

# 10 Lessons for out-scaling and up-scaling from *Effective policy advocacy*

## Background

It is essential to ensure that research goes beyond the publication of results in peer-reviewed journals, and that it achieves deep-rooted impact through productive changes in policy, and concerted and directed actions to influence policy change (i.e. active policy advocacy). This is the premise of the study *Effective Policy Advocacy: An RNRRS Synthesis*<sup>37</sup>, commissioned by DFID.

The authors of the paper stress the need to improve people's understanding of the concept of policy advocacy in order to encourage effective uptake of research results. They argue that it is unrealistic to expect unpredictable market forces and farmer-to-farmer diffusion to be enough to ensure that research outcomes have an impact. There is a need to move from this passive attitude to a decidedly active and integrated approach. Only in this way, they emphasize, can the benefits of research findings be effectively institutionalized and targeted in a way that will make a positive difference in the lives of end users, and in particular the poor, who often lack the means to engage and influence policy makers.

## Key points

- Decision makers, decision shapers and other stakeholders must be engaged at opportunistic times, when conditions are ripe for success.
- One size does not fit all—action and information must be carefully targeted and delivered according to each audience.
- Diverse cultural and sectoral dynamics must be taken into account.
- Natural and political scientists with local contacts in the policy domain must be involved to help understand and address these dynamics.
- Activities aimed at shaping policy must go far beyond the project cycle.

## Lessons learned

**This movement towards a more active approach for ensuring that research has an impact depends on thoroughly assessing the particular situations in which research results are to be applied in order to ensure that conditions are favourable (Box 10.1).**

Once this assessment has been conducted, "barriers to entry" can be identified and steps can be taken to overcome them. The authors of the RNRRS synthesis use specific case studies to

demonstrate how this can be done, especially when working to influence the first four of the conditions mentioned in Box 10.1. They also analyze past efforts in order to illustrate (1) why they succeeded or failed to engage policy makers and bring about policy change and (2) to highlight areas for improvement.

## Box 10.1

**For policy changes to take root, the right conditions must be in place.**

- People must be aware of the problem.
- People must believe that change is feasible, both technically and politically.
- An understanding of the change process must exist.
- Advocates must have access to policy shapers (anyone who has a direct impact on policy development, whether inside or outside the government sphere) and makers.
- Mechanisms for effective change must be in place.
- There must be sufficient political will.

**Effectively engaging decision makers, decision shapers and other stakeholders is a complex process that requires informed, diversified and targeted action on many levels.** Case studies have shown that interaction with policy makers and shapers depends to a great extent on local conditions. At the same time, these actors represent—and must respond to the needs of—diverse constituencies. Concerted and targeted action is fundamental to produce change in this complex panorama and make it possible for research results to have a real impact.

Interaction with policy makers and shapers helps them to understand what contribution research can make to their own objectives. However, the mechanisms for accessing these actors—and their needs and interests—differ according to each sector, country and region. At the same time, there are many levels and scales of policy making, ranging from the local, to the national, regional or international. This is why policy advocates must understand the local scene in order to design and put in place effective interventions and mechanisms (Box 10.2).

Case studies have also shown that it is important to target individual policy shapers and makers separately, building relationships with them over time. This enables policy advocates to time their interventions and contributions so that they reach their targets at the most opportune moment.

<sup>37</sup> The paper draws on the experience of research projects from DFID's Forestry Research Programme, Livestock Production Programme and Crop Post-Harvest Programme.

## Box 10.2

### **Identifying the policy shapers**

Studies have shown that in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, Livestock Parliamentary Groups (members of parliament representing pastoral areas and concerns) have enormous potential to influence policy for improved pastoral livelihoods. As yet, however, this potential is largely untapped. Taking advantage of it will depend on many factors. These include:

- assessing the complex political circumstances of each of the three countries;
- analyzing parliamentary procedures and the parliamentarians' ability to use them;
- studying the role of 'policy entrepreneurs,' capable of networking across diverse interest groups;
- understanding the limitations of individual parliamentarians in terms of motivation and capabilities;
- appreciating the acute need for information on policy options;
- gathering knowledge of the actual conditions in remote areas and constituencies.

The significance of the problems addressed by research is not always evident to policy shapers and decision makers. In these cases, advocates must provide a 'hook' that will catch and hold their attention, explaining the chains of cause and effect.

At the same time, it is also important to work with all of the stakeholders if policy change is to be effective, deep-rooted, equitable, and able to respond to real and critical needs (Box 10.3).

## Box 10.3

### **The power of partnership**

In Kampala, Uganda, researchers were able to change longstanding city bylaws and endorse city farmers' rights by bringing together urban farmers, national and local policy makers, civil society groups, researchers and donors. In Nairobi, Kenya, poor livestock keepers from slum areas have been empowered to take collective action that is benefiting more than 1000 farmers directly.

