



# Drivers of chronic poverty policy process

## Guidance sheet 3: Evidence

### Purpose

This is the third of three guidance sheets – all underpinned by a summary and implications sheet - that examine the ‘drivers of change’ in the chronic poverty policy process.<sup>1</sup> 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 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 to ‘what works’, but rather to ‘what works – and what may work - given certain criteria’.

### Introduction

Drawing from Court *et al.* (2005), evidence is recognised as important for policy uptake because the methodology, credibility, simplicity, delivery and challenging nature of messages profoundly affect perceptions and hence utilisation by policy-makers. It is important to note that while this set of drivers is often absent from conventional drivers of change analysis, it is obviously critically important to evidence-based policy influencing efforts. Breaking this down further, Box 1 highlights the sub-components of evidence and the way they have been

conceived for the purposes of the guidance sheet.

These sub-components can be considered ‘drivers’: factors or processes that can be isolated and determined to significantly prevent or promote change (see overview sheet). However, while the role of some of the drivers presented remain 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

#### Availability of evidence

The ability to think about and develop policies on chronic poverty is highly dependent on the access to, and control of, relevant information and knowledge. Without this evidence, many authors point out, a potential negative feedback loop can occur where the perceived unimportance of chronic poverty issues can reinforce a lack of funding for research to argue otherwise.

This driver has quantity and quality dimensions. There is an obvious need to increase the number and availability of longitudinal data such as panel sets (Hickey and Braunholtz-Speight, 2007), as well as more common data sets – the 2001 Indian census for instance, failed to consider destitute people in its count, effectively ignoring them as citizens and significantly jeopardising their involvement in future policy-making activities (Singh, 2001).



### Box 1: Drivers of change

**Availability of evidence** - Having data, research funding or interest in research can lead to the perceived (un)importance of a particular topic and hence its ability to influence agendas or policy construction.

**Capacity and willingness to use research-informed evidence** - The demand for, and use of, evidence varies depending on value perceptions based on awareness or degree of separation from the issue at hand as well as the degree to which it can create credibility and legitimacy for policy agendas.

**Credibility of the messenger** - The use of information and knowledge, though dependent on quality of content, is also largely accepted from reputable and trusted sources.

**Evidence framing** - Information can resonate with certain contexts or actors depending on the way it is presented and communicated, and can therefore be received, digested and utilised in a variety of ways.

However, there is a less obvious (though equally important) need to improve the quality aspect of chronic poverty research as there often tends to be a conflation of the causes and effects of chronic poverty, together with a lack of disaggregation and discussion on the structures that give rise to these characteristics (Harris-White, 2005; Hickey, 2005). Moreover, methodologies frequently focus 'on the poor' when examining the multidimensional dimensions of poverty, rather than 'with the poor' in a more mixed-method fashion (Moore and Brauholtz-Speight, 2007). The case study in Box 1 highlights some of the above issues.

In addition to the quality and quantity aspects, the availability of evidence can also be determined by who has access to it, when, and under what circumstances.

### Evidence framing

This driver is given a fair amount of consideration in the chronic poverty literature on the whole, but frequently from different perspectives and case studies. Hossain and Moore (2002) use an instrumental perspective in arguing that elites are persuadable if changes can be framed as being in their interest, Du Toit (2004) uses 'modernising myths' and 'moralizing narratives' to describe how evidence is made sense of in policy circles, while Harriss (2006:1) reduces the framing

### Box 2: Poverty data in Uganda

The second round of Uganda's Participatory Poverty Assessment (2001-2) was informed by a direct focus on 'poverty dynamics', helping to build an overall acceptance that other forms of poverty exist, despite the fact that concepts such as 'chronic' and 'transient' poverty are rarely used by policymakers. Several policy makers cited a single report from a national research centre as influencing this enhanced understanding.

Nonetheless, the data was not appropriately disaggregated along specific social axes (e.g. gender) nor was it differentiated by district. (only by region) (Hickey, 2005).

as largely dependent on the evidence itself, quoting Chambers (1988), "poverty becomes what has been measured and is available for analysis".

Despite these nuanced approaches, it is clear that the framing of policy messages is a highly discursive procedure and open to manipulation. If links between variables such as poverty, crime, social unrest or poor economic performance can be verifiably identified and effectively communicated, the potential to attract the attention of political actors seeking security or gains can be significant (Bird and Pratt, 2004). The specific character of a potential target group may also be politically attractive in some contexts – the elderly, for instance, can be considered 'worthy' of assistance (Hickey, 2006) while not considering or giving credence to the fact that research from South Africa demonstrates that there are many multiplier effects from such categorical targeting investments on child health and education (Adato and Hoddinot, 2008).

On the other hand, chronic poverty evidence can also be framed as a residual rather than relational pattern. That is, other categories of the chronically poor, such as the homeless or substance dependent, can be considered 'undeserving' and outside of a structural relationship with society (see guidance Sheet 1). It is in light of this point that the CPRC (2008) does not necessarily promote chronic poverty policy responses as 'good for growth' but as a rights-based issue.

Similarly, the chronic poverty policy process can be reframed in contrast to the interests of the poor through the depoliticisation of political economy issues. As outlined in Guidance Sheet 2, a participatory policy consultation in Andhra Pradesh was promoted as a local initiative and thereby insulated and isolated from inputs and critiques of national economic policy approaches (Mooij, 2003). Nonetheless, where the chronically poor lack the



technical capacity or opportunity to participate in reframing an agenda at the policy formation stage, there still remains a significant role for them in reframing national poverty discourse in terms of economic and social justice (CPRC, 2008).

