

"We are shifting our emphasis from understanding and facilitating interactions at single interfaces to understanding and facilitating simultaneous interactions at multiple-interfaces" (Engel, 1997)

Outside of the development community, however, the demand for policy advice in support of sustainable development is often more notable for its absence (and even in the development community interest comes in cycles). Identifying ways of working for influence begs the question of whether the influence is really beneficial. Often, however, the challenge is not so much to identify important sustainable development issues as to focus attention on taking action to address them. This is no excuse for creating misleading crisis narratives, but it is a good reason for developing effective ways of engaging in influential policy processes.

Taking a more tactical point of view, Box 1 illustrates some of the different ways in which an organization like IIED and its partners can engage to affect policy change.

Box 1: Ways of working for influence

Building constituencies – supporting groundswell and networks to (one day) push policy (implicit here is the long-term engagement and staying power to support)
Drawing-in policy makers. Involving the current 'holders' of policy in the process of analysis
Servicing the policy machine. Technical support on demand to improve current policy and process
Staying connected – seizing policy opportunities. Acting politically and maximising activity when policy leverage points appear
Creating vision. Capturing minds and stimulating debates
Convening better policy processes. Showing how policy can be improved by fostering alternative policy processes
Offering do-it-yourself policy research kits. Methodology development and training material on how to assess policy situations and develop 'solutions'

Source: Mayers and Bass, 1998

In an increasingly integrated or globalised world, it becomes even more important to use information and generate change at different levels – local, national and international – which means building relationships at and between these different levels. Thus as described in later sections, IIED's ways of working involve simultaneous or coordinated engagement on each element of policy change in both local and international arenas. Even a single project is quite likely to involve research designed to bring new (or underrepresented) knowledge into the policy arena, and the creation of fora designed to bring new (or underrepresented) voices to bear on policy debates, as well as more direct engagement or advocacy designed to promote specific policy improvements. Where one or more of these elements are missing from a particular project, they are often included in other projects within the same programme of work.

In attempting to inform and change policies, without losing its footing in research, IIED has become something of a hybrid institution. Organizationally, as described in the following section, it has become a combination of a research institute, a consulting company, and an advocacy organization. Alternatively, as described in the section on ways of working, it combines research and advisory work with work in what can be referred to as the 'mediatory space', facilitating dialogue and negotiation.

What sort of policy research institute is IIED?

There are an enormous variety of institutions that engage in research and contribute to policy debates concerning environment and development issues. Despite this diversity, policy research institutions and their ways of working tend to cluster around three conventional categories: academic research organizations (that focus on the knowledge element of policy change, and often claim impartiality), consultancy research organizations (that focus on providing their clients with information, analysis and time-bound capacity support) and advocacy research organizations (that focus on providing information and rallying or orchestrating support for a particular cause or agenda – working mainly in the mediatory space). IIED does not fit neatly into any of these categories, and indeed its approach to combining research, policy advice and advocacy is a central theme of this paper.

In effect, IIED combines certain characteristics of an academic institute, a consultancy company and an advocacy organization. Like an academic institute, it often publishes in "peer reviewed" journals, values its independence and views maintaining high standards for research as important in its own right (and not only as a means of achieving greater credibility). Like a consultancy company, it often undertakes work for international development agencies, treating them as clients, and advising them on specific projects, policies or issues. Like an advocacy organization, it often selects particular issues or arguments, and promotes them in the public policy arena.

The combination of academic, consultancy and advocacy research situates IIED in a far smaller set of institutions working on environment and development issues. Moreover, within organizations working at all three there are pressures to gravitate towards one pole, or at least to have one set of priorities dominate.

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Some of these pressures are driven by funders, who tend to apply such different criteria when assessing both proposals and outcomes from academic research, policy consultancies, and advocacy, that what is valued in one setting can actually be a disadvantage in another. In a more academic research project, for example, referencing peer reviewed publications is central to demonstrating success, while in research consultancies and advocacy the production of peer reviewed publications is not considered to be essential to supporting a particular case.

Some pressures have become socialized. "Independent" academics are inclined to dismiss the policy research of most consultancy and advocacy organizations as lacking rigour and integrity. "Professional" consultants are inclined to dismiss the policy research of most academics and activists as impractical or naïve (the term 'academic' has itself become a term of abuse). "Committed" activists are inclined to dismiss the policy research of most academics as overly specialised and that of professional consultants as compromised.

As a result of such pressures, many of the organizations that combine (more academic) research, consultancy and advocacy allow one to dominate their institutional strategy. They either become research institutes in the narrow more academic sense, or become consultancy companies or advocacy organizations that carry out research.

IIED claims to value elements of all three, and to combine them in a way that creates synergies, and does not require compromising on quality – even if IIED staff do tend to be less impartial than most academic researchers, more critical of

their donors/clients than most research consultants, and more easily swayed by their local partners than most researchers engaged in advocacy.

Crossing boundaries

From this rapid and rather stereotyped overview what becomes apparent is that IIED does not fit into any one of these categories, not just because real institutions never conform to stereotypes, but because IIED purposefully crosses their boundaries.

