

Does Evidence Matter?

An ODI Meeting Series



**Research and Policy in Development:
Does Evidence Matter? Meeting Series**

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Does Evidence Matter? Meeting Series

Introduction

Better utilization of research and evidence in development policy and practice can have a dramatic impact. For example, household disease surveys in rural Tanzania informed health service reforms which contributed to a 28% reduction in infant mortality in two years. On the other hand, the HIV/AIDS crisis has deepened in some countries as governments fail to implement effective prevention and mitigation programmes, despite clear evidence how to prevent it spreading. Although evidence clearly matters, there is no systematic understanding of when, how and why evidence informs policy.

This lunch-time meeting series organised by ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme provided an opportunity for researchers, policy makers and intermediaries in the UK to discuss how and why evidence informs policy. Speakers included politicians, bureaucrats, researchers, NGO activists and practitioners from UK government and non-government organisations. They talked about how the political and institutional context influences development policy makers, what sort of evidence they want and need, how research institutes can manage and use their knowledge more effectively, how NGO campaigns and think tanks achieve policy influence, and what makes a good policy entrepreneur.

This monograph contains summaries of each meeting, full transcripts of each talk and short biographies of each speaker. Full audio tracks and video clips of each talk are available on the RAPID website: www.odi.org.uk/rapid/meetings/evidence/Evidence_Series.html.

Index of Meetings

Does Evidence Matter?

Why is evidence important in policy making? What sort of evidence? How do you get it? Is the current emphasis on evidence-based policy in government resulting in better policies?

Speakers: David Halpern; Erik Millstone
Chair: John Young

The Political Context

Are policy makers 'evidence aware'? What sort of evidence gets to them? What other factors influence their decision-making? What room for manoeuvre do they have?

Speakers: Vincent Cable; Julius Court
Chair: John Young

The Role of Research

What does DFID want from research? Do they get it? How could research have more impact on policy? How can you measure research impact? What is its relative importance in recent development policy shifts?

Speakers: Paul Spray; John Young
Chair: Diane Stone

NGO Campaigns

What role do they play in policy processes? Are they evidence based? Are they really effective? How? How do they communicate? How to build coalitions.

Speakers: Andrew Simms; Justin Forsyth
Chair: Simon Maxwell

Think Tanks

What role do they play in policy processes? Are they a force for good? Can they be independent? What is the ideal balance between research and communication? How important is reputation?

Speakers: Tom Bentley; Simon Maxwell;
Mark Garnett
Chair: Larry Elliott

Putting Knowledge into Practice

Do organisations learn? What incentives do people need to learn? How to convert information into knowledge. How to manage knowledge in international networks. Who buys knowledge? The power of networks.

Speakers: Bonnie Cheuk; John Borton
Chair: John Young

Policy Entrepreneurship

What makes an effective policy entrepreneur? Is it art or science? Spotting policy windows.

Speakers: Simon Maxwell; Ann Pettifor
Chair: Baroness Margaret Jay

International Policies

What is unique about international and transnational policy processes? The balance between local and international voice and capacity. How can research contribute?

Speakers: Alex Wilks; Lord Desai
Chair: John Young



Meeting 1: Does Evidence Matter?

Speakers: David Halpern – Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office

Erik Millstone – Science Policy Research Unit

Chair: John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID, ODI



Meeting Summary

This was the first meeting of the series 'Does Evidence Matter?' **John Young** outlined that the aim of the session was to focus on a few key questions: Why is evidence important in policy making? What sort of evidence? How do you get it? Is the current emphasis on evidence-based policy in government resulting in better policies?

David Halpern's presentation, Evidence Based Policy: 'Build on' or 'Spray on'? focused on evidence-based policies in the UK – examples of success and failure, the characteristics of what distinguished the different outcomes and how we can do it better. Is policy built on a base of evidence or is evidence sprayed onto what policy makers were going to do anyway?

The UK has many specific cases where evidence has improved policy with positive outcomes – literacy, labour market participation and pre-schooling, for example. Several successful policy strategies have been based on evidence from other countries. He explained that, in addition to what the evidence was, how the evidence is marshaled matters for the outcome. However, even in cases where evidence did influence policy, it is often difficult to attribute changes in policy to a specific evidence-based strategy. The UK also has examples where there have been gaps between the policy and the strategies that would be suggested by existing evidence – the crime and justice sector and primary healthcare issue are two.

What drives impact? David Halpern highlighted five issues: (i) the evidence must exist – and good evidence takes time to marshal; (ii) someone must know the evidence exists; (iii) the evidence must have policy implications – 'so what?' is a common response to many research papers; (iv) the issue must be relevant to public interests; (v) it must be in the 'zone of proximal development' – evidence must be within existing frameworks of understanding.

What would improve the situation? (i) Bridge the division between analysts and policy makers; (ii) encourage experiments and variance – so we can see what does and doesn't work; (iii) be realistic about how knowledge spreads; (iv) do the groundwork for next time; (v) statistics are important – and so is the capacity to understand them; (vi) continue communicating; (vii) reform the Research Assessment Exercise.

Other suggestions for researchers were: (i) talk to policy makers – and keep talking; (ii) look for

policy windows; (iii) take a long-term perspective – you are likely to have more impact in two years than two weeks; (iv) use intermediaries; (v) work inside government.

Evidence is actually used much more than people think. But, evidence is only one of a number of factors that influences policy making.

Erik Millstone spoke on what evidence can and cannot do, using the case of BSE as an example. He described it as one of the biggest evidence-policy failures in recent times. Policy decisions are usually a hybrid of political and technical considerations.

The government claimed policy was based on the best scientific advice. But, the BSE case was one where the evidence was not clear – scientists were not sure if BSE could affect people. Bureaucrats were privately worried, but did not always let policy makers know the whole story. The science was misrepresented to the public – ministers argued beef was safe.

For policy making to be evidence-based requires both technical information and social information (e.g. whether a policy is actually being implemented). Understanding is never complete – there are always some gaps and there are always risks. In the BSE case, the problem was that the policy makers became addicted to their own narrative: 'Our knowledge of BSE is sufficiently extensive, comprehensive and secure to guarantee that British beef is perfectly safe'. Eventually the credibility of the policy makers was destroyed by the evidence and the case undermined public faith in science-based policy making.

What kind of policy making model is best? Neither a decisionist nor a technocratic model was desirable. There was agreement that there needed to be interaction between policy makers, implementers and scientists. The 'iterative' model was preferred.

Comments focused on a range of issues:

- It is important to distinguish between public policy statements and practice on the ground when considering the use of evidence.
- Clearly political context matters. Policy makers are under diverse pressures and evidence is one set of issues that influences them.
- Elites and vested interests affect whether evidence is used or not and, if so, what evidence is used.

- Personal dynamics matter – it is often difficult to speak truth to those in power.
- Policy makers are much more constrained in their actions than researchers – and therefore linking research and policy is not as straightforward as researchers might hope. This raises the importance of intermediaries who both know the evidence (new thinking as well as existing evidence) and are less constrained than policy makers.
- We should not focus solely on what we can measure or learn from stakeholders. Some important issues cannot be measured and some stakeholders are invisible and would be ignored if evidence was the sole guide to policy making. This is especially important in the humanitarian policies, where communities needing support are less visible, vocal and powerful.
- Who is an expert? Using evidence is important, but it is dangerous to create a 'cult of expertise'. It is important to draw on a range of knowledge.
- Public opinion increasingly matters in UK policy making. Policy change often occurs when the public understand issues. It is therefore important to de-mystify scientific advice.

David Halpern

Evidence Based Policy: 'Build on' or 'Spray on'?



Firstly I should just confess that mainly I work on domestic policy. I am told that that is ok, but many of the examples I give therefore will be domestic ones. I will talk to the title of an issue which is being discussed in Government, about whether evidence is something that we build on, or whether it is something we just spray on.

A few words about the Strategy Unit so you know what it is and where I am coming from. We are known both as 'the Strategy Unit' in the Cabinet Office, or as 'the PM's Strategy Unit'. So we serve the Prime Minister. We do a mixture of both relatively public reviews, which are often divided into a large evidence-gathering exercise and which we nearly always publish if we can (we have learnt that this is the right thing to do, for lots of reasons) and then sometimes more private reviews on what the politics is and so on. We take long-term cross-departmental views on issues – that is our value-added. It is project-based, so we assemble teams of people from both outside and inside to work on particular issues. I believe we operate an evidence-based approach. I have to confess that I am a bit naïve about this. I have worked in all parts of government and I almost cannot understand how else you can do policy, but of course policy is often done in other ways.

I am going to cover, quite succinctly, classic examples of successes and failures, in terms of the impact of the evidence on the subsequent decision, in the UK domestic context particularly; what characterised the effective use of evidence (essentially what makes the difference: what made it work in one case and in another the argument did not fly), and how can we do it better.

I am going to try to do that first from the perspective of how can we – government – do it better, but also try to reflect back to the mindset of an academic or being in a think tank. Of course, it is an informal view, a cluster of thoughts.

So, the key question: are we in a new golden age of evidence-based policy? Or are we a spray-on cover for decisions we would have made anyway?

Firstly, some classic success stories. The literacy strategy in Britain is perhaps the most quoted example of success. Back in 1996 we had Michael Barber [then responsible for drafting the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, now head of the PM's Delivery Unit] and a group of people coming together to try to work out what the problem was in terms of low-levels of literacy and numeracy, particularly at the primary level, and to look at what you could do about it. They looked at a wide range of evidence to try to work out what would work to improve literacy and numeracy. Indeed, it was something just to believe that it was possible after years and years, when many people believed that there was nothing you could do

about it (which was patently not the case when you looked in terms of international comparisons).

A big part of the success of the literacy strategy was not just that the evidence was put together, but how it was put together. It was about building a certain coalition and consensus amongst many of the stakeholders. I am going to focus mainly on the evidence-based approach, but that is nested within a wider set of issues about what leads to effective policy intervention and change. Those are two different types of stories.

The literacy strategy was very successful and with a very high profile. Although the ultimate targets have not quite been reached on time, nonetheless it was a spectacular turnaround in terms of Key Stage One and Key Stage Two in British schools. From an evidence-based policy viewpoint, it can and has been criticised on specific points, for example about insufficient emphasis on phonetics and so on not being adequately covered. There is also the question of how far we can say that the improvements in literacy and numeracy actually resulted from the strategy and therefore from the evidence. Because it was pretty universally applied – or encouraged perhaps we should say – it is actually quite difficult to track whether that original strategy was the cause, from an evidence-based point of view.

Active Welfare or New Deal was another classic example, particularly borrowing on Scandinavian evidence about how you could achieve much higher participation in the labour market through certain means. It also drew on evidence from Richard Layard [London School of Economics] and others about how unemployment was moving across countries, between cycles and so on.

Early Years is a more current example. Spending reviews are supposed partly to be evidence-based pleas to the government and to Treasury. A Department will make a submission saying you should give us X many more billion pounds because we will spend it well and here are our ideas. As part of that process, SureStart was put together, partly based on US evidence. In the last spending review, a successful bid around a massive expansion of childcare was definitely swung by an evidence-based argument and it was a particularly good submission to treasury and it continues to be an area, even though it is very expensive in terms of pre-school interventions, where there is quite a lot of focus and is very much driven by the evidence of, for example, the extent to which the Scandinavian countries have been able to break the link between class origins and class destinations, specifically through pre-school. Or to put it another way, the extent to which standard education has not broken the link and therefore you have to look elsewhere.

Longitudinal data suggests that a vast amount of the attainment gap can be seen in under-five year olds, in fact it can be seen even at 22 months, which suggests you have to do something before that, even though government is not particularly comfortable about it in some ways.

A few other examples to mention in passing include the Energy White Paper: whilst it may not be perfect, it is certainly true that it is an argument and an area which is being driven strongly by the science base, because there are high costs of getting involved.

Higher Education: for example, the OECD cross-national analyses about the contribution of various kinds of research and development to economic growth has definitely had a big impact, especially in the medical area.

Now onto failures, or areas where the discrepancy between the evidence base and the policy is larger.

Classically, criminal justice and crime – Mary Tuck when she was at the Home Office [ex-head of the Research and Stats Unit] put this in a particularly forthright way about the discrepancies between what governments had done for many years in terms of policy and what was it actually known, in terms of the evidence base, would reduce crime. This is an area where the gaps are particularly large.

Primary healthcare: arguments about if you really want to improve primary health, not just in the UK context but nationally, what is the way to do it? The political temptation is always to go for secondary healthcare as opposed to trying to pick up causes early. Similarly with attempting to do things about mothers' education and so on in different contexts.

Life satisfaction: partly I just threw this in because I was doing something on it this morning at Downing Street and I have a graph, which I think is great. I was tempted to get it stuck on a T-shirt and wander around Treasury. But basically what it shows is GDP per capita, which is the line going up and up, and life satisfaction for the UK – depressingly flat. What it poses is the fundamental question about what is it you are trying to achieve and what are your levers. Anyway, it certainly poses questions, if not answers.

So what drives impact? This might seem quite inane, but there has to be good evidence there to have an impact. Good evidence normally takes a long time to assemble, particularly when you want, for example, great longitudinal data with cross-national comparisons and so on. You are not going to get that in a six week period when you suddenly have to do something in that area. It has to be there already.

Secondly, someone has to know it. Again in some ways this is trite, but also phenomenally important. The way in which knowledge gets transmitted is not primarily through someone reading very detailed technical papers somewhere in government (although that does happen a little bit). You have to have someone there who actually understands the literature and the material well enough to be able to interpret it effectively. That is clearly absolutely critical and not to be assumed.

It has to go somewhere. We produce various papers which go to the Prime Minister in an early draft form and he will write on the bottom 'so what?'. It is all very well to explore a particular literature but it has to go somewhere with some policy implications. You have to believe that you can do something about it.

Then there is our relationship to public attitudes and interests. Clearly criminal justice policy etc. are constrained by these familiar issues.

There is also this thing of 'zone of proximal development'. The psychologist Vygotsky used this phrase to explain development in children. His point was that siblings would learn from one another but they had to be close enough in the development process to be able to learn from one another and if the gap was substantial that learning would not occur. You see that all the time. It partly goes to this issue of absorptive capacity, but if you are way out there ahead with the evidence, it will not have that impact. You have to be in that zone where people are going to do something with it.

How can we do it better? Within government, one of the things I have been shocked about is the extent to which departments often have this division between analysts and the policy makers, which often makes little sense. You have to encourage experiments and variability. For evidence-based policy to work, it is not just about hiring some academic and getting them to do a review of the literature, although that might be worthy enough, but in many key areas, the system itself has to generate the evidence, because there has to be variability within it and there has to be analysis of what worked and what did not, in a systematic way. That is absolutely pivotal for creating some sort of learning system.

Be realistic about how knowledge spreads. This is not just about getting the knowledge originally but, in terms of the practices on the ground, we have to be more sophisticated than we have been about how best practice spreads. You often go into an area and think you know what the key evidence would be but we do not have it. You could put down a marker so that when you come back to the issue in five years' time, such evidence would be in play. That would be a sensible thing to do.

Statistical literacy would be nice. It is not that widespread and it is a serious limitation, not just in terms of being able to interpret a logistic progression or something but it is about being able to understand a mindset of a whole body of work.

You should talk to others. Let them know questions. It is a bit unfair when policy makers bemoan the wider community about not delivering the right evidence at the right time and the question is, who told them? You have to know what is in the minds of the policy makers in order to know how to understand. Reform of the Research Assessment Exercise is a possible point for discussion.

‘Outside the black box’ was a message delivered to government, but in terms of the wider community, evidence is often used much more than people think it is at certain key points. People do not realise that at the right time a particular paper or piece of evidence can dominate. Key arguments can really hinge on one or two academic papers. The person who wrote it may never know that but it may happen.

You have to keep talking to policy makers, even where this is frustrating at times. You have to keep looking for the window of opportunity. You can be banging on about an issue for years and years and no one seems to listen and then the right configuration of factors will emerge and all of a sudden it will be the issue and there will be a readiness. It is often very difficult to judge that when you have only ever worked in a particular area.

The key point is that you can have much more influence if you look to the two year rather than the two week horizon. Normally by the time things get into detailed consultation documents, government has gone a long way down the road to making formal commitments and adopting a position. You can tinker with it at the margins but if you really want to have a big impact, you normally do it before that has happened, in some more fundamental agenda-setting way.

Use intermediaries. Clearly that matters greatly. A good example might be capital endowments and asset-based welfare. Ackerman in the States and Le Grand and others in Britain made the argument quite well about why people should be given a capital endowment at a certain age but they could not really make any progress. Then the Institute of Public Policy Research took it up and ran with it as a ‘Baby Bond’ and they just got good contacts. The other thing is to do what people like me do: work inside. Increasingly there are opportunities for this. Someone told me that there are 4,000 people now working in the civil service, seconded from bits of academia. They can have a very big impact.

In conclusion, evidence can be massively influential. I think there are a number of policy areas where you could say that it was utterly

decisive, though not enough, and only when you are in that ‘zone’, when the opportunity is there. We have to be honest about it. Generally, it is not routine practice and it is not the case that most submissions and papers relate to and rely heavily on the evidence.

Evaluation is probably getting better and this is my point about a learning system: it can not just be that we occasionally stick our heads out and do a literature review. It has to be about how you conduct policy and deliberately introduce or encourage variation into systems and evaluate it in such a way that you are learning all the time about what works and what does not.

I cannot give the exact field but in a major area of policy we decided to look at all the evaluations done and all the different policies and see if we could work out their cost-effectiveness and what worked best. Of course there had been hundreds in this major area of government policy. Yet we were only able to identify two which met any kind of methodological rigour. It is getting better but there is still a long way to go.

Lastly, evidence-based policy is only one of a number of factors. There are many other things which drive whether a policy and policy change is effective: about how you engage with stakeholders and a whole variety of issues. We should not conflate evidence-based policy as being a case of ‘if we did that, everything’s fine’. There is more at play than that.



Erik Millstone

When, Where and Why Does Evidence Matter to Policy Makers?

Thank you very much to ODI for inviting me. I am delighted to be here. I have made one small mistake though which is that I was told I had 20 minutes and I made a few more than 20 overheads. And I will therefore adopt the all-too-familiar tactic of speaking quickly and racing through it.

I appreciate the point made by David that it is worth distinguishing success and failure in evidence-based policy. I particularly want to talk about BSE which, I think I ought to explain, I count as the single biggest failure of UK public policy since the Suez debacle of 1956 and I think there are lessons to be learnt from it. But I want to treat it as part of a broader category of issues which is whether a particular kind of evidence is supposed to have a bearing on policy, namely scientific evidence derived from experts and their role in giving advice to policy makers.

You may recall that for many years during the BSE saga, which for approximation purposes we could say started in 1986 and culminated at the watershed on the 20th March 1996, when Dorrell and Hogg went the House and said, 'I am terribly sorry, it looks as though people have got a disease from BSE'. Previously they had said repeatedly that British beef was perfectly safe, there was no risk and that the policy was based on sound science. The rhetoric that policy is based on sound science is one with which we are very familiar in a wide range of issues related to the regulation of risk.

How much sense can we make of this? Under what conditions can evidence play a constructive role?

It is obviously reasonable that policies could be more evidence-based than they have been, but what will evidence do for us and what will it not do?

Weber's 'decisionist' model: 'politics first, then technocracy', was one of the earliest ways of conceptualising the role that evidence can and should play in public policy, developed by Max Weber in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He saw industrial society as rapidly bureaucratising and people were increasingly arguing that society would be run by bureaucrats and technocrats. He said that could not work and that the way it should work is this: policy makers should set the goals, identify what is to be achieved, and then hand it over to bureaucrats and technocrats who have expertise and facts not possessed by the policy makers who are generalists, and they develop and implement the policy.

But that does not quite fit with the expression which David used: 'build on evidence'. It is the other way round here, it is not that policy is built on the evidence – that is a twentieth century reinterpretation of the argument – here it is policy

comes first and evidence comes after, or the macro-political goal comes first and it is implemented in detail in the light of expert knowledge. But this model has real problems. It is superficially very plausible and attractive, but it breaks down in several ways. Firstly, it is not too bad if you are in a Platonic universe in which nothing changes, but in a modern industrial, technological universe where you get new scientific evidence and new technologies, new risks and new challenges, what the ends are that you are aiming at depends on being informed by what the experts know and what the emerging facts are. Therefore you cannot simply separate policy guidance from evidence gathering and technocratic expertise. What the goals are themselves depends on what the evidence is.

When the policy makers themselves were trying to decide about BSE, they needed to have a certain kind of evidence that should have been available to them. They needed to know what was hazardous. Were there risks in beef, in milk, in gelatine, in hides, in bull-semen? They needed to know what was contaminated and what was not, and how far it was possible to separate them. And then you need not just technical information, you need social information, about what actually happens in slaughter-houses and whether proposed rules can be implemented effectively. But actually no amount of evidence that the experts did and could give to Ministers was sufficient to set the goals.

The question was, what was the goal of policy? The goal could either have been eradicating the risks, or reducing them sufficiently to reassure the customers in order to keep the market stable and to keep people buying beef. In practice, the goal adopted in the UK over BSE was the latter, but it was misrepresented as if it were the former. So evidence was deployed to defend a policy objective which itself was misrepresented.

Similar problems arise in relation to all the other risk issues that government is having to deal with now: GM crops, mobile phones, etc. When it comes to deciding what the goals of policy are, it is not something you can either just give to policy makers or give to the experts, because the kinds of judgements that need to be made are intrinsically hybrid and involve integrating technical and political judgements. Therefore the role of evidence gets terribly complicated.

The problem of Weber's model where politics sets the goals and the technocrats get the evidence, work out the facts and implement things in detail is that it always runs the risk that evidence comes to be recruited in order to back up policy that had already been chosen. That is precisely what happened over BSE.

Especially in BSE, it was horrendous. The evidence was very incomplete. We are still not actually sure what the BSE pathogen is; the claim that it is a 'prion' is just the most plausible hypothesis. We still do not know if there are tissues in cattle that are pathogen free or if there is a threshold of exposure below which it is perfectly safe, or constitutes a risk.

The evidence remains hugely fragmented, nonetheless, between 1986 and 1996, we were told repeatedly that policy was based on – and only on – the best available scientific evidence. The number of times in which Ministers stood up in the House and said, 'I am doing what and only what my experts advise'. The model there was a different one, not Weber's. It was a highly technocratic one in which Ministers took no responsibility for anything.

Somehow we have the facts, we have the science. It is like Dickens' Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times*: 'give me facts and nothing but the facts, that is all we need'. This is like a Gradgrind view not of educational philosophy but of policy making. And this is the one that was implicit in the legitimisation of policy given by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) from 1986 to 1996. 'We have the facts and we know what to do. No one else does and no one else can criticise it'. It is wonderfully useful this technocratic narrative. It is a way of de-politicising politics. You kick an issue into the long grass, hand it over to the experts and it is not open to criticism and scrutiny.

This practice did not end after the General Election of 1997. To my certain knowledge, the head of a public sector regulatory agency was summoned by the Secretary of State to their first meeting and the Minister said, 'I want you to know Professor, I will never hesitate to use you as my shield'. In effect he was saying: 'Do not expect me to take responsibility for anything. You are an expert, we are putting you to the front and you take responsibility for decisions'. So it protects Ministers. They can take credit when things go well and their hands are clean when things go badly. But it also flatters the experts because it gives great social and intellectual prestige.

The trouble was that in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, they represented it in a technocratic way but they knew that it was not true – at least the officials did. What happened is that because the institution became addicted to its own narrative: that knowledge was certain, the risk was negligible and the policy was robust, they could not cope with new evidence which undermined the reassuring narrative, so they got locked into a situation and became deaf and were unable to learn until things became catastrophically bad.

In practice, the evidence did not support the reassuring narrative. But it did not prove it wrong either, it was open ended. The uncertainties were massive. There was a phrase from the Southwood

Report in 1989 – a slightly infelicitous phrase – 'a dead-end host', meaning the disease will not pass beyond cattle into other species, and therefore everything is perfectly safe.

Then in the 1990s things started to get sticky. Poor 'Mad Max the Cat' in Bristol was diagnosed with feline Spongiform Encephalopathy. You will appreciate that when the ban on contaminated materials in the human food chain was introduced, they went into pet food, so pets were eating a lot of this contaminated material. Max was important for the following reason: part of the Government's narrative was that BSE 'is just Scrapie'. Scrapie comes from sheep, it has been in the UK flock for 350 years, the UK have been eating mutton from Scrapie-afflicted sheep, it has not done anyone any harm, so beef is perfectly safe. But they had tried for years to transmit Scrapie to cats with no success. But Max went down with feline Spongiform Encephalopathy having eaten contaminated pet food and proved that BSE could transmit in ways that Scrapie could not. So the idea that BSE is just Scrapie started to crumble. The evidence undermined it and it undermines the claim that the disease was confined to Ruminants. The response of the Ministry was just to discount it. The cat still could be a dead-end host – just because it is transmitted to one species does not mean it can be transmitted to another, particularly not to humans.

But that was not the only evidence to be discounted. The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, from their offices just the other side of Waterloo station, sent a letter in 1991 telling the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that the regulations were not being implemented. That could be discounted too since they had told people that the material was perfectly safe, it did not matter if people consumed it anyway. It only had to look as though there were regulations in order to reassure the consumers, but non-compliance posed no risk so it did not matter.

There was this very sharp disjunction between what was said in private and what was said in public. For example, in 1988 civil servants told Ministers that they could not answer the question of whether BSE was transmissible to humans. But the next year the Minister says publicly that he is totally and completely sure that there is no risk. In private, the scientific civil servants say that it would not be justified to state categorically that there is no risk. In public, Ministers said that British beef is perfectly safe. The risk that there may be some contamination in food is met with the argument that it is not possible for BSE to enter the food chain.

As late as December 1995, Health Secretary Dorrell said to Jonathan Dimbleby on a Sunday lunchtime news programme that it was inconceivable that anyone could ever get CJD from BSE and then, come the watershed on the 20th March, 1996 evidence that a new disease had emerged in humans, most probably from eating

BSE contaminated food, destroyed the policy instantly and the credibility of the BSE policy and the policy making institutions collapsed. Many people said it undermined general confidence in science-based policy and experts in regulation and that it provoked a crisis.

But it is alright, we have a new way of making policy and a new orthodoxy and it is the reverse of Weber's model. It is closer to what David had in mind when he talked about building on evidence, so that instead of politics coming first and science coming second, it is the other way round. Now experts deliberate, they have the evidence, they can make the judgement. This is sometimes called a risk assessment. Once scientists have spoken, they then pass the information to policy makers; it is almost as if the scientists are expected to specify the objective which policy makers should reach.

Instead of politicians setting goals, the experts set the goals, so that for example, levels of contamination should not exceed a certain figure, or certain kinds of tissue should be kept out of the food supply, and then policy makers take into account what the meat industry will do, what the farmers will do, what the abattoirs will do; they make judgements on what it will cost the Treasury; what kinds of regulations and the most cost-effective ways of achieving the goals that the scientists have set.

This is now the new orthodoxy. This is embodied in a great deal of the restructuring of public policy in the risk issue: the way that government Chief Scientist talks about it, the Office of Science of Technology, it is all predicated on this kind of model, except they most typically talk about risk assessment, risk management and risk communication.

But one of the problems of this way of looking at it is that it presupposes that scientific deliberation is something that does not take place within a socio-political context but within a kind of academic abstraction. Secure in their ivory towers, uninfluenced by external political and socio-economic interests, the facts will enable them to decide what the policy objectives should be.

This is an improvement because it is much better than technocracy. Technocracy somehow says that evidence alone will decide policy. At least there is an acknowledgement that you need both evidential scientific considerations and political considerations and it puts scientists into a predicament in which, potentially by comparison with the initial Weberian model, they might be less vulnerable to political pressures under which there is a temptation to recruit evidence to back up the policy you are going to follow anyway – which is what I am implying happened over BSE to a very considerable extent, and in many other fields too.

If we try to do it this way, the notion is that you assign autonomy to experts. You create separate agencies; you create expert committees; you give them some functional autonomy and make them less the creatures of politics. But it simply is unrealistic to think that scientific evidence is gathered and interpreted in a policy vacuum. So increasingly scholars in my academic sub-sector which is called science policy, conceptualise policy as not a two stage process but a three stage process, with interactions amongst the stages where all of it is understood as operating within a specific policy context. No more pretence that what are the facts can be determined abstractly, in a purely disinterested way.

The relationship between science and policy is neither politicians telling the scientists what their goals should be, or the scientists telling the politicians what the goals should be, but a much richer exchange whereby policy makers articulate the range of options available and under consideration, and the experts can then gather the evidence, review it, deliberate and make informed judgements about what is known and not known about the consequences of following, or failing to follow, a range of different options.

So instead of scientists giving policy makers monolithic prescriptive advice on a course of action to follow, or policy makers telling scientists this is where we want to be, it is a richer interaction in which the experts do not solve the policy makers' problems for them entirely, but they give them very useful intelligence. In practice the experts give plural and conditional advice for a range of policy options and politicians have to make the choice for what the policy judgements are and stop trying to hide behind their experts.

Evidence matters a great deal. Evidence can support policy, it can undermine policy, but it will never settle a policy on its own and of course policy objectives without the evidence are pointless, but data without goals are meaningless. Policy is not going to be based just on evidence, and evidence will not solve the policy questions either, but it can make an important contribution.

Meeting 2: The Political Context

Speakers: Vincent Cable – MP for Twickenham

Julius Court – Research Officer, RPEG, ODI

Chair: John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID, and Research Fellow, ODI



Meeting Summary

This was the second meeting in the series 'Does Evidence Matter?'. **John Young** introduced the session by pointing to the importance of political context for evidence-based policy. Some of the key questions in this area are: How does the political context affect decisions? What sort of evidence is available to policy makers in different contexts? Are policy makers 'evidence aware'? What other factors influence their decision-making?

Vincent Cable began by stating that evidence based policy is important to him as an MP, and emphasised that in many ways researchers and policy makers are in the same business of extracting and processing information.

He went on to outline five 's's' that limit evidence-based decision-making: speed; superficiality; spin; secrecy; and scientific ignorance.

Speed: Policy makers are under chronic time pressure and are forced to process information quickly. This requires improvisation and also means that sometimes compromises have to be made. Occasionally, this leads to bad decisions.

Superficiality: Each policy maker has to cover vast thematic fields, and cannot possibly have in depth knowledge about every issue in those areas. They are therefore heavily dependent on the knowledge and integrity of the people who inform them. This raises difficult questions about who policy makers should turn to for advice, and how they can judge the advice given to them – for example the increasing amount of advice coming from the NGO sector.

Spin: In the political world, perception is very important. For example, even though evidence has shown that beat policing is not the most cost effective way of using police resources, this form of policing is still prioritised because there is a strong public perception that it will improve security. Perception guides political decisions.

Secrecy: Vincent also raised the question of how to relate to evidence that is secret. A recent example is Blair's memorandum on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which formed the basis of political decisions.

Scientific ignorance: There is a growing suspicion towards science and scientists among the public, which will have an effect on policies. One example of this is the public demand for zero rail accidents while road accidents are tolerated.

This means that political decisions are made to invest far more in rail safety than in road safety.

Despite the challenges that these five 's's' present, Vincent concluded by pointing to positive examples where evidence has indeed informed policy, and stated that research will have an increasing role to play in decision-making processes as policy makers become more professional.

Julius Court spoke about the role of the political context in research-policy linkages in developing countries. He introduced the topic by saying that evidence can matter, but that it often does not matter. The question to be asked is therefore: When does evidence matter?

He presented findings from a synthesis report of 50 case studies on research/policy links in developing countries carried out by the Global Development Network (GDN). The main conclusion from the case studies is that political context is a crucial factor. It is important to bear in mind that the political context in developing countries is distinct due to three factors: (i) diversity of Southern contexts; (ii) weak capacity in South; and (iii) importance of Northern research, influence and funding.

Five of the GDN case studies were presented briefly: the GALASA case study from India; rainwater harvesting in Tanzania; DELIVERI in Indonesia; animal healthcare in Kenya; and SPEECH in India.

The political context is clearly the most crucial issue regarding the uptake of evidence both in democratic and less democratic political systems. Evidence does appear to be used more in open political systems, but this depends on the specific issue. Attempts to change the political context usually takes massive effort.

In general the likelihood of policy uptake can be described using the following formula: Policy uptake = Demand – Contestation, where demand refers to policy maker's and societal demand, and contestation to the degree of variance with prevailing ideology and vested interests.

Understanding the policy process is crucial for researchers who wish to have an impact. Evidence uptake is greater and also more rapid during crises or policy windows. These windows are hard to trigger, but important to seize.

A perspective of policy highlights policy implementation rather than formal policy statements. The work of 'street level bureaucrats' who put policy into practice is more visible than the policies themselves.

Many of the existing theories in the literature on research/policy links are of limited use in a developing country context.

Strategic factors influencing research uptake include: the level of the policy (macro or local level); current political interests, the political culture, the process (influencing through participation or insider connections); and the importance of timing (responding to decisive moments or longer-term programmes and pilots on the ground).

Julius concluded by pointing to three areas that need further analysis: (i) the implications of a changing political context within international development policy; (ii) the impact of external influence on policy, for example the impact of donors on national policy processes; and (iii) the consequences of democratic deficits and how to work in less democratic contexts.

Next steps for ODI's RAPID programme include: developing a more systematic understanding about evidence use in different contexts; developing a taxonomy of contexts; a cross-country study on the evidence/policy links relating to HIV/AIDS; and workshops with NGOs and policy makers.

Comments in the discussion focused on a range of issues:

- Would British parliamentarians be better equipped if they had the research facilities provided to the US Senate?
- NGO research does not necessarily lead government astray. Pressure groups have an important role to play, for example in select committees that seek a broader and better understanding of different policy issues.
- Policy makers (and not researchers) should take responsibility for distinguishing between high and low level research.
- Vincent's five 's's are not constraints that we are forced to work around; they can be changed.
- Policy departments often feel like a different universe to research institutions. Policy makers need evidence that is sufficiently good quality, but cannot afford to wait indefinitely for it. Researchers may therefore have to compromise.
- Working with policy makers requires that researchers make choices about who to approach and when to do so. At what point is it best to engage with the policy cycle?
- The political context is seen as rigid. But from the PRSP case study (conducted as part of the RAPID programme at ODI) it can be seen that it is possible to change at least the political

perception of the context within a relatively short period of time.

- There are differences in political culture between the US and UK, where policy and research are separate, and Germany and Scandinavia, where there are closer connections between the state and research institutes. Is DFID moving towards the model of closer connection? If so, this will have consequences for researchers. They are more likely to have impact on policy if they have an 'insider' status in relation to policy processes than if they have 'outsider' status.
- Who are the policy makers? Should we rather use the term policy actors?

Vincent Cable

Evidence and UK Politics



Thank you for inviting me back here. I think it was three moves ago that I was last in the Overseas Development Institute, but it is nice to come back after almost 30 years. I was flattered to be described as a policy maker. I cannot think when I actually made policy. I am a politician, which is not the same thing. This is an interesting subject, which made me think more than you normally have to when speaking. I realised that to an extraordinary degree, even in the political world, we pay lip-service to the evidence and research. I have two researchers working for me, one as researcher to me as Shadow Trade and Industry Secretary and one for general purposes. We have the House of Commons library that we all use and this is one of the best libraries in the country. So in a sense our lives are embodied in information and research. I thought rather than emphasise the difference between the research world and the political world, it might be more illuminating to think in terms of continuity.

I have an analogy from the oil industry where I worked before I became an Member of Parliament. In the oil industry you have a progression from the upstream where you get the oil out of the ground to the refineries to the pumps to the consumers. Essentially what happens in relation to this subject is that you have to extract data, which someone then processes (this is probably what researchers are doing). It then gets passed downstream and people like me are at the downstream end of the business. We take the research and the data and we buy it and sell it. So in a sense we are part of the same industry but we deal with the product in a different way.

This is a politicians trick, but I thought that one way of differentiating between the way that someone like me operates and the way that researchers operate is in terms of a series of 's's which seem to summarise the political world quite well: speed; superficiality; spin; secrecy; and scientific ignorance. I will give examples of each of those.

In terms of speed, one of the differences between the two worlds is that, in the world I am in now, a lot of decisions have to be made very fast. I am an opposition spokesman not a Minister, but typically you will get a page at half past eight in the morning: something has been on the Today programme, like a steel works closing down or a strike somewhere and you have to get on the airwaves, get out a press release and give a comment on the subject, about which you know very little. You know broadly what your line is, but you have very little evidence, very little information and you have to improvise. And once you have a line you have to stick with it.

Speed compromises a lot of what you have to do and a lot of political life is like that. Some of the

worst bits of decision-making that I have seen in my six years as an MP have been due to speed. I think the worst case of all was the Foot and Mouth epidemic. Everything happened very fast: it was in the run-up to a General Election; there was a lot of evidence out there; people had done studies about vaccination versus mass culling; but there just was not the time. It is about who gets to the Prime Minister's ear first and how you respond to tomorrow's headlines. As a result some awful decisions were made and it cost billions of pounds. Another example was the panic around the oil blockade. In my party, when we were in government, we all panicked. We had worked out for years what a sensible approach to oil pricing was and the idea of the price escalator. All the parties had a consensus that this was environmentally sound, we had had conferences and endless reports and we thought we knew what we were doing. And then the blockade happened and everyone simultaneously panicked and abandoned their policy positions. So an awful lot of political life is about how you respond with speed to rapidly changing events and often evidence is completely forgotten.

Secondly, superficiality. One of the sayings which has most applicability to my current life is that in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. We cover a lot of turf. I am not exceptional, but I am supposed to cover all Patricia Hewitt's department, the Department for Trade and Industry, as her opposite number, but I have also been given financial services, which includes everything to do with the City, as well as being on the Chancellor's Euro preparations group, plus a lot of constituency work. So inevitably you are dealing with things at a very superficial level. You are very dependent on the last person you talked to, or the person who gets to you with advice. At the risk of offending people here, there is one aspect of the trade and development work which worries me – precisely because of this problem that the one-eyed man is king – and that aspect is who the one-eyed man is. In a very complicated area like trade and development, we as political consumers are very dependent on the competence and integrity of people in the NGO and think tank community.

So within an issue like trade policy, which is extremely complicated, there are probably only a few people in Parliament who have a clue about things like how the World Trade Organisation functions and the precise terms of the services agreement. You are very dependent on the people who come to you with what seems to be research and what seems like technical information. I have run into a certain amount of conflict with bodies such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, who are very effective at presenting what looks like extremely professional, well-researched data seeming to prove that trade is bad for poor countries and bad

for poor people in these countries. I do not know a great deal about the subjects that they deal with, but I know enough about trade policy to have doubts in my mind when I read this stuff. But my colleagues come to me with it and say that they have had a deputation, including the local vicar and all the party members and have been given this report from Oxfam's public affairs department and it must be right! They ask 'why are you being awkward and asking questions? Surely we should just sign'.

I think there is a worry here about the research community, that in between groups like the Overseas Development Institute and the Institute for Development Studies and us, there is now a quite dense network of non-governmental and campaigning organisations, much of whose work is excellent proselytising and professional work, but who have acquired a status in filling in the gaps in our lack of knowledge. They have been very influential in areas like this and often, I think, steering us in horribly wrong directions.

My third 's' is spin. It is often used pejoratively but essentially the point here is that in the political world, perception is often more important than reality. What people feel is often more important than the substance. I chair the all-party police group and this provides a classic example. Anyone involved in police work will know that using beat police is a pretty inefficient way of using police resources, but you cannot tell people that on the doorstep. There is massive public demand for more police on the beat, and the police have now accepted that and the fact that public perception is more important than evidence-based allocation of resources. That is political reality. This is a very pervasive fact of life which does not just apply to politics.

Another example, perhaps a bit closer to the bone, is that when I was in Shell, one of the issues I was trying to communicate as Chief Economist to the Managing Directors was that developing countries were, in the long-term (over a 20 or 30 year time horizon), potentially very important to the business. A lot of them were very sceptical. Their minds were focused on Europe and the US, and 'out there' was a very threatening and dangerous place. This was not true of everyone, but there was this very conservative way of looking at things.

I hit on a pedagogic device which solved this problem. It was to take a different way of presenting Gross Domestic Product (GDP) statistics. If you just take the classic GDP numbers it tends to show, for example, that China has a smaller economy than Belgium, but if you take the Purchasing Power Parity GDP numbers, it shows that China has the second biggest economy in the world. It is the same set of facts, the same evidence, but interpreted in a radically different way. So what I did was to take all our GDP numbers converted into a Purchasing Power Parity base and present our projections and

analysis of the world in these terms. It was a startling reappraisal of the way the world actually was. You did not need to preach that the emerging world was important, the evidence was there. But what I was essentially doing was 'spinning' data in a different way. So spinning is part of political life and also part of business life and part of communication.

My fourth 's' is secrecy. One of the problems of government in general is secrecy. Certainly in the UK there are key areas where secrecy is everything. I hardly need to go on at great length about the war in Iraq, but there was an attempt not to argue the merits of the war in emotional terms but to do it in terms of evidence. The Blair memorandum on weapons of mass destruction was based on evidence. But it was evidence that was very heavily coloured by availability of data through the security services. So what is evidence, what is true and what is reliable?

My final 's' is scientific ignorance. One of the things that strikes you in the political world is that often there is very little relationship between the way we deal with, for example, risk and what scientific evidence (epidemiological studies and so on) would suggest was the real risk. One example was the panic over the MMR vaccine, where the political world is dealing with a set of assumptions about risk which are totally at odds with the scientific data. Another is the panic about rail safety. The whole rail network has enormous investment obligations imposed upon it in order to reduce accidents to zero, such that the risk involved in travelling on the railways is a hundred times less than it is in going on a road. But there is no mechanism for getting people to assess risk objectively between one mode of transport and another. Nuclear power is another case. I am not an advocate of nuclear power (one of the things I have been campaigning about is the bail-out on British energy), but looked at objectively in terms of risk, all the scientific evidence suggests that the risk of environmental damage, let alone death from a nuclear plant is massively lower than the public perception of that risk.

So scientific ignorance plays a major part in decisions. Scientific evidence leading to objective assessment of risk is something that is very often absent. One of the underlying reasons is a growing suspicion of science and scientists, who often respond in the worst possible way. For example, a big political issue if you are a constituency MP is telecommunications masts. People are scared about the cancer risks from these mobile phone masts and as an MP who wants to get re-elected, I have to say that I mercilessly exploit this. I organise petitions and all kinds of things. The fact is that the Chief Medical Officer, Sir William Stuart, did a very good scientific analysis of this a few years ago which looked at all the evidence and concluded that absolutely no evidence had been found to connect this phenomenon with health.

Then, because of the way that scientists have been scarred by their own experiences of things like BSE, he left himself an escape route by saying that although he could not find any evidence of any health risk, he would advise policy makers to apply a cautionary approach, just in case. This gives us a wonderful let-out because now we can all play politics with telecommunications masts.

I hope that by listing those factors, I have given some indication of the kind of factors that operate in political life which prevent us from operating a rigorous, research-based and evidence-based approach.

In my concluding remarks and having said all of that, I wanted to say on a more positive note that there are lots of examples of how, in some ways, British public life is improving in terms of how we use evidence. Perhaps the most important decision that the Labour Government made was the one it made in the first few weeks, to establish the independence of the Bank of England and the Monetary Policy Committee. This was an enormously important decision and almost certainly a very good decision. What it has done is free economic policy from the traditional reliance on the Chancellor of the Exchequer dreaming up things in the bath, to really quite a rigorous evidence-based approach to policy, in which the best experts in the land come together, discuss, research, express an opinion and publish transparently. The whole quality of economic decision-making has improved enormously as a consequence. It has become much more professional, more transparent and more evidence-based.

Related to that is the decision about entry to the European Monetary Union. I could score points saying that the government has procrastinated, but the fact of the matter is that they have established a whole series of very detailed, very professional studies on all aspects of the problem. When the decision is made, no-one can complain that there is not any evidence, because they really have been through the hoops. So there are some very major examples in British public life of evidence becoming important.

A third example is probably the most difficult moral issue which we had to deal with as MPs: the debate about stem-cell research in the last Parliament. As an example of an attempt to produce scientifically based and evidence-based decisions, it was an absolute model.

The government decided from the outset that this was not going to be party-political and they were going to give us all the evidence we wanted. We had reports thrown at us, seminars organised by Yvette Cooper who was the Minister in the Department of Health. It was all done in a very thorough, professional way. I think it was the only vote in the House of Commons which I ever regretted – I voted against stem-cell research because the research I saw persuaded me that it

was not necessary. In retrospect I think I voted the wrong way. But as an exercise in decision-making it was admirable and one of the few in British history, given the way that we have previously dealt with issues like abortion and so on, which represented a real step forward in trying to get people to think and analyse in an evidence-based way.

The final point I want to make is that those are all big, high-profile examples, but there are many little examples of the way that decision-making is being put onto a more professional basis. Decisions about health priorities through NICE; the way that food-safety is now dealt with through the Food Standards Agency rather than through the farmers pushing their own agenda; the way that regulations are now subject to fairly demanding tests of regulatory impact assessment; risk assessments being required in the police and fire services. There is a much greater emphasis in government on the use of evidence and objective criteria. Slowly and gradually it is happening. So I finish on a positive note that despite my initial qualifications, evidence and research has a role, and probably even a dominant role, in the way that most decisions are being made.



Julius Court

The Political Context in Developing Countries

The good news is that evidence can matter. The bad news is that it often does not. We often highlight the case of HIV/AIDS where despite very clear evidence about the disease, policy makers, particularly in the South, have ignored the implications. That has led us to what we think is the key question: not whether evidence matters, but when evidence matters. Particularly for developing countries, we think there is a need for a much more systematic understanding of these issues. This is where the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme and the Global Development Network's Bridging Research and Policy project have come from and they represents a major effort to look at this.

I will be talking about some work that John Young and I did which synthesised 50 case studies collected from the Global Development Network (GDN) project. I will talk about the main findings, that context is crucial in determining when evidence does matter; highlight three sets of issues relating to the fact that there is still a lot which we do not know in this area; and point to some next steps.

So, where did this all come from? The first issue is that there is a huge amount of anecdotal evidence, from policy makers, researchers from ODI and so on, who have been highlighting that there is a gap between research and policy, but we do not have any systematic evidence on it yet. The second is that we have a huge amount of theory which is based on the study of the OECD countries and when we came to look at this area, we found that the development sector, not surprisingly, was rather distinct and that a lot of the theory and practice which you can use in the North did not apply. We highlight three issues in that regard: the diversity of Southern context; the issue of capacity; and particularly crucial, that there are a different set of relevant issues, reflected in the research of the World Bank and ODI for example, compared to those that matter in the North.

I want to emphasise that this is an exploratory piece of work which is part of a much bigger project and we are highlighting issues that we want to take forward and would welcome feedback on them.

The case studies are from all parts of the world. There are positive cases where research has fed into policy and we also have a lot of cases where it has not. We have asked the case study authors to highlight the reasons why.

We use a framework which does not just cover the political context but also looks at the evidence, and the interaction between researchers and policy makers around the growing group of non-governmental and other organisations in the

middle that Vincent Cable spoke of, who mediate that interaction. Finally I will say a bit about external influences because we think this is an area which needs a lot more work.

We had 50 case studies of which I will outline five, to give you a flavour of the types of things which were in them. The first one was a case study from India regarding research on rice. The researchers had piloted the use of paddy rice production. This was a negative example, where the research fed the policy makers' ideology that this kind of technology could be applied throughout the state in India, when actually it only applied to a very specific area where it had been tested by the researchers. Because of the fit with their ideology and because it looked like a successful pilot, it was immediately pulled up, despite the fact that when it came to implementation it fell apart and yields plummeted in other areas where it was tried.

The second case was funded by DFID and was regarding rainwater harvesting in Tanzania. Policy makers' initial view of rainwater was as a threat, with regard to flooding. Researchers over a 15 or 20 year period have done studies on the ground showing how rainwater can be harvested. Because it worked on the ground and fed upwards, the narrative has been completely turned around, so that rainwater is no longer seen as a threat but much more positively, and the President of Tanzania is highlighting this technology as one that should be promoted further.

The third case was in Indonesia. There were a lot of cases, in Indonesia and Peru in particular, where massive regime change created entry points for all kinds of policy changes with all kinds of issues that could be changed. John Young was involved in this case study so can talk further about it.

The next case was in Kenya. Kenya has taken a large step forward in the past year, but previously we had the case of animal healthcare where the technology or approach of paravets in arid areas had been blocked for 20 years because of vested interests in the bureaucracy, despite the fact that it was incredibly useful. The last case study really highlights that when it comes to the crunch, it is the issue of implementation that matters. I will come back to that.

Not surprisingly, we found that context was the crucial issue when looking at the uptake of evidence into policy. It did not really matter whether it was a democratic or less democratic context, wherever you were, issues of context were the most critical in affecting whether research or evidence was pulled up. We do think that evidence is used more in a democratic system but we think that this is an area which needs more work. What was surprising to us was

not that the policy process is not linear – I think that everyone believes that at the moment – but that even though people know that, they act as though it were linear. We are not quite sure why that is. It is amazing that everyone says that the policy process is not linear, it is not rational, yet when we act as researchers or as NGOs, the assumptions that are being made show that it is taken as linear.

This issue of volatility works both ways. There are cases in Indonesia and Peru where the uptake was great after these changes in regime. It works the other way too: we had a fascinating case from Iran where the policy makers changed and the link between researchers and policy makers which had worked very well in the past was basically thrown out of the window. I think the last point is rather obvious: that it is difficult to change this set of issues.

So what matters? When we looked at our case studies, two issues seemed to come back repeatedly: issues of demand and issues of contestation. What we saw as demand was direct policy maker demand. For example, if Vincent Cable commissions a piece of research, it is much more likely to get into policy than if John Young or I commission it. So if there is a policy demand, it makes a big difference. Secondly, policy makers do not have a monopoly on knowledge – there are other people in society who can look at issues, perceive a demand and focus on a problem, and that can generate a policy demand but it does not always happen. So we distinguish between policy maker demand and societal demand.

The second huge set of issues was to do with contestation, where there were two crucial factors. The first were issues of ideology, the kind that came out in Joseph Stiglitz' book where he talks about the politics and ideology in the World Bank overriding evidence in decision-making. Second is the issue of narrative, which came out in the case of Tanzania. If policy makers are on the wrong narrative, there are certain things which you can do to shift it, but if you come from beyond their narrative, it is very hard to engage them in policy change.

The issue of vested interests is rather straight forward. A very broad summary of what we came out with is that essentially, in cases where there was policy change, it was to do with issues of demand and issues of contestation. The questions then are about how you change demand or reduce the contestation. Evidence can matter, it does not always.

Briefly, since this will mostly be known to many in this room, we always emphasise that understanding the policy process is crucial. Targeting when meetings are happening, when votes are happening and when the framework is being set, and engaging at that point means you are much more likely to have an impact on policy than if you do not.

We found in a lot of cases that there was much more uptake of evidence during crisis. This issue is particularly important in the literature. Kingdom talks about 'policy windows'. They are incredibly difficult to spur but once you feel that you are in one, that is the time to go after it and that is when you are likely to have a policy change.

We have all these cases where there was a change of context and where researchers went in and actually did manage to change policy in quite dramatic ways. I would encourage you to have a look at some of these specific cases. I am doing a 15 minute whirl through them, but some of the specific ones are fascinating and they are on the GDN website.

Now I am going to concentrate on the issues of implementation. We distinguished between public policy making, for example, as in parliament, and what is happening on the ground. When it comes to the crunch, most people's engagement with the policy process is through 'street-level bureaucrats' as they are described in the literature – healthcare or police and so on, which make up the interactions that normal people have. Obviously this brings issues of bureaucratic incentives and pressures.

I want to highlight two points in particular. We found that changing the process was as important as changing the policy. In India we had a case where everything had been tried to get over a problem to do with management of eco-systems. Money had been thrown at it with absolutely no impact, but once they tried a participatory approach, it all fell into place. Another example is from the Philippines where they had some new evaluation indexes and again, using evidence and a more open participatory approach, they changed policy quite dramatically and improved outcomes, which is the ultimate goal.

The second point (and we found this more in developing countries) is that policy seems to change on the ground quicker than in parliament or in public policy making. The Tanzania study emphasised this, where an approach had spread in a number of rural areas and was beginning to spread through word of mouth and being promoted by NGOs. It was only once it had worked and policy makers began to pick it up that it was elevated to national policy. Again, the case of the paravets in Kenya was instructive. It had spread all throughout the arid parts of northern Kenya, despite the fact that it was illegal (it is still illegal but quite widespread). So you have a distinction there between policy on the ground or policy implementation and the official policy.

Two points about theory. Some of the existing theory is useful. The work on social epidemics and tipping points by Gladwell is a gripping read and absolutely great, and some other sources are good. The main point though is that we found existing theory was rather limited in a development context.

This does not compete with the five 's's, but there are six strategic issues which came out of our work. They are not quite recommendations or conclusions but they are issues which I think we would put out for discussion.

The first is that you have to be very aware of the level of the policy maker that you are going after. If you have a macro-context which is a disaster, as in Zimbabwe, you have no choice but regime change if you want the use of research in policy, there is no other way. Whereas in other cases, for example, in the United Kingdom, we would say that on crime, despite being a democratic process, you do not have the uptake of research into policy. Again, this is very broad brush stroke but that is a distinction we would make and are looking at.

The second issue is to do with political strategy and these are the issues of demand and contestation that I mentioned and whether you would want to try to generate policy maker demand or whether you are going to work on an issue which is more pertinent to society but which has not quite fed into the policy making yet.

The third set of issues is to do with the way that politicians view evidence. A quote I have pulled out of DFID's research report, talks about policy makers within the Department: 'they often view research as the opposite of action rather than the opposite of ignorance'. On the other hand, DFID are frustrated with the evidence they receive from researchers – hence the review. This is a dimension of things that needs to be looked at and exactly the aim of the RAPID programme.

There is an issue of whether you engage top level policy makers or whether you engage street-level bureaucrats. These are all slightly banal because it depends on the type of context you are in. What I am doing is putting them out for discussion.

The next set of issues are to do with processes. I have said that in a lot of our cases, a participatory approach has worked very well. In other cases that may not be the best way forward. If time is limited, if the decision is happening tomorrow, you cannot work in that way and you have to go through insider influencing, if you can.

The issue of timing and speed has been made quite forcefully and whether you go for these decisive moments or whether you have time to work up programmes, as has happened in Tanzania, or interestingly in Ukraine – a very tricky political environment but they had piloted some work on economic clusters which had worked very well and was absorbed by policy makers.

