2021 PEP annual conference

Workshop:
Best practices for policy engagement

Session 2: Designing research to fit policy needs

May 19
Marjorie Alain
PEP Director of Communications and M&E

www.pep-net.org
Session 2 - Contents

- Science and policy: a complicated relationship
- Understanding policy needs
- What do policymakers need to know
- Your PEP policy paper
Evidence-informed policymaking – the objective of your PEP project

• PEP research aims to inform policy

• Providing evidence that is both:
  
  ➢ **Reliable** (scientifically-sound)
  
  ➢ **Contextualised**:
    
    • From a local perspective
    
    • Addressing COUNTRY-SPECIFIC POLICY NEEDS / QUESTIONS
Why are we here?

Purpose of this workshop:

- Make sure your PEP research answers actual policy questions

PEP requirements from grantees:

- Identify and consult with stakeholders
  - PEP requires stakeholder analysis and periodic reports
- Develop a (parallel) policy paper analysis
  - Starting with a policy context analysis, to clarify the key policy questions to address
Why are we here?

Structure of this workshop:

- **Session 1**: Understanding policy processes
- **Session 2**: Designing research to address actual policy needs
- **Session 3**: Designing an effective policy engagement strategy
Science and policy: a complicated relationship

The tale of “two communities”

Like in any relationship... it’s mainly a “communication problem”

Science and policy “don’t speak the same language”

- Not just in terms of “technical jargon”, which is ALWAYS a problem with academics
- But also in terms of “PRIORITIES”...
“Whereas academics’ value lies in illuminating complexity, civil servants are assessed on their ability to simplify complex issues down to the key components necessary to make a decision.”

“What (policymakers) want from research is NOT:

‘It’s complicated’ or ‘Here’s the answer’.

What they want is comparative work highlighting a range of possible solutions..”
# Science and policy: a complicated relationship

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<th>Mission/objective</th>
<th>POLICY</th>
<th>ACADEMIC</th>
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<td>Find solutions and actions to “change the world”</td>
<td>Produce knowledge, spur more ideas/questions to “explain the world”</td>
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<td>Talking to</td>
<td>Decision-makers, or the general public</td>
<td>Scholars</td>
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| Output | • Clear & concise  
• Linked to “action”/solution  
• Account for broader context | • Exhaustive, relates to literature  
• Descriptive  
• Focused on ”one piece of the puzzle” |
| Timeline | Short deadline and time-sensitive | Long or no deadline |
| Success criteria | “Right”, (cost-)effective, actionable and applicable | Novel, exact, generalizable |
| Incentives | Successful interventions, political capital | More research, publication, (academic) acknowledgement |
Science and policy: a complicated relationship

The **relative influence of scientific evidence** VS other factors/inputs in policymaking:
Science and policy: a complicated relationship

The relative influence of scientific evidence versus other factors/inputs in policymaking:

Scientific knowledge

Decision-making
Good policy requires effective use of all

Professional knowledge
Held by bureaucrats, intermediaries, and advocates

Local knowledge
From society/communities' experiences and practice
Science and policy: a complicated relationship

The **relative influence of scientific evidence** VS other factors/inputs in policymaking:

Wide range of **political, stakeholder and value considerations** that:

- are outside the scope of science
- must be incorporated by the (multiple) actors involved in the policy advisory process.

Better understanding these considerations can help align research & communicate evidence in a way that speaks to policy needs.
Science and policy: a complicated relationship

Science
- Identify/define problem
- Design research/gather data
- Apply method to produce/analyze data
- Produce new evidence
- Assess validity/robustness
- Communicate results/conclusions

Policy
- Evaluation
- Implementation
- Decision (policy selection)
- Weigh/assess different policy options
- Define/advise policy option(s)
- Synthesize data/information + produce brief
- Gather evidence (information) on given policy issue/problem
- Gather evidence (information) on given policy issue/problem

Research problem ≠ policy problem
Science and policy: a complicated relationship

Science

- Identify/define problem
- Design research/gather data
- Apply method to produce/analyze data
- Produce new evidence
- Assess validity/robustness
- Communicate results/conclusions

Result =
Difficult to translate scientific evidence into useful policy advice

Policy

- Decision (policy selection)
- Weigh/assess different policy options
- Define/advise policy option(s)
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- Implementation
- Evaluation

Should inform:

Science and policy: a complicated relationship
Science and policy: a complicated relationship

The various roles of science in policy

- **identify** problems
- **measure** their magnitude and seriousness
- **review** alternative policy interventions
- **assess** the likely consequences of policy actions (ex-ante)
- **evaluate** what, in fact, results from policy (ex-post)

Different uses = different “policy questions”

Must understand the type of question to provide the right type of answer.
Science and policy: a complicated relationship

“Communications are adequate if they reach people with the information that they need in a form that they can use.”

