

PANOS
LONDON
ILLUMINATING
VOICES

Research makes the news

Strengthening media
engagement with research
to influence policy

Promoting dialogue, debate and change

Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Joanne Carpenter and Ingrid Yngstrom of Panos London's Relay programme.

It was produced with the support of the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

Panos London acknowledges the work of Francesca Silvani and Jackie Davies in implementing the research and authoring the full-length report. Thanks also to the in-country case study researchers: Paul Kavuma Nkwanga in Uganda and Indi Mclymont-Lafayette and Dawn Marie Roper in Jamaica. Special thanks to the many journalists, researchers, civil society representatives and policymakers who gave up their valuable time to be interviewed and to staff at Panos Caribbean and Panos Eastern Africa whose support was critical in making this report a reality.

Panos London is grateful to Kitty Warnock, Annie Hoban, Frances Cornford, Francesca Silvani, Luther Bois Anukur and Beryl Leach for insights and comments on the draft report.



This material has been funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the department's official policies.

The text in this publication is subject to a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 2.0 UK: England and Wales licence. To view a copy of this licence go to <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-sa/2.0/uk>

© Panos London, March 2010
Some rights reserved

If you wish to alter, transform or build upon this work, please inform Panos London.

Panos London
9 White Lion Street
London N1 9PD
United Kingdom

tel +44 (0)20 7278 1111
fax +44 (0)20 7278 0345

info@panos.org.uk
www.panos.org.uk

All photography

© Photographer | Panos Pictures

All rights reserved

Photographs available from Panos Pictures: www.panos.co.uk

Except for photograph, p12, which is subject to a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 2.0 Generic licence

© J J Richards

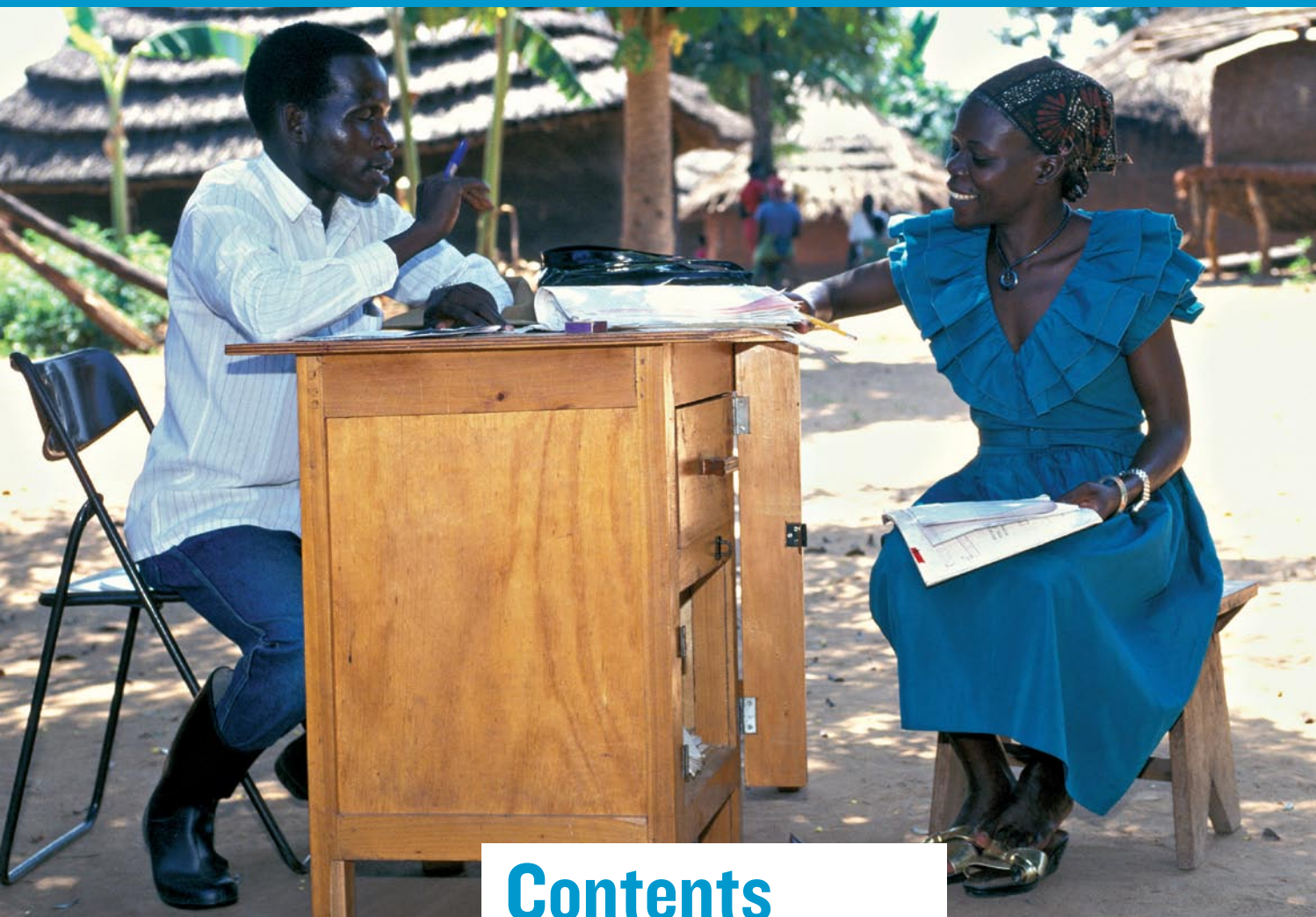
Some rights reserved

Photograph available from Flickr: www.flickr.com

978 1 870670 43 2



Panos London is part of the worldwide Panos network of independent institutes working to ensure that information is used effectively to foster debate, pluralism and democracy. For more information, see: www.panos.org



