



Drivers of chronic poverty policy process Summary and implications sheet: context, actors and linkages, evidence

Purpose

This summary sheet synthesises key findings with regard to the drivers of change in the chronic poverty policy process provided in the three accompanying guidance sheets and discusses implications for actors seeking to promote chronic poverty policy change. It therefore aims to highlight the potential entry and veto points identified in the three central domains of the knowledge-policy interface: context, linkages and evidence (Court *et al.*, 2005) – and suggest methods to design relevant influencing strategies.

Introduction

The dimensions of chronic poverty are becoming increasingly recognised by policy-makers in many regions, although this has not been matched in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (CPRC, 2008). However, a broad and systematic analysis of the causes of this increased recognition (or lack thereof) has not been forthcoming and is hence the subject of the guidance sheets.

The genesis of this type of analysis is largely rooted in the Drivers of Change (DoC) framework which emerged out of the UK's Department for International Development in c. 2001 as a method for conducting political economy analysis. This approach appreciates that development processes are inherently political at all stages, and seeks

to unpack the black box entitled 'lack of political will' so common in policy documents attempting to explain away policy and practice inertia.

The DoC is commendable in promoting widespread recognition on the importance of agents, institutions and structures in directing change, together with its complementary sub-analyses. However, few DoC reviews have actually led to modifications in the design and scope of DFID programmes, generally due to a lack of clear methodology, a tendency to focus on known issues or symptoms, and a lack of consideration for the role of behavioural incentives (DFID, 2005). The approach at its best, though potentially useful in predicting and generating long-term political change, is also only likely to be used by donors for medium-term timeframes (Scott, 2007).

Moreover, while the DoC has provided a welcome addition to poverty diagnostics, it has tended to overlook the dynamics of the interface between research and policy, and its constituent variables, that is, context, evidence and linkages (Court *et al.*, 2005).

Methodology

A series of articles relating to chronic poverty and social protection, with respect to politics and policy processes, were selected for review. Each article was assessed according to the degree to which it contained discussions on a predefined set of drivers, framed according to three



broad categories: context, actors/linkages and evidence, while leaving space for the iterative discovery of overlooked drivers. This process revealed common threads on the magnitude of information available for each driver as well as the relative merit of the underlying arguments. Patterns thus became discernable with regard to the availability and depth of content on each driver.

It became apparent that a series of drivers lacked sufficient analysis or were too complex to be able to indicate whether or not they could be considered to have a strong or weak impact on policy processes, and were hence designated as unknown/uncertain drivers. The methodology is therefore best conceived in a 3x3 matrix (diagram 1).

Diagram 1 – Drivers: identified from the guidance sheets are identified in practice and located on a matrix that maps key areas of the knowledge-policy interface

	Context	Evidence	Actors / Linkages
Strong	• driver a driver b	driver c	• driver d
Unknown		driver e	driver f
Weak	driver h	driver g	

Conducting such an exercise is not an exact science, but a practice open to interpretation that is itself dependent on power relations, as well as the available capacity and resources to conduct the exercise. An agency will, for instance, define what is ‘strong’, ‘weak’ and ‘uncertain/unknown’ depending on staff expertise and experience. A particular challenge is that, if not clearly defined, agreed upon and continuously referred back to, drivers can quickly become fluid and floating due to subtle changes in understanding over the duration of analysis. The ‘Civil Society and State Relations’ driver, for instance, is present in both the ‘Context’ and the ‘Actors and Linkages’ guidance sheets based on subtle conceptual differences. It also worth noting from lessons on the DoC framework, that greatest resultant impact of the analysis was apparent when sufficient planning space was given and a target audience was clearly defined (DFID, 2005).

This summary sheet first synthesises the key lessons that have emerged about drivers of the policy process around chronic poverty issues, then turns to a critical discussion on implications. The implications

section introduces the second and third stages of the methodology, which demonstrate procedures – based on the alignment of the drivers (diagram 2) and potential impact aspects (diagram 3) – through which to decide influencing strategies.

