



# Learning from the Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy

## Effective policy advocacy

*The Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS) evolved during its lifetime (1995–2006) from having a strong focus on producing scientific research and publications to an emphasis on the impact of research on poverty. Influencing policy by advocating uptake of research findings therefore became increasingly important. Insights from this experience are valuable for any policy advocacy work in the natural resources sector.*

### Key messages

- Policy advocacy is the essential link that ensures research results enter the policy domain.
- Policy advocacy should be integrated into project design and management from the outset.
- For policy advocacy to be successful, research teams need to identify and gain access to appropriate political decision makers at the most opportune moments. Timing of research outputs is crucial to maximise the opportunity for policy reform.
- Communication of policy messages must be targeted carefully to different stakeholders. One size does not fit all.
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the uptake of research outputs in policy processes is critical to assess progress and learn from experience.
- Policy advocacy should be a long-term process that continues beyond the conventional lifetime of a project so that research findings can be incorporated within policy processes when appropriate.

### Introduction

This Brief shares insights from the 11-year DFID-funded Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS) in the area of policy advocacy. In particular it discusses five key considerations for the uptake of research outputs and highlights lessons for future advocacy work within the natural resources sector. It draws on the experience of research projects from the Department for International Development's (DFID's) Forestry Research Programme (FRP – hydrology cluster), Livestock Production Programme (LPP – landless livestock-keeper cluster) and Crop Post Harvest Programme (CPHP – street food cluster). The research clusters

were selected as examples of successful or significant engagement with policy makers.

### Background

Policy advocacy is defined in this Brief as the deliberate process of influencing policy decision makers through targeted actions. Policy advocacy is the essential link that ensures research results enter the policy domain.

Research programmes often culminate in the publication of research findings in international peer-reviewed journals and books. In reality, it is highly unlikely that these outputs will reach policy

makers, who are generally time-poor. There is therefore a risk of research findings remaining on the fringe of policy debates and decision making.

A more pro-active, targeted, policy advocacy strategy is needed if outputs are to be made accessible to those who shape and make policy decisions. Policy advocacy therefore needs to be conceptualised within projects as an activity beyond dissemination of research findings.

Bringing about policy change requires an enabling environment, which includes the following:

- A belief that change is feasible, both technically and politically
- Access to policy makers and policy shapers (people inside or outside government who have a direct impact on policy development)
- Appropriate mechanisms for effecting change
- Availability and knowledge of suitable change mechanisms
- Sufficient political will.

## The route to successful policy advocacy

Five key considerations for the uptake of research outputs are discussed in this Brief: policy engagement, policy communication, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral working, local culture and policy, and a long-term perspective of policy.

### Policy engagement

Policy engagement is concerned with how research can make an impact on and change existing policy. Successful engagement with policy makers relies on understanding the policy environment. This involves understanding the roles and responsibilities of decision making at local, national, regional and international levels; identifying the available mechanisms for creating policy change at the different levels; comprehending the processes by which policy shapers inform and influence policy makers; and becoming familiar with current relevant policy debates and the opportunities for engagement.

Working alongside policy shapers and makers during the lifetime of a research project provides the opportunity to establish effective relationships with decision makers and identify key moments for engagement in the policy process. For example

### Box 1. Communication between researchers and policymakers

Researchers often regret the fact that they appear to have little direct influence on policy. In return, policy makers blame researchers for providing information at the wrong time and in an inaccessible format. If the impact of research on policy development is to be improved, the nature of the relationship between research and policy formulation needs to be better understood.

an FRP hydrology project in India developed a communication network that enabled researchers and policy makers to have continuous dialogue on water issues.

Timing the emergence of research findings with opportunities for policy engagement can be challenging. Appropriate timing more often than not occurs by chance. Too often, scientific results are available too late to influence policy, or projects may be completed before potential opportunities for advocacy arise. Having interconnected clusters of projects and continuous policy engagement can help to increase the potential for good timing. In addition, it should be possible to indicate scenarios early in the project to provide a hook with which to engage policy makers. Broadly speaking, policy engagement needs to extend for longer than most projects, and donors should recognise this.

The most successful policy engagements are not always planned. Experience from the FRP shows that successes in influencing policy have often followed chance meetings with political ministers or fortuitous matching of research project cycles with election cycles. While it is important to capitalise on unplanned opportunities, long-standing or perennial problems need a more systematic approach.

Collaboration across a range of stakeholders can develop strong coalitions for change. For example, an LPP project that focused on livestock keepers in urban and peri-urban areas collaborated with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Urban Harvest

Programme in Kampala, Uganda. The coalition brought together urban farmers, policy makers from city and national levels, civil society groups, researchers and donors. The result was a change in city bylaws that benefited city farmers.

Appropriate skills for political advocacy are extremely important. Natural resources research project staff are generally not accustomed to considering advocacy as part of their remit. They need training in advocacy processes and techniques. When armed with the relevant skills, they are more likely to develop a sense of confidence and ownership, and advocacy is more likely to be sustained when the project has finished.