Contents

Interview with local health
official, Uganda
ROBIN COUSINS | PANOS PICTURES

2 Introduction

3 Research into policy: context, evidence, linkages

4 The case studies

4 Jamaica

5 Working conditions in Jamaica among women in wholesale outlets

7 Early childhood development in Jamaica

8 Uganda

8 Uganda and the scourge of *buveera*

10 The 'Save Mabira' campaign, Uganda

13 Discussion and implications

16 Final conclusions

Introduction

Research into development issues is not an end in itself. If knowledge created by researchers is shared and debated publicly, it is more likely to be adopted by policymakers and practitioners. Too many research reports sit on library shelves gathering dust. Today there is growing recognition of the importance of communicating research findings. The 2008 Research Strategy of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) states that the 'critical issue for the future is how to improve researchers' effectiveness in producing outputs that directly and indirectly change both policy and practice, are truly relevant to poor people's needs, and are effectively taken up'.¹ The strategy commits DFID to devoting a greater proportion of its resources to promoting the use and uptake of research in order to influence policy.

The media are known to play a role in the communication of policy ideas. At times, policymakers use newspapers as a source of information and quote from newspapers in parliament or when speaking on radio or television programmes. They also use radio phone-ins to gauge public opinion, and participate in them. Media debates can fuel public interest and concern over particular issues, adding to existing pressure on governments to change policy. However, the conditions under which the media engage with, and report on, research and evidence to influence policy debates and outcomes, and the factors that strengthen their capacity to do so in developing country contexts, remain relatively unexamined. This briefing looks at the media's capacity to generate public debate using research to influence policy outcomes. It provides insights on how to strengthen that capacity, drawing on commissioned case-study research from Uganda and Jamaica.

Key findings

Drawing on available research and evidence from the field, this briefing finds that the political and institutional context, including the degree of representativeness of government and the vibrancy of civil society, is important to understanding the capacity of the media to generate public debate around research and evidence, and to influence policy outcomes. The following factors strengthen the capacity of the media to do so:

- the capacity of **journalists** to use research to create stories that capture the public's interest and are related to existing and emerging policy-making agendas
- the capacity of **researchers** to produce policy-relevant research and to work with intermediaries to present such research in a way that the media can use
- the capacity of **civil society activists** to pick up policy-related research and drive public debate around it
- **the strength of the relationships among these actors** – journalists, civil society activists and researchers – and their associated organisations, and the degree of openness and trust among them.

The briefing is organised into four further sections. First, it provides a conceptual framework in which to interpret the findings from four case studies. It goes on to provide a description of the case studies. In each case study, it looks at the media's capacity to generate public debate using research to influence policy outcomes. This is followed by a synthesis and discussion of the main findings. The final section provides conclusions and outlines some of the main implications of the briefing.

¹ DFID 'DFID Research Strategy, 2008–2013', London, 2008

Research into policy: context, evidence, linkages

There has been growing interest in evidence-based policy-making and in how research influences policy in developing country contexts.² The Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme run by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has been investigating the process of research uptake into policy and practice.³ In building this body of work, ODI has looked at the factors that contribute to, or limit, the roles that the different stakeholders – including the media and civil society – play in this process.⁴

Media freedom is considered to be a key factor in the communication of new ideas, and in turning them into policy and practice.⁵ A strong and vibrant civil society is also important in effectively advocating for policy, legislative and administrative change. Academic freedom is a further significant factor, which provides the foundation for a strong research base. It means researchers are free to ask questions and approach government policies with a critical eye. The degree of freedom of each of these is directly related to the degree of freedom and openness of the political system and its institutions.

RAPID's findings show – and this is also supported by the findings from these case studies – that the political and institutional context is the most important factor affecting how and why research is taken up by policymakers. Specifically, the findings indicate that more open democratic political systems generally better support evidence-based policy-making:

*'Democracies imply a greater accountability of governments and therefore a greater incentive to improve policy and performance. Democratic contexts also imply the existence of more open entry points into the policymaking process, and there are fewer constraints on communication. In contrast, autocratic regimes often tend to limit the gathering and communication of evidence and have weak accountability mechanisms.'*⁶

ODI's RAPID programme identifies two further areas that are important to understanding the linkages between research and policy. The first is the evidence itself, including the quality and packaging of the research for communication to different audiences. The second is the nature and strength of the linkages among all the different actors involved in the research-policy nexus, which includes but is not limited to policymakers, researchers, civil society activists and the media. These insights are strongly supported by evidence presented in this briefing.

One clear conclusion from the overall findings is that there is no linear trajectory from research to policy outcome, and no single actor in that trajectory who can determine a particular policy outcome. Each of the actors and institutions has a role to play but their relationships with each other are key to ensuring a successful outcome. The specific role of the media is the main focus of this briefing. The briefing draws on RAPID's findings to elaborate on the differences in research uptake by the media across four case studies. It looks at the media's capacity to generate public debate and influence policy outcomes, and provides insights into how to strengthen that capacity.