As an example, we can consider the work of the Human Settlements programme. Within a range of activities to contribute to urban poverty reduction and the improvement in urban environments, it produces the journal *Environment and Urbanization*. This is one of the few international journals where the majority of authors come from Africa, Asia and Latin America. It specifically aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice and provides a space for southern researchers and practitioners to gain access to and influence a broad readership of academics, researchers, policy makers, students and practitioners all over the world. In this instance, IIED has used its position, credibility, networks and knowledge to provide a space in which otherwise unheard voices have an opportunity to influence. Programme staff also advise many international development agencies on urban issues, so that work which is undertaken with southern NGOs is not only disseminated through publications, the web-site and specific workshops but also feeds into advice given to international agencies. This illustrates IIED playing the role of credible information broker – linking evidence and actors together, working at the local, national and international levels. It uses research to press governments and aid agencies, strengthens the influence of southern organisations to have voices that are listened to and participates in networks that make advocacy work more effective.

Environment and Urbanization aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice and provides a space for southern researchers and practitioners to gain access to and influence a broad readership of academics, researchers, policy makers, students and practitioners all over the world.

The following list draws on reflections of the communications programme, and highlights some of the differences between IIED's ways of working and other apparently similar organisations:

- Different actors are brought together within new fora which enable a range of voices to be heard. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that those whose voices are usually lost or ignored feel able to participate in these new fora or on existing platforms with the ultimate aim that they can engage in debate (policy or public) after IIED has left.

- While most research programmes involve a range of actors IIED's focus is on building and supporting links with Southern organisations and individuals so as to increase their representation.

- Diverse ways of working with both partners and other agencies/organisations are encouraged in order to build long term capacity for change and influence This means that the research has a shelf life which way outlives the involvement of IIED staff.

- Long term engagement with partners and in specific regions enables a deeper understanding of the local environment and policy arena which in turn maximises opportunities to affect change.

- Long term engagement also means that there is a mutual understanding between IIED and local partners which allows both sides to react quickly if the need arises.

- Recognition and credibility are another result of IIED's long-term engagement with issues and actors who are not usually part of the formal policy-making process

What IIED facilitates through its ways of working is an approach which specifically tries to ensure that poor and marginalized groups have the chance to participate in different policy arenas so that sustainable development takes their concerns into account. Specifically IIED also operates at an international policy level where it helps bring these voices to the table either in person or through the experience of its researchers.

To sum up, what IIED delivers through its ways of working is an understanding and careful application of what to work on (i.e. what will make a difference), who to work with, when to initiate work and in what way to build relationships and open new fora for new voices to be heard.

How does IIED characterise its 'ways of working'?

How does IIED see itself as a leading policy research institute working to achieve policy influence and change in the field of environment and development? Its mission is:

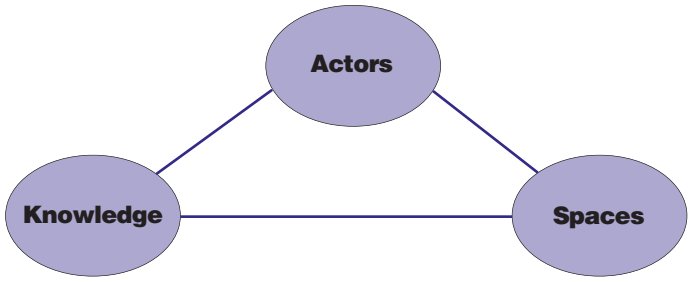
"To provide expertise and leadership in researching and achieving sustainable development at local, national, regional and global levels. In alliance with others we seek to share a future that ends global poverty and delivers and sustains efficient and equitable management of the world's natural resources."

The link between ways of working and effective policy outcomes can be described by Figure 1, where **ways of working involves choices about:**

1. *building effective knowledge and ensuring its transfer*
2. *identifying and working with the appropriate actors,*
3. *developing or operating in spaces where knowledge and actors can be brought together to shape and change policy and*
4. *understanding and working with the relationships that connect these elements.* (after Keeley and Scoones, 2003)

This is usefully depicted as a triangular set of relationships. The detail contained within each of these three elements will depend on the context in which IIED staff are operating.

Figure 1



For example, the knowledge element may be developed through:

1. *Discipline-based research* (e.g. agroecology, environmental economics)
2. *Sectoral research* (agriculture, biodiversity, climate, drylands, forestry etc.)
3. *Regional research* (e.g. West African drylands, East African water systems)
4. *Thematic research* (e.g. governance, public-private partnerships, sustainable markets)
5. *Resource focus*: soils, non-timber forest products

Actors and spaces elements may be brought together in various ways:

1. stakeholder engagement,
2. capacity development
3. advocacy

The term 'spaces' is used to denote not only the different locations where discussions are held and decisions may be taken but also the conceptual space in which discourse is developed and contested.

Principles:
"– not every relationship in development is or should be a 'partnership'. To work well, the development system needs all sorts of relationships; partnership is only one of them
– A 'partnership' is the most far-reaching in terms of the depth and breadth of rights and obligations that can be achieved
– A healthy relationship of any type is characterised by an agreed level of mutuality and balance in terms of rights and obligations of the parties concerned"
(Fowler, 2000:5)

IIED works in different political spaces creating new spaces for individuals and organisations to participate in, extending the boundaries to previously excluded actors and perhaps in some situations closing down spaces or preventing particular actors from entering.

