



Drivers of chronic poverty policy process

Guidance sheet 1: Context

Purpose

This is the first of three guidance sheets – all underpinned by a summary and implications sheet - that examine the ‘drivers of change’ in the chronic poverty policy process¹. It aims to support researchers, agencies, governments, NGOs and civil society actors to interpret the relevant processes that influence whether or not chronic poverty orientated policies are formally adopted or implemented, with the eventual aim of informing campaign or policy advocacy strategies.

The drivers presented are drawn from current chronic poverty literature and hypotheses, and as such offer a generic introduction to the range of currents at work in the chronic poverty policy arena. They therefore do not offer a blueprint as to ‘what works’, but rather to ‘what works, as well – what may potentially work, – given the presence of certain criteria’.

Introduction

Drawing from Court *et al.* (2005), context is recognised as the setting in which everything in the policy process, from the production of ideas to the final negotiations during implementation, are shaped by the power relations rooted in current and historical political structures and policy agendas. Breaking this down further, Box 1 highlights the sub-components of context and the way they have been conceived for the purposes of the guidance sheet. These are divided between political context and policy context – the former referring to formal and informal institutions that influence policy processes while the

latter refers to policy history and settings which influence policy processes.

These sub-components can be considered ‘drivers’: factors or processes that can be isolated and determined to significantly prevent or promote change (see summary and implications sheet). However, while the role of some of the drivers presented remains unknown or uncertain due to evidence-based issues, they also offer an opportunity to think in more complex and pragmatic ways about policy change.

Drivers of change - Strong

Political culture, ideology and values

This category emerges as having extremely influential effects on the chronic poverty policy process. Firstly, in considering patron-client relationships, there is emerging emphasis (in particular Benjamin, 2000; Hickey, 2006; Hickey and Brauholtz-Speight, 2007) that working with local patronage structures as well as alternative accountability methods, can be an effective way of allowing the poorest to harness at least some access to decision-makers (see Box 2). This is effectively a call to ‘go with the grain’ of the core sets of beliefs and attitudes underlying governance in a particular environment (Kelsall, 2008).

Secondly, a distinctive area of discussion in literature focused on chronic poverty policy, is the difference between the apparent deserving and undeserving poor. Perceptions of the extremely marginalised and disenfranchised may be based on combinations of



Box 1: Drivers of change

Political

History - Widely accepted national economic growth or ideological legacies frame support or antagonism toward accepting policy ideas.

Political culture, ideology and values - The behavioural characteristics such as attitudes, beliefs and given norms within institutions and processes, all underscore thinking on policy processes.

State and civil society relations - History of struggle or co-operation between the state and civil society, referring to the relative balance of power between the two, rather than the quality of the relationship.

Centralised or decentralised structures - Degree to which various governance administrative practices are dispersed or concentrated.

Policy

History - Past policy choices may affect current policy options and create path dependent trajectories.

Governance practices - Extent to which civil society participation can influence the policy process based on strategies of accountability, transparency and responsiveness.

Broader development goals - Resonance or match of specific policy goals with wider country-level plans.

Type of space - Policy spaces differ by sector and can be closed to civil society actors, invited (through consultation processes), demanded by civil society actors, visible, hidden, and invisible (Gaventa, 2006).

pathological, productivity, fear and dependency factors (Hossain and Moore, 2002; Bird and Pratt, 2004) that collectively turn the chronic poor into part of the problem. Meanwhile, there is ongoing research challenging these hypotheses (Du Toit and Neves, 2006). Targeting these views, and gaining awareness and recognition from important decision-makers that the chronic poor are a diverse group with inherent capabilities, will help drive the chronic poverty policy agenda forward.

Thirdly, the presence of an ideological project, such as a widely accepted agenda of nation-building, can be an area in which relevant policy momentum exists with which to engage, especially where the project is based on – or can be influenced by – notions of ‘justice’ or ‘fairness’ (CPRC, 2008). This

Box 2: The Bangladesh Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Programme

It is notable that there is a relative lack of ‘social distance’ between the poor and elites in Bangladesh. These connections are considered to have assisted a fairly efficient and gender-equitable distribution of wheat supplies to the poorest for a number of decades. Any leakages in this process are not considered to be the consequence of corruption, and do not put in jeopardy the overall goal of the programme, which is essentially poverty reduction. Indeed, calls for more accurate targeting put at risk the efficiency of the programme because targeting reduces the discretionary delivery options of political actors and hence the political advantages and incentives to implement it properly (Hossain, 2007).

driver links closely with the ‘Capacity and willingness to use research-based evidence (Guidance sheet 3) and is demonstrated by Vietnam’s recent demand for assistance in promoting economic modernisation (Carden, 2008). On the other hand, Uganda’s recent re-engagement with the project of ‘modernisation’ can significantly diverge from the interests of the poorest (Hickey, 2005).