² For example, see DFID's R4D site: www.research4development.info

³ www.odi.org.uk

⁴ For example, see Julius Court with Lin Cotterrell (2006) 'What political and institutional context issues matter for bridging research and policy? A literature review and discussion of data collection approaches', ODI working paper, no 269, p5

⁵ For example, information and press freedoms have been linked persuasively by Amartya Sen to the state's willingness to intervene in famine prevention, particularly in India. See J Court with L Cotterrell (2006), p6, as note 4

⁶ J Court with L Cotterrell (2006), p6, see note 4. Court and Cotterrell also note that: 'The limited number of cases from non-democratic contexts makes it too soon to tell exactly how a closed political system affects the impact of research on policymaking. In some cases, there are clearly constraints to using research in policymaking (eg Iran and Morocco), while in others, there can still be a significant impact (eg Saudi Arabia and Ukraine).'

The case studies

Panos undertook four case studies for this briefing, looking at the links between research, media debate and policy influence – two in Jamaica and two in Uganda. In both countries, the media sector is relatively independent and pluralistic, and operates within a culture of lively public debate. For each case study, in-depth qualitative interviews were carried out with key stakeholders and radio content was analysed.⁷ This was complemented by an analysis of media coverage in two principal dailies. Print media were influential in setting news agendas in both countries, and issues first covered in newspapers quickly reached a wider audience through radio news bulletins and discussion programmes.⁸ How research was taken up varied by country and also by case study.

Jamaica

Country context

Jamaica's political system is stable and its government is considered to be relatively democratic.⁹ In a recent USAID survey, it was found that there was wide support for democracy in Jamaica, and voting and political participation is high.¹⁰ Press freedom in Jamaica is ranked 12th in the world, higher than the UK or USA.¹¹ But there is still a way to go in terms of institutional development: the public sector is considered to be over-bureaucratic and inefficient, and corruption is perceived to be widespread.¹²

Economically, the Jamaican government faces high unemployment – currently averaging 12.5 per cent – growing debt, and high interest rates. These economic problems have exacerbated existing social problems. For example, the migration of unemployed people to urban areas, coupled with an increase in the use and trafficking of narcotics – crack cocaine and marijuana – has contributed to a high level of violent crime in cities, particularly in the capital, Kingston.¹³ Women and young children are especially at risk in this environment.¹⁴

The Jamaican government's track record on social issues – particularly those related to women and children – has not been good relative to its economic track record. For example, in 2009, Jamaica's progress in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was on track for poverty reduction targets, while its progress in meeting MDG targets on issues related to women and children was not: on MDG 3 (gender equality), Jamaica was 'lagging', and on MDGs 4 (child mortality) and 5 (maternal health), Jamaica was 'far behind' meeting its targets.¹⁵

Over the last five to ten years, the Jamaican government has been developing new policies and legislation to deal with some of its social issues.

- Since the early 2000s the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has been drafting, with International Labour Organization (ILO) assistance, new legislation to strengthen workplace safety and workers' rights. The Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act is set to replace the Factories Act of 1973, which has provided minimal protection for workers.
- In 2005, the Jamaican government passed the Early Childhood Act, to bolster early childhood education in schools. A government commission, charged with implementing the policy laid out in the Act, was set up.
- In 1984, the Jamaican government ratified CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

⁷ This included researchers, civil society representatives, journalists, editors and media managers, policymakers, government officials and members of communities most affected by the issues raised by the research

⁸ The scope and timescale of this research project made it impossible to analyse the content of radio programmes. Instead, views on radio content were gathered from panel discussions and interviews. Follow-up research in this area would be valuable. Politicians in both countries use discussion programmes to gauge public opinion on current issues, and occasionally participate in them

⁹ World Democracy Audit (www.worldaudit.org). See also note 32

¹⁰ Lawrence Powell and Balford Lewis (2009) 'Political culture of democracy in Jamaica, 2008: The impact of governance', USAID

¹¹ Freedom House: www.freedomhouse.org

¹² Powell and Lewis (2009), see note 10

¹³ US Department of State, 'Jamaica Country Profile', December 2009

¹⁴ See also findings from research conducted in a 2009/10 study by UNIFEM and the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre (WROC) on inner-city communities in Jamaica, reported by Dawn Marie Roper, 'Inner-city children dangerously caught in border divisions, new UNIFEM study shows', *Panoscope*, Panos Caribbean, 17 February 2010

¹⁵ National Report of Jamaica on Millennium Development Goals for the UN Economic and Social Council Annual Ministerial Review, Geneva, July 2009, p9



Children in Raytown, Jamaica. Problems of early childhood received widespread coverage after a study on child health was promoted to the media.

MARC FRENCH | PANOS PICTURES

The following two case studies from Jamaica focus on research related to these policies and Acts, and the rights and welfare of women and children in particular. The first is a study of research reported through the press on women's labour conditions in the wholesale outlets of downtown Kingston, and government responses to it. The second is a study of research and policy on child health, reported through the press, and its influence on public awareness.

Working conditions in Jamaica among women in wholesale outlets

In 2006, an MA student in Jamaica, Ann-Murray Brown, undertook a study of the working conditions of young women employed in wholesale stores in downtown Kingston.¹⁶ She aimed to gather evidence and highlight the illegal working conditions that the women faced. The research concluded that the employers were breaking several national employment and labour laws and that the practices were in contravention of international treaties to which Jamaica was a signatory, including CEDAW.

In 2007, Brown presented her research findings at a workshop to a civil society organisation (CSO), the CEDAW Advocacy Committee (CAC), which was campaigning around Jamaica's poor progress in implementing CEDAW.¹⁷ CAC integrated Brown's research into its existing advocacy campaign. It first wrote to the Minister of Labour and Social Security, advising him of the findings and requesting an urgent meeting with CAC and an investigation. With the ongoing drafting of the new OSH Act, the matter was definitely on the ministry's agenda. However, two months later the ministry had still not responded to CAC. At this point CAC decided to release the story to the media.