There are three sets of issues where we think more work is needed and which we are beginning to look at. Essentially, the context is changing very rapidly in developing countries and the critical issues are the democracy type issues and the much greater involvement of NGOs and the

private sector in policy making, and crucial changes like that which are having an impact, the outcome of which we do not quite know at the moment. We are having glimpses of what the impact might be but we are not quite sure yet. The key issue is that there is an increased role for research institutes and for the use of evidence in policy. We have found that some of these big incentives like European Union succession, PRSP processes, the WTO etc, were very important in getting policy makers to use research more – they wanted to know what it would mean and were sucking up all kinds of use of evidence. We also had interesting cases where donors were trying to change. DFID is obviously one of them with the new research policy.

The real critical issues are how can you promote evidence use in policy making from outside. In some cases it gives it a huge amount of credibility but in others policy makers will reject it simply because it has come from outside. There are a whole set of issues there that we are looking at through the GDN project that will be crucial and we are simply not quite sure what works in different contexts.

The third set of issues I have talked about. We know that in an open political system you can gather and communicate evidence. We know that in a democratic system preferences are aggregated and there are structures for aggregating these preferences and resolving conflicts, but in less democratic countries (which is a lot of the ones we have to work with), we are really not quite sure yet what you have to do to engage the policy process.

So, future directions: the GDN call is incredibly broad and diverse, it is a million dollar project which is massive and will be taking these issues further. One of the specific areas that we are quite interested in – it is one of the strategic dimensions that I have been talking about – is that we want to know much more about, and develop a taxonomy of contexts, and work out what kind of evidence is pulled up in these different contexts and what are the critical issues.

One of the most interesting things I think we are going to be doing is a study on HIV/AIDS where the gap is perhaps the biggest between research and policy, and also where the gap has the biggest implications. The final point is that we want to work much more with non-governmental organisations and with policy makers. We will be doing workshops in the future with both of those sets of people both in the North and in the South. If anyone wants to help guide us through this mine-field we would be very grateful.

Meeting 3: The Role of Research

Speakers: Paul Spray – Director of Research, Policy Division, DFID
John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID and Research Fellow, ODI
Chair: Diane Stone – CSGR, University of Warwick



Meeting Summary

Diane Stone introduced the third meeting in the series 'Does Evidence Matter?'. This meeting focused on the role of research, raising questions such as: What does DFID want from research? Does it get it? How could research have more impact on policy? How can you measure research impact? What is its relative importance in recent development policy shifts?

Paul Spray spoke about the role and use of research in DFID. He began by pointing out that DFID distinguishes between 'research' and 'policy analysis'. While policy analysis is short term and always geared towards issues that DFID wants to know about quickly, research can be longer term and does not have to relate directly to DFID's work.

However, all research carried out and funded by DFID has to contribute to the larger objective of poverty reduction. When choosing which research to fund, the key criteria is how plausibly the research will promote poverty reduction; that inevitably puts us at the applied end of research. Research often should have an element of challenge in it, perhaps challenging shorter term policy analysis.

Overall the impact of research on poverty reduction is unknown. However, it is known that the link between research and poverty reduction does not necessarily have to go through government policy. Also policy decisions are not necessarily informed by research – even though they may give the impression of being based on rigorous facts.

When are researchers influential? Researchers can seek to influence through snuggling up to policy makers. But they can also have an impact through being confrontational and contributing to conflict in a specific field – which forces policy makers to reflect on what is going on and to respond.

It is important for researchers to catch the right moment in a policy process, for example when new ministers are appointed. At the same time, researchers can also be influential when they tackle emerging issues: governments need to know if there are big problems or opportunities ahead (e.g. DEFRA funds 'horizon scanning' research).

Research is widely popular with government when it produces a quick fix. Not all research should aim to do this. But it is worth noting that research is usually more effective when it is

problem focused and when it is easy to measure its effects.

There are a number of key issues that DFID is interested in currently. DFID needs to find out what its own niche is, both in international development research and in national research (e.g. in relation to ESRC). DFID London also needs to find out how central programmes can best relate to DFID country offices, especially in capacity building of southern research. There are issues to be worked out regarding how to leverage private sector research, how to disseminate research findings effectively and manage the relationship between researchers and users. In this respect, DFID may perhaps draw more on its convening power and stage dissemination events and workshops.

DFID Policy Division has now moved to a more think tank type structure, with shorter term teams grouped around topical issues. Hopefully the team structure will enable DFID to draw in outsiders to work for shorter periods in different teams: this is an important opportunity which academics should seize.

John Young presented one aspect of the RAPID programme at ODI – how can researchers achieve greater policy influence. Clearly evidence can matter, but there is no systematic understanding of how and when it does. ODI has been examining this issue in a systematic manner since 1999, when Rebecca Sutton published her paper on the policy process.

Traditionally the link between research and policy has been viewed as a linear process. This is clearly not the reality. Opinion is now shifting towards a more dynamic and complex model of research-policy linkages. To illustrate this, John presented two quotes on policy and research respectively: 'The whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents' (Clay and Schaffer, 1984), and 'Most policy research on African agriculture is irrelevant to agricultural and overall economic policy' (Omamo, 2003).

RAPID uses a three-dimensional framework to understand research-policy linkages: political context, evidence, and links. The framework has been applied to four examples of policy change in four in-depth case studies: the adoption of PRSPs; the launch of SPHERE in the humanitarian sector; the (non)-evolution of animal health policies in Kenya; and the incorporation of Sustainable Livelihoods principles in the DFID



1997 White Paper. In addition, RAPID draws on evidence from the 50 summary case studies collected by the Global Development Network (GDN).

What have we learnt from this material about what researchers need to do? In relation to the political context, researchers must get to know the policy makers, identify potential supporters and opponents, prepare for regular policy opportunities, and react to unexpected policy windows. This is illustrated by examples from the study on animal health policy in Kenya and the study on the Sustainable Livelihoods approach.

In relation to the 'evidence' dimension of the framework, researchers need to establish credibility and legitimacy, provide practical solutions to problems, and communicate effectively. For example, the Rwanda evaluation that led to SPHERE was influential largely because it was regarded as rigorous and credible. Also, action research and pilot projects seem to be effective means of convincing policy makers. One example of this is the influence of the PEAP programme in Uganda prior to the full adoption of PRSPs.

In relation to 'links', researchers must get to know the other stakeholders, establish a presence in existing networks, build coalitions, identify key networkers and salesmen, and use informal contacts. Again these points can be illustrated with examples from the RAPID case studies.

In conclusion, think tanks/'do tanks'/operational organisations appear to have more immediate policy impact than academic research institutes. However, academic research and 'free thought' contributes to the discourse in which policy is made.

Comments from the audience focused on a range of issues:

- How do we build constituencies at the national level to link research to the democracy/governance agendas?
- The National Systems of Innovation (NSI) literature provides good insight into why some research is taken up and other research is ignored.
- The quote from Clay and Schaffer ('policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents') would seem to suggest that research-policy linkages are far less rational than implied in the diagrams used by John in his presentation (on what researchers should do and how they should do it).
- Researchers still work under conservative career conditions – for example, they need to publish articles in peer reviewed journals. This may hinder inter-disciplinary work.
- Will DFID collaborate with civil society organisations on research issues?
- The sole objective of poverty reduction may limit the nature of development research.

- The meeting has presented material that challenges researchers to behave differently. It also challenges research funders to behave differently, for example by providing more funding for networks, dissemination and impact work. This is particularly important in relation to building research capacity in developing countries.
- The sole aim of poverty reduction may exclude research within the humanitarian field.
- Is all research really pro bono and therapeutic? There seems to be an underlying assumption in the meeting that all researchers are virtuous.

Paul Spray

Research and Policy in DFID



Thank you very much. I should point out that John Young is not just a speaker, he is the impresario of this event and gave a long list of questions to me. I have chosen the ones that I think I might stand a chance of answering. Some of what I am going to say is about the Department for International Development (DFID) and how DFID thinks about research. That is partly because we have just reorganised and have a new research department or team, which pulls together all the different bits of research, from the infrastructure knowledge and research area, to health and population, to the old ESCOR (SSR) social science research programme.

Within DFID we make a distinction between research on the one hand and policy analysis on the other. This carries no intellectual weight but it is convenient from our point of view. It is not the same distinction that other government departments make (for example, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister when researching on housing does not make this distinction).

Policy analysis is when we as DFID want to know something, for example, how best to fight corruption in a particular context: DFID is the client, we want to know something very quickly (usually within three months) and we call that policy analysis. Research is different: research tends to be longer term (three years or so) and although it must have a route to reducing poverty, that route does not necessarily go through DFID. It is research that will help poor people to get out of poverty but it does not have to involve DFID at all. In some sense, it is a public good – not necessarily a global public good, but a public good. That is what we mean by research and it is a bit specialised therefore, it is a particular area.

The first question which John Young posed was ‘What does the Department for International Development want from research?’. Here we are in Christian Aid week and DFID actually wants the same sort of thing: we are concerned to eliminate poverty. That is what we want from research and that is actually all we want from research. Anything that you want is a useful by-product.

We have an agreement with the Treasury as all government departments do (called the Public Service Agreement) which has a number of targets within it (about five), one of which is to develop evidence-based innovative approaches to development. We fall under that, so we certainly think that research has a role in this area. It also puts us very much at the applied end of research and we tend to want a fairly short route from research to having an impact on poverty. Knowing that the contribution to poverty reduction is the critical question when we are deciding what to fund is useful, but it does not actually tell us specifically what to fund and we

will be wrestling with that question throughout the remainder of this year, by the end of which we have to produce a new research strategy.

I suppose that the kind of things which are going through my mind are that if there is a piece of research, there ought to be a route through that research to an impact on poverty, meaning that the plausibility of that route is very important to whether or not we are going to decide to fund it. There are also issues of risk attached here: how risky it is that that route is going to be achieved and then questions of trade-off between the size of the risk and how big the benefits are likely to be if it succeeds.

So factors to consider include: the plausibility of the route; the size of the potential impact; the extent of innovation (which matters because of the hope that further things will spin off it) and finally (and this is another thing which distinguishes research from policy analysis), research ought generally to have an element of challenge in it. In the case of policy analysis, we know the area we want to work on and what we want to know is how to do it. In the case of research, we do not mind being challenged and it is in fact an important function of research that not just DFID but the accepted wisdom might be challenged.

Those are the kinds of things which DFID wants from research. Do we get what we want from research? Sometimes yes, we do and there are examples in the reports that we produce and in bits of research that have been delivered on poverty. I think it is fair to say that we do not know, overall, the impact of research on poverty. We do not know much about impact beyond an aggregation of the anecdotes. One reason, which has probably become clear from other sessions is this series, is that it is actually very hard to know because of the distance between a piece of research and the outcome and because there are likely to be joint products and so on.

I want to say a few preliminary points about the link between research and poverty reduction. The first is that the link does not necessarily go through government policy. There are pieces of research which produce outcomes which may, for example, go through the private sector – such as new seeds. One of my favourite quotes in development comes from a colonial agricultural officer somewhere up in the north of Tanganyika in 1928, who when writing about an innovation in the area to his boss in Dar-es-Salaam said, ‘the trouble is that native coffee needs no encouragement, native coffee in Arusha is increasing against all the discouragement it is possible for my department to give’. So research does not always have to have an impact on poverty which goes through public policy.

The second obvious point is that policy is a result of a political process; it is a result of politics and, historically, politicians have tended to find the researchers that they need. I have just been reading a book on Vichy France and there were plenty of Vichy researchers who were prepared to find the answers that the Vichy Government wanted to have in France. Policy decisions are not necessarily informed by research, even when they appear quite technical. I was involved in the negotiations about the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and there were some numbers (200% and 150%) which looked as though they were the result of careful calculation by researchers, when actually they were the result of horse-trading between countries who were prepared to give debt relief.

It is important that the impact of research can be through conflict and not through ‘snuggling up’ (where the idea is that what matters is that the researcher snuggles up to the policy maker and that will cause a leap to be made). That sometimes works, but equally, sometimes the researcher causes quite a row and that in turn causes change to come about. The Canadian International Development Research Centre has been doing a parallel series of research investigations to the one that John Young will be talking about later today. They have a nice example in one of their case studies of the effect of researching pollution caused by a mining company somewhere in Latin America, which very clearly had a big impact on government policy and this was entirely through causing large amounts of (non-violent) conflict in the area. Indeed the research was to some extent commissioned in order to make the conflict more plausible to various people.

Nevertheless, we are obviously hugely interested in research which does influence policy and I had a number of small points to make about that, in no particular order. In terms of when research influences policy, it is obviously important that you catch the right moment. New Ministers are quite often interested in new policy. I think John Young is going to talk about the way in which the sustainable livelihoods approach was picked up in DFID. It had been researched in a study that DFID funded and essentially the work had been done some years before, but there was a particular moment in the internal politics of the new DFID which meant that it came into DFID and was very useful – it arrived at the right moment for delivery.

There are other examples too: there has been a lot of research on education in Uganda, and that research has had a considerable effect on the educational reform programme in Uganda because it has been delivering research on unit costs or on labour market demand or on whatever aspects were important to the Ugandan Government and to the donors in negotiating sector-wide programmes on education in the country.

Secondly, I think research can be influential when it is producing new issues. The issue of fear comes into play here. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has a horizon scanning programme which they have put quite a lot of effort into and it arose, not surprisingly, in the aftermath of Foot and Mouth and BSE etc. The programme aims to scan the horizon for issues which are likely to arise which might cause problems or offer opportunities for us in government. That is an example of a good point of entry for research. I think the Economic and Social Research Council is hoping to do a similar thing with a series of monthly seminars aimed at picking up issues which they have identified or have got government to identify as potentially important.

A third issue is that where research offers a quick fix or a magic bullet, this is wildly popular with government. There have been some good examples of that, such as the Cassava Mosaic virus, which is an example we use frequently within DFID, where the people in Uganda grew Cassava, then the deadly virus caused problems akin to the potato famine in Ireland, and a research effort dealt with that and produced strains of Cassava which were resistant to that virus. This is an example not just of a quick fix but of research with a very high priority and a very clear link between the research and the outcome. But the obvious problem with this is that not all research has quick fix results. I remember in Botswana, where I worked briefly in the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Water Affairs, various charlatans would claim that they had ways of finding water beneath the desert and this was hugely attractive, but we had to have evidence and to ask them to prove it.

A fourth point is that it is useful when research is clearly problem-focused and it is easy to assess the effect. There is an example, quoted in Martin Surr’s DFID study on research and policy, of a medical/agricultural project in West Africa where about 80% of the project budget went into research and that research was effective because in the course of doing that project, various problems emerged which were unexpected (such as the insects concerned flew hundreds of kilometres) and the fact that the research was in place meant that (a) they discovered that and (b) they were able to do something about it. There was a sort of feedback loop built in between the research and the policy and that made it effective.

Another of the questions that John Young asked was whether we have any examples of research overcoming resistance to reform. That was a good question to which I did not have an answer. One case that was quite interesting was of insecticide-soaked bed nets. It has been known for decades that if you sleep under a mosquito net which has been treated with insecticide you are much less likely to get malaria and if all children in Africa slept under such mosquito nets there would be

about a 30% reduction in malarial mortality and morbidity. But actually people do not. There has been an extensive amount of research at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and various other places looking not at the chemistry or medicine and so on but at issues like how to get local manufacture of bed nets; the organisation of re-dipping nets; advertising methods that might work, and so on, on the social science end, that overcame a resistance to the adoption of an innovation. It was a different kind of research but again focused on the problem.

How might we get more impact from DFID's research? We are going to be looking over the next few months at six areas, which I will just list briefly now. First of all we are interested to find out what our niche is on the international effort in research, either in terms of what DFID is particularly well-placed to do or in terms of what others are not doing so that we should step in. We need to do some investigation there and would be interested in people's thoughts on that.

Secondly, we are interested in what our place is in the national spectrum of research here in Britain, including our role vis-à-vis the Economic and Social Research Council for example, under its new Head (who is an international statistician who has himself worked on health programmes in developing countries that we have funded), and our position and potential there.

Thirdly, we are concerned with the question of how we can best relate our DFID programmes with the programmes of DFID's country offices. Clearly if research is to have an impact on developing country policy makers it tends to be researchers who are resident in those countries who are more likely to be in touch and the links will work better. That requires support in the way we think about our allocation of money and that has to come from DFID's country offices, not from my team.

We need to think about leveraging private sector research. There are some very cost-effective efforts that have been made in the recent past and there is a question about the extent to which we can find more of those or whether they are just one-off cases.

There is an issue about communication and dissemination of research results, about collecting demand, and the interaction between researchers and users that we need to do some more work on.

There is also an issue about DFID using its own convening power. The Joseph Rowntree foundation in Britain does not, on the whole, require its researchers to do the dissemination, and takes it as its responsibility to create the links between the researchers and the housing policy managers in the key local authorities and the relevant government departments and so on. Should we as DFID, with a lot of convening power, be doing that more and calling the relevant seminars?

These are some of the areas that we will look at over the next two months in the course of trying to think up our research strategy.

Finally I wanted to say something about improving the context at the policy end. I have been talking about the links between research and policy in terms of the research end. Clearly we can also do something about the policy end, particularly within DFID. The reorganisation which has been going on within DFID since 1st April has not just been about research, it has also been about the policy division as a whole and we have changed very dramatically from being a set of twelve sectoral departments (with one dealing with economics and one dealing with health etc.) to something which is much more like a think tank, looking at specific issues for defined periods of time and when that issue is solved, shutting down that team and setting up another team to look at another issue for another defined period of time. At the heart of those teams are some DFID staff but the teams are to be porous and in order to work effectively they will need to pick the brains of and involve researchers from around the world, but particularly from within Britain. I think that offers a huge opportunity to the research community.



John Young

Maximising Research Impact

Paul Spray has stolen much of my thunder, as always, but I will try to fill in some of the gaps he has left. We have already heard a lot in this meeting series about examples of where research has or has not influenced policy: Julius Court talked about household disease surveys in rural Tanzania which had informed a process of health service reforms, resulting in a reduction in infant mortality; Erik Millstone spoke about BSE and how, as the story unfolded, UK policy makers were deafened by their own rhetoric to the results of the research; David Halpern talked about the new literacy programme developed by a group of academics, practitioners and policy makers looking together at the evidence to develop new policies. But there is still this problem: many researchers cannot understand why their great ideas do not find their way into policy and many policy makers cannot quite understand what researchers do.

Richard Dewdney last week said that one of his great frustrations in DFID is that often when they commission research looking for practical advice, one of the key recommendations that comes back is that more research is needed.

So this is an area that needs a lot more work. There has been very little by way of systematic attempts to understand the relationship between research and policy, and that is what we have been trying to do in ODI. I am going to talk about the research on the research-policy interface that we have been doing, on how development policy can be more evidence-based, and I will focus on the practical results and on what we as researchers can do to improve our impact on policy.

I will talk briefly about the RAPID (Research and Policy in Development) Programme; the research framework that we have used to try to understand this linkage; some of the case studies that we have been looking at – focusing particularly on the lessons for researchers; and at the end, some final conclusions.

The RAPID Programme has been developing in ODI over the last two and a half years. One could argue that the whole of ODI's work is about the interface between research and policy, in which case ODI has been working in this area for 40 years. I think the first time that ODI began to look systematically at how this interface works was in 1999 in a paper by Rebecca Sutton, which looked at theoretical approaches across a wide range of academic disciplines and came up with a 21 point checklist of what makes policies happen.

Since then we have been involved in collecting preliminary case studies as part of the Global Development Network's research project which Julius Court talked about last week. We have also been doing a number of quite detailed case

studies about specific policy events to try to understand how research influenced those policy processes and I will talk more about those later.

We have also been involved in a wide range of advisory work: mapping organisations involved in southern policy research; looking at how knowledge and information can contribute to policies in the World Bank and within the FAO; developing a communications strategy to enhance policy impact for the DFID Multi-Stakeholder Forestry Project in Indonesia; and we are currently involved in an evaluation of the policy impact of DFID's Infrastructure and Urban Development Department/Knowledge and Research programme. So we have been involved in a lot of things, some practical and some quite theoretical.

The reality is that there has been a transition from a linear, logical view of how research influences policy towards a much more dynamic and complex understanding where there are many different players, and it is a two-way process between researchers and policy makers with other intermediaries involved as well. This was described well by Clay and Schaffer in their 1984 book *Room for Manoeuvre* about public policy in agriculture, where they argued that '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', so we have known that it is chaotic for a very long time. Another problem of course is that much research does not even focus on the right problems. A recent report by the International Service for Agricultural Research concluded that much of the policy research on African agriculture is irrelevant to agriculture and to overall economic policy. So it is a complicated process and policy makers, as Paul Spray mentioned earlier, are not necessarily evidence-aware and researchers are often not policy-aware.

So how have we tried to understand it? Based on the literature and on practical experience, we identified three broad groups of factors which influence whether research is likely to have an impact on policy. The first and probably the most important is the political context. If the politics are right and politicians and policy makers are looking for change then research can feed into policy. However, there are a whole range of factors there: political and economic structures and interests; systems of innovation; institutional pressures; culture; prevalent narratives etc.

The second area is the quality and credibility of the evidence and the degree it challenges received wisdom (which as Paul Spray said earlier on is a double-edged sword, sometimes it is good to challenge with research and at other times it is better to snuggle up with the policy makers).

The third area is the link between the policy community and the research community which includes a range of factors including: networks; relationships; power; competing discourses; trust; and knowledge use. We used this framework to analyse the case studies.

Another point is that we did it in a different way to the way that most people are doing it. Most people take a bit of research and try to assess its impact on policy. The International Development Research Centre study is a very good example of this and the International Food Policy Research Institute has done a lot of work in this area as well. That approach immediately clears the pitch because as soon as you start talking to people about the piece of research it raises it in their minds and it either becomes very important or not at all important. The way that we have looked at things is to try to identify policy events and track back from those policy events to get a historical narrative, identifying the key players and processes, and then asking what factors influenced and contributed to the various decisions along the way. Research may or may not have been one of those influences. That probably tends to downplay the role of research, but that is the methodology which we used.

We had three case studies within ODI. The first was on the adoption of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) by the World Bank and the IMF as part of the second Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC2) process in September 1999. PRSPs seemed to come out of nowhere and suddenly by the end of the year they were the key eligibility criteria both for entry into the Enhanced HIPC framework by the G8 and for concessional lending by the World Bank. Why did that happen? It was a very complex process, with many stakeholders, international bodies (including the IMF and WB) and national governments all with their own, very often different, agendas. DFID's agenda was very clearly poverty relief, the United States' agenda was much more to do with sound financial management in developing countries and the World Bank was desperately looking for an alternative to the Common Development Framework. And within that process, although academic and operational research clearly contributed, it certainly did not lead the process.

A second case study was the adoption of ethical principles within humanitarian agencies, as captured in the Sphere project, launched in 1997 after the Rwanda crisis. After the crisis there had been a lot of criticism about how many of the humanitarian agencies had responded to the crisis. These agencies needed to find mechanisms for self-regulation before donors did it for them, so there was a large multi-stakeholder evaluation of the humanitarian response to the Rwanda crisis, followed by the development and implementation of the Sphere project. This case study is interesting because most of the important policy makers

were also the practitioners, the heads of the NGOs and other organisations involved in humanitarian aid delivery and they worked very closely with other researchers and practitioners in a collaborative process to develop these new policies. Again, research did not lead that process, though research was clearly influential.

The third study, which I know a lot more about because I was there (this was my first overseas work), was on animal health policy in Kenya. This case study is about the total non-evolution of animal health care policies in Kenya, despite the clear demonstration of the value of new forms of animal health care delivery systems (including paravets or bare-foot vets, inspired by research elsewhere). This case study is interesting because it is an example of an idea looking for policy endorsement.

The fourth case study is one that Paul Spray talked about and it is not ODI's, though the analysis of it has enriched our understanding. It was carried out by William Solesbury from the Centre for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice at Queen Mary, as part of an evaluation of ESCOR-funded research within DFID. This study examined how research contributed to the adoption of the sustainable livelihoods approach in the 1997 White Paper (and much DFID policy, practice and structure thereafter). This provides an interesting example of policy change within a development organisation.

Then there are the 50 case studies which Julius Court talked about last week. I am not going to go into any more detail about these case studies, which will be published as an ODI Working Paper. They will also be available on the website, so look there if you want to know the details.

What I am going to do now is a very crude cross-cutting review of what we have learnt from these case studies and particularly what we have learnt about how we can improve our capacity as researchers to influence the policy process.

It is difficult to learn across such different and highly specific studies. The challenge is to find a useful mid-point between context specific recommendations (which may be useless in other contexts) and very general recommendations (which are not really much more than common sense). These studies do, though, help us to identify some things we need to know, some things we need to do, and provide useful guidance on how to do them, if we want to increase the impact of our research.

So looking first at what we need to know. In the political context area of the framework what we need to know is: who the policy makers are; whether there is policy maker demand for new ideas; what the sources and strengths of resistance are; what the policy making process is; what opportunities exist and what the timing is for input into formal policy making processes;

and whether there are any policy windows that can be taken advantage of.

In the evidence area of the framework, you need to know: what the current theory is; what the prevailing narratives are; how divergent the results of your research are from the current narrative and therefore how hard you will have to work to change people's minds; and you also need to know what sort of evidence will convince the sort of policy makers who you are dealing with in that particular situation.

In terms of links, you need to know: who the key stakeholders in the policy discourse are; what links and networks exist between them; and who the connectors, mavens and salesmen are and how you can work with them.

What to do in the political context area and how to do it: to know the political context, it is important to get to know the policy makers, their agendas and constraints; identify their supporters and opponents; prepare for regular policy opportunities and look out for – and react to – unexpected policy opportunities as they come up (elections, changes of Ministers etc).

I will give some examples from the case studies. On the question of how you get to know the policy makers, do not do it the way we did in Kenya in the 1980s. We arrived there, on a brief influenced by research about the new understanding of bare-foot doctors from China and about the new understanding from anthropology of the importance of indigenous knowledge systems, and the idea was to find out whether the bare-foot doctor approach would work in Kenya.

It seemed like a great idea at the time and we went there without having a clue about the policy process, politics, who the policy makers were, and we just got on and did it, pretty much hidden (partly because we were there under slightly dubious pretences under Oxfam's wing and we did not want to raise our heads above the parapet), but it was not until many years into the programme that we even started to understand how animal health care policies were made in Kenya. It was not until a senior animal health professional blundered into one of our workshops of his own accord that we got to know any of the key policy makers. So do not do it like that!

An example of how you can seize opportunity (though I will not go into any detail because Paul Spray has already talked about this) is the way in which the Natural Resources department within DFID, facing extinction in the mid-1990s, desperately needed a new line and having worked on livelihoods, seized the chance of Clare Short coming in and needing to prepare a new White Paper on Development. And the rest is history. (It is actually history now because the Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office has now been closed.)

Another DFID example is the DELIVERI project in Indonesia which was trying to improve government services in Indonesia through participatory approaches, client-oriented approaches and so on. It was an action research project working with the local government staff on the ground and seeking to influence policy. It got absolutely nowhere while President Soeharto was in power. As soon as he fell then the opportunity opened.

On to what to do about evidence and how to do it. You need to establish credibility over the long term; provide practical solutions to problems; establish legitimacy; build a convincing case and present clear options; package new ideas in familiar narratives and communicate effectively.

A couple of good examples were provided in the case studies. The Sphere project was described by one of the people interviewed for the case study as, 'a veritable Rolls Royce of humanitarian evaluation with unprecedented scope and unprecedented resources available to it, and this made it a privileged and professionally extremely rewarding process'. It was a very highly regarded piece of research done by people who were linked in with the policy makers, and it had a huge influence. There are lots of examples throughout the case studies that suggest that action research is a very effective means of influencing policy. Another example is the Poverty Eradication Action Plan in Uganda, which was quoted by many of the informants in the PRSP study as both the source of the PRSP idea (which it probably was not) and more importantly as a manifestation of how effective it can be in practice, which was very important in influencing the policy makers.

So what to do and how to build links. The important points here seem to be to: get to know the other stakeholders; establish a presence in existing networks; build coalitions with like-minded stakeholders; and build new policy networks. The livelihoods case study is a very good example of how gradually over time DFID built partnerships with researchers and practitioners, and established a programme of collaborative research, where researchers from different institutes collaborated with DFID to test and develop new ideas. Gradually DFID also built up supporters amongst its own ranks so that when Clare Short came along it had the evidence, it had a coalition of people and it could use that to influence the production of the White Paper.

Another example from Kenya suggests the importance of identifying key networks and 'salesmen' which we did not, as I explained earlier, until this wonderful bloke Julius Kajume came to one of the workshops we were running. He was Provincial Director of Vet Services in Eastern Province. One of his staff had asked if he could go to a workshop he had been invited to and Julius had decided to come to the meeting himself to find out what was going on. He was convinced by what he saw because we took him

to the field and he then became one of the key supporters in government, and since he moved to Nairobi has been one of the key players in this whole policy process ever since. It is terribly important to identify those people.

In conclusion, based on our research, it seems that if you want immediate policy impact then the think tank / 'do-tank' / research-through-operational-agents route is likely to have much more immediate policy impact than academic research, though it is quite clear from our case studies that academic research influenced the discourse within which much of this more operational research took place. For example, when I went to Kenya bright-eyed and bushy-tailed to do the paravet thing, I personally had no idea that this was based on the Chinese bare-foot doctor model and on the anthropological literature, but this is what convinced the powers-that-were at that time (who sent me there) that this was something worth doing. High-level academic research and free-thinking does contribute to the discourse within which policies are made.

We have skipped a lot here, and Paul Spray mentioned a very interesting point earlier on about the danger of regarding cuddling up to policy makers as being the only route to policy impact and the importance of sometimes taking a more confrontational approach. There has been a lot of work about the power of campaigns and it is the subject of one of our later meetings in this series.

Meeting 4: NGO Campaigns

Speakers: Andrew Simms – Director of Policy, New Economics Foundation

Justin Forsyth – Director of Policy, Oxfam

Chair: Simon Maxwell – Director, ODI



Meeting Summary

Simon Maxwell introduced the fourth meeting in the ‘Does Evidence Matter?’ series, this one on NGO campaigns. One of the roles researchers can play is to service campaigners. In addition, researchers can learn from campaigners when it comes to influencing policy change.

Andrew Simms pointed out that policy change is frequently not a rational process. He gave an initial illustration of how the brain makes decisions: the decision is based on how the brain guesses that you will feel once the decision has been made. In other words, decisions are subjective processes.

To show that the world is run on very little evidence and a lot of assumptions, Andrew highlighted two examples. The first example was trade liberalisation. There are a range of assumptions underlying the World Bank’s tendency to recommend liberalisation policies, and often these are inversely related to the evidence on what people say they need – even though the evidence has been gathered by the Bank.

The second example was globalisation: is it going to bring us all together or drive the rich and the poor further apart? According to Wade, it is possible to list eight different views on globalisation. Seven of these suggest that globalisation will drive groups further apart. Yet *The Economist*, for example, chooses to base its analyses on the one view that suggests that globalisation is a unifying force.

It is equally important to point out evidence gaps. An example of this is that there has not yet been an overview of the impact of global warming on the possibility of achieving the MDGs, despite the huge impact global warming will have.

Andrew described four examples of New Economics Foundation (NEF) campaigns and highlighted the use of evidence in each:

- NEF campaigned for supermarkets to adopt codes of conduct on the sourcing of their products: The evidence they used was partly based on original research, and was presented in a series of reports that managed to grab the attention of Clare Short. The result of the campaign was that most supermarkets adopted a voluntary code of conduct.
- Debt campaign: The evidence behind the campaign for debt relief entailed a lot of number crunching and economic analysis.

In addition, personal testimonies and stories were drawn on. A high degree of lobbying and a new movement, Jubilee 2000, resulted in a new awareness among the public that debt is not just an economic issue but also political. All in all the success of the campaign has been moderate.

- GM foods: The campaign on GM foods did not only rely on evidence, but also pointed out the gaps in the existing evidence base. Again, the campaign had moderate success. Importantly, it did manage to bring about a change in public attitude, and a new coalition has grown out of it. The most successful aspect of the campaign was to spark public debate on the issue.
- Local community sustainability: NEF has recently released a report entitled ‘Ghost Town Britain’, which outlines the current state of rural communities. The report argues that local retail sectors are being hollowed out and that rural Britain is facing decreasing sustainability. The report has so far led to a Parliamentary campaign for a new Bill for local community sustainability.

In conclusion, Andrew highlighted four lessons learnt:

- The higher you advance in an organisational structure, the more you have to internalise the propaganda.
- Evidence is rarely conclusive. Most of the time we have to act on imperfect information with more or less unpredictable outcomes.
- Absence of evidence of harm is not the same as evidence of absence of harm. The absence of evidence is closely linked to political agenda-setting power.
- A false positive diagnosis can be inconvenient, but a false negative diagnosis can be catastrophic.

Justin Forsyth spoke about the need to situate the role of evidence in a wider setting. The big question is: How does change happen? The answer to this question will determine whether and what kind of evidence you should use. Evidence is only one part of a much larger change strategy. Sometimes, the change process is not affected by evidence – one example of such a situation is the protracted conflict in Colombia.

Evidence matters at different times. Justin spoke of an Oxfam meeting with top politicians – Patricia Hewitt, Jacques Chirac, Tony Blair. However, whether or not Oxfam manages to



influence these politicians is frequently not dependent on the evidence, but on political pressure. The political context is very important. Evidence at the right moment matters, but at other times, political pressure matters far more.

How can campaigns work effectively? Firstly, it is very important to have a campaign that works as a wedge. At heart it is based on a big issue, such as the environment, but the campaign itself is strongly focused on a single issue – save the whale for instance. Campaigns about coffee and patents, for example, serve as wedges that all spring out of the same big issue: the dynamics of globalisation.

Secondly, campaigns only succeed if they are broad-based and fairly loose coalitions. They should not be run by a Stalinist-type central committee that dictates everything, but should be based on the ideal of ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’ within the limits of a joint strategy.

Thirdly, we should be careful not to split up different roles too much. A campaign is dependent on work at several levels: in-depth research, popular mass campaigns, and high-level political lobbying. All levels need to be taken into account. When that is said, it must also be noted that once a space has been opened up by a campaign, it can be difficult to know when to strike. For example, Oxfam are engaged in the issue of the TRIPS agreement, which highlights the fact that it is important to strike at the right level at just the right moment.

Fourthly, the ‘Birmingham moment’ is important. This is the moment when the terms of the debate change. Even though the policy might not be altered yet, the Birmingham moment signals that the public argument has been won, and politicians have to engage seriously with the issue at hand, for example, debt relief.

Finally, it is important to foster ownership among members of a coalition campaign. This can be done through spending a relatively long time on drawing up terms for joint research, joint activities, joint strategy, etc.

To conclude, Justin used the example of Oxfam’s campaign on access to medicines. The campaign was based on a combination of Oxfam’s own research, commissioned papers, adoption of others’ research, and research on specific companies. The wedge of the campaign was to establish the connection between patents, access to medicines and trade rules. The evidence was pulled together into a report, which was presented in a number of places, including on Wall Street and in the City. This had the effect of generating some ‘inside’ pressure from, for example, people in the City on the companies concerned. The corporate angle also made it easier to get the campaign into the news.

Comments from the audience included:

- Do the public need the evidence behind campaigns – and if so, how much of it? The public frequently react on the basis of a few illustrations rather than in-depth evidence.
- Evidence for campaigns can be misused.
- Jubilee was only one small factor in the larger lead-up to debt relief. Just as important were politicians (such as Gordon Brown), bankers and IMF staff.
- We need different sales pitches for different audiences. But when lobbying at a high political level, such as when trying to convince Gordon Brown, it is crucial to be able to present detailed evidence of possible means and outcomes.
- Never underestimate the power of personal motivations when seeking policy change. For example, what motivated Bono from U2 to support debt relief?
- To sum up, Simon Maxwell asked each of the speakers to briefly answer the question of what researchers can do better in order to support campaigners. Andrew Simms said that it would help if researchers lived in the real world. A simulation of this could be achieved if researchers imagined themselves having to phone up a busy news editor and explain to him or her why their particular issue should take precedence over everything else. Justin Forsyth suggested that one of the most important roles researchers can play is to support Southern governments and NGOs to become more engaged themselves in debates and decision-making processes.

Andrew Simms

Evidence in NGO Campaigns



I had a genuine 'I told you so' moment in 1999 in Seattle. The government had been very nice to the NGOs, they had opened up the doors on the first day there and we had three Ministers, Michael Meacher, Clare Short and Stephen Byers in a nice little line. It was a good day because it was the day that Joseph Stiglitz had launched one of his first pre-emptive attacks on the International Monetary Fund (IMF), criticising a lot of what they did and saying what a complete failure conditionality had been in terms of adjustment. It had taken 10 years of campaigning and of criticising adjustment to get to that point and in the nasty, cheeky fashion that us NGOs have, I stuck up my hand and said, 'look, it took us 10 years to convince you of the weaknesses of conditionality, can we just cut to the chase on trade liberalisation and put it to one side now, since that does not work either?' They all looked and smirked and did not say much, so I can genuinely say, 'I told him so'. That was fun.

When I received the invitation to come and talk today, I had also seen that *The Economist* was running an essay competition in association with Shell, wanting you to write a 2,000 word essay on the subject of whether we need nature. My initial reaction when I see things like that is 'Doh!'. When I saw the title of the meeting series today, 'Does Evidence Matter?' I had a very similar reaction. I had two thoughts about it, one was, 'what a stupid question' and the other was an academic response which is 'well, maybe we need more research to find out'. I am slightly suspicious of the theme as well because there is a kind of implicit rationalist discourse, implying that you either want to use evidence or you do not, and that you are either rational or you are emotional. As we all know, reality is a lot more murky than that.

I want to share with you a snippet in a science magazine about some of the latest neurological research on how the brain makes decisions. The interesting thing was that the article was indicating that at the very earliest stages of going through the process of making a choice, what your brain does is guess how you will feel about it after you have made a certain decision, one way or another. So as a message to all those draconian scientists, I thought this was absolutely fascinating, because it means that at the very outset, the prior stage of research, however scientific and organised you might be, there is a subjective process going on.

This also slightly pre-empts one of my conclusions which I am going to drive home which is that, if there is one lesson I have come across through all the work that we have done and all the advocacy campaigns that we have run, the most striking one is that change is not a rational policy process. Both Justin Forsyth and I

have sat around whilst innumerable policy officers have crunched numbers and created great long shopping lists of change that they would like to happen, and then sent them to Whitehall and wondered why nothing ever did. There is a wonderful thing about statistics, which is that if you say to someone that you saw 17 elephants flying over your house this morning they will stop and look, whereas if you just say that you saw an elephant flying today they will think you are a lunatic. Once you apply a figure, a number to something, it is extraordinary how you can catch their attention. So always be suspicious of statistics – all statistics.

As an interesting context to the debate that we are in at the moment, there is this fantastic term that emerged a couple of years into the first Labour administration (which I think came out of the Treasury) when all of a sudden people started talking about 'evidence-based policy' – which made you ask what on earth they were basing it on before?

So yes, evidence matters, but what is interesting is the degree to which the world is run at the moment on the basis of very little evidence and an awful lot of assumptions. One need only leaf through the critical literature on the benefits and circumstances of trade liberalisation and then reflect on the fact that the motor of policy in the global economy is one of progressive trade liberalisation, which will apparently at some future point deliver us into a state of market utopia. Similarly with capital liberalisation, which is built into membership of the IMF, and also the assumed benefits of Foreign Direct Investment, despite the fact that there is a very healthy debate going on at the moment about whether this is a form of investment or actually a form of extraction. With that I will give you a slightly different advertising plug: yes, Simon Maxwell was right, we do have a thing called the 'Alternative Mansion House Speech' which will be about trade and will be very interesting.

Perhaps a slightly more important project we have coming out later this year is an alternative to the annual World Bank and IMF reports. Our report will be called the 'Real World Economic Outlook' and it will go into some of these questions in some detail.

Just as a couple of examples about the extraordinary way in which evidence gets used when it is in the hands of powerful institutions: it was either the 1997 or 1998 World Development Report (WDR) in which the World Bank trumpeted a private sector survey it had carried out which was included in the back of the Report. They had disaggregated the results into seven or eight regions and in about 80% to 90% of the responses, the major concern of small and

medium size businesses in developing countries was a lack of public investment. In almost all incidences, the lowest order concern was regulation. When you came to the summary of recommendations and conclusions in the WDR (you can guess what I am going to say), they were bizarrely inverted and all of a sudden regulation was heavy and onerous and needed to be swept away throughout the developing world, and heavy public investment to support the sectors was a dangerous and dodgy subsidy. From the earliest days of the debt campaign, there was a marvellous little quote that we brought out from the IMF research department (remembering that this was the basis upon which entire strategies and adjustment processes were based) where the IMF admitted to themselves that forecasts for these developing countries were 'not particularly accurate' – but of course that never stopped them knowing what they should do.

Another marvellous example of the inversion of the role of evidence in policy formulation is in the build up to the new trade round. There was a heavy lobby from the NGO sector that at the very least, before embarking on a new round, there should be a social and environmental impact assessment of the consequences of the last round. The reaction from civil servants and others at the World Trade Organisation was the analogy that trade liberalisation is a bit like riding a bike: if you go too slowly you are going to fall off. Think about that, because what if, while riding that bike, you happen to have a blindfold on and you are in the middle of heavy traffic. Without the evidence-base, without having looked at how things went before, you could be in a very sticky situation.

That brings me to the debate which is hot and active at the moment, which is whether globalisation brings us all together and closes gaps between rich and poor or whether it does exactly the opposite. According to Professor Robert Wade, there are about eight ways of summing this up at the moment, seven of which say that things are getting worse and one of which says that things are not quite so bad. I wonder which one *The Economist* and its various cohorts and policy advocates like to quote most often. Change is not a rational policy process.

There are also other problems when one considers the role of evidence in some of the big historical events, for example the issue of tobacco and safety, or nuclear power versus renewable energy sources. There are major issues about the suppression of evidence and what that means. Interestingly, when you consider the role of evidence in what I think is one of the most important issues of our time, climate change, we have actually achieved a global consensus on the need for a precautionary principle, where the absence of conclusive evidence should not be seen as grounds for inaction. So straight away, we are in a highly contingent situation where we are acting within uncertainty and insecurity,

yet having to make decisions about policy proposals and the allocation of resources.

Yet when we come to the issue of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), nowhere has there been a systematic mapping of the likely impacts of global warming and climate change on the pursuit of and achievability of the MDGs. Because we do not have the resources to do this in a very comprehensive way ourselves, we have attempted to address this in a report with a Bangladeshi partner organisation Becas called 'The End of Development? Global Warming, Disasters and the End of Human Progress', to say that evidence is lacking and that one of the things that we can do is to play the role of a catalyst to those with bigger resources and more cash, to encourage them to go away and look at this in a more substantive way. There is already enough evidence around to make us consider quite seriously the possibility that climate change makes the achievement of the MDGs even more laughable than it is already.

I want to talk briefly about a couple of examples of campaigns that we have done and the role that evidence played in some of those, and then I will finish with an ad hoc, mildly disorganised list of lessons learnt over the past few years whilst working on these various issues. At Christian Aid several years ago we launched a campaign to get supermarkets to adopt codes of conduct on the sourcing of their products from developing countries. The role that evidence played in this was that we gathered as much intelligence on the sector as we could. We had a number of partner organisations and our staff went out into the field and carried out a form of investigative journalism about abuses of safety regulations etc. We produced a series of reports, starting with one entitled 'The Global Supermarket'. What happened as a consequence was that Clare Short got excited about it and helped to set up the Ethical Trading Initiative; most of the supermarkets did adopt voluntary codes; there is a new and ongoing project called 'Race to the Top' which is organised and chaired by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and it has become pretty much a permanent advocacy feature.

What is interesting in looking at the relative success or failure of this campaign was that the impact was greatest during the first year when we put a lot of evidence in front of the noses of the supermarkets. When we shifted – or perhaps slipped – into the role of positive engagement for years two and three, it was remarkable how things slowed down and how the allocation of resources within the supermarkets, towards ensuring that the whole produce supply chain was monitored and evaluated and kept in good order, really slipped by. So the interesting thing there was that the role of evidence, in terms of supporting the advocacy goals and keeping things moving forward, was relatively unsustainable.

In terms of the kind of evidence used, where the supermarkets were concerned, first of all there was the mapping required to see what power and control the multiple major retailers had, and a process of charting their ascendance to their capture of the British retail market and their control of the supply chain and of growers. That required some secondary and some primary research, some insider brown envelopes here and there and the occasional conversation in a coffee bar, and it also involved us commissioning research from partner organisations in some of the areas where plantations were supplying the products.

An anecdote which just occurs to me is that in terms of cultural impact on the debate, perhaps the more powerful and important effect was when a documentary was made by BBC2 in the 'Modern Times' series about the sourcing of mange-tout from Zimbabwe for Tesco's, which caused an uproar. The maker and director of that film (who I later collaborated with in making a television advertisement for the debt campaign) was invited to speak at some Anthropology departments at various universities around the country, where they said 'do you realise you have done in an hour what we have failed to do in 20 years in terms of making these issues matter'. That was an interesting reflection.

The debt campaign is something which many people will be very familiar with here. The campaign involved lots of number crunching, lots of duals with statistics between the agencies and the Bank and the IMF, lots of personal testimony, extremely complex number crunching which led many people in the agencies in the early days to think that we could never run a successful high-profile, public and policy-oriented advocacy campaign on the issue when you are dealing with the niceties of net present value etc., but when the campaigners got hold of it and boiled it down to a proposition that debt kills babies, it is remarkable what progress we did have.

These are ongoing battles over statistics which we are still having with the Bank and the Fund. There is a lot of lobbying still. What happened as a consequence of the campaign was some successful cancellation; a new movement, the Jubilee Campaign, which still has active campaigns in about 60 countries around the world, many of which have taken on a life of their own and formed new coalitions; new attitudes and a new awareness that debt is not a straightforward economic issue (which was the standard response we would get from people in the early days), but is highly political and the solutions to it are likewise. I would say that the successes of the campaign have been moderate and the jury is still out on that. The role of evidence well presented was to win specific concessions, to make this point that the debt was politically defined.

Something of a slightly different nature was a campaign (again, at Christian Aid) which

succeeded in getting an issue to be talked about for the first time amongst a particular community. It was about the impact or likely impact of the introduction of genetically modified (GM) crops into agriculture and with them, the introduction of a whole set of market relationships which have very specific impacts on rural and farming populations. Evidence played a role again. It was a mixture of pointing out where there was not evidence and more evidence was needed, and using the accumulated evidence and what was already known about what worked to support rural populations to deal with hunger and poverty. The result was a huge public attitude change. The introduction of GM crops has been slowed down to allow more time for evidence to accumulate and again a new coalition was formed out of it. In terms of success, again I would say that the jury is very much out. There has been a great deal of success in terms of getting the issue debated and making it clear that a lot more evidence is needed and in a perverse way, perhaps the biggest success was in terms of putting the hunger debate back centre-stage.

Extraordinarily, the reason that this became an issue was because the bio-technology companies themselves started using extremely emotional appeals in their advertising without any reference whatsoever to debates about hunger and poverty, or about access to food and what actually works, saying that wringing your hands about world hunger will not help but food bio-technology will. They started the debate themselves and they had no evidence base from which they were working when they did that. Subsequently a lot of evidence which has emerged about the real experience of GM crops in the field has exposed both the weakness of the product and the need for a lot more evidence.

Bringing us up to date is an example which is more UK focused. We produced a report as part of our localism campaign called 'Ghost Town Britain', looking at the decline of local economies the length and breadth of Britain, the hollowing out of small, independent retail sectors (everything from banking, through to retail, to the closure of post offices) and what this means for sustainability and the creation of food deserts and banking deserts for marginalised communities in this country. This campaign is based on evidence from a mixture of primary research, including a lot of nifty graphs and a few surveys to gauge how people think about it, and has led to a parliamentary campaign for a new Bill about local communities' sustainability.

I will round up with my slightly ad hoc and rapid list of conclusions that all this points me towards. I reiterate that if you are in the change game, change is not a rational policy process, by any means. Interestingly, in terms of how people operate when they are in the major institutions, I observe that the higher you advance through an institutional setting, the more deeply you have to internalise its propaganda.

I would say also that evidence is rarely, if ever, conclusive and that we have to act as a permanent condition in a state of imperfect knowledge and insecurity, not knowing the full outcome of our actions. In fact there will always be unpredicted emergent consequences, but this is no reason for not doing anything.

I would say that where lots of these issues are concerned, be it climate change, be it biotechnology, that absence of evidence of harm is not evidence of absence of harm. Part of the reason is that the accumulation of evidence is a function of your ability to pay for and accumulate research, so if you are in a situation within a large institutional setting with assumed power and dominance already, the chances are that you can generate a larger body of evidence to substantiate your case and this kind of evidence will almost always be tendentious. If you are in a situation where you cannot stand up and say something without 55-year university projects behind you backing up your case, that will always favour the status quo.

An observation, which I have borrowed from Ian Wilson's book *Concilliance* is about why I think it is necessary for us to wave the danger flag very early on with a lot of these issues, which is that in many of these issues a false positive diagnosis might be an inconvenience, but a false negative diagnosis can be a catastrophe and a lethal one.

Another observation (from studying ideology and discourse analysis) is that evidence is always sutured into a web of discourse, power and interest. This for me finally knocks on the head the old draconian notion of rationalist science and rationalist discourse.

Finally I want to show you a picture of a gentleman from a global investment company (whose name I will not mention). They had been sitting one day in an advertising meeting thinking about how the company could pitch its services and they thought, 'I know, we will show what a nice bunch of guys we are and that you can really trust us'. So they got their men in suits to go out into the open with a beach ball with a picture of the world on it and thought that they would show people the new face of corporate social responsibility. So here is the picture of our gentleman kicking the world into touch! These guys do not worry about the evidence base too much. This is so much the case that the *Investment Chronicle* could give an award to another investment company that advertises its services on this evidence base: 'an introduction to spread betting'. So I think, all things considered, we do pretty well by comparison.

Justin Forsyth

Evidence in NGO Campaigns



I very much endorse what Andrew Simms began by talking about, in terms of thinking about the role of evidence within a wider setting. I think evidence matters a lot because I think that the starting point is that we are trying to find out what is right and wrong and what truth is. I know truth sounds a strange thing because there are different truths, but there are things that work and there are things that fail and it is important that we constantly try to work out what we want to do.

So from an Oxfam perspective, one of the reasons why we think that evidence matters is that even in relation to campaigning, when we choose our campaigns we try to pull together what people are saying about how the world is changing, to look at what is coming from our programme staff and the people that we work with, and to ask what the big issues are, based on that kind of thinking and evidence. That is the starting point for campaigning: to know what the right issues are to campaign about, based on knowing what issues are important, in this case to poor people around the world. You could choose to campaign on any issue if it works in advertising or because it is an easy issue to campaign on, but it is important to choose issues which will really make a difference to the lives of billions of people around the world if you change them.

The other reason why evidence is important, particularly in terms of strategy for campaigning, is that evidence is ammunition in the war, in the campaign: to prove the point in an intellectual sense and to win the argument in the more intellectual and policy-driven debate, but also to find the killer facts and the human interest stories to win the popular debate in that war. I am not sure which is more important, but both play out equally when you want to achieve change.

The real question behind this is how change happens. I do not think there is a single answer to that and the question of how much evidence matters will be partly determined by how the change happens in different situations. For example, I have just been in Columbia working with some of our programme staff right out in the rural mountain areas where you have the ELN, the FARC and the paramilitaries, and I do not think in that situation evidence matters at all. Nobody sits down and discusses the root causes of conflict in Columbia. When you are thinking about strategies for change, it comes back to politics, conflict and war, and you have to think of very different strategies to make change happen in that situation, which is much more to do with how you remove some of the causes fuelling the conflict and how you empower people to take back the space denied them in terms of politics and their own lives.

So the first point I want to make is that I do think evidence matters in actually understanding what is happening and in the ammunition in the war, but it is only one part of a much bigger strategy to achieve change. The really important question that we should be asking ourselves every time we develop a campaign, or in anything that we do, is how does change happen and what would it take to achieve that change. That is a hard question to answer because the world is changing very fast politically and where governments were stronger, now we have corporations who are stronger; where in the past we had more than one superpower, now we have only one, but we also have the public, the media and all these different factors that contribute to change happening.

The second thing I wanted to say is that within that context, evidence matters at different times. Today we have a meeting with Patricia Hewitt MP to talk about the run up to Cancun and trade. In Paris there is a meeting with Jacques Chirac about the G8, and there is a meeting with Tony Blair to talk about the same thing. In Cancun we are likely to decide very little that will benefit poor countries, it is extraordinarily depressing at the moment if you look at these meetings and what they are actually going to deliver, given the promises that have been made in the last few years about a development round and given what we had at the G8 in Canada about a new agenda for Africa. We are actually, in all probability, going to get even less. In those situations it is not a question of evidence, it is a matter of pure political will. It is equally about the fact that Iraq has sucked every bit of political energy from every other possibility of progress on other issues. So you have at the G8 a proposal by President Chirac for a moratorium on export subsidies – a modest proposal, probably a proposal to divert attention away from them undermining the CAP reform, but it is still a proposal. The reason that it will not be agreed in Evian is that President Bush will not agree it because President Chirac is proposing it, because of Iraq. It is as simple as that. The White House say that is not the case but the British Government will tell you that it is.

So within my opening point that evidence does matter but within the context, I wanted to make this second point, that evidence at the right moment matters but at other moments it is really about sheer political pressure. The only thing that will change the G8 and Cancun will be if hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets. Probably if these hundreds of thousands of people who took to the streets used violence and caused a riot, it would have more impact than Oxfam or NEF organising peaceful demonstrations. Sadly I think that is the only thing that will get into the media and I am not endorsing that kind of violence, but we are in that stage of how political change can happen.

I want to talk about how campaigns can work effectively to achieve change, and then how you think about evidence and research within them. I think there are some things that we have collectively learnt about campaigning in the last 10 years. It is important to understand these and then to think about what you do in research. There are some things that we have learnt about campaign planning which you have to think about in research as well and we have also learnt some things about why campaigns succeed or fail.