### Policy communication

The development of appropriate forms of communication at all levels is a key element of effective policy engagement and advocacy. Within the RNRRS, knowledge dissemination to policy audiences has mainly been carried out by inviting policy makers to project workshops and meetings. These interactions have been useful in informing the policy audience of research results and uptake strategies. Workshops and conferences are most effective when the partici-

pants have already established good working relationships.

This approach alone is unlikely to influence policy change, however. Within the RNRRS, there has been increasing recognition of the need for information dissemination and interaction targeted specifically at key stakeholders. Communication materials can be tailored to particular stakeholder groups by using different media and formats. For example, a CPHP project regarding the food safety of informal food-sellers, which found that high rainfall in summer increases the risk of transmission of disease through contaminated water and poor sanitation, developed a training package for environmental health officers in Zimbabwe and Zambia.

For multiple categories of stakeholders, a series of face-to-face meetings with policy shapers may be more productive than relying on the written word. Also within the CPHP project cluster, a coalition partnership approach was used to include street vendor non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local authorities, food standards authorities, research institutions and food laboratories. Initiatives were undertaken jointly, including action research to explore issues around government support for unlicensed vendors.

As the case study clusters show, influencing policy is not simply a case of making policy makers more aware of research outputs. It is important to understand and engage with the processes by which research finds a pathway to policy makers. FRP commissioned a training manual on communication methods and scientific advocacy aimed at researchers and this is available online (see Additional resources).

### Multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral working

Despite the complexity and cross-sectoral nature of natural resource issues, many development agencies continue to be organised along sectoral lines. For example, an FRP project found that in India one of the difficulties for policy makers involved in water management programmes is that field responsibilities are spread between various technical government departments, many of which use different data sets. Furthermore, the implementation of integrated land and water management policies is hindered by

#### Box 2. Successful policy engagement

Successful policy engagement relies on the project management team identifying the key political decision makers. The FRP and LPP case study clusters demonstrate this point.

Through the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) newsletter, the FRP hydrology cluster was able to publicise an interview with the Prime Minister of India, Dr Manmohan Singh. In the interview, he noted the main issues being tackled by the cluster, particularly the components operating in India.

The LPP adopted an innovative method of policy engagement in East African countries by focusing their activities on members of parliament with constituencies with pastoral development interests. Livestock Parliamentary Groups were established, which focused on current relevant livestock policy issues.

disparate administration. However, different activities can be facilitated to nurture cross-sectoral working. At the FRP-funded Shimla workshop in Himachal Pradesh in August 2004, more than 40 State and central government departments were represented. Since then, the State government of Himachal Pradesh has taken steps to create the Water Resource Management Council, chaired by the Chief Minister, to ensure that an integrated approach to watershed management is adopted in the State.

A further issue is the difficulty of communicating to a multi-sectoral audience. Many research outputs tend to be expressed in technical and jargon-filled language. Such outputs can be difficult to translate into direct policy actions and recommendations for decision makers.

For optimum policy uptake, multi-disciplinary teams, including political and natural scientists, are needed to ensure that specialised knowledge relevant to policy makers can be translated into workable policies. This can be particularly important at opportune moments for policy engagement and can be carried out in various ways. For example, the FRP arranged for expertise to be brought in from the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme of the Overseas Development Institute, to help demonstrate the value of non-traditional inter-sectoral negotiation for improved water management in India.

### Local culture and policy

Political, cultural and historical factors all play a part in policy formation and uptake. At the same time,

'The whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents, it is not at all a matter of the rational implementation of the so-called decisions through selected strategies.' (Clay and Schaffer, in Rath and Barnett, 2005).

policies are not necessarily based purely on scientific rationale and logic; they may be embedded in deeply held religious or customary beliefs. Moreover, as has been long recognised, policy making is far from linear. When researchers engage with policy makers

they should be aware of and understand the basis on which policy is formed.

The historical background to a research project may make it difficult to pursue policy advocacy. For example, one of the FRP's hydrological projects includes socio-economic studies of livelihoods in upper water catchments, where payments for forest-based environmental services (PES) are in place. However, a long history of perceived broken promises by government departments and agencies has left local farmers unwilling to participate in government-mediated PES. They do not believe they will be paid at rates that compensate for the loss of their own decision-making over land use.

The FRP's hydrology cluster also demonstrates the implications of culture and politics in relation to policy advocacy in the case of water management in India. There were a large number of suicides of poor farmers in some states following crop failures in rainfed areas and a lack of alternative livelihoods, and this has made water management a sensitive political issue. In addition, the fact that numerous government agencies have responsibility at State level or below for some aspect of the management of water supply or demand, together with the block votes of richer farmers at election time, make it politically difficult to implement reform measures.

### A long-term perspective

Policy shaping in the natural resources sector is usually a long-term venture involving extensive collaboration between projects, stakeholders and donors. While research projects often use the 'ripple effect' as a way of disseminating new technologies via farmer-to-farmer contact or more formal extension processes, this is unlikely to work with policy. Policy tends to evolve through step changes, and these require long-term involvement.