¹⁶

Ann-Murray Brown (2007) 'Gender and labour in Jamaica, modern day slavery: The experience of women working in the wholesales in downtown Kingston', dissertation for MA in Social Policy at the University of the West Indies

¹⁷

Panos Caribbean was a leading actor in CAC and proactively brought stakeholders together for this workshop

Take-up of research by the media

CAC communicated the research to the media through a press release, which included a clear summary of the research report, and a workshop that drew on existing relationships with journalists interested in labour rights and women's issues. All three national broadsheets¹⁸ took the issue up, with front page news stories and features on the inside pages. Radio stations immediately took up the story as a talking point in their phone-in programmes. According to one editor: 'It was on everybody's lips that morning.'

Two days after the research story first broke, the newspapers published responses from the ministry who promised to investigate the issue, meet with the employers and produce a report.

'I saw it [the research] in the newspaper... so I was really made aware by the media... I had discussions internally... and arranged for the Ministry to do an investigation.'

Chief technical director
Ministry of Labour and Social Security

Public interest, expressed through letters to editors and calls to talk shows, was such that one paper sent a reporter to work undercover in a wholesale outlet. When this story was published a month or so later, a new wave of public outrage ensued. There were specific calls for government action against the offending outlets, and debate, for instance between two trade union leaders about what the government should do.

The media ran with the story in their own way for several months; this was very important in sustaining debate because CAC had limited resources to run an advocacy campaign and ran out of money within a few weeks of the story breaking. Some steps were taken by the ministry to tighten up compliance with existing laws.

More recent press reports indicate that significant steps were taken to finalise the OSH Act and get it through parliament. Meanwhile, in July 2009, the senate passed the Factories Amendment Bill, paving the way for the implementation of heavier fines for breaches of provisions of the Factories Act and its regulations.¹⁹

The findings show that the media on their own lacked the capacity or commitment to analyse legal and policy issues more widely, for instance by inviting input into the debate from employers themselves, scrutinising the research methodology or holding government accountable over a longer period. However, by highlighting an issue that was already on the government's agenda, the media were able to increase public awareness and put pressure on the government to tighten up on compliance. Although the passing of the Factories Amendment Bill cannot be directly attributed to influence from press coverage of Brown's research, the response to the coverage from within the ministry shows that it is likely to have played an important role, prompting the ministry to introduce interim policy and regulations while the draft of the OSH Act is finalised.

¹⁸
The Sunday Herald, The Observer
and The Gleaner

¹⁹
Jamaica Information Service,
'Senate Passes New Factories
Act Provisions', July 2009,
[www.jis.gov.jm/parliament/html/
20090705t220000-0500_
20293_jis_senate_passes_new_
factories_act_provisions.asp](http://www.jis.gov.jm/parliament/html/20090705t220000-0500_20293_jis_senate_passes_new_factories_act_provisions.asp)

Early childhood development in Jamaica

In 2004, the Inter-American Development Bank, in partnership with the Jamaican government, commissioned a survey of early childhood development.²⁰ This study was led by Professor Maureen Samms-Vaughan of the University of the West Indies' Child Development Unit. In 2004, Samms-Vaughan had also been appointed Executive Chairman of the commission charged with implementing the policy laid out in the Early Childhood Act passing through parliament at the time.

Professor Samms-Vaughan's survey of 245 six-year-olds painted a stark picture. It revealed an emerging problem of obesity and poor diet among this age group, with many witnessing considerable violence at home or in the community. Forty per cent were living without fathers, with mothers under considerable parenting stress. Policy recommendations included parenting education, regulation of nurseries and childcare providers, inclusion of child development indicators in annual living standards surveys and screening of children.

Take-up of research by the media

The media launch of the report was handled by the government's Planning Institute, which had also managed the research. News stories broke on inside pages and opinion pieces took up the findings. The report struck a chord with Jamaicans, worried about social breakdown and crime levels. As one journalist commented: 'After that, you heard everybody talking about parenting.'

Samms-Vaughan's voice dominated coverage. The involvement of the Inter-American Bank and the Planning Institute of Jamaica was never mentioned. She gave 15 interviews on radio and television about the research findings. As a high-profile and respected researcher, she wrote several media pieces in her own name. Her position ensured a uniquely close link between research, media and policy.

The media continued to pick up the story, advocating on behalf of children and in support of the research and the government's response. Media debate was therefore not a factor in getting research into public debate and onto a policy agenda in this case study. Rather, the media's role was to disseminate government policy.

Support for the government was expressed through various types of coverage, including opinion pieces by influential Jamaican journalists. The public responded emotionally to childhood suffering, and it appears the government's effort to win support for its policy was successful. But it is unclear how groups in society who are the target of policy initiatives felt about the policies (such as parents and young children from low-income backgrounds) as their views were not represented in the media debate.

Jamaican policymakers and politicians say that they listen to the media, particularly radio stations, to learn how issues and policies are being discussed, and that this influences policy and practice. However, among policymakers interviewed for this case study, there was little understanding about how the media can act as a platform for the exchange of information, perspectives and ideas that can be fed into policy. The media have not seen the need to question government policy and, although they are accorded an important role, this role is limited to providing information about research and policy, and acting as a channel for public education around parenting.