Firstly (learnt from the environment movement), it is really important to have a campaign which is a kind of 'wedge', which has at its heart a very strong focus, but which illustrates a wider point. So all Greenpeace campaigns are about things like whales and oil rigs. They are actually about the environment, but they focus on an example of injustice which illustrates a wider point. That is the only way to break into the popular media. Campaigns like that have problems, solutions and villains – and they need villains. That is simplistic but if you are going to get into the popular media, you need to break issues down into human interest stories and have campaigns that are specific whilst illustrating wider points.

If you look at our campaigning on trade at the moment, there are campaigns about the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, for example World Development Movement, which is about health in education. There are campaigns about access to medicines and patents, about coffee, and other issues. But they are all campaigns, in effect, about how globalisation does not work for poor people and how rules are rigged. If you had a campaign simply about how rules are rigged and how globalisation does not work for poor people, you would talk to readers of *The Guardian*, but that is not going to achieve the kind of change we need. So we need these specific campaigns but we have to remember that they are wedges and the bigger change is what we are after.

Secondly, we have learnt that campaigns only succeed if they are broad coalitions. Not the kind of Stalinist 'uncoalitions' with a central secretariat that tells everyone what to do, but loose coalitions with common objectives, agenda settings and timelines. The Jubilee campaign, although it probably did have some elements of Stalinism at its heart, in general was a loose coalition. The campaigns at the moment about cutting the cost of medicine, which include groups like Pac in South Africa, Third World Network and groups such as the Nada group in America, are very loose coalitions within a joint strategy. Their objectives are determined and the odd joint action is agreed, but it is a case of 'a thousand flowers blooming'. The real way to achieve change is not through each organisation doing its own thing. They have to run their own campaigns, but they are in wider coalitions of change. I think we have got better at understanding how some of those alliances work in the north and, particularly crucially, the south.

The third element I want to mention is that we have tactics which we have always split up and I think we have to do them together. I spent five years in Washington doing high-level lobbying and that has been a kind of discipline. I remember in the IMF days how one would pitch up and literally be laughed at as you sat there and tried to explain some of the things that Andrew Simms was talking about earlier. It was only really when Jubilee kicked in and you got the mass mobilisation that they created the space for the change to happen. So high-level lobbying; popular campaigning; media; doing it in alliances north and south; doing research to underpin that strategy, those are the things you need to bring about change.

Then there are practical choices about when you do it. You need sometimes to shake the tree with mass, direct and confrontational campaigning, but you also need to know the right moment to do the deal. The question then is who has the right to make that deal? We are in that situation at the moment with, for example, the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement and the WTO. A deal has to be done at some point, but everyone is frightened that the deal will be less than people want. NGOs have created a space for the deal with some southern governments, but who is going to decide what the compromise is going to be? It is going to be a hard choice because southern NGOs fear that large organisations like Oxfam will sell them down the river by saying that they will do the deal; we feel that southern governments are going to do the deal prematurely, and as we get closer to Cancun and there is no deal on intellectual property and the TRIPS agreement, it is going to be very embarrassing for northern governments. You have to hold out, because this was promised two years ago, but if you leave it too long you might lose the momentum.

Sometimes we are in danger in the wider civil society / NGO movement of not knowing when to do each of those strategies. We can get into campaigning for campaigning's sake and never do the deal, but we have to win sometimes, move on and fight the next battle, because these are all wedges in that bigger battle. If we give the impression that we are only interested in the next media headline or we are only interested in campaigning for campaigning's sake, then we lose credibility with the people whom we are trying to influence, because they think we are always going to be moving the goal posts and that they will never do anything that will satisfy us. We have to understand those dynamics.

The final point on campaign methodology is the 'Birmingham moment'. I think that it is about understanding the moment when the terms of the debate change – not when you get the policy victory, but when you have won the argument with decision-makers and opinion formers, and also won the public argument. That is the moment when you are most powerful in achieving change.

The question then is how you capture the benefit of that moment to achieve change. In Birmingham at the G8 all those years ago, Jubilee basically changed the terms of the debate on debt and from there on in, it has been about capturing the benefits. We have not captured the benefits as much as we wanted, but that moment was extraordinarily powerful in that suddenly no-one was talking about not doing debt relief and even the IMF had stopped laughing. The debate had become about how much, how far and how to do it. Understanding that is very important in campaigning and achieving change.

Those are some of the lessons that we have learnt from recent campaigns and it is a matter of applying those methodologies and strategies to how we develop and implement campaigns. One further point: the important way to build a coalition is not unilaterally to develop a campaign and then negotiate with partners and allies in the south to work with you on the implementation. The way that I think research and analysis comes in at the beginning is that by doing it together, you are determining the policy and determining the campaign, and that creates a solid foundation for a real coalition to achieve change. We are trying to do that at the moment on some of our campaigns and it takes a lot of time.

One of the campaigns we are developing as part of our work on trade is about women's labour. We are working with 12 southern organisations who are running national campaigns. We have been negotiating since January 2002 on everything from joint research, to the objectives of the campaign, to how it will be launched and which of the campaigns will be highlighted at the global level, and the campaign will not be launched until 2004. The downside is that this has taken two years of investment and a lot of transactional costs. The upside is that this is genuinely a joint campaign owned by these allies who feel that they have not just shaped the strategy, they have shaped the content, the objectives, the research and they have done or commissioned some of the research themselves, helped to write the report and have ownership of it from beginning to end.

Where the evidence and the research comes in is as an integral part of the campaign and it is not a thing you do before doing the campaign. Doing the research together is part of forming trust and relationships, as well as coming up with the evidence that will form the basis of the campaign.

An example of how this works in practice is the campaigning around access to medicine and patents. From an Oxfam point of view, we do original research, we have a research team and researchers who we work with all around the world, but not on the scale of the World Bank, ODI or DFID, and it is quite targeted. So for example, on the labour research, we have carried out a lot of interviews, and collected data and

analysis about supply chains in a number of different countries; we have used questionnaires and focus groups with women workers themselves; and we combine that with other research. We also do a lot of secondary research and we unapologetically steal everyone else's analyses and research.

That is what we did with the campaign on access to medicines: we stole a lot of research from everyone; we did some of our own in places like the Dominican Republic, Bangladesh and Pakistan; we commissioned papers and we put all of that together and produced reports. We also researched companies and that is where I come back to the idea of problems, solutions and villains. I know it is wrong, we should not demonise companies completely because they are also part of the solution, but it was important to put the spotlight on them and that type of research, which is not just about the issue but about how companies use their power, for example in Thailand companies had basically bribed and bullied the Thai government not to introduce a drug. We did research on both Glaxo and Pfizer which we then used to present to investors in Wall Street and the City, who then asked for meetings with these companies to talk through the research, saying that whether or not they believed Oxfam, what its research was saying was a risk to the company's profits and something needed to be done about it.

These are all strategies and tactics about how research is very important, both in forming the coalition and in convincing important people like investors, who can then exert an influence on the companies in terms of winning the argument on an issue like patents. Lastly, we also work with a lot of academics on areas such as patents, people like Professor Peter Drahos, who helped shape what we were doing and saying, and pointed us in the direction where we could identify other research.

So the ingredients for success, going back to my first points, were that this campaign was a very powerful wedge – it is about medicine, about HIV/AIDs. Then the drugs companies put Nelson Mandela in the dock, which was a really stupid thing to do and which made the campaign about patents and medicines huge, and we benefited from that. It was a wide alliance, a lot of southern groups in Thailand, Brazil, South Africa and also American groups, Médecins Sans Frontières, VSO and many others, and it had a corporate angle which made it very news worthy (with big companies like Garnier getting £22 million pay-offs). All of these things make it more campaignable, but at the heart of it was a solid case, that actually nobody has been able to dispute: that there is a connection between patents and access to medicines. It is not the only issue, which is also about basic health services, but making that case and winning the argument allowed all of the rest of it to happen.

Meeting 5: Think Tanks

Speakers: Tom Bentley – Executive Director, DEMOS

Simon Maxwell – Director, ODI

Mark Garnett – Visiting Fellow, University of Leicester

Chair: Larry Elliott – Economics Editor, The Guardian



Meeting Summary

Larry Elliott introduced the topic, think tanks, by asking a few questions: What role do they play in policy processes? Are they a force for good? Does it matter whether they are independent or not? What is the ideal balance between research and communication? How important is reputation?

Tom Bentley outlined the current status of DEMOS. Like most other think tanks, DEMOS is adapting to the changing policy environment. Their motto has been ‘the first political think tank for the twenty-first century’. Even in a changing environment, however, the fundamental questions about how political decisions are taken have not gone away.

DEMOS has gone through three stages of life. When it was formed in 1993 (at a time when public interest in politics was very low) it did a lot of work and established a high-profile very quickly. Then as the Labour government took shape, DEMOS addressed several new policy agendas. This gradually led to an existentialist crisis as the think tank found itself becoming embedded in one political project. For the last three years DEMOS has been reinventing itself in order to retain both its creativity and independence.

As New Labour has discovered, the gap between policy and practice is one of the most difficult to bridge. DEMOS has, in many ways, acted as an intellectual intermediary in the policy/practice sphere, introducing and working on new terms (e.g. ‘social entrepreneurship’ and ‘joined-up government’) as well as applied thinking. Many policy makers are not well equipped to build institutions, and DEMOS therefore works through partnerships to develop this capacity.

There is a growing realisation in many sectors that networks are a fundamental organisational form well-suited to the emerging policy environment. This is particularly true in sectors that have been transnationalised and work across borders.

So that leaves us with interesting questions of independence and originality. Think tanks such as DEMOS are becoming increasingly focused on engaging in wide-ranging conversations, both locally and internationally. DEMOS increasingly works in collaboration with a wide range of different partners. However, even where partners fund parts of the work, DEMOS retains its right to challenge them and to remain independent in its policy recommendations.

Simon Maxwell endorsed Tom Bentley’s point about the different roles of think tanks, and the need for them to engage. He reminded the audience of the ODI mission statement: ‘to inspire and inform policy and practice’. The Director of IPPR, Matthew Taylor, had made a similar point, describing the three functions of a think tank:

- The gas function – to change awareness and attitudes in the environment;
- The solid function – to communicate core ideas to inform policy;
- The liquid function – to facilitate the trickling-down of these ideas through government and partner institutions.

The problems facing think tanks with an international agenda are complex, however. All the decision-making processes they are involved in today have multiple actors and multiple poles or sites. They are far more complex than in the past. How can think tanks work together across national borders?

One way forward is through international networks, which are not new. Simon gave as an example the story of Anthony Fisher – founder of the Institute of Economic Affairs, and, later, founder of an international network of neo-liberal think tanks, the Atlas Foundation. The Global Development Network is a contemporary example, though of course less ideological and less tightly structured than Atlas.

Simon proposed there are different approaches to working together. From an earlier paper (‘Development Research in Europe: Towards an (All) Star Alliance’, *EADI Newsletter* 3, 2002), he outlined three possible models:

- The Microsoft model – essentially hegemonic;
- The McDonald’s model – a franchise operation where each store is locally owned but agree to sell the same product;
- The Airline Alliance model – where all airlines are independently owned and take their own decisions, but are able to cooperate effectively, even sharing seats on the same plane. Simon described this as a model of ‘policy code sharing’.

Is the Airline Alliance model a way forward for think tank collaboration? The idea of policy code sharing has many advantages – but would require

a high degree of trust. ODI are working with EADI to set up a network built on this principle, and dealing with European development issues, named the 'All-Star Alliance'. Hopefully this model will allow think tanks to retain their personality while working together.

There are still substantial challenges ahead. In particular, there is the challenge of funding think tank capacity in developing countries.

While infected by the enthusiasm of previous speakers for think tanks, **Mark Garnett** thought a few cautionary remarks were in order. He pointed out how indiscriminately the term 'think tank' is now used. But what should a think tank ideally be?

The first generation think tanks, like the Fabians, were ideologically-driven and contributed enormously to the development of the welfare state under the post-war Labour government. The second generation were less ideological – combining unbiased research with sound policy advice. The third generation, such as the IEA, were founded by idealists devoted to rolling back the welfare state under Thatcherism. The fourth, current, generation seem to be neither ideologically, nor research-driven, providing intellectual credibility to their sponsors, and focusing mainly on achieving a high media profile to attract funds.

Think tanks should not try to change policy for ideological reasons; this is the role of pressure groups. Rather, think tanks should work to improve the flow of information and independent research to policy makers.

There is a certain problem today of hollowed-out shells of think tanks who demand intellectual credibility without any substance to back this up. There are also a set of think tanks who seem to have the purpose of chasing media headlines.

In developing countries there are a distinct set of challenges for think tanks. At times they may be seen to operate as the extended arm of government, without much independence (for example, in China and Malaysia). In other contexts, the independent and informative role that think tanks could potentially play is not being played by them, but by NGOs. Many of the NGOs have relevant experience and knowledge, and are able to process this knowledge and inform other actors. Therefore, perhaps it is worth considering whether support should be channelled to these NGOs rather than to the so-called think tanks.

Comments from the floor included the following points:

- Think tanks are becoming speak tanks. There is a very strong link between the political sphere and the media. Therefore think tanks need to grab media attention. However, this does not mean that think tanks (in developing countries) are white elephants supported by

political funding. There are several examples of African think tanks doing high quality research on an independent basis.

- NGOs could not fulfil the same role as think tanks in developing countries, as they are not necessarily representative or open to various debates.
- There is a danger inherent in networks: the participants may end up merely talking to too many people who resemble themselves. Network participants should also allow for spaces where they can be challenged by people who think differently.
- Is it possible to work in virtual think tanks, for example, drawing international experts together into a virtual team over a period of time?
- Is there an emerging division of labour between intellectuals working with interesting ideas on the one hand, and disenchanted policy implementers on the other hand? If practitioners had more space to develop their own ideas, we might not need so many think tanks.
- To what extent can we actually influence policy through the media?
- From experience of working in NGOs, it is fairly clear that NGOs do not have the same capacity as think tanks to process ideas and publications.
- Funders exercise censorship over think tanks, not only through modifying publications, but also through playing a role in which topics can be researched in the first place.

Tom Bentley

Evidence and Think Tanks



Thanks to ODI for inviting me. This is a very broad question so I thought I would start by explaining a bit about what DEMOS is and how it works, and then use that to raise a number of questions which remain open about think tanks. These questions are being debated and, to some extent, decided in practice by the way that different organisations – not just those we traditionally think of as think tanks – are adapting to the changing policy environment, including its internationalisation.

DEMOS is 10 years old this year. It was founded with the humble aim of becoming ‘the first political think tank for the twenty-first century’. If you think back to 1993 and the domestic political climate in Britain, the dominant mood was one of stagnation: a Labour Party that could not work out how to win an election; a deeply divided and really fairly exhausted Conservative administration, and the beginning of a whole series of fears, anxieties and consciousness of wider change. This was the early stages of the debate about globalisation, what it was and what it might mean.

It is quite interesting to note that we are at a point in the political cycle where many of those questions about political disengagement, disillusionment and disappointment with mainstream politics have returned. While New Labour produced a big rush of energy and has changed quite a lot – both within the Labour Party and in Britain – the underlying questions about politics, power, decision-making and engagement of citizens in the way that decisions are taken, have not gone away.

DEMOS was founded in part on the propositions that firstly there were a series of long-term questions and transitions to be addressed, and secondly, that we could be optimistic about some of the opportunities created by those transitions. Whilst DEMOS does point to many long-term and in some ways low-level crises in our institutional life, it also actively looks for new disciplines, new perspectives and new ideas that might help to generate solutions, or, just as importantly, connect solutions and practices in one area of life or society to what is happening elsewhere.

Since it was founded, DEMOS has been through three stages in its life. The first was a start-up phase, a kind of think tank precursor of the dot.com bubble, in that it appeared very quickly and it rapidly generated a high profile public agenda by publishing a lot of eye-catching ideas and generating a lot of debate, and by putting itself on the map under the guidance of its founding director, Geoff Mulgan, and a number of other leading individuals who created a series of agendas. Then as the prospect of a Labour government took shape and Tony Blair was elected as leader of the Labour Party the year after

DEMOS was founded, it became increasingly entwined with the formation of a whole series of new policy agendas and a redrawing of the political landscape. I believe quite firmly that DEMOS’ success in becoming part of that redrawing also provoked its first existential crisis, because it is quite difficult for an organisation dedicated to long-term thinking, independence, creativity and lateral connections to be too deeply embedded in a single political project.

So the third stage of life, which we have been working on for the past three years or so, has been to develop and reshape (to some extent to reinvent) the organisation, without losing any of its core themes or commitments. The result is an organisation which aims – I leave you to judge for yourselves how far it succeeds – to be both independent and connected.

I do not think this is the only mode of think tank life or the only thing that a think tank can do, but DEMOS produces a particular kind of blend of long-term focus and a strong emphasis on conceptual thinking – identifying new perspectives, ideas and language – and then helping to give substance and add flesh to those conceptual agendas by connecting directly with both policy and practice elsewhere. I think it is crucial to understanding what we do and try to do: that we are interested in intellectual innovation and the generation of ideas, partly through the ongoing relationship between policy and practice. As New Labour has discovered, the relationship between policy and practice, and the problem of implementation, is probably the most difficult and intractable problem to solve. As some of the energy has drained away from its first few years, the challenges of making institutions which can fit better the contours of our wider environment and express collective desires and needs come out more and more starkly.

The way that DEMOS tries to work in this environment and generate answers in it, is to act as an intellectual intermediary. So DEMOS is associated with a whole series of ideas which, I think, have helped to shape the current political vocabulary: ideas like ‘social entrepreneurship’; ‘joined-up’ government; the creative cities agenda; possibilities of creative learning in schooling and the education system; and a whole series of other things.

Much of our work is very empirical, but this is not always the work which generates most attention in the media. As part of our range of activities, we do quite detailed primary research and interpretation of the results. We also work quite deliberately with organisations and institutions, including academic ones, who have particular areas of expertise that might be brought out into wider public debates.

I think perhaps the development most significant for our discussion today is that we have gradually developed a practice in what you might call ‘applied thinking’, which involves direct collaboration with partner organisations who are both our funders and our collaborators. I deliberately do not call it consultancy because it involves taking quite concrete and manifest organisational problems and looking at the potential for using broader, more abstract analysis or ideas generated elsewhere to help focus and develop organisational strategies and ways of learning in these specific settings. Examples include a partnership with the National College for School Leadership, a fairly big, new and high-profile New Labour institution which is charged with generating leadership capacity in the school system. It has set itself up from scratch over the last three years and is looking for ways to disburse its money and to have the right kind of impact on the system.

Putting the right knowledge in the right places and working out how to build institutions is actually a problem for which many policy makers are not prepared or equipped. So an approach to think tanking which includes working out how to learn as you go along and how to transfer knowledge and ideas from one setting to another, including understanding the conditions under which certain kinds of innovation can flourish, is crucially important.

We also do this in local communities. We are working with the North Southwark Education Action Zone at the moment, looking at ways in which their collaborative networking between schools can be linked more strongly with their community development agenda, and with the way that they try to engage both businesses and institutions in raising educational attainment overall. We have just finished writing a ‘social enterprise strategy’ in Hackney, which looks at the potential for networking the social entrepreneurs with the social businesses in ways which might help to produce critical mass and sustainability for that tier of economic activity.

We also do this kind of work with other voluntary organisations, sometimes with Trades Unions and occasionally with firms, although we apply a fairly clear public interest test to our work where companies are concerned, and we always ask ourselves whether or not the ideas and agendas that we are working on could be broadly described as contributing to the public benefit in the long-run. That is the source of a lot of DEMOS’ expertise and, I think, also of its credibility – although it is not necessarily the kind of credibility which will find its way into mainstream media coverage, or the way that politicians and policy makers in central government will understand it.

Its significance in the new policy environment is really about the long-term importance of policy networks to the degree of ‘informedness’ with

which policy decisions by various institutions are taken in real time, and also the transparency and legitimacy of the way in which those institutions are formed.

Five or 10 years ago, words such as intermediary and networker tended to be associated with less than legitimate activities, particularly with lobbyists, corporate communications and other forms of ‘shadowy influence’. One of the things that is happening is that more people in more sectors are beginning to realise that networks are a fairly fundamental organisational form and means of communication in every sphere of life, and the fact that an idea is communicated by a network is not a test of the credibility or legitimacy of the idea. The question is how we sort out the right questions to be asking under those conditions. It is true, particularly in areas of policy that have been increasingly transnationalised, that organising through networks is more or less the only way to create coherent agendas that have a chance of affecting large-scale institutional decision-making. (This is particularly true of the way that policy debate is conducted around Brussels.)

So where does that leave us? I think there is an interesting question about independence and originality. The conventional model of the think tank is a fairly obvious stereotype of a small group of usually very clever and certainly very ‘worldly’ people working in a very constrained environment and developing ideas that they somehow manage to push through to other people who are making ‘real world’ decisions. I think it is less and less like that. My experience of being a think tank director is increasingly about debating and developing conversations, about forms of interactive communication and the ways in which that can build critical mass for certain ideas. DEMOS is doing this both in the local settings that I was talking about, and more and more internationally.

For example, we have just launched DEMOS Athens with a partner in Greece, which seemed like the appropriate place to go; we have just published a big study on migration policy and strategies for Europe which arises from a collaboration with Dutch policy makers and which I hope will lead to more international partnership work; we are working with partners in Scandinavia and so on. But rather than simply trying to replicate the organisational model that we have based in London, we are doing it by building a series of collaborative relationships which are distinctive in themselves, are appropriate to their local context and which, we hope, over time will take the form of a network itself, and add to an overall conversation and exchange of ideas which goes far beyond the core set of activities under our direction in London.

How those kinds of network-based exchanges fit in with the structure of government, or of the established media, and how they get funded and

financed are open questions. The way in which we try to protect our independence is not to look for unrestricted core funding because there is very little of this around (and I find it sometimes has quite significant strings attached anyway), but rather to apply a golden editorial rule to what we produce, which is that however much money or other resources a partner might be contributing, they get no formal control over what we decide or over what we decide to publish. That quite often results in negotiated conflicts with our funders. We have just had an example of this where, having finished a big study on workforce development in the museums, galleries and libraries sector, we published a pamphlet by someone else attacking the whole policy edifice and strategy for libraries, which resulted in fairly intense local controversy. I see that kind of intellectual challenge as fundamental to sustaining the role that DEMOS has marked out for itself.

The other route to independence is to operate transparently as this intermediary hovering between sectors, and to try to diversify our funding and revenue sources sufficiently that we do not depend in any way on any one sector or institution. Although the transaction costs in doing that may be quite high (it means you have to manage a lot of relationships and understand a lot of sectors), it fits very well in the long-run with our mission to learn from anywhere and everywhere.



Simon Maxwell

Policy Code Sharing

Whenever I think about what we do at ODI, I think about people like Tom Bentley at DEMOS, because of the verve that they bring to this whole enterprise of trying to change policy and practice – that is what our mission statement says: we want to ‘inspire and inform policy and practice’ which change the world. A number of the things which you talked about are really relevant, such as the intermediation and the combining of the theory with the applied.

Matthew Taylor, who runs the Institute of Public Policy Research, once described think tanks as having a three-fold function: a liquid function, a solid function and a gaseous function. The gaseous function is not just hot air, it is about changing the way people think about an issue, changing the zeitgeist. The solid function is about changing the core, concrete ideas that inform a shift in policy. The liquid is trickling down between the interstices of government, working with partners and the private sector to try to make those things happen. Of course, there is also an interaction or iteration between the solid, liquid and gaseous functions.

However, and although we are in the same business, I do think that at one level DEMOS has it easy. I wanted to start with Edward Heath and the question (not just a *Daily Mail* question) of ‘who governs Britain?’ We know that if you ask that question you lose the election, but the fact is that most of the decisions that we (at ODI) work on are decisions taken by lots of different actors. Debt relief, for example, does not happen because Gordon Brown or Clare Short want it. It happens because they can produce a consensus in the G8 and then sell that to the interim committee of the Fund. Trade liberalisation happens not because President Chirac makes a particular proposal for the G8, but because somehow it gets carried through the European Union and the World Trade Organisation.

All the decisions that we are involved in are multi-actor, multi-polar decisions, so the policy process which we are trying to influence is as much in Zimbabwe or Zambia as it is in London. That is an enormously complicated exercise for us.

So how do we do it? One model I carry in my head draws on the experience of Anthony Fisher. Fisher was a British Royal Air Force pilot in the Second World War who, after the war, went to the United States and saw the first broiler-house chickens. At the time, they did not have these in Britain. He came back and founded Buxted chickens, made a fortune and decided to invest his money in promulgating the ideas of his hero, Hayek. He founded the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), which went on to become a leading driver of the neo-liberal revolution that found its apotheosis around the time of Margaret Thatcher.

There were other think tanks involved, such as the Centre for Policy Studies. There is a book about this experience of the neo-liberal revolution in Britain, which describes the way in which a dozen people changed the face of Britain, through dining clubs, pamphlets, parliamentary debates, key links into ministries, working on the next manifesto – the kinds of things that DEMOS has always done very well.

But Anthony Fisher was not satisfied with just doing it in the UK, he had global ambitions. So he founded the Atlas Foundation, which still exists. Its mission is to set up like-minded think tanks around the world which will promulgate free-market ideas. They are quite unabashed about it. Lots of think tanks are very unabashed about their political leanings, but what is particularly interesting about Atlas is this focus on the internationalisation of ideas and policy processes. Of course, we think we have discovered globalisation, but it is not new: the IEA was founded in 1957.

That, then, is the challenge: how do we internationalise the policy processes? Tom Bentley focused on networks, which is absolutely the right topic. There are, needless to say, hundreds of think tanks around the world. We are involved in the European Association of Development Institutes, which has over 150 institutional members around Europe (including not just the EU but accession countries and others). Most of the members are small, some are political, many of them are universities and most have an academic bent. But the network is there and the question is how we use it.

I have been thinking about this problem, and there seem to be three kinds of approach to using networks. The first is the Microsoft model. It is hegemonic: you switch on your computer anywhere in the world and you are using software produced by one company based in Seattle. So we could, as DEMOS seems to be doing, set up a network of think tanks, all branded ODI. They would all be exactly the same and our empire would extend from coast to coast, but that would be a very bad model for us because that kind of hegemonic, dominating, monopolist of ideas is probably a bad idea intellectually, but also all of these places have histories, there is a path dependency and there is no way that we could take over think tanks around the world and nor should we.

The second model I call the McDonald’s model. It looks a bit like Microsoft but actually it is largely a franchise operation. Most McDonald’s outlets are owned by local people, so there is strong local ownership, but the fact is that every time you walk through the door you get the same hamburger – whether an Indian or a Swedish version, it is

basically the same product. Aside from problems of fat, sugar and salt, there is a homogenisation issue which is also rather inappropriate to the kind of intellectual debate that we want to foment. Although, as I will come back to in a moment, it is not an entirely hopeless model.

Looking around for ideas, the third model I came to was the Airline Alliance model. What is interesting about airline alliances is that all the airlines are independently owned, they make their own decisions about aircrafts, routes, maintenance schedules, uniforms, food, charging and so on, but they work together in some kind of loose alliance, so that when you put your baggage on a plane in Ljubljana and transfer planes, (you hope) it will end up in Heathrow when you arrive with a different airline. The highest form of that alliance is code sharing, where you get on a plane to Brussels and it is British Airways/Sabena switching backwards and forwards – one plane but two different airlines.

So I have been working on the idea of ‘policy code sharing’ and how we might use this idea of the Airline Alliance to work with partners in our networks around the world on the same topics and, with luck, producing the same kinds of results. So it is not McDonald’s, it looks a bit like homogenisation but we try to retain independence, and explicitly try to improve the degree of coordination. We know from the airlines that it is a difficult job to pull off because you need to cross-guarantee quality and standards across very different companies, and you need a high degree of trust to make policy code sharing work.

We have some examples of incipient networks. The Global Development Network which we have talked about in this meeting series is an institution with which we are very much involved within ODI. This is not yet policy code sharing and is a rather loose structure of academics and intellectuals around the world. However, its annual conferences involve people from 70 or 80 countries.

We are trying something different on what we think is a very important emerging agenda, on the future of European development cooperation. I will not go into the details of what we are trying to do now, except to say that there is a whole series of decisions about to take place on Europe – the Convention is the least of it. The accession of new members will take place in 2004. There are elections to take place next year which will mean the reconfiguration of the Commission; there are the trade talks in Mexico this autumn; there is a renegotiation of the European budget, beginning next year; there is a midterm review of the European development fund – a whole series of things. We need to take that agenda and work on it not just as one country but as 25 countries who, by next year, will be the members of the European Union.

So what we are trying to do is create something that looks like an Airline Alliance model. We are calling it the ‘All-Star Alliance’, and setting it up through the European Association of Development Institutes. We are trying to put policy code sharing into practice. The project takes the form of a background paper prepared jointly by us and our partners in the Netherlands, the European Centre for Development Policy Management, a shared website hosted by EUFORIC, and what we hope will be a series of parallel meetings taking place in as many as 15 countries around Europe over the next six to nine months. We are starting our own series in June and we have already signed up the Secretary of State, Chris Patten, Glenys Kinnock, Baroness Symons, Sally Keeble from DFID and a range of other people, with civil society counterparts, to try to debate all these issues about enlargement and the EDF and so on. We will post our findings on the website, hope that others will do the same and will, just as Tom Bentley says, be creating and developing a conversation around Europe using the ‘All-Star Alliance’ model.

We are not quite as single-minded as Anthony Fisher and we are certainly not as committed to a free-market ideology, but we do think that the Atlas model is one that we ought to be looking at: a way of building a network of think tanks that will retain their personality but work together. This is a huge challenge – not least for us working in developing countries – because it is so difficult both to find capacity in developing countries and to fund it. Funding ODI equivalents (not ODI names but equivalents) is one of the most urgent tasks we face if we are to fulfil our mission and theirs, which is to inspire and inform policy change.



Mark Garnett

Does the Developing World Need Think Tanks?

It was lovely to hear two people with such enthusiasm for the work of think tanks. Their enthusiasm was so infectious I feel duty-bound to throw a bucket of cold water over it and sound even more cynical about think tanks than I really am. It goes without saying that these remarks have nothing to do with Tom Bentley's or Simon Maxwell's work. I just want to utter a few, perhaps cautionary, remarks about think tanks. The term has very strong positive connotations. It implies objective, evidence-based research and a group of people dedicated to improving government policy because they themselves are impressed by the evidence which they research. The history of think tanks in Britain suggests that the term is now being banded about rather indiscriminately.

It is possible to identify four waves of think tanks in Britain. The first was the Fabians at the end of the nineteenth century: a group of ideologically committed people who were also very much committed to evidence-based research. In the 1930s there was a wave of think tanks in political and economic planning, such as the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, who were less ideological than the Fabians and more committed to evidence-based research. These think tanks conform, as far as I think it is possible, to the ideal model: one which is not driven by a desire to change the world for ideological reasons, but by a desire to improve the flow of information to governments and provide independent sources of information. The 1930s were in my view a heyday for think tanks.

In the post-war period, the Institute for Economic Affairs heralded a wave of unashamedly ideological think tanks who harped back to the days of the Fabians and wanted to do Fabianism in reverse, to roll back the state which the Fabians had helped to roll forward. These were the first group to bring the whole term into question and discredit because they were not doing independent research. They had their minds made up before they started doing any research whatsoever and their conclusions were written for them as extreme free-market economic liberals. These are pressure groups, not think tanks.

One of the particularly dangerous things about this wave of think tanks is that they were effective at attracting funds. Small businessmen who became bigger businessmen loved the IEA, CPS and the plethora of alphabet soup think tanks we have now. The Social Market Foundation for example, what is that? As it is seen as a think tank, people think it has intellectual credibility, so to have their name behind your speaking head as a government minister is supposed to add intellectual credibility. These are hollowed out shells of think tanks and you can see why this happens: think tanks thrive on media headlines and publicity as it is how they get their funding.

That third wave heralded the fourth, which is where we are now: a wave of post-modern think tanks which no longer have the ideological thrust of the third wave because ideology is dead, we are all economic liberals now. (In fact this shows that ideology is not dead, it is just that none of us have the nous to think in an independent way.) The fourth wave is entirely devoted to headline chasing, meaning that long-term research is at a premium – you cannot do it, you have to get the headlines. This is what Tom Bentley was talking about in the early days of DEMOS. They were brilliant at getting headlines but it was not clear that the very skilful, enthusiastic, young people involved in DEMOS had a lot of experience at running anything. They were just very good writers and publicity chasers. It seems that DEMOS now has a vision of being like the second wave of think tanks and it may well not be a coincidence that I have not heard very much from DEMOS recently, but actually a good thing reflecting the fact that it now has a proper ethos as an organisation which merits the term think tank.

There are lots of good reasons for saying think tanks no longer fulfil the definition of a think tank which gives intellectual credibility and carries the positive connotations. I do not think that the best known think tanks fulfil this role anymore and this means that a development which could have been a great blessing to people – not only to governments who would get better information from independent sources, but also to the public who would benefit from the pluralism of competing sources of information produced by independent groups – has not done so. Neither of those things can be said to be happening any more in Britain.

In terms of the developing world, think tanks in countries less economically blessed than the United States and Britain are really bodies of lackeys, given state funding by politicians who want to get intellectual credibility. This is certainly the case in a recently developed country such as Malaysia and in places where there is not such a democratic or pluralistic ethos.

My personal view is that the most positive role think tanks could play in developing countries is already being played by NGOs across the board. Charities who have the expertise to actually make life better for people in those particular countries seem to obviate the need for developing a think tank world in these countries. We should draw on the existing expertise of people and I cannot see that their job could be done better by organisations called think tanks. The dividing line between pressure groups and think tanks is already very difficult to identify and the job of helping developing countries should go to the people with the practical knowledge derived from working on the ground.

Meeting 6: Putting Knowledge into Practice

Speakers: Bonnie Cheuk – Director, Knowledge Management, The British Council

John Borton – ALNAP Learning Support Office, ODI

Chair: John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID, and Research Fellow, ODI



Meeting Summary

John Young introduced the meeting, pointing out that knowledge and learning are at the core of evidence-based policy making, and raising the questions: How is information converted into knowledge, and when is knowledge influential? How do organisations use knowledge, and are they able to learn from past experiences?

Bonnie Cheuk presented the different ways in which the British Council is trying to promote internal knowledge sharing. The mission of the British Council is to promote understanding abroad of the United Kingdom's values, ideas and achievements. The Council works in 109 countries and deals with hundreds of enquiries every day. With staff spread out across the globe, it is vital for them to be able to access information quickly and easily. Bonnie suggested that in this context, Knowledge Management (KM) is about 'connecting employees with the right information or the right person at the right time'.

In December 2002 three existing divisions in the Council (with responsibilities for the intranet, global databases, and records management) were grouped together to form the KM Team, headed by Bonnie. She spent the previous five months conducting a knowledge audit of the organisation, and found many encouraging trends. For example, there are over 100 Communities of Practice (CoPs) already set up. However, there are also many challenges. Just one example of this is the fact that many intranet sites are outdated, and staff contact information is missing.

The British Council is developing a KM strategy which includes elements such as a content improvement project, institutionalising a knowledge sharing network, continuing to build and nurture CoPs, improved technologies, and new ways of monitoring and evaluating the benefits of knowledge sharing.

A few visible results of the KM strategy have already appeared. The Development Services Team of the Council needed ready access to specific information, such as consultant CVs and lists of partners. These have now been placed on a specific intranet page and are easily accessible to all employees worldwide. A similar support and resources page has been set up for other groups, including the Justice Information Network.

Achievements so far include improved access to key contacts, two dedicated knowledge management staff; raised awareness of KM, including in the business plan; strengthened CoPs;

and revamped intranet pages. There are still many challenges ahead. How can the KM Team ensure that new content comes onto the intranet and old content is taken off? How can they encourage staff to contribute and see the benefits of KM?

Bonnie concluded with a model of their KM framework and some key elements of their strategy to build a knowledge sharing culture.

John Borton presented the results of the Learning Support Office (LSO) Test in Malawi, run by ALNAP (The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, hosted by ODI). The ALNAP concepts of KM and learning in the humanitarian sector. The LSO concept had originated in 1999 and had been market tested in Orissa, East Timor and Sierra Leone, but it still needed to be operationalised. It was decided that the concept would be tested out in a six month trial project, a Learning Support Office in Malawi.

The LSO was set up at the end of August 2002 (and ran until the end of March 2003) to support learning by and between organisations, teams and individuals involved in the ongoing humanitarian operation. The office was staffed by around 10 people, half of whom were locally recruited.

The LSO activities covered three broad areas: 'learning in'; 'lateral learning'; and 'learning out'. Learning in (learning from previous operations) activities included: (i) setting up a resource centre with a thousand documents, both general and Malawi-specific. Documents were delivered to relief workers as and when they needed them; (ii) literature reviews and analysis were carried out, e.g. on HIV/AIDS and food security; (iii) a lot of 'oiling' had to be done, i.e. participating in meetings and inputting/transferring knowledge.

Lateral learning (learning between organisations during the operation) was the most successful part of the LSO's activities. A manual for relief workers in Malawi was developed and tested through a workshop–manual–training cycle. LSO arranged three workshops for 70 field officers, developed a manual from the information gathered at the workshop, which then formed the basis for training over 250 other relief workers.

The learning out (retaining knowledge for use in later operations) phase was rather brief and included archiving and handing over the resource centre, as well as sharing lessons with C-SAFE.



A collective lessons learning workshop had been envisaged, but the agency personnel did not have the space to start such a process due to programme implementation pressures.

Provisional lessons from the LSO concept include most importantly, that a LSO can add value in an ongoing operation. However, the office must be set up early to be present during the planning stage. Other lessons are to bring key items of equipment with you rather than relying on local suppliers; take more care in staff recruitment; and ensure more explicit support from agency HQs.

Lessons for learning and KM include that there is a lack of readily accessible documents in both hard copy and electronically (CD-ROMs would be useful). However, in an emergency situation it is not enough to make existing information available; information has to be condensed and individually tailored to the needs of busy relief workers. There was some defensive behaviour, especially from the larger agencies, and this must be taken into account when setting up a LSO.

In conclusion, there is a definite need for an independent and respected learning office that can distribute information, provide advice, facilitate connections, and host meetings and evaluations.

Comments and questions from the audience included the following:

- Good knowledge systems are expensive and time-consuming. Learning systems are not new. Rockefeller was doing this sort of thing systematically over 20 years ago. Senge's book *The 5th Discipline* (written over a decade ago) covers much of this ground and it was surprising that the humanitarian sector was still in the early stages of implementing such thinking. Donors are often unwilling to provide the resources to maintain good learning systems over the long term.
- Is the British Council KM strategy only concerned with internal knowledge? Bonnie responded no, and that this is only one part of the picture. We also want to capture externally generated knowledge that is useful to our work.
- Could the LSO activities have been undertaken by existing institutions in Malawi rather than setting up a new and temporary office? John responded that in Lilongwe it was most expedient to set up a new office, as the university is three hours away and the library did not have many documents on relief operations. But in other countries the situation may be different and then it would be advantageous to align with existing institutions.
- Does the British Council encourage individuals to communicate directly as well, rather than relying mostly on technology to carry the KM process forward? Bonnie confirmed that they try to do both.

- What would the implications of the LSO lessons be for researchers who write big reports? Will anyone ever have time to read them? Should we be doing something different? John replied that busy relief workers need very practically oriented knowledge and many products of research are not of direct or immediate use to them. The humanitarian sector desperately needs an easily searchable library of useful materials: they exist, it's just that they need pulling together and being made readily available in ongoing operations in appropriate formats.

Bonnie Cheuk



How Does the British Council Learn and Manage its Knowledge?

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to meet up with so many of you here. I am new to the British Council and new to this country. To give you a brief background of myself, I moved from Arthur Anderson in San Francisco to London six months ago and joined the British Council on the 2nd December 2002 in charge of knowledge management. My past experience is in implementing knowledge management for Arthur Anderson as well as for external clients.

Today I am going to share with you some of the work that we have done in managing knowledge within the Council and some of our plans for moving forward, and I will share the good news as well as the bad news.

Before we get into the question of how we share knowledge, I will introduce briefly what the British Council does. Our purpose is to win recognition abroad for the United Kingdom's values, ideas and achievements, and to nurture lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with other countries. We are actually selling the UK's ideas to other countries. The British Council was founded in 1934 and is registered as a charitable organisation, with 7,500 employees world-wide, of which 1,500 are based in the UK, mainly in London and Manchester.

How many of you are familiar with what the British Council does? Most of you – good, then I can go through this very briefly! We conduct examinations, manage library and information centres, provide vocational projects and exchange programmes and have a development service team which works with our partners on development projects. We also organise arts events, science events and a range of other activities in 109 countries.

We started to ask ourselves, being such a large organisation, what was going on with knowledge sharing within the Council. I have some examples to share with you to explain why we think knowledge management is such a crucial issue for the Council and why our senior management team felt that we needed to get someone in place to make sure that it was going to happen.

Here are some examples. At 10am a director in San Paulo is planning an animation project and wants to find out which other offices have run similar initiatives and what has worked and what has failed. Meanwhile in Bangkok at the same time, 5pm, the communications manager wants to access some market research to find out what has been done, who he can consult and what the best practices are. At 9am in Brussels a business developer needs to compile a development proposal to be sent out to a tight deadline. He needs to include the CVs of experienced consultants who can be used on the project and

he wants to find out what experience we have in the area in economic development. Two hours later, someone in London learns that a Member of Parliament is going to visit Morocco at the end of the week and needs a briefing, so she needs to find out more about the MP and quickly to get hold of a country brief and more detailed information about the country.

These are real cases of things happening in the Council every day. Is it easy for us to get answers to all of these questions? That is my question to the senior management and also to the staff. If not, there is a problem.

Knowledge management is about connecting employees with the right information, or the right person, at the right time, so that they can learn faster, work better and ultimately achieve the Council's objectives.

The challenge is how do we make that happen? The senior management realised that this was an issue for the Council and wanted to do something about it. So beginning in December 2002, three divisions within the Council, (covering internet services, global databases, building and nurturing communities of practice, reports management, data standards, data protection and freedom of information) were grouped together under 'Knowledge Management'. These are really the building blocks for making information available and making sure that people use it and contribute to it, using the internet as the portal through which people can participate. Of course we will not forget our face-to-face tradition within the Council, but we believe these are all enablers to that.

When I first started, I needed to find out what was going on within the Council in terms of knowledge sharing, so over the first few months I conducted a knowledge audit, visiting a number of countries and talking to numerous colleagues in London and Manchester. I found out that we did have some good examples: we have over 100 networking communities which had already been set up, we have many collaborative tools which are already in place, some of which we have purchased and some of which we have built ourselves, including our intranet which has received double the number of hits, up from two million to five million in the past year. We have a number of knowledge databases, discussion forums, mailing lists, internet chat, web-logging and are looking at new technologies every day to see what we can use to help people to collaborate and learn from one another.

But I also found that we had a number of bad examples. The intranet is there but if you look beyond the main page, many of the intranet sites have become outdated; many of the discussion

forums lack participation; the experience-gains from face-to-face meetings like this one are not well captured – it is good for the people who have the chance to attend a meeting, but is it shared to a wider audience? This has not happened that often. Employees complain that they do not have time to share and that the organisational structure does not really support effective knowledge sharing. Some of the really critical information sharing – basic information which people need to do their work – is missing or incomplete. For example, staff contact information: I want to find out someone's contact details in Brazil and I notice that in the staff directory there are only five numbers under the telephone field, so there is something wrong with the data standard or issues. Other examples include things like a lack of data on past projects that we have managed. These are the kinds of issues which came out from the knowledge audit.

So we realised that we needed to improve in all of these areas and we are tasked to do that. In the past few months we have done a lot of consultation and brainstorming and come up with a 'grand plan' of how we want to move things forward. These are some of the highlights.

First, we believe that it is really important to improve the quality of content. We need to institutionalise a knowledge sharing network and we want people to be dedicated to helping to facilitate knowledge sharing – capture, organisation and dissemination of content. We need to raise awareness of knowledge management. Although some senior management think that it is really critical, there are a lot of middle-management and people doing work in the field who may not buy into it immediately because it is something that they are being asked to do on top of their daily work. So that area will take a lot of work. We will continue to build and nurture communities of practice. We want people to group together if they share similar interests and to support them if they want to collaborate on a global basis, not just within their office.

We will continue to improve the technologies to reduce barriers to sharing knowledge. For example if you ask people to share knowledge using the intranet, not everyone will have the html skills to contribute, so we are looking at content management systems and whether we can ask people to write things in MSWord and then save it as a web page. There are a lot of technologies that we are considering and of course we also need to improve the retrieval of the content, so we are investing in a new search engine and looking at an electronic records management system, which we hope to roll out early next year.

On top of that we need to make sure that we set corporate standards and have a corporate taxonomy, so that we know where to go to get information and how to retrieve it from the system. We also need to measure the benefits and effectiveness of knowledge sharing, which

we have not yet done effectively. We always say that it is important, but how do we convince people that this is something that is worth a certain amount of investment?

This is all part of our 'grand plan' and I call it that because it is impossible for us to do all of this, addressing all of the divisions and all of the communities, at the same time. We need to prioritise. We have started to identify a number of communities which say that they have an urgent need to collaborate, to share knowledge and to work closely with one another on a global basis.

One other example which I will share with you is what our development services team has done in the past three to four months. They are one of the groups who came to us and said that they needed to share their knowledge better. Although they were doing great work, they had not been sharing effectively on a global basis.

The development services team support our partners' objectives in a number of areas: economic development, education, governance, health, training management, etc. They started with the question of what was the knowledge that they wanted to share and to manage. They did a series of user studies to talk to people who need information to help them to do their work and they came up with a wish list which included quick access to consultants' CVs and a searchable database to look through these. Other examples of things they need include past project experience, case studies, information about what is in the pipeline, and who the experts and the potential partners are for a particular project.

The intranet of the development services team shows some of the resources they have built to support people in development services work, including the consultants' database and information about how to produce proposals and other documents for clients and customers, and how to access other information and key documents which they have found useful or key to getting their work done. This is still being worked on and is not complete.

There is also a network of people interested in similar areas who are grouped together under various interests. The justice information network, for example, provides detailed summaries of projects, the methodologies used, what has been done, best practice and lessons learnt, etc. They have also included a section showing what is in the pipeline so that people know what is coming up in this area, and client and partner information. This functions as a one-stop-shop for the information that people need in order to do their work and ultimately to achieve the Council's objectives.

So in summary, the work that has been done over the past few months includes: improving access to key content; assigning two knowledge

managers to be in charge of capturing, organising and disseminating knowledge (including managing the intranet, conducting and facilitating face-to-face meetings, producing internal and e-newsletters to inform people in the network about these resources); raising awareness of knowledge management through including the knowledge sharing agenda in the business plan, so that people know that this is the high-level direction that the whole development service team want to go in; setting up quarterly face-to-face meetings to get feedback from staff; building and nurturing communities of practice (including identifying existing communities and how to revitalise their work); revamping the intranet site with more content, better navigation and design; and planning the development of databases to manage contracts and consultants' CVs. This is all the hard work which has been done to date.

The challenge ahead includes questions of how we ensure that the new content will come – setting up the site is one thing but keeping new content coming in and deciding how old content will be taken out, who will be in charge of keeping the site up-to-date and how people will find the time to share their knowledge, participate in discussions and encourage greater use of the intranet – involves getting people to be more aware of the resources available and to use them. Ultimately the most important question is how we prove the benefits of knowledge management.

I will give one short case study from our communities. The challenge is how to build some really successful communities and to show the benefit, then to multiply it to all the communities in a five year time range. That is a challenge!

We use a framework within the Council to identify key areas that we want to look at to make knowledge sharing happen within a community or within the Council as a whole. We understand that we need to get leadership support and incorporate knowledge management into the corporate and business strategy. We need to assign people to knowledge management, as the development services department has done, and to get that structure right for the British Council. We need to invest in technology because it can make it easier for people to contribute and retrieve information, and reduce the barriers to doing so by making it simpler and easier to access. This is an area that we really want to improve on.

I have talked about how important effectiveness is and, at the core of it, we believe that it is vital to ask people what the information is that they need in order to do their work. We have started to look at each individual community and ask them to come up with a list of critical information which they need in order to get their work done. Once this is decided you can come up with what we call the 'content management process', where you can start identifying where to get

this information, who is in charge and how it is or should be organised and shared. This is the knowledge management framework which we will be using and which we have used to move knowledge management forward.

A lot of people say that it is nice if everyone wants to share knowledge but they do not see this happening in their organisations and the question is how to make it happen. The tips and tricks that we have come up with include inviting people to contribute to a monthly newsletter, encouraging people to give out mysterious gifts or some recognition to contributors, announcing top contributors in business meetings, just to showcase that this is something important to the Council and to excite people a bit more, and also to make knowledge sharing part of the work process. The development services' methodology includes a proper debrief at the end of each project, and a system to store and feed documents into the intranet so others can also learn from the project. These systems have to be in place or it will not happen.

We are looking at management issues such as how to include knowledge sharing as a staff appraisal criteria. There are people within the Council who are already doing this kind of work, communications and information managers, who need to send out frequent reminders to build relationships with different people, we have not created new knowledge manager posts. Educating new staff and teaching them how to use all the knowledge management tools is very important, but it has often been neglected in the past, so we are looking at including the knowledge sharing programme into the corporate induction programme. Also important is continuing to build good relationships with users and content experts so that they will contribute, and showing the benefits by sharing success stories and liaising with people in the different communities to understand the benefits of knowledge sharing to the business.



John Borton

Encouraging and Facilitating Learning in a Relief Operation

Thank you for the opportunity to present the results of the test of the Learning Support Office (LSO) concept in Malawi. Whereas the previous presentation was about knowledge sharing, this is more about learning, and concerns one sector of practice and action during a relief operation that has only just wound down in Malawi. For those of you that do not know ALNAP, it is the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in humanitarian action. The Secretariat is based here in ODI. It was formed in 1997 and has most of the main actors within the humanitarian sector within it: all the main United Nations agencies, donors, non-governmental organisations, Red Cross and so on.

ALNAP seriously began to engage with knowledge management and learning when it was preparing for the Annual Review in 2002. This represented the first sector-wide assessment of knowledge management and learning in the humanitarian sector, but some discussion had been going on amongst ALNAP members before that about supporting learning in an ongoing operation. There was a sense within ALNAP that the Network was a great talk shop but needed to be made relevant to people in the field, to relief workers in ongoing operations.

This concept was born during discussions in 1999 during the Kosovo operations and then was in effect market-tested and developed through retrospective interviews with those involved in operations in Orissa and then in East Timor and then Sierra Leone. In early 2002, it was decided to form an interest group to run a test of the concept in an operation to see how it worked, so this was very much a trial and pilot project of a concept. There were lots of questions about whether it would work and how it would get on with the agencies and so on. In July 2002 Malawi was selected to run the test from a list of 15 countries and at that point Malawi was seen to be the worst affected of the countries in southern Africa (six countries had begun to set up big relief emergency and food security relief operations).

The concept is of an independent capacity, dedicated to supporting learning by and between organisations, teams and individuals in an ongoing relief operation, and having a positive impact on performance in that operation, not just subsequent operations.

What we took out of the knowledge management and learning literature – to simplify the rather off-putting jargon that we found in the literature – was three types or directions of learning: ‘lateral learning’ within an operation (which is pretty synonymous I think with action learning); ‘learning in’ from previous operations; and ‘learning out’, which was capturing lessons for use in subsequent operations elsewhere.

We rented an office which I think had been vacated by DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency) a few months before. The set-up team arrived at the end of August 2002 and we ran the project through until the end of March 2003. Originally we thought we were going to be hosted by one of the ALNAP member agencies, but the ALNAP member agencies with offices in the country were all so busy gearing up for the operation that they could not bear the thought of having to handle yet another project, even if we were not going to be placing many demands on them. So the first few weeks were spent identifying a host, because without one you do not have a legal cover to operate in a country, you do not have a business stamp even to contract mobile phones – all sorts of constraints. Fortunately the Malawi Red Cross saved us and there was a nice compatibility between the Malawi Red Cross’s agenda in the relief operation and our own.

In terms of team composition, there were a total of six internationally recruited personnel and five locally recruited personnel. The first two international staff left after about three months, so for most of the time there was a team of nine people. Running in parallel to the project was a real-time evaluation being carried out by a Swiss consultant, to draw out the lessons and to see how the operation looked at different stages and so on. Dealing with those three different types of learning, I will try to give you an idea of the activities.

Firstly learning in from previous operations. We had a very nice resource centre of some 900 documents which were flown out from London to Malawi, including guidelines, handbooks, evaluations from previous operations in southern Africa and so on – a generic humanitarian collection we called it – and then during the course of the operation, we built up the Malawi-specific collection. We used PonyExpress, run by Securicor, to take documents to field workers in various parts of the country. We also undertook literature reviews and analysis. One particular example was a paper on HIV/AIDS and food security which a Malawian colleague prepared and which was very well received locally.

Then we have this term ‘oiling’. This was not in the original terms of reference for the project but we found that it was what we were doing a lot. It involved participating in meetings, of which there were far too many. There was a sophisticated coordination structure but what it did was simply spawn more and more sub-committees and working groups, and none of the agencies had enough personnel to go to all of these meetings, so they had to choose which of the three meetings being held in one morning to attend. Often we would go to many more meetings than

the agencies, so we were actually playing a role of moving information around the operation and also of being present in meetings and inputting that knowledge from the resource centre – not that I have all 900 documents in my head, but at least I know that there is a big literature on that and can say, ‘if you give me until the end of the week, I can come back to you with a summary of the main points from that literature’. That role was very important and I will return to this later.

I went with a budget to bring in experts but we did not actually do this, partly because of the speed at which things were moving and the fluidity of the situation in which each week was different from the previous week. I think there was also a slight coolness towards ‘external fly-ins’ and a greater – perhaps too great – respect for home-grown knowledge and the idea that the people in the room must have the knowledge and be able to generate the answers. To set up a group and try to have the answer by the end of the week was a very common way of operating for the relief organisations. We did not really do briefings or orientations for new staff, because the numbers coming through were not great and it was quite hard to identify who was coming in before meeting them at the next coordination meeting.

In addition to the Resource Centre, another significant asset of the LSO was the meeting room, which was frequently used to host meetings for relief workers, visiting researchers and evaluators. In January, for example, it was used by the Field Emergency Monitors funded by the United Nations Development Programme and reporting to the Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs, who based themselves in the meeting room for a week.