Connecting knowledge to spaces and actors are different types of relationships. How relationships are formed, with whom, the duration and the trust built; these all become critical elements of building effective ways of working (Eyben, 2004). Hence IIED works in different political spaces creating new spaces for individuals and organisations to participate in, extending the boundaries to previously excluded actors and perhaps in some situations closing down spaces or preventing particular actors from entering. Figure 2 illustrates the types of spaces IIED operates within. This implies a set of explicit choices about where, how and with whom to work that form part of the action research process.

Each thematic area or sector engages through a variety of relationships (both long and short-term), some of which are characterised as partnerships (but note the importance of not falling into the trap of describing each and every relationship as a partnership) in focused research built on linking local-level understanding to policy influence and change at national, regional and international levels. Within each programme an inter-disciplinary approach is taken to addressing the issues, with research themes emerging from experience in a particular geographical or sectoral arena.

What is interesting about this set of tactics is that they are in many situations complementary and over-lapping temporally. For instance building voice (i.e. constituencies) is a valid means to create space for policies to be challenged and informed. However, this works in a more effective way when it is joined to on-going work on drawing in policy makers to analyse policy i.e. opening the ears to listen to the voices. Even if IIED does not necessarily cover all these channels, actors and spaces, analysis of the landscape to identify which other organisations are operating in these spaces, to build alliances with them in IIED's areas of competence will lead to strengthened policy outcomes.

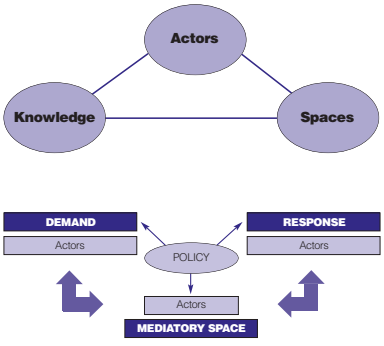
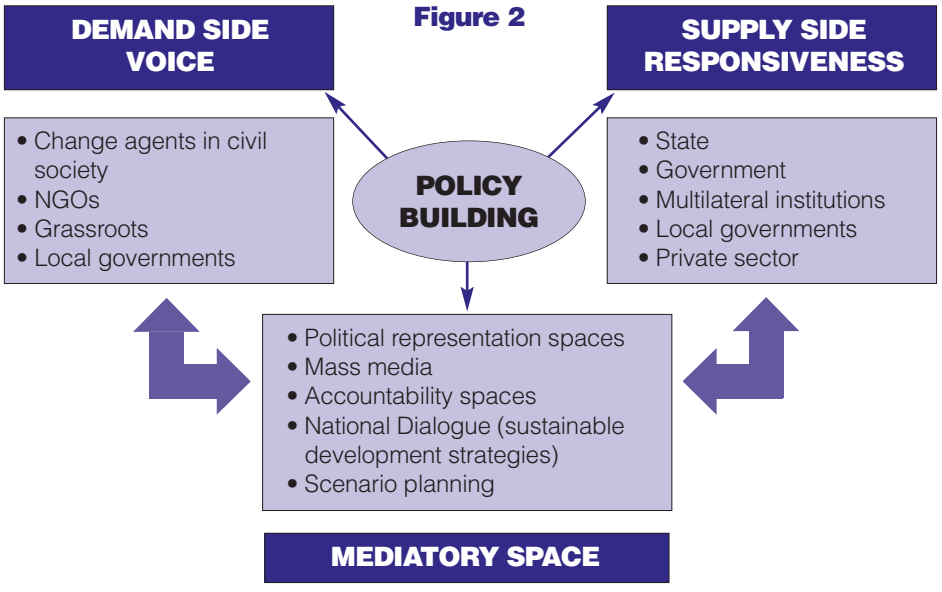


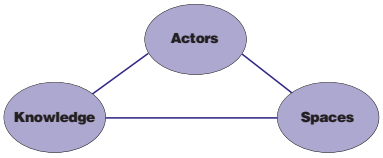
Figure 2



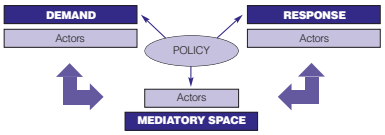
Adapted: Blackburn and Rodriguez-Carmona 2003

Much of IIED's work through its programmes focuses on each element of policy change and recognises that it is necessary to operate at these different levels and in the demand (voice), responsiveness and mediatory spaces to ensure reinforcing processes for change. Some examples will help to clarify these ways of working, and illustrate the use of the triangle of actors, spaces and knowledge to support policy change.

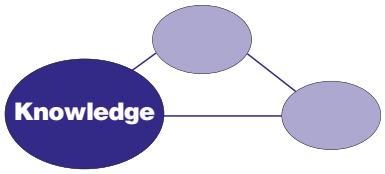
Examples of how IIED works



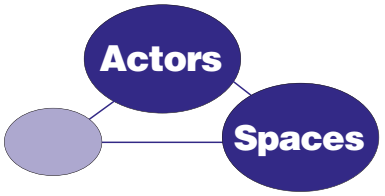
The examples show how spaces and levels (local, national, international) in which to operate are chosen according to the context – whether it is working in the 'demand' space, 'responsiveness' space, 'mediatory space' or a combination of all or parts of these. Within each of these spaces choices about the entry point – whether it is building knowledge, capacity of actors or perhaps creating new spaces will be context dependent.



Policy that Works for forests and people:
This project (1995-99) provided an approach that has since been followed by other programmes in IIED. The goal of the project was to improve the understanding and practice of policy processes, so that they improve the sustainability of forest management and optimise stakeholder benefits.