Key lessons (see also Table 1)

Context

The strong drivers in this setting are ‘political culture, ideology and values’ and ‘governance practices’. These drivers are mutually reinforcing and present policymakers and practitioners with some counter-intuitive and difficult propositions. In terms of the first driver, there is evidence to suggest that the acceptance of a core set of attitudes and beliefs based on a discretionary provision of rewards (neo-patrimonialism) can actually enhance the efficiency of programme implementation through the maintenance of political incentives to participate in it, rather than being seen to distort the otherwise ‘natural’ targeting measures inherent in the programme.

Secondly, in terms of ‘governance practices’, the assertion that authoritarian systems can be constructive in promoting social protection policy (Hickey, 2008) is not controversial for instrumental purposes or for the delivery of economic and social rights. However, it can be considered unethical in terms of the delivery of intrinsic political and civil rights-based approaches. These factors indicate a challenge to temper demands for ‘good governance’ with ‘good enough governance’ (Grindle, 2007)¹².

There are also two unexpected lessons to emerge from the ‘context’ section of the analysis. Firstly, the amount of discussion space given to the issue over perceptions of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor was notable. A range of authors working in diverse country contexts and policy arenas have encountered views that effectively blame the poor for the condition (Hossain and Moore, 2002; Bird and Pratt, 2004).

Secondly, the lack of discussion and available evidence given to faith-based values is surprising. This is all the more relevant given the intuitively large role faith can be considered to have in influencing the views of, and practical reactions to, policy positions.

Actors and Linkages

The strongest driver in this setting - by sheer volume and continuous presence of anecdotal accounts - is the influence that donors and other international actors have in setting policy agendas and practices. Using overt strategies such as the provision of demands through unnegotiables in funding contracts, participatory strategies such as influencing debates and discourses,



Table 1: Summary of key drivers, resulting implications and possible actions

Setting	Drivers ³	Key characteristics	Implications	Possible action
Context	Strongest drivers Governance practices	The type of governance structure, e.g. authoritarian, stable democratic, dominant one-party rule, or 'illiberal' - all have varying influences	The key trade-off here is between costs of debate and consultation versus quicker implementation that potentially undermines civil society	A dual pronged strategy may be the most effective – identifying key actors who can ensure delivery of policy commitments – but also developing longer-term alignments with civil society actors to support their capacity to influence key decision-making authorities
	Political culture, ideology and values	The ideological 'nation-building' agenda, elite perceptions of the poor, or alignment of governance practices 'with the grain' of neo-patrimonial practices	Capitalise on broader development agendas where possible, and use evidence to target specific elite perceptions	Reframe policy asks in language and symbols that is culturally resonant and maintain flexibility in framing where possible so as to ensure uptake by multiple audiences
	Weakest Driver Policy history	Policies may not be new, e.g. path-dependency rooted in colonial practices, but also may be obscured or lost in policy proliferation or abandonment of strategies	Determine the policy environment and its history in a given context, whether it is crowded by competing policies or has a clear long-standing policy trajectory	Use a sectoral policy review to inform present policy recommendations and strategies, but do not over-emphasise its importance
Actors and Linkages	Strongest driver Donors and international actors	Upward financial accountability to these actors can influence policy and practice debates, either positively or through the omission of possible alternatives, while also reinforcing or undermining sovereignty and policy ownership	A policy influencing strategy involves shaping discourse of donors and national interlocutors, while considering the risks of a critical stance (developing a reputation as a critical friend rather than opponent is key)	With changing aid architecture, chronic poverty highlighted in donor-government sector working groups and policy take-up acts as trigger for funding
	Weakest drivers State and civil society actors	The chronic poor, in particular, have a weak political constituency arising out of exclusion, self-exclusion and adverse incorporation	Shift emphasis to enhance symbolic power of the poorest with a focus on representation	Use justice and rights-based approaches and promote exposure in cross-party collaborative efforts
Evidence	Strongest drivers Availability of evidence	The relative lack of data on chronic poverty can create a negative feedback loop leading to perceived unimportance.	Investing in quantitative and qualitative data collection on chronic poverty and related programmes needs to be prioritised to overcome this gap	Target donors and policymakers through exposure workshops
		Quantity issues include the presence and access to longitudinal panel data, as well as the incorporation of previously ignored citizens through census data. Quality issues concern disaggregation of social axes and separation of cause and effect	Focus on supply side by skills and capacity building, demand side through promoting increased interest from policy makers and donors	Build resources on mixed-method analysis and benefits, and work alongside analysts of broader poverty dynamics
	Weakest drivers Unknown	As the least discussed facet of the policy process, weaker drivers are not readily identifiable in the analysis	Build on the stock of research examining 'capacity and willingness to use research-based evidence' and 'messenger credibility' and carry out specific analysis in the field of chronic policy processes	Promote cross-disciplinary desk reviews or primary research on the role of panel data or lifecycle histories in driving the chronic policy process



