Research communication:
Review of best practices in disseminating and communicating research

Marjorie Alain, Manuel Paradis
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PEP mission

To strengthen locally-based capacity / expertise in developing countries for HIGH-QUALITY AND POLICY-ENGAGED research

Ultimate goal of PEP research = to inform development
What is policy-engaged research?

1. **RELEVANT, or useful, to existing policy needs**
   - Hence the requirement, at the proposal stage, to identify and consult potential users
     - understand their needs (and constraints)
     - confirm their interest in resulting evidence

2. **COMMUNICATED to policy**
   - During and after research
   - Make sure to keep potential users
     1. engaged in discussion
     2. informed of, and interested in, project’s progress and results
Introduction

why is this useful to you?

Perspective
Understanding contexts and needs = better orientation of research

Capacity
New skills in policy-responsiveness and communication (with non-academics)

Exposure
Increased visibility and acknowledgement of your research AND expertise, i.e. build reputation as field experts
➢ Often result in new career opportunities, research funding or consultancy

Contacts
Extend your network to include several potential research users, for now or later, and people who can promote you
Introduction

Policy engagement: why is this useful to you?

PAGE I – impact

1 in 3 projects results in findings taken up to influence policy

Another 20% have elicited official statements that findings will be used for policymaking

52% of researchers experience major career-promoting events

39% of events lead to increased involvement in policy processes

1 in 3 papers gets published in a peer-reviewed journal

Incl. 50% in high-impact factor journals (up to 95% rejection rates) and 50% from projects led in LIC
Introduction

Policy engagement: why is this useful to you?

PAGE 1 – impact

PEP-PAGE publications, since 2015

- 52 policy briefs
  - 35,000+ downloads

- 81 working papers
  - 72,000+ downloads

Also

12,000+ followers receive the PEP newsletter (PEP talk)
Introduction

Importance of communicating research

Studies by ODI show that:

• 65% of policy makers point to the lack of dissemination of research findings to explain poor research uptake

• 79% of respondents (developed and developing countries) point to the policy brief as an essential tool to disseminate findings

• 50% of policy actors use existing relationships to learn about new issues.

• On average, policy actors spend 45 minutes reviewing a policy brief
Discussion

Your feedback on the PEP approach.

Comments on your proposal’s policy aspects

Policy context analysis (PCA) – template and review

Policy engagement workshop (Nairobi)

Policy outreach mentor

Dissemination strategy – template
Next and final stages

Your POC mentor will:

- Review your dissemination strategy
- Prepare a (written) evaluation/comment of your paper’s conclusions regarding policy implications of your research findings
- Contact you to schedule a final meeting to discuss your “policy messages” and dissemination strategy
Introduction

Next and final stages

PEP will require:

- 2 new updates of your **technical report** (consultations, dissemination, impact)
  - Conditions for each of your next grant payments
- Submission of a **draft policy brief**, along with your working paper
  - Condition for your final/WP grant payment
  - Jennie (PEP comm officer) will help!

PEP will provide additional grants and support to:

- Organize a **national policy conference**
- Present at a high-level **international conference**
- For each grant, you need to update the technical report (condition)
Workshop contents

I – Dissemination strategy

• Define your objective and policy-oriented goal
• Audiences, channels and tools

Lunch break

II – How to communication research

• Formulate/adapt your policy messages
• Writing a good (PEP) policy brief
• The national policy conference

If time allows, request an individual meeting to discuss your particular project
Your PEP project’s dissemination strategy
Dissemination strategy

Define your objective, or policy-oriented goal
➢ Following the answer to your policy question

Formulate your policy message(s), or policy proposal(s)
➢ Findings ➢ implications for policy ➢ recommendation(s)

Identify who can make the best use of this information
➢ Based on different stakeholders’ positions/interests and influence level

Determine the best way to reach them
➢ The best way may not be the most direct one

Select and prepare your “tools”
➢ Use them, and then follow up…
Define your objective - PEP

PEP’s communication objectives are aligned with the interests of its key audiences:

- PEP network is mainly analysts and researchers – interested in “research”
- Donors – interested in “the impact of research” they fund, or could fund

PEP itself does not “advocate” for any specific policy changes (except greater use of local expertise/evidence), and so most of our “own” communications stay “neutral”, include methods, etc.