Baruch Fischhoff, 2011

Applying the science of communication to the communication of science

“For policy makers to do science better, scientists need to do policy better.”

Chris Tyler, Director of UK Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology

The complicated relationship between science and policy
What can be done from the science/research side?

Adapt research DESIGN & COMMUNICATION to better address policy needs

Step #1: UNDERSTAND POLICY NEEDS
Understanding policy needs

Policy

Evidence gap

Science
Understanding policy needs

Researchers must:

1. Understand the **POLICY PROBLEM** (vs research issue) in order to...

2. Position research/evidence into existing **policy options/strategies** in order to...

3. Produce practical/**useful recommendations** for policymakers
1. Understand the **POLICY PROBLEM** (vs research issue)

- **POLICY QUESTION**
  - Answer provides recommendation FOR ACTION

- **RESEARCH QUESTION**
  - Answer provides an assessment of the situation

Must inform..
1. Understand the **POLICY PROBLEM** (vs research issue)

What are the effects of non-farm diversification on rural women’s income?

Research or policy?
1. Understand the POLICY PROBLEM (vs research issue)

What type of intervention can effectively contribute to improving rural women’s income?

Research or policy?
1. Understand the POLICY PROBLEM (vs research issue)

Policy question:
What type of intervention to improve rural women’s income?

Research question:
Effects of non-farm diversification on rural women’s income?

Must inform:
Sufficient to inform policy decision?
Non-farm diversification = 1 option

How do policymakers assess/compare policy options? What criteria?

Right question?
## What do policymakers need to know? Criteria

### Usual criteria to assess “good policy”

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<td>Are there unintended effects to consider?</td>
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<td>What are the effects for different population groups? How do they affect equity?</td>
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<td>How is this policy perceived by (priority) stakeholders?</td>
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What do policymakers need to know? **Criteria**

Research evidence usually inform 1-2 criteria, but NEVER THE FULL PICTURE

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And research largely tends to overlook the “practical” constraints of policymaking.

**Criteria**

**What do policymakers need to know?**

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- Cost
- Feasibility
- Acceptability

= cost-effectiveness
= efficiency

Major consideration for Gov, yet rarely part of scientific assessment.

Is it applicable/realistic??
What do policymakers need to know?

Babu Rahman, 2017
How to make research more useful to government officials

“What (policymakers) want from research is (...) comparative work highlighting a range of possible solutions.”

Brick et al., 2018
Winners and losers: Communicating the potential impacts of policies

“Decision-makers need communications that succinctly describe potential harms and benefits of different options”
What do policymakers need to know? Options

Questions that decision-makers always have
Gluckman, 2019

• Why do we have to do something now? Why is it a priority?
  ➢ What is the (political) risk of doing or not doing something?

• Have we got the OPTION that meets our broader needs?
  ➢ Who will it benefit? Does it benefit priority stakeholders?
  ➢ What are the risks and to whom?
  ➢ How does it compare with other options?

• What will it cost? (vs “benefits”)
What do policymakers need to know? Options

When designing research aimed at informing policy, or preparing to communicate findings to policy users, must remember that:

Decision = choice = options
= need to compare options!!

A policy decision will be made by weighing the pros & cons, or harms & benefits of the different options.
What do policymakers need to know? Options

4 questions to ask before defining research questions/objectives

#1: What “decision” do you wish to inform?

#2: What are the options likely to be considered in this decision process?

#3: What are the key criteria that would be used to evaluate/compare the options?

#4: What type of evidence is missing to help inform this evaluation?
### What do policymakers need to know?

**Difference between “COMMUNICATING RESEARCH RESULTS”**

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**Option 1**

- Effectiveness: 🟢
- Unintended effects: 🔴
- Equity: 🟢
- Cost: ??
- Feasibility: ??
- Acceptability: ??
What do policymakers need to know?

And communicating “EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY ADVICE”

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If not possible to research all, then..

Should also be able/ready to communicate uncertainty..
What do policymakers need to know?