²⁰ Maureen Samms-Vaughan et al (2004) 'Profiles of the Jamaican pre-school child: the status of early childhood development in Jamaica', Child Development Unit, University of the West Indies

Uganda

Country context

Uganda's economy is claimed by many to have been in a relatively good state of health since 1986 when President Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power and subsequently opened up Uganda to market forces. As a result, Uganda is seen to be politically liberal by African standards. Democratic culture, however, as evidenced by transparent policy-making and accountability to constituents, is not embedded in the political and civic institutions. While macroeconomic indicators show that Uganda's economic fundamentals have strengthened since Museveni came to power, it is widely acknowledged that his system of government has suppressed any genuine opposition.²¹

This is evidenced in the way the government has dealt with the press. Compared with the periods prior to 1986, the media have had some autonomy, which they have used to publicise corruption and challenge government actions. However, the government has attempted to regulate the media through the 1995 Press and Journalist Statute. This statute allows the Media Council to suspend journalists and publications, and there are many reports of harassment and imprisonment of journalists who are critical of the state. More broadly, analysts conclude that while civil society has blossomed since 1986, there are serious resource and political constraints that prevent it from effectively championing democratisation and accountability.²²

Despite these constraints, the case studies presented below show civil society to be an important player in advocating for policy change, supported by the press. However, research uptake by the media or by civil society to support particular policy positions is shown to be more problematic in Uganda than in Jamaica.

The first case study deals with the issue of a ban on the use and disposal of polythene bags, an issue on which there was broad political consensus. The second case study is more instructive in what it shows about the dynamics of policy-making in Uganda and the engagement of civil society and the media with a policy issue that was widely contested in the public domain.

Uganda and the scourge of *buveera*

In 2006, in the context of a ban being introduced across East Africa on the use of polythene bags, commonly known in Uganda as *buveera*, efforts were being made by Ugandan civil society groups to highlight and push the same issue. In the same year, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), Environmental Alert, made an application in the High Court requiring the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) to implement a ban on these bags as part of its role. In 2007, NEMA produced a Cabinet paper requesting the government to ban polythene bags under 30 microns – the thinnest bags, considered to be the most dangerous to the environment. On 1 July 2007, in a context of broad political consensus, a ban was announced. Under the new rules, companies were forbidden from producing, importing or using polythene bags under 30 microns.

²¹ Joy Moncrieffe (2004) 'Uganda's political economy: A synthesis of major thought', report prepared for DFID Uganda, ODI

²² See note 21



A woman throws water into a heavily polluted stream outside her home in Kenya. Polythene bags are an environmental problem throughout East Africa.

SVEN TORFINN | PANOS PICTURES

In 2006, a team of researchers at Makerere University's Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness initiated new research looking at the use of *buveera*.²³ The primary aim of the research was to inform policymakers about the use and disposal of polythene bags in the capital, Kampala. The research was not commissioned by policymakers but came out of a university department that had close ties with policymakers.

The researchers surveyed 240 urban and peri-urban households at different socio-economic levels, and found that polythene bags are disproportionately used (and discarded) by lower income, less educated and male-headed households. The study pointed to the need to raise public awareness, particularly in low income households, about the safe use and disposal of polythene bags and how to reduce use of the bags. The research was published by *Makerere University Research Journal* (MURJ) and was released in May 2007. It was available as a printed article, eight pages long, with a clear abstract. No press release or policy brief was issued.

Take-up of research by the media

Throughout 2007, the media covered the issue of the ban extensively, reporting on the impact of *buveera* on agriculture and health, and the impact of the ban on different groups in society (mainly focusing on small business owners). As it became clear that implementing the ban would be difficult, due among other things to defiance from business and the weak mandate of NEMA, the issue of enforcing the ban entered the media debate.

²³

J Mugisha, F Nakakawa and W Ekere (2007) 'Socio-economic perspectives of handling used plastic and polythene waste in urban and peri-urban areas of Uganda', Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, *Makerere University Research Journal*, vol 002, no 1, pp43–51

A local daily – *The Monitor* – was sceptical about the effectiveness of any ban, while its competitor, *The New Vision*, was supportive of the government's actions. Television discussion programmes and radio talk shows often featured the issue because of the strong public interest. However, the uptake of the research findings was limited. NEMA did not take up the research or show any interest in developing a campaign to raise awareness about how, for example, to reduce usage of polythene bags.

Media uptake of the research was also limited. The lead researcher was instrumental in promoting the research and was committed to engaging the media. He worked alone in doing this. But despite his good intentions, only one print article out of the 47 that were analysed for this case study presented the research findings.

'I think when researchers try to give their research to the media, they should always make it simple, take out all those jargons, statistics and, well, not take everything out, but leave some and then try as much as possible to make it simple.'

Journalist
Uganda

In the absence of guidance on how the media works and how the research could be presented to them effectively, the researcher was left disappointed by the media's treatment of his research. He criticised the media coverage for being too shallow and not attaching enough importance to his work.

The research could have had greater impact if it had been linked to CSOs with experience of working with the media to advocate for change. At around the time the research was released, the Ugandan NGO, Environmental Alert, was working through the courts to force the government environment agency to act on the issue of *buveera*, but no connection was made between these two actors/organisations and their campaigns.

The 'Save Mabira' campaign, Uganda

The Mabira forest is a protected rainforest area covering about 300 km in Uganda. In 2006, the Sugar Corporation of Uganda Ltd (SCOUL) asked the government to assign a quarter of the Mabira forest reserve to sugar cane production.

There was a public outcry when President Museveni accepted the proposal to de-gazette the protected land and hand it over to SCOUL. The media began covering the story and many journalists and editors became members of the 'Save Mabira' campaign, alongside civil society organisations. Media coverage peaked in April 2007 when, during a Save Mabira protest, an opposition minister was arrested and four people were killed in a riot in Kampala. It was one of the largest public disturbances in Uganda for decades.