and invisible strategies such as limiting the framework of possible thought, powerful agencies can promote their organisational perspectives and goals. For example, the initial reluctance of funding institutions to promote social protection, and cash transfers in particular, is presented as an example of how these institutions can use powerful ‘fronts’ to cover for a deeper reluctance to change approaches (Farrington and Slater, 2006).

This process is partly driven by the inability of actors promoting chronic poverty policy change to participate at the global level due to capacity constraints (CPRC, 2008), but also partly due to the tendency of development discourses to divert criticism and focus away from global structural issues (Mawdsley and Rigg, 2002, 2003).

In terms of the weakest driver, there is a likely possibility that the role of civil society in the chronic poverty policy process has been overstressed and is in fact quite limited (Hickey, 2006). This is fairly controversial given the increased emphasis over the last decade on the ‘voices of the poor’ and participatory process in development (World Bank, 2000).

It is also worth mentioning the unexpected discovery that specific information on the pragmatic linkages of the private sector with the chronic poverty policy process is difficult to obtain (CPRC, 2008; Brautigam, 2004) hence forcing a conclusion that this currently is an uncertain driver of the chronic poverty policy agenda.

Evidence

Here the strongest drivers of change were considered to be the ‘availability of evidence’ and ‘evidence framing’, although the overall prominence of research papers and arguments investigating these and other evidence-related topics were fairly low by comparison. Nevertheless, it is notable that the ‘availability of evidence’, comprised of quantity and quality dimensions, has the ability to create a positive or negative feedback loop on the topic of exposure and acceptance to previously alternative, or sidelined, ways of thinking about the chronically poor.

It is also notable that while framing evidence in culturally-resonant ways could be considered to be a significantly strong promoter of policy uptake, a focused investigation of this driver was not forthcoming.

Such an investigation, highlighting case studies in which chronic poverty evidence can be framed in terms of relevance for demographic categories (e.g. the elderly) or by theme (e.g. risk reduction) would be extremely useful for campaigners and advocates to draw upon when forming intervention strategies.

Sequencing influencing strategies

Strategic timing of policy engagement initiatives such as a focus on a particular event or policy process, although a notable part of the reality in which agents push for

change, is not an issue clearly present in the guidance sheets. This is an important point because harnessing knowledge about drivers of change in a given context in order to inform an influencing strategy in a timely manner is critical (Carden, 2009).

For instance, Bird and Pratt (2004) declare that the opening up of the ‘framework of possible thought’ is the crucial first step in validating the interests of social movements, while Mooij (2003) sees that attention should initially be focused at the policy implementation phase as this is the area where the most overt, and therefore identifiable, struggles and contestations occur.