Not everyone is qualified to be an effective policy advocate. Special skills are needed to make research results credible, inspire confidence and trust, capitalize on present opportunities—as small as they may seem—and pave the way for future gains. Training in advocacy can help to build these skills.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See FRP training manual on communication methods and scientific advocacy: [http://www.frp.uk.com/project\\_dissemination\\_details.cfm/projectID/8121/projectCode/ZF0147E/disID/4094](http://www.frp.uk.com/project_dissemination_details.cfm/projectID/8121/projectCode/ZF0147E/disID/4094)

### **Using appropriate communication tools and products targeted to diverse audiences can make or break the effectiveness of policy engagement and advocacy.**

Involving policy makers in workshops—especially when the ground has been prepared by developing good relationships with them—is helpful, but it is not enough. Special information and communication tools must be developed to reach and influence each of the stakeholder groups.

In some cases, monographs, manuals, handbooks and guides may be useful, while in others more interactive decision- or negotiation-support tools (ranging from simple flow-charts to complex computer-driven systems) are called for. Posters may be appropriate for a more technically knowledgeable audience, while radio, press, video or TV may help in reaching remote or geographically dispersed communities. The important thing is that both the vehicle and the messages must be tailored to the audience.

Face-to-face meetings, when they are feasible, may also be far more effective than the written word, particularly when the advocates are able to articulate complex processes and outputs in easy-to-understand language. It is important to keep in mind, nonetheless, that different audiences may react differently to the same facts, depending on their perspectives and background knowledge (Box 10.4).

## Box 10.4

### **No problem, no policy**

Where there is little or no awareness of the problem, policy change is difficult or impossible to put in place. In Ghana, for instance, researchers discovered that the methods used to manufacture traditional cooking pots resulted in dangerous metal residues in food. They also found that a local food known as fufu, made from pounded cassava, was one of the more high-risk foods in terms of microbial disease, and that this risk increased during high-rainfall periods. Yet surveys showed that most consumers did not associate unsafe food with food-borne diseases. TV documentaries and billboards were therefore used to cultivate better-informed consumers, while posters and training materials encouraged health officials and street vendors to work together on improving consumer safety and health.

**Translating specialized knowledge into workable policies is particularly difficult under circumstances where intersectoral cooperation is not the norm.** Corruption, fragmentation of responsibility and lack of geographic and institutional integration can all raise barriers, making it difficult to secure the commitment that enables the key players to take ownership of policy changes.

The participation of specialists in the natural and political sciences can help advocacy teams to build an understanding of the local

nature of policy making. This includes defining the effect of perceptions and other cultural factors (see below) on policy adoption. These specialists can also help to foster intersectoral understanding and cooperation (Box 10.5).

## Box 10.5

### ***Going against the flow***

In India, central government ministries as well as national, state and local departments are involved in planning and implementing water management policies, and they often use different data sets to do so. This diversity of actors and responsibilities has limited the success of watershed management programmes in producing positive policy change. If this is to change, one of the first challenges is to improve intersectoral communication and linkages. In Himachal Pradesh, this need was addressed by bringing together more than 40 local and central government departments in a workshop designed to create a more integrated approach to watershed management.

**Policy uptake is influenced by political, historical and cultural factors.** Policy advocates must be aware of political, historical, and cultural factors so that they can determine whether policy formulation is based on perceptions or facts, and whether it is influenced by religion, ethnicity or other cultural factors. For instance, long-standing beliefs and practices may counter research findings or make them difficult to understand and accept. A history of broken promises or inequitable treatment of certain social groups may also make it difficult to build the trust needed for effective policy development and implementation (Box 10.6).

## Box 10.6

### ***Different focuses for different folks***

Focus groups are often used to resolve conflict and promote policy change. Yet while they worked well with livestock keepers in Uganda, in India they met with failure, largely because of cultural differences and a history of conflict. This was attributed to the fact that the target groups (the nomadic pastoralists of the arid and semi-arid Himalayas) are politically marginalized in this country. In India, pastoralism is viewed by the dominant majority as an obstacle to development and those who practice it are increasingly excluded from scarce property resources.

Proactive advocacy approaches backed by astute analysis of circumstances can help to surmount these obstacles, permitting the development of compelling arguments based on a thorough understanding of local factors.

**Effective policy shaping is a long-term proposition, involving changes that build on each other over time.** Staff turnover at the local and regional level—often in response to funding considerations or political changes—may make it difficult to construct the progressive steps needed to shape policy. Advocacy must be devised, therefore, with a long-term perspective in mind, to help compensate for change and provide the continuity that is missing at the local level.

The criteria outlined in this summary can help when analyzing why research has not produced the desired impact in the past and when working to build successes in the future. It is necessary to remember, however, that we must continually monitor and evaluate policy, suggesting change as needed.

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

2005. 'Effective policy advocacy: an RNRRS synthesis' (author details not available).

#### **See**

[http://www.research4development.info/pdf/ThematicSummaries/RNRRS\\_Advocacy\\_and\\_Policy\\_Linkages\\_Synthesis\\_Paper\\_P1.pdf](http://www.research4development.info/pdf/ThematicSummaries/RNRRS_Advocacy_and_Policy_Linkages_Synthesis_Paper_P1.pdf)