‘They [the media] played a very big role in this campaign, and in fact I would say that if they were not involved, it would have been very difficult – but they were very involved.’

Civil society group member
Uganda

In 2007, NatureUganda, an NGO, commissioned a consultancy firm to undertake an economic evaluation of the forest.²⁴ The study made an economic argument against turning the forest over to sugar cane production. As one journalist remarked: ‘Politicians in this country understand figures more than anything else.’

The study put the value of the sustainable activity and ‘goods’ within the forest at US\$45 million, and calculated that the proposed sugar cane production would only generate US\$29.9 million. It found that the actual cost of the forest give-away, when compensation payments were included, was more than four times the cost of buying non-protected forest land nearby. The research claimed that the deal with SCOUL amounted to little more than a subsidy for one of the country’s least efficient sugar cane producers.

Take-up of research by the media

The research report was released in October 2007. NatureUganda and its partners in the Save Mabira campaign promoted the research to the media through direct engagement with journalists and through presentations and public forum discussions. The researchers themselves had no role in communicating their findings to the media and, in some cases, were reluctant to be associated with such a highly politicised topic.

In the same month, it was reported that the government had dropped its plans to give away the forest. One report noted: ‘A study by NatureUganda earlier this year is thought to have prompted the government’s decision. It showed that income from conserving Mabira would dwarf the profits anticipated from sugar cane production and pinpointed other land suitable for sugar cane cultivation.’²⁵

In fact, it seems more likely that the government dropped the issue ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Kampala in November. Journalists found it difficult to engage with the research report, which contained complex technical arguments and lacked a clear, accessible summary of findings. The report itself was lost among a plurality of opinions and views and was overshadowed by news events.²⁶ By December 2007, the government had picked up the plans to de-gazette the forest once again.

Over the next year, it seems that the president was increasingly at odds with various factions in parliament, including the National Forestry Authority (NFA) which opposed the de-gazetting. In June 2008, Museveni attempted to shift powers to gazette forest reserves from parliament to cabinet, thereby reducing the NFA’s influence.²⁷ But it seems this was unsuccessful. In mid-July, the NFA assured the public through the press that the issue would continue to need parliamentary approval.²⁸

²⁴ Yakobo Moyini, Moses Masiga, Achilles Byaruhanga and Paul Ssegawa (2008) ‘Economic Evaluation of the proposed degazettement of part of Mabira Central Forest Reserve’, Yoma Associates, Uganda

²⁵ ‘Forest spared the scourge of biofuel’, RSPB, 29 October 2007, cited by AlphaGalileo. www.alphagalileo.org/ViewItem.aspx?ItemId=10932&CultureCode=en

²⁶ Up until June 2008 only four articles mentioned the research or reported the findings, out of 97 produced over the preceding 15 months

²⁷ ‘Cabinet plots fresh Mabira giveaway’, *The Monitor*, 26 June 2008, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200806260236.html>

²⁸ ‘MPs have final say on Mabira – NFA’, *The New Vision*, 17 July 2008, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200807180050.html>



Forest canopy, Mabira forest.

J J RICHARDS

It was at this time that civil society groups began to remobilise, and the print media, supported by NatureUganda, began to more confidently articulate the economic arguments against the de-gazetting. In late July 2008, the executive director of the NFA announced that it would not allocate part of the Mabira natural forest reserve for sugar cane production because this was a threat to the environment.²⁹ At this point, there is no press evidence that the NFA was using the economic arguments to support its position. Museveni continued to do public battle with the NFA,³⁰ but in July 2009, the NFA's executive director – this time referring to the economic argument against the give-away – assured MPs that the forest was intact.³¹

The Ugandan government's eventual backtracking on the de-gazetting coincided with stronger scientific arguments being made in the media, and among key policymakers, against the de-gazetting. It is not possible to demonstrate a direct causal relationship between media reporting and how policymakers and politicians argued their case to parliament and cabinet. However, what is clear is that the media played an important role in maintaining public awareness of this policy issue, increasingly bringing research findings to bear to strengthen the advocacy position of the Save Mabira campaign.

29

'Uganda NFA says won't allocate Mabira forest for sugar cane', 21 July 2008, Dow Jones Newswires www.climateark.org/shared/reader/welcome.aspx?linkid=103519

30

'Museveni stops sales of forests' *The New Vision*, 23 November 2008, www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/661004

31

'Mabira safe – NFA' *The New Vision*, 9 July 2009, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200907100049.html>

Discussion and implications

The importance of political and institutional context

The case studies show that the media is an important player in the constellation of individual actors and relationships that participate in debate that can influence policy outcomes. As the RAPID findings have shown, the political and institutional context and culture, and the degree of representativeness of government, are important in determining the likelihood that research will be taken up and influence policy debates and outcomes.

In both case studies, the Jamaican government showed itself to be more responsive and accountable to its constituents, expressed through its relationship with the media.³² Policymakers demonstrated interest in development issues and there were few apparent constraints on communication among the different stakeholders. However, in both case studies, the media appeared to lack the capacity to analyse policy issues more broadly, and to bring a plurality of voices and perspectives to debates. In the child health case, it limited itself to providing information about research and policy and acting as a channel for public education around parenting, rather than facilitating a deeper debate about the issues raised by the research.

In the Ugandan case studies, it was much more difficult to get research into the media in the first instance. However, once important policy issues were raised by the media, government accountability to public demand was weakened by factional interests (in the Mabira forest case) and weak implementation of the mandated agency (in the *buveera* case). Stakeholder consultation was not in evidence in either case; communication efforts and linkages/relationships among all the different actors were generally weak or absent.

