NATURAL RESOURCES SYSTEMS PROGRAMME
PROJECT REPORT[1]

DFID Project Number

R8334

Report Title

Building consensus. STREAM Policy Brief Number 1.

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NRSP Production System

High Potential

A briefing on …

Building Consensus

… in two pages or less

Summary

What is this about?

People agreeing policy change

Read this if …

… you want to change policy.

It involves:

- Understanding the livelihoods contexts in which the policy must operate.

- Gathering opinion on current policy and recommendations for change from people who are recipients of policy and services.

- Sharing ideas through drama, case studies, workshops and lessons learnt from elsewhere.

- Building consensus for policy changes.

"Going beyond hierarchy in making decisions"

"Facilitating participation with repeated inputs and careful feedback"

"Collating group responses, monitoring the amount of agreement and agreeing a decision"

It works formally or informally, in large or small groups.

It helps people to have a voice in policy and policy-makers and implementers to comment freely on new ideas.

It provides appropriate prioritized policy change options for decisions.

If you can only do one thing with this Policy Brief, do this …

Enable recipients of policy and services to recommend policy changes and build consensus for change among policy-makers and implementers

The briefing …

To create policies effectively we need to understand the livelihoods contexts in which a policy must operate.

It is neither rapid nor simple to understand the resources that people own and access in various ways, the vulnerabilities and coping strategies they have, and the ways in which policies can best support people's livelihoods objectives. This understanding will come from people who are the recipients of policy and services. There are techniques, resources and training to help us build relationships of trust and gain this understanding.

At the same time as understanding about people's lives, we can learn from them about their experiences of current policies and services and gather their opinions and recommendations for change.

Policy-makers and -shapers are often a long way from the local communities their policies aim to support. There can be large linguistic, cultural and socio-economic barriers to communications. There are mechanisms for sharing information rapidly, for example, supporting farmers or fishers to film their lives, or commissioning a street-play from case studies, then showing or performing these and encouraging clear statements at policy workshops while also sharing lessons learnt from elsewhere.

- Go out into communities and **understand the livelihoods contexts** in which the policy must operate,

- **Gather opinions on current policy and recommendations for change** from people who are recipients of policy and services, and

- **Share ideas** through drama, case studies, workshops and lessons learnt from elsewhere.

   → This will help to understand key issues, the context in which policy operates, any current policy shortcomings and recommendations for changes.

A briefing on … building consensus for policy change

> To move from recommendations to a policy decision requires discussion and the building of consensus. **Consensus-building processes** help decision-making in a political or emotional environment, or when the decisions affect strong factions with opposing preferences, keeping the benefits of group decision-making while avoiding some of its limitations.

🔴 Build a consensus for change

Convene a group of policy-makers and implementers (at national, provincial and local levels). Each member of the group should know who the other members are, but work separately; provide information and make choices anonymously through a moderator.

A moderator provides **information on context** and **options for policy change** (from the recipients of policy and services), asks each participant to **rank the policy change options**, collates the responses and then returns the anonymous group responses to each individual. Consensus-building process participants are now free to agree or disagree anonymously and, by the strength of their arguments alone, to encourage others to also change their views. The moderator highlights any new emerging consensus, and non-aligned participants can accept this or propose further arguments why others should change their views.

⟶ This helps all group members to express their views freely and critique responses of others on their anonymous merit alone, **while avoiding over-dominant group members and deference to seniors.**

Through several iterations, usually not more than four, **unity of thinking is sought**.

⟶ Getting recommendations for change from within communities **gives recipients a voice**; moderated, anonymous iteration and controlled feedback give policy-makers and implementers an opportunity to fully participate.

This provides a clear set of **prioritized policy change options** – derived from recipients, and agreed by policy-makers and implementers – on which to base policy change decisions.

Links to other documents and information sources on this topic:

- **R8100 Investigating Improved Policy on Aquaculture Service Provision to Poor People** Twelve reports (ISBN 974-7313-63-4) http://www.streaminitiative.org/Library/India/india.html
- **R8334 Promoting the Pro-Poor Policy Lessons of R8100 with Key Policy Actors in India** Eight reports http://www.streaminitiative.org/Library/pdf/pdf-india/StakeholdersMeeting.pdf

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Where has this come from?