Contextual understanding – building knowledge
The project began with IIED staff reviewing literature and consulting with various policy research organisations and forestry practitioners to understand the state of debate on forest-related policy – processes and context – north and south. It began, then, at the **knowledge** point of the triangle we are using. It also was scoping out the whole policy context – looking at demand, response and mediatory spaces.



Actor and space analysis
It then selected six countries for detailed studies, with criteria for selection that included active 'policies' in that country (have some effect/ under debate/reform) and where previous fruitful collaborative links (good **relationships**) existed between one or more local institutions interested in the project. Thus it quickly moved to a consideration of **actors and spaces** – selecting partners and contexts to make the most of opportunities to create greater political 'space' and to push the debate forward on the basis of good research. (A secondary objective of the project was to use and strengthen local research capacity, through IIED's collaborative relationships.)

Actor analysis – example
"The people chosen were the good and perceptive people that we knew or knew of, rather than any particular institutions, and we found that it was better to find good people and then go with their institutions. They were already 'insiders', or at very least engaged, and were well-regarded by different important groups of stakeholders and actors.

"Nothing substitutes for having a reasonable profile with a piece of politically relevant and topical ongoing work, with a local team who can jump on opportunities that arise. When the government department has a workshop or initiates a process that is germane to the issue, for example, the team is ready, plugged into the relevant networks and institutions, and with meaningful and reliable facts at their fingertips. In our experience this is probably the main route for influence along the way." (James Mayers, IIED, pers.comm.)

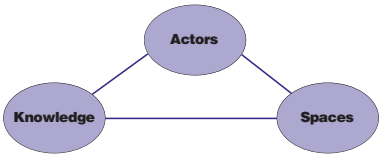
IIED's role

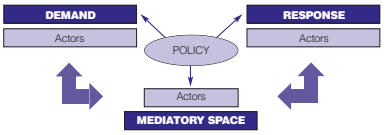
The teams were asked how they could use IIED most effectively. IIED's main role in the early stages, in addition to overall co-ordination, was to swap information and try to spot gaps in the way teams were approaching things, and to note how one team could help another team to tackle a problem, or develop a method to solve a problem,

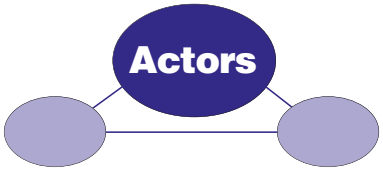
thus enabling the teams to build each other's capacity. It was a revelation at times just how useful this was, and when the whole group got together it really worked because there had been genuine links built between the teams.

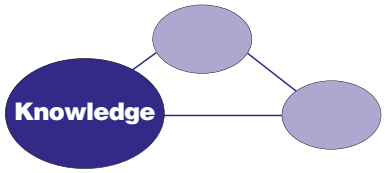
Importantly, IIED was also used to back up the teams and to take the flak or to be the excuse for pushing at politically sensitive areas. "We also pushed the teams to keep making their case in every way possible for different audiences, and to keep information moving and maintain the profile of the project. "

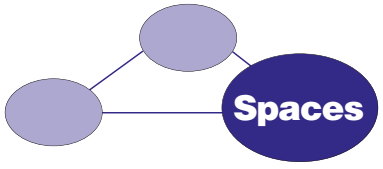
This example shows clearly the importance of contextual understanding, good knowledge (well-researched evidence to inform policy decision-making) identifying and working with appropriate actors and importantly IIED taking a role that creates new spaces and contests existing spaces to allow different voices to influence policy. In this and other cases, IIED staff play an important part in constructing and facilitating the relationships between actors, knowledge and spaces (the lines linking the three elements in the triangle)

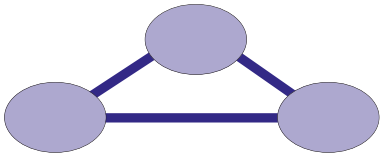












Sustainable and equitable food systems

Another programme of work in IIED (Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods – SARL) seeks to promote sustainable and equitable agri-food systems based on local diversity and participatory democracy, thereby contributing to improved livelihoods.

Within SARL's work on fairer food systems, Race to the Top aimed to help key players in the UK supermarket sector to enhance their social, environmental and ethical policies and performance over a five year period. Besides making contact with supermarkets, the initial work consisted of identifying the key **actors,** which included a range of civil society organisations and interest groups, key government departments as well as private sector companies. It also involved setting up groups to work on different 'modules' of the project (environment, producers, workers, health and so on) as well as advisory and coordination groups. It has generated **knowledge** on how supermarkets operate, benchmarking and documenting good practice and undertaking research or collating data in key areas. The project has provided new **spaces** for different actors to come together and IIED staff have had an important role in building trust (**relationships**) between actors.

Monitoring the progress of this kind of project might involve:

- assessing the quality of the **knowledge** produced through peer review, for example through the 'scientific review panel' which has been set up.
- assessing which actors have been included, how the range of **actors** expanded or contracted and why, contributions, problems etc. Which actors 'changed their behaviour' and why? (including IIED!)
- assessing how and whether the **spaces** have functioned to resolve conflicts, on which issues consensus has been built, where issues have got stuck and why.
- Assessing unexpected outcomes, positive and negative

The importance of relationships for supporting effective policy outcomes

Where does all this analysis of ways of working lead? Investment in relationships, building trust, opening spaces for voices of the poor to be heard is laudable but does it lead to any change?