The central point to note in using this driver to promote policy change is that reframed messages can work in a myriad of ways and contexts. Furthermore, if they are streamlined into orthodox management approaches or sidelined altogether as too radical an alternative, they may have no influence at all.

Messages therefore require strategic planning and contextual analysis that consider entry points and potential cost-benefit risks.

## Drivers of change – Weak

The review of the chronic poverty policy process literature revealed no evidence-orientated factors that clearly indicated only a weak impact on policy processes. This is likely to be due in part to the historical lack of discussion in this area, particularly with regard to the topic of chronic poverty, rather than any inherent structural characteristic. However, as more analysis is undertaken in the future the uncertain/unknown drivers identified below may lead to the identification of weak drivers in certain circumstances.

## Drivers of change – Uncertain/unknown

### Capacity and willingness to use research-informed evidence

This driver is closely related to the one above in that it can be largely dependent on the availability of evidence for creating interest amongst policy makers. However, five of the ten countries reviewed for the CPRC report (2008) for example, had relevant longitudinal data available for their Poverty Reduction Strategies, but did not consult them, suggesting that evidence is important but not necessarily the determining variable in the uptake of new ideas.

Unfortunately, specific investigation of this driver is not conducted in the CPRC report, nor is it common to find such studies elsewhere, particularly with regard to chronic poverty. It is nevertheless possible to differentiate between capacity and willingness issues, the former reducible as a resource issue, and the latter as a more complex issue.

Whitehead and Gray -Molina (2000) note for instance that many economists and participants in policy consultations lack the training to rationalise apparently unpredictable variables or incorporate

contingencies into planning and implementation strategies. Consequently, there is an argument that building analytical capacity as a resource will begin to generate sufficient awareness and confidence to promote usage in policy circles.

However, the willingness to engage with and use relevant evidence (as well as build analytical capacity) is more complex. This is largely an instrumental driver that can be argued to be largely co-dependent on a range of evidence-based drivers (presented in this guidance sheet). For example, the availability of high quality evidence that is rigorous, independent and monitored, and which is framed in an operationally useful way, will be more credible, and therefore readily communicable to policy makers (Court *et al.*, 2005).

It is all the better if two-way communications are initiated at the outset of a research project, as in the case of the Tanzanian Essential Health Intervention Project (TEHIP), where research and development were seen as interlocking components (Carden, 2009). Consistent two-way communications are also critical to enable research-institutions to be able to seize opportunities where policy-makers have made an explicit call for information. However, research providers must be prepared and responsive to such eventualities as they can arise and progress with speed. Take for instance, the case of the Centre for Applied Economic Research's work with the International Development Research Centre in Senegal on research techniques which seek to demonstrate linkages between the micro-impacts of macro-economic policies (Carden, 2009). Here, this research partnership contributed to shaping the evidence-generation approach of the coordinating agency of the Senegalese PRSP. This experience translated into a new framework regarding research-policy linkages in the country aimed at strengthening the quality and speed of policy responses to poverty and development challenges.

Drivers from other guidance sheets may also have a role in influencing the willingness to use research-based evidence. Norm-based drivers such as Political Culture, Ideology and Values stand out as potentially significant in this regard as they constitute a strong driver in Guidance Sheet 1. In practice, this may appear in the form of political sympathy overriding a willingness to examine the evidence by favouring the transient poor who are seen to fall into poverty (Hickey and Bracking, 2005), rather than the chronic poor who may be seen as pathologically 'unproductive' and 'undeserving' (Hossain 2005, Bird and Pratt, 2004).

In other cases, such attitudinal perspectives can be partly adjusted through the promotion of cross-ministerial and multi-sectorial working groups that create awareness and exposure to the realities of

chronically poor people's lives, as discussed by Bird and Grant (2005) regarding the case of Help the Aged International in Uganda, where the participation of ministry staff in a district poverty assessment proved 'invaluable' in encouraging group members to identify service delivery reforms in their respective ministries.

### Credibility of the messenger

The perception of the evidence provider and the specific role this has in driving the chronic poverty policy process is infrequently discussed in the chronic poverty literature. It is clear that the credibility of the message itself is critical (see above), but the internal/external status of the agent or network supplying it, is equally important in maintaining trust (Court *et al.*, 2005). Indeed, Carden (2009) has nominated trust as the most critical strategic asset that a researcher has in dealing with a party that makes a research demand. In addition, trust coincides strongly with reputation-building. Bird and Grant (2005) note how the affiliation of the CPRC with the highly regarded Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) has assisted in the development of policy entry points for researchers. The Institute is closely affiliated

with Ministry of Planning and has a close relationship with national media. Consequently, there have been opportunities for the CPRC to link-in with government planning processes and have access to the media through seminars, workshops and topical commentary.

In relation, Court *et al.* (2005) declare that messenger credibility is also dependent on whether or not the agent has been directly commissioned by policy makers – this was considered a central source of credibility for the internal Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility Review (in contrast to a parallel external review) provided to the World Bank and IMF promoting the PRSP initiative in 1998 (*ibid*).

### Next steps?

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 (context and actors/linkages) 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.



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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.