Staff stability is an important aspect of long-term linkages. Staff movement within NGOs tends to depend on changes in donor funding, while staff changes in developing country national agricultural research systems can be substantial due to attrition, promotion and geographic gap-filling. The RNRRS projects were relatively short term in relation to the pace of policy and legislative change in developing countries and tended to suffer from a lack of continuity of personnel and data.

## Recommendations

A number of lessons have emerged and these can be taken forward in future policy advocacy work within the field of renewable natural resources.

- Integrate policy advocacy into project design and project processes.
- Understand the nature of policy making. This includes whether projects are seeking to change policy makers' perception of facts or if existing policy is based on additional factors, such as religion, ethnicity or professional mythology.
- Formulate research findings in a manner that can best influence policy.
- Target promotion appropriately; in policy communication, one size does not fit all.
- Establish professional working relationships between research staff and policy makers before formal interactions (e.g. conferences) to achieve maximum impact.
- Work alongside policy shapers during the lifetime of a research project.
- Include natural and political scientists at appropriate stages of project planning and implementation. The variety of cultural dynamics means that local political scientists must be included in the project team.
- Identify and access the right political decision maker at the most opportune time.
- Continue policy advocacy after the completion of fieldwork. Train project teams in advocacy processes and techniques so they feel ownership and continue advocating for research outputs well after the project has finished.
- Monitor and evaluate policy to the same degree or more as the technical areas of research projects.

## Additional resources

FRP training manual on communication methods and scientific advocacy: [http://www.frp.uk.com/dissemination\\_documents/ZF0147E\\_-\\_English\\_Workbook.pdf](http://www.frp.uk.com/dissemination_documents/ZF0147E_-_English_Workbook.pdf)

Rath, A. and Barnett, A. (2005). Innovation systems: Concepts, approaches and lessons from the RNRRS. RNRRS Synthesis Study No. 10. The Policy Practice Limited: Brighton, UK.

## RNRRS projects

- R7937 Catchment Management and Poverty Alleviation: The Role of Economic Instruments and Compensation Mechanisms in Water Resource and Forest Management
- R7493 Enhancing the Food Security of the Peri-urban and Urban Poor Through Improvements to the Quality, Safety and Economics of Street Vended Foods in Ghana (1999–2000)
- R7991 Hydrological Impacts of Converting Tropical Montane Cloud Forest to Pasture, with Initial Reference to Northern Costa Rica
- R8109 Using Livestock to Improve Livelihoods of Landless and Refugee-affected Livestock Keepers in Bangladesh and Nepal
- R8110 Livestock and Urban Livelihoods: Developing Appropriate Extension Dialogues with the Landless
- R8171 Management of Upper Water Catchments, Especially in Dry Forests in India with Low Base Flows; Forestry and Low Flows, Spatial Modelling and Open GIS Dissemination of the Science Perception
- R8174 Socio-economic Impacts and Market Opportunities Associated with Land Use and Hydrological Change in Tropical Montane Cloud Forest Areas in Arenal, Costa Rica
- R8270 Developing Food Safety Strategies and Procedures Through Reduction of Food Hazards in Street Vended Foods to Improve Food Security for Consumers, Street Food Vendors and Input Suppliers
- R8272 Improving Food Safety of Informally Vended Foods in Southern Africa
- R8433 Maximising Impact of Food Safety Knowledge of Street Vended and Informally Vended Foods Generated by CPHP Projects in West and Southern Africa Using the Coalition Approach and Extending the Approach to India
- ZC0201 Urban Livestock Keeping in East Africa
- ZC0256 Politics and Pastoralism
- For further information see <http://www.research4development.info/projectsandprogrammes.asp>

## About this Brief

This Brief is an edited summary, prepared by Susanne Turrall, of a paper commissioned by

the Forestry Research Programme: *Effective policy advocacy: An RNRRS synthesis*. [www.research4development.info/thematicSummaries/RNRRS\\_Advocacy\\_and\\_Policy\\_Linkages\\_Synthesis\\_Paper\\_P1.pdf](http://www.research4development.info/thematicSummaries/RNRRS_Advocacy_and_Policy_Linkages_Synthesis_Paper_P1.pdf)

## Other RNRRS Briefs

Participatory research approaches

An integrated approach to capacity development

Pathways for change: monitoring and evaluation

Research, policy and practice in water management

From research to innovation systems

Gender: some insights

Poverty measurement, mapping and analysis

### About the Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (1995–2006)

The objective of DFID's Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS) was to generate new knowledge and to promote its uptake and application such that the livelihoods of poor people are improved through better management of renewable natural resources. Through its ten research programmes it addressed the knowledge needs of poor people whose livelihoods are dependent on natural resources production systems in semi-arid areas, high potential areas, hillsides, tropical moist forests, and at the forest/agriculture interface, the land/water interface and the peri-urban interface. The breadth of the strategy programme reflected the wide variety of environments in which poor people live in poorer countries and the multiple routes by which research can reduce poverty.

For more information about the source papers and other RNRRS thematic summaries, visit <http://www.research4development.info/thematicSummaries.asp>

For further information on DFID-funded research go to <http://www.research4development.info>