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Lessons for out-scaling and up-scaling from *Linking research, policy and livelihoods: challenges and contradictions*

Background

The Natural Resources Systems Programme brief *Linking research, policy and livelihoods: challenges and contradictions: learning from practice* identified "lessons about policy processes for natural resource management, and the relationship between research and policy". Based on a review of 35 projects, the brief drew out lessons relevant to researchers and those who fund research. For the most part, the links between research and policy are presented as background to the research topic. Researchers seldom explore how they could influence the development of policies.

During the timeframe of the Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy, research for development shifted towards policy issues. However, researchers did not often directly tackle the role that they themselves might play in influencing the shape of policies for natural resource management. They often did not address questions such as the following: how those who had power and influence might (or might not) look at research findings; how the policy processes worked and at what stage or stages research results might be considered in a particular developing country; what research results in the same and other disciplines (social science and economics) other parties might be putting forward; and who, in fact, really decides policies and how they are to be implemented.

Clearly, those concerned with out-scaling or up-scaling existing research findings will need to determine and use policy relationships and processes (which are often very complex) to influence the take-up of new knowledge and technologies in the development and implementation of policies.

For those concerned with out-scaling research results, there are some pointers as to circumstances when changes to policies at the community and grass-roots levels are likely to be more successful. For the most part, simultaneous change in institutions at all policy levels seems to be the most promising. But, for this to happen, large numbers of people at all levels would need to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to understand and apply the changes.

Key points

Those working to up-scale and out-scale results should:

- Become directly involved in policy processes.
- Establish the validity and credibility of the research.
- Build relationships.
- Be aware that decentralisation can be both positive and negative.

Lessons learned

**Become directly involved in policy processes.** The programmes and projects considered worked primarily with national research institutions as the agents for changing policies. This sometimes proved successful, for example where the objective was to release new varieties, though the process may have been far more protracted than researchers may have initially thought.

For up-scaling research findings, those involved need to clearly understand and directly engage in policy processes. Understanding who the key players are and how they go about developing policies are pre-requisites for developing strategies to feed research findings into policy processes. In many developing countries, DFID is not the only development agency funding research and there are numerous agencies all offering governments their research results and policy advice. In any particular case, it is not really known at present whether or not governments, ministries, politicians and their advisors take note of the research results and advice given and, if they do, how they evaluate and weigh it against that of, for example, lobby groups, private-sector interests, the impact on their economies and budgets, or the concerns of other government sectors.

History shows that policy development, far from being a systematic and rational process, is complex and messy. It also makes clear that policies, when implemented, often have unintended consequences. Policy development is not simple and policies do not always work as intended, even in developed countries that have long-established independent government research bureaus that evaluate research from relevant institutions. Based on their evaluation of research findings and mindful of what research findings can and cannot show, such research bureaus brief government departments and ministers on policy options together with the likely implications—positive and negative—of putting policies in place. Most of these institutions are long-established and nurture their reputations for sound, impartial analysis.

Few developing countries have this capacity for policy analysis and advice. In many of these countries, global lending entities, such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, shape policies (through National Poverty Reduction Strategies and National Development Plans) and set conditions that governments must comply with. And sometimes there are donor consortia or round tables that cooperate or advise on particular development issues. To be out-scaled and up-scaled, research results need to be fed into the analyses of the major lending agencies and put on the agendas of fora where development issues are considered (Box 8.1).

## Box 8.1

### **Direct involvement in the policy process is important**

"Policy papers were important, but the presence of project members at regional meetings and their lobbying efforts were critical activities to ensuring that the issues were placed on the [CARICOM] agenda." <sup>25</sup>

### **Tackle policy strategically**

"the mandatory communication plan is useful in that it forces one to think about institutional linkages and the actors and institutions one has to address to bring about change. ...we have had to address institutional issues, and focus on communicating our results in forms that address institutional issues, and can be understood by those in relevant institutions at the interface with communities and policy communication." <sup>26</sup>

**Establish validity and credibility.** The 'quality, accuracy or robustness of research findings' often has little to do with whether or not they are taken up. Research can be disregarded because of where it comes from—particular research organisations, whether from the 'north' or 'south', may have no credibility in policy areas they are trying to influence. The reasons could be many, such as hidden agendas, 'them' and 'us', or prejudice.

Researchers were most successful in engaging with policy makers when they made their objectives clear. They explained in plain words what their research was about, what the research did and did not show, how they thought it could be used, and the dimensions that the research did not and could not take into account. In these cases, researchers' willingness to explain, to listen and to clarify informed the policy-making process. They demonstrated the validity of their findings and established their own credibility. Similar direct engagement will be needed for up-scaling research findings.

**Build relationships.** Research was most successful in creating local impacts and working upwards and outwards where funding was sustained over many years. In such cases, building relationships helped influence policy and strengthened commitment (Box 8.2). Projects that invested in building and maintaining alliances over many years found that local partners did come to 'own' the agenda. This implies that significant long-term commitments would be needed to establish the relationships that would pave the way for major out-scaling and up-scaling of these kinds of local impacts.

In developing-country policy processes, much can depend on individuals. Whereas in developed countries policies are mediated, for example, by ministries, government departments, the media and the electorate, in many developing countries, individuals and

## Box 8.2

### **Build relationships**

One project initially brought together a wide range of stakeholders in Tobago to identify the challenges in managing Marine Protected Areas in the Caribbean. The group then looked at how the Marine Protected Areas were managed and what could (and could not) be changed to manage each area sustainably. As relationships and trust between stakeholders developed, they began to see what actions could be taken in reality, where and by whom, and were prompted to take action to make feasible changes to policies.<sup>27</sup>

local elites wield much more power. This has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, changes can happen very quickly. On the other hand, individuals can block changes, or individuals who are helping change can themselves go elsewhere or be replaced, or policies can be reversed. Elites can capture resources. Any strategy to out-scale or up-scale needs take into account the risks inherent in relationships with individuals and particular interest groups.

**Decentralisation can be both positive and negative.** Those engaged in initiatives to out-scale research findings need to be aware that decentralisation of responsibilities for managing natural resources can have both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, decentralisation of natural resources management improves the chances for communities to have a say in planning and managing natural resources. Communities contribute their knowledge and insights and are less likely to be discounted or ignored.

On the negative side, decentralisation may give the wealthy and powerful opportunities to hijack resources. Those whose powers are being taken away may dig in their heels against change. And, unless decentralisation policies are effectively implemented—meaning that people are trained for their new roles and adequate resources are allocated—decentralisation may be just a paper exercise.

### **This synopsis of lessons learned for up-scaling and out-scaling research into use is drawn from:**

Brock, K., and Harrison, E. 2006. 'Linking research, policy and livelihoods: challenges and contradictions'.

#### **See**

<http://www.research4development.info/pdf/ThematicSummaries/NRSPPolicy%20BriefLR.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> P4 Box 4 Communication for research uptake promotion: learning from practice June 2006 Pat Norrish.

<sup>26</sup> P4 Box 4 Communication for research uptake promotion: learning from practice June 2006 Pat Norrish.

<sup>27</sup> P4 Box 1 Linking research, policy and livelihoods: challenges and contradictions March 2006 Karen Brock and Elizabeth Harrison.