I think that the area of lateral learning activities was the area in which we really scored, which was interesting. We got involved early on in a process which, unexpectedly, formed a whole cycle. We started with ‘after-action-review’ workshops for field officers of the agencies involved in general food distributions, in which we asked them what was supposed to happen, what did happen and what they would do differently next time – very powerful questions. We used a ‘carousel’ approach, where the field officers rotated around three ‘stations’ (each with a facilitator and the recorder) to explore different issues. The stations were: community sensitisation and targeting; food distribution (the mechanics of trucking, storage and distribution; and monitoring and reporting. The workshops drew a lot of information out from the field officers who, by that stage, had three months’ experience of running the operation and knowledge which they had acquired in practice. That was a very rich source of information.

Then we formed a drafting team to convert all of that knowledge into a manual (which took far too long but that is another story). It was owned by the agencies and members of the agencies were

on that drafting team. The manual, which was very practical and very Malawi-specific, was then used to train up all the other field officers (245 in total) from all the agencies who had not been able to participate in the original workshops.

Again, ‘oiling’ comes up: transferring knowledge and information between groups. Perhaps you need to be a networker in that sort of situation – linking people who have one issue coming up with another group of people who are just starting work on that issue is a form of lateral networking, as is putting people in contact with each other. We ran seminars and meetings and hosted visiting researchers. We ran a workshop which brought together the relief community and the HIV/AIDS community that were not having much to do with each other throughout the relief operation – which was remarkable.

We also did some filming with a small digital video camera. The idea was to show film of agency distribution sites to other agencies to show how other people were doing it and to see the differences, but it was a task too far and although we started filming, we never really carried it through – another lesson.

Another activity was facilitating the strategic planning meeting for the agencies undertaking general food distributions. Out of interest, there was only one Malawian in the room for this particular meeting. The two other Africans in the room were from Zambia and South Sudan. That is one of the issues of knowledge in a relief operation, that the people who are managing and coordinating the agencies’ work are often expatriates who have just come in from other relief operations in places such as Kosovo or Afghanistan. They tend to be very operationally focused people.

Learning out activities included archiving and we donated the Malawi-specific collection to the United Nations resource centre when we left. It involved facilitation of evaluators and researchers, which for us was a bit of a problem. If you hosted someone’s meeting then you might be tainted by association with that particular evaluation, so we were a bit vulnerable I think to the conduct of individuals and teams that we had no control over. Finally, it involved the sharing of lessons. C-SAFE is the US NGO consortium undertaking recovery activities to follow-on from the emergency programme that was running in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. They were wanting to set up a learning centre so we shared the results and design of the LSO and our lessons from working with the agencies.

I think outsiders had a strong expectation that the LSO should be setting out the lessons from the Malawi emergency operations – not just from the LSO test but the lessons for Malawi itself. We wanted to facilitate a collective lesson learning process for the agencies, but that was very difficult to do for two reasons. One reason was

that the agencies were scaling up the operation right up until the last month, there was an increase in the number of general ration beneficiaries during January and February from 2.8 million to 3.5 million people. Consequently the agencies were simply too busy and did not have the mental space or the time to think about lessons, they were just too preoccupied with the present – getting the trucks out and getting the new village relief committees set up.

Then there was a very rapid shift over the space of about three weeks, when everyone became focused on the post-emergency programme. They were looking at their budgets, realising that they would have to lay off their staff in a few weeks time and thinking about how they could get enough funding to keep some of their staff on after the emergency programme finished. So the space was never really there while we were in the country to really engage with a collective learning process. The other reason why it was difficult to undertake any collective learning was that some agencies and relief workers found it difficult to handle comments that were at all critical of their performance. There was a surprising degree of defensive behaviour, particularly among some of the larger agencies that were projecting a positive corporate image of their achievements.

So provisionally there are two sorts of lessons. The first is for the LSO concept and model. A LSO can add value in an ongoing operation, I believe that very strongly. But we should have started earlier. It is important for an LSO to be present during the planning stage because that is where a lot of the knowledge from previous operations can be inputted fruitfully. By the time we arrived, a lot of the programme design was over, so whilst we might have problems with the programme design, our saying so was not welcome.

Of course another lesson is having hosting arrangements in place so that you do not have to scurry around looking for an agency willing to take on the hosting role. People said that you could buy anything in Malawi, but our experience was that although you can buy anything, it often takes two or three months to be delivered, so office-in-a-box solutions are important – even satellite phones because we had terrible trouble with communications (telephones, email, internet access), and similar problems were also experienced by large organisations such as the WFP and other UN agencies. Since January there have been power cuts every day in Lilongwe and Blantyre which has caused real problems for internet service providers. These kind of practical problems are really significant and do not seem to be fully appreciated back here.

Other lessons are that we should have taken more care in staff recruitment. We needed to have codes and procedures for how staff conduct themselves in relation to other agencies and also to go out with more explicit support from agency head offices.

Secondly, in terms of lessons for learning and knowledge management, there is an amazing lack of documented materials and what exists is very difficult to get hold of, with no central location. You could spend days searching for a particular document which had only been produced six months before – people would say that it was on their hard disc somewhere but they did not have time to find it for you. Our resource centre did provide a central place where the agencies could come and get the key documents, but I think we need to take it a step further and put it onto CD-ROM. We had a web-bibliography on the LSO website, but internet access was really poor in Malawi unless you invested (as we did subsequently) in a wireless broadband access.

You can put the information in front of your relief workers, but these are people working 12 or 14 hour days and unless they are really motivated they are not going to do their searches, so you need to complement making the knowledge resources available on a CD-ROM with a service that filters and condenses information so that you are providing busy people with what is immediately useful to them in addressing this week's task – especially in a relief situation where people are really pushed for time. That is where this oiling process comes in again, it is a human filtering of the knowledge on the CD-ROMs, not a mechanical process, but a human face or interpreter who is able to filter and translate in a way that is directly useful to relief workers.

One of the lessons was that lateral learning, or action learning, was the most productive and well-received, but this relates to the next point, which was that there was defensive behaviour and some quite strong reactions to anything that contained critical comment from some of the agencies. In my experience this was worse in some of the larger agencies who had corporate images to protect. That has big implications for knowledge management and learning. It is extremely difficult to undertake collective learning and learning out in that context. The conclusion I would draw is that we need to explore processes such as Appreciative Inquiry and encourage change in organisational cultures.

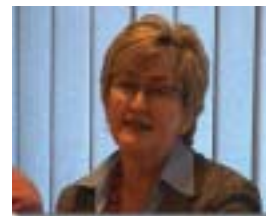
The overall conclusion is that there is a definite role for an independent, objective, respected, learning support capacity that participates in ongoing discussions and meetings. The point I want to relay to my former colleagues here at ODI is that this applies not only to relief, but to development as well. There were two donors who were very keen for us to extend the LSO even though the emergency programme was winding up, because they wanted an independent capacity that was objective, respected and could host and initiate meetings on Malawi's structural issues. They were conscious that if they were to initiate or propose a meeting on a structural issue they would be seen as 'having an agenda'. Our independence and neutrality was really important to supporting learning.

Meeting 7: Policy Entrepreneurship

Speakers: Simon Maxwell – Director, ODI

Ann Pettifor – Director, Jubilee Research

Chair: Baroness Margaret Jay – Chair, ODI



Meeting Summary

Baroness Jay introduced the questions to be addressed this meeting: How can one be an effective policy entrepreneur? Is policy entrepreneurship an art or a science?

Simon Maxwell spoke on the topic of how researchers can be successful policy entrepreneurs. He introduced the topic by referring to a quote that illustrates how inept researchers can sometimes be at engaging with policy processes: ‘... government ministers and civil servants were scathing about some of the [research] work they receive. This is claimed all too often to speak naively of policy issues, demonstrate little or no awareness of current policy, is over-technical and sometimes need drastic editing to make it readable to key players.’ (Commission on the Social Sciences (2003), *Great Expectations: the Social Sciences in Britain*, Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, London.)

He emphasised that he was not addressing the problem of campaigning, even research-rich campaigning. Ann Pettifor is a role model in that respect, but campaigning is a different skill. Nor were his remarks addressed to pure researchers. Instead, he was dealing with researchers interested in policy. The task could best be summarised in the title of Diane Stone’s book on think tanks and policy processes) *Capturing the Political Imagination*. How can we do this?

We know already that policy is not formed in a linear fashion. There are many theoretical models to guide us (for overviews, see previous work by Sutton (1999) – *ODI Working Paper 118*; Crewe and Young (2002) – *ODI Working Paper 173*; and De Vibe et al (2002) – *ODI Working Paper 174*). The Research and Policy Programme (RAPID) at ODI has organised these theories into a three-dimensional framework, focusing on the three spheres of policy context, evidence and links.

Policy entrepreneurship by researchers is only one small part of the process. The options can be presented as four different approaches to policy entrepreneurship:

- A successful policy entrepreneur needs to be a good story-teller. This can be illustrated by Sheherazade, who told stories to stay alive. Stories may resemble development narratives (as examined by Roe). Powerful narratives include the desertification narrative and the narrative of structural adjustment.

- A successful policy entrepreneur needs to be a good networker. ODI networks and meetings offer good examples of epistemic communities in the international development field.
- A successful policy entrepreneur needs to be a good engineer, (as illustrated by Brunel). ‘Policy is what policy does’, and there is little point in having a policy on paper if it is not implemented by the ‘street level bureaucrats’. Researchers need to engage both with high-level policy makers and ground-level practitioners.
- A successful policy entrepreneur needs to be a good fixer (like Rasputin). It is important to understand the political game surrounding the policy process. If you want to change anything you need to identify the relevant sources of power (which according to Charles Handy can be divided into categories of physical, resource, position, expert, personal, or negative).

Final issues and questions:

- How do we make the right choices regarding sequencing and time prioritisation?
- Are there hidden trade-offs? For example, it is sometimes difficult to strike a balance between ODI’s public and private activities.
- Can we expect one individual to take on all these four styles of entrepreneurship, or do we need to construct teams that combine the four styles as a group?
- Can policy entrepreneurship be taught? Simon suggested that the answer to this final question is yes.

Simon also invited the audience to fill out a questionnaire on policy entrepreneurship.

Ann Pettifor began by stating that as far as she was concerned, evidence on its own really does not matter. For example, there is a mountain of evidence on the effects of the AIDS crisis in Africa, and yet this has not mobilised the global community to the extent necessary. So what really matters, is making the evidence matter.

In 1994, when Ann started working with the Debt Crisis Network, there was a lack of information and understanding of the individual debtors, how much debt they owed, and their relationship to the British government. Ann duly set out to unearth the details of the loans made by the government.

The prevailing attitude at the time was that debt relief might be seen as a charitable act to aid poor countries. The Debt Crisis Network uncovered a far more complete picture of what was going on, by assembling evidence about creditors and by showing through analysis of this evidence that debt relief was not just a matter of charity.

Analysing evidence in this way can be compared to cutting a diamond. The diamond cutter spends a long time examining the stone from all angles, before deciding just where and how to cut it in order to maximise the potential reflection of the diamond.

When the Debt Crisis Network found the right way to 'cut' the evidence – framing the problem of debt in terms of the oil crisis, export arrangement and lending policies – the issue of debt relief was seen in a different light. This empowered campaigners to mobilise.

The debt relief campaign paid much attention to ways of communicating the evidence they had. For example, they briefed the comedian Mark Thomas on the role of the Export Credit Guarantee Department, and he incorporated this into his show. An issue that would otherwise not have caught the interest of many people was thus communicated more widely. Another aspect of public communication was the need to explain economic theory in accessible formats – without being patronising towards the debt relief supporters. The mobilisation of the debt relief campaign empowered people both to understand the issue and to do something about it – witness the astounding number of letters sent to the Treasury on the matter.

Ann pointed out that there are still research and policy staff in development agencies who do not aim for communication with the public, but rather aim explicitly for exclusivity. University staff may also be withdrawn. The Jubilee campaign found it very hard to link up with academics willing to provide them with intellectual ballast.

In terms of mobilising people, it is also important to find the right angles. Ann suggested that poverty reduction is now a rather hackneyed phrase, and prefers the phrase economic justice. This was used to mobilise people for the Jubilee campaign.

The campaign made a couple of resolutions right from the start that helped them during their work: Firstly, they decided that they would not demand that a bureaucracy change its ways. Instead, they would go straight to the G7. Secondly, it would not be possible to have a democratically run global campaign. Therefore, they used the 'McDonald's' model where every country could set up its own Jubilee 'outlet' using the same materials and analyses.

Comments from the audience included the following points:

- It is important to keep messages to policy makers simple.
- Should we add another style of policy entrepreneur to Simon's four types, namely style of policy champion or policy advocate?
- New ministers are often looking for a cause to champion.
- If it is difficult to engage with academics, are there ways of bringing them on board right from the start?
- Perhaps places like ODI needs a policy and strategic wing on the one side and an active, militant wing on the other side.
- Ann's talk brought up new ways to use evidence. Firstly, she suggested that evidence can be used to refute and to challenge your opponents. Secondly, she suggested that evidence can be used to demystify; complex evidence can be used to back up a simple and understandable narrative.
- Successful policy change is often built on many 'dead bodies' or previous failed attempts. ('It takes many bricks to build a wall with a policy window...')
- Jubilee 2000 managed to capture the political imagination partly because it built on religious narratives that spoke to certain groups.
- Advertising is not the same as policy change. If advertising can be compared to slight shifts in a tributary flow, policy change, on the other hand is about reversing the flow of the entire river.

Simon Maxwell

Policy Entrepreneurship



This talk is about how researchers can be ‘policy entrepreneurs’. Firstly, why we must do better.

The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences produced a report earlier this year called *Great Expectations: the Social Sciences in Britain*. They make a point which is a starting point for our discussion, that researchers are often very bad at communicating what they know, and what they think should happen, to the people who make the decisions. We speak naively of policy issues (says the report), demonstrate little or no awareness of current policy, are over-technical, and sometimes we need drastic editing to make ourselves readable and understandable to key players. Of course that critique does not apply to anyone in this room, but it may apply to some researchers some of us have met.

I want to exclude from the discussion those who are pure campaigners, even the research-rich, and those who are pure researchers, with little direct connection to poverty. Ann Pettifor provides a model of success at the campaigning end. Martin Luther King might be another example of the kind of person who takes ideas and translates them into practice, but would not normally be thought of as potential ODI Research Fellows. At the other extreme, we find the researcher who is not at all engaged in policy. There are perfectly legitimate reasons not to be engaged in policy, if one is concerned with pure research or if one is in an entirely academic world. I do not want to decry that.

ODI, however, is different. We exist between the campaign and the pure research. There is legitimate territory in the middle which we try to occupy. Our purpose is well-captured by the title of the book by Diane Stone (an ODI Council member) *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process*. That is the art form we need to master.

We have discussed a number of aspects of the policy process during the course of these meetings. We often start with a very simple linear model of the policy process in which the problem is identified, the alternatives are analysed and the best option is chosen, implemented and evaluated. We know policy making does not work in that way, policy making is not a linear process. As Clay and Schaffer remind us: ‘the whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents’. Our job, if we wish to be policy entrepreneurs, is to unpack that statement, to see whether we can impose some order on the chaos of purposes and accidents.

We know that there is a rich literature, in anthropology, political science, sociology, public administration, management and organisational theory. ODI reviewed this literature in a Working

Paper written by Rebecca Sutton in 1999, which provides an overview of the policy process. We tried to write it as the ‘bluffer’s guide’ to the policy process, simplifying the jargon in the field, and providing a glossary.

More recently, ODI has developed a large programme of work in this area, ‘Research and Policy in Development’ (RAPID), led by John Young. There is an annotated bibliography and a review paper, available on the website. There are many different models of policy change presented in the literature, for example ‘policy as social experiments’; ‘disjointed incrementalism’; ‘policy as argument’; and ‘mixed scanning’. John Young has organised these ideas around three sets of issues which provide a framework: understanding the political context; understanding the links between policy and research communities; and looking carefully at the quality of evidence that is provided in that process.

I will not be talking about the whole of that framework, but instead will take a very narrow and practical question, which is the question of what we as researchers can do if we want to engage in the policy process.

In seeking to break this question down, I have identified four styles of policy entrepreneurship. Each of these is informed by an image of how the researcher can best contribute to the policy process.

Firstly is the researcher as ‘story-teller’. This style is represented by the story of Scheherazade, who offered to marry a sultan who had been so aggrieved by his wife’s betrayal that he had taken to marrying a different woman every day and having her murdered the following morning. Scheherazade managed to survive by telling him the most wonderful stories, which she spun out for so long that she succeeded in bearing him several children and living to a happy old age.

There is a literature about the importance of telling stories in changing policy. Roe developed the idea of development narratives. For example, he argued that rural development is a genuinely uncertain activity, but that one of the principal ways that practitioners, bureaucrats and policy makers articulate and make sense of this uncertainty is to tell stories or describe scenarios that simplify the ambiguity.

Much of the literature on this topic demonstrates that narratives can be profoundly misleading and that ‘counter-narratives’ develop. Leach and Mearns assemble cases in their cleverly-titled book *The Lie of the Land*, which is about how environmental narratives tell lies. Desertification narratives are a good example of misleading over-simplification.

Narratives are, however, incredibly powerful. It is not difficult to think of powerful narratives which have informed policy: 'getting the prices right', structural adjustment, the Washington Consensus, the Post-Washington Consensus, debt-relief as the answer to poverty-reduction. These are powerful stories which help us to get over to policy makers what the problem is and what the solution might be. So, successful policy entrepreneurs need to be good story-tellers.

In model two, the researcher is a networker. There is a large literature which demonstrates that policy making usually takes place within communities (policy or epistemic communities) of people who know each other and interact. President Lyndon Johnson talked about being inside the tent or outside the tent. If you are inside the tent, your voice is heard and you will have an influence. If you are outside, you will not.

ODI is a power in the land and influential because, by virtue of the position we occupy in London, we are able to help create the epistemic community which informs policy. Clare Short first heard about the international development targets sitting in a meeting like this one at ODI. She was able to take the idea from within the epistemic community and turn it into a very powerful policy vehicle. At ODI, we invest a great deal in building networks. We have the Rural Development and Forestry Network (RDFN), the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), the Agricultural Research and Extension Network (AgREN) and many other formal and informal networks which enable us to be influential in policy.

The other example I often use is that of Zoltan Karpathy in *My Fair Lady*. When Henry Higgins had trained up Eliza Doolittle, he took her to the ball, where a Hungarian linguistics professor set out to trap her. He is described as having 'oiled his way around the floor, oozing charm from every pore'. That is what I want ODI Research Fellows to do, because that is the way that we stay within our network.

A final example comes from *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell, which we have referred to a number of times in this series. The example is of Paul Revere, riding out in 1775 to raise the militia against the British. Malcolm Gladwell describes the fact that on that night, two people set out. One was Paul Revere, and the other was William Dawes. In all the villages that Paul Revere went to, the militia turned out and defeated the British. In the villages that William Dawes went to, no-one turned out to fight. Why is that? The answer is that Paul Revere was networked and William Dawes was not. Paul Revere was a well-known pewtersmith and silversmith, who sat on all the committees, was well-connected, knew people and had their trust. William Dawes did not.

The third model of researcher as 'engineer' comes from the literature about 'street-level bureaucracy'

and is informed by this phrase: 'policy is what policy does'. There can be a significant implementation gap between what politicians and policy makers think that they are doing and what actually happens on the ground. Researchers need to work not just with the senior level policy makers, but also with the 'street-level bureaucrats'.

Who better to represent that way of working than Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Unfortunately, my favourite story about him is apocryphal, but it is worth telling nonetheless. Brunel was very much engaged in the debate about whether paddle wheels or screws were more efficient and powerful for moving boats. In order to test that theory, the (sadly apocryphal) story is that he built one of each, tied them together and put them in the Bristol Channel to see which would tug the hardest. The story captures the idea of being engaged on the ground and not just sitting in a laboratory. Needless to say, we at ODI spend a great deal of time engaged in that kind of activity.

The fourth and final model of the policy entrepreneur in our field is the 'fixer'. The examples could include Rasputin and Machiavelli. This model is about understanding the policy and political process, knowing when to make your pitch and to whom.

I come to this partly from the literature on organisation and management. Charles Handy, in *Understanding Organisations* (1976) said that if you want to change anything, you need first of all to think about your source of power. Handy identifies these sources of power as: physical power, resource power, position power, expert power, personal power and negative power. As researchers, our 'expert' power is often very powerful. If you are able to look a Minister in the eye and tell them that by applying the principles of game theory to a problem, the solution becomes obvious, they will normally crumble and do what you say. In theory.

So, we have four models of policy entrepreneurship that researchers can use. They are not entirely straightforward and I want to end with a few remarks about the issues involved – choices, sequences and trade-offs.

First, it is necessary to use the right styles at the right times. That is both a question of choosing between the styles and about getting the sequencing right. There is no point in rushing to present narratives in a very forceful way and claiming expert power if you have not done the research. There is no point in trying to play political games unless you are safely inside the network.

Much more seriously for people like us, there are issues about choices. You can either write a paper for *Development Policy Review*, or write an article for *The Guardian*, or take someone out for lunch,

but you probably cannot do all three. So the questions we need to ask ourselves every day are about what we are trying to achieve and what the best instruments are to do it. This means asking who is making what decision, when they are making it and what product is needed in order to influence the decision. These are not questions that we researchers ask ourselves very often, but they should be, because these questions help us to choose between the styles of policy entrepreneurship.

A second question is whether there are any trade-offs. Every week, we face rather practical questions about how to play this game at the interface of research and policy. The issue of the balance between the public and the private personality of ODI is a particularly difficult one to judge. For example, there have been a number of occasions when there has been an issue in the news and I have spoken to the person in ODI who knows about that issue to suggest that they ring up *The Guardian* or the Today Programme and make a point. The response has often been that that would not help because it is much more influential to make a private phone call to the Head of one of the bilateral aid agencies, for example, than to make a statement to the media.

The third question is whether we can expect one individual to deliver all of these different aspects of policy entrepreneurship or whether we should try to construct teams. That is another practical management issue for those of us involved in think tanks. My own prejudice is that most people could do most of these four styles if they wanted to, but it is also true that some people are very much predisposed to one rather than the other. If you are not someone who can turn a very detailed piece of research with lots of appendices, or 18 detailed studies, into a simple message which says 'yes, but not yet' (to take this week's example of the UK Treasury's review of the desirability of the UK adopting the euro), then you need someone who is, because no-one is going to read your 18 volumes unless they are paid to do so.

Finally there is the question of whether policy entrepreneurship can be taught. I start from the prejudice that it can, that simply by opening up these styles and roles, and by thinking about the choices and identifying the trade-offs, we could all do a great deal better at this core task of trying to change policy.

I want to leave you with two things. One is to remind you about our mission statement at ODI, which is to inspire and inform policy and practice. 'Inspire' and 'inform' are carefully chosen words, which imply that we are research-based, but also that we do not do research simply to put it into a journal or onto a shelf. We want to use our research proactively in order to change things.

Finally, it is an interesting question for each of us as to what kind of style we ourselves favour in

our policy work. I have prepared a questionnaire which you are each invited to complete. There are 15 questions to answer and if you send it back to us, we will tell you what kind of policy entrepreneur you are and whether or not we think you ought to develop one particular area or not. We are doing this partly because we are interested to see whether we can turn this kind of material into practical training of which a self-assessment questionnaire might form a part, but also because it might encourage you to sign up for the very important and interesting work which we are doing in the RAPID programme.

At ODI we do not think it is enough simply to do research. Policy entrepreneurship is exactly the territory in which an independent, London-based think tank like ours needs to be. It is a skill that needs to be thought about, taught and mastered if we are to be even more successful than we are now.



Ann Pettifor

Some Lessons from Jubilee 2000

I am just a campaigner, so I am a little nervous being here amongst all these policy people, but I welcome the opportunity to tell part of our story. I am busy writing a chapter for a book by Oxford University Press in which I will try to distil some of the lessons from Jubilee 2000, but I feel about Jubilee 2000 a little like Mao Tse Tung felt about the French Revolution: that it is really far too early to make any assessment about its impact. When we do assess what progress we made, we tend to feel that we could have done a great deal more than we did.

I wanted to begin by saying, somewhat provocatively, that evidence on its own does not matter at all. I would like to illustrate this by showing that the evidence of the holocaust of AIDS in Africa is widespread and well-known. UNAIDS have produced the most extraordinary tomes, data and information on the AIDS crisis and yet it does not matter. We do not have people making movies about that particular holocaust. We do not have a Picasso painting pictures to illuminate it for us. The AIDS crisis is not part of what is happening here and the evidence is not mobilising the global community to take action. I am exaggerating, I must give President Bush some credit for his US\$15 billion, and clearly there are people doing things and I do not want to understate that.

But what it shows me is that what is important is not the evidence, but making the evidence matter. I know that I have a quite tense relationship with some policy makers, particularly those who live in 19th Street in Washington, and that some of the numbers we used and the way that we used them in the campaign caused intense irritation in Washington.

Having said that, evidence was incredibly important to the Jubilee campaign and there simply was not enough of it. When I was taken on by the Debt Crisis Network in 1994 and began this work, we knew an awful lot about the state of debtors and about what was happening in developing countries. The World Bank's annual Debt Tables, which cost \$300 to purchase, was published every year, giving as much detail as it is possible to have on developing country debt. But there was no World Bank set of creditor tables. To be fair, at some point soon after we had started to make a fuss about the debt crisis, EURODAD did produce a set of creditor tables in one year.

In Britain we knew very well there were lots of debtors and that there was a very big debt problem. There had been campaigns in Britain since the Mexican debt crisis in 1982, but there was no knowledge or understanding of the individual debtor nations and what their relationship to the

British government had been, why they had been lent money and for what purpose.

So I began the really tedious but quite heroic task, in those days, of unearthing the details of the cumulative loans made by the British government to developing countries. I did that with the help of much lamented Joan Lester MP, who at that time was an opposition Labour MP. We tabled Parliamentary Question after Parliamentary Question to extract from the Export Credit Guarantee Department some detail of which country the British government had lent money to, and why. The World Development Movement (WDM) had produced a report at about that time on how much of Export Credit Guarantee funding subsidies were being used to promote military exports. We had some rough idea, but I think we had approximate numbers because no-one, at that time, really got that amount of detail and evidence out of either the government or the Export Credit Guarantee Department. The latter are far more transparent and accountable today than they were then, but we still lack full information on those issues which are regarded as commercially sensitive.

Back in 1994, no non-governmental organisation in this country knew who Britain's sovereign debtors were, and why and how much debt was owed by each of these countries. Finding that out was very revealing in terms of the analysis. So what is important about the evidence is the way that it is analysed. Evidence on its own matters not at all, but evidence analysed in certain ways produces results and actions.

The way in which the limited evidence available was used was then reflected in the debate conducted about the debt: that there were all these countries (and I am crudely summarising the debate here) in the deep south, most of them black, incompetent and corrupt, who had got themselves into a muddle, had very high levels of debt and needed to be bailed out. We knew all about them, but little about why our government had lent money to these countries in the first place, these supposedly corrupt governments. The approach instead was, despite all this, we ought to do something about resolving the crisis, in a charitable way. There was no approach of looking deeper, at how and why they had got into debt or at the role of the creditor in creating this debt; and that was reflected in the non-availability of much of the evidence.

No-one cared about the role of the creditor (which is generally held to be above reproach) or held the creditor responsible and that is why we did not have evidence about them. Once this evidence began to be dug up, we began to see that the British government made loans and provided tax-funded subsidies for certain exports which it did

not provide for domestic produce. If you grow armoured cars in Newcastle, you can be sure of taxpayer funds, but if you grow tomatoes in Lincolnshire you do not get taxpayer support for your work. That was for a good reason: to help boost employment; and to help with the balance of payments. Britain, like many other countries, has a trade deficit and needs to maintain some sort of balance in the balance of payments. Promoting exports is a big part of that.

In 1994, we had a Tory government which, surprisingly, wholeheartedly supported these forms of subsidy. So what we did initially was to unearth this evidence of the total relationship, not just the partial relationship. In doing so, we developed a very different picture, which then informed the way that we developed the campaign. I will be forever grateful to Ed Mayo who hired me in 1994. He said that he did not expect me to do anything except to go away and think, read, learn and understand and to come back in a year's time when we would think what to do about it. This was a great privilege. So we began to assemble the evidence, some of which was already in the public domain and some of which was not, and put it all together.

The second analogy or illustration which I want to give is that assembling the evidence and analysing it so that it can be recognised by a wide audience is a bit like looking at a diamond before you cut it. The diamond is a big lump dug out of the earth somewhere and it is probably ungainly when you are looking at it. But if you are a diamond cutter you may well spend two years looking at it before you decide to make the cut, and, when you do, you cut the stone in such a way as to maximise the reflection of every facet of the true stone. That is the genius of the diamond cutter. That is the only analogy I can make to explain how, having collected all the evidence, one analyses it in such a way as to invite recognition and understanding from those who are looking at it.

I am generalising and perhaps being unfair, but on the whole the campaign on the debt had been run as a campaign, which was a problem for countries in the south, to which we had the solution. As a result of the way in which we cut this total evidence – looking at debtors and creditors – we switched the campaign to say that actually the problem was here and not there. The problem was with lending policies and the desperate effort to promote military exports, with the petrodollar crisis of the 1970s where money had to be exported in order to stabilise inflation here, and so on.

When you looked at the problem in that way, you immediately empowered people here. The analysis said to Joe Bloggs who was an active member of their church, who supported the Jubilee principle and had a conscience about what was happening to people in Africa or Latin America, not that he must do something about a

starving child in Africa, but that he must do something about what is going on here, on our doorsteps; and that you can do it by going to your own Member of Parliament, and by addressing your own economy, your own lifestyle and your actions. That is empowering in a way that talking about victims in far away places is not. Feeling guilty only makes one feel paralysed and immobilised.

What I think Jubilee 2000 succeeded in doing was mobilising people by saying that this was something that they could do something about. They could go and do their homework about something called the Export Credit Guarantee Department and find out where this department was. So, for example, we briefed Mark Thomas, the comedian, on export credit guarantees and sent him out there to make people laugh about this. Sure enough, he did. He hired an old rusty tank and he drove it up to the front door of the Export Credit Guarantee Department and claimed to be Saddam Hussein, saying that they had sold him the tank some years ago and demanding his money back. Mark Thomas took this even further and wanted to find out who was on the Board of the Export Credit Guarantee Department. He discovered that there were a lot of people in corporations receiving the export subsidies who were also on the Board, making the decisions. He rang the Chair of the Board one morning, live on television, and said that he believed she was on the Board, to which she agreed. He said that he believed she was also on the Board of 12 companies that had benefited from export credit guarantee. She denied this, creating the biggest story we had had on export credit guarantees for some time, because her denial was an outright lie. She did not realise that she was live and it would be broadcast. (The lesson is clearly not to tell fibs, especially to comedians.) The whole thing exploded and she had to resign.

The point is that we got this fairly arcane piece of evidence about an obscure department (which tried hard to be very obscure), and we got ordinary people really excited about it. My proudest moment, I think, was when the man from the Treasury came up to me at the end of the campaign and said he had needed to hire people to deal with the correspondence from individuals following the postcard and letter campaigns. He told me stories of receiving letters on pink flowered paper with roses in one corner, detailing debt-export ratios in Uganda and arguing that he had made a misjudgement about setting those ratios when fixing the debt relief. He could not believe that these letters were coming from Mrs Bloggs in Sussex, etc. They received thousands of letters like that, which were not from your average activist but from people who wrote on pink paper with roses in the corner. That was telling them something.

We tried never to patronise our supporters. We told them that it was not complicated, it was not rocket-science, even if the Treasury would like

them to think it was. We told people that the elite club of policy people from aid agencies and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank who gather twice a year in Washington (as I did) were talking in arcane language, but that really you can understand that, you can be part of that too and you can also write. We explained about debt-export ratios. These middle-aged women who wrote their letters to the Treasury felt respected and empowered, and the Treasury had to write them careful and detailed letters back, which they would then forward to us so that we could point out what was being avoided in the way that it had been drafted so that they could send back a rebuttal. Eventually they just became really smart about all of this and felt as though they could (and were) doing something.

So the campaign was about assembling the evidence and analysing it properly. I think this is more of an art than a science, as the diamond cutter's skill is an art, but it is something which you can perfect if you know who you are talking to. If you are taking complex evidence and making it available to ordinary people and you know, hear and talk to those people and know what they can understand, then it is possible to know the language that they speak and to draft it for them. It is not complicated and we had clever people with us like Jo Hanlon who is a journalist (and also in the audience today), who went out and found people to help us to communicate.

It still annoys me that there are elites in both institutions and agencies who work on research and policy issues and do so almost with the intention of being exclusive. They like talking to their peer group about these issues because that is stimulating, but do not want to be forced to talk to someone who is not as knowledgeable about these issues as they are, because they might have to explain A, B and C before they could have a proper conversation about where to go from here. The Bank and the Fund are past masters at inventing language which is incomprehensible and which disguises what is really going on. It is a profoundly anti-democratic instinct. Even in universities, there are very few academics who work on the debt issue. We were perfectly aware that we were up against 3,000 men (they were mostly men), all of whom had one or two PhDs, and that we were just a group of activists trying to take them on and challenge their way of thinking. We would have loved intellectual ballast from people within the universities to help us in running our campaign, but we found that unless you could afford to hire an economist you could not have one.

Worse still, some of the people who worked for us would go to the London School of Economics (LSE) afterwards to do Masters' courses and be told that debt was not a problem and that it would not be covered there, since the LSE agreed with the position of the IMF and, at that time, the Department for International Development (DFID), that debt was not a problem.

The next part was communicating what we were trying to do. What we worked out was that just communicating to people that there was a big problem and making them feel bad about it would not empower them. Poverty reduction has become a hackneyed phrase and some people only get money because they work on poverty reduction. What happened with Jubilee 2000 was that we felt that it was far more an issue of economic justice. We also felt that economic justice was an issue which could fire people up and was the reason our campaigners got out of bed in the morning, because they felt the whole thing was so unfair. Quite a lot of our evidence was mobilised to explain that.

DFID attacked us vehemently throughout the campaign and Clare Short was never supportive, arguing that we had got it wrong. DFID may have had a point in arguing that aid flows had collapsed over the time that the Jubilee 2000 campaign was running, but for us the key issue was the injustice in the relationship between powerful creditors and vulnerable debtors, and the absence of any mechanism whereby that relationship could be resolved or negotiated out of crisis. Some people may not have thought it unfair to lend money and extract enormous amounts of money back in the form of debt repayments and compound interest, but we did find that there was a very imbalanced relationship which allowed the creditor to exploit the debtor and impose other policies on them. That was a vital point in the campaign.

I want to say a word about managing campaigns, general lessons and ensuring legitimacy. We made several key decisions right at the beginning. The first such decision was our resolve never to demand that a bureaucracy change its ways, because we do not believe that the IMF or World Bank are capable of being anything but a bureaucracy. We insisted instead that we would take a massive demonstration to the G7 summit in Birmingham, which we did long before they even thought about doing so in Seattle and it was a much bigger demonstration, even though it never got the same attention. Our target was the decision-makers. We did not particularly want to engage with the IMF (and they did not particularly want to engage with us), who are fundamentally civil servants doing what their shareholders tell them to do. The shareholders had spent the last 20 years hiding behind the cover of their civil servants, so the IMF was taking the brunt of all the attacks, whilst the decision-makers were sat behind their Treasuries and sheltered from blame for IMF policies.

The second thing we resolved was that it would not be possible to have a democratic international campaign and that because there were so many northern creditors, the campaign needed to be international. We aimed instead to develop the autonomy of local and national campaigns. Looking at Simon Maxwell's models of alliances: the Microsoft model, the McDonald's

model and the airline-alliance model, I think we were pretty much the McDonald's model. We had a brand, a style of organising on the basis of a coalition and we had a franchise which we offered to whoever wanted it. To our astonishment, people did like it and it did get picked up. The IMF travelled to over 160 countries around the world and kept coming up against Jubilee 2000 chains. It must have terrorised them and made them think that we were powerful and huge. We were not. We were a coalition of some very wobbly campaigns and some much more effective campaigns (largely because of the churches) in some 60 countries, who shared a single mission statement which was the petition that we wanted the debts cancelled by the year 2000 under a fair process, and who shared a logo, which had been something that honestly had been developed in the most primitive way. When I think about branding and how advertising agencies come up with logos and so on, ours was never so sophisticated. But I am very proud that in four years we turned this simple brand into a global brand and here at headquarters in the United Kingdom, we had spent only £3 million over a four year period.

How effective we were is another discussion. We have already had a discussion with the World Bank at this table about how effective we were, but I wanted to point to some of the methods we used to make the campaign a success.

Meeting 8: International Policies

Speakers: Alex Wilks – Coordinator, The Bretton Woods Project

Lord Desai – Director, Centre for the Study of Global Governance, LSE

Chair: John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID, and Research Fellow, ODI



Meeting Summary

John Young introduced the eighth and last meeting in the Does Evidence Matter? series. The topic of this meeting was the role of evidence in international and transnational development policy processes.

Alex Wilks presented himself as closer to the activist side than the analyst side of the research-policy spectrum. He went on to describe different types of international policy processes that he and other researchers/activists might engage with – including world and regional summits; agency strategies; research by academics and think tanks; and activist publications.

Activist engagement in policy processes can be seen through two different lenses: (i) as a matter of producing and presenting evidence in a ‘truth to power’ manner; or (ii) as a matter of improving the bargaining power of those whose voices are seldom heard.

It is frequently difficult for grassroots organisations to access and influence international high-level policy processes. Perhaps adding to the difficulty of lower-level actors is the fact that, in many respects, the World Bank has a position resembling a monopoly on certain aspects of international development policy. A very high number of development agency staff read and use Bank reports, especially the annual World Development Report (WDR).

What are WDRs? Are they global academic syntheses? Bank policy statements or think pieces? Or are they simply self-promotional exercises? Brendan Martin has commented that ‘[WDRs are] highly leveraged interventions in the policy markets’. Wolfensohn has emphasised that WDRs are not meant to be blueprints but rather documents contributing to international debate.

How was the Poverty WDR produced? There were a number of background studies (including ‘Voices of the Poor’), wide consultation in all regions, and an e-conference. In the final stages of preparing the Report, confrontations between the WDR team and the Bank, plus the Bank’s shareholder governments, led to the resignation of the lead-author, Kanbur.

Alex summed up some lessons from the experience:

- Power politics are hard to remove but easier to reveal when outside stakeholders have clear standing in the policy process;
- Final report insulated by controversy over resignation;

- Process improvements have not been maintained in subsequent years;
- WDR status still unclear: all things to all people?
- The ‘Voices of the Poor’ study consulted 60,000 people worldwide. Some of the researchers on the Voices project have published criticisms, pointing out that there were multiple filters before the supposedly ‘unmediated’ voices of these people appeared in the final publication.

Alex discussed the experience of the World Commission on Dams which the World Bank helped initiate following significant and well-organised external pressure. Initially, the Bank reacted to the criticism by producing a desk-based review of dams, which did not satisfy the critics. The Bank subsequently appointed 12 commissioners who represented a broad range of groups. The result was an independent and innovative process that provided an opportunity for dam-affected people to get their voices heard. It is important to note that the independent and innovative nature of the recommendations also meant that the recommendations met with some resistance in the Bank.

In conclusion, Alex showed an excerpt of the World Bank’s staff newsletter which challenged the internal ‘thought police’ in the institution, and cited researchers from the ‘Voices for the Poor’ exercise who called for ‘No generalisation without representation’. Future international policy processes should have purpose and process clarifications and guarantees, including stakeholder co decision-making, not just evidence extraction. This will help insulate the processes from problematic institutional incentives.

Lord Desai stated that in his view, evidence does not matter, but ideas do. To illustrate this he used the example of Keynes’ General Theory. Keynes’ idea was far ahead of the data-collection that was needed to back it up – yet in spite of this lack of ‘evidence’, his idea was hugely influential.

The problem now is that there is no single dominant paradigm, there are a myriad of ideas. We all seem to believe that answers can be found by huge and ongoing public meetings. But the wide participation in public debates has in some respects led to an overcrowded arena with a phantasmagoria of Platonic ideas about development. Moreover, it seems that the more inarticulate the proposition, the greater its authority.

In such an overcrowded and over-intrusive domain, it is difficult to see what function is served by organised policy making. He described himself as a cheerful pessimist – doubting that much of it will make any difference, but believing that development will happen despite our best efforts, rather than because of them. It would be far more effective simply to hand out money to every poor person, than spend billions on aid policies and aid machinery.

Lord Desai then recounted his experience of taking part in the development of the UN's Human Development Index. The need for a new indicator for development was driven by questions about the outcomes of structural adjustment, and whether it was possible to find a better measure for development than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The initial idea used a measure of remaining life-expectancy as a non-monetary indicator of welfare. This simple idea was then developed into the Human Development Index (HDI) which includes only three dimensions and four variables. The value of the index lies in its simplicity. This made it usable by anyone who wanted to use it.

In conclusion, Lord Desai pointed out that development indicators, such as the HDI, are measures and not causes. Moreover, they are not primarily based on evidence but on ideas.

Comments from the floor included the following:

- Even if you have clear and unambiguous evidence that is known by all actors involved in a policy process, this will not necessarily lead to an evidence-based policy. Firstly, political factors and resource prioritisation are more important factors in determining policy formulation and outcomes. Secondly, of course, the evidence is never clear and unambiguous.
- Evidence is never produced in a perfect state of neutrality; it is always interpreted by the different people who use it.
- The politics surrounding policy processes are very important. Even if there is evidence that a project has been successful (such as a couple of projects in Mozambique that aimed to simply hand out money to the poor), the evidence will not automatically be taken into account. If it conflicts with political interests it is more likely to be ignored.
- Policy processes are not necessarily improved through as wide a consultation as possible, because not everyone is competent to comment on everything. We need to be sceptical of the idea that the process matters. What really matters is the outcome.
- Let us try to apply the hypotheses of the speakers to a practical example. If you were Gordon Brown, what evidence, if any, would you need to garner political support for the International Financing Facility?

Alex Wilks



International Policy Processes: Experiences and Lessons

Thank you for inviting me, I am very pleased to be here. I think I am more at the activist than the analyst end of the spectrum. The talks here at ODI have been given by a range of different people and I think I am correct in saying that I have been invited because at the Bretton Woods Project we have been probing and challenging the World Bank's significant role in a number of international policy processes. I am going to run through some of our experiences with such processes; some of the problems that I see with them; some of the lessons; and some suggestions for future practice.

There are of course many types of international policy processes and I am by no means going to be able to discuss all of them. I will focus particularly on the role of the World Bank in these processes. In fact, I could find World Bank roles in many international policy processes, such as World Summits on Sustainable Development, or on Financing for Development, in which the World Bank does play a significant role, as do many others.

There are a large number of analysts of these processes in general and I will not be able to deal with all of those. There are all sorts of regional commissions and all sorts of strategies (new institutional strategies, target strategies and so on) developed by international development agencies, from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) to the World Bank.

Then there is research, which is not necessarily tightly linked to the strategies, policies and programmes of these development agencies, but again there are any number of these research reports being done by agencies, academics and think tanks. There are also many examples of activists' publishing, which is an overlapping category, but which in many ways remains distinct.

I wanted to start by saying that there are two main ways in which I hear people conceiving of the international process. Firstly, it may be viewed as an exercise in producing evidence and presenting it to powerful agencies in a 'truth-to-power' dynamic. In its most simplistic form, this is a case of assuming, hoping and expecting that if you assemble enough material, data and anecdotal evidence and hand it over in a thick report, people in positions of power will simply realise that this was the information they had been lacking and change everything they were doing.

Of course, most people do not see it that simplistically and many people view the international policy processes through the lens not of 'truth-to-power' but of bargaining power: to what extent do these processes in and of themselves, or their results, enhance the

bargaining power of people who generally cannot get their voices heard? These are two ends of the spectrum in conceiving of and understanding international policy processes.

I thought I would read a few comments from different participants in international policy processes which to me illuminate these different dimensions.

On the basis of attending a number of United Nations processes such as the UN Habitat and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, an organisation called Shack, Slum-Dwellers International said that, 'the content is alienating, the global discourse bears little relationship to problems on the ground, there is little to be gained immediately for individual participants or federations, and the costs of participation are high. For an organisation which believes that change has to be driven from the bottom up and that a critical factor in successful pro-poor transformation is the centrality of the poor themselves, engagement with the United Nations is fraught with difficulties'. So this is an example of a grass-roots network, based in mainly urban areas across the developing world, reflecting on some of these processes.

In self-reflective mode on another process, the 'Voices of the Poor' exercise (which I will return to again in a moment), Robert Chambers from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) said, 'it is flattering to be invited to Washington. It is great to be able to return to one's institution and write a trip report, as I did, saying that our workshop had been addressed by James Wolfensohn at a time when he was exceptionally busy, and glowing with pleasure that he had said that our work was immensely important to him and that he needed us to help him'. These are two very different responses to flying across the globe and participating in different ways in global policy processes.

Turning now to the World Bank, there is a lot of data if you wanted to chase it down. I am going to present a bit of it and I will argue that the World Bank is a very pre-eminent development knowledge actor. I will also describe how, under pressure, the World Bank has in some ways innovated in some of its approaches to policy processes, in particular around the poverty World Development Report (WDR 2000/2001 *Attacking Poverty*) and the World Commission on Dams.

There are number of ways in which the World Bank as a knowledge actor can be understood. I will give one snapshot example. Nancy Birdsall was a senior researcher who ran one of the research departments in the World Bank for some time and who is now at the Centre for Global Development in Washington DC. She has argued

in a paper about the World Bank that we need to end the analytic near-monopoly which the World Bank has on many details of country policy reform. There are many people who disagree with the way that the World Bank presents evidence, calculates it and forms global conclusions, often tending towards a 'one size fits all' approach with disclaimers that there really is no blueprint, but that this seems the best way forward.

The World Bank did a survey of what it called high-level policy makers. These were largely senior officials in ministries across the developing world plus some others, including people in think tanks etc. The survey asked people to rank different information sources, including sources of data, studies and analysis. The World Bank was rated the most important information source. 84% of the respondents, who were supposedly randomly chosen, said that they used World Bank analytical reports and that the World Bank's work was seen as technically sound, relevant and objective.

At this point I just thought that, although this is a very unscientific survey, it would be interesting to know from the people in this room whether you use World Bank analytical reports. If I ask for a show of hands as to how many people here use World Bank analytical reports, we get an impressive percentage – not dissimilar from 84%. A show of hands on how many people here use ODI analytical reports suggests that a reasonable number do, but not as many.

In terms of a specific product from the World Bank, I think that the pre-eminent one according to many people that I have spoken to and according to the way that the World Bank pitches it, is the World Development Report (WDR). The number of copies varies, but I believe it is normally over 100,000. Many of them are circulated for free and you find them all over the world on policy makers shelves and in research institutes, including those which do not have much of a budget to purchase such publications. The World Bank is obviously able to go beyond dissemination to promote and attract significant attention to these documents.

When the World Bank began to open up consultations on the World Development Report, it was in line with thinking across development that emphasised the need to engage poor people directly in development. This had led to pressure to have them engaged directly in forming these important research pieces which frame development thinking for many different actors. When the World Bank began to think of this there were various experiments which were quite unsatisfactory for all sides.

Alison Evans might want to contribute something here as we had an interesting confrontation when she was with the World Bank on the WDR teams and we were a number of civil society groups challenging aspects of the process.

In brief, the World Bank seemed to be trying to have it all ways. On the one hand, it seemed to be saying that this global policy process and the production of this global report was some sort of academic synthesis of knowledge on a topic and possibly in fact, a World Bank policy statement. Alternatively, it could be seen as an institutional think piece, published and commissioned by the World Bank, but not reflecting anything that the Bank thought, only the thinking of the individuals and the team writing the report. Or perhaps it was just a self-promotional exercise. The World Bank, like many non-governmental organisations and others, needs to have some flagship documents to wave around and draw attention to itself. I very much like Brendan Martin's pithy statement that WDRs are highly leveraged interventions in the policy market. He and others from the outside were saying that the World Development Reports were probably along the lines of the self-promotional exercise and were about buying profile for the World Bank.

Caroline Harper of Save the Children said that by not openly declaring its status, the WDR managed subversively to influence policy, by being taken as both independent and objective, yet also mainstream and accepted within the World Bank.

So my first point is that we need to be clear about what these global policy processes are, because muddled or false expectations can lead to a lot of problems. We sent a lot of sign-on letters (a classic NGO tactic which gets people to sign onto a letter and send it off) to the President of the World Bank and the Chief Economist (at that time, Joseph Stiglitz), asking for clarity about what this thing was all about. They said that the process was as important as the product and James Wolfensohn argued that the WDRs were instruments of dialogue, a two-way process, and were not simply about producing a document and spreading it around the world. He also said that the WDRs are not policy-statements, but are documents for raising the fundamental questions about poverty to which there are no easy answers.

I will not do another show of hands to see whether you think they are delivering on those objectives, but I think that they fall quite short and that there are mixed and muddled expectations. Ravi Kanbur, who was just then taking on the role of being lead author for the Poverty WDR 2000/2001, said that he wanted to stress before he started that he was taking personal responsibility as lead author and he had commitments from the World Bank confirming that that was to be the case (which of course was interesting later on).

I am sure that many people in this room were involved in the Poverty WDR in one way or another. There was a meeting here at ODI about it at one stage. There were some key stages in the process: there were all sorts of background studies commissioned, including the 'Voices of the Poor' exercise (a huge consultation and

qualitative exercise in many countries); there were many consultation meetings in all regions; and there was an electronic conference which, as a tiny NGO based in London, we were very surprised to be asked to run. It had a reasonable number of participants from different countries. In general, Ravi Kanbur and his team made significant efforts to break out from Washington and London, and from some of the small circles where previous consultations had been done on some of these reports, and to get out into the field to try to allow different people to set up meetings, independently moderate fora etc.

However, I think that the end-game of writing the report was extremely illustrative of some of the pitfalls and problems with global policy processes. Despite bringing in Ravi Kanbur, and despite all his efforts at building coalitions of interest, commitment and involvement with many outsiders, and bringing in other outsiders to his team, just a couple of months before it was to go to print, the final editing of the report became so messy and confrontational that he resigned as lead author, having put in over 18 months of effort and despite the fact that this had been a prestigious thing to be asked to do.

The reason why he resigned was that there were powerful elements within the World Bank and within World Bank shareholder governments who were worried that some of the language and emphasis in his report was too subversive. They either felt that some stuff should be struck out or that the balance should be changed significantly to favour growth over empowerment. That is a very basic snapshot analysis. After Seattle where the trade discussions were blocked and a lot of people had taken to the streets, there was a lot of sensitivity, particularly in the US Treasury, to the language and points presented in the international policy reports such as the World Development Report from the World Bank.

So for me the World Bank has still not found the right balance in terms of getting independent people to take the lead in running their own report and in getting in different stakeholder views. They are still too tightly controlling the exercise. However, the fact that we had questioned and challenged the Bank before, asking them to make explicit some of these process elements, meant that we could use that later to reveal where the real power dynamics lay. We broke the story internationally to the Financial Times as well as in a number of other places and it was a good moment to illustrate some of these tensions and complexities in global policy making processes.

I think also that the initial statement of process and the controversy over the resignation meant that the final report was not actually as bad as it might have been, because it was insulated and the World Bank was embarrassed to go as far in reworking and rewording it as they would have liked to. Still, I think that it tries to be all things to all people.

I want to move on now to the 'Voices of the Poor' study. This was an exercise which claims to have directly consulted 60,000 poorer people across developing countries, partly by dint of synthesising existing participatory poverty assessments (PPAs), but partly by new consultations in 23 countries. It was marketed as the unmediated voices of the poor at a global level. It was used in the Poverty WDR, by many people including researchers, politicians, etc.

However, in an excellent book *Knowing Poverty*, published by EarthScan, two of the researchers who worked on the synthesis of the PPAs have produced a critique of some of the ways in which the process worked. Like many of the people commenting on these global policies, they wonder whether the cart is sometimes driving the horse, whether the policy process has preconceived answers and then the evidence is mined to find it. In this case they point out that there are multiple filters between the voices of the poor and the production of the final report. I will not go through all of these, many of which may be familiar to you from policy processes which you were involved in, but the main point for me is that there is no such thing as unmediated individual poor people's voices at the global level. There are all sorts of process filters and process elements between them and the final report and dissemination.

I was asked to comment on some good practice or recommendations. I think that the World Commission on Dams is extremely interesting in that respect. The exercise was initiated in response to strong campaigning over many years by civil society which had formed well-organised networks. I need not go into all the different dams and networks which people know about, but there was a strong body of organisation there putting pressure on the World Bank. That strong body of negotiators was then able to remove World Bank control from the final process. It was able to go way beyond having a consultative status whereby groups might have been able to show up to one or two meetings, to actually co-decision-making about the running, execution and final report produced by that commission, so in that respect it is different from many other commissions and global policy processes.

As usual, the World Bank's initial response to all this outside pressure was to do an in-house desk-based number crunching review, where they ran some figures, threw in all sorts of counter-factuals and came up with a classification which said something like: half the dams were generally alright, another third would have been alright if X, and another third look pretty bad but could be fixed if Y. That sort of report did not at all satisfy the outside critics, either in terms of process or in terms of the analysis and the evidence presented, so negotiations were undertaken for a genuinely independent review and not an in-house. The World Bank brought in the World Conservation Union (IUCN) to help facilitate that.

To cut a long story short, after a lot of knife-edge negotiations, 12 commissioners were appointed. The difference between these commissioners and many previous commissioners was that, in the words of someone quoted in the independent evaluation, they were not broad middle-ground worthies, but were people active in networks and practitioners at different ends of the spectrum, for example the leader of a people's movement in India, the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The Chair of the commission was the serving South African Water Minister. So there was a range of different people. Another distinction was that civil society was not represented by NGOs close to the centres of power in Washington, London, etc., but was represented by this activist organisation representing affected peoples, by an indigenous person, himself active in many networks, as well as by an international NGO. Another aspect that gave this review proper independence was that it had multiple sources of finance. I think that there were something like 45 separate contributors, so no one funder could capture it in any way.

In terms of how research fitted in, as opposed to other aspects of the process, a brief schematic of the knowledge base which was built up during the course of the review includes a number of different case studies and a cross-check survey. Whereas the case study was obviously going into more depth, the cross-check survey was to see if there were any other trends missed by the case studies, or to see whether there were other things which could be matched up. The thematic reviews were on sectoral or issues slices and all of this was underpinned by submissions, consultations and field visits. There was some very interesting chemistry and relationships built up between the commissioners, one of whom was also the head of Asea Brown Boveri (a large multinational company active in dam-building), and the affected peoples. They went to field visits and saw that, in some cases, after 30 or 40 years no resettlement had taken place, so the review went way beyond what you can get from reading dry literature, statistics and chewing over data.