These factors, moreover, need to be balanced in relation to the time parameters shaping the actions of other actors ; researchers for instance, can feel strongly about withholding information that is incomplete and that can potentially damage reputations, despite the otherwise appropriate release-date of a publication. This latter point implies a need for a greater balance of supply and demand negotiations between researchers and policy-makers (Carden, 2009). An investigation of the relevance of these timing and staging issues in the chronic poverty policy process may indeed generate new and useful insights into drivers of change.

External Influences

The framework provided by Court *et al.*, (2005) has a final background category that can be loosely termed ‘external influences’. These can be conceived of as factors that have a significant effect on context, evidence, actors and linkages all at once. They can be long-term changes in economic performance, more sudden changes such as crises, or trigger events – the United Nations International Hyogo Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, for instance, was given a major awareness boost when its World Conference was shortly preceded by the Asian Tsunami Disaster of 2004. The importance of such events is not mentioned in the chronic poverty literature.

Implications for strategic thinking

The choices made in maximising the knowledge-policy interface and developing an effective influencing strategy to promote policies to tackle chronic poverty, will depend on a variety of contextual factors. These factors have been considered in an ‘Alignment, Interest and Influence matrix’ (AIIM) (ODI, 2009) as well as a priority-setting ‘Force-Field Analysis (FFA) (Lewin, 1951). Although these tools are designed to identify opportunities and risks in working together with a range of actor coalitions rather than the broader range of drivers that these guidance briefs have considered, they do offer some



useful insights.

Firstly, drawing on the Force Field Analysis, it is important to determine the 'direction' of drivers identified in a given setting (context, evidence, actors and linkages) in relation to whether they support the goals and orientations of the agents developing an influencing strategy (diagram 2). If these goals and orientations have not been determined, the agency can refer to the five key dimensions identified by Keck and Sekkink (1998) below. The unknown/uncertain drivers can be identified in terms of worthiness for research investigation, or even immediately corrected as a strong or weak driver, and targeted accordingly.

Having determined whether the drivers are supportive or oppositional of an agency's goals, the next stage will be to evaluate the potential degree of impact an agency will have in influencing the driver. For instance, parties can capitalise on strong or weak supportive drivers, minimise strong or weak oppositional drivers or invest in activities to determine the influence of unknown/uncertain drivers (diagram 3) depending on whether they have the appropriate expertise and resources. This aspect of impact is encapsulated as 'high/low' status. Again, the unknown/uncertain drivers have yet to be determined, but may be investigated in concert with campaign or advocacy implementation or as an external research component. Moreover, in some settings the unknown/uncertain drivers may be immediately 'solved' and incorporated into the influencing strategy.

As an additional process, an organisation can further clarify its influencing strategy by examining the possible ways through which it can influence drivers. This also provides an opportunity to rethink diagram 3 through redefining, for instance, the actors that come together to build a network. For this task, the five key dimensions identified by Keck and Sekkink (1998) can be drawn

Diagram 2 - Alignment: The drivers from diagram 1 are next assessed on whether they are likely to serve as a supportive or oppositional force to a given agency's influencing aims

	Context	Evidence	Actors/ Linkages
Strong	● supports opposes ●	opposes ●	● supports
Unknown		?	?
Weak	supports ●	supports ●	

upon, with an illustration of policy engagement around childhood poverty (Jones and Villar, 2008).

Firstly, campaign and advocacy networks can challenge accepted policies by reframing debates and getting new issues onto the political agenda. In DFID's 'Young Lives' project, for instance, a series of photographic essay exhibitions placed in key government institutions successfully demonstrated the urgency and complexity of childhood poverty to members of congress. This initiative sought to highlight the need for poverty policy to include a specific focus on childhood and children's multi-dimensional experience of poverty and vulnerability.

Secondly, obtaining discursive commitments from states and other policy actors creates a set of precedents against which policy and programming action can be measured, and which provide a lever of accountability. For instance, securing the recognition of children's rights within the Ethiopian PRSP was an important first step in a longer-term advocacy process to increase resources dedicated to addressing child deprivations in the country.