And communicating “EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY ADVICE”

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If not possible to research all, then...

Identify and focus on - PRIORITIES
What do policymakers need to know?

And communicating “EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY ADVICE”

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If not possible to research all, then...

Identify and focus on - KEY EVIDENCE GAPS
What do policymakers need to know?

And communicating “EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY ADVICE”

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Don’t underestimate the importance of COST-EFFECTIVENESS

A basic “cost-benefit analysis” can be a very powerful policy argument..
What do policymakers need to know?

And communicating "EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY ADVICE"

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New in PEP research:
Must provide information about the "cost implications" of the recommended policy intervention.

Option 1: Effectiveness - Green Thumb
Option 2: Unintended effects - Green Thumb
Option 3: Equity - Red Thumb

Cost - $$$
What can be done from the science/research side?

Adapt research DESIGN & COMMUNICATION to better address policy needs

Step #2: POSITION YOUR RESEARCH
Your PEP policy paper

STRUCTURE

- **Problem** - importance
- **Options** available / considered
- **Criteria** to assess options
- **Evaluation** - comparing options based on criteria
- **Recommendation** + roadmap

**Part 1** – interim stage (December)

**Part 2** – final stage (May 2022?)
Your PEP policy paper – Part 1 (December)

**STRUCTURE – PROBLEM**

Why do we have to do something **now**? Why is it a **priority**?

- What is the (political) risk of doing or not doing something?

**CONTEXT MATTERS!**

Interest in issues that are important “NOW”

- Media – public perceptions
- Commitments – electoral cycle
- Especially for constituencies/core supporters
Have we got the option that meets our broader needs?

1) What are the options available to address this problem?
   - Current policy
   - Policy alternative/change under consideration by Gov (CONSULT!)
   - Other alternatives? – based on literature, or other countries.
Have we got the option that meets our broader needs?

1) What are the options available to address this problem?

2) On the basis of which criteria can we evaluate/compare options?
   - Effectiveness, equity, efficiency…
   - Consider:  
     - Government priorities & constraints – budget, commitments..
     - Which can you realistically assess / find information about?
STRUCTURE – CRITERIA

Have we got the option that meets our broader needs?

1) What are the options available to address this problem?

2) On the basis of which criteria can we evaluate/compare options?
   = Framework of analysis
Have we got the option that meets our broader needs?

1) What are the options available to address this problem?
2) On the basis of which criteria can we evaluate/compare options?

3) Assess criteria and use results to compare options

What will it cost?
### Your PEP policy paper – Part 2 (May 2022)

Assess as many criteria as POSSIBLE...

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- Your research
- Consultations
- Literature
- Find info on costs and analyse!

**Policy paper = parallel ANALYSIS**
# Your PEP policy paper – Part 2 (May 2022)

## STRUCTURE – RECOMMENDATION

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**Best option**

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*Your PEP policy paper – Part 2 (May 2022)*

*Your PEP policy paper – Part 2 (May 2022)*
Have we got the option that meets our **broader needs**?

1) What are the options available to address this problem?
2) On the basis of which criteria can we evaluate/compare options?
3) Assess criteria and use results to compare options
4) **Identify best option**  (What will it **cost**?)
Structure – Recommendation

Have we got the option that meets our broader needs?

1) What are the options available to address this problem?
2) On the basis of which criteria can we evaluate/compare options?
3) Assess criteria and use results to compare options
4) Identify best option
5) How do we implement? Propose a roadmap for success..
Consultations, data gathering, further analysis
Your PEP policy paper

STRUCTURE

• **Problem** - importance
• **Options** available / considered
• **Criteria** to assess options
• **Evaluation** - comparing options based on criteria
• **Recommendation** + roadmap

**Part 1** – interim stage
(December)

**Part 2** – final stage
(May 2022)
Assignment – for tomorrow (May 20)

Slide 5 – Identify your project’s POLICY vs RESEARCH questions

Must inform...

POLICY QUESTION? ≠ RESEARCH QUESTION?

How will your research/evidence contribute to informing a specific policy decision/process?

to answer..
Policy VS research questions...

How can we mitigate the impact of climate change on food security?

Policy

What are the effects of crop diversification on household food security in a context of rainfall shocks?

Research

How do climate-related shocks affect women’s intra-household bargaining power?

Research

How can the current climate resilience strategy be adapted to mitigate effects of climate shocks on girls’ education?

Policy
Thank you!

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