The Mabira forest case study is illustrative of the power of the president's executive office to make policy decisions without stakeholder engagement, including that of relevant departments, and to ignore significant policy-related evidence. However, it also shows that dissent from inside government can be effective and influential. The pressure to reverse the de-gazetting of Mabira forest ultimately came from within the government itself – the NFA. The reporting of research through the press is likely to have played a role in strengthening the hand of those opposed to it within government, but the extent of this cannot be evaluated with the existing evidence.

32

See studies cited above (eg Powell and Lewis, note 10; Joy Moncrieffe, note 21) and the World Democracy Audit (www.worldaudit.org) for differences between Jamaica and Uganda. The World Democracy Audit uses a combination of different measures to provide an evaluation of freedom and democracy, including political rights, civil liberties, human rights, rule of law, corruption and press freedom. There are 150 countries and four divisions in these rankings. The first two divisions include countries that are ranked as unquestionably free and democratic. In the third division, where Jamaica sits in 45th place (in the overall ranking), are countries whose political systems are considered broadly democratic, but where the democracy is emergent, fragile and limited. In the fourth division are countries considered to be undemocratic, including Uganda, in 91st place

Strengthening the capacity of the media to influence policy outcomes

This analysis shows that there are four main factors that strengthen the role of the media to promote public debate based on research and evidence:

- journalists' capacity to use research to create stories that capture the public's interest
- the capacity of researchers to produce policy-relevant research and to present it in a way that journalists can use
- the strength and capacity of civil society activists to pick up policy-related research and drive public debate around it
- the strength of the relationships among these actors – journalists, civil society activists and researchers – and their associated organisations, and the degree of openness and trust among them.

Journalists' lack of engagement with challenging research suggests that they need skills and training to use research in their reporting. When research findings are poorly presented, uptake is slow and it takes considerable skill on the part of journalists to turn them into a story. In both the Jamaican case studies, journalists were provided with press releases which supported them in producing a good story that captured the public's interest. In Uganda, the journalists were provided with no press releases and, therefore, had to figure out how to present the stories themselves.³³

Research uptake also depends on how the research and evidence are packaged, as ODI's RAPID programme also finds – in this case, for the media. In both Ugandan cases, research was not presented in a way that the journalist could easily use. In the Mabira case, the technical language was not translated into something that journalists could use to speak to the public. This is one of the reasons that the research took much longer to enter the public debate. The CSO, NatureUganda, acted as an intermediary in 'translating' the research findings and relaying them to the media, since the researchers in this case wanted to keep at some distance from the political ramifications of their research.

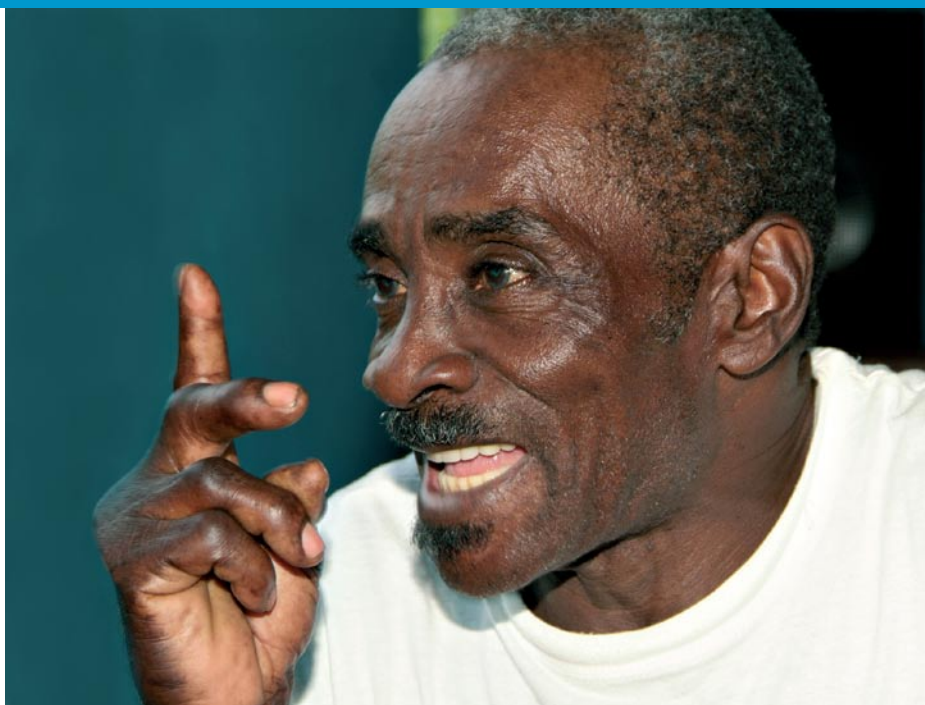
In the *buveera* case, the researcher worked alone and wanted to communicate with the media. However, he was frustrated by the limited uptake of his research. This was most likely due to the poor packaging and poor presentation of the policy implications, and a lack of understanding of how the media could use the research.

The findings suggest that researchers themselves may not always be best placed to present their research to the media. This depends on individuals, however, and their capacity to speak to the media and the public. In both the Jamaican studies, civil society and government were involved in presenting the research; they both used a press release, but this alone was insufficient to ensure research uptake. In the health and safety case, it was the workshop organised by CAC that made the difference to uptake in the first instance. Its lack of resources to continue may partly explain why media debate dropped off. In the child health case, it was the researcher herself and the interviews she gave that ensured the new policy reached the public and that there was sustained interest through the media. In this case, the link between the research institution and the policy-making body was already in place. However, the researcher's voice dominated media coverage at the expense of other voices. In both cases, the capacity of the media to include more voices and provide analysis of existing policy issues was not in evidence.