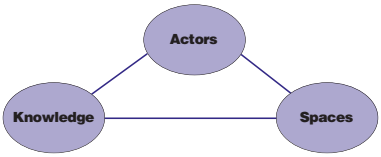
Some examples from IIED provide indications of the types of outcomes achieved. In Ghana, for example, the work on forestry policy was used by government to rethink their approach to community forestry. In Costa Rica, a campesino organisation, involved in the research with IIED, used the findings to support advocacy to change incentives and use taxation to provide a fund for smallholder forestry.

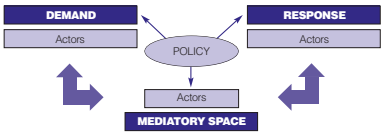
What is clear from these limited examples is that far more work needs to be carried out to assess outcomes from the ways in which IIED works. However, what is also apparent is the importance of valuing the relationships built through these ways of working and the damage that can be done when these relationships are not valued.

An important element of effective working is the style of engagement or perhaps more profoundly the interplay between cultures of the different organisations (Lewis et al, 2003). Building relationships that are going to make a difference requires significant investment and understanding by both parties (Eyben 2004).

Trust is the cornerstone of an effective relationship that may take a long time to build and is easily destroyed by inappropriate behaviours or styles of interaction. The epitome of this is the abrupt termination of funding to a project leaving relationships severed with no recognition of the human cost. This may happen where there is poor communication between a donor and IIED, or where the funding environment suddenly changes due to political reasons. Donors too have a responsibility to understand the nature of the engagement undertaken by IIED through their financing and the implications for these relationships if there are precipitate changes in IIED's operating environment. IIED has a matching responsibility to be able to convey the importance of its approaches to donors.

Ways of working thus are not just to be understood by IIED but need to be communicated to funders. Relationships are fragile easily and rapidly broken although investment to build them may be long-term. If relationships are not perceived to be of central value, they are easily ignored or betrayed. In essence, each actor, whether it is a donor, IIED staff member or a research partner has the agency to affect the relationship and therefore the outcome. Nobody has a neutral relationship each therefore has a responsibility to understand the effects of their relationships on others and the effects on outcomes.





A framework and possible tools for monitoring IIED's ways of working

This section first attempts to develop a preliminary framework that builds on IIED's ways of working, and articulates some of the questions that guide these ways of working. It then examines the potential for adapting monitoring tools from more conventional academic, consultancy and advocacy organizations. Together, these are intended to provide a first step in developing an approach to monitoring and evaluation tailored to IIED's particular ways of working.

Questions that frame IIED's ways of working

As discussed earlier there are a set of distinct processes followed by the different IIED programmes to build understanding and relationships that lead to change. The policy stories, using the triangle of actor, space and knowledge combined with the demand, responsiveness and mediatory space diagram, give us a framework for evaluating local or sectoral policy agendas and identify how IIED's work in this area can help support sustainable development. This framework can be expressed through a series of questions:

Looking at the context:

- What evidence and knowledge is already available?
- Who are the actors in the different spaces (demand, responsiveness, mediatory)?
- What types of spaces are already available for actors?

Answering these sets of questions effectively provides a baseline and a map of the landscape in which the researcher is operating. Similarly review questions can be asked using the baseline as the means to interrogate changes in the policy landscape. Finally an evaluation using the maps and description produced at the start, mid-point and the end allows plausible stories to be told of reasons for change focused on the key elements of knowledge, actors and spaces.

Contextual understanding: what and where?
Looking across each of the programmes a set of patterns emerges around how research issues are selected and entry points defined. The range of possible issues to focus on is of course prescribed by the programme area in which staff are operating. However, within this, the issue is contextualised socially, politically, economically, historically and environmentally. This broad contextualisation ensures an equally broad engagement with the actors in this particular arena. The line to policy change is not linear or sequential. This is recognised by staff and factored into their ways of working. The knowledge held by programme staff allows them to build relationships across the gamut of actors engaged in policy formation directly and indirectly and to avoid the more often seen problems of policy research that focuses on the publicly acknowledged policy agendas rather than the underlying concerns that are driving change. Credibility of position gained through experience, cultural understanding and institutional status all help to build relationships that result in a more real dialogue. The example from the Drylands programme of selecting interlocutors who are accepted to have these attributes led to more effective understanding of the hidden discourses that affect policy change.

Thus if we analyse a couple of examples we can see how the triangle of ways of working is applied within the framework for policy change (working in demand, responsiveness and mediatory spaces). Once we can identify these elements then

Ways of working = Choice about what and where, who, when, how

1) issue on which to work that is going to make a difference in terms of supporting the achievement of particular outcomes
2) who to work with (institution/ key individual)
3) when to work on it
4) methods to use

Mapping and making of policy in Mali

The study was done by Mike Winter, experienced in Mali since 1981 with the help of Ali Basha of Jam Sahel. Mike was known to and respected by senior important players, both within and out of government, including people that he had worked with many years ago when they were junior, and this gave him access to interview the right people, who although they did not want to be named were willing to 'tell secrets'. Their approval also gave him access to other important senior people

we can consider ways to monitor them. For example a baseline mapping of the demand, responsiveness, mediatory space diagram (Figure 2) for a particular context with a mapping of actors and the spaces they currently occupy provides a useful starting point against which to measure change.

