

Uptake of research in policy and practice: Perspectives of policy makers and researchers

Introduction

It is recognised that there are insufficient linkages between research, policy and practice at each stage of designing, conducting and communicating research to policy makers and practitioners, which mean that the use of research can be limited. The reasons for these gaps may be perceived differently by members of the research and policy-making communities. This fact sheet highlights these differing perceptions.



The purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify and consult a number of key informants at a range of sector-related events. These events were selected based on their location, and the number of participants in attendance who were engaged in research and/or policy making. The events attended were located in the Mekong, East and West Africa, and Europe. In total, 20 key informant interviews were conducted, seven with policy makers and 15 with researchers.

Headline facts

The perspective of policy makers

Policy makers have a range of attitudes towards the problem of linking research and policy; from a strict dichotomy of two distinctly non-overlapping elements, to being able to demonstrate examples of effective research to policy linkages. Within this range of experience, common features include:

- systematic processes being in place;
- discussion and sharing of ideas between a range of stakeholders;
- input from experts; and
- commissioning research based on known demand at country level.



The perspective of researchers

There is a general frustration amongst the research community about the uptake and use of research findings, with little evidence of policy documentation based on research. There is a range of experience demonstrated, but some points of note include:

- there is little understanding by researchers of how to link their work to policy;
- results are often presented to potential users only at the end of research projects;
- face to face contact is useful;
- knowledge about the real demand for research often does not exist;
- policy based on consultative research is more likely to be well received;
- training in research methods is important; and
- including impact measurement at the planning stage leads to improved communication during the research process.

Recommendations

Barriers to linking research and policy

Both policy makers and researchers identified a number of potential barriers to creating strong links between the two parties. These relate to a wide variety of factors, including:

- pressures associated with the nature of political office which can work against the need to ensure that scientific research informs policy design and implementation;
- a lack of consensus on the prioritization of research by governments, universities and civil society;
- lack of harmonization between the interests of researchers, donors and policy issues;

- serious disincentives for the researcher to reach policy making audiences, due to career progression routes based on academic publications;
- limited evidence of the positive impact of research findings on policy.

How to improve linkages between research and policy

The issue of responsibility to create and maintain these linkages is important. The burden of responsibility is perceived to lie most heavily on the researcher, who should be more proactive in terms of identifying research agendas and in communicating the results of research to policy makers. Other ways to improve these linkages are:

- a continual process of consultation, with all relevant stakeholders;
- for policy makers to maintain strong links with research institutions, for the purposes of commissioning research or to learn about current research;
- to foster personal relationships at a senior level;
- to use intermediary organizations as a communication route, especially where personal contacts are weak.



Further information

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