



## Scanning the Policy, Communications, and Research environments

*including an assessment of risks that would undermine the implementation of the Communications Strategy*

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### **SCANNING THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT**

Very few research projects take place in a benign policy environment where the application of 'new research knowledge' on its own will bring about poverty reduction. For this reason, it is important to review the policy environment to understand what forces are at play that will constrain, inhibit or enable the uptake of the research itself.

Policy processes are complicated. Tools that attempt to make them simple are useful but can always be improved upon. If your project can improve the tools described, make sure you communicate the improvements and help others in future. You need to be able to:

What you should do	Helpful tools and guidance
Identify which part of the policy process you are trying to influence with your research, if any.	Useful tools include the following <b>Mapping the Policy System</b> <sup>i</sup> that asks you to list the key players and their influence in each of the four stages of policymaking (agenda setting; formulation and enactment; implementation and enforcement; and monitoring and evaluation). The tool allows you to set objectives for each of the phases of policymaking with each of the influential target groups e.g. different levels of government, private sector, civil society etc. Carrying out this activity will help you to identify who you need to keep informed by your research, for what purpose, and at what stage of the project cycle.
Be clear about what exactly are the changes the project is trying to bring about and what are the forces acting in support and against these changes being realised.	<b>Force field analysis</b> <sup>ii</sup> is a useful tool for groups to collectively agree what is the desired policy goal or objective connected with research, and what are the forces working in support of, and against the desired changes. Suitable for a project team and useful to explore differences of opinion and interpretation that may become problematic if not exposed and discussed early on in the project.
Understand more about who are the key players in the policy processes that you're trying to influence, and what motivates them?	A useful tool is What do they know and care about <sup>iii</sup> ?

Be clear about what you <b>can</b> and <b>should</b> do to influence policy.	A useful matrix that helps you to identify what you need to know; what you need to do; and how to do it in a generic sense is <b>How to influence policy and practice<sup>iv</sup></b> You can choose to influence as a project, or to join a broader influencing debate. Different models will determine the kind of roles that individuals have e.g. <b>honest broker, expert informant, capacity builder, lobbyist and player<sup>v</sup></b> and the nature of information that you feed into the debate.
Be explicit about the connection between the policy issue, the people that are affected by the policy, and the role of your research in bringing about change.	A helpful tool is <b>Policy Mapping<sup>vi</sup></b> that shows worked examples of what is the problem; who is affected by it and where; what are the supportive policies and the restrictive policies and how are they enforced.
'Buy in' expertise to help you explore, understand and analyse the policy processes that surround your research area, either as a discrete piece of work or building it into the project team by making sure one of the team members has this as their area of expertise.	

### **UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNICATIONS ENVIRONMENT**

Each research project will need to work with, interact with, inform and influence different groups of people in order to achieve its objectives. In turn, each group will contain people who have different knowledge levels about the subject; who access information in a wide variety of ways; and whose methods of learning and acting on new information are influenced by their widely differing living environments. Each person you want to communicate with is unique. The more you understand about the ways in which they access information, prefer to engage with it (in a way that leads to action) the more likely you are to achieve uptake of your research.

<b>What you should do</b>	<b>Helpful tools and guidance</b>
Find out how your target audience seeks out and uses information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can do this through <b>focus groups<sup>vii</sup></b> that bring together a sample of your audience, or by talking to project team members who have worked with your target groups before.</li> <li>• Find out what people already know; what they need to know; what are their constraints in using this knowledge to bring about change; how your research can help them bring about joint objectives.</li> <li>• Talk to the networks that supply your target audience with information. If they are effective, they will understand their users' information needs, and can give you patterns of use if you show that you can supply them with useful information in return.</li> </ul>
Know your audience – particularly the ones whose co-operation and interest is essential to	Find out what are their political interests and self-interests in relation to the issues raised by your

the success of the project.	project. How much do they already know about the subject and do they already have an opinion. If so, what is it? What objections may they have to your project activities or ambitions? A useful tool is a <b>Stakeholder Analysis</b> grid that plots people according to the power that they hold around the research issue, and their interest in it.
Identify the barriers that prevent research findings from reaching their target audience, and that prevent researchers in the project from disseminating their work	Potential users may not be able to make use of research findings (a) because they are not aware that they exist (b) because they physically cannot access it for example not being able to log onto the Internet (c) because the language – both vernacular and the technicality of content – is not accessible to them (d) because they do not have the time. Each of these barriers, and others, should be identified by the project and a plan to overcome them set out in the Project Communications Plan. <b>What are the barriers to effective dissemination<sup>viii</sup></b> explores some of these constraints and provides lessons learned from DFID funded infrastructure research.
Review the ways that information is packaged most effectively for your target audiences, including message crafting.	The clearer you are about what is the intended outcome of your communication with each stakeholder group (e.g. do you want to inform them about a new methodology or influence them to listen closer to the needs of farmers when designing new health services?), the more effective you will be. A useful tool is <b>Developing effective messages<sup>ix</sup></b>
Find out what are the most appropriate media and channels to communicate with your target audiences	You need to consider both the communications channel that is most appropriate to your target audience (see point 1) and who would be the most persuasive messenger. It is helpful to follow a worksheet that sets out questions you need to answer to ensure messages are delivered strategically, e.g. <b>Getting Your Message Across<sup>x</sup></b> . It is useful to look at the communications plans of other research projects to see how they have analysed the choice of media, and planned to reach different audiences e.g. <b>Developing supportive policy environments for improved land management strategies<sup>xi</sup></b>
Find out what is the 'public discourse' around your research topic. How, for example, does the media cover the issues? What is the nature of coverage in specialist development journals and websites?	Useful tools for analysing the media include <b>Media Scanning, Framing the issue</b>

### **EXPLORING THE RESEARCH CONTEXT**

Most DFID research programmes are managed by experienced and expert researchers, who will be familiar with the standard tools of analysis. A number of them produce information that can be fed

into the communications strategy, in particular the following:

A **SWOT analysis**<sup>xii</sup> can help the project team identify its internal Strengths and Weaknesses to undertake not only the research but also the communication of research. The Opportunities and Threats questions similarly can explore the external environment that influences research as well as the way that research is adopted and adapted for poverty reduction.

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<sup>i</sup> *Advocacy Sourcebook*, Miller and Covey, IDR 1997

<sup>ii</sup> p 17 RAPID Tools for Policy Impact: A Handbook for researchers

<sup>iii</sup> Tool 4.4: What do they know and care about? Save the Children Advocacy Toolkit

<sup>iv</sup> p8 Rapid Tools for policy impact

<sup>v</sup> CARE Chapter 6 Advocacy Tools and Guidelines

<sup>vi</sup> Section 4.8 Policy Mapping, Advocacy Tools and Guidelines: Promoting Policy Change, CARE January 2001

<sup>vii</sup> Krueger, R.A. (1988) Focus Groups: A practical guide for applied research. Sage, UK

<sup>viii</sup> Spreading the Word: Disseminating research findings, WEDC Synthesis Note

<sup>ix</sup> p43 5.1 Handout and Tool: Developing Effective Messages SCF Toolkit; Chapter 8 Developing and Delivering Messages from Advocacy tools and guidelines CARE Jan 2001

<sup>x</sup> Chapter 8 Worksheet CARE Advocacy Tools and Guidelines

<sup>xi</sup> Q7 NRSP Communication Plan Guidelines Q7 'What media and channels might be used to communicate with the various communications stakeholders in relation to the research products?'

<sup>xii</sup> p 25 RAPID Tools for Policy Impact