Actor analysis: who to work with?

In Kanji and Greenwood's review of IIED's participatory approaches to research, they describe an appreciation of the sometimes unplanned nature of actor analysis and the sometimes circumscribed selection of actors with whom to engage: 'The selection of partners is often an informal and ad hoc process, building on past contacts and existing networks, sometimes with key individuals rather than institutions. Some staff see the existence of these networks as a major strength of IIED. Others see it as a problem in that 'new blood' is not systematically included, connections with institutions are broken when individuals leave and it is not clear who to approach and how, when new countries or new areas of work are involved" (p.18). Although this quote is relatively self-critical it does highlight two important strengths of IIED:

1. the importance of past experience in a particular country
2. the existence of good networks of contacts as a result of long-term engagement in one area

The importance of these two elements should not be underestimated. They are essential parts of the strength of an organisation and enable it to engage with a context and identify the meaningful issues, critical timing and players who will make a difference. Often these two attributes are individualised within an organisation rather than being a whole-organisation approach. IIED over the years has attempted to ensure that these attributes are built across its programmes as a key element of effective working and delivery of outcomes.

When identifying actors with whom to build relationships, IIED staff identified the characteristics, described in Box 2, that help to ensure effective relationships and outcomes emerge.

Box 2: Characteristics contributing to effective outcomes

- Partners' expertise and experience in the particular field
- Partners' positioning to influence decision-making at different levels
- Levels of trust in IIED-partner relations
- Partners' values and approaches

Kanji and Greenwood (2001:18)

However, this is confined to defining those actors with whom IIED wishes to enter into a partnership relationship. There are however, a range of other actors who may have an effect on policy with whom partnership is neither necessarily desirable nor perhaps necessary to achieve change. A wide scoping of the landscape enables an identification of these actors and the possible sets of relationships they have and thus assessment of their role within the policy arena.

Actor analysis matrix

Looking at actors individually makes it possible to identify and describe relevant practices, trace convergences and coalitions, and assess the actor's strengths and weaknesses with respect to affecting policy in a particular direction.

SARL and temporal shifts in ways of working

Four phases

1. getting the word out – making the case for a new approach
2. Going to ground – showing it can work in practice
3. Stepping back mainstreaming while fire-fighting
4. moving upstream – policies, markets, civil society organisations

The art of effective working often lies in revealing the hidden relations and actors that often are the most influential.

Such purposive mapping is often useful in revealing what you do not know as much as what is known. The art of effective working often lies in revealing the hidden relations and actors that often are the most influential.

Timing: when?
Understanding the context, identifying the issue and key individuals and institutions is all part of an effective research process and a way of working. However, having the necessary knowledge to know when to build relationships around a particular issue, when to release evidence into a particular arena, who to work with is another critical part of effective operation. Getting timing right is about being able to respond to an opportunity, it is also about building opportunity for future action. In order to do this it is necessary to 1) understand the context, 2) have the relationships to operate, 3) have the organisational flexibility to respond and perhaps most importantly 4) have the time to build understanding and relationships (often intangible and difficult to demonstrate to funders the importance of such actions).

Choice of method: how?
Once you have determined what, when and with whom, the question about how the relationship is to be built becomes paramount. Reflecting back again into programmatic experience, the choice of how is again dependent on the reading of the context. There are diverse ways of working depending on context, level of understanding, trust, positioning of individuals.

Part of working out how we work also depends on considering the most effective spaces in which to work and which we should ignore? Space analysis – i.e. whether to create new platforms, mediate between disparate actors, build capacity in others to create or expand existing spaces, all become questions to be asked when choosing methods of engagement for influence.

This aspect of ways of working has been well reviewed already by Kanji and Greenwood (2001) and does not need to be revisited here. The major point to take away from their work is that the choice of method for engagement depends on the context of the particular policy arena, and therefore is dependent on proper assessment of the other elements of the ways of working equation.

This framework, and the questions that define it, focuses directly on IIED's ways of working, and what they mean for research practice. IIED's ways of working also have implications for the tools that can be used to monitor the quality and impact of its work. Some such tools should emerge from the framework above, and explicit attempts to answer the questions posed. Others need to be adapted from more conventional monitoring and evaluation systems. Conventional monitoring and evaluation tools are, of course, already being applied at IIED, at both project and institute-wide levels. The following section focuses more specifically on adapting conventional tools to IIED's ways of working.

Monitoring the quality of research, consultancy and advocacy in a hybrid organization

While IIED is not unique in combining (more academic) research, consultancy and advocacy, its combination is sufficiently rare that conventional monitoring tools do need to be adapted to IIED's particular ways of working to achieve their full potential. The evaluation of academic research, for example, centres on peer review and citations of peer reviewed journals, while for IIED an extended peer review

process is more appropriate, giving more recognition to the knowledge of practitioners and others. Alternatively, oversight panels can be adapted to play an important role in IIED's advocacy work, evaluating, correcting or reinforcing IIED's advocacy messages. The following sections provide a very brief summary of some of the ways in which conventional indicators of success and mechanisms of quality control in academic research, consultancy and advocacy need to be adapted to meet IIED's requirements. Particular attention, however, is paid to extended peer review and adapted oversight panels, as examples of how IIED can adapt conventional tools to its approaches.