E.g. policy brief
Define your objective – PEP and you

But PEP also has the need/objective for your research to have impact

- Donors, mission, responsibility of the knowledge producer..
- Why research if not to inform..

And so **PEP has the objective of policy influence/uptake.. THROUGH YOU**
And then it becomes your objective 😊, 

**to be achieved through your communications**
Dissemination strategy

Objective of policy influence

In the end, a good “policy-related goal” should be clear on:

- What needs to change (or remain?)
- Why is this change important, and preferable (vs other options)
- Who could be affected (political economy – who benefits, who opposes)
What needs to change?

What have you found? **What is the answer to your policy question?**

What does it mean in terms of policy “action”?

**Example:**

- **Question:** Would social assistance programs be effective in reducing child work?
- **Answer (finding):** Yes, if designed to incentivize parents to send children to school
- **Recommendation  - or your policy proposal:**
  
  To design/implement assistance programs to incentivize school attendance
Why is this change important, and preferable? Context-dependent

To be effective (useful/credible), your “policy proposal” also has to be:

- Realistic, and actionable: can what you propose really be done / acted on?
- Time-bound: must be related to a specific “calendar of action” (will see later)
- Formulated so as to respond to specific interests/values (will see after lunch)
- Cost-effective: i.e. considering the cost vs benefits, why this action is preferable to other scenarios.

Which means that you have to be aware of:

- Policy needs, constraints, history, calendar, budget (i.e. your PCA)
- The different positions and options envisaged in the related policy processes?
Your policy proposal

**Why is this change important, and preferable?** Context-dependent

**Consider the cost-benefit analysis** - A necessary tool for decision-making

- What is the COST of the intervention, change, or even the status quo, that you advise

In terms of:

  - **Resources/budget** - WHERE SHOULD THE MONEY COME FROM?
  - **Option value, incl. political risks** - versus benefits and/or alternatives

**Refer to other scenarios** – or show that you are aware of the alternatives
Your policy proposal

Why is this change important, and preferable? Context-dependent

Example: Consider the cost of the recommendation to “design/implement assistance programs to incentivize school attendance”

The cost is real, and can be considerable (esp. if considering financial incentives)

➢ Where would the money come from? Are resources available for this?

➢ How does it compare to:

  - Doing nothing? Cost of child work – social, economic, etc.

  - Other ways or programs to reduce child work?
    What has been tried before? Why didn’t it work? (from your PCA)
    Evidence from other research/countries? (your literature review)
If information on alternatives is not available, then recommendation could be

- To conduct “new research”, to explore alternatives before taking action..

But then, you should propose a very SPECIFIC AGENDA, and how to make it happen (i.e. an actionable proposal)

- What kind of scenarios/policy alternatives should be envisaged/analyzed?
- What kind of analysis/method can produce the required evidence?
- How does this fit into the stakeholders’ calendar?

If this is your recommendation, can affect the choice of targets for your dissemination strategy.. (policy maker vs civil servants vs research funder..)
Your policy proposal

Who could be affected by your policy proposal? Choosing your target audiences..

- **Policy actors** (direct) - Policy makers vs civil servants
  - Importance of time and interests

Other “actors” can also be direct users (e.g. MFI), and easier to reach/influence

*Direct is not necessarily best, depending on context*

- **Advisors** (indirect) - E.g. development partner organization (World Bank)
  - Can promote findings to actors (influence/credibility/champion), but also encourage or fund more research

- **Advocacy groups** (indirect) - E.g. NGO
  - Strong with media - give them reliable but powerful arguments in favor of cause

- **Media** (channel) – Can be powerful, but interest is different from the “stakeholders”
Dissemination strategy

Audiences, channels and tools
Audiences
A broader spectrum

Audiences, channels and tools

- General public
- Civil society and NGO
- Policy maker
- Think tank
- Practionner
- Academic
Audiences, channels and tools

Audiences

Importance of context and timing:

• Situational analysis: At this moment, is there a momentum or debate around the issue and implications of my research?