The key lesson from this is that it was an innovative process, providing genuine opportunities for those people who tend not to have their voices heard, to participate in running as well as feeding into a global process. However, the fact that it was so genuinely independent and came up with such far reaching conclusions meant that it has not been, by any means, instantly accepted by the World Bank and others. However, it is being used as a benchmark by many different groups in real world situations. It also is interesting that the World Bank, when starting subsequent reviews, has exerted much tighter control and reverted back to the eminent persons model, or if you like, the broad middle-ground worthies model, which the World Commission on Dams broke with.

So to conclude, there are many institutional incentives which the World Bank and probably many other global knowledge actors face. Individual researchers within these institutions face a difficulty in knowing how far to go or how far to be 'political' or 'radical' in what they are listening to and representing in their research findings. They often face a lot of problems in their contracts in terms of funders they negotiate with not giving them enough freedom. The World Bank's staff association newsletter had a special issue on the difficulties for World Bank researchers in being able to really put forward their point of view – and the idea that there is a thought police operating inside the World Bank to prevent them from doing certain things.

We should conceive of these global policy exercises not in terms of their product, the quality of their evidence etc, because quality can be seen and broken down in multiple ways, but we should see it in terms of process: who are these things empowering, who are they not empowering? Raj Patel and Anne Rademacher (the critical 'Voices of the Poor' researchers) have an interesting slogan: 'no generalisation without representation', which means that the processes of abstracting and synthesising all this global data should involve the stakeholders, not just be a process of sucking out and extracting the information on which other people then do the analytical work. I think I am just restating what I have said already, but we need to have clear statements of purpose and process and guarantees about this for these global policy exercises, to insulate from problematic institutional incentives and to ensure co decision-making, not just extracting.

Many civil society groups are concerned that in the absence of such process and purpose guarantees, they may be legitimating processes which place their knowledge and experience at a disadvantage.

Lord Desai

Ideas Matter More Than Evidence



The broad question, 'Does evidence matter?' reminds me of a question I used to have to teach about in the 1970s and 1980s, 'Does money matter?'. It took not just me but a whole profession in economics about 20 years to reach an inconclusive answer, during which time, policy makers had gone off and done all sorts of things that they wanted to do, based on our partial answers. Even while we were still debating about econometric equations, they were going out doing something with the money supply.

So in a sense this is a very unanswerable question. In my view, evidence does not matter, ideas do. Evidence is secondary to generating ideas. My classic example is Keynes' General Theory, which comes from no evidence whatsoever – there is some data but no evidence there. It is really a piece of cerebral argument in persuading people how the world works and that the world works differently from the way they had thought.

Keynes' book actually starts by stating in the preface that it is a book addressed to his fellow economists. The process of generating knowledge and ideas is not a democratic one. It is a minority occupation. It then filters down and once you have an idea that spans different research programmes, people may then start gathering evidence. No-one was gathering evidence about consumption functions or investment expectations of businessmen and so on until Keynes said that was the way it worked. It was because of the way he formulated the problem. Of course, there were many lags between that idea and its implementation in detailed policy making. In the early 1950s, people did not have national income data. Those ideas were way ahead of the data. The idea was very important.

I have studied development since the 1950s, I have read it, and in the 1990s I have done some work in development, and changed my mind several times. The problem of development (and I should say it parenthetically) is that there is no viable distinct dominant idea. I do not know, for example, that I could give you a coherent answer in five minutes to the question of what causes poverty and what cures it. That is a central dilemma.

When I was studying development there were sharp paradigms. Actually, they were left-wing paradigms, from the idea that only socialism will help the poor and capitalism will never help the poor, to a kind of middle of the road Keynesian development paradigm. Now I think we have the problem that there is no sharp ideological divide admitted. The poverty theory has become a huge jungle in which a variety of people can grasp a little bit of it. None of it is untrue, that is the problem. But no-one knows whether the truth is a certain combination of perspectives or another combination.

There are three things that we have done. Partly because of this lack of sharp theoretical perspective and partly because of the growth of democracy in the world and so on, we all believe that the answer will be found by having a large public meeting. A huge ongoing meeting used to happen in Mao's China, a perpetual meeting of different forces, which eventually would generate an answer. What we have done firstly then, is overloaded the agenda. In the old days development was a very simple arena, it would cover income growth or structure or socialism or something. Today we have sustainable development, gender awareness, popular participation, transparency, accountability, good governance and so on.

We had a discussion in the House of Lords recently about the number of questions that are asked of the recipient even for small amounts of money such as £1 million. I do not know of any project in any developed country that has satisfied those criteria. Why we have created this fantasmagoria of ideal development, this platonic model of development, is beyond me. It happened by accretion and, because everyone is powerful – some people are more powerful than others, but everyone is powerful – they can throw in their two-penny's worth.

This leads to my next idea, which is that we have an overcrowded arena. There are no thresholds as to who can be in a development dialogue – anyone can take part in the dialogue, start a non-governmental organisation or be a policy-advisor. It is very all-inclusive and no matter how absurd an idea a person has, the World Bank says if you write us a paper we will give you some money. The World Bank does not say that the idea is rubbish because that is not the way that development takes place. In a sense (and this may be very unfair), the more inarticulate the proposition, the higher the attention it is given.

My own cynical pessimistic view (I call myself a cheerful pessimist) is that I do not think any improvement in the world is going to happen in my lifetime, but I am resigned to being very cheerful about it. Improvements will happen not because of anything we do, but despite us. It is quite remarkable that there has been reduction of poverty in the world in Asia. What happened in Asia in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, was completely against all the ideas of the 1950s and 1960s. In my view, and people will disagree, development in Asia led to poverty reduction when Asia got into an open economy and a capitalist process, and generated an amazing amount of growth to reduce poverty.

The official or organised way of development policy making is, I think, overcrowded, over-inclusive and overloaded, therefore I do not know

what it does. Lots of money is doled out and I hope some of it does some good, but yesterday in complete frustration I said publicly, 'Look, we are giving \$50 billion of overseas aid. There are a billion poor people in the world. Why don't we just find the poor and give them \$1 a week and do nothing else. No questions asked. What they do with the money is not our concern'. That would probably do more to relieve poverty than anything else. This will not happen so do not worry, we will all still be in business.

I have never actually been a policy advisor to any government, or written a single piece of policy advice. I was once a visiting fellow to the World Bank, but I told them that they should not worry about social capital, it is a disastrous concept and they should not waste any money over it. This was way back in 1996 and they completely ignored my advice. But I did take part in a Human Development Report (HDR), which I would like to describe.

In a sense the HDR is like the Mother Teresa of development, it is not like the World Development Report at all. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the poor body, it does not have any money, it is somewhat scrappy and they cannot get large conferences or give out free HDRs, and their budget is quite modest. But I think that the Human Development Index (HDI) worked in its initial phase. It was driven by a very powerful research entrepreneur, a policy entrepreneur Mahbub ul Haq who sadly died unrecognised. He did not get the alternative Nobel prize for which he was proposed. I think it was also driven by what was then a fairly precise question which arose out of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) following the debt-crisis of the early 1980s and when people saw what was happening in Latin America, especially regarding public expenditure, and the outcomes in macro-economic dimensions which were the International Monetary Fund's focus (balance of trade, inflation, etc.) and outcomes in development goals.

There was a contrast there, so quite a lot of people were saying that there must be a better measure of development than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Back in 1988 the Latin American branch of the UNDP went to Amartya Sen and asked for an alternative to the GDP. He was very busy at the time for various reasons and suggested that his friend Meghnad Desai might do it. I said I would not do it unless he acted as a consultant to the consultant. We met and we thought that we would be able to think about it and do it. When I got back it did not take me long to realise that we would find an answer.

I think it is important to explain why that was. It is important that the view that is put forward is both sharp and communicable, and also fairly robust to criticism, but also not so complex that it becomes diffuse. My measure was very simple. When a politician says that under his government

the growth rate is going to go up by 5%, everyone applauds thinking that their own income will go up by 5%. We all know that this is a fallacy. GDP is itself a very dubious notion, but it is a powerful signal and policy makers have not found a better signal to talk about well-being. What is it about GDP that is so powerful that people who do not know anything about economics know about GDP? You need a welfare measure which is relateable to individual experience, as well as being a systematic economic concept. Income is very powerful because of that, everyone thinks they know what income is and what an increase in it would mean.

So I proposed that the best non-monetary indicator of welfare was the number of years I had left to live. I called it 'potential lifetime'. That is an indicator of welfare because if I have time I can do a variety of things which may give me well-being. It is an individual measure, it is linear, and it can be added up, across people. It is very simple. Immediately that gives us a reason for why high infant mortality is a bad thing: because a lot of people will have very low potential lifetime. So you can immediately say that longevity is a good thing. I was very precise about not wanting to include resources or quality or anything else, just time. Time as an alternative to money as a measure of welfare. It turned out that some people were very unhappy with it nonetheless.

The power of HDI is that it is simple, it only has three dimensions and four variables. Secondly, it has been kept simple all these years. That is hard work. The most difficult thing in economics is to keep things simple, because it is not just education and health that matter but social deprivation and nutrition etc. In the first HDR, we had certain measures of over-development: when development becomes dysfunctional. But we kept HDI simple and the fact that it is a very simple measure makes it explainable to everyone and usable by them. It is not as simple as national income but it is simple enough to compute, at national level and at district level. You can have HDI for groups, so it is disaggregable, it is quantitative and it ranks, which is important because people like league tables. There were other ranks such as the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), which had a kind of ranking system, but everyone forgot about it, partly because it was not disseminated and partly because it was not computed again and again.

Two things had happened, firstly Mahbubul Haq was able to disseminate and act as an ambassador for the idea across the world, but before he did that he wanted to make sure that as far as the theoretical foundations were concerned, it was based on sound economics. He had good economists working with him and he told them to make it as theoretically complex as they liked, to make it theoretically rigorous, and he would explain it in a simple way.

Theoretical rigour is very important because it makes for conceptual simplicity and I think that the HDI does not actually say how high human development would be achieved. It is a measure not a causal story. The causal story of what enhances the HDI falls back into what Frances Stewart called the 'meta-production function of human development' which we have not found. Because it is only a measure and it is an indicator rather than policy advice, it performed this role by changing the way that people thought about development in the 1990s. It even influenced the World Bank. The World Bank fought against the HDI for a while but finally gave up because if you really want an indicator to measure development, there is not anything better.

The UNDP went on developing various poverty indices and so on, and there is a whole proliferation of indices now, but none of them have ever had the appeal of the HDI because none of them have been that simple. The fact that HDI was used as a measure is not due to evidence as such, but to a priori thinking, mainly by Amartya Sen, but also by people like Frances Stewart, Keith Griffin, Paul Streeten – they were all there at the one-day meeting in which HDI was formulated. We started at 11am and by 4.30pm we had done it, but that was because the people sitting there brought a lot of knowledge to it.

So I would say that the lessons of HDI are: simplify, simplify, simplify. Do not overload the agenda. HDI is not a perfect indicator, but do not spoil it by adding dimensions to it, which is what happened to UNRISD, which had a huge number of indices for development in the 1960s. Then you disseminate and you come back to it again and again and recalculate it, so that people can always use it and can repeat it themselves. What use they make of it then is not your concern.

Brief Biographies of Speakers and Chairs

John Borton recently completed an assignment as Director of the Learning Support Office in Malawi. The LSO is a new approach to improve the quality of emergency response in the field, through the promotion and facilitation of three-way learning activities: learning in, lateral learning, and learning out. He has 20 years experience in the emergency/humanitarian sector as a researcher/network manager/evaluator. He worked for the Government of Botswana in the early 1980s as Planning Officer for the National Drought Relief Programme, and was a Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute in London during the 1990s. During this time he founded and was the first Coordinator of the Humanitarian Practice Network; led the team conducting the humanitarian component of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda; and was one of ALNAP's founders and served as its Coordinator for its first five years. John spoke at the sixth meeting: Putting Knowledge into Practice.

Vincent Cable, MP for Twickenham, is the Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and he also speaks for his party on issues of Finance, European Economic and Monetary Union and the City. He has been an MP since 1997 and was a Labour Councillor in Glasgow between 1971 and 1974, focusing on transport and strategic planning for the city. In between he has been Chief Economist of Shell International; Head of Economics, Royal Institute of International Affairs; Special Adviser to the Commonwealth Secretary-General Sonny Ramphal; Deputy Director of the Overseas Development Institute; a Lecturer in Economics, University of Glasgow; and a Treasury Official, in the Government of Kenya. He has an MA (Natural Sciences) from Cambridge University and Ph.D. (Economics) from the University of Glasgow. He has written several books on Trade Policy and International Finance including an in depth study of international telecommunications: *Global Superhighways* and in 1999 a major book on *Globalisation and Global Governance* for Chatham House and Brookings. Vincent spoke at the second meeting: The Political Context.

Bonnie Cheuk joined the British Council early in 2003 as Chief Knowledge Officer. She has worked in knowledge management roles in the US, Singapore and Hong Kong and has a particular interest in workplace information literacy. She will shortly be presenting a paper on workplace information literacy at UNESCO's Information Literacy World Summit. Bonnie spoke at the sixth meeting: Putting Knowledge into Practice.

Julius Court is a Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute. He has experience as a researcher (with a range of publications on governance and development issues) and in

management (at the United Nations University). He specialises in bridging research and policy; governance and development; and surveys. He worked as an Executive Officer in the Office of the Rector at the United Nations University in Tokyo, Japan (1996-2002). Before joining UNU, he was a researcher at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. His main publications include *Making Sense of Governance: Empirical Evidence from Sixteen Transitional Societies* (with G. Hyden and K. Mease, 2004); and co-edited volumes on *Asia and Africa in the Global Economy* (2003) and *Human Development and the Environment: Challenges for the United Nations in the New Millennium* (2002). He was born and grew up in Kenya. Julius spoke at the second meeting: The Political Context.

Lord Desai has been a Professor of Economics at the LSE since 1983 and Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance since 1992. He received an MA from the University of Bombay and a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. His areas of expertise include applied macroeconometrics; inflation; unemployment; monetary theory; problems of political economy and Marxian economics; international economic development; economic history; and financial innovation. His publications include: *Marxian Economic Theory* (1974); *Applied Econometrics* (1976); *Marxian Economics* (1979); *Testing Monetarism* (1981); *The Cambridge Economic History of India 1757* (1970, 1983) (Assistant Editor to Professor Dharma Kumar); *Macroeconomics and Monetary Theory: Selected Essays, Vol. 1* (1995); *Globalization, Growth and Sustainability* (1997); *Measuring Political Freedom, LSE on Freedom* (1995). He has also contributed articles to *Econometrica*, *Economica* and the *Economic History Review*. Lord Desai spoke at the eighth meeting: International Policies.

Larry Elliott joined the Guardian as an industrial reporter from the Press Association in 1988. He became Economics Correspondent in 1989 and Economics Editor in 1995. Larry chaired the fifth meeting: Think Tanks.

Justin Forsyth is Policy Director of Oxfam GB. He has a BA (Hons) in History and Politics, Oxford Brookes University. He has worked for Oxfam for over 10 years. His main interests and responsibilities include international policy issues; lobbying and campaigning; managing global campaigns; and the media. Justin spoke at the fourth meeting: NGO Campaigns.

David Halpern is a Senior Policy Advisor in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU). He was seconded to the Unit immediately after the 2001 election from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Cambridge, and has previously held posts at Nuffield College, Oxford; the Centre for



John Borton



Vincent Cable



Bonnie Cheuk



Julius Court



Lord Desai



Justin Forsyth



David Halpern



Simon Maxwell



Erik Millstone



Ann Pettifor



Paul Spray



Alex Wilks



John Young

European Studies, Harvard; and the Policy Studies Institute, London. He is a teamleader within the PMSU and has worked on several major strategic policy reviews for the Prime Minister; has authored SU think-pieces on social capital (2002) and life satisfaction (2003); and is currently lead advisor to the Strategic Audit. David has published extensively including on cross-national differences and trends in values; citizenship; mental health and the built environment; crime; social capital; and strategic policy, notably the influential *Options for Britain: a strategic policy review* (Dartmouth, 1996). Outside of his work for the PMSU, he has completed a book on *Social Capital* (Polity Press, 2003) and has a growing interest in research on happiness and the policy implications. David spoke at the first meeting: Does Evidence Matter?

Margaret Jay is a former Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women, with a previous career in television journalism. She has a strong interest in development issues, particularly in the area of health, and served previously on the Overseas Development Institute Council between 1993 and 1997. Margaret chaired the seventh meeting: Policy Entrepreneurship.

Simon Maxwell became Director of the Overseas Development Institute in 1997. He is an economist who worked overseas for 10 years, in Kenya and India for UNDP, and in Bolivia for UKODA; and then for 16 years at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, latterly as Programme Manager for Poverty, Food Security and the Environment. He has written widely on poverty; food security; agricultural development; and aid. His current research interests include: global governance; economic and social rights; social exclusion; and the dissolving boundary between North and South. Simon chaired the fourth meeting: NGO Campaigns and spoke at the fifth meeting: Think Tanks; and at the seventh meeting: Policy Entrepreneurship.

Erik Millstone is the Director of Studies for the MSc in Science and Technology Policy at the Science Policy Research Unit, University of Brighton. He teaches on the Social Institution of Science and on Environmental Policy. He has a first degree in Physics, and three postgraduate degrees in Philosophy, culminating in a doctorate on epistemological scepticism. He taught philosophy and the history and social impact of studies of science before joining SPRU in 1987. His main research interest is on how policy makers balance the complex mixture of scientific and technical considerations on the one hand, and economic, political and social considerations on the other. The methodology he adopts involves deconstructing policy decisions by identifying the contributions made by each of these considerations. Recent publications include *The Painful Lessons of BSE*, on the *Financial Times* website. Erik spoke at the first meeting: Does Evidence Matter?

Ann Pettifor is Director of Jubilee Research at NEF. She gained a degree in Politics and Economics from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, then worked in Tanzania before coming to Britain in the mid 1970s. She first worked at the Headquarters of the British Labour Party, then moved into the private sector and worked as an adviser to chief executives in the energy, retail and property sectors. Since 1994, first as director of the Debt Crisis Network, then with the Jubilee 2000 movement, she has campaigned for the cancellation of the debts of the poorest countries. As well as her work with Jubilee Research she is an advisor for the United Nation's *Human Development Report* (2003) on the Millennium Development Goals. Ann spoke at the seventh meeting: Policy Entrepreneurship.

Paul Spray is the recently-appointed Head of Research in the Policy Division at the UK Department for International Development (DFID). His team has been established to pull together all the research centrally commissioned by DFID, moving from its previous separate sectoral programmes. He will be producing a new research strategy for DFID. He was previously head of DFID's Nigeria office, and before that worked as an Economic Adviser on DFID's relations with the IMF and the World Bank focussing on debt and the (then new) PRSPs. Before joining DFID in 1997, he was Policy and Campaigns Director of Christian Aid. Paul spoke at the third meeting: The Role of Research.

Diane Stone is Reader in Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick. She has also taught at the Australian National University where she gained her Masters (1989) and PhD (1993) degrees in Political Science and International Relations, Murdoch University in Western Australia (BA, 1987) and Manchester Metropolitan University. For the past decade, Diane Stone has researched the role of think tanks and research institutes in public policy making. A recent research interest concerns the World Bank, especially in its guise as the 'knowledge bank'. She is working on a book which addresses the transnationalisation of knowledge elites – think tanks, consultants, foundations, academics – especially their interactions with international organisations. Other research interests include the influence of ideas and expertise on policy; the political economy of higher education; the role of non-state actors in domestic, regional and global affairs; conceptual developments in the study of policy networks; and the political process of lesson-drawing and policy transfer. Diane chaired the third meeting: The Role of Research.

Alex Wilks is an activist and analyst on development issues. He studied at Oxford University and has been involved with diverse campaigns and movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan in India. Since 1995 he has been Coordinator of the Bretton Woods Project,

working with non-governmental organisations to monitor and advocate on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. In his previous work as Campaigns Editor for The Ecologist magazine he also wrote about and campaigned on World Bank issues, helping organise some of the alternative events around the Bank/Fund 50th anniversary. As part of this he carried out extensive work to challenge the roles of the World Bank as the predominant development 'knowledge bank'. Alex spoke at the eighth meeting: International Policies.

John Young is a Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute and Head of the RAPID programme, focusing on research-policy linkages and communications. He has been involved in action-research, policy development and government service reform projects in Africa and Asia for the last 15 years. He joined ODI after five years in Indonesia managing the DFID Decentralised Livestock Services in the Eastern Regions of Indonesia (DELIVERI) Project – an action-research project to promote more decentralised and client-oriented livestock services. Prior to that he was ITDG's Country Director in Kenya, responsible for managing the group's practical project and research work on a wide range of technologies, to ensure that lessons were effectively communicated to government and non-government policy makers. Since joining ODI he has been involved in projects on decentralisation and rural services; information and information systems; and strengthening southern research capacity. John chaired the first meeting: Does Evidence Matter?; the second meeting: The Political Context; the sixth meeting: Putting Knowledge into Practice; the eighth meeting: International Policies; and spoke at the third meeting: The Role of Research.

RAPID Publications

How Civil Society Organisations use Evidence to Influence Policy Processes: A Literature Review

Amy Pollard and Julius Court (ODI), ODI Working Paper, forthcoming 2004

Networks and Policy Processes in International Development: An Annotated Bibliography

Emily Perkin and Julius Court (ODI), ODI Working Paper, forthcoming 2004

Bridging Research and Policy in International Development

Julius Court, Ingie Hovland and John Young, ITDG Publishing, 2004

'Bridging Research and Policy in International Development: Context, Evidence and Links' Julius Court and John Young, in **The Challenge of Transnational Knowledge Networks: Bridging Research and Policy in a Globalising World**, edited by Diane Stone and Simon Maxwell, Routledge, 2004

Livelihoods Approaches to Information and Communication in Support of Rural Poverty Elimination and Food Security

Robert Chapman, Tom Slaymaker and John Young (ODI), November 2003

Communication of Research for Poverty Reduction: A Literature Review

Ingie Hovland (ODI), ODI Working Paper 227, October 2003

Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning, An International Development Perspective: An Annotated Bibliography

Ingie Hovland (ODI), ODI Working Paper 224, August 2003

Good News when Researchers and Politicians Work Together

John Young and Julius Court (ODI), Panos Features, July 2003

Sustainable Livelihoods: A Case Study of the Evolution of DFID Policy

William Solesbury (ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice), ODI Working Paper 217, June 2003

The PRSP Initiative: Multilateral Policy Change and the Relative Role of Research

Karin Christiansen with Ingie Hovland (ODI), ODI Working Paper 216, August 2003

How the Sphere Project Came into Being: A Case Study of Policy-making in the Humanitarian Aid Sector, and the Relative Influence of Research

Margie Buchanan-Smith (Independent consultant), ODI Working Paper 215, July 2003

Animal Health Care in Kenya: The Road to Community-Based Animal Health Service Delivery

John Young (ODI), Julius Kajume (DVS Kenya) and Jacob Wanyama (ITDG Kenya), ODI Working Paper 214, May 2003

Bridging Research and Policy: Insights from 50 Case Studies

Julius Court and John Young (ODI), ODI Working Paper 213, August 2003

Bridging Research and Policy: An Annotated Bibliography

Maja de Vibe, Ingie Hovland and John Young (ODI), ODI Working Paper 174, September 2002

Bridging Research and Policy: Context, Evidence and Links

Emma Crewe (UCL) and John Young (ODI), ODI Working Paper 173, June 2002

For more information contact:

John Young (j.young@odi.org.uk) or Julius Court (j.court@odi.org.uk)
at the Overseas Development Institute, 111 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JD, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7922 0300 or visit www.odi.org.uk/rapid/publications

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Does Evidence Matter? Meeting Series

Introduction

Better utilization of research and evidence in development policy and practice can have a dramatic impact. For example, household disease surveys in rural Tanzania informed health service reforms which contributed to a 28% reduction in infant mortality in two years. On the other hand, the HIV/AIDS crisis has deepened in some countries as governments fail to implement effective prevention and mitigation programmes, despite clear evidence how to prevent it spreading. Although evidence clearly matters, there is no systematic understanding of when, how and why evidence informs policy.

This lunch-time meeting series organised by ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme provided an opportunity for researchers, policy makers and intermediaries in the UK to discuss how and why evidence informs policy. Speakers included politicians, bureaucrats, researchers, NGO activists and practitioners from UK government and non-government organisations. They talked about how the political and institutional context influences development policy makers, what sort of evidence they want and need, how research institutes can manage and use their knowledge more effectively, how NGO campaigns and think tanks achieve policy influence, and what makes a good policy entrepreneur.

This monograph contains summaries of each meeting, full transcripts of each talk and short biographies of each speaker. Full audio tracks and video clips of each talk are available on the RAPID website: www.odi.org.uk/rapid/meetings/evidence/Evidence_Series.html.



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The Political Context

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The Role of Research

What does DFID want from research? Do they get it? How could research have more impact on policy? How can you measure research impact? What is its relative importance in recent development policy shifts?

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NGO Campaigns

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What role do they play in policy processes? Are they a force for good? Can they be independent? What is the ideal balance between research and communication? How important is reputation?

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Putting Knowledge into Practice

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Meeting 1: Does Evidence Matter?

Speakers: David Halpern – Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office

Erik Millstone – Science Policy Research Unit

Chair: John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID, ODI



Meeting Summary

This was the first meeting of the series ‘Does Evidence Matter?’ **John Young** outlined that the aim of the session was to focus on a few key questions: Why is evidence important in policy making? What sort of evidence? How do you get it? Is the current emphasis on evidence-based policy in government resulting in better policies?

David Halpern’s presentation, Evidence Based Policy: ‘Build on’ or ‘Spray on’? focused on evidence-based policies in the UK – examples of success and failure, the characteristics of what distinguished the different outcomes and how we can do it better. Is policy built on a base of evidence or is evidence sprayed onto what policy makers were going to do anyway?

The UK has many specific cases where evidence has improved policy with positive outcomes – literacy, labour market participation and pre-schooling, for example. Several successful policy strategies have been based on evidence from other countries. He explained that, in addition to what the evidence was, how the evidence is marshaled matters for the outcome. However, even in cases where evidence did influence policy, it is often difficult to attribute changes in policy to a specific evidence-based strategy. The UK also has examples where there have been gaps between the policy and the strategies that would be suggested by existing evidence – the crime and justice sector and primary healthcare issue are two.

What drives impact? David Halpern highlighted five issues: (i) the evidence must exist – and good evidence takes time to marshal; (ii) someone must know the evidence exists; (iii) the evidence must have policy implications – ‘so what?’ is a common response to many research papers; (iv) the issue must be relevant to public interests; (v) it must be in the ‘zone of proximal development’ – evidence must be within existing frameworks of understanding.

What would improve the situation? (i) Bridge the division between analysts and policy makers; (ii) encourage experiments and variance – so we can see what does and doesn’t work; (iii) be realistic about how knowledge spreads; (iv) do the groundwork for next time; (v) statistics are important – and so is the capacity to understand them; (vi) continue communicating; (vii) reform the Research Assessment Exercise.

Other suggestions for researchers were: (i) talk to policy makers – and keep talking; (ii) look for

policy windows; (iii) take a long-term perspective – you are likely to have more impact in two years than two weeks; (iv) use intermediaries; (v) work inside government.

Evidence is actually used much more than people think. But, evidence is only one of a number of factors that influences policy making.

Erik Millstone spoke on what evidence can and cannot do, using the case of BSE as an example. He described it as one of the biggest evidence-policy failures in recent times. Policy decisions are usually a hybrid of political and technical considerations.

The government claimed policy was based on the best scientific advice. But, the BSE case was one where the evidence was not clear – scientists were not sure if BSE could affect people. Bureaucrats were privately worried, but did not always let policy makers know the whole story. The science was misrepresented to the public – ministers argued beef was safe.

For policy making to be evidence-based requires both technical information and social information (e.g. whether a policy is actually being implemented). Understanding is never complete – there are always some gaps and there are always risks. In the BSE case, the problem was that the policy makers became addicted to their own narrative: ‘Our knowledge of BSE is sufficiently extensive, comprehensive and secure to guarantee that British beef is perfectly safe’. Eventually the credibility of the policy makers was destroyed by the evidence and the case undermined public faith in science-based policy making.

What kind of policy making model is best? Neither a decisionist nor a technocratic model was desirable. There was agreement that there needed to be interaction between policy makers, implementers and scientists. The ‘iterative’ model was preferred.

Comments focused on a range of issues:

- It is important to distinguish between public policy statements and practice on the ground when considering the use of evidence.
- Clearly political context matters. Policy makers are under diverse pressures and evidence is one set of issues that influences them.
- Elites and vested interests affect whether evidence is used or not and, if so, what evidence is used.

- Personal dynamics matter – it is often difficult to speak truth to those in power.
- Policy makers are much more constrained in their actions than researchers – and therefore linking research and policy is not as straightforward as researchers might hope. This raises the importance of intermediaries who both know the evidence (new thinking as well as existing evidence) and are less constrained than policy makers.
- We should not focus solely on what we can measure or learn from stakeholders. Some important issues cannot be measured and some stakeholders are invisible and would be ignored if evidence was the sole guide to policy making. This is especially important in the humanitarian policies, where communities needing support are less visible, vocal and powerful.
- Who is an expert? Using evidence is important, but it is dangerous to create a 'cult of expertise'. It is important to draw on a range of knowledge.
- Public opinion increasingly matters in UK policy making. Policy change often occurs when the public understand issues. It is therefore important to de-mystify scientific advice.

David Halpern

Evidence Based Policy: 'Build on' or 'Spray on'?



Firstly I should just confess that mainly I work on domestic policy. I am told that that is ok, but many of the examples I give therefore will be domestic ones. I will talk to the title of an issue which is being discussed in Government, about whether evidence is something that we build on, or whether it is something we just spray on.

A few words about the Strategy Unit so you know what it is and where I am coming from. We are known both as 'the Strategy Unit' in the Cabinet Office, or as 'the PM's Strategy Unit'. So we serve the Prime Minister. We do a mixture of both relatively public reviews, which are often divided into a large evidence-gathering exercise and which we nearly always publish if we can (we have learnt that this is the right thing to do, for lots of reasons) and then sometimes more private reviews on what the politics is and so on. We take long-term cross-departmental views on issues – that is our value-added. It is project-based, so we assemble teams of people from both outside and inside to work on particular issues. I believe we operate an evidence-based approach. I have to confess that I am a bit naïve about this. I have worked in all parts of government and I almost cannot understand how else you can do policy, but of course policy is often done in other ways.

I am going to cover, quite succinctly, classic examples of successes and failures, in terms of the impact of the evidence on the subsequent decision, in the UK domestic context particularly; what characterised the effective use of evidence (essentially what makes the difference: what made it work in one case and in another the argument did not fly), and how can we do it better.

I am going to try to do that first from the perspective of how can we – government – do it better, but also try to reflect back to the mindset of an academic or being in a think tank. Of course, it is an informal view, a cluster of thoughts.

So, the key question: are we in a new golden age of evidence-based policy? Or are we a spray-on cover for decisions we would have made anyway?

Firstly, some classic success stories. The literacy strategy in Britain is perhaps the most quoted example of success. Back in 1996 we had Michael Barber [then responsible for drafting the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, now head of the PM's Delivery Unit] and a group of people coming together to try to work out what the problem was in terms of low-levels of literacy and numeracy, particularly at the primary level, and to look at what you could do about it. They looked at a wide range of evidence to try to work out what would work to improve literacy and numeracy. Indeed, it was something just to believe that it was possible after years and years, when many people believed that there was nothing you could do

about it (which was patently not the case when you looked in terms of international comparisons).

A big part of the success of the literacy strategy was not just that the evidence was put together, but how it was put together. It was about building a certain coalition and consensus amongst many of the stakeholders. I am going to focus mainly on the evidence-based approach, but that is nested within a wider set of issues about what leads to effective policy intervention and change. Those are two different types of stories.

The literacy strategy was very successful and with a very high profile. Although the ultimate targets have not quite been reached on time, nonetheless it was a spectacular turnaround in terms of Key Stage One and Key Stage Two in British schools. From an evidence-based policy viewpoint, it can and has been criticised on specific points, for example about insufficient emphasis on phonetics and so on not being adequately covered. There is also the question of how far we can say that the improvements in literacy and numeracy actually resulted from the strategy and therefore from the evidence. Because it was pretty universally applied – or encouraged perhaps we should say – it is actually quite difficult to track whether that original strategy was the cause, from an evidence-based point of view.

Active Welfare or New Deal was another classic example, particularly borrowing on Scandinavian evidence about how you could achieve much higher participation in the labour market through certain means. It also drew on evidence from Richard Layard [London School of Economics] and others about how unemployment was moving across countries, between cycles and so on.

Early Years is a more current example. Spending reviews are supposed partly to be evidence-based pleas to the government and to Treasury. A Department will make a submission saying you should give us X many more billion pounds because we will spend it well and here are our ideas. As part of that process, SureStart was put together, partly based on US evidence. In the last spending review, a successful bid around a massive expansion of childcare was definitely swung by an evidence-based argument and it was a particularly good submission to treasury and it continues to be an area, even though it is very expensive in terms of pre-school interventions, where there is quite a lot of focus and is very much driven by the evidence of, for example, the extent to which the Scandinavian countries have been able to break the link between class origins and class destinations, specifically through pre-school. Or to put it another way, the extent to which standard education has not broken the link and therefore you have to look elsewhere.

Longitudinal data suggests that a vast amount of the attainment gap can be seen in under-five year olds, in fact it can be seen even at 22 months, which suggests you have to do something before that, even though government is not particularly comfortable about it in some ways.

A few other examples to mention in passing include the Energy White Paper: whilst it may not be perfect, it is certainly true that it is an argument and an area which is being driven strongly by the science base, because there are high costs of getting involved.

Higher Education: for example, the OECD cross-national analyses about the contribution of various kinds of research and development to economic growth has definitely had a big impact, especially in the medical area.

Now onto failures, or areas where the discrepancy between the evidence base and the policy is larger.

Classically, criminal justice and crime – Mary Tuck when she was at the Home Office [ex-head of the Research and Stats Unit] put this in a particularly forthright way about the discrepancies between what governments had done for many years in terms of policy and what was it actually known, in terms of the evidence base, would reduce crime. This is an area where the gaps are particularly large.

Primary healthcare: arguments about if you really want to improve primary health, not just in the UK context but nationally, what is the way to do it? The political temptation is always to go for secondary healthcare as opposed to trying to pick up causes early. Similarly with attempting to do things about mothers' education and so on in different contexts.

Life satisfaction: partly I just threw this in because I was doing something on it this morning at Downing Street and I have a graph, which I think is great. I was tempted to get it stuck on a T-shirt and wander around Treasury. But basically what it shows is GDP per capita, which is the line going up and up, and life satisfaction for the UK – depressingly flat. What it poses is the fundamental question about what is it you are trying to achieve and what are your levers. Anyway, it certainly poses questions, if not answers.

So what drives impact? This might seem quite inane, but there has to be good evidence there to have an impact. Good evidence normally takes a long time to assemble, particularly when you want, for example, great longitudinal data with cross-national comparisons and so on. You are not going to get that in a six week period when you suddenly have to do something in that area. It has to be there already.

Secondly, someone has to know it. Again in some ways this is trite, but also phenomenally important. The way in which knowledge gets transmitted is not primarily through someone reading very detailed technical papers somewhere in government (although that does happen a little bit). You have to have someone there who actually understands the literature and the material well enough to be able to interpret it effectively. That is clearly absolutely critical and not to be assumed.

It has to go somewhere. We produce various papers which go to the Prime Minister in an early draft form and he will write on the bottom 'so what?'. It is all very well to explore a particular literature but it has to go somewhere with some policy implications. You have to believe that you can do something about it.

Then there is our relationship to public attitudes and interests. Clearly criminal justice policy etc. are constrained by these familiar issues.

There is also this thing of 'zone of proximal development'. The psychologist Vygotsky used this phrase to explain development in children. His point was that siblings would learn from one another but they had to be close enough in the development process to be able to learn from one another and if the gap was substantial that learning would not occur. You see that all the time. It partly goes to this issue of absorptive capacity, but if you are way out there ahead with the evidence, it will not have that impact. You have to be in that zone where people are going to do something with it.

How can we do it better? Within government, one of the things I have been shocked about is the extent to which departments often have this division between analysts and the policy makers, which often makes little sense. You have to encourage experiments and variability. For evidence-based policy to work, it is not just about hiring some academic and getting them to do a review of the literature, although that might be worthy enough, but in many key areas, the system itself has to generate the evidence, because there has to be variability within it and there has to be analysis of what worked and what did not, in a systematic way. That is absolutely pivotal for creating some sort of learning system.

Be realistic about how knowledge spreads. This is not just about getting the knowledge originally but, in terms of the practices on the ground, we have to be more sophisticated than we have been about how best practice spreads. You often go into an area and think you know what the key evidence would be but we do not have it. You could put down a marker so that when you come back to the issue in five years' time, such evidence would be in play. That would be a sensible thing to do.

Statistical literacy would be nice. It is not that widespread and it is a serious limitation, not just in terms of being able to interpret a logistic progression or something but it is about being able to understand a mindset of a whole body of work.

You should talk to others. Let them know questions. It is a bit unfair when policy makers bemoan the wider community about not delivering the right evidence at the right time and the question is, who told them? You have to know what is in the minds of the policy makers in order to know how to understand. Reform of the Research Assessment Exercise is a possible point for discussion.

‘Outside the black box’ was a message delivered to government, but in terms of the wider community, evidence is often used much more than people think it is at certain key points. People do not realise that at the right time a particular paper or piece of evidence can dominate. Key arguments can really hinge on one or two academic papers. The person who wrote it may never know that but it may happen.

You have to keep talking to policy makers, even where this is frustrating at times. You have to keep looking for the window of opportunity. You can be banging on about an issue for years and years and no one seems to listen and then the right configuration of factors will emerge and all of a sudden it will be the issue and there will be a readiness. It is often very difficult to judge that when you have only ever worked in a particular area.

The key point is that you can have much more influence if you look to the two year rather than the two week horizon. Normally by the time things get into detailed consultation documents, government has gone a long way down the road to making formal commitments and adopting a position. You can tinker with it at the margins but if you really want to have a big impact, you normally do it before that has happened, in some more fundamental agenda-setting way.

Use intermediaries. Clearly that matters greatly. A good example might be capital endowments and asset-based welfare. Ackerman in the States and Le Grand and others in Britain made the argument quite well about why people should be given a capital endowment at a certain age but they could not really make any progress. Then the Institute of Public Policy Research took it up and ran with it as a ‘Baby Bond’ and they just got good contacts. The other thing is to do what people like me do: work inside. Increasingly there are opportunities for this. Someone told me that there are 4,000 people now working in the civil service, seconded from bits of academia. They can have a very big impact.

In conclusion, evidence can be massively influential. I think there are a number of policy areas where you could say that it was utterly

decisive, though not enough, and only when you are in that ‘zone’, when the opportunity is there. We have to be honest about it. Generally, it is not routine practice and it is not the case that most submissions and papers relate to and rely heavily on the evidence.

Evaluation is probably getting better and this is my point about a learning system: it can not just be that we occasionally stick our heads out and do a literature review. It has to be about how you conduct policy and deliberately introduce or encourage variation into systems and evaluate it in such a way that you are learning all the time about what works and what does not.

I cannot give the exact field but in a major area of policy we decided to look at all the evaluations done and all the different policies and see if we could work out their cost-effectiveness and what worked best. Of course there had been hundreds in this major area of government policy. Yet we were only able to identify two which met any kind of methodological rigour. It is getting better but there is still a long way to go.

Lastly, evidence-based policy is only one of a number of factors. There are many other things which drive whether a policy and policy change is effective: about how you engage with stakeholders and a whole variety of issues. We should not conflate evidence-based policy as being a case of ‘if we did that, everything’s fine’. There is more at play than that.



Erik Millstone

When, Where and Why Does Evidence Matter to Policy Makers?

Thank you very much to ODI for inviting me. I am delighted to be here. I have made one small mistake though which is that I was told I had 20 minutes and I made a few more than 20 overheads. And I will therefore adopt the all-too-familiar tactic of speaking quickly and racing through it.

I appreciate the point made by David that it is worth distinguishing success and failure in evidence-based policy. I particularly want to talk about BSE which, I think I ought to explain, I count as the single biggest failure of UK public policy since the Suez debacle of 1956 and I think there are lessons to be learnt from it. But I want to treat it as part of a broader category of issues which is whether a particular kind of evidence is supposed to have a bearing on policy, namely scientific evidence derived from experts and their role in giving advice to policy makers.

You may recall that for many years during the BSE saga, which for approximation purposes we could say started in 1986 and culminated at the watershed on the 20th March 1996, when Dorrell and Hogg went the House and said, 'I am terribly sorry, it looks as though people have got a disease from BSE'. Previously they had said repeatedly that British beef was perfectly safe, there was no risk and that the policy was based on sound science. The rhetoric that policy is based on sound science is one with which we are very familiar in a wide range of issues related to the regulation of risk.

How much sense can we make of this? Under what conditions can evidence play a constructive role?

It is obviously reasonable that policies could be more evidence-based than they have been, but what will evidence do for us and what will it not do?

Weber's 'decisionist' model: 'politics first, then technocracy', was one of the earliest ways of conceptualising the role that evidence can and should play in public policy, developed by Max Weber in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He saw industrial society as rapidly bureaucratising and people were increasingly arguing that society would be run by bureaucrats and technocrats. He said that could not work and that the way it should work is this: policy makers should set the goals, identify what is to be achieved, and then hand it over to bureaucrats and technocrats who have expertise and facts not possessed by the policy makers who are generalists, and they develop and implement the policy.

But that does not quite fit with the expression which David used: 'build on evidence'. It is the other way round here, it is not that policy is built on the evidence – that is a twentieth century reinterpretation of the argument – here it is policy

comes first and evidence comes after, or the macro-political goal comes first and it is implemented in detail in the light of expert knowledge. But this model has real problems. It is superficially very plausible and attractive, but it breaks down in several ways. Firstly, it is not too bad if you are in a Platonic universe in which nothing changes, but in a modern industrial, technological universe where you get new scientific evidence and new technologies, new risks and new challenges, what the ends are that you are aiming at depends on being informed by what the experts know and what the emerging facts are. Therefore you cannot simply separate policy guidance from evidence gathering and technocratic expertise. What the goals are themselves depends on what the evidence is.

When the policy makers themselves were trying to decide about BSE, they needed to have a certain kind of evidence that should have been available to them. They needed to know what was hazardous. Were there risks in beef, in milk, in gelatine, in hides, in bull-semen? They needed to know what was contaminated and what was not, and how far it was possible to separate them. And then you need not just technical information, you need social information, about what actually happens in slaughter-houses and whether proposed rules can be implemented effectively. But actually no amount of evidence that the experts did and could give to Ministers was sufficient to set the goals.

The question was, what was the goal of policy? The goal could either have been eradicating the risks, or reducing them sufficiently to reassure the customers in order to keep the market stable and to keep people buying beef. In practice, the goal adopted in the UK over BSE was the latter, but it was misrepresented as if it were the former. So evidence was deployed to defend a policy objective which itself was misrepresented.

Similar problems arise in relation to all the other risk issues that government is having to deal with now: GM crops, mobile phones, etc. When it comes to deciding what the goals of policy are, it is not something you can either just give to policy makers or give to the experts, because the kinds of judgements that need to be made are intrinsically hybrid and involve integrating technical and political judgements. Therefore the role of evidence gets terribly complicated.

The problem of Weber's model where politics sets the goals and the technocrats get the evidence, work out the facts and implement things in detail is that it always runs the risk that evidence comes to be recruited in order to back up policy that had already been chosen. That is precisely what happened over BSE.

Especially in BSE, it was horrendous. The evidence was very incomplete. We are still not actually sure what the BSE pathogen is; the claim that it is a 'prion' is just the most plausible hypothesis. We still do not know if there are tissues in cattle that are pathogen free or if there is a threshold of exposure below which it is perfectly safe, or constitutes a risk.

The evidence remains hugely fragmented, nonetheless, between 1986 and 1996, we were told repeatedly that policy was based on – and only on – the best available scientific evidence. The number of times in which Ministers stood up in the House and said, 'I am doing what and only what my experts advise'. The model there was a different one, not Weber's. It was a highly technocratic one in which Ministers took no responsibility for anything.

Somehow we have the facts, we have the science. It is like Dickens' Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times*: 'give me facts and nothing but the facts, that is all we need'. This is like a Gradgrind view not of educational philosophy but of policy making. And this is the one that was implicit in the legitimisation of policy given by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) from 1986 to 1996. 'We have the facts and we know what to do. No one else does and no one else can criticise it'. It is wonderfully useful this technocratic narrative. It is a way of de-politicising politics. You kick an issue into the long grass, hand it over to the experts and it is not open to criticism and scrutiny.

This practice did not end after the General Election of 1997. To my certain knowledge, the head of a public sector regulatory agency was summoned by the Secretary of State to their first meeting and the Minister said, 'I want you to know Professor, I will never hesitate to use you as my shield'. In effect he was saying: 'Do not expect me to take responsibility for anything. You are an expert, we are putting you to the front and you take responsibility for decisions'. So it protects Ministers. They can take credit when things go well and their hands are clean when things go badly. But it also flatters the experts because it gives great social and intellectual prestige.

The trouble was that in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, they represented it in a technocratic way but they knew that it was not true – at least the officials did. What happened is that because the institution became addicted to its own narrative: that knowledge was certain, the risk was negligible and the policy was robust, they could not cope with new evidence which undermined the reassuring narrative, so they got locked into a situation and became deaf and were unable to learn until things became catastrophically bad.

In practice, the evidence did not support the reassuring narrative. But it did not prove it wrong either, it was open ended. The uncertainties were massive. There was a phrase from the Southwood

Report in 1989 – a slightly infelicitous phrase – 'a dead-end host', meaning the disease will not pass beyond cattle into other species, and therefore everything is perfectly safe.

Then in the 1990s things started to get sticky. Poor 'Mad Max the Cat' in Bristol was diagnosed with feline Spongiform Encephalopathy. You will appreciate that when the ban on contaminated materials in the human food chain was introduced, they went into pet food, so pets were eating a lot of this contaminated material. Max was important for the following reason: part of the Government's narrative was that BSE 'is just Scrapie'. Scrapie comes from sheep, it has been in the UK flock for 350 years, the UK have been eating mutton from Scrapie-afflicted sheep, it has not done anyone any harm, so beef is perfectly safe. But they had tried for years to transmit Scrapie to cats with no success. But Max went down with feline Spongiform Encephalopathy having eaten contaminated pet food and proved that BSE could transmit in ways that Scrapie could not. So the idea that BSE is just Scrapie started to crumble. The evidence undermined it and it undermines the claim that the disease was confined to Ruminants. The response of the Ministry was just to discount it. The cat still could be a dead-end host – just because it is transmitted to one species does not mean it can be transmitted to another, particularly not to humans.

But that was not the only evidence to be discounted. The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, from their offices just the other side of Waterloo station, sent a letter in 1991 telling the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that the regulations were not being implemented. That could be discounted too since they had told people that the material was perfectly safe, it did not matter if people consumed it anyway. It only had to look as though there were regulations in order to reassure the consumers, but non-compliance posed no risk so it did not matter.

There was this very sharp disjunction between what was said in private and what was said in public. For example, in 1988 civil servants told Ministers that they could not answer the question of whether BSE was transmissible to humans. But the next year the Minister says publicly that he is totally and completely sure that there is no risk. In private, the scientific civil servants say that it would not be justified to state categorically that there is no risk. In public, Ministers said that British beef is perfectly safe. The risk that there may be some contamination in food is met with the argument that it is not possible for BSE to enter the food chain.

As late as December 1995, Health Secretary Dorrell said to Jonathan Dimbleby on a Sunday lunchtime news programme that it was inconceivable that anyone could ever get CJD from BSE and then, come the watershed on the 20th March, 1996 evidence that a new disease had emerged in humans, most probably from eating

BSE contaminated food, destroyed the policy instantly and the credibility of the BSE policy and the policy making institutions collapsed. Many people said it undermined general confidence in science-based policy and experts in regulation and that it provoked a crisis.

But it is alright, we have a new way of making policy and a new orthodoxy and it is the reverse of Weber's model. It is closer to what David had in mind when he talked about building on evidence, so that instead of politics coming first and science coming second, it is the other way round. Now experts deliberate, they have the evidence, they can make the judgement. This is sometimes called a risk assessment. Once scientists have spoken, they then pass the information to policy makers; it is almost as if the scientists are expected to specify the objective which policy makers should reach.

Instead of politicians setting goals, the experts set the goals, so that for example, levels of contamination should not exceed a certain figure, or certain kinds of tissue should be kept out of the food supply, and then policy makers take into account what the meat industry will do, what the farmers will do, what the abattoirs will do; they make judgements on what it will cost the Treasury; what kinds of regulations and the most cost-effective ways of achieving the goals that the scientists have set.

This is now the new orthodoxy. This is embodied in a great deal of the restructuring of public policy in the risk issue: the way that government Chief Scientist talks about it, the Office of Science of Technology, it is all predicated on this kind of model, except they most typically talk about risk assessment, risk management and risk communication.

But one of the problems of this way of looking at it is that it presupposes that scientific deliberation is something that does not take place within a socio-political context but within a kind of academic abstraction. Secure in their ivory towers, uninfluenced by external political and socio-economic interests, the facts will enable them to decide what the policy objectives should be.

This is an improvement because it is much better than technocracy. Technocracy somehow says that evidence alone will decide policy. At least there is an acknowledgement that you need both evidential scientific considerations and political considerations and it puts scientists into a predicament in which, potentially by comparison with the initial Weberian model, they might be less vulnerable to political pressures under which there is a temptation to recruit evidence to back up the policy you are going to follow anyway – which is what I am implying happened over BSE to a very considerable extent, and in many other fields too.

If we try to do it this way, the notion is that you assign autonomy to experts. You create separate agencies; you create expert committees; you give them some functional autonomy and make them less the creatures of politics. But it simply is unrealistic to think that scientific evidence is gathered and interpreted in a policy vacuum. So increasingly scholars in my academic sub-sector which is called science policy, conceptualise policy as not a two stage process but a three stage process, with interactions amongst the stages where all of it is understood as operating within a specific policy context. No more pretence that what are the facts can be determined abstractly, in a purely disinterested way.

The relationship between science and policy is neither politicians telling the scientists what their goals should be, or the scientists telling the politicians what the goals should be, but a much richer exchange whereby policy makers articulate the range of options available and under consideration, and the experts can then gather the evidence, review it, deliberate and make informed judgements about what is known and not known about the consequences of following, or failing to follow, a range of different options.

So instead of scientists giving policy makers monolithic prescriptive advice on a course of action to follow, or policy makers telling scientists this is where we want to be, it is a richer interaction in which the experts do not solve the policy makers' problems for them entirely, but they give them very useful intelligence. In practice the experts give plural and conditional advice for a range of policy options and politicians have to make the choice for what the policy judgements are and stop trying to hide behind their experts.

Evidence matters a great deal. Evidence can support policy, it can undermine policy, but it will never settle a policy on its own and of course policy objectives without the evidence are pointless, but data without goals are meaningless. Policy is not going to be based just on evidence, and evidence will not solve the policy questions either, but it can make an important contribution.

Meeting 2: The Political Context

Speakers: Vincent Cable – MP for Twickenham

Julius Court – Research Officer, RPEG, ODI

Chair: John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID, and Research Fellow, ODI



Meeting Summary

This was the second meeting in the series 'Does Evidence Matter?'. **John Young** introduced the session by pointing to the importance of political context for evidence-based policy. Some of the key questions in this area are: How does the political context affect decisions? What sort of evidence is available to policy makers in different contexts? Are policy makers 'evidence aware'? What other factors influence their decision-making?

Vincent Cable began by stating that evidence based policy is important to him as an MP, and emphasised that in many ways researchers and policy makers are in the same business of extracting and processing information.

He went on to outline five 's's' that limit evidence-based decision-making: speed; superficiality; spin; secrecy; and scientific ignorance.

Speed: Policy makers are under chronic time pressure and are forced to process information quickly. This requires improvisation and also means that sometimes compromises have to be made. Occasionally, this leads to bad decisions.

Superficiality: Each policy maker has to cover vast thematic fields, and cannot possibly have in depth knowledge about every issue in those areas. They are therefore heavily dependent on the knowledge and integrity of the people who inform them. This raises difficult questions about who policy makers should turn to for advice, and how they can judge the advice given to them – for example the increasing amount of advice coming from the NGO sector.

Spin: In the political world, perception is very important. For example, even though evidence has shown that beat policing is not the most cost effective way of using police resources, this form of policing is still prioritised because there is a strong public perception that it will improve security. Perception guides political decisions.

Secrecy: Vincent also raised the question of how to relate to evidence that is secret. A recent example is Blair's memorandum on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which formed the basis of political decisions.

Scientific ignorance: There is a growing suspicion towards science and scientists among the public, which will have an effect on policies. One example of this is the public demand for zero rail accidents while road accidents are tolerated.

This means that political decisions are made to invest far more in rail safety than in road safety.

Despite the challenges that these five 's's' present, Vincent concluded by pointing to positive examples where evidence has indeed informed policy, and stated that research will have an increasing role to play in decision-making processes as policy makers become more professional.

Julius Court spoke about the role of the political context in research-policy linkages in developing countries. He introduced the topic by saying that evidence can matter, but that it often does not matter. The question to be asked is therefore: When does evidence matter?

He presented findings from a synthesis report of 50 case studies on research/policy links in developing countries carried out by the Global Development Network (GDN). The main conclusion from the case studies is that political context is a crucial factor. It is important to bear in mind that the political context in developing countries is distinct due to three factors: (i) diversity of Southern contexts; (ii) weak capacity in South; and (iii) importance of Northern research, influence and funding.

Five of the GDN case studies were presented briefly: the GALASA case study from India; rainwater harvesting in Tanzania; DELIVERI in Indonesia; animal healthcare in Kenya; and SPEECH in India.

The political context is clearly the most crucial issue regarding the uptake of evidence both in democratic and less democratic political systems. Evidence does appear to be used more in open political systems, but this depends on the specific issue. Attempts to change the political context usually takes massive effort.