Governance practices

A significant theme emerging from the literature regarding governance practices concerns a call for increased efforts at getting ‘the politics’, as well as ‘the policies’, right to ensure that poverty is addressed appropriately.

Indeed, this is often seen as a critical driver of change. Niles (1999) observes for instance that stable democratic and elected authoritarian systems, followed by semi-authoritarian systems with dominant parties, are more likely to be associated with social protection programmes. The CPRC (2008), similarly suggests that while Vietnam and Ethiopia are one party states (with only limited consultation and debate within the national assembly) their Poverty Reduction Strategies suggest a strong commitment to addressing chronic poverty issues. Indeed, as noted from research in Malawi, the parliamentary legislature is an institution often bypassed in more technocratic approaches to introducing social protection policies (Chisinga, 2007).

However, while some citizenries have been able to somewhat transform their contract with the state through non-fragmented party politics and an openness to new ideas or at times fracture events (such as elections or regime change²), others have floundered, as Box 3 illustrates.



Box 3: Governance practices in Uganda - limited space for the chronic poor

Claims that Uganda's recent pro-poor policy successes have largely emerged from a strategy of 'ownership' and 'getting the politics right', have not considered that the poorest are still not given due attention in policy content, or the process that helped shape it. In fact, the apparent inclusive nature of the political system was not directed by rights-based claims, but rather given as a gift by the regime. Moreover, relations between parliament and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) were considered poor at the time. Altogether, a lack of change in chronic poverty policy came not from bad governance per se, but from a strategy of civil-society incorporation and an agenda of possibilities void of 'alternative' approaches (see guidance sheet 2 – donors and international influence) (Hickey, 2005).

Drivers of change – Weak

Policy history

Research demonstrates that many poverty oriented policies put in place through colonialism (Hickey and Braunholz-Speight, 2007) or PRSPs (e.g. rural growth or agricultural policies) (CPRC, 2008) can act as path-dependent drivers of chronic poverty, indeed, 'many 'new' pro-poorest policies build directly on existing policy initiatives' (Hickey, 2006:vi). However, this is not an obviously 'strong' driver of change as there is simultaneous potential for a previous proliferation of policy documents to obscure path-dependent strategies (Booth *et al.*, 2006) or for there to be a drought of policies to base such as strategy on (e.g. PRSPs in Africa are increasingly being sidelined in favour of national planning papers (Green, 2009).

Unknown/uncertain drivers of change

Political culture, ideology and values

A glaring gap in chronic poverty discussions is the significant role that faith may have in establishing the views of, and reactions to, certain policy issues. This driver is far from straightforward and can vary across many social axes and contexts, but it suffices to say that much thinking in policy circles prefers to situate itself in a 'secular bubble' (Green, 2009:172) rather than begin to untangle the complexities of religion as an important site with which policy interacts.

A further topic that needs clarification and is

likely to significantly influence policy processes is the typical characteristics of middle-class values in a given context. An 'anxious middle' acting as executive champions and mid-level bureaucrats, can both have closer policy affinity with the poor and their kin (CPRC, 2008), while simultaneously reinforcing social structures (Thorp *et al.*, 2005).

Political history

While the presence or absence of an ideological project has been discussed in terms of the role it plays on policy processes (see above), this factor may itself be dependent on a trajectory of similar nation-building projects or indeed be setup in deliberate contrast to a previous national programme. Social protection interventions in India, South Africa and Bangladesh for example, were partly influenced by ideologies such as anti-colonialism and socialism (ibid)³.

The literature on chronic poverty rarely addresses this variable head-on and it is usually, and understandably, conflated with other variables such as policy history or contemporary political culture, ideologies and values. Despite clear evidence though, it easy to speculate that a political history analysis is required to understand what is feasible in terms of policy demands at particular points in time.