Two core types of audiences:

1. Already concerned/interested – E.g. NGO
   • Contact is relatively easy, because you have something they want

2. Should be concerned, but aren’t for various reasons
   • This requires a more strategic approach and awareness campaign – you have to “sell” your findings/knowledge (cost-benefit analysis)
Audiences, channels and tools

**Channels or platforms**
How to reach/communicate with your target audiences

- Mass media
- Social media
- Public debate
- Advisory meeting
- National policy conference
- Specialized media
- Advisory meeting
- Seminar
Audiences, channels and tools

Audiences

General public
Civil society and NGO
Policy maker
Think tank
Practitioner
Academic
Audiences, channels and tools

Channels/audiences – each call for different TOOLS

Advisory meeting:
Policy brief – or rather a policy note?
Slide presentation?
Be prepared
Bring your full paper to leave with them

National policy conference:
Slide presentation
Policy brief
Fact sheet
Press release / kit
Can also make copies of your full paper available
Audiences, channels and tools

Channels/audiences – each call for different TOOLS

General public/media:
- Press release / kit (including fact sheet)
- Social media posts
- Video / animated infographics

In all cases: **ADAPT – both your message and formats**

To discuss in the afternoon
“HOW TO” communicate research
How to communicate research

Formulating key policy messages

Now that you have:

• **Completed research** - that points to how policy changes can impact economic development in your country

• **Defined your objectives** – and policy-oriented goals

• **Identified who your target audiences are**

• **Selected the channels/tools that will best help you reach your target audiences and meet your objectives**
How to communicate research

Formulating key policy messages

Example situation

Research on child work and school performance.

- Your findings show that all child work, including domestic chores, has a negative impact on learning outcomes.

1. **Policy objective**: policy changes to reduce child work
   - Through social support programs & raising awareness among parents

2. **Research objective**: raise your profile as child labor expert
How to communicate research

Formulating key policy messages

You are trying to “sell” your policy messages as solutions to current development problems.

- You can use the AIDA rule of marketing and advertising:
  - Attention
  - Interest
  - Desire
  - Action

- Think about the story you are trying to tell and how this can lead to action

- Use your experience and knowledge of the policy context you’re working within.
How to communicate research

Formulating key policy messages

Example: Working paper text

Our research shows that child labor, whether it occurs inside or outside the home, causes a decrease in school achievement. This means that domestic work has a negative effect on children’s school performance. These results indicate that domestic work, which is often not counted in social statistics and not considered dangerous, should be included in policies designed to combat child labor.

Policy makers will have to make efforts to reduce child labor, through social programs, and by raising awareness about the importance of education and the hazard of early entrance into the job market.

Finding

Implication for policy

Recommendation

Good policy proposal?
Formulating key policy messages

Essential policy messages

• Child work has a negative impact on educational outcomes and needs to be reduced
• Child work includes domestic chores
• Poor families should receive support so children are not asked to contribute

You can now adapt these messages

• Policy brief for Ministries
• Briefing paper for NGO
• Press release
• Social media campaign
How to communicate research

**Formulating key policy messages**

- Example: **Policy brief for policymakers**

  Brazil is falling behind other Latin American countries in terms of education outcomes, including literacy rates and years of education, because children spend too much time working. New findings show that efforts need to be made to reduce the number of hours that children work, whether in the labor market or at home. Children in poor families are more likely to let their education suffer to contribute to the household. Increasing social assistance programs can provide important sources of income for poor families while being conditional on children’s attendance at school.