In general the likelihood of policy uptake can be described using the following formula: Policy uptake = Demand – Contestation, where demand refers to policy maker's and societal demand, and contestation to the degree of variance with prevailing ideology and vested interests.

Understanding the policy process is crucial for researchers who wish to have an impact. Evidence uptake is greater and also more rapid during crises or policy windows. These windows are hard to trigger, but important to seize.

A perspective of policy highlights policy implementation rather than formal policy statements. The work of 'street level bureaucrats' who put policy into practice is more visible than the policies themselves.

Many of the existing theories in the literature on research/policy links are of limited use in a developing country context.

Strategic factors influencing research uptake include: the level of the policy (macro or local level); current political interests, the political culture, the process (influencing through participation or insider connections); and the importance of timing (responding to decisive moments or longer-term programmes and pilots on the ground).

Julius concluded by pointing to three areas that need further analysis: (i) the implications of a changing political context within international development policy; (ii) the impact of external influence on policy, for example the impact of donors on national policy processes; and (iii) the consequences of democratic deficits and how to work in less democratic contexts.

Next steps for ODI's RAPID programme include: developing a more systematic understanding about evidence use in different contexts; developing a taxonomy of contexts; a cross-country study on the evidence/policy links relating to HIV/AIDS; and workshops with NGOs and policy makers.

Comments in the discussion focused on a range of issues:

- Would British parliamentarians be better equipped if they had the research facilities provided to the US Senate?
- NGO research does not necessarily lead government astray. Pressure groups have an important role to play, for example in select committees that seek a broader and better understanding of different policy issues.
- Policy makers (and not researchers) should take responsibility for distinguishing between high and low level research.
- Vincent's five 's's are not constraints that we are forced to work around; they can be changed.
- Policy departments often feel like a different universe to research institutions. Policy makers need evidence that is sufficiently good quality, but cannot afford to wait indefinitely for it. Researchers may therefore have to compromise.
- Working with policy makers requires that researchers make choices about who to approach and when to do so. At what point is it best to engage with the policy cycle?
- The political context is seen as rigid. But from the PRSP case study (conducted as part of the RAPID programme at ODI) it can be seen that it is possible to change at least the political

perception of the context within a relatively short period of time.

- There are differences in political culture between the US and UK, where policy and research are separate, and Germany and Scandinavia, where there are closer connections between the state and research institutes. Is DFID moving towards the model of closer connection? If so, this will have consequences for researchers. They are more likely to have impact on policy if they have an 'insider' status in relation to policy processes than if they have 'outsider' status.
- Who are the policy makers? Should we rather use the term policy actors?

Vincent Cable

Evidence and UK Politics



Thank you for inviting me back here. I think it was three moves ago that I was last in the Overseas Development Institute, but it is nice to come back after almost 30 years. I was flattered to be described as a policy maker. I cannot think when I actually made policy. I am a politician, which is not the same thing. This is an interesting subject, which made me think more than you normally have to when speaking. I realised that to an extraordinary degree, even in the political world, we pay lip-service to the evidence and research. I have two researchers working for me, one as researcher to me as Shadow Trade and Industry Secretary and one for general purposes. We have the House of Commons library that we all use and this is one of the best libraries in the country. So in a sense our lives are embodied in information and research. I thought rather than emphasise the difference between the research world and the political world, it might be more illuminating to think in terms of continuity.

I have an analogy from the oil industry where I worked before I became an Member of Parliament. In the oil industry you have a progression from the upstream where you get the oil out of the ground to the refineries to the pumps to the consumers. Essentially what happens in relation to this subject is that you have to extract data, which someone then processes (this is probably what researchers are doing). It then gets passed downstream and people like me are at the downstream end of the business. We take the research and the data and we buy it and sell it. So in a sense we are part of the same industry but we deal with the product in a different way.

This is a politicians trick, but I thought that one way of differentiating between the way that someone like me operates and the way that researchers operate is in terms of a series of 's's which seem to summarise the political world quite well: speed; superficiality; spin; secrecy; and scientific ignorance. I will give examples of each of those.

In terms of speed, one of the differences between the two worlds is that, in the world I am in now, a lot of decisions have to be made very fast. I am an opposition spokesman not a Minister, but typically you will get a page at half past eight in the morning: something has been on the Today programme, like a steel works closing down or a strike somewhere and you have to get on the airwaves, get out a press release and give a comment on the subject, about which you know very little. You know broadly what your line is, but you have very little evidence, very little information and you have to improvise. And once you have a line you have to stick with it.

Speed compromises a lot of what you have to do and a lot of political life is like that. Some of the

worst bits of decision-making that I have seen in my six years as an MP have been due to speed. I think the worst case of all was the Foot and Mouth epidemic. Everything happened very fast: it was in the run-up to a General Election; there was a lot of evidence out there; people had done studies about vaccination versus mass culling; but there just was not the time. It is about who gets to the Prime Minister's ear first and how you respond to tomorrow's headlines. As a result some awful decisions were made and it cost billions of pounds. Another example was the panic around the oil blockade. In my party, when we were in government, we all panicked. We had worked out for years what a sensible approach to oil pricing was and the idea of the price escalator. All the parties had a consensus that this was environmentally sound, we had had conferences and endless reports and we thought we knew what we were doing. And then the blockade happened and everyone simultaneously panicked and abandoned their policy positions. So an awful lot of political life is about how you respond with speed to rapidly changing events and often evidence is completely forgotten.

Secondly, superficiality. One of the sayings which has most applicability to my current life is that in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. We cover a lot of turf. I am not exceptional, but I am supposed to cover all Patricia Hewitt's department, the Department for Trade and Industry, as her opposite number, but I have also been given financial services, which includes everything to do with the City, as well as being on the Chancellor's Euro preparations group, plus a lot of constituency work. So inevitably you are dealing with things at a very superficial level. You are very dependent on the last person you talked to, or the person who gets to you with advice. At the risk of offending people here, there is one aspect of the trade and development work which worries me – precisely because of this problem that the one-eyed man is king – and that aspect is who the one-eyed man is. In a very complicated area like trade and development, we as political consumers are very dependent on the competence and integrity of people in the NGO and think tank community.

So within an issue like trade policy, which is extremely complicated, there are probably only a few people in Parliament who have a clue about things like how the World Trade Organisation functions and the precise terms of the services agreement. You are very dependent on the people who come to you with what seems to be research and what seems like technical information. I have run into a certain amount of conflict with bodies such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, who are very effective at presenting what looks like extremely professional, well-researched data seeming to prove that trade is bad for poor countries and bad

for poor people in these countries. I do not know a great deal about the subjects that they deal with, but I know enough about trade policy to have doubts in my mind when I read this stuff. But my colleagues come to me with it and say that they have had a deputation, including the local vicar and all the party members and have been given this report from Oxfam's public affairs department and it must be right! They ask 'why are you being awkward and asking questions? Surely we should just sign'.

I think there is a worry here about the research community, that in between groups like the Overseas Development Institute and the Institute for Development Studies and us, there is now a quite dense network of non-governmental and campaigning organisations, much of whose work is excellent proselytising and professional work, but who have acquired a status in filling in the gaps in our lack of knowledge. They have been very influential in areas like this and often, I think, steering us in horribly wrong directions.

My third 's' is spin. It is often used pejoratively but essentially the point here is that in the political world, perception is often more important than reality. What people feel is often more important than the substance. I chair the all-party police group and this provides a classic example. Anyone involved in police work will know that using beat police is a pretty inefficient way of using police resources, but you cannot tell people that on the doorstep. There is massive public demand for more police on the beat, and the police have now accepted that and the fact that public perception is more important than evidence-based allocation of resources. That is political reality. This is a very pervasive fact of life which does not just apply to politics.

Another example, perhaps a bit closer to the bone, is that when I was in Shell, one of the issues I was trying to communicate as Chief Economist to the Managing Directors was that developing countries were, in the long-term (over a 20 or 30 year time horizon), potentially very important to the business. A lot of them were very sceptical. Their minds were focused on Europe and the US, and 'out there' was a very threatening and dangerous place. This was not true of everyone, but there was this very conservative way of looking at things.

I hit on a pedagogic device which solved this problem. It was to take a different way of presenting Gross Domestic Product (GDP) statistics. If you just take the classic GDP numbers it tends to show, for example, that China has a smaller economy than Belgium, but if you take the Purchasing Power Parity GDP numbers, it shows that China has the second biggest economy in the world. It is the same set of facts, the same evidence, but interpreted in a radically different way. So what I did was to take all our GDP numbers converted into a Purchasing Power Parity base and present our projections and

analysis of the world in these terms. It was a startling reappraisal of the way the world actually was. You did not need to preach that the emerging world was important, the evidence was there. But what I was essentially doing was 'spinning' data in a different way. So spinning is part of political life and also part of business life and part of communication.

My fourth 's' is secrecy. One of the problems of government in general is secrecy. Certainly in the UK there are key areas where secrecy is everything. I hardly need to go on at great length about the war in Iraq, but there was an attempt not to argue the merits of the war in emotional terms but to do it in terms of evidence. The Blair memorandum on weapons of mass destruction was based on evidence. But it was evidence that was very heavily coloured by availability of data through the security services. So what is evidence, what is true and what is reliable?

My final 's' is scientific ignorance. One of the things that strikes you in the political world is that often there is very little relationship between the way we deal with, for example, risk and what scientific evidence (epidemiological studies and so on) would suggest was the real risk. One example was the panic over the MMR vaccine, where the political world is dealing with a set of assumptions about risk which are totally at odds with the scientific data. Another is the panic about rail safety. The whole rail network has enormous investment obligations imposed upon it in order to reduce accidents to zero, such that the risk involved in travelling on the railways is a hundred times less than it is in going on a road. But there is no mechanism for getting people to assess risk objectively between one mode of transport and another. Nuclear power is another case. I am not an advocate of nuclear power (one of the things I have been campaigning about is the bail-out on British energy), but looked at objectively in terms of risk, all the scientific evidence suggests that the risk of environmental damage, let alone death from a nuclear plant is massively lower than the public perception of that risk.

So scientific ignorance plays a major part in decisions. Scientific evidence leading to objective assessment of risk is something that is very often absent. One of the underlying reasons is a growing suspicion of science and scientists, who often respond in the worst possible way. For example, a big political issue if you are a constituency MP is telecommunications masts. People are scared about the cancer risks from these mobile phone masts and as an MP who wants to get re-elected, I have to say that I mercilessly exploit this. I organise petitions and all kinds of things. The fact is that the Chief Medical Officer, Sir William Stuart, did a very good scientific analysis of this a few years ago which looked at all the evidence and concluded that absolutely no evidence had been found to connect this phenomenon with health.

Then, because of the way that scientists have been scarred by their own experiences of things like BSE, he left himself an escape route by saying that although he could not find any evidence of any health risk, he would advise policy makers to apply a cautionary approach, just in case. This gives us a wonderful let-out because now we can all play politics with telecommunications masts.

I hope that by listing those factors, I have given some indication of the kind of factors that operate in political life which prevent us from operating a rigorous, research-based and evidence-based approach.

In my concluding remarks and having said all of that, I wanted to say on a more positive note that there are lots of examples of how, in some ways, British public life is improving in terms of how we use evidence. Perhaps the most important decision that the Labour Government made was the one it made in the first few weeks, to establish the independence of the Bank of England and the Monetary Policy Committee. This was an enormously important decision and almost certainly a very good decision. What it has done is free economic policy from the traditional reliance on the Chancellor of the Exchequer dreaming up things in the bath, to really quite a rigorous evidence-based approach to policy, in which the best experts in the land come together, discuss, research, express an opinion and publish transparently. The whole quality of economic decision-making has improved enormously as a consequence. It has become much more professional, more transparent and more evidence-based.

Related to that is the decision about entry to the European Monetary Union. I could score points saying that the government has procrastinated, but the fact of the matter is that they have established a whole series of very detailed, very professional studies on all aspects of the problem. When the decision is made, no-one can complain that there is not any evidence, because they really have been through the hoops. So there are some very major examples in British public life of evidence becoming important.

A third example is probably the most difficult moral issue which we had to deal with as MPs: the debate about stem-cell research in the last Parliament. As an example of an attempt to produce scientifically based and evidence-based decisions, it was an absolute model.

The government decided from the outset that this was not going to be party-political and they were going to give us all the evidence we wanted. We had reports thrown at us, seminars organised by Yvette Cooper who was the Minister in the Department of Health. It was all done in a very thorough, professional way. I think it was the only vote in the House of Commons which I ever regretted – I voted against stem-cell research because the research I saw persuaded me that it

was not necessary. In retrospect I think I voted the wrong way. But as an exercise in decision-making it was admirable and one of the few in British history, given the way that we have previously dealt with issues like abortion and so on, which represented a real step forward in trying to get people to think and analyse in an evidence-based way.

The final point I want to make is that those are all big, high-profile examples, but there are many little examples of the way that decision-making is being put onto a more professional basis. Decisions about health priorities through NICE; the way that food-safety is now dealt with through the Food Standards Agency rather than through the farmers pushing their own agenda; the way that regulations are now subject to fairly demanding tests of regulatory impact assessment; risk assessments being required in the police and fire services. There is a much greater emphasis in government on the use of evidence and objective criteria. Slowly and gradually it is happening. So I finish on a positive note that despite my initial qualifications, evidence and research has a role, and probably even a dominant role, in the way that most decisions are being made.



Julius Court

The Political Context in Developing Countries

The good news is that evidence can matter. The bad news is that it often does not. We often highlight the case of HIV/AIDS where despite very clear evidence about the disease, policy makers, particularly in the South, have ignored the implications. That has led us to what we think is the key question: not whether evidence matters, but when evidence matters. Particularly for developing countries, we think there is a need for a much more systematic understanding of these issues. This is where the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme and the Global Development Network's Bridging Research and Policy project have come from and they represents a major effort to look at this.

I will be talking about some work that John Young and I did which synthesised 50 case studies collected from the Global Development Network (GDN) project. I will talk about the main findings, that context is crucial in determining when evidence does matter; highlight three sets of issues relating to the fact that there is still a lot which we do not know in this area; and point to some next steps.

So, where did this all come from? The first issue is that there is a huge amount of anecdotal evidence, from policy makers, researchers from ODI and so on, who have been highlighting that there is a gap between research and policy, but we do not have any systematic evidence on it yet. The second is that we have a huge amount of theory which is based on the study of the OECD countries and when we came to look at this area, we found that the development sector, not surprisingly, was rather distinct and that a lot of the theory and practice which you can use in the North did not apply. We highlight three issues in that regard: the diversity of Southern context; the issue of capacity; and particularly crucial, that there are a different set of relevant issues, reflected in the research of the World Bank and ODI for example, compared to those that matter in the North.

I want to emphasise that this is an exploratory piece of work which is part of a much bigger project and we are highlighting issues that we want to take forward and would welcome feedback on them.

The case studies are from all parts of the world. There are positive cases where research has fed into policy and we also have a lot of cases where it has not. We have asked the case study authors to highlight the reasons why.

We use a framework which does not just cover the political context but also looks at the evidence, and the interaction between researchers and policy makers around the growing group of non-governmental and other organisations in the

middle that Vincent Cable spoke of, who mediate that interaction. Finally I will say a bit about external influences because we think this is an area which needs a lot more work.

We had 50 case studies of which I will outline five, to give you a flavour of the types of things which were in them. The first one was a case study from India regarding research on rice. The researchers had piloted the use of paddy rice production. This was a negative example, where the research fed the policy makers' ideology that this kind of technology could be applied throughout the state in India, when actually it only applied to a very specific area where it had been tested by the researchers. Because of the fit with their ideology and because it looked like a successful pilot, it was immediately pulled up, despite the fact that when it came to implementation it fell apart and yields plummeted in other areas where it was tried.

The second case was funded by DFID and was regarding rainwater harvesting in Tanzania. Policy makers' initial view of rainwater was as a threat, with regard to flooding. Researchers over a 15 or 20 year period have done studies on the ground showing how rainwater can be harvested. Because it worked on the ground and fed upwards, the narrative has been completely turned around, so that rainwater is no longer seen as a threat but much more positively, and the President of Tanzania is highlighting this technology as one that should be promoted further.

The third case was in Indonesia. There were a lot of cases, in Indonesia and Peru in particular, where massive regime change created entry points for all kinds of policy changes with all kinds of issues that could be changed. John Young was involved in this case study so can talk further about it.

The next case was in Kenya. Kenya has taken a large step forward in the past year, but previously we had the case of animal healthcare where the technology or approach of paravets in arid areas had been blocked for 20 years because of vested interests in the bureaucracy, despite the fact that it was incredibly useful. The last case study really highlights that when it comes to the crunch, it is the issue of implementation that matters. I will come back to that.

Not surprisingly, we found that context was the crucial issue when looking at the uptake of evidence into policy. It did not really matter whether it was a democratic or less democratic context, wherever you were, issues of context were the most critical in affecting whether research or evidence was pulled up. We do think that evidence is used more in a democratic system but we think that this is an area which needs more work. What was surprising to us was

not that the policy process is not linear – I think that everyone believes that at the moment – but that even though people know that, they act as though it were linear. We are not quite sure why that is. It is amazing that everyone says that the policy process is not linear, it is not rational, yet when we act as researchers or as NGOs, the assumptions that are being made show that it is taken as linear.

This issue of volatility works both ways. There are cases in Indonesia and Peru where the uptake was great after these changes in regime. It works the other way too: we had a fascinating case from Iran where the policy makers changed and the link between researchers and policy makers which had worked very well in the past was basically thrown out of the window. I think the last point is rather obvious: that it is difficult to change this set of issues.

So what matters? When we looked at our case studies, two issues seemed to come back repeatedly: issues of demand and issues of contestation. What we saw as demand was direct policy maker demand. For example, if Vincent Cable commissions a piece of research, it is much more likely to get into policy than if John Young or I commission it. So if there is a policy demand, it makes a big difference. Secondly, policy makers do not have a monopoly on knowledge – there are other people in society who can look at issues, perceive a demand and focus on a problem, and that can generate a policy demand but it does not always happen. So we distinguish between policy maker demand and societal demand.

The second huge set of issues was to do with contestation, where there were two crucial factors. The first were issues of ideology, the kind that came out in Joseph Stiglitz' book where he talks about the politics and ideology in the World Bank overriding evidence in decision-making. Second is the issue of narrative, which came out in the case of Tanzania. If policy makers are on the wrong narrative, there are certain things which you can do to shift it, but if you come from beyond their narrative, it is very hard to engage them in policy change.

The issue of vested interests is rather straight forward. A very broad summary of what we came out with is that essentially, in cases where there was policy change, it was to do with issues of demand and issues of contestation. The questions then are about how you change demand or reduce the contestation. Evidence can matter, it does not always.

Briefly, since this will mostly be known to many in this room, we always emphasise that understanding the policy process is crucial. Targeting when meetings are happening, when votes are happening and when the framework is being set, and engaging at that point means you are much more likely to have an impact on policy than if you do not.

We found in a lot of cases that there was much more uptake of evidence during crisis. This issue is particularly important in the literature. Kingdom talks about 'policy windows'. They are incredibly difficult to spur but once you feel that you are in one, that is the time to go after it and that is when you are likely to have a policy change.

We have all these cases where there was a change of context and where researchers went in and actually did manage to change policy in quite dramatic ways. I would encourage you to have a look at some of these specific cases. I am doing a 15 minute whirl through them, but some of the specific ones are fascinating and they are on the GDN website.

Now I am going to concentrate on the issues of implementation. We distinguished between public policy making, for example, as in parliament, and what is happening on the ground. When it comes to the crunch, most people's engagement with the policy process is through 'street-level bureaucrats' as they are described in the literature – healthcare or police and so on, which make up the interactions that normal people have. Obviously this brings issues of bureaucratic incentives and pressures.

I want to highlight two points in particular. We found that changing the process was as important as changing the policy. In India we had a case where everything had been tried to get over a problem to do with management of eco-systems. Money had been thrown at it with absolutely no impact, but once they tried a participatory approach, it all fell into place. Another example is from the Philippines where they had some new evaluation indexes and again, using evidence and a more open participatory approach, they changed policy quite dramatically and improved outcomes, which is the ultimate goal.

The second point (and we found this more in developing countries) is that policy seems to change on the ground quicker than in parliament or in public policy making. The Tanzania study emphasised this, where an approach had spread in a number of rural areas and was beginning to spread through word of mouth and being promoted by NGOs. It was only once it had worked and policy makers began to pick it up that it was elevated to national policy. Again, the case of the paravets in Kenya was instructive. It had spread all throughout the arid parts of northern Kenya, despite the fact that it was illegal (it is still illegal but quite widespread). So you have a distinction there between policy on the ground or policy implementation and the official policy.

Two points about theory. Some of the existing theory is useful. The work on social epidemics and tipping points by Gladwell is a gripping read and absolutely great, and some other sources are good. The main point though is that we found existing theory was rather limited in a development context.

This does not compete with the five 's's, but there are six strategic issues which came out of our work. They are not quite recommendations or conclusions but they are issues which I think we would put out for discussion.

The first is that you have to be very aware of the level of the policy maker that you are going after. If you have a macro-context which is a disaster, as in Zimbabwe, you have no choice but regime change if you want the use of research in policy, there is no other way. Whereas in other cases, for example, in the United Kingdom, we would say that on crime, despite being a democratic process, you do not have the uptake of research into policy. Again, this is very broad brush stroke but that is a distinction we would make and are looking at.

The second issue is to do with political strategy and these are the issues of demand and contestation that I mentioned and whether you would want to try to generate policy maker demand or whether you are going to work on an issue which is more pertinent to society but which has not quite fed into the policy making yet.

The third set of issues is to do with the way that politicians view evidence. A quote I have pulled out of DFID's research report, talks about policy makers within the Department: 'they often view research as the opposite of action rather than the opposite of ignorance'. On the other hand, DFID are frustrated with the evidence they receive from researchers – hence the review. This is a dimension of things that needs to be looked at and exactly the aim of the RAPID programme.

There is an issue of whether you engage top level policy makers or whether you engage street-level bureaucrats. These are all slightly banal because it depends on the type of context you are in. What I am doing is putting them out for discussion.

The next set of issues are to do with processes. I have said that in a lot of our cases, a participatory approach has worked very well. In other cases that may not be the best way forward. If time is limited, if the decision is happening tomorrow, you cannot work in that way and you have to go through insider influencing, if you can.

The issue of timing and speed has been made quite forcefully and whether you go for these decisive moments or whether you have time to work up programmes, as has happened in Tanzania, or interestingly in Ukraine – a very tricky political environment but they had piloted some work on economic clusters which had worked very well and was absorbed by policy makers.

There are three sets of issues where we think more work is needed and which we are beginning to look at. Essentially, the context is changing very rapidly in developing countries and the critical issues are the democracy type issues and the much greater involvement of NGOs and the

private sector in policy making, and crucial changes like that which are having an impact, the outcome of which we do not quite know at the moment. We are having glimpses of what the impact might be but we are not quite sure yet. The key issue is that there is an increased role for research institutes and for the use of evidence in policy. We have found that some of these big incentives like European Union succession, PRSP processes, the WTO etc, were very important in getting policy makers to use research more – they wanted to know what it would mean and were sucking up all kinds of use of evidence. We also had interesting cases where donors were trying to change. DFID is obviously one of them with the new research policy.

The real critical issues are how can you promote evidence use in policy making from outside. In some cases it gives it a huge amount of credibility but in others policy makers will reject it simply because it has come from outside. There are a whole set of issues there that we are looking at through the GDN project that will be crucial and we are simply not quite sure what works in different contexts.

The third set of issues I have talked about. We know that in an open political system you can gather and communicate evidence. We know that in a democratic system preferences are aggregated and there are structures for aggregating these preferences and resolving conflicts, but in less democratic countries (which is a lot of the ones we have to work with), we are really not quite sure yet what you have to do to engage the policy process.

So, future directions: the GDN call is incredibly broad and diverse, it is a million dollar project which is massive and will be taking these issues further. One of the specific areas that we are quite interested in – it is one of the strategic dimensions that I have been talking about – is that we want to know much more about, and develop a taxonomy of contexts, and work out what kind of evidence is pulled up in these different contexts and what are the critical issues.

One of the most interesting things I think we are going to be doing is a study on HIV/AIDS where the gap is perhaps the biggest between research and policy, and also where the gap has the biggest implications. The final point is that we want to work much more with non-governmental organisations and with policy makers. We will be doing workshops in the future with both of those sets of people both in the North and in the South. If anyone wants to help guide us through this mine-field we would be very grateful.

Meeting 3: The Role of Research

Speakers: Paul Spray – Director of Research, Policy Division, DFID
John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID and Research Fellow, ODI
Chair: Diane Stone – CSGR, University of Warwick



Meeting Summary

Diane Stone introduced the third meeting in the series 'Does Evidence Matter?'. This meeting focused on the role of research, raising questions such as: What does DFID want from research? Does it get it? How could research have more impact on policy? How can you measure research impact? What is its relative importance in recent development policy shifts?

Paul Spray spoke about the role and use of research in DFID. He began by pointing out that DFID distinguishes between 'research' and 'policy analysis'. While policy analysis is short term and always geared towards issues that DFID wants to know about quickly, research can be longer term and does not have to relate directly to DFID's work.

However, all research carried out and funded by DFID has to contribute to the larger objective of poverty reduction. When choosing which research to fund, the key criteria is how plausibly the research will promote poverty reduction; that inevitably puts us at the applied end of research. Research often should have an element of challenge in it, perhaps challenging shorter term policy analysis.

Overall the impact of research on poverty reduction is unknown. However, it is known that the link between research and poverty reduction does not necessarily have to go through government policy. Also policy decisions are not necessarily informed by research – even though they may give the impression of being based on rigorous facts.

When are researchers influential? Researchers can seek to influence through snuggling up to policy makers. But they can also have an impact through being confrontational and contributing to conflict in a specific field – which forces policy makers to reflect on what is going on and to respond.

It is important for researchers to catch the right moment in a policy process, for example when new ministers are appointed. At the same time, researchers can also be influential when they tackle emerging issues: governments need to know if there are big problems or opportunities ahead (e.g. DEFRA funds 'horizon scanning' research).

Research is widely popular with government when it produces a quick fix. Not all research should aim to do this. But it is worth noting that research is usually more effective when it is

problem focused and when it is easy to measure its effects.

There are a number of key issues that DFID is interested in currently. DFID needs to find out what its own niche is, both in international development research and in national research (e.g. in relation to ESRC). DFID London also needs to find out how central programmes can best relate to DFID country offices, especially in capacity building of southern research. There are issues to be worked out regarding how to leverage private sector research, how to disseminate research findings effectively and manage the relationship between researchers and users. In this respect, DFID may perhaps draw more on its convening power and stage dissemination events and workshops.

DFID Policy Division has now moved to a more think tank type structure, with shorter term teams grouped around topical issues. Hopefully the team structure will enable DFID to draw in outsiders to work for shorter periods in different teams: this is an important opportunity which academics should seize.

John Young presented one aspect of the RAPID programme at ODI – how can researchers achieve greater policy influence. Clearly evidence can matter, but there is no systematic understanding of how and when it does. ODI has been examining this issue in a systematic manner since 1999, when Rebecca Sutton published her paper on the policy process.

Traditionally the link between research and policy has been viewed as a linear process. This is clearly not the reality. Opinion is now shifting towards a more dynamic and complex model of research-policy linkages. To illustrate this, John presented two quotes on policy and research respectively: 'The whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents' (Clay and Schaffer, 1984), and 'Most policy research on African agriculture is irrelevant to agricultural and overall economic policy' (Omamo, 2003).

RAPID uses a three-dimensional framework to understand research-policy linkages: political context, evidence, and links. The framework has been applied to four examples of policy change in four in-depth case studies: the adoption of PRSPs; the launch of SPHERE in the humanitarian sector; the (non)-evolution of animal health policies in Kenya; and the incorporation of Sustainable Livelihoods principles in the DFID



1997 White Paper. In addition, RAPID draws on evidence from the 50 summary case studies collected by the Global Development Network (GDN).

What have we learnt from this material about what researchers need to do? In relation to the political context, researchers must get to know the policy makers, identify potential supporters and opponents, prepare for regular policy opportunities, and react to unexpected policy windows. This is illustrated by examples from the study on animal health policy in Kenya and the study on the Sustainable Livelihoods approach.

In relation to the 'evidence' dimension of the framework, researchers need to establish credibility and legitimacy, provide practical solutions to problems, and communicate effectively. For example, the Rwanda evaluation that led to SPHERE was influential largely because it was regarded as rigorous and credible. Also, action research and pilot projects seem to be effective means of convincing policy makers. One example of this is the influence of the PEAP programme in Uganda prior to the full adoption of PRSPs.

In relation to 'links', researchers must get to know the other stakeholders, establish a presence in existing networks, build coalitions, identify key networkers and salesmen, and use informal contacts. Again these points can be illustrated with examples from the RAPID case studies.

In conclusion, think tanks/'do tanks'/operational organisations appear to have more immediate policy impact than academic research institutes. However, academic research and 'free thought' contributes to the discourse in which policy is made.

Comments from the audience focused on a range of issues:

- How do we build constituencies at the national level to link research to the democracy/governance agendas?
- The National Systems of Innovation (NSI) literature provides good insight into why some research is taken up and other research is ignored.
- The quote from Clay and Schaffer ('policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents') would seem to suggest that research-policy linkages are far less rational than implied in the diagrams used by John in his presentation (on what researchers should do and how they should do it).
- Researchers still work under conservative career conditions – for example, they need to publish articles in peer reviewed journals. This may hinder inter-disciplinary work.
- Will DFID collaborate with civil society organisations on research issues?
- The sole objective of poverty reduction may limit the nature of development research.

- The meeting has presented material that challenges researchers to behave differently. It also challenges research funders to behave differently, for example by providing more funding for networks, dissemination and impact work. This is particularly important in relation to building research capacity in developing countries.
- The sole aim of poverty reduction may exclude research within the humanitarian field.
- Is all research really pro bono and therapeutic? There seems to be an underlying assumption in the meeting that all researchers are virtuous.

Paul Spray

Research and Policy in DFID



Thank you very much. I should point out that John Young is not just a speaker, he is the impresario of this event and gave a long list of questions to me. I have chosen the ones that I think I might stand a chance of answering. Some of what I am going to say is about the Department for International Development (DFID) and how DFID thinks about research. That is partly because we have just reorganised and have a new research department or team, which pulls together all the different bits of research, from the infrastructure knowledge and research area, to health and population, to the old ESCOR (SSR) social science research programme.

Within DFID we make a distinction between research on the one hand and policy analysis on the other. This carries no intellectual weight but it is convenient from our point of view. It is not the same distinction that other government departments make (for example, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister when researching on housing does not make this distinction).

Policy analysis is when we as DFID want to know something, for example, how best to fight corruption in a particular context: DFID is the client, we want to know something very quickly (usually within three months) and we call that policy analysis. Research is different: research tends to be longer term (three years or so) and although it must have a route to reducing poverty, that route does not necessarily go through DFID. It is research that will help poor people to get out of poverty but it does not have to involve DFID at all. In some sense, it is a public good – not necessarily a global public good, but a public good. That is what we mean by research and it is a bit specialised therefore, it is a particular area.

The first question which John Young posed was ‘What does the Department for International Development want from research?’. Here we are in Christian Aid week and DFID actually wants the same sort of thing: we are concerned to eliminate poverty. That is what we want from research and that is actually all we want from research. Anything that you want is a useful by-product.

We have an agreement with the Treasury as all government departments do (called the Public Service Agreement) which has a number of targets within it (about five), one of which is to develop evidence-based innovative approaches to development. We fall under that, so we certainly think that research has a role in this area. It also puts us very much at the applied end of research and we tend to want a fairly short route from research to having an impact on poverty. Knowing that the contribution to poverty reduction is the critical question when we are deciding what to fund is useful, but it does not actually tell us specifically what to fund and we

will be wrestling with that question throughout the remainder of this year, by the end of which we have to produce a new research strategy.

I suppose that the kind of things which are going through my mind are that if there is a piece of research, there ought to be a route through that research to an impact on poverty, meaning that the plausibility of that route is very important to whether or not we are going to decide to fund it. There are also issues of risk attached here: how risky it is that that route is going to be achieved and then questions of trade-off between the size of the risk and how big the benefits are likely to be if it succeeds.

So factors to consider include: the plausibility of the route; the size of the potential impact; the extent of innovation (which matters because of the hope that further things will spin off it) and finally (and this is another thing which distinguishes research from policy analysis), research ought generally to have an element of challenge in it. In the case of policy analysis, we know the area we want to work on and what we want to know is how to do it. In the case of research, we do not mind being challenged and it is in fact an important function of research that not just DFID but the accepted wisdom might be challenged.

Those are the kinds of things which DFID wants from research. Do we get what we want from research? Sometimes yes, we do and there are examples in the reports that we produce and in bits of research that have been delivered on poverty. I think it is fair to say that we do not know, overall, the impact of research on poverty. We do not know much about impact beyond an aggregation of the anecdotes. One reason, which has probably become clear from other sessions is this series, is that it is actually very hard to know because of the distance between a piece of research and the outcome and because there are likely to be joint products and so on.

I want to say a few preliminary points about the link between research and poverty reduction. The first is that the link does not necessarily go through government policy. There are pieces of research which produce outcomes which may, for example, go through the private sector – such as new seeds. One of my favourite quotes in development comes from a colonial agricultural officer somewhere up in the north of Tanganyika in 1928, who when writing about an innovation in the area to his boss in Dar-es-Salaam said, ‘the trouble is that native coffee needs no encouragement, native coffee in Arusha is increasing against all the discouragement it is possible for my department to give’. So research does not always have to have an impact on poverty which goes through public policy.

The second obvious point is that policy is a result of a political process; it is a result of politics and, historically, politicians have tended to find the researchers that they need. I have just been reading a book on Vichy France and there were plenty of Vichy researchers who were prepared to find the answers that the Vichy Government wanted to have in France. Policy decisions are not necessarily informed by research, even when they appear quite technical. I was involved in the negotiations about the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and there were some numbers (200% and 150%) which looked as though they were the result of careful calculation by researchers, when actually they were the result of horse-trading between countries who were prepared to give debt relief.

It is important that the impact of research can be through conflict and not through ‘snuggling up’ (where the idea is that what matters is that the researcher snuggles up to the policy maker and that will cause a leap to be made). That sometimes works, but equally, sometimes the researcher causes quite a row and that in turn causes change to come about. The Canadian International Development Research Centre has been doing a parallel series of research investigations to the one that John Young will be talking about later today. They have a nice example in one of their case studies of the effect of researching pollution caused by a mining company somewhere in Latin America, which very clearly had a big impact on government policy and this was entirely through causing large amounts of (non-violent) conflict in the area. Indeed the research was to some extent commissioned in order to make the conflict more plausible to various people.

Nevertheless, we are obviously hugely interested in research which does influence policy and I had a number of small points to make about that, in no particular order. In terms of when research influences policy, it is obviously important that you catch the right moment. New Ministers are quite often interested in new policy. I think John Young is going to talk about the way in which the sustainable livelihoods approach was picked up in DFID. It had been researched in a study that DFID funded and essentially the work had been done some years before, but there was a particular moment in the internal politics of the new DFID which meant that it came into DFID and was very useful – it arrived at the right moment for delivery.

There are other examples too: there has been a lot of research on education in Uganda, and that research has had a considerable effect on the educational reform programme in Uganda because it has been delivering research on unit costs or on labour market demand or on whatever aspects were important to the Ugandan Government and to the donors in negotiating sector-wide programmes on education in the country.

Secondly, I think research can be influential when it is producing new issues. The issue of fear comes into play here. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has a horizon scanning programme which they have put quite a lot of effort into and it arose, not surprisingly, in the aftermath of Foot and Mouth and BSE etc. The programme aims to scan the horizon for issues which are likely to arise which might cause problems or offer opportunities for us in government. That is an example of a good point of entry for research. I think the Economic and Social Research Council is hoping to do a similar thing with a series of monthly seminars aimed at picking up issues which they have identified or have got government to identify as potentially important.

A third issue is that where research offers a quick fix or a magic bullet, this is wildly popular with government. There have been some good examples of that, such as the Cassava Mosaic virus, which is an example we use frequently within DFID, where the people in Uganda grew Cassava, then the deadly virus caused problems akin to the potato famine in Ireland, and a research effort dealt with that and produced strains of Cassava which were resistant to that virus. This is an example not just of a quick fix but of research with a very high priority and a very clear link between the research and the outcome. But the obvious problem with this is that not all research has quick fix results. I remember in Botswana, where I worked briefly in the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Water Affairs, various charlatans would claim that they had ways of finding water beneath the desert and this was hugely attractive, but we had to have evidence and to ask them to prove it.

A fourth point is that it is useful when research is clearly problem-focused and it is easy to assess the effect. There is an example, quoted in Martin Surr’s DFID study on research and policy, of a medical/agricultural project in West Africa where about 80% of the project budget went into research and that research was effective because in the course of doing that project, various problems emerged which were unexpected (such as the insects concerned flew hundreds of kilometres) and the fact that the research was in place meant that (a) they discovered that and (b) they were able to do something about it. There was a sort of feedback loop built in between the research and the policy and that made it effective.

Another of the questions that John Young asked was whether we have any examples of research overcoming resistance to reform. That was a good question to which I did not have an answer. One case that was quite interesting was of insecticide-soaked bed nets. It has been known for decades that if you sleep under a mosquito net which has been treated with insecticide you are much less likely to get malaria and if all children in Africa slept under such mosquito nets there would be

about a 30% reduction in malarial mortality and morbidity. But actually people do not. There has been an extensive amount of research at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and various other places looking not at the chemistry or medicine and so on but at issues like how to get local manufacture of bed nets; the organisation of re-dipping nets; advertising methods that might work, and so on, on the social science end, that overcame a resistance to the adoption of an innovation. It was a different kind of research but again focused on the problem.

How might we get more impact from DFID's research? We are going to be looking over the next few months at six areas, which I will just list briefly now. First of all we are interested to find out what our niche is on the international effort in research, either in terms of what DFID is particularly well-placed to do or in terms of what others are not doing so that we should step in. We need to do some investigation there and would be interested in people's thoughts on that.

Secondly, we are interested in what our place is in the national spectrum of research here in Britain, including our role vis-à-vis the Economic and Social Research Council for example, under its new Head (who is an international statistician who has himself worked on health programmes in developing countries that we have funded), and our position and potential there.

Thirdly, we are concerned with the question of how we can best relate our DFID programmes with the programmes of DFID's country offices. Clearly if research is to have an impact on developing country policy makers it tends to be researchers who are resident in those countries who are more likely to be in touch and the links will work better. That requires support in the way we think about our allocation of money and that has to come from DFID's country offices, not from my team.

We need to think about leveraging private sector research. There are some very cost-effective efforts that have been made in the recent past and there is a question about the extent to which we can find more of those or whether they are just one-off cases.

There is an issue about communication and dissemination of research results, about collecting demand, and the interaction between researchers and users that we need to do some more work on.

There is also an issue about DFID using its own convening power. The Joseph Rowntree foundation in Britain does not, on the whole, require its researchers to do the dissemination, and takes it as its responsibility to create the links between the researchers and the housing policy managers in the key local authorities and the relevant government departments and so on. Should we as DFID, with a lot of convening power, be doing that more and calling the relevant seminars?

These are some of the areas that we will look at over the next two months in the course of trying to think up our research strategy.

Finally I wanted to say something about improving the context at the policy end. I have been talking about the links between research and policy in terms of the research end. Clearly we can also do something about the policy end, particularly within DFID. The reorganisation which has been going on within DFID since 1st April has not just been about research, it has also been about the policy division as a whole and we have changed very dramatically from being a set of twelve sectoral departments (with one dealing with economics and one dealing with health etc.) to something which is much more like a think tank, looking at specific issues for defined periods of time and when that issue is solved, shutting down that team and setting up another team to look at another issue for another defined period of time. At the heart of those teams are some DFID staff but the teams are to be porous and in order to work effectively they will need to pick the brains of and involve researchers from around the world, but particularly from within Britain. I think that offers a huge opportunity to the research community.



John Young

Maximising Research Impact

Paul Spray has stolen much of my thunder, as always, but I will try to fill in some of the gaps he has left. We have already heard a lot in this meeting series about examples of where research has or has not influenced policy: Julius Court talked about household disease surveys in rural Tanzania which had informed a process of health service reforms, resulting in a reduction in infant mortality; Erik Millstone spoke about BSE and how, as the story unfolded, UK policy makers were deafened by their own rhetoric to the results of the research; David Halpern talked about the new literacy programme developed by a group of academics, practitioners and policy makers looking together at the evidence to develop new policies. But there is still this problem: many researchers cannot understand why their great ideas do not find their way into policy and many policy makers cannot quite understand what researchers do.

Richard Dewdney last week said that one of his great frustrations in DFID is that often when they commission research looking for practical advice, one of the key recommendations that comes back is that more research is needed.

So this is an area that needs a lot more work. There has been very little by way of systematic attempts to understand the relationship between research and policy, and that is what we have been trying to do in ODI. I am going to talk about the research on the research-policy interface that we have been doing, on how development policy can be more evidence-based, and I will focus on the practical results and on what we as researchers can do to improve our impact on policy.

I will talk briefly about the RAPID (Research and Policy in Development) Programme; the research framework that we have used to try to understand this linkage; some of the case studies that we have been looking at – focusing particularly on the lessons for researchers; and at the end, some final conclusions.

The RAPID Programme has been developing in ODI over the last two and a half years. One could argue that the whole of ODI's work is about the interface between research and policy, in which case ODI has been working in this area for 40 years. I think the first time that ODI began to look systematically at how this interface works was in 1999 in a paper by Rebecca Sutton, which looked at theoretical approaches across a wide range of academic disciplines and came up with a 21 point checklist of what makes policies happen.

Since then we have been involved in collecting preliminary case studies as part of the Global Development Network's research project which Julius Court talked about last week. We have also been doing a number of quite detailed case

studies about specific policy events to try to understand how research influenced those policy processes and I will talk more about those later.

We have also been involved in a wide range of advisory work: mapping organisations involved in southern policy research; looking at how knowledge and information can contribute to policies in the World Bank and within the FAO; developing a communications strategy to enhance policy impact for the DFID Multi-Stakeholder Forestry Project in Indonesia; and we are currently involved in an evaluation of the policy impact of DFID's Infrastructure and Urban Development Department/Knowledge and Research programme. So we have been involved in a lot of things, some practical and some quite theoretical.

The reality is that there has been a transition from a linear, logical view of how research influences policy towards a much more dynamic and complex understanding where there are many different players, and it is a two-way process between researchers and policy makers with other intermediaries involved as well. This was described well by Clay and Schaffer in their 1984 book *Room for Manoeuvre* about public policy in agriculture, where they argued that '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', so we have known that it is chaotic for a very long time. Another problem of course is that much research does not even focus on the right problems. A recent report by the International Service for Agricultural Research concluded that much of the policy research on African agriculture is irrelevant to agriculture and to overall economic policy. So it is a complicated process and policy makers, as Paul Spray mentioned earlier, are not necessarily evidence-aware and researchers are often not policy-aware.

So how have we tried to understand it? Based on the literature and on practical experience, we identified three broad groups of factors which influence whether research is likely to have an impact on policy. The first and probably the most important is the political context. If the politics are right and politicians and policy makers are looking for change then research can feed into policy. However, there are a whole range of factors there: political and economic structures and interests; systems of innovation; institutional pressures; culture; prevalent narratives etc.

The second area is the quality and credibility of the evidence and the degree it challenges received wisdom (which as Paul Spray said earlier on is a double-edged sword, sometimes it is good to challenge with research and at other times it is better to snuggle up with the policy makers).

The third area is the link between the policy community and the research community which includes a range of factors including: networks; relationships; power; competing discourses; trust; and knowledge use. We used this framework to analyse the case studies.

Another point is that we did it in a different way to the way that most people are doing it. Most people take a bit of research and try to assess its impact on policy. The International Development Research Centre study is a very good example of this and the International Food Policy Research Institute has done a lot of work in this area as well. That approach immediately clears the pitch because as soon as you start talking to people about the piece of research it raises it in their minds and it either becomes very important or not at all important. The way that we have looked at things is to try to identify policy events and track back from those policy events to get a historical narrative, identifying the key players and processes, and then asking what factors influenced and contributed to the various decisions along the way. Research may or may not have been one of those influences. That probably tends to downplay the role of research, but that is the methodology which we used.

We had three case studies within ODI. The first was on the adoption of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) by the World Bank and the IMF as part of the second Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC2) process in September 1999. PRSPs seemed to come out of nowhere and suddenly by the end of the year they were the key eligibility criteria both for entry into the Enhanced HIPC framework by the G8 and for concessional lending by the World Bank. Why did that happen? It was a very complex process, with many stakeholders, international bodies (including the IMF and WB) and national governments all with their own, very often different, agendas. DFID's agenda was very clearly poverty relief, the United States' agenda was much more to do with sound financial management in developing countries and the World Bank was desperately looking for an alternative to the Common Development Framework. And within that process, although academic and operational research clearly contributed, it certainly did not lead the process.

A second case study was the adoption of ethical principles within humanitarian agencies, as captured in the Sphere project, launched in 1997 after the Rwanda crisis. After the crisis there had been a lot of criticism about how many of the humanitarian agencies had responded to the crisis. These agencies needed to find mechanisms for self-regulation before donors did it for them, so there was a large multi-stakeholder evaluation of the humanitarian response to the Rwanda crisis, followed by the development and implementation of the Sphere project. This case study is interesting because most of the important policy makers

were also the practitioners, the heads of the NGOs and other organisations involved in humanitarian aid delivery and they worked very closely with other researchers and practitioners in a collaborative process to develop these new policies. Again, research did not lead that process, though research was clearly influential.

The third study, which I know a lot more about because I was there (this was my first overseas work), was on animal health policy in Kenya. This case study is about the total non-evolution of animal health care policies in Kenya, despite the clear demonstration of the value of new forms of animal health care delivery systems (including paravets or bare-foot vets, inspired by research elsewhere). This case study is interesting because it is an example of an idea looking for policy endorsement.

The fourth case study is one that Paul Spray talked about and it is not ODI's, though the analysis of it has enriched our understanding. It was carried out by William Solesbury from the Centre for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice at Queen Mary, as part of an evaluation of ESCOR-funded research within DFID. This study examined how research contributed to the adoption of the sustainable livelihoods approach in the 1997 White Paper (and much DFID policy, practice and structure thereafter). This provides an interesting example of policy change within a development organisation.

Then there are the 50 case studies which Julius Court talked about last week. I am not going to go into any more detail about these case studies, which will be published as an ODI Working Paper. They will also be available on the website, so look there if you want to know the details.

What I am going to do now is a very crude cross-cutting review of what we have learnt from these case studies and particularly what we have learnt about how we can improve our capacity as researchers to influence the policy process.

It is difficult to learn across such different and highly specific studies. The challenge is to find a useful mid-point between context specific recommendations (which may be useless in other contexts) and very general recommendations (which are not really much more than common sense). These studies do, though, help us to identify some things we need to know, some things we need to do, and provide useful guidance on how to do them, if we want to increase the impact of our research.

So looking first at what we need to know. In the political context area of the framework what we need to know is: who the policy makers are; whether there is policy maker demand for new ideas; what the sources and strengths of resistance are; what the policy making process is; what opportunities exist and what the timing is for input into formal policy making processes;

and whether there are any policy windows that can be taken advantage of.

In the evidence area of the framework, you need to know: what the current theory is; what the prevailing narratives are; how divergent the results of your research are from the current narrative and therefore how hard you will have to work to change people's minds; and you also need to know what sort of evidence will convince the sort of policy makers who you are dealing with in that particular situation.

In terms of links, you need to know: who the key stakeholders in the policy discourse are; what links and networks exist between them; and who the connectors, mavens and salesmen are and how you can work with them.

What to do in the political context area and how to do it: to know the political context, it is important to get to know the policy makers, their agendas and constraints; identify their supporters and opponents; prepare for regular policy opportunities and look out for – and react to – unexpected policy opportunities as they come up (elections, changes of Ministers etc).

I will give some examples from the case studies. On the question of how you get to know the policy makers, do not do it the way we did in Kenya in the 1980s. We arrived there, on a brief influenced by research about the new understanding of bare-foot doctors from China and about the new understanding from anthropology of the importance of indigenous knowledge systems, and the idea was to find out whether the bare-foot doctor approach would work in Kenya.

It seemed like a great idea at the time and we went there without having a clue about the policy process, politics, who the policy makers were, and we just got on and did it, pretty much hidden (partly because we were there under slightly dubious pretences under Oxfam's wing and we did not want to raise our heads above the parapet), but it was not until many years into the programme that we even started to understand how animal health care policies were made in Kenya. It was not until a senior animal health professional blundered into one of our workshops of his own accord that we got to know any of the key policy makers. So do not do it like that!

An example of how you can seize opportunity (though I will not go into any detail because Paul Spray has already talked about this) is the way in which the Natural Resources department within DFID, facing extinction in the mid-1990s, desperately needed a new line and having worked on livelihoods, seized the chance of Clare Short coming in and needing to prepare a new White Paper on Development. And the rest is history. (It is actually history now because the Sustainable Livelihoods Support Office has now been closed.)

Another DFID example is the DELIVERI project in Indonesia which was trying to improve government services in Indonesia through participatory approaches, client-oriented approaches and so on. It was an action research project working with the local government staff on the ground and seeking to influence policy. It got absolutely nowhere while President Soeharto was in power. As soon as he fell then the opportunity opened.

On to what to do about evidence and how to do it. You need to establish credibility over the long term; provide practical solutions to problems; establish legitimacy; build a convincing case and present clear options; package new ideas in familiar narratives and communicate effectively.

A couple of good examples were provided in the case studies. The Sphere project was described by one of the people interviewed for the case study as, 'a veritable Rolls Royce of humanitarian evaluation with unprecedented scope and unprecedented resources available to it, and this made it a privileged and professionally extremely rewarding process'. It was a very highly regarded piece of research done by people who were linked in with the policy makers, and it had a huge influence. There are lots of examples throughout the case studies that suggest that action research is a very effective means of influencing policy. Another example is the Poverty Eradication Action Plan in Uganda, which was quoted by many of the informants in the PRSP study as both the source of the PRSP idea (which it probably was not) and more importantly as a manifestation of how effective it can be in practice, which was very important in influencing the policy makers.

So what to do and how to build links. The important points here seem to be to: get to know the other stakeholders; establish a presence in existing networks; build coalitions with like-minded stakeholders; and build new policy networks. The livelihoods case study is a very good example of how gradually over time DFID built partnerships with researchers and practitioners, and established a programme of collaborative research, where researchers from different institutes collaborated with DFID to test and develop new ideas. Gradually DFID also built up supporters amongst its own ranks so that when Clare Short came along it had the evidence, it had a coalition of people and it could use that to influence the production of the White Paper.

Another example from Kenya suggests the importance of identifying key networks and 'salesmen' which we did not, as I explained earlier, until this wonderful bloke Julius Kajume came to one of the workshops we were running. He was Provincial Director of Vet Services in Eastern Province. One of his staff had asked if he could go to a workshop he had been invited to and Julius had decided to come to the meeting himself to find out what was going on. He was convinced by what he saw because we took him

to the field and he then became one of the key supporters in government, and since he moved to Nairobi has been one of the key players in this whole policy process ever since. It is terribly important to identify those people.

In conclusion, based on our research, it seems that if you want immediate policy impact then the think tank / 'do-tank' / research-through-operational-agents route is likely to have much more immediate policy impact than academic research, though it is quite clear from our case studies that academic research influenced the discourse within which much of this more operational research took place. For example, when I went to Kenya bright-eyed and bushy-tailed to do the paravet thing, I personally had no idea that this was based on the Chinese bare-foot doctor model and on the anthropological literature, but this is what convinced the powers-that-were at that time (who sent me there) that this was something worth doing. High-level academic research and free-thinking does contribute to the discourse within which policies are made.

We have skipped a lot here, and Paul Spray mentioned a very interesting point earlier on about the danger of regarding cuddling up to policy makers as being the only route to policy impact and the importance of sometimes taking a more confrontational approach. There has been a lot of work about the power of campaigns and it is the subject of one of our later meetings in this series.

Meeting 4: NGO Campaigns

Speakers: Andrew Simms – Director of Policy, New Economics Foundation

Justin Forsyth – Director of Policy, Oxfam

Chair: Simon Maxwell – Director, ODI



Meeting Summary

Simon Maxwell introduced the fourth meeting in the ‘Does Evidence Matter?’ series, this one on NGO campaigns. One of the roles researchers can play is to service campaigners. In addition, researchers can learn from campaigners when it comes to influencing policy change.

Andrew Simms pointed out that policy change is frequently not a rational process. He gave an initial illustration of how the brain makes decisions: the decision is based on how the brain guesses that you will feel once the decision has been made. In other words, decisions are subjective processes.

To show that the world is run on very little evidence and a lot of assumptions, Andrew highlighted two examples. The first example was trade liberalisation. There are a range of assumptions underlying the World Bank’s tendency to recommend liberalisation policies, and often these are inversely related to the evidence on what people say they need – even though the evidence has been gathered by the Bank.

The second example was globalisation: is it going to bring us all together or drive the rich and the poor further apart? According to Wade, it is possible to list eight different views on globalisation. Seven of these suggest that globalisation will drive groups further apart. Yet *The Economist*, for example, chooses to base its analyses on the one view that suggests that globalisation is a unifying force.

It is equally important to point out evidence gaps. An example of this is that there has not yet been an overview of the impact of global warming on the possibility of achieving the MDGs, despite the huge impact global warming will have.

Andrew described four examples of New Economics Foundation (NEF) campaigns and highlighted the use of evidence in each:

- NEF campaigned for supermarkets to adopt codes of conduct on the sourcing of their products: The evidence they used was partly based on original research, and was presented in a series of reports that managed to grab the attention of Clare Short. The result of the campaign was that most supermarkets adopted a voluntary code of conduct.
- Debt campaign: The evidence behind the campaign for debt relief entailed a lot of number crunching and economic analysis.

In addition, personal testimonies and stories were drawn on. A high degree of lobbying and a new movement, Jubilee 2000, resulted in a new awareness among the public that debt is not just an economic issue but also political. All in all the success of the campaign has been moderate.

- GM foods: The campaign on GM foods did not only rely on evidence, but also pointed out the gaps in the existing evidence base. Again, the campaign had moderate success. Importantly, it did manage to bring about a change in public attitude, and a new coalition has grown out of it. The most successful aspect of the campaign was to spark public debate on the issue.
- Local community sustainability: NEF has recently released a report entitled ‘Ghost Town Britain’, which outlines the current state of rural communities. The report argues that local retail sectors are being hollowed out and that rural Britain is facing decreasing sustainability. The report has so far led to a Parliamentary campaign for a new Bill for local community sustainability.