Resonance with broader development goals

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers are seen as a potential mechanism to streamline and implementing chronic poverty mechanisms (CPRC, 2008), but otherwise there is very little discussion in the literature given to the importance of policy content complying with, for example, Millennium Development Goals or other widely recognised agreements. Adding a chronic poverty perspective to broader development goals, or preferably informing at the them at the outset, is a potentially high driver of change because the likes of MDG targets may otherwise continue along a trajectory of focusing on the 'easy to reach' – through the making of 'non-decisions' based on target-orientated frameworks (Johnson and Start, 2001).

State and Civil Society Relations

This driver refers to the history and current situation of paternal dominance, conflict or collaboration between the state and civil society that determines the tone in which policies are adopted – it could be considered the balance of powers between parties.

The literature centred on chronic poverty and social protection policy processes rarely gives significant attention to this dynamic, providing only skirting discussions when doing so. For instance, Bird and Pratt (2004) and Hickey (2007) both refer to the influence of colonial administration generating

a political contract with government employees and urbanites while ignoring other groups. This amounted to a building of governments focused on law enforcement without a corresponding welfare agenda (van de Walle, 2001) and hence creating a historical climate of civil society alienation. This goes beyond a romanticisation of civil society as well: Good (1999) cites Iliffe (1987) to demonstrate that pre-colonial elites in Botswana maintained asymmetrical relationships with the poor.

Although enlightening, these analyses do not inform the degree to which these relationships impact on chronic poverty policy processes. Tussie and Newell (2006) come a little closer however, in describing how many Latin American NGOs have traditionally organised in opposition to authoritarian rule and that this legacy continues to shed light on how NGOs develop strategies to confront trade negotiations (NAFTA, FTAA, Mercosur-SCM)⁴. The authors demonstrate that resistance and oppositional politics have managed to obtain significant leverage in the policy process, but do not, unfortunately, discuss chronic poverty in particular. The relevance of such power characteristics for chronic poverty policy remains however because networks and their characteristics are fungible. That is, networks may form, disband and then regroup in a different form while maintaining oppositional political positions (Whitehead and Gray-Molina, 2000).

Centralised and decentralised structures

The implication of centralised or decentralised governance for chronic poverty policy interventions is, at present, ambivalent. The conflation of a number of factors such as the relative power of central and local elites (Hossain, 2005), the quality of the central –local relations (Chisinga, 2007) as well as the complexity of the structures themselves (e.g. India's federalised states), have all contributed to an appreciation that this is a highly context dependent driver. Hickey and Braunholtz-

Speight (2007) conclude that current enthusiasm for decentralised systems are grounded more in ideology than empirical evidence.

Type of space

The topic of 'space' appears often in pro-poor poverty literature, carrying with it multiple meanings that all too easily act as a depository for many types of communication contexts. Furthermore, Bird and Pratt (2004) note that it is not just enabling access to policy spaces that is important, but crucially, the opening up of the 'framework of possible thought'. Both Goetz (2003) and the CPRC (2008) note for instance, that despite increased consultation on the Ugandan Participatory Poverty Assessment Programme (UPPAP), the possibilities of introducing alternative policy approaches were highly circumscribed.

The unknown and unknowable qualities of this driver are routed in the time-consuming and complex difficulties of obtaining non-tokenistic feedback with marginalised groups (Moore and Braunholtz-Speight, 2007) and in the monitoring of closed informal spaces. Hickey (2006:iv) commenting on social protection policies in a number of study countries, is more decisive however, 'Policy spaces do not emerge as defining features concerning the production and implementation of pro-poor policies, with as many of interventions emerging from closed policy spaces as from ones into which pro-poor advocates were either invited or have claimed'.

What comes next?

The Summary and Implications Sheet of this package provides an overview of the drivers addressed here, as well as their relationship with the drivers situated in the other categories (actors/linkages and evidence) and the implications for generating influencing strategies that capitalise on available drivers.

Endnotes

- 1 The term 'Drivers of Change' emerged from the UK's Department for International Development in 2001 as a new method for conducting political economy analysis
- 2 A 'politics of crisis' rather than 'politics as usual' create an atmosphere where settlements can be re-negotiated (Hickey, 2006). For example, competitive elections provided a key shift on pension policy in South Africa and Namibia in 1994 and 1992 respectively (ibid).
- 3 More specifically, nation-building ideology in Bangladesh was even associated with some categories of destitute women
- 4 North American Free Trade Agreement, Free Trade Area of the Americas, Southern Common Market



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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.