³³ This particular briefing paper does not focus on the kinds of skills that journalists need. Panos is working in a number of countries to support journalists to develop the capacity to use research

Media coverage of research can spark public discussion. Man speaking at a community meeting in Jamaica.

NEIL COOPER | PANOS PICTURES



The significance of institutional linkages

The strength of existing relationships among journalists, researchers and civil society activists, and their associated organisations, is an important indicator of the likelihood of research being taken up and influencing policy. In Uganda, there seems to be limited connectivity among all these different actors and institutions. Researchers, CSOs and journalists seemed less able to connect with each other, and less aware of the significance of the role each could play to support the others' goals. The weakness or lack of these institutional relationships reduces the likelihood of research being taken up by the media and influencing policy.

In the case of the *buveera* ban, the research could have had greater impact if the researcher had been linked to CSOs with experience of working with the media to advocate for change. In the Mabira forest case, the researchers actively distanced themselves from the campaign and did not see themselves as part of a network of individuals and organisations with the capacity to influence policy outcomes.

In the Jamaican case studies, the formal and informal linkages among the different actors were stronger than in Uganda. This suggests that cross-organisational links are generally stronger in Jamaica, and the different actors are more aware of each other and the need to communicate among themselves and with policymakers. Supporting findings from the RAPID programme, the findings show that the stronger these relationships and linkages are, the more likely research will be taken up and influence policy.

However, policy outcomes cannot be predetermined or controlled by any one factor or set of actors. When cross-institutional relationships and goals are strong, and where parties are working together towards a common goal, there can still be other interests working against these goals. That means that once agreement to change has been achieved, it can also be blocked by powerful interests. There is always going to be an unpredictable factor in this process, and success cannot be guaranteed. For example, in the Mabira forest case, although it has been pushed off the policy agenda and public awareness is not focused on it, the case is not settled. New or repackaged evidence, renewed campaigning by civil society, and an interested media, could reopen the issue.

Final conclusions

The media can open up important debate around policy issues, bringing these into the public arena. The media have the capacity to speak to policymakers, civil society and the general public, and therefore have an important role to play in keeping debate and awareness of particular issues in the public domain. Research that supports existing debates can also bring evidence and corroborated facts to a debate where they might otherwise be absent.

Civil society organisations, in particular, can act as important intermediaries between researchers and the media, broadening debate to include more players and also creating an important bridge as lobbyists and campaigners for specific policy changes. How far each of the actors in the policy process is aware of the need to work with others in pursuit of the same policy goals, and is able and motivated to do so, is a key factor that affects research uptake.

Even in the event of policy issues being reopened, the research presented here strongly suggests that strengthening relationships and institutions among the main actors who can have an influence on policy outcomes can increase the likelihood of research being taken up in policy processes.

In conclusion, the main activities that need to be supported to this effect are the following:

- support of relationship-building and strengthening of trust among researchers, journalists and civil society activists
- creation of the conditions for stronger institutional linkages and networks to develop among researchers, civil society and policymakers
- development of journalists' capacity to report on research findings, and their capacity to work more closely with civil society who can act as mediators with policymakers and researchers
- development of researchers' capacity to work more closely with the media, and with civil society advocates who can promote their work to the media and to policymakers.

About Panos London

Inclusive



We believe that embracing the views of poor and marginalised people is essential for sustainable and effective development.

Taking part in dialogue and debate contributes to a healthy and vibrant society.

Empowering



We believe that poor and marginalised people should drive and shape the changes needed to improve their lives.

We enable people to share information and ideas, speak out and be heard.

Balanced



We believe people need accessible information reflecting a wide range of views.

This allows them to make informed choices about crucial issues that have an impact on their lives.

Diverse



We respect different views, value local knowledge and encourage a range of approaches in our work worldwide.

We believe that freedom of information and media diversity are essential for development.

Illuminating



We shed light on ignored, misrepresented or misunderstood development issues.

We believe that the views of poor and marginalised people give greater insight into their lives and offer unique perspectives on the challenges they face.

www.panos.org.uk

This paper uses four case studies from Jamaica and Uganda to look at the multiple factors that shape the media's role in reporting on research and generating public debate around research and evidence – and its capacity to influence policy as a result. It finds that journalists, researchers and civil society activists all play important roles in this process.

The paper also finds that a key factor driving media capacity to influence policy is the strength of the relationships among the different actors – journalists, civil society activists and researchers – as well as the degree of openness and trust among them and the political context in which they are operating.

Research makes the news recommends that stronger links and relationships between different groups should be supported, as should developing the capacity of researchers and journalists to work with each other. This will increase the likelihood of research being taken up in policy processes.



The Relay programme works in developing countries to connect journalists and editors with researchers. It is implemented by the Panos Network around the world.

To find out more about the RELAY programme go to www.panos.org.uk/relay



Panos London
9 White Lion Street
London N1 9PD
United Kingdom

tel +44 (0)20 7278 1111
fax +44 (0)20 7278 0345
info@panos.org.uk
www.panos.org.uk

Cover image

Newspaper printing press,
Kampala, Uganda

TRYGVE BØLSTAD | PANOS PICTURES

In England Panos London is registered
as a company limited by guarantee.

Company Number 1937340.

Registered Charity Number 297366.