In conclusion, Andrew highlighted four lessons learnt:

- The higher you advance in an organisational structure, the more you have to internalise the propaganda.
- Evidence is rarely conclusive. Most of the time we have to act on imperfect information with more or less unpredictable outcomes.
- Absence of evidence of harm is not the same as evidence of absence of harm. The absence of evidence is closely linked to political agenda-setting power.
- A false positive diagnosis can be inconvenient, but a false negative diagnosis can be catastrophic.

Justin Forsyth spoke about the need to situate the role of evidence in a wider setting. The big question is: How does change happen? The answer to this question will determine whether and what kind of evidence you should use. Evidence is only one part of a much larger change strategy. Sometimes, the change process is not affected by evidence – one example of such a situation is the protracted conflict in Colombia.

Evidence matters at different times. Justin spoke of an Oxfam meeting with top politicians – Patricia Hewitt, Jacques Chirac, Tony Blair. However, whether or not Oxfam manages to



influence these politicians is frequently not dependent on the evidence, but on political pressure. The political context is very important. Evidence at the right moment matters, but at other times, political pressure matters far more.

How can campaigns work effectively? Firstly, it is very important to have a campaign that works as a wedge. At heart it is based on a big issue, such as the environment, but the campaign itself is strongly focused on a single issue – save the whale for instance. Campaigns about coffee and patents, for example, serve as wedges that all spring out of the same big issue: the dynamics of globalisation.

Secondly, campaigns only succeed if they are broad-based and fairly loose coalitions. They should not be run by a Stalinist-type central committee that dictates everything, but should be based on the ideal of ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’ within the limits of a joint strategy.

Thirdly, we should be careful not to split up different roles too much. A campaign is dependent on work at several levels: in-depth research, popular mass campaigns, and high-level political lobbying. All levels need to be taken into account. When that is said, it must also be noted that once a space has been opened up by a campaign, it can be difficult to know when to strike. For example, Oxfam are engaged in the issue of the TRIPS agreement, which highlights the fact that it is important to strike at the right level at just the right moment.

Fourthly, the ‘Birmingham moment’ is important. This is the moment when the terms of the debate change. Even though the policy might not be altered yet, the Birmingham moment signals that the public argument has been won, and politicians have to engage seriously with the issue at hand, for example, debt relief.

Finally, it is important to foster ownership among members of a coalition campaign. This can be done through spending a relatively long time on drawing up terms for joint research, joint activities, joint strategy, etc.

To conclude, Justin used the example of Oxfam’s campaign on access to medicines. The campaign was based on a combination of Oxfam’s own research, commissioned papers, adoption of others’ research, and research on specific companies. The wedge of the campaign was to establish the connection between patents, access to medicines and trade rules. The evidence was pulled together into a report, which was presented in a number of places, including on Wall Street and in the City. This had the effect of generating some ‘inside’ pressure from, for example, people in the City on the companies concerned. The corporate angle also made it easier to get the campaign into the news.

Comments from the audience included:

- Do the public need the evidence behind campaigns – and if so, how much of it? The public frequently react on the basis of a few illustrations rather than in-depth evidence.
- Evidence for campaigns can be misused.
- Jubilee was only one small factor in the larger lead-up to debt relief. Just as important were politicians (such as Gordon Brown), bankers and IMF staff.
- We need different sales pitches for different audiences. But when lobbying at a high political level, such as when trying to convince Gordon Brown, it is crucial to be able to present detailed evidence of possible means and outcomes.
- Never underestimate the power of personal motivations when seeking policy change. For example, what motivated Bono from U2 to support debt relief?
- To sum up, Simon Maxwell asked each of the speakers to briefly answer the question of what researchers can do better in order to support campaigners. Andrew Simms said that it would help if researchers lived in the real world. A simulation of this could be achieved if researchers imagined themselves having to phone up a busy news editor and explain to him or her why their particular issue should take precedence over everything else. Justin Forsyth suggested that one of the most important roles researchers can play is to support Southern governments and NGOs to become more engaged themselves in debates and decision-making processes.

Andrew Simms

Evidence in NGO Campaigns



I had a genuine ‘I told you so’ moment in 1999 in Seattle. The government had been very nice to the NGOs, they had opened up the doors on the first day there and we had three Ministers, Michael Meacher, Clare Short and Stephen Byers in a nice little line. It was a good day because it was the day that Joseph Stiglitz had launched one of his first pre-emptive attacks on the International Monetary Fund (IMF), criticising a lot of what they did and saying what a complete failure conditionality had been in terms of adjustment. It had taken 10 years of campaigning and of criticising adjustment to get to that point and in the nasty, cheeky fashion that us NGOs have, I stuck up my hand and said, ‘look, it took us 10 years to convince you of the weaknesses of conditionality, can we just cut to the chase on trade liberalisation and put it to one side now, since that does not work either?’ They all looked and smirked and did not say much, so I can genuinely say, ‘I told him so’. That was fun.

When I received the invitation to come and talk today, I had also seen that *The Economist* was running an essay competition in association with Shell, wanting you to write a 2,000 word essay on the subject of whether we need nature. My initial reaction when I see things like that is ‘Doh!’. When I saw the title of the meeting series today, ‘Does Evidence Matter?’ I had a very similar reaction. I had two thoughts about it, one was, ‘what a stupid question’ and the other was an academic response which is ‘well, maybe we need more research to find out’. I am slightly suspicious of the theme as well because there is a kind of implicit rationalist discourse, implying that you either want to use evidence or you do not, and that you are either rational or you are emotional. As we all know, reality is a lot more murky than that.

I want to share with you a snippet in a science magazine about some of the latest neurological research on how the brain makes decisions. The interesting thing was that the article was indicating that at the very earliest stages of going through the process of making a choice, what your brain does is guess how you will feel about it after you have made a certain decision, one way or another. So as a message to all those draconian scientists, I thought this was absolutely fascinating, because it means that at the very outset, the prior stage of research, however scientific and organised you might be, there is a subjective process going on.

This also slightly pre-empts one of my conclusions which I am going to drive home which is that, if there is one lesson I have come across through all the work that we have done and all the advocacy campaigns that we have run, the most striking one is that change is not a rational policy process. Both Justin Forsyth and I

have sat around whilst innumerable policy officers have crunched numbers and created great long shopping lists of change that they would like to happen, and then sent them to Whitehall and wondered why nothing ever did. There is a wonderful thing about statistics, which is that if you say to someone that you saw 17 elephants flying over your house this morning they will stop and look, whereas if you just say that you saw an elephant flying today they will think you are a lunatic. Once you apply a figure, a number to something, it is extraordinary how you can catch their attention. So always be suspicious of statistics – all statistics.

As an interesting context to the debate that we are in at the moment, there is this fantastic term that emerged a couple of years into the first Labour administration (which I think came out of the Treasury) when all of a sudden people started talking about ‘evidence-based policy’ – which made you ask what on earth they were basing it on before?

So yes, evidence matters, but what is interesting is the degree to which the world is run at the moment on the basis of very little evidence and an awful lot of assumptions. One need only leaf through the critical literature on the benefits and circumstances of trade liberalisation and then reflect on the fact that the motor of policy in the global economy is one of progressive trade liberalisation, which will apparently at some future point deliver us into a state of market utopia. Similarly with capital liberalisation, which is built into membership of the IMF, and also the assumed benefits of Foreign Direct Investment, despite the fact that there is a very healthy debate going on at the moment about whether this is a form of investment or actually a form of extraction. With that I will give you a slightly different advertising plug: yes, Simon Maxwell was right, we do have a thing called the ‘Alternative Mansion House Speech’ which will be about trade and will be very interesting.

Perhaps a slightly more important project we have coming out later this year is an alternative to the annual World Bank and IMF reports. Our report will be called the ‘Real World Economic Outlook’ and it will go into some of these questions in some detail.

Just as a couple of examples about the extraordinary way in which evidence gets used when it is in the hands of powerful institutions: it was either the 1997 or 1998 World Development Report (WDR) in which the World Bank trumpeted a private sector survey it had carried out which was included in the back of the Report. They had disaggregated the results into seven or eight regions and in about 80% to 90% of the responses, the major concern of small and

medium size businesses in developing countries was a lack of public investment. In almost all incidences, the lowest order concern was regulation. When you came to the summary of recommendations and conclusions in the WDR (you can guess what I am going to say), they were bizarrely inverted and all of a sudden regulation was heavy and onerous and needed to be swept away throughout the developing world, and heavy public investment to support the sectors was a dangerous and dodgy subsidy. From the earliest days of the debt campaign, there was a marvellous little quote that we brought out from the IMF research department (remembering that this was the basis upon which entire strategies and adjustment processes were based) where the IMF admitted to themselves that forecasts for these developing countries were 'not particularly accurate' – but of course that never stopped them knowing what they should do.

Another marvellous example of the inversion of the role of evidence in policy formulation is in the build up to the new trade round. There was a heavy lobby from the NGO sector that at the very least, before embarking on a new round, there should be a social and environmental impact assessment of the consequences of the last round. The reaction from civil servants and others at the World Trade Organisation was the analogy that trade liberalisation is a bit like riding a bike: if you go too slowly you are going to fall off. Think about that, because what if, while riding that bike, you happen to have a blindfold on and you are in the middle of heavy traffic. Without the evidence-base, without having looked at how things went before, you could be in a very sticky situation.

That brings me to the debate which is hot and active at the moment, which is whether globalisation brings us all together and closes gaps between rich and poor or whether it does exactly the opposite. According to Professor Robert Wade, there are about eight ways of summing this up at the moment, seven of which say that things are getting worse and one of which says that things are not quite so bad. I wonder which one *The Economist* and its various cohorts and policy advocates like to quote most often. Change is not a rational policy process.

There are also other problems when one considers the role of evidence in some of the big historical events, for example the issue of tobacco and safety, or nuclear power versus renewable energy sources. There are major issues about the suppression of evidence and what that means. Interestingly, when you consider the role of evidence in what I think is one of the most important issues of our time, climate change, we have actually achieved a global consensus on the need for a precautionary principle, where the absence of conclusive evidence should not be seen as grounds for inaction. So straight away, we are in a highly contingent situation where we are acting within uncertainty and insecurity,

yet having to make decisions about policy proposals and the allocation of resources.

Yet when we come to the issue of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), nowhere has there been a systematic mapping of the likely impacts of global warming and climate change on the pursuit of and achievability of the MDGs. Because we do not have the resources to do this in a very comprehensive way ourselves, we have attempted to address this in a report with a Bangladeshi partner organisation Becas called 'The End of Development? Global Warming, Disasters and the End of Human Progress', to say that evidence is lacking and that one of the things that we can do is to play the role of a catalyst to those with bigger resources and more cash, to encourage them to go away and look at this in a more substantive way. There is already enough evidence around to make us consider quite seriously the possibility that climate change makes the achievement of the MDGs even more laughable than it is already.

I want to talk briefly about a couple of examples of campaigns that we have done and the role that evidence played in some of those, and then I will finish with an ad hoc, mildly disorganised list of lessons learnt over the past few years whilst working on these various issues. At Christian Aid several years ago we launched a campaign to get supermarkets to adopt codes of conduct on the sourcing of their products from developing countries. The role that evidence played in this was that we gathered as much intelligence on the sector as we could. We had a number of partner organisations and our staff went out into the field and carried out a form of investigative journalism about abuses of safety regulations etc. We produced a series of reports, starting with one entitled 'The Global Supermarket'. What happened as a consequence was that Clare Short got excited about it and helped to set up the Ethical Trading Initiative; most of the supermarkets did adopt voluntary codes; there is a new and ongoing project called 'Race to the Top' which is organised and chaired by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and it has become pretty much a permanent advocacy feature.

What is interesting in looking at the relative success or failure of this campaign was that the impact was greatest during the first year when we put a lot of evidence in front of the noses of the supermarkets. When we shifted – or perhaps slipped – into the role of positive engagement for years two and three, it was remarkable how things slowed down and how the allocation of resources within the supermarkets, towards ensuring that the whole produce supply chain was monitored and evaluated and kept in good order, really slipped by. So the interesting thing there was that the role of evidence, in terms of supporting the advocacy goals and keeping things moving forward, was relatively unsustainable.

In terms of the kind of evidence used, where the supermarkets were concerned, first of all there was the mapping required to see what power and control the multiple major retailers had, and a process of charting their ascendancy to their capture of the British retail market and their control of the supply chain and of growers. That required some secondary and some primary research, some insider brown envelopes here and there and the occasional conversation in a coffee bar, and it also involved us commissioning research from partner organisations in some of the areas where plantations were supplying the products.

An anecdote which just occurs to me is that in terms of cultural impact on the debate, perhaps the more powerful and important effect was when a documentary was made by BBC2 in the 'Modern Times' series about the sourcing of mange-tout from Zimbabwe for Tesco's, which caused an uproar. The maker and director of that film (who I later collaborated with in making a television advertisement for the debt campaign) was invited to speak at some Anthropology departments at various universities around the country, where they said 'do you realise you have done in an hour what we have failed to do in 20 years in terms of making these issues matter'. That was an interesting reflection.

The debt campaign is something which many people will be very familiar with here. The campaign involved lots of number crunching, lots of duels with statistics between the agencies and the Bank and the IMF, lots of personal testimony, extremely complex number crunching which led many people in the agencies in the early days to think that we could never run a successful high-profile, public and policy-oriented advocacy campaign on the issue when you are dealing with the niceties of net present value etc., but when the campaigners got hold of it and boiled it down to a proposition that debt kills babies, it is remarkable what progress we did have.

These are ongoing battles over statistics which we are still having with the Bank and the Fund. There is a lot of lobbying still. What happened as a consequence of the campaign was some successful cancellation; a new movement, the Jubilee Campaign, which still has active campaigns in about 60 countries around the world, many of which have taken on a life of their own and formed new coalitions; new attitudes and a new awareness that debt is not a straightforward economic issue (which was the standard response we would get from people in the early days), but is highly political and the solutions to it are likewise. I would say that the successes of the campaign have been moderate and the jury is still out on that. The role of evidence well presented was to win specific concessions, to make this point that the debt was politically defined.

Something of a slightly different nature was a campaign (again, at Christian Aid) which

succeeded in getting an issue to be talked about for the first time amongst a particular community. It was about the impact or likely impact of the introduction of genetically modified (GM) crops into agriculture and with them, the introduction of a whole set of market relationships which have very specific impacts on rural and farming populations. Evidence played a role again. It was a mixture of pointing out where there was not evidence and more evidence was needed, and using the accumulated evidence and what was already known about what worked to support rural populations to deal with hunger and poverty. The result was a huge public attitude change. The introduction of GM crops has been slowed down to allow more time for evidence to accumulate and again a new coalition was formed out of it. In terms of success, again I would say that the jury is very much out. There has been a great deal of success in terms of getting the issue debated and making it clear that a lot more evidence is needed and in a perverse way, perhaps the biggest success was in terms of putting the hunger debate back centre-stage.

Extraordinarily, the reason that this became an issue was because the bio-technology companies themselves started using extremely emotional appeals in their advertising without any reference whatsoever to debates about hunger and poverty, or about access to food and what actually works, saying that wringing your hands about world hunger will not help but food bio-technology will. They started the debate themselves and they had no evidence base from which they were working when they did that. Subsequently a lot of evidence which has emerged about the real experience of GM crops in the field has exposed both the weakness of the product and the need for a lot more evidence.

Bringing us up to date is an example which is more UK focused. We produced a report as part of our localism campaign called 'Ghost Town Britain', looking at the decline of local economies the length and breadth of Britain, the hollowing out of small, independent retail sectors (everything from banking, through to retail, to the closure of post offices) and what this means for sustainability and the creation of food deserts and banking deserts for marginalised communities in this country. This campaign is based on evidence from a mixture of primary research, including a lot of nifty graphs and a few surveys to gauge how people think about it, and has led to a parliamentary campaign for a new Bill about local communities' sustainability.

I will round up with my slightly ad hoc and rapid list of conclusions that all this points me towards. I reiterate that if you are in the change game, change is not a rational policy process, by any means. Interestingly, in terms of how people operate when they are in the major institutions, I observe that the higher you advance through an institutional setting, the more deeply you have to internalise its propaganda.

I would say also that evidence is rarely, if ever, conclusive and that we have to act as a permanent condition in a state of imperfect knowledge and insecurity, not knowing the full outcome of our actions. In fact there will always be unpredicted emergent consequences, but this is no reason for not doing anything.

I would say that where lots of these issues are concerned, be it climate change, be it biotechnology, that absence of evidence of harm is not evidence of absence of harm. Part of the reason is that the accumulation of evidence is a function of your ability to pay for and accumulate research, so if you are in a situation within a large institutional setting with assumed power and dominance already, the chances are that you can generate a larger body of evidence to substantiate your case and this kind of evidence will almost always be tendentious. If you are in a situation where you cannot stand up and say something without 55-year university projects behind you backing up your case, that will always favour the status quo.

An observation, which I have borrowed from Ian Wilson's book *Concilliance* is about why I think it is necessary for us to wave the danger flag very early on with a lot of these issues, which is that in many of these issues a false positive diagnosis might be an inconvenience, but a false negative diagnosis can be a catastrophe and a lethal one.

Another observation (from studying ideology and discourse analysis) is that evidence is always sutured into a web of discourse, power and interest. This for me finally knocks on the head the old draconian notion of rationalist science and rationalist discourse.

Finally I want to show you a picture of a gentleman from a global investment company (whose name I will not mention). They had been sitting one day in an advertising meeting thinking about how the company could pitch its services and they thought, 'I know, we will show what a nice bunch of guys we are and that you can really trust us'. So they got their men in suits to go out into the open with a beach ball with a picture of the world on it and thought that they would show people the new face of corporate social responsibility. So here is the picture of our gentleman kicking the world into touch! These guys do not worry about the evidence base too much. This is so much the case that the *Investment Chronicle* could give an award to another investment company that advertises its services on this evidence base: 'an introduction to spread betting'. So I think, all things considered, we do pretty well by comparison.

Justin Forsyth

Evidence in NGO Campaigns



I very much endorse what Andrew Simms began by talking about, in terms of thinking about the role of evidence within a wider setting. I think evidence matters a lot because I think that the starting point is that we are trying to find out what is right and wrong and what truth is. I know truth sounds a strange thing because there are different truths, but there are things that work and there are things that fail and it is important that we constantly try to work out what we want to do.

So from an Oxfam perspective, one of the reasons why we think that evidence matters is that even in relation to campaigning, when we choose our campaigns we try to pull together what people are saying about how the world is changing, to look at what is coming from our programme staff and the people that we work with, and to ask what the big issues are, based on that kind of thinking and evidence. That is the starting point for campaigning: to know what the right issues are to campaign about, based on knowing what issues are important, in this case to poor people around the world. You could choose to campaign on any issue if it works in advertising or because it is an easy issue to campaign on, but it is important to choose issues which will really make a difference to the lives of billions of people around the world if you change them.

The other reason why evidence is important, particularly in terms of strategy for campaigning, is that evidence is ammunition in the war, in the campaign: to prove the point in an intellectual sense and to win the argument in the more intellectual and policy-driven debate, but also to find the killer facts and the human interest stories to win the popular debate in that war. I am not sure which is more important, but both play out equally when you want to achieve change.

The real question behind this is how change happens. I do not think there is a single answer to that and the question of how much evidence matters will be partly determined by how the change happens in different situations. For example, I have just been in Columbia working with some of our programme staff right out in the rural mountain areas where you have the ELN, the FARC and the paramilitaries, and I do not think in that situation evidence matters at all. Nobody sits down and discusses the root causes of conflict in Columbia. When you are thinking about strategies for change, it comes back to politics, conflict and war, and you have to think of very different strategies to make change happen in that situation, which is much more to do with how you remove some of the causes fuelling the conflict and how you empower people to take back the space denied them in terms of politics and their own lives.

So the first point I want to make is that I do think evidence matters in actually understanding what is happening and in the ammunition in the war, but it is only one part of a much bigger strategy to achieve change. The really important question that we should be asking ourselves every time we develop a campaign, or in anything that we do, is how does change happen and what would it take to achieve that change. That is a hard question to answer because the world is changing very fast politically and where governments were stronger, now we have corporations who are stronger; where in the past we had more than one superpower, now we have only one, but we also have the public, the media and all these different factors that contribute to change happening.

The second thing I wanted to say is that within that context, evidence matters at different times. Today we have a meeting with Patricia Hewitt MP to talk about the run up to Cancun and trade. In Paris there is a meeting with Jacques Chirac about the G8, and there is a meeting with Tony Blair to talk about the same thing. In Cancun we are likely to decide very little that will benefit poor countries, it is extraordinarily depressing at the moment if you look at these meetings and what they are actually going to deliver, given the promises that have been made in the last few years about a development round and given what we had at the G8 in Canada about a new agenda for Africa. We are actually, in all probability, going to get even less. In those situations it is not a question of evidence, it is a matter of pure political will. It is equally about the fact that Iraq has sucked every bit of political energy from every other possibility of progress on other issues. So you have at the G8 a proposal by President Chirac for a moratorium on export subsidies – a modest proposal, probably a proposal to divert attention away from them undermining the CAP reform, but it is still a proposal. The reason that it will not be agreed in Evian is that President Bush will not agree it because President Chirac is proposing it, because of Iraq. It is as simple as that. The White House say that is not the case but the British Government will tell you that it is.

So within my opening point that evidence does matter but within the context, I wanted to make this second point, that evidence at the right moment matters but at other moments it is really about sheer political pressure. The only thing that will change the G8 and Cancun will be if hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets. Probably if these hundreds of thousands of people who took to the streets used violence and caused a riot, it would have more impact than Oxfam or NEF organising peaceful demonstrations. Sadly I think that is the only thing that will get into the media and I am not endorsing that kind of violence, but we are in that stage of how political change can happen.

I want to talk about how campaigns can work effectively to achieve change, and then how you think about evidence and research within them. I think there are some things that we have collectively learnt about campaigning in the last 10 years. It is important to understand these and then to think about what you do in research. There are some things that we have learnt about campaign planning which you have to think about in research as well and we have also learnt some things about why campaigns succeed or fail.

Firstly (learnt from the environment movement), it is really important to have a campaign which is a kind of 'wedge', which has at its heart a very strong focus, but which illustrates a wider point. So all Greenpeace campaigns are about things like whales and oil rigs. They are actually about the environment, but they focus on an example of injustice which illustrates a wider point. That is the only way to break into the popular media. Campaigns like that have problems, solutions and villains – and they need villains. That is simplistic but if you are going to get into the popular media, you need to break issues down into human interest stories and have campaigns that are specific whilst illustrating wider points.

If you look at our campaigning on trade at the moment, there are campaigns about the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, for example World Development Movement, which is about health in education. There are campaigns about access to medicines and patents, about coffee, and other issues. But they are all campaigns, in effect, about how globalisation does not work for poor people and how rules are rigged. If you had a campaign simply about how rules are rigged and how globalisation does not work for poor people, you would talk to readers of *The Guardian*, but that is not going to achieve the kind of change we need. So we need these specific campaigns but we have to remember that they are wedges and the bigger change is what we are after.

Secondly, we have learnt that campaigns only succeed if they are broad coalitions. Not the kind of Stalinist 'uncoalitions' with a central secretariat that tells everyone what to do, but loose coalitions with common objectives, agenda settings and timelines. The Jubilee campaign, although it probably did have some elements of Stalinism at its heart, in general was a loose coalition. The campaigns at the moment about cutting the cost of medicine, which include groups like Pac in South Africa, Third World Network and groups such as the Nada group in America, are very loose coalitions within a joint strategy. Their objectives are determined and the odd joint action is agreed, but it is a case of 'a thousand flowers blooming'. The real way to achieve change is not through each organisation doing its own thing. They have to run their own campaigns, but they are in wider coalitions of change. I think we have got better at understanding how some of those alliances work in the north and, particularly crucially, the south.

The third element I want to mention is that we have tactics which we have always split up and I think we have to do them together. I spent five years in Washington doing high-level lobbying and that has been a kind of discipline. I remember in the IMF days how one would pitch up and literally be laughed at as you sat there and tried to explain some of the things that Andrew Simms was talking about earlier. It was only really when Jubilee kicked in and you got the mass mobilisation that they created the space for the change to happen. So high-level lobbying; popular campaigning; media; doing it in alliances north and south; doing research to underpin that strategy, those are the things you need to bring about change.

Then there are practical choices about when you do it. You need sometimes to shake the tree with mass, direct and confrontational campaigning, but you also need to know the right moment to do the deal. The question then is who has the right to make that deal? We are in that situation at the moment with, for example, the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement and the WTO. A deal has to be done at some point, but everyone is frightened that the deal will be less than people want. NGOs have created a space for the deal with some southern governments, but who is going to decide what the compromise is going to be? It is going to be a hard choice because southern NGOs fear that large organisations like Oxfam will sell them down the river by saying that they will do the deal; we feel that southern governments are going to do the deal prematurely, and as we get closer to Cancun and there is no deal on intellectual property and the TRIPS agreement, it is going to be very embarrassing for northern governments. You have to hold out, because this was promised two years ago, but if you leave it too long you might lose the momentum.

Sometimes we are in danger in the wider civil society / NGO movement of not knowing when to do each of those strategies. We can get into campaigning for campaigning's sake and never do the deal, but we have to win sometimes, move on and fight the next battle, because these are all wedges in that bigger battle. If we give the impression that we are only interested in the next media headline or we are only interested in campaigning for campaigning's sake, then we lose credibility with the people whom we are trying to influence, because they think we are always going to be moving the goal posts and that they will never do anything that will satisfy us. We have to understand those dynamics.

The final point on campaign methodology is the 'Birmingham moment'. I think that it is about understanding the moment when the terms of the debate change – not when you get the policy victory, but when you have won the argument with decision-makers and opinion formers, and also won the public argument. That is the moment when you are most powerful in achieving change.

The question then is how you capture the benefit of that moment to achieve change. In Birmingham at the G8 all those years ago, Jubilee basically changed the terms of the debate on debt and from there on in, it has been about capturing the benefits. We have not captured the benefits as much as we wanted, but that moment was extraordinarily powerful in that suddenly no-one was talking about not doing debt relief and even the IMF had stopped laughing. The debate had become about how much, how far and how to do it. Understanding that is very important in campaigning and achieving change.

Those are some of the lessons that we have learnt from recent campaigns and it is a matter of applying those methodologies and strategies to how we develop and implement campaigns. One further point: the important way to build a coalition is not unilaterally to develop a campaign and then negotiate with partners and allies in the south to work with you on the implementation. The way that I think research and analysis comes in at the beginning is that by doing it together, you are determining the policy and determining the campaign, and that creates a solid foundation for a real coalition to achieve change. We are trying to do that at the moment on some of our campaigns and it takes a lot of time.

One of the campaigns we are developing as part of our work on trade is about women's labour. We are working with 12 southern organisations who are running national campaigns. We have been negotiating since January 2002 on everything from joint research, to the objectives of the campaign, to how it will be launched and which of the campaigns will be highlighted at the global level, and the campaign will not be launched until 2004. The downside is that this has taken two years of investment and a lot of transactional costs. The upside is that this is genuinely a joint campaign owned by these allies who feel that they have not just shaped the strategy, they have shaped the content, the objectives, the research and they have done or commissioned some of the research themselves, helped to write the report and have ownership of it from beginning to end.

Where the evidence and the research comes in is as an integral part of the campaign and it is not a thing you do before doing the campaign. Doing the research together is part of forming trust and relationships, as well as coming up with the evidence that will form the basis of the campaign.

An example of how this works in practice is the campaigning around access to medicine and patents. From an Oxfam point of view, we do original research, we have a research team and researchers who we work with all around the world, but not on the scale of the World Bank, ODI or DFID, and it is quite targeted. So for example, on the labour research, we have carried out a lot of interviews, and collected data and

analysis about supply chains in a number of different countries; we have used questionnaires and focus groups with women workers themselves; and we combine that with other research. We also do a lot of secondary research and we unapologetically steal everyone else's analyses and research.

That is what we did with the campaign on access to medicines: we stole a lot of research from everyone; we did some of our own in places like the Dominican Republic, Bangladesh and Pakistan; we commissioned papers and we put all of that together and produced reports. We also researched companies and that is where I come back to the idea of problems, solutions and villains. I know it is wrong, we should not demonise companies completely because they are also part of the solution, but it was important to put the spotlight on them and that type of research, which is not just about the issue but about how companies use their power, for example in Thailand companies had basically bribed and bullied the Thai government not to introduce a drug. We did research on both Glaxo and Pfizer which we then used to present to investors in Wall Street and the City, who then asked for meetings with these companies to talk through the research, saying that whether or not they believed Oxfam, what its research was saying was a risk to the company's profits and something needed to be done about it.

These are all strategies and tactics about how research is very important, both in forming the coalition and in convincing important people like investors, who can then exert an influence on the companies in terms of winning the argument on an issue like patents. Lastly, we also work with a lot of academics on areas such as patents, people like Professor Peter Drahos, who helped shape what we were doing and saying, and pointed us in the direction where we could identify other research.

So the ingredients for success, going back to my first points, were that this campaign was a very powerful wedge – it is about medicine, about HIV/AIDs. Then the drugs companies put Nelson Mandela in the dock, which was a really stupid thing to do and which made the campaign about patents and medicines huge, and we benefited from that. It was a wide alliance, a lot of southern groups in Thailand, Brazil, South Africa and also American groups, Médecins Sans Frontières, VSO and many others, and it had a corporate angle which made it very news worthy (with big companies like Garnier getting £22 million pay-offs). All of these things make it more campaignable, but at the heart of it was a solid case, that actually nobody has been able to dispute: that there is a connection between patents and access to medicines. It is not the only issue, which is also about basic health services, but making that case and winning the argument allowed all of the rest of it to happen.

Meeting 5: Think Tanks

Speakers: Tom Bentley – Executive Director, DEMOS

Simon Maxwell – Director, ODI

Mark Garnett – Visiting Fellow, University of Leicester

Chair: Larry Elliott – Economics Editor, The Guardian



Meeting Summary

Larry Elliott introduced the topic, think tanks, by asking a few questions: What role do they play in policy processes? Are they a force for good? Does it matter whether they are independent or not? What is the ideal balance between research and communication? How important is reputation?

Tom Bentley outlined the current status of DEMOS. Like most other think tanks, DEMOS is adapting to the changing policy environment. Their motto has been ‘the first political think tank for the twenty-first century’. Even in a changing environment, however, the fundamental questions about how political decisions are taken have not gone away.

DEMOS has gone through three stages of life. When it was formed in 1993 (at a time when public interest in politics was very low) it did a lot of work and established a high-profile very quickly. Then as the Labour government took shape, DEMOS addressed several new policy agendas. This gradually led to an existentialist crisis as the think tank found itself becoming embedded in one political project. For the last three years DEMOS has been reinventing itself in order to retain both its creativity and independence.

As New Labour has discovered, the gap between policy and practice is one of the most difficult to bridge. DEMOS has, in many ways, acted as an intellectual intermediary in the policy/practice sphere, introducing and working on new terms (e.g. ‘social entrepreneurship’ and ‘joined-up government’) as well as applied thinking. Many policy makers are not well equipped to build institutions, and DEMOS therefore works through partnerships to develop this capacity.

There is a growing realisation in many sectors that networks are a fundamental organisational form well-suited to the emerging policy environment. This is particularly true in sectors that have been transnationalised and work across borders.

So that leaves us with interesting questions of independence and originality. Think tanks such as DEMOS are becoming increasingly focused on engaging in wide-ranging conversations, both locally and internationally. DEMOS increasingly works in collaboration with a wide range of different partners. However, even where partners fund parts of the work, DEMOS retains its right to challenge them and to remain independent in its policy recommendations.

Simon Maxwell endorsed Tom Bentley’s point about the different roles of think tanks, and the need for them to engage. He reminded the audience of the ODI mission statement: ‘to inspire and inform policy and practice’. The Director of IPPR, Matthew Taylor, had made a similar point, describing the three functions of a think tank:

- The gas function – to change awareness and attitudes in the environment;
- The solid function – to communicate core ideas to inform policy;
- The liquid function – to facilitate the trickling-down of these ideas through government and partner institutions.

The problems facing think tanks with an international agenda are complex, however. All the decision-making processes they are involved in today have multiple actors and multiple poles or sites. They are far more complex than in the past. How can think tanks work together across national borders?

One way forward is through international networks, which are not new. Simon gave as an example the story of Anthony Fisher – founder of the Institute of Economic Affairs, and, later, founder of an international network of neo-liberal think tanks, the Atlas Foundation. The Global Development Network is a contemporary example, though of course less ideological and less tightly structured than Atlas.

Simon proposed there are different approaches to working together. From an earlier paper (‘Development Research in Europe: Towards an (All) Star Alliance’, *EADI Newsletter* 3, 2002), he outlined three possible models:

- The Microsoft model – essentially hegemonic;
- The McDonald’s model – a franchise operation where each store is locally owned but agree to sell the same product;
- The Airline Alliance model – where all airlines are independently owned and take their own decisions, but are able to cooperate effectively, even sharing seats on the same plane. Simon described this as a model of ‘policy code sharing’.

Is the Airline Alliance model a way forward for think tank collaboration? The idea of policy code sharing has many advantages – but would require

a high degree of trust. ODI are working with EADI to set up a network built on this principle, and dealing with European development issues, named the 'All-Star Alliance'. Hopefully this model will allow think tanks to retain their personality while working together.

There are still substantial challenges ahead. In particular, there is the challenge of funding think tank capacity in developing countries.

While infected by the enthusiasm of previous speakers for think tanks, **Mark Garnett** thought a few cautionary remarks were in order. He pointed out how indiscriminately the term 'think tank' is now used. But what should a think tank ideally be?

The first generation think tanks, like the Fabians, were ideologically-driven and contributed enormously to the development of the welfare state under the post-war Labour government. The second generation were less ideological – combining unbiased research with sound policy advice. The third generation, such as the IEA, were founded by idealists devoted to rolling back the welfare state under Thatcherism. The fourth, current, generation seem to be neither ideologically, nor research-driven, providing intellectual credibility to their sponsors, and focusing mainly on achieving a high media profile to attract funds.

Think tanks should not try to change policy for ideological reasons; this is the role of pressure groups. Rather, think tanks should work to improve the flow of information and independent research to policy makers.

There is a certain problem today of hollowed-out shells of think tanks who demand intellectual credibility without any substance to back this up. There are also a set of think tanks who seem to have the purpose of chasing media headlines.

In developing countries there are a distinct set of challenges for think tanks. At times they may be seen to operate as the extended arm of government, without much independence (for example, in China and Malaysia). In other contexts, the independent and informative role that think tanks could potentially play is not being played by them, but by NGOs. Many of the NGOs have relevant experience and knowledge, and are able to process this knowledge and inform other actors. Therefore, perhaps it is worth considering whether support should be channelled to these NGOs rather than to the so-called think tanks.

Comments from the floor included the following points:

- Think tanks are becoming speak tanks. There is a very strong link between the political sphere and the media. Therefore think tanks need to grab media attention. However, this does not mean that think tanks (in developing countries) are white elephants supported by

political funding. There are several examples of African think tanks doing high quality research on an independent basis.

- NGOs could not fulfil the same role as think tanks in developing countries, as they are not necessarily representative or open to various debates.
- There is a danger inherent in networks: the participants may end up merely talking to too many people who resemble themselves. Network participants should also allow for spaces where they can be challenged by people who think differently.
- Is it possible to work in virtual think tanks, for example, drawing international experts together into a virtual team over a period of time?
- Is there an emerging division of labour between intellectuals working with interesting ideas on the one hand, and disenchanted policy implementers on the other hand? If practitioners had more space to develop their own ideas, we might not need so many think tanks.
- To what extent can we actually influence policy through the media?
- From experience of working in NGOs, it is fairly clear that NGOs do not have the same capacity as think tanks to process ideas and publications.
- Funders exercise censorship over think tanks, not only through modifying publications, but also through playing a role in which topics can be researched in the first place.

Tom Bentley

Evidence and Think Tanks



Thanks to ODI for inviting me. This is a very broad question so I thought I would start by explaining a bit about what DEMOS is and how it works, and then use that to raise a number of questions which remain open about think tanks. These questions are being debated and, to some extent, decided in practice by the way that different organisations – not just those we traditionally think of as think tanks – are adapting to the changing policy environment, including its internationalisation.

DEMOS is 10 years old this year. It was founded with the humble aim of becoming ‘the first political think tank for the twenty-first century’. If you think back to 1993 and the domestic political climate in Britain, the dominant mood was one of stagnation: a Labour Party that could not work out how to win an election; a deeply divided and really fairly exhausted Conservative administration, and the beginning of a whole series of fears, anxieties and consciousness of wider change. This was the early stages of the debate about globalisation, what it was and what it might mean.

It is quite interesting to note that we are at a point in the political cycle where many of those questions about political disengagement, disillusionment and disappointment with mainstream politics have returned. While New Labour produced a big rush of energy and has changed quite a lot – both within the Labour Party and in Britain – the underlying questions about politics, power, decision-making and engagement of citizens in the way that decisions are taken, have not gone away.

DEMOS was founded in part on the propositions that firstly there were a series of long-term questions and transitions to be addressed, and secondly, that we could be optimistic about some of the opportunities created by those transitions. Whilst DEMOS does point to many long-term and in some ways low-level crises in our institutional life, it also actively looks for new disciplines, new perspectives and new ideas that might help to generate solutions, or, just as importantly, connect solutions and practices in one area of life or society to what is happening elsewhere.

Since it was founded, DEMOS has been through three stages in its life. The first was a start-up phase, a kind of think tank precursor of the dot.com bubble, in that it appeared very quickly and it rapidly generated a high profile public agenda by publishing a lot of eye-catching ideas and generating a lot of debate, and by putting itself on the map under the guidance of its founding director, Geoff Mulgan, and a number of other leading individuals who created a series of agendas. Then as the prospect of a Labour government took shape and Tony Blair was elected as leader of the Labour Party the year after

DEMOS was founded, it became increasingly entwined with the formation of a whole series of new policy agendas and a redrawing of the political landscape. I believe quite firmly that DEMOS’ success in becoming part of that redrawing also provoked its first existential crisis, because it is quite difficult for an organisation dedicated to long-term thinking, independence, creativity and lateral connections to be too deeply embedded in a single political project.

So the third stage of life, which we have been working on for the past three years or so, has been to develop and reshape (to some extent to reinvent) the organisation, without losing any of its core themes or commitments. The result is an organisation which aims – I leave you to judge for yourselves how far it succeeds – to be both independent and connected.

I do not think this is the only mode of think tank life or the only thing that a think tank can do, but DEMOS produces a particular kind of blend of long-term focus and a strong emphasis on conceptual thinking – identifying new perspectives, ideas and language – and then helping to give substance and add flesh to those conceptual agendas by connecting directly with both policy and practice elsewhere. I think it is crucial to understanding what we do and try to do: that we are interested in intellectual innovation and the generation of ideas, partly through the ongoing relationship between policy and practice. As New Labour has discovered, the relationship between policy and practice, and the problem of implementation, is probably the most difficult and intractable problem to solve. As some of the energy has drained away from its first few years, the challenges of making institutions which can fit better the contours of our wider environment and express collective desires and needs come out more and more starkly.

The way that DEMOS tries to work in this environment and generate answers in it, is to act as an intellectual intermediary. So DEMOS is associated with a whole series of ideas which, I think, have helped to shape the current political vocabulary: ideas like ‘social entrepreneurship’; ‘joined-up’ government; the creative cities agenda; possibilities of creative learning in schooling and the education system; and a whole series of other things.

Much of our work is very empirical, but this is not always the work which generates most attention in the media. As part of our range of activities, we do quite detailed primary research and interpretation of the results. We also work quite deliberately with organisations and institutions, including academic ones, who have particular areas of expertise that might be brought out into wider public debates.

I think perhaps the development most significant for our discussion today is that we have gradually developed a practice in what you might call ‘applied thinking’, which involves direct collaboration with partner organisations who are both our funders and our collaborators. I deliberately do not call it consultancy because it involves taking quite concrete and manifest organisational problems and looking at the potential for using broader, more abstract analysis or ideas generated elsewhere to help focus and develop organisational strategies and ways of learning in these specific settings. Examples include a partnership with the National College for School Leadership, a fairly big, new and high-profile New Labour institution which is charged with generating leadership capacity in the school system. It has set itself up from scratch over the last three years and is looking for ways to disburse its money and to have the right kind of impact on the system.

Putting the right knowledge in the right places and working out how to build institutions is actually a problem for which many policy makers are not prepared or equipped. So an approach to think tanking which includes working out how to learn as you go along and how to transfer knowledge and ideas from one setting to another, including understanding the conditions under which certain kinds of innovation can flourish, is crucially important.

We also do this in local communities. We are working with the North Southwark Education Action Zone at the moment, looking at ways in which their collaborative networking between schools can be linked more strongly with their community development agenda, and with the way that they try to engage both businesses and institutions in raising educational attainment overall. We have just finished writing a ‘social enterprise strategy’ in Hackney, which looks at the potential for networking the social entrepreneurs with the social businesses in ways which might help to produce critical mass and sustainability for that tier of economic activity.

We also do this kind of work with other voluntary organisations, sometimes with Trades Unions and occasionally with firms, although we apply a fairly clear public interest test to our work where companies are concerned, and we always ask ourselves whether or not the ideas and agendas that we are working on could be broadly described as contributing to the public benefit in the long-run. That is the source of a lot of DEMOS’ expertise and, I think, also of its credibility – although it is not necessarily the kind of credibility which will find its way into mainstream media coverage, or the way that politicians and policy makers in central government will understand it.

Its significance in the new policy environment is really about the long-term importance of policy networks to the degree of ‘informedness’ with

which policy decisions by various institutions are taken in real time, and also the transparency and legitimacy of the way in which those institutions are formed.

Five or 10 years ago, words such as intermediary and networker tended to be associated with less than legitimate activities, particularly with lobbyists, corporate communications and other forms of ‘shadowy influence’. One of the things that is happening is that more people in more sectors are beginning to realise that networks are a fairly fundamental organisational form and means of communication in every sphere of life, and the fact that an idea is communicated by a network is not a test of the credibility or legitimacy of the idea. The question is how we sort out the right questions to be asking under those conditions. It is true, particularly in areas of policy that have been increasingly transnationalised, that organising through networks is more or less the only way to create coherent agendas that have a chance of affecting large-scale institutional decision-making. (This is particularly true of the way that policy debate is conducted around Brussels.)

So where does that leave us? I think there is an interesting question about independence and originality. The conventional model of the think tank is a fairly obvious stereotype of a small group of usually very clever and certainly very ‘worldly’ people working in a very constrained environment and developing ideas that they somehow manage to push through to other people who are making ‘real world’ decisions. I think it is less and less like that. My experience of being a think tank director is increasingly about debating and developing conversations, about forms of interactive communication and the ways in which that can build critical mass for certain ideas. DEMOS is doing this both in the local settings that I was talking about, and more and more internationally.

For example, we have just launched DEMOS Athens with a partner in Greece, which seemed like the appropriate place to go; we have just published a big study on migration policy and strategies for Europe which arises from a collaboration with Dutch policy makers and which I hope will lead to more international partnership work; we are working with partners in Scandinavia and so on. But rather than simply trying to replicate the organisational model that we have based in London, we are doing it by building a series of collaborative relationships which are distinctive in themselves, are appropriate to their local context and which, we hope, over time will take the form of a network itself, and add to an overall conversation and exchange of ideas which goes far beyond the core set of activities under our direction in London.

How those kinds of network-based exchanges fit in with the structure of government, or of the established media, and how they get funded and

financed are open questions. The way in which we try to protect our independence is not to look for unrestricted core funding because there is very little of this around (and I find it sometimes has quite significant strings attached anyway), but rather to apply a golden editorial rule to what we produce, which is that however much money or other resources a partner might be contributing, they get no formal control over what we decide or over what we decide to publish. That quite often results in negotiated conflicts with our funders. We have just had an example of this where, having finished a big study on workforce development in the museums, galleries and libraries sector, we published a pamphlet by someone else attacking the whole policy edifice and strategy for libraries, which resulted in fairly intense local controversy. I see that kind of intellectual challenge as fundamental to sustaining the role that DEMOS has marked out for itself.

The other route to independence is to operate transparently as this intermediary hovering between sectors, and to try to diversify our funding and revenue sources sufficiently that we do not depend in any way on any one sector or institution. Although the transaction costs in doing that may be quite high (it means you have to manage a lot of relationships and understand a lot of sectors), it fits very well in the long-run with our mission to learn from anywhere and everywhere.



Simon Maxwell

Policy Code Sharing

Whenever I think about what we do at ODI, I think about people like Tom Bentley at DEMOS, because of the verve that they bring to this whole enterprise of trying to change policy and practice – that is what our mission statement says: we want to ‘inspire and inform policy and practice’ which change the world. A number of the things which you talked about are really relevant, such as the intermediation and the combining of the theory with the applied.

Matthew Taylor, who runs the Institute of Public Policy Research, once described think tanks as having a three-fold function: a liquid function, a solid function and a gaseous function. The gaseous function is not just hot air, it is about changing the way people think about an issue, changing the zeitgeist. The solid function is about changing the core, concrete ideas that inform a shift in policy. The liquid is trickling down between the interstices of government, working with partners and the private sector to try to make those things happen. Of course, there is also an interaction or iteration between the solid, liquid and gaseous functions.

However, and although we are in the same business, I do think that at one level DEMOS has it easy. I wanted to start with Edward Heath and the question (not just a *Daily Mail* question) of ‘who governs Britain?’ We know that if you ask that question you lose the election, but the fact is that most of the decisions that we (at ODI) work on are decisions taken by lots of different actors. Debt relief, for example, does not happen because Gordon Brown or Clare Short want it. It happens because they can produce a consensus in the G8 and then sell that to the interim committee of the Fund. Trade liberalisation happens not because President Chirac makes a particular proposal for the G8, but because somehow it gets carried through the European Union and the World Trade Organisation.

All the decisions that we are involved in are multi-actor, multi-polar decisions, so the policy process which we are trying to influence is as much in Zimbabwe or Zambia as it is in London. That is an enormously complicated exercise for us.

So how do we do it? One model I carry in my head draws on the experience of Anthony Fisher. Fisher was a British Royal Air Force pilot in the Second World War who, after the war, went the United States and saw the first broiler-house chickens. At the time, they did not have these in Britain. He came back and founded Buxted chickens, made a fortune and decided to invest his money in promulgating the ideas of his hero, Hayek. He founded the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), which went on to become a leading driver of the neo-liberal revolution that found its apotheosis around the time of Margaret Thatcher.

There were other think tanks involved, such as the Centre for Policy Studies. There is a book about this experience of the neo-liberal revolution in Britain, which describes the way in which a dozen people changed the face of Britain, through dining clubs, pamphlets, parliamentary debates, key links into ministries, working on the next manifesto – the kinds of things that DEMOS has always done very well.

But Anthony Fisher was not satisfied with just doing it in the UK, he had global ambitions. So he founded the Atlas Foundation, which still exists. Its mission is to set up like-minded think tanks around the world which will promulgate free-market ideas. They are quite unabashed about it. Lots of think tanks are very unabashed about their political leanings, but what is particularly interesting about Atlas is this focus on the internationalisation of ideas and policy processes. Of course, we think we have discovered globalisation, but it is not new: the IEA was founded in 1957.

That, then, is the challenge: how do we internationalise the policy processes? Tom Bentley focused on networks, which is absolutely the right topic. There are, needless to say, hundreds of think tanks around the world. We are involved in the European Association of Development Institutes, which has over 150 institutional members around Europe (including not just the EU but accession countries and others). Most of the members are small, some are political, many of them are universities and most have an academic bent. But the network is there and the question is how we use it.

I have been thinking about this problem, and there seem to be three kinds of approach to using networks. The first is the Microsoft model. It is hegemonic: you switch on your computer anywhere in the world and you are using software produced by one company based in Seattle. So we could, as DEMOS seems to be doing, set up a network of think tanks, all branded ODI. They would all be exactly the same and our empire would extend from coast to coast, but that would be a very bad model for us because that kind of hegemonic, dominating, monopolist of ideas is probably a bad idea intellectually, but also all of these places have histories, there is a path dependency and there is no way that we could take over think tanks around the world and nor should we.

The second model I call the McDonald’s model. It looks a bit like Microsoft but actually it is largely a franchise operation. Most McDonald’s outlets are owned by local people, so there is strong local ownership, but the fact is that every time you walk through the door you get the same hamburger – whether an Indian or a Swedish version, it is

basically the same product. Aside from problems of fat, sugar and salt, there is a homogenisation issue which is also rather inappropriate to the kind of intellectual debate that we want to foment. Although, as I will come back to in a moment, it is not an entirely hopeless model.

Looking around for ideas, the third model I came to was the Airline Alliance model. What is interesting about airline alliances is that all the airlines are independently owned, they make their own decisions about aircrafts, routes, maintenance schedules, uniforms, food, charging and so on, but they work together in some kind of loose alliance, so that when you put your baggage on a plane in Ljubljana and transfer planes, (you hope) it will end up in Heathrow when you arrive with a different airline. The highest form of that alliance is code sharing, where you get on a plane to Brussels and it is British Airways/Sabena switching backwards and forwards – one plane but two different airlines.

So I have been working on the idea of ‘policy code sharing’ and how we might use this idea of the Airline Alliance to work with partners in our networks around the world on the same topics and, with luck, producing the same kinds of results. So it is not McDonald’s, it looks a bit like homogenisation but we try to retain independence, and explicitly try to improve the degree of coordination. We know from the airlines that it is a difficult job to pull off because you need to cross-guarantee quality and standards across very different companies, and you need a high degree of trust to make policy code sharing work.

We have some examples of incipient networks. The Global Development Network which we have talked about in this meeting series is an institution with which we are very much involved within ODI. This is not yet policy code sharing and is a rather loose structure of academics and intellectuals around the world. However, its annual conferences involve people from 70 or 80 countries.

We are trying something different on what we think is a very important emerging agenda, on the future of European development cooperation. I will not go into the details of what we are trying to do now, except to say that there is a whole series of decisions about to take place on Europe – the Convention is the least of it. The accession of new members will take place in 2004. There are elections to take place next year which will mean the reconfiguration of the Commission; there are the trade talks in Mexico this autumn; there is a renegotiation of the European budget, beginning next year; there is a midterm review of the European development fund – a whole series of things. We need to take that agenda and work on it not just as one country but as 25 countries who, by next year, will be the members of the European Union.

So what we are trying to do is create something that looks like an Airline Alliance model. We are calling it the ‘All-Star Alliance’, and setting it up through the European Association of Development Institutes. We are trying to put policy code sharing into practice. The project takes the form of a background paper prepared jointly by us and our partners in the Netherlands, the European Centre for Development Policy Management, a shared website hosted by EUFORIC, and what we hope will be a series of parallel meetings taking place in as many as 15 countries around Europe over the next six to nine months. We are starting our own series in June and we have already signed up the Secretary of State, Chris Patten, Glenys Kinnock, Baroness Symons, Sally Keeble from DFID and a range of other people, with civil society counterparts, to try to debate all these issues about enlargement and the EDF and so on. We will post our findings on the website, hope that others will do the same and will, just as Tom Bentley says, be creating and developing a conversation around Europe using the ‘All-Star Alliance’ model.

We are not quite as single-minded as Anthony Fisher and we are certainly not as committed to a free-market ideology, but we do think that the Atlas model is one that we ought to be looking at: a way of building a network of think tanks that will retain their personality but work together. This is a huge challenge – not least for us working in developing countries – because it is so difficult both to find capacity in developing countries and to fund it. Funding ODI equivalents (not ODI names but equivalents) is one of the most urgent tasks we face if we are to fulfil our mission and theirs, which is to inspire and inform policy change.



Mark Garnett

Does the Developing World Need Think Tanks?

It was lovely to hear two people with such enthusiasm for the work of think tanks. Their enthusiasm was so infectious I feel duty-bound to throw a bucket of cold water over it and sound even more cynical about think tanks than I really am. It goes without saying that these remarks have nothing to do with Tom Bentley's or Simon Maxwell's work. I just want to utter a few, perhaps cautionary, remarks about think tanks. The term has very strong positive connotations. It implies objective, evidence-based research and a group of people dedicated to improving government policy because they themselves are impressed by the evidence which they research. The history of think tanks in Britain suggests that the term is now being banded about rather indiscriminately.

It is possible to identify four waves of think tanks in Britain. The first was the Fabians at the end of the nineteenth century: a group of ideologically committed people who were also very much committed to evidence-based research. In the 1930s there was a wave of think tanks in political and economic planning, such as the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, who were less ideological than the Fabians and more committed to evidence-based research. These think tanks conform, as far as I think it is possible, to the ideal model: one which is not driven by a desire to change the world for ideological reasons, but by a desire to improve the flow of information to governments and provide independent sources of information. The 1930s were in my view a heyday for think tanks.

In the post-war period, the Institute for Economic Affairs heralded a wave of unashamedly ideological think tanks who harped back to the days of the Fabians and wanted to do Fabianism in reverse, to roll back the state which the Fabians had helped to roll forward. These were the first group to bring the whole term into question and discredit because they were not doing independent research. They had their minds made up before they started doing any research whatsoever and their conclusions were written for them as extreme free-market economic liberals. These are pressure groups, not think tanks.

One of the particularly dangerous things about this wave of think tanks is that they were effective at attracting funds. Small businessmen who became bigger businessmen loved the IEA, CPS and the plethora of alphabet soup think tanks we have now. The Social Market Foundation for example, what is that? As it is seen as a think tank, people think it has intellectual credibility, so to have their name behind your speaking head as a government minister is supposed to add intellectual credibility. These are hollowed out shells of think tanks and you can see why this happens: think tanks thrive on media headlines and publicity as it is how they get their funding.

That third wave heralded the fourth, which is where we are now: a wave of post-modern think tanks which no longer have the ideological thrust of the third wave because ideology is dead, we are all economic liberals now. (In fact this shows that ideology is not dead, it is just that none of us have the nous to think in an independent way.) The fourth wave is entirely devoted to headline chasing, meaning that long-term research is at a premium – you cannot do it, you have to get the headlines. This is what Tom Bentley was talking about in the early days of DEMOS. They were brilliant at getting headlines but it was not clear that the very skilful, enthusiastic, young people involved in DEMOS had a lot of experience at running anything. They were just very good writers and publicity chasers. It seems that DEMOS now has a vision of being like the second wave of think tanks and it may well not be a coincidence that I have not heard very much from DEMOS recently, but actually a good thing reflecting the fact that it now has a proper ethos as an organisation which merits the term think tank.