Thirdly, creating procedural change and building dialogue opportunities may be equally as important as changing policy outcomes. For instance, securing close working relationships with the provincial-level implementers of Vietnam's Socio-Economic Development plan has been critical for international agencies such as UNICEF and Save the Children in opening up policy dialogue spaces to address neglected child development issues.

Fourthly, it is obvious that policies and laws must change themselves, even if corresponding changes in implementation are not necessarily causally related. Although these are often difficult to influence due to the non-linear nature of policy processes, achieving

Diagram 3 – Potential impact: The drivers are then reviewed in terms of the degree to which a given agency has the potential to shape the direction of a driver

	Context	Evidence	Actors/ Linkages
Strong	● hi impact lo impact	hi impact	● lo impact
Unknown		?	?
Weak	hi impact ●	lo impact ●	

changes in policy or legal commitments is a critical first step. For instance, without a National Plan of Action on Children which ‘domesticates’ the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is difficult for advocates to press for the fulfilment of children’s rights.

Finally, the goal of behavioural change is considered the ultimate goal of policy-making as it transforms actors and ensures policy sustainability. This could include the end of harmful traditional practices against girls in a community or community commitment to facilitate children’s attendance in schools by employing an adult animal herder in livestock-dependent environments.

In short, consideration of these five different policy change objectives, can play an important role in helping an agency to determine its potential to shape a particular driver. After all, even a strong supportive driver may have particular entry

points that may or may not demand significant dedicated time and resources to influence.

Overall, the framework developed in this summary sheet is designed to raise awareness and illicit more systematic discussion on the dimensions of the policy engagement process that could otherwise be overlooked in busy and pressurised working environments. The purpose of the framework is therefore to add nuance and, critically, strategic options. As such, it offers a method by which to identify strong drivers and harness those that are supportive of an agency’s influencing aims. Strong oppositional drivers can themselves be targeted through either a risk minimisation campaign, or efforts to redirect the driver altogether. Finally, an opportunity is provided whereby the unknown and uncertain drivers of the policy process can be isolated and more appropriately dealt with.

A three-step process to identify ingredients to inform an influencing strategy: drivers, alignment, and potential impact

A: Drivers

These are first identified and located in the matrix in terms of the degree of influence they bring to the change process – the guidance sheets assist in indicating the relevant drivers that may be noteworthy in a given situation.

	Strong	Unknown	Weak
Strong	● driver a driver b ●	driver c ●	● driver d
Unknown		driver e ●	driver f ●
Weak	driver h ●	driver g ●	
Context	Evidence	Actors/ Linkages	

B: Alignment

The drivers from matrix A are next assessed on whether they are likely to serve as a supportive or oppositional force to a given agency’s influencing aims (This step assumes that an agency has predetermined aims. If not, it must be sub-divided to accommodate a stage whereby influencing intentions are outlined).

	Strong	Unknown	Weak
Strong	● supports opposes ●	opposes ●	● supports
Unknown		?	?
Weak	supports ●	supports ●	
Context	Evidence	Actors / Linkages	

C: Potential impact

The drivers are then reviewed in terms of the degree to which a given agency has the potential to shape the direction of a driver.

	Strong	Unknown	Weak
Strong	● hi impact lo impact ●	hi impact	● lo impact
Unknown			?
Weak	hi impact ●	lo impact ●	
Context	Evidence	Actors / Linkages	

Endnotes

- 1 The basis of ‘good enough’ governance is that increased focus should be applied to the minimal governance measures for ‘what works’ for particular ends in a specific context, rather than the full range of activities possible for confronting governance deficits (Grindle, 2007).
- 2 Unknown/uncertain drivers are not discussed in depth here (see context, evidence and actor/linkages guidance sheets for more details).



This Research Guide is written by David Walker and Nicola Jones

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The Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) is an international partnership of universities, research institutes and NGOs, with the central aim of creating knowledge that contributes to both the speed and quality of poverty reduction, and a focus on assisting those who are trapped in poverty, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.