The key policy messages attract the attention, but to be useful/credible for policymakers, this has to be completed with cost-benefit analysis; **Cost? Resources? History/alternatives?**
How to communicate research

Formulating key policy messages

• Example: **Briefing paper for NGO**

  Work, whether at home or in the labor market, is detrimental to children’s academic performance – and their future. Although less detrimental to school performance than working in the labor market, domestic work also has a negative effect on children’s education outcomes and can lead to students dropping out of school. Parents need to be made aware so that they encourage their children to focus on school. Families currently relying on the children to bring in additional income should be referred to social assistance programs that can provide financial aid, provided the children attend school.
How to communicate research

Formulating key policy messages

• Example: Press release

Too many hours spent helping at home is damaging children’s school performance, according to a new study by researchers at the University of Sao Paulo. The time spent on domestic chores is usually not included in child work statistics as it is considered necessary for teaching children household responsibilities. However, the study into the impact of child labor on school performance found that for each hour of chores (per day), the students’ test results decreased by as much as 2.4%.

Ana Kassouf, the lead researcher on the study, said: “As academic performance decreases, students become less engaged in their education and more likely to drop out.”

Many families rely on the children’s contribution to the household but this could be putting their future at risk. “The government needs to increase social support for families so children are not required to work,” said Kassouf.
How to communicate research

Formulating key policy messages

• Example: Social media

1. For the general population

   *Too many household chores are harming children’s education and their futures, according to new findings* [+ link]

2. For the research community

   *New findings show that all child work – including household chores – can harm their education* [+ link]

A good social media post will also include a graphic (photo/infographic/illustration) that will catch people's attention.
How to communicate research

Writing a (PEP) policy brief

• A good policy brief should:
  • Highlight an “urgent” policy issue that needs to be addressed
  • Outline recommendations (policies) that can address the issue
  • Provide evidence as to why your recommendations should be applied
  • Provide insights to policymakers on what they need to know to formulate sound policy
  • **Not** simply be a summary of your working paper
How to communicate research

Writing a (PEP) policy brief

• A good PEP policy brief is:
  • 2 to 4 pages
  • Written for a non-scientific audience
  • Attractive (pictures) and accessible (infographics)
  • A starting point for more specific/tailored policy briefs (in your language, if appropriate)

• Key objective
  • To highlight need for policy change and to present a viable policy option

• Key target audience
  • For PEP: general
  • For you? Policy actor? NGO? Media? Must adapt message
How to communicate research

Writing a (PEP) policy brief

• Structure (e.g. 3 pages)
  • Title
  • Key messages
    • 2 to 4 bullet points summarizing your key findings and recommendations
  • Background/context – ½ page
  • Research questions and brief methodology – ½ page
  • Key findings – 1 page
  • Conclusions and policy implications/recommendations – 1 page

While writing, keep in mind:
• Your objective
• Your target audience
How to communicate research

Writing a (PEP) policy brief

• Title
  • Not the same as your project title
  • Appeals to a more general audience

• For example, the working paper:
  • The effects of minimum wages on the labour market and income distribution in Kenya: A CGE analysis

• Becomes the policy brief:
  • How cutting the minimum wage in Kenya improves wellbeing for the poorest families

While writing, keep in mind:
• Your objective
• Your target audience
How to communicate research

Writing a (PEP) policy brief

• Key messages
  • 2 to 4 bullet points summarizing your key findings and recommendations
  • The “distilled” version – the absolute essentials.

• Example
  • Lessons from the booming Peruvian avocado sector can be applied to Kenya through public interventions
  • Strong private-sector firms, supported by government policy, can lead the development of new market opportunities and expand exports.
  • The government should develop a strategy to stimulate the participation and inclusion of small producers.

While writing, keep in mind:
• Your objective
• Your target audience
How to communicate research

Writing a (PEP) policy brief

• Background/context
  • About 150 words
  • Present and explain the issue
  • Show knowledge gap/evidence need

• Research questions and brief methodology
  • About 120 words to state research questions/aims and your approach
  • You might include
    • The data source (primary/secondary data)
    • Key methodology (experiment/simulation)

While writing, keep in mind:
• Your objective
• Your target audience
How to communicate research

Writing a (PEP) policy brief

• Key findings
  • Summary of your most pertinent and interesting findings
  • Shows the quality and credibility of your research
  • Some simple illustrative statistics
    • Should include a graph/chart/infographic to better illustrate your findings
  • Visual tools to organize or group information
    • E.g. bullet points or colored text boxes

While writing, keep in mind:
• Your objective
• Your target audience

Will be assisted by PEP (Jennie) – both for contents and visual
How to communicate research

Writing a (PEP) policy brief

• Conclusions and policy recommendations
  • Your key policy messages - adapted to target audience
  • Clear and actionable – how can they do it
  • Based on your findings - Don’t suggest something you haven’t investigated!