Academic Research: peer reviewing, and more

Traditionally, making research findings public, and subjecting research papers to peer review before publication, have been two of the principal means of preventing sub-standard or biased research from gaining credibility and influence. The evaluation of research departments and researchers at universities relies heavily on assessing the number of peer-reviewed publications appearing in academic journals. Citation counts, based on the number of times work is cited in peer reviewed journals, are also used, and are sometimes treated as a measure of 'impact'.

Such evaluation procedures are relevant to IIED, but they are far more appropriate to academic research organizations. When IIED engages in a programme of research, there is usually an attempt to publish at least some of the findings in peer reviewed academic journals, in part to demonstrate that the research does indeed meet academic standards. There have been discussions of setting at least tentative targets of, for example, having each researcher publish at least one article in a peer-reviewed journal every year. However, in many of IIED's areas of work, academic reviewers are unlikely to be in the best position to judge the quality of the research, and readers of peer-reviewed journals are not the most relevant public.

Tools & Mechanisms
Multi-stakeholder/ citizen peer review panel

In short, IIED's approach to research generally requires a broader definition of 'peers' and of the relevant 'public'. A peer review process designed for IIED's ways of working would place far more emphasis on local knowledge, and procedures giving those who have such local knowledge the opportunity to judge the validity of the research findings. Similarly, the audiences for IIED publications would not be primarily researchers. Thus, while academic review processes and publications to academic audiences have a role for IIED, they need to be balanced with non-academic review processes and audiences with the use of a range of media and diversity of products to communicate results and approaches to different groups. This holds even when looking narrowly at issues of quality control. It holds all the more in the broader context of policy debates, and the need to ensure the representation of the views and interests of groups that are politically marginal but are going to be affected by the policy decisions. Thus methods such as citizen's juries, videos, radio drama all provide important means of broadening the access of politically marginal groups to information, decision-making and policy influence.

Tools & Mechanisms
Diversity of media to reach diversity of audiences

Consultancy: when profits are not an indicator of success

If the stereotypical academic researcher is primarily concerned with the opinion of his or her 'peers' and publishes in peer-reviewed journals, the stereotypical consultant, working for a large consulting firm, is primarily concerned with the opinion of his or her 'clients' and their willingness to pay for services. From a consultancy perspective, profitability is the ultimate criteria of success, for research as for other activities. To the extent that it is considered necessary to justify why profits should be taken as an indication of good policy research, the obvious answer

is that clients are willing to pay more for good advice, based on good research, so a higher (and sustained) willingness to pay signals higher quality research.

Tools & Mechanisms
Indicators:
Repeat business
New work through client recommendations

Clients tend to evaluate the work of consultants on a project-by-project basis, against Terms of Reference set out in the initial project documents. If the project is evaluated in a broader context, this context is, in the first instance, defined by the client, not the consultants. The client is more likely to want to evaluate the project in the context of their own project portfolio, and their own mandate and strategy, than in the context of a consultancy firm's projects and strategy.

IIED does engage in work that could be described as consultancy, and some of the monitoring and evaluation procedures employed in this arena are applicable to IIED. Given IIED's ways of working, however, it would also be a mistake to adopt project or client-centred monitoring and evaluation at IIED. Only a small share of IIED's projects are designed to serve a particular client, and even these need to be understood in the context of the programme of work they are part of. Moreover, since IIED is a non-profit organization profits can never be an indicator of success. However, repeat business with a client is a good indicator of success.

IIED does, of course, need to ensure its activities are financially viable, and that funders can see the value of IIED's work. In some cases this must be done on a project-by-project basis. Generally, however, IIED's projects are likely to be better evaluated in relation to their policy context, and in relation to other IIED activities, than to the context of the funder's project portfolio. The important question to answer is the degree to which the consultancy work contributes to the overall achievement of the whole programme. This relates back to the earlier discussion of monitoring IIED's ways of working. Since it is in combining a range of different activities that IIED typically pursues its goals, and these activities often span different projects, the means must be found to present these ways of working in a different form, centred around themes rather than projects.

Advocacy: from promoting a cause to ensuring the views of deprived groups are represented

The stereotypical advocate, unlike either the academic researcher or the consultant, has a cause that their work is intended to further. In the extreme, advocacy is pursued with a campaign and a predetermined policy agenda (e.g. to cancel debt, save species, or stop child labour). IIED is closer to an advocacy organization than is the stereotypical academic research institute, or the stereotypical consultancy firm – but its ways of working are such that it would be a mistake to monitor or evaluate IIED as if advocacy were its primary purpose.

Tools & Mechanisms
Independent oversight panels
Actor mapping before and after the advocacy work

Like all policy processes, advocacy is inherently messy, unpredictable and contested. "Advocacy that works" will inevitably upset different coalitions of power and generate contradictory debate. This is often an indicator of success. Given that much of IIED's advocacy work will aim to represent the views of partners involved in collaborative activities, it is important that these partners be represented in evaluations of the quality and validity of IIED's advocacy work. Where controversy exists – or is anticipated – as a result of IIED's advocacy interventions, there will be a need to set up quality assurance groups or independent oversight panels to evaluate, correct or reinforce IIED's advocacy messages.

Depending on the policy issue and context, the composition of these oversight panels should:

i. represent all social actors or stakeholder groups more or less equally
ii. purposefully over-represent social groups who are likely to be most affected by policies being advocated and whose voices are usually marginalized from the policy process and the validation of whose knowledge counts. (Michel Pimbert, pers.comm.)