• Example of good recommendation:
  • Finding (answers policy question): Avocado contract farming is the best way to transform the Kenyan avocado market from a non-programmed to a programmed world. Recommendation: To make this move successful, policymakers need to made contract farming more attractive to the contracting partners and ensure greater loyalty. Proposed action: For example, improved contracting terms could be offered to smallholders who have been loyal sellers in past seasons.

While writing, keep in mind:
• Your objective
• Your target audience
How to communicate research

Writing a PEP forum post

• **New PEP online forum**: Initiating a series of posts/discussions on “The way forward”
• To help define the research agenda
  • Academic (development economics) audience
  • Explain key findings - do they concur/disagree with previous findings?
  • Highlight areas where further research is needed
    • E.g. To confirm your findings in other contexts, to develop better policy recommendations
  • Keep it brief (max 200 words) but include a link to more information
    • Link to policy brief, working paper, web page – as appropriate
How to communicate research

National policy conference

• Step 1: Find a co-organizer or sponsor:
  • Reach, credibility, funds, venue, collaboration and networking
  • Identify key invitees (main stakeholders or research users)
  • Pair up! With other research teams/projects (same topic or not)

• Step 2: Prepare concept note/proposal
  • State main objective/theme
  • Structure/program – should include:
    o Contributions from key invitees
    o Interactive discussions, comments, debate
How to communicate research

National policy conference

• Step 3: Find a venue and a date
  • Venue checklist: comfort, access, audiovisual, etc.
  • Date checklist: conflicting events and availability of top guests

• Step 4: Promotion and invitations
  • Invitations adapted to audience (VIPs, media representatives, NGOs, colleagues, etc.)
    • Depending on your objectives for the event
    • Use the right tools, channels, contacts
    • Policy brief, press release/kit, champion
    • Media – if appropriate (ID, reserve area for cameras, etc.)
How to communicate research

National policy conference

• Step 5: Prepare your presentation
  • Think about your audience and your objective
    • Best way to communicate with them?
  • What you will show AND say (practice before!)
  • Slide presentation supports what you are saying
    • Bullet points, colors
    • Graphs, charts, infographics
    • Key statistics
How to communicate research

National policy conference

• Step 5: Prepare your slide presentation

  • Deconstruct your text
    • Hierarchy of ideas - Main vs sub-ideas
    • One line for each idea!!!
    • Full sentences (subject, verb, complement) NOT necessary!
  • Select and highlight key words – use **bold** and colors
  • Use lines that start with stats/numbers
Press release

Announce findings and/or national policy conference

Tip for media: MAKE IT EASY FOR THEM

- As close to a newspaper article as possible – “copy-paste material”
- Include all the information most important to your objectives
- Provide credible courses and quote

Structure:

1. Key (policy) message - Will discuss in the afternoon
2. Current situation/debate - Why is this relevant now?
3. Contact/logistical details - Conference where and when/Sources of more information (Policy brief, web page, researchers). Make yourself available, and follow up
Audiences, channels and tools

Press kit
Accompanies the press release

• Fact sheet
  • Quick key statistics
  • Include your infographic!
  • About your project
    • Link PEP project page
  • About you/your institute
    • Link website & social media accounts

• Illustrative photos (high resolution)
  • If they are yours to sell/share
  • Illustrate your topic

• Interviews/press reports
  • Links to videos/radio reports
How to communicate research

References

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  • https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/46152/IDL-46152.pdf

• Tools for Policy Impact: A handbook for researchers (ODI)

• Communicating Research: A beginner’s guide for researchers in Vietnam (ODI)