Monitoring of the effectiveness of advocacy requires careful contextual analysis and mapping at the outset and follow-up review at the end of the process to begin to unravel and demonstrate the effects of the advocacy process.

All these approaches need to be applied in their relevant context. There is no one approach to monitoring that can deliver an answer to the question concerning the effectiveness of the work that IIED carries out.

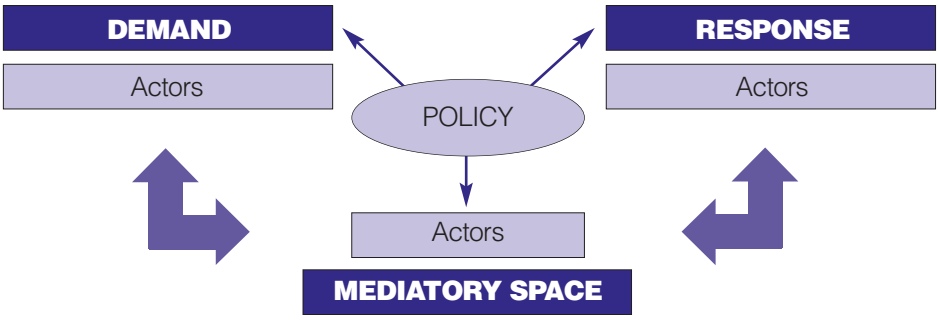
Key conclusions

What we hope this paper provides is a starting point for further discussion to develop more systematic approaches to building the credible stories that link the actions of IIED staff and the choices that are made to the changes in behaviours and policies that may result.

The key conclusions we draw from this work is that there are some clear elements of process that can make a difference to policy outcomes but that thus far IIED has been unsuccessful in systematically demonstrating the ways in which its particular and distinctive ways of working do make a difference. There are some interesting examples that have been developed around 'the Policy that Works' model but there has been limited follow-up in tracking change as a result of the inputs from IIED and the research support.

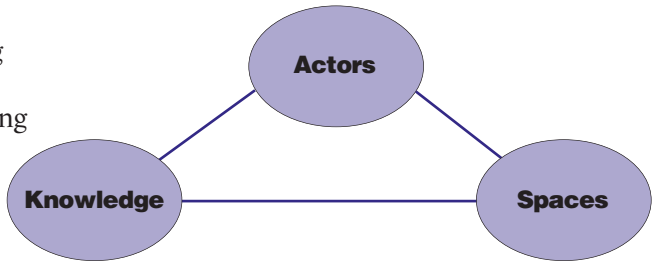
The major gaps to be resolved through further work include:

a. developing a set of examples illustrating how IIED's ways of working has effects, and why we would expect these effects to be larger than single pronged approaches. This would be done by tracking, through a pilot study, one of the programmes in IIED looking backwards as well as working with the programme to develop forward strategies to determine the effects



b. developing a minimal framework for programmatic or thematic areas to ensure that the major policy spaces of demand, supply and mediation are covered by activities covered by the programme or theme.

c. systematic analysis of the context to include scoping of actors, knowledge available and gaps, mapping of relationships and influence, assessment of spaces in which they operate



d. use of the contextual analysis to inform the monitoring and quality assurance processes to be put in place, ensuring the processes used are contextually appropriate

e. use of the actor analysis and understanding of influence and relationships as a basis for a programmatic communications strategy identifying the most appropriate forms of media and channels to build understanding, open up spaces for marginalised voices and reach those who are usually excluded by the written word.

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Footnotes

1. It could, for example, lead IIED to: a) choose projects believed to have small but measurable impacts over those believed to have large but difficult to measure impacts; b) advocate policies and initiatives that are more likely to occur (and hence can be claimed as an impact), rather than those that would yield the best results; c) claim credit for outcomes and impacts even when these claims undermine local ownership of joint initiatives (damaging IIED's partnerships, as well as reducing the impacts of the initiatives it is involved in).

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Ways of Working for Sustainable Development: IIED's experience

IIED works at the crossroads of policy, research and advocacy, with the aim of furthering sustainable development internationally. But to what extent does IIED really contribute to this ambitious goal? One way in which to address this question is to focus on the ways IIED claims to be working, whether these are the most effective ways for the organisation to work towards achieving its goals, and whether IIED is indeed working in these ways.

The term 'ways of working' implies a focus on the process through which something is done rather than just on the output or outcome. It has become increasingly popular in discussions of policy research. This is in recognition of the problems with monitoring and assessing policy-related research and information initiatives in terms of their formal outputs and outcomes. It also emphasises the importance of examining how research is carried out, the relationships that are developed, and the lessons that are learned along the way.

This paper considers what ways of working means within IIED and considers the diversity of spaces IIED occupies and actors it works with in order to help contribute to the achievement of its mission. It draws on several pieces of work already undertaken within IIED in addition to drawing on ideas from the literature and from other organisations' experiences. The paper is as much for IIED staff as it is for partners, donors and other organisations with an interest in monitoring and evaluating the activities of policy research institutes.

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is an independent, non-profit research institute working in the field of sustainable development. IIED aims to provide expertise and leadership in researching and achieving sustainable development at local, national, regional, and global levels.
In alliance with others we seek to help shape a future that ends global poverty and delivers and sustains efficient and equitable management of the world's natural resources.

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