There are lots of good reasons for saying think tanks no longer fulfil the definition of a think tank which gives intellectual credibility and carries the positive connotations. I do not think that the best known think tanks fulfil this role anymore and this means that a development which could have been a great blessing to people – not only to governments who would get better information from independent sources, but also to the public who would benefit from the pluralism of competing sources of information produced by independent groups – has not done so. Neither of those things can be said to be happening any more in Britain.

In terms of the developing world, think tanks in countries less economically blessed than the United States and Britain are really bodies of lackeys, given state funding by politicians who want to get intellectual credibility. This is certainly the case in a recently developed country such as Malaysia and in places where there is not such a democratic or pluralistic ethos.

My personal view is that the most positive role think tanks could play in developing countries is already being played by NGOs across the board. Charities who have the expertise to actually make life better for people in those particular countries seem to obviate the need for developing a think tank world in these countries. We should draw on the existing expertise of people and I cannot see that their job could be done better by organisations called think tanks. The dividing line between pressure groups and think tanks is already very difficult to identify and the job of helping developing countries should go to the people with the practical knowledge derived from working on the ground.

Meeting 6: Putting Knowledge into Practice

Speakers: Bonnie Cheuk – Director, Knowledge Management, The British Council

John Borton – ALNAP Learning Support Office, ODI

Chair: John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID, and Research Fellow, ODI



Meeting Summary

John Young introduced the meeting, pointing out that knowledge and learning are at the core of evidence-based policy making, and raising the questions: How is information converted into knowledge, and when is knowledge influential? How do organisations use knowledge, and are they able to learn from past experiences?

Bonnie Cheuk presented the different ways in which the British Council is trying to promote internal knowledge sharing. The mission of the British Council is to promote understanding abroad of the United Kingdom's values, ideas and achievements. The Council works in 109 countries and deals with hundreds of enquiries every day. With staff spread out across the globe, it is vital for them to be able to access information quickly and easily. Bonnie suggested that in this context, Knowledge Management (KM) is about 'connecting employees with the right information or the right person at the right time'.

In December 2002 three existing divisions in the Council (with responsibilities for the intranet, global databases, and records management) were grouped together to form the KM Team, headed by Bonnie. She spent the previous five months conducting a knowledge audit of the organisation, and found many encouraging trends. For example, there are over 100 Communities of Practice (CoPs) already set up. However, there are also many challenges. Just one example of this is the fact that many intranet sites are outdated, and staff contact information is missing.

The British Council is developing a KM strategy which includes elements such as a content improvement project, institutionalising a knowledge sharing network, continuing to build and nurture CoPs, improved technologies, and new ways of monitoring and evaluating the benefits of knowledge sharing.

A few visible results of the KM strategy have already appeared. The Development Services Team of the Council needed ready access to specific information, such as consultant CVs and lists of partners. These have now been placed on a specific intranet page and are easily accessible to all employees worldwide. A similar support and resources page has been set up for other groups, including the Justice Information Network.

Achievements so far include improved access to key contacts, two dedicated knowledge management staff; raised awareness of KM, including in the business plan; strengthened CoPs;

and revamped intranet pages. There are still many challenges ahead. How can the KM Team ensure that new content comes onto the intranet and old content is taken off? How can they encourage staff to contribute and see the benefits of KM?

Bonnie concluded with a model of their KM framework and some key elements of their strategy to build a knowledge sharing culture.

John Borton presented the results of the Learning Support Office (LSO) Test in Malawi, run by ALNAP (The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, hosted by ODI). The ALNAP concepts of KM and learning in the humanitarian sector. The LSO concept had originated in 1999 and had been market tested in Orissa, East Timor and Sierra Leone, but it still needed to be operationalised. It was decided that the concept would be tested out in a six month trial project, a Learning Support Office in Malawi.

The LSO was set up at the end of August 2002 (and ran until the end of March 2003) to support learning by and between organisations, teams and individuals involved in the ongoing humanitarian operation. The office was staffed by around 10 people, half of whom were locally recruited.

The LSO activities covered three broad areas: 'learning in'; 'lateral learning'; and 'learning out'. Learning in (learning from previous operations) activities included: (i) setting up a resource centre with a thousand documents, both general and Malawi-specific. Documents were delivered to relief workers as and when they needed them; (ii) literature reviews and analysis were carried out, e.g. on HIV/AIDS and food security; (iii) a lot of 'oiling' had to be done, i.e. participating in meetings and inputting/transferring knowledge.

Lateral learning (learning between organisations during the operation) was the most successful part of the LSO's activities. A manual for relief workers in Malawi was developed and tested through a workshop–manual–training cycle. LSO arranged three workshops for 70 field officers, developed a manual from the information gathered at the workshop, which then formed the basis for training over 250 other relief workers.

The learning out (retaining knowledge for use in later operations) phase was rather brief and included archiving and handing over the resource centre, as well as sharing lessons with C-SAFE.



A collective lessons learning workshop had been envisaged, but the agency personnel did not have the space to start such a process due to programme implementation pressures.

Provisional lessons from the LSO concept include most importantly, that a LSO can add value in an ongoing operation. However, the office must be set up early to be present during the planning stage. Other lessons are to bring key items of equipment with you rather than relying on local suppliers; take more care in staff recruitment; and ensure more explicit support from agency HQs.

Lessons for learning and KM include that there is a lack of readily accessible documents in both hard copy and electronically (CD-ROMs would be useful). However, in an emergency situation it is not enough to make existing information available; information has to be condensed and individually tailored to the needs of busy relief workers. There was some defensive behaviour, especially from the larger agencies, and this must be taken into account when setting up a LSO.

In conclusion, there is a definite need for an independent and respected learning office that can distribute information, provide advice, facilitate connections, and host meetings and evaluations.

Comments and questions from the audience included the following:

- Good knowledge systems are expensive and time-consuming. Learning systems are not new. Rockefeller was doing this sort of thing systematically over 20 years ago. Senge's book *The 5th Discipline* (written over a decade ago) covers much of this ground and it was surprising that the humanitarian sector was still in the early stages of implementing such thinking. Donors are often unwilling to provide the resources to maintain good learning systems over the long term.
- Is the British Council KM strategy only concerned with internal knowledge? Bonnie responded no, and that this is only one part of the picture. We also want to capture externally generated knowledge that is useful to our work.
- Could the LSO activities have been undertaken by existing institutions in Malawi rather than setting up a new and temporary office? John responded that in Lilongwe it was most expedient to set up a new office, as the university is three hours away and the library did not have many documents on relief operations. But in other countries the situation may be different and then it would be advantageous to align with existing institutions.
- Does the British Council encourage individuals to communicate directly as well, rather than relying mostly on technology to carry the KM process forward? Bonnie confirmed that they try to do both.

- What would the implications of the LSO lessons be for researchers who write big reports? Will anyone ever have time to read them? Should we be doing something different? John replied that busy relief workers need very practically oriented knowledge and many products of research are not of direct or immediate use to them. The humanitarian sector desperately needs an easily searchable library of useful materials: they exist, it's just that they need pulling together and being made readily available in ongoing operations in appropriate formats.

Bonnie Cheuk



How Does the British Council Learn and Manage its Knowledge?

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to meet up with so many of you here. I am new to the British Council and new to this country. To give you a brief background of myself, I moved from Arthur Anderson in San Francisco to London six months ago and joined the British Council on the 2nd December 2002 in charge of knowledge management. My past experience is in implementing knowledge management for Arthur Anderson as well as for external clients.

Today I am going to share with you some of the work that we have done in managing knowledge within the Council and some of our plans for moving forward, and I will share the good news as well as the bad news.

Before we get into the question of how we share knowledge, I will introduce briefly what the British Council does. Our purpose is to win recognition abroad for the United Kingdom's values, ideas and achievements, and to nurture lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with other countries. We are actually selling the UK's ideas to other countries. The British Council was founded in 1934 and is registered as a charitable organisation, with 7,500 employees world-wide, of which 1,500 are based in the UK, mainly in London and Manchester.

How many of you are familiar with what the British Council does? Most of you – good, then I can go through this very briefly! We conduct examinations, manage library and information centres, provide vocational projects and exchange programmes and have a development service team which works with our partners on development projects. We also organise arts events, science events and a range of other activities in 109 countries.

We started to ask ourselves, being such a large organisation, what was going on with knowledge sharing within the Council. I have some examples to share with you to explain why we think knowledge management is such a crucial issue for the Council and why our senior management team felt that we needed to get someone in place to make sure that it was going to happen.

Here are some examples. At 10am a director in San Paulo is planning an animation project and wants to find out which other offices have run similar initiatives and what has worked and what has failed. Meanwhile in Bangkok at the same time, 5pm, the communications manager wants to access some market research to find out what has been done, who he can consult and what the best practices are. At 9am in Brussels a business developer needs to compile a development proposal to be sent out to a tight deadline. He needs to include the CVs of experienced consultants who can be used on the project and

he wants to find out what experience we have in the area in economic development. Two hours later, someone in London learns that a Member of Parliament is going to visit Morocco at the end of the week and needs a briefing, so she needs to find out more about the MP and quickly to get hold of a country brief and more detailed information about the country.

These are real cases of things happening in the Council every day. Is it easy for us to get answers to all of these questions? That is my question to the senior management and also to the staff. If not, there is a problem.

Knowledge management is about connecting employees with the right information, or the right person, at the right time, so that they can learn faster, work better and ultimately achieve the Council's objectives.

The challenge is how do we make that happen? The senior management realised that this was an issue for the Council and wanted to do something about it. So beginning in December 2002, three divisions within the Council, (covering internet services, global databases, building and nurturing communities of practice, reports management, data standards, data protection and freedom of information) were grouped together under 'Knowledge Management'. These are really the building blocks for making information available and making sure that people use it and contribute to it, using the internet as the portal through which people can participate. Of course we will not forget our face-to-face tradition within the Council, but we believe these are all enablers to that.

When I first started, I needed to find out what was going on within the Council in terms of knowledge sharing, so over the first few months I conducted a knowledge audit, visiting a number of countries and talking to numerous colleagues in London and Manchester. I found out that we did have some good examples: we have over 100 networking communities which had already been set up, we have many collaborative tools which are already in place, some of which we have purchased and some of which we have built ourselves, including our intranet which has received double the number of hits, up from two million to five million in the past year. We have a number of knowledge databases, discussion forums, mailing lists, internet chat, web-logging and are looking at new technologies every day to see what we can use to help people to collaborate and learn from one another.

But I also found that we had a number of bad examples. The intranet is there but if you look beyond the main page, many of the intranet sites have become outdated; many of the discussion

forums lack participation; the experience-gains from face-to-face meetings like this one are not well captured – it is good for the people who have the chance to attend a meeting, but is it shared to a wider audience? This has not happened that often. Employees complain that they do not have time to share and that the organisational structure does not really support effective knowledge sharing. Some of the really critical information sharing – basic information which people need to do their work – is missing or incomplete. For example, staff contact information: I want to find out someone's contact details in Brazil and I notice that in the staff directory there are only five numbers under the telephone field, so there is something wrong with the data standard or issues. Other examples include things like a lack of data on past projects that we have managed. These are the kinds of issues which came out from the knowledge audit.

So we realised that we needed to improve in all of these areas and we are tasked to do that. In the past few months we have done a lot of consultation and brainstorming and come up with a 'grand plan' of how we want to move things forward. These are some of the highlights.

First, we believe that it is really important to improve the quality of content. We need to institutionalise a knowledge sharing network and we want people to be dedicated to helping to facilitate knowledge sharing – capture, organisation and dissemination of content. We need to raise awareness of knowledge management. Although some senior management think that it is really critical, there are a lot of middle-management and people doing work in the field who may not buy into it immediately because it is something that they are being asked to do on top of their daily work. So that area will take a lot of work. We will continue to build and nurture communities of practice. We want people to group together if they share similar interests and to support them if they want to collaborate on a global basis, not just within their office.

We will continue to improve the technologies to reduce barriers to sharing knowledge. For example if you ask people to share knowledge using the intranet, not everyone will have the html skills to contribute, so we are looking at content management systems and whether we can ask people to write things in MSWord and then save it as a web page. There are a lot of technologies that we are considering and of course we also need to improve the retrieval of the content, so we are investing in a new search engine and looking at an electronic records management system, which we hope to roll out early next year.

On top of that we need to make sure that we set corporate standards and have a corporate taxonomy, so that we know where to go to get information and how to retrieve it from the system. We also need to measure the benefits and effectiveness of knowledge sharing, which

we have not yet done effectively. We always say that it is important, but how do we convince people that this is something that is worth a certain amount of investment?

This is all part of our 'grand plan' and I call it that because it is impossible for us to do all of this, addressing all of the divisions and all of the communities, at the same time. We need to prioritise. We have started to identify a number of communities which say that they have an urgent need to collaborate, to share knowledge and to work closely with one another on a global basis.

One other example which I will share with you is what our development services team has done in the past three to four months. They are one of the groups who came to us and said that they needed to share their knowledge better. Although they were doing great work, they had not been sharing effectively on a global basis.

The development services team support our partners' objectives in a number of areas: economic development, education, governance, health, training management, etc. They started with the question of what was the knowledge that they wanted to share and to manage. They did a series of user studies to talk to people who need information to help them to do their work and they came up with a wish list which included quick access to consultants' CVs and a searchable database to look through these. Other examples of things they need include past project experience, case studies, information about what is in the pipeline, and who the experts and the potential partners are for a particular project.

The intranet of the development services team shows some of the resources they have built to support people in development services work, including the consultants' database and information about how to produce proposals and other documents for clients and customers, and how to access other information and key documents which they have found useful or key to getting their work done. This is still being worked on and is not complete.

There is also a network of people interested in similar areas who are grouped together under various interests. The justice information network, for example, provides detailed summaries of projects, the methodologies used, what has been done, best practice and lessons learnt, etc. They have also included a section showing what is in the pipeline so that people know what is coming up in this area, and client and partner information. This functions as a one-stop-shop for the information that people need in order to do their work and ultimately to achieve the Council's objectives.

So in summary, the work that has been done over the past few months includes: improving access to key content; assigning two knowledge

managers to be in charge of capturing, organising and disseminating knowledge (including managing the intranet, conducting and facilitating face-to-face meetings, producing internal and e-newsletters to inform people in the network about these resources); raising awareness of knowledge management through including the knowledge sharing agenda in the business plan, so that people know that this is the high-level direction that the whole development service team want to go in; setting up quarterly face-to-face meetings to get feedback from staff; building and nurturing communities of practice (including identifying existing communities and how to revitalise their work); revamping the intranet site with more content, better navigation and design; and planning the development of databases to manage contracts and consultants' CVs. This is all the hard work which has been done to date.

The challenge ahead includes questions of how we ensure that the new content will come – setting up the site is one thing but keeping new content coming in and deciding how old content will be taken out, who will be in charge of keeping the site up-to-date and how people will find the time to share their knowledge, participate in discussions and encourage greater use of the intranet – involves getting people to be more aware of the resources available and to use them. Ultimately the most important question is how we prove the benefits of knowledge management.

I will give one short case study from our communities. The challenge is how to build some really successful communities and to show the benefit, then to multiply it to all the communities in a five year time range. That is a challenge!

We use a framework within the Council to identify key areas that we want to look at to make knowledge sharing happen within a community or within the Council as a whole. We understand that we need to get leadership support and incorporate knowledge management into the corporate and business strategy. We need to assign people to knowledge management, as the development services department has done, and to get that structure right for the British Council. We need to invest in technology because it can make it easier for people to contribute and retrieve information, and reduce the barriers to doing so by making it simpler and easier to access. This is an area that we really want to improve on.

I have talked about how important effectiveness is and, at the core of it, we believe that it is vital to ask people what the information is that they need in order to do their work. We have started to look at each individual community and ask them to come up with a list of critical information which they need in order to get their work done. Once this is decided you can come up with what we call the 'content management process', where you can start identifying where to get

this information, who is in charge and how it is or should be organised and shared. This is the knowledge management framework which we will be using and which we have used to move knowledge management forward.

A lot of people say that it is nice if everyone wants to share knowledge but they do not see this happening in their organisations and the question is how to make it happen. The tips and tricks that we have come up with include inviting people to contribute to a monthly newsletter, encouraging people to give out mysterious gifts or some recognition to contributors, announcing top contributors in business meetings, just to showcase that this is something important to the Council and to excite people a bit more, and also to make knowledge sharing part of the work process. The development services' methodology includes a proper debrief at the end of each project, and a system to store and feed documents into the intranet so others can also learn from the project. These systems have to be in place or it will not happen.

We are looking at management issues such as how to include knowledge sharing as a staff appraisal criteria. There are people within the Council who are already doing this kind of work, communications and information managers, who need to send out frequent reminders to build relationships with different people, we have not created new knowledge manager posts. Educating new staff and teaching them how to use all the knowledge management tools is very important, but it has often been neglected in the past, so we are looking at including the knowledge sharing programme into the corporate induction programme. Also important is continuing to build good relationships with users and content experts so that they will contribute, and showing the benefits by sharing success stories and liaising with people in the different communities to understand the benefits of knowledge sharing to the business.



John Borton

Encouraging and Facilitating Learning in a Relief Operation

Thank you for the opportunity to present the results of the test of the Learning Support Office (LSO) concept in Malawi. Whereas the previous presentation was about knowledge sharing, this is more about learning, and concerns one sector of practice and action during a relief operation that has only just wound down in Malawi. For those of you that do not know ALNAP, it is the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in humanitarian action. The Secretariat is based here in ODI. It was formed in 1997 and has most of the main actors within the humanitarian sector within it: all the main United Nations agencies, donors, non-governmental organisations, Red Cross and so on.

ALNAP seriously began to engage with knowledge management and learning when it was preparing for the Annual Review in 2002. This represented the first sector-wide assessment of knowledge management and learning in the humanitarian sector, but some discussion had been going on amongst ALNAP members before that about supporting learning in an ongoing operation. There was a sense within ALNAP that the Network was a great talk shop but needed to be made relevant to people in the field, to relief workers in ongoing operations.

This concept was born during discussions in 1999 during the Kosovo operations and then was in effect market-tested and developed through retrospective interviews with those involved in operations in Orissa and then in East Timor and then Sierra Leone. In early 2002, it was decided to form an interest group to run a test of the concept in an operation to see how it worked, so this was very much a trial and pilot project of a concept. There were lots of questions about whether it would work and how it would get on with the agencies and so on. In July 2002 Malawi was selected to run the test from a list of 15 countries and at that point Malawi was seen to be the worst affected of the countries in southern Africa (six countries had begun to set up big relief emergency and food security relief operations).

The concept is of an independent capacity, dedicated to supporting learning by and between organisations, teams and individuals in an ongoing relief operation, and having a positive impact on performance in that operation, not just subsequent operations.

What we took out of the knowledge management and learning literature – to simplify the rather off-putting jargon that we found in the literature – was three types or directions of learning: ‘lateral learning’ within an operation (which is pretty synonymous I think with action learning); ‘learning in’ from previous operations; and ‘learning out’, which was capturing lessons for use in subsequent operations elsewhere.

We rented an office which I think had been vacated by DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency) a few months before. The set-up team arrived at the end of August 2002 and we ran the project through until the end of March 2003. Originally we thought we were going to be hosted by one of the ALNAP member agencies, but the ALNAP member agencies with offices in the country were all so busy gearing up for the operation that they could not bear the thought of having to handle yet another project, even if we were not going to be placing many demands on them. So the first few weeks were spent identifying a host, because without one you do not have a legal cover to operate in a country, you do not have a business stamp even to contract mobile phones – all sorts of constraints. Fortunately the Malawi Red Cross saved us and there was a nice compatibility between the Malawi Red Cross’s agenda in the relief operation and our own.

In terms of team composition, there were a total of six internationally recruited personnel and five locally recruited personnel. The first two international staff left after about three months, so for most of the time there was a team of nine people. Running in parallel to the project was a real-time evaluation being carried out by a Swiss consultant, to draw out the lessons and to see how the operation looked at different stages and so on. Dealing with those three different types of learning, I will try to give you an idea of the activities.

Firstly learning in from previous operations. We had a very nice resource centre of some 900 documents which were flown out from London to Malawi, including guidelines, handbooks, evaluations from previous operations in southern Africa and so on – a generic humanitarian collection we called it – and then during the course of the operation, we built up the Malawi-specific collection. We used PonyExpress, run by Securicor, to take documents to field workers in various parts of the country. We also undertook literature reviews and analysis. One particular example was a paper on HIV/AIDS and food security which a Malawian colleague prepared and which was very well received locally.

Then we have this term ‘oiling’. This was not in the original terms of reference for the project but we found that it was what we were doing a lot. It involved participating in meetings, of which there were far too many. There was a sophisticated coordination structure but what it did was simply spawn more and more sub-committees and working groups, and none of the agencies had enough personnel to go to all of these meetings, so they had to choose which of the three meetings being held in one morning to attend. Often we would go to many more meetings than

the agencies, so we were actually playing a role of moving information around the operation and also of being present in meetings and inputting that knowledge from the resource centre – not that I have all 900 documents in my head, but at least I know that there is a big literature on that and can say, ‘if you give me until the end of the week, I can come back to you with a summary of the main points from that literature’. That role was very important and I will return to this later.

I went with a budget to bring in experts but we did not actually do this, partly because of the speed at which things were moving and the fluidity of the situation in which each week was different from the previous week. I think there was also a slight coolness towards ‘external fly-ins’ and a greater – perhaps too great – respect for home-grown knowledge and the idea that the people in the room must have the knowledge and be able to generate the answers. To set up a group and try to have the answer by the end of the week was a very common way of operating for the relief organisations. We did not really do briefings or orientations for new staff, because the numbers coming through were not great and it was quite hard to identify who was coming in before meeting them at the next coordination meeting.

In addition to the Resource Centre, another significant asset of the LSO was the meeting room, which was frequently used to host meetings for relief workers, visiting researchers and evaluators. In January, for example, it was used by the Field Emergency Monitors funded by the United Nations Development Programme and reporting to the Department of Poverty and Disaster Management Affairs, who based themselves in the meeting room for a week.

I think that the area of lateral learning activities was the area in which we really scored, which was interesting. We got involved early on in a process which, unexpectedly, formed a whole cycle. We started with ‘after-action-review’ workshops for field officers of the agencies involved in general food distributions, in which we asked them what was supposed to happen, what did happen and what they would do differently next time – very powerful questions. We used a ‘carousel’ approach, where the field officers rotated around three ‘stations’ (each with a facilitator and the recorder) to explore different issues. The stations were: community sensitisation and targeting; food distribution (the mechanics of trucking, storage and distribution; and monitoring and reporting. The workshops drew a lot of information out from the field officers who, by that stage, had three months’ experience of running the operation and knowledge which they had acquired in practice. That was a very rich source of information.

Then we formed a drafting team to convert all of that knowledge into a manual (which took far too long but that is another story). It was owned by the agencies and members of the agencies were

on that drafting team. The manual, which was very practical and very Malawi-specific, was then used to train up all the other field officers (245 in total) from all the agencies who had not been able to participate in the original workshops.

Again, ‘oiling’ comes up: transferring knowledge and information between groups. Perhaps you need to be a networker in that sort of situation – linking people who have one issue coming up with another group of people who are just starting work on that issue is a form of lateral networking, as is putting people in contact with each other. We ran seminars and meetings and hosted visiting researchers. We ran a workshop which brought together the relief community and the HIV/AIDS community that were not having much to do with each other throughout the relief operation – which was remarkable.

We also did some filming with a small digital video camera. The idea was to show film of agency distribution sites to other agencies to show how other people were doing it and to see the differences, but it was a task too far and although we started filming, we never really carried it through – another lesson.

Another activity was facilitating the strategic planning meeting for the agencies undertaking general food distributions. Out of interest, there was only one Malawian in the room for this particular meeting. The two other Africans in the room were from Zambia and South Sudan. That is one of the issues of knowledge in a relief operation, that the people who are managing and coordinating the agencies’ work are often expatriates who have just come in from other relief operations in places such as Kosovo or Afghanistan. They tend to be very operationally focused people.

Learning out activities included archiving and we donated the Malawi-specific collection to the United Nations resource centre when we left. It involved facilitation of evaluators and researchers, which for us was a bit of a problem. If you hosted someone’s meeting then you might be tainted by association with that particular evaluation, so we were a bit vulnerable I think to the conduct of individuals and teams that we had no control over. Finally, it involved the sharing of lessons. C-SAFE is the US NGO consortium undertaking recovery activities to follow-on from the emergency programme that was running in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. They were wanting to set up a learning centre so we shared the results and design of the LSO and our lessons from working with the agencies.

I think outsiders had a strong expectation that the LSO should be setting out the lessons from the Malawi emergency operations – not just from the LSO test but the lessons for Malawi itself. We wanted to facilitate a collective lesson learning process for the agencies, but that was very difficult to do for two reasons. One reason was

that the agencies were scaling up the operation right up until the last month, there was an increase in the number of general ration beneficiaries during January and February from 2.8 million to 3.5 million people. Consequently the agencies were simply too busy and did not have the mental space or the time to think about lessons, they were just too preoccupied with the present – getting the trucks out and getting the new village relief committees set up.

Then there was a very rapid shift over the space of about three weeks, when everyone became focused on the post-emergency programme. They were looking at their budgets, realising that they would have to lay off their staff in a few weeks time and thinking about how they could get enough funding to keep some of their staff on after the emergency programme finished. So the space was never really there while we were in the country to really engage with a collective learning process. The other reason why it was difficult to undertake any collective learning was that some agencies and relief workers found it difficult to handle comments that were at all critical of their performance. There was a surprising degree of defensive behaviour, particularly among some of the larger agencies that were projecting a positive corporate image of their achievements.

So provisionally there are two sorts of lessons. The first is for the LSO concept and model. A LSO can add value in an ongoing operation, I believe that very strongly. But we should have started earlier. It is important for an LSO to be present during the planning stage because that is where a lot of the knowledge from previous operations can be inputted fruitfully. By the time we arrived, a lot of the programme design was over, so whilst we might have problems with the programme design, our saying so was not welcome.

Of course another lesson is having hosting arrangements in place so that you do not have to scurry around looking for an agency willing to take on the hosting role. People said that you could buy anything in Malawi, but our experience was that although you can buy anything, it often takes two or three months to be delivered, so office-in-a-box solutions are important – even satellite phones because we had terrible trouble with communications (telephones, email, internet access), and similar problems were also experienced by large organisations such as the WFP and other UN agencies. Since January there have been power cuts every day in Lilongwe and Blantyre which has caused real problems for internet service providers. These kind of practical problems are really significant and do not seem to be fully appreciated back here.

Other lessons are that we should have taken more care in staff recruitment. We needed to have codes and procedures for how staff conduct themselves in relation to other agencies and also to go out with more explicit support from agency head offices.

Secondly, in terms of lessons for learning and knowledge management, there is an amazing lack of documented materials and what exists is very difficult to get hold of, with no central location. You could spend days searching for a particular document which had only been produced six months before – people would say that it was on their hard disc somewhere but they did not have time to find it for you. Our resource centre did provide a central place where the agencies could come and get the key documents, but I think we need to take it a step further and put it onto CD-ROM. We had a web-bibliography on the LSO website, but internet access was really poor in Malawi unless you invested (as we did subsequently) in a wireless broadband access.

You can put the information in front of your relief workers, but these are people working 12 or 14 hour days and unless they are really motivated they are not going to do their searches, so you need to complement making the knowledge resources available on a CD-ROM with a service that filters and condenses information so that you are providing busy people with what is immediately useful to them in addressing this week's task – especially in a relief situation where people are really pushed for time. That is where this oiling process comes in again, it is a human filtering of the knowledge on the CD-ROMs, not a mechanical process, but a human face or interpreter who is able to filter and translate in a way that is directly useful to relief workers.

One of the lessons was that lateral learning, or action learning, was the most productive and well-received, but this relates to the next point, which was that there was defensive behaviour and some quite strong reactions to anything that contained critical comment from some of the agencies. In my experience this was worse in some of the larger agencies who had corporate images to protect. That has big implications for knowledge management and learning. It is extremely difficult to undertake collective learning and learning out in that context. The conclusion I would draw is that we need to explore processes such as Appreciative Inquiry and encourage change in organisational cultures.

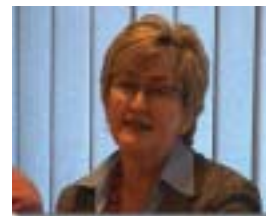
The overall conclusion is that there is a definite role for an independent, objective, respected, learning support capacity that participates in ongoing discussions and meetings. The point I want to relay to my former colleagues here at ODI is that this applies not only to relief, but to development as well. There were two donors who were very keen for us to extend the LSO even though the emergency programme was winding up, because they wanted an independent capacity that was objective, respected and could host and initiate meetings on Malawi's structural issues. They were conscious that if they were to initiate or propose a meeting on a structural issue they would be seen as 'having an agenda'. Our independence and neutrality was really important to supporting learning.

Meeting 7: Policy Entrepreneurship

Speakers: Simon Maxwell – Director, ODI

Ann Pettifor – Director, Jubilee Research

Chair: Baroness Margaret Jay – Chair, ODI



Meeting Summary

Baroness Jay introduced the questions to be addressed this meeting: How can one be an effective policy entrepreneur? Is policy entrepreneurship an art or a science?

Simon Maxwell spoke on the topic of how researchers can be successful policy entrepreneurs. He introduced the topic by referring to a quote that illustrates how inept researchers can sometimes be at engaging with policy processes: ‘... government ministers and civil servants were scathing about some of the [research] work they receive. This is claimed all too often to speak naively of policy issues, demonstrate little or no awareness of current policy, is over-technical and sometimes need drastic editing to make it readable to key players.’ (Commission on the Social Sciences (2003), *Great Expectations: the Social Sciences in Britain*, Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences, London.)

He emphasised that he was not addressing the problem of campaigning, even research-rich campaigning. Ann Pettifor is a role model in that respect, but campaigning is a different skill. Nor were his remarks addressed to pure researchers. Instead, he was dealing with researchers interested in policy. The task could best be summarised in the title of Diane Stone’s book on think tanks and policy processes) *Capturing the Political Imagination*. How can we do this?

We know already that policy is not formed in a linear fashion. There are many theoretical models to guide us (for overviews, see previous work by Sutton (1999) – *ODI Working Paper 118*; Crewe and Young (2002) – *ODI Working Paper 173*; and De Vibe et al (2002) – *ODI Working Paper 174*). The Research and Policy Programme (RAPID) at ODI has organised these theories into a three-dimensional framework, focusing on the three spheres of policy context, evidence and links.

Policy entrepreneurship by researchers is only one small part of the process. The options can be presented as four different approaches to policy entrepreneurship:

- A successful policy entrepreneur needs to be a good story-teller. This can be illustrated by Sheherazade, who told stories to stay alive. Stories may resemble development narratives (as examined by Roe). Powerful narratives include the desertification narrative and the narrative of structural adjustment.

- A successful policy entrepreneur needs to be a good networker. ODI networks and meetings offer good examples of epistemic communities in the international development field.
- A successful policy entrepreneur needs to be a good engineer, (as illustrated by Brunel). ‘Policy is what policy does’, and there is little point in having a policy on paper if it is not implemented by the ‘street level bureaucrats’. Researchers need to engage both with high-level policy makers and ground-level practitioners.
- A successful policy entrepreneur needs to be a good fixer (like Rasputin). It is important to understand the political game surrounding the policy process. If you want to change anything you need to identify the relevant sources of power (which according to Charles Handy can be divided into categories of physical, resource, position, expert, personal, or negative).

Final issues and questions:

- How do we make the right choices regarding sequencing and time prioritisation?
- Are there hidden trade-offs? For example, it is sometimes difficult to strike a balance between ODI’s public and private activities.
- Can we expect one individual to take on all these four styles of entrepreneurship, or do we need to construct teams that combine the four styles as a group?
- Can policy entrepreneurship be taught? Simon suggested that the answer to this final question is yes.

Simon also invited the audience to fill out a questionnaire on policy entrepreneurship.

Ann Pettifor began by stating that as far as she was concerned, evidence on its own really does not matter. For example, there is a mountain of evidence on the effects of the AIDS crisis in Africa, and yet this has not mobilised the global community to the extent necessary. So what really matters, is making the evidence matter.

In 1994, when Ann started working with the Debt Crisis Network, there was a lack of information and understanding of the individual debtors, how much debt they owed, and their relationship to the British government. Ann duly set out to unearth the details of the loans made by the government.

The prevailing attitude at the time was that debt relief might be seen as a charitable act to aid poor countries. The Debt Crisis Network uncovered a far more complete picture of what was going on, by assembling evidence about creditors and by showing through analysis of this evidence that debt relief was not just a matter of charity.

Analysing evidence in this way can be compared to cutting a diamond. The diamond cutter spends a long time examining the stone from all angles, before deciding just where and how to cut it in order to maximise the potential reflection of the diamond.

When the Debt Crisis Network found the right way to 'cut' the evidence – framing the problem of debt in terms of the oil crisis, export arrangement and lending policies – the issue of debt relief was seen in a different light. This empowered campaigners to mobilise.

The debt relief campaign paid much attention to ways of communicating the evidence they had. For example, they briefed the comedian Mark Thomas on the role of the Export Credit Guarantee Department, and he incorporated this into his show. An issue that would otherwise not have caught the interest of many people was thus communicated more widely. Another aspect of public communication was the need to explain economic theory in accessible formats – without being patronising towards the debt relief supporters. The mobilisation of the debt relief campaign empowered people both to understand the issue and to do something about it – witness the astounding number of letters sent to the Treasury on the matter.

Ann pointed out that there are still research and policy staff in development agencies who do not aim for communication with the public, but rather aim explicitly for exclusivity. University staff may also be withdrawn. The Jubilee campaign found it very hard to link up with academics willing to provide them with intellectual ballast.

In terms of mobilising people, it is also important to find the right angles. Ann suggested that poverty reduction is now a rather hackneyed phrase, and prefers the phrase economic justice. This was used to mobilise people for the Jubilee campaign.

The campaign made a couple of resolutions right from the start that helped them during their work: Firstly, they decided that they would not demand that a bureaucracy change its ways. Instead, they would go straight to the G7. Secondly, it would not be possible to have a democratically run global campaign. Therefore, they used the 'McDonald's' model where every country could set up its own Jubilee 'outlet' using the same materials and analyses.

Comments from the audience included the following points:

- It is important to keep messages to policy makers simple.
- Should we add another style of policy entrepreneur to Simon's four types, namely style of policy champion or policy advocate?
- New ministers are often looking for a cause to champion.
- If it is difficult to engage with academics, are there ways of bringing them on board right from the start?
- Perhaps places like ODI needs a policy and strategic wing on the one side and an active, militant wing on the other side.
- Ann's talk brought up new ways to use evidence. Firstly, she suggested that evidence can be used to refute and to challenge your opponents. Secondly, she suggested that evidence can be used to demystify; complex evidence can be used to back up a simple and understandable narrative.
- Successful policy change is often built on many 'dead bodies' or previous failed attempts. ('It takes many bricks to build a wall with a policy window...')
- Jubilee 2000 managed to capture the political imagination partly because it built on religious narratives that spoke to certain groups.
- Advertising is not the same as policy change. If advertising can be compared to slight shifts in a tributary flow, policy change, on the other hand is about reversing the flow of the entire river.

Simon Maxwell

Policy Entrepreneurship



This talk is about how researchers can be ‘policy entrepreneurs’. Firstly, why we must do better.

The Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences produced a report earlier this year called *Great Expectations: the Social Sciences in Britain*. They make a point which is a starting point for our discussion, that researchers are often very bad at communicating what they know, and what they think should happen, to the people who make the decisions. We speak naively of policy issues (says the report), demonstrate little or no awareness of current policy, are over-technical, and sometimes we need drastic editing to make ourselves readable and understandable to key players. Of course that critique does not apply to anyone in this room, but it may apply to some researchers some of us have met.

I want to exclude from the discussion those who are pure campaigners, even the research-rich, and those who are pure researchers, with little direct connection to poverty. Ann Pettifor provides a model of success at the campaigning end. Martin Luther King might be another example of the kind of person who takes ideas and translates them into practice, but would not normally be thought of as potential ODI Research Fellows. At the other extreme, we find the researcher who is not at all engaged in policy. There are perfectly legitimate reasons not to be engaged in policy, if one is concerned with pure research or if one is in an entirely academic world. I do not want to decry that.

ODI, however, is different. We exist between the campaign and the pure research. There is legitimate territory in the middle which we try to occupy. Our purpose is well-captured by the title of the book by Diane Stone (an ODI Council member) *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process*. That is the art form we need to master.

We have discussed a number of aspects of the policy process during the course of these meetings. We often start with a very simple linear model of the policy process in which the problem is identified, the alternatives are analysed and the best option is chosen, implemented and evaluated. We know policy making does not work in that way, policy making is not a linear process. As Clay and Schaffer remind us: ‘the whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents’. Our job, if we wish to be policy entrepreneurs, is to unpack that statement, to see whether we can impose some order on the chaos of purposes and accidents.

We know that there is a rich literature, in anthropology, political science, sociology, public administration, management and organisational theory. ODI reviewed this literature in a Working

Paper written by Rebecca Sutton in 1999, which provides an overview of the policy process. We tried to write it as the ‘bluffer’s guide’ to the policy process, simplifying the jargon in the field, and providing a glossary.

More recently, ODI has developed a large programme of work in this area, ‘Research and Policy in Development’ (RAPID), led by John Young. There is an annotated bibliography and a review paper, available on the website. There are many different models of policy change presented in the literature, for example ‘policy as social experiments’; ‘disjointed incrementalism’; ‘policy as argument’; and ‘mixed scanning’. John Young has organised these ideas around three sets of issues which provide a framework: understanding the political context; understanding the links between policy and research communities; and looking carefully at the quality of evidence that is provided in that process.

I will not be talking about the whole of that framework, but instead will take a very narrow and practical question, which is the question of what we as researchers can do if we want to engage in the policy process.

In seeking to break this question down, I have identified four styles of policy entrepreneurship. Each of these is informed by an image of how the researcher can best contribute to the policy process.

Firstly is the researcher as ‘story-teller’. This style is represented by the story of Scheherazade, who offered to marry a sultan who had been so aggrieved by his wife’s betrayal that he had taken to marrying a different woman every day and having her murdered the following morning. Scheherazade managed to survive by telling him the most wonderful stories, which she spun out for so long that she succeeded in bearing him several children and living to a happy old age.

There is a literature about the importance of telling stories in changing policy. Roe developed the idea of development narratives. For example, he argued that rural development is a genuinely uncertain activity, but that one of the principal ways that practitioners, bureaucrats and policy makers articulate and make sense of this uncertainty is to tell stories or describe scenarios that simplify the ambiguity.

Much of the literature on this topic demonstrates that narratives can be profoundly misleading and that ‘counter-narratives’ develop. Leach and Mearns assemble cases in their cleverly-titled book *The Lie of the Land*, which is about how environmental narratives tell lies. Desertification narratives are a good example of misleading over-simplification.

Narratives are, however, incredibly powerful. It is not difficult to think of powerful narratives which have informed policy: 'getting the prices right', structural adjustment, the Washington Consensus, the Post-Washington Consensus, debt-relief as the answer to poverty-reduction. These are powerful stories which help us to get over to policy makers what the problem is and what the solution might be. So, successful policy entrepreneurs need to be good story-tellers.

In model two, the researcher is a networker. There is a large literature which demonstrates that policy making usually takes place within communities (policy or epistemic communities) of people who know each other and interact. President Lyndon Johnson talked about being inside the tent or outside the tent. If you are inside the tent, your voice is heard and you will have an influence. If you are outside, you will not.

ODI is a power in the land and influential because, by virtue of the position we occupy in London, we are able to help create the epistemic community which informs policy. Clare Short first heard about the international development targets sitting in a meeting like this one at ODI. She was able to take the idea from within the epistemic community and turn it into a very powerful policy vehicle. At ODI, we invest a great deal in building networks. We have the Rural Development and Forestry Network (RDFN), the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), the Agricultural Research and Extension Network (AgREN) and many other formal and informal networks which enable us to be influential in policy.

The other example I often use is that of Zoltan Karpathy in *My Fair Lady*. When Henry Higgins had trained up Eliza Doolittle, he took her to the ball, where a Hungarian linguistics professor set out to trap her. He is described as having 'oiled his way around the floor, oozing charm from every pore'. That is what I want ODI Research Fellows to do, because that is the way that we stay within our network.

A final example comes from *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell, which we have referred to a number of times in this series. The example is of Paul Revere, riding out in 1775 to raise the militia against the British. Malcolm Gladwell describes the fact that on that night, two people set out. One was Paul Revere, and the other was William Dawes. In all the villages that Paul Revere went to, the militia turned out and defeated the British. In the villages that William Dawes went to, no-one turned out to fight. Why is that? The answer is that Paul Revere was networked and William Dawes was not. Paul Revere was a well-known pewtersmith and silversmith, who sat on all the committees, was well-connected, knew people and had their trust. William Dawes did not.

The third model of researcher as 'engineer' comes from the literature about 'street-level bureaucracy'

and is informed by this phrase: 'policy is what policy does'. There can be a significant implementation gap between what politicians and policy makers think that they are doing and what actually happens on the ground. Researchers need to work not just with the senior level policy makers, but also with the 'street-level bureaucrats'.

Who better to represent that way of working than Isambard Kingdom Brunel. Unfortunately, my favourite story about him is apocryphal, but it is worth telling nonetheless. Brunel was very much engaged in the debate about whether paddle wheels or screws were more efficient and powerful for moving boats. In order to test that theory, the (sadly apocryphal) story is that he built one of each, tied them together and put them in the Bristol Channel to see which would tug the hardest. The story captures the idea of being engaged on the ground and not just sitting in a laboratory. Needless to say, we at ODI spend a great deal of time engaged in that kind of activity.

The fourth and final model of the policy entrepreneur in our field is the 'fixer'. The examples could include Rasputin and Machiavelli. This model is about understanding the policy and political process, knowing when to make your pitch and to whom.

I come to this partly from the literature on organisation and management. Charles Handy, in *Understanding Organisations* (1976) said that if you want to change anything, you need first of all to think about your source of power. Handy identifies these sources of power as: physical power, resource power, position power, expert power, personal power and negative power. As researchers, our 'expert' power is often very powerful. If you are able to look a Minister in the eye and tell them that by applying the principles of game theory to a problem, the solution becomes obvious, they will normally crumble and do what you say. In theory.

So, we have four models of policy entrepreneurship that researchers can use. They are not entirely straightforward and I want to end with a few remarks about the issues involved – choices, sequences and trade-offs.

First, it is necessary to use the right styles at the right times. That is both a question of choosing between the styles and about getting the sequencing right. There is no point in rushing to present narratives in a very forceful way and claiming expert power if you have not done the research. There is no point in trying to play political games unless you are safely inside the network.

Much more seriously for people like us, there are issues about choices. You can either write a paper for *Development Policy Review*, or write an article for *The Guardian*, or take someone out for lunch,

but you probably cannot do all three. So the questions we need to ask ourselves every day are about what we are trying to achieve and what the best instruments are to do it. This means asking who is making what decision, when they are making it and what product is needed in order to influence the decision. These are not questions that we researchers ask ourselves very often, but they should be, because these questions help us to choose between the styles of policy entrepreneurship.

A second question is whether there are any trade-offs. Every week, we face rather practical questions about how to play this game at the interface of research and policy. The issue of the balance between the public and the private personality of ODI is a particularly difficult one to judge. For example, there have been a number of occasions when there has been an issue in the news and I have spoken to the person in ODI who knows about that issue to suggest that they ring up *The Guardian* or the Today Programme and make a point. The response has often been that that would not help because it is much more influential to make a private phone call to the Head of one of the bilateral aid agencies, for example, than to make a statement to the media.

The third question is whether we can expect one individual to deliver all of these different aspects of policy entrepreneurship or whether we should try to construct teams. That is another practical management issue for those of us involved in think tanks. My own prejudice is that most people could do most of these four styles if they wanted to, but it is also true that some people are very much predisposed to one rather than the other. If you are not someone who can turn a very detailed piece of research with lots of appendices, or 18 detailed studies, into a simple message which says 'yes, but not yet' (to take this week's example of the UK Treasury's review of the desirability of the UK adopting the euro), then you need someone who is, because no-one is going to read your 18 volumes unless they are paid to do so.

Finally there is the question of whether policy entrepreneurship can be taught. I start from the prejudice that it can, that simply by opening up these styles and roles, and by thinking about the choices and identifying the trade-offs, we could all do a great deal better at this core task of trying to change policy.

I want to leave you with two things. One is to remind you about our mission statement at ODI, which is to inspire and inform policy and practice. 'Inspire' and 'inform' are carefully chosen words, which imply that we are research-based, but also that we do not do research simply to put it into a journal or onto a shelf. We want to use our research proactively in order to change things.

Finally, it is an interesting question for each of us as to what kind of style we ourselves favour in

our policy work. I have prepared a questionnaire which you are each invited to complete. There are 15 questions to answer and if you send it back to us, we will tell you what kind of policy entrepreneur you are and whether or not we think you ought to develop one particular area or not. We are doing this partly because we are interested to see whether we can turn this kind of material into practical training of which a self-assessment questionnaire might form a part, but also because it might encourage you to sign up for the very important and interesting work which we are doing in the RAPID programme.

At ODI we do not think it is enough simply to do research. Policy entrepreneurship is exactly the territory in which an independent, London-based think tank like ours needs to be. It is a skill that needs to be thought about, taught and mastered if we are to be even more successful than we are now.



Ann Pettifor

Some Lessons from Jubilee 2000

I am just a campaigner, so I am a little nervous being here amongst all these policy people, but I welcome the opportunity to tell part of our story. I am busy writing a chapter for a book by Oxford University Press in which I will try to distil some of the lessons from Jubilee 2000, but I feel about Jubilee 2000 a little like Mao Tse Tung felt about the French Revolution: that it is really far too early to make any assessment about its impact. When we do assess what progress we made, we tend to feel that we could have done a great deal more than we did.

I wanted to begin by saying, somewhat provocatively, that evidence on its own does not matter at all. I would like to illustrate this by showing that the evidence of the holocaust of AIDS in Africa is widespread and well-known. UNAIDS have produced the most extraordinary tomes, data and information on the AIDS crisis and yet it does not matter. We do not have people making movies about that particular holocaust. We do not have a Picasso painting pictures to illuminate it for us. The AIDS crisis is not part of what is happening here and the evidence is not mobilising the global community to take action. I am exaggerating, I must give President Bush some credit for his US\$15 billion, and clearly there are people doing things and I do not want to understate that.

But what it shows me is that what is important is not the evidence, but making the evidence matter. I know that I have a quite tense relationship with some policy makers, particularly those who live in 19th Street in Washington, and that some of the numbers we used and the way that we used them in the campaign caused intense irritation in Washington.

Having said that, evidence was incredibly important to the Jubilee campaign and there simply was not enough of it. When I was taken on by the Debt Crisis Network in 1994 and began this work, we knew an awful lot about the state of debtors and about what was happening in developing countries. The World Bank's annual Debt Tables, which cost \$300 to purchase, was published every year, giving as much detail as it is possible to have on developing country debt. But there was no World Bank set of creditor tables. To be fair, at some point soon after we had started to make a fuss about the debt crisis, EURODAD did produce a set of creditor tables in one year.

In Britain we knew very well there were lots of debtors and that there was a very big debt problem. There had been campaigns in Britain since the Mexican debt crisis in 1982, but there was no knowledge or understanding of the individual debtor nations and what their relationship to the

British government had been, why they had been lent money and for what purpose.

So I began the really tedious but quite heroic task, in those days, of unearthing the details of the cumulative loans made by the British government to developing countries. I did that with the help of much lamented Joan Lester MP, who at that time was an opposition Labour MP. We tabled Parliamentary Question after Parliamentary Question to extract from the Export Credit Guarantee Department some detail of which country the British government had lent money to, and why. The World Development Movement (WDM) had produced a report at about that time on how much of Export Credit Guarantee funding subsidies were being used to promote military exports. We had some rough idea, but I think we had approximate numbers because no-one, at that time, really got that amount of detail and evidence out of either the government or the Export Credit Guarantee Department. The latter are far more transparent and accountable today than they were then, but we still lack full information on those issues which are regarded as commercially sensitive.

Back in 1994, no non-governmental organisation in this country knew who Britain's sovereign debtors were, and why and how much debt was owed by each of these countries. Finding that out was very revealing in terms of the analysis. So what is important about the evidence is the way that it is analysed. Evidence on its own matters not at all, but evidence analysed in certain ways produces results and actions.

The way in which the limited evidence available was used was then reflected in the debate conducted about the debt: that there were all these countries (and I am crudely summarising the debate here) in the deep south, most of them black, incompetent and corrupt, who had got themselves into a muddle, had very high levels of debt and needed to be bailed out. We knew all about them, but little about why our government had lent money to these countries in the first place, these supposedly corrupt governments. The approach instead was, despite all this, we ought to do something about resolving the crisis, in a charitable way. There was no approach of looking deeper, at how and why they had got into debt or at the role of the creditor in creating this debt; and that was reflected in the non-availability of much of the evidence.

No-one cared about the role of the creditor (which is generally held to be above reproach) or held the creditor responsible and that is why we did not have evidence about them. Once this evidence began to be dug up, we began to see that the British government made loans and provided tax-funded subsidies for certain exports which it did

not provide for domestic produce. If you grow armoured cars in Newcastle, you can be sure of taxpayer funds, but if you grow tomatoes in Lincolnshire you do not get taxpayer support for your work. That was for a good reason: to help boost employment; and to help with the balance of payments. Britain, like many other countries, has a trade deficit and needs to maintain some sort of balance in the balance of payments. Promoting exports is a big part of that.

In 1994, we had a Tory government which, surprisingly, wholeheartedly supported these forms of subsidy. So what we did initially was to unearth this evidence of the total relationship, not just the partial relationship. In doing so, we developed a very different picture, which then informed the way that we developed the campaign. I will be forever grateful to Ed Mayo who hired me in 1994. He said that he did not expect me to do anything except to go away and think, read, learn and understand and to come back in a year's time when we would think what to do about it. This was a great privilege. So we began to assemble the evidence, some of which was already in the public domain and some of which was not, and put it all together.

The second analogy or illustration which I want to give is that assembling the evidence and analysing it so that it can be recognised by a wide audience is a bit like looking at a diamond before you cut it. The diamond is a big lump dug out of the earth somewhere and it is probably ungainly when you are looking at it. But if you are a diamond cutter you may well spend two years looking at it before you decide to make the cut, and, when you do, you cut the stone in such a way as to maximise the reflection of every facet of the true stone. That is the genius of the diamond cutter. That is the only analogy I can make to explain how, having collected all the evidence, one analyses it in such a way as to invite recognition and understanding from those who are looking at it.

I am generalising and perhaps being unfair, but on the whole the campaign on the debt had been run as a campaign, which was a problem for countries in the south, to which we had the solution. As a result of the way in which we cut this total evidence – looking at debtors and creditors – we switched the campaign to say that actually the problem was here and not there. The problem was with lending policies and the desperate effort to promote military exports, with the petrodollar crisis of the 1970s where money had to be exported in order to stabilise inflation here, and so on.

When you looked at the problem in that way, you immediately empowered people here. The analysis said to Joe Bloggs who was an active member of their church, who supported the Jubilee principle and had a conscience about what was happening to people in Africa or Latin America, not that he must do something about a

starving child in Africa, but that he must do something about what is going on here, on our doorsteps; and that you can do it by going to your own Member of Parliament, and by addressing your own economy, your own lifestyle and your actions. That is empowering in a way that talking about victims in far away places is not. Feeling guilty only makes one feel paralysed and immobilised.

What I think Jubilee 2000 succeeded in doing was mobilising people by saying that this was something that they could do something about. They could go and do their homework about something called the Export Credit Guarantee Department and find out where this department was. So, for example, we briefed Mark Thomas, the comedian, on export credit guarantees and sent him out there to make people laugh about this. Sure enough, he did. He hired an old rusty tank and he drove it up to the front door of the Export Credit Guarantee Department and claimed to be Saddam Hussein, saying that they had sold him the tank some years ago and demanding his money back. Mark Thomas took this even further and wanted to find out who was on the Board of the Export Credit Guarantee Department. He discovered that there were a lot of people in corporations receiving the export subsidies who were also on the Board, making the decisions. He rang the Chair of the Board one morning, live on television, and said that he believed she was on the Board, to which she agreed. He said that he believed she was also on the Board of 12 companies that had benefited from export credit guarantee. She denied this, creating the biggest story we had had on export credit guarantees for some time, because her denial was an outright lie. She did not realise that she was live and it would be broadcast. (The lesson is clearly not to tell fibs, especially to comedians.) The whole thing exploded and she had to resign.

The point is that we got this fairly arcane piece of evidence about an obscure department (which tried hard to be very obscure), and we got ordinary people really excited about it. My proudest moment, I think, was when the man from the Treasury came up to me at the end of the campaign and said he had needed to hire people to deal with the correspondence from individuals following the postcard and letter campaigns. He told me stories of receiving letters on pink flowered paper with roses in one corner, detailing debt-export ratios in Uganda and arguing that he had made a misjudgement about setting those ratios when fixing the debt relief. He could not believe that these letters were coming from Mrs Bloggs in Sussex, etc. They received thousands of letters like that, which were not from your average activist but from people who wrote on pink paper with roses in the corner. That was telling them something.

We tried never to patronise our supporters. We told them that it was not complicated, it was not rocket-science, even if the Treasury would like

them to think it was. We told people that the elite club of policy people from aid agencies and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank who gather twice a year in Washington (as I did) were talking in arcane language, but that really you can understand that, you can be part of that too and you can also write. We explained about debt-export ratios. These middle-aged women who wrote their letters to the Treasury felt respected and empowered, and the Treasury had to write them careful and detailed letters back, which they would then forward to us so that we could point out what was being avoided in the way that it had been drafted so that they could send back a rebuttal. Eventually they just became really smart about all of this and felt as though they could (and were) doing something.

So the campaign was about assembling the evidence and analysing it properly. I think this is more of an art than a science, as the diamond cutter's skill is an art, but it is something which you can perfect if you know who you are talking to. If you are taking complex evidence and making it available to ordinary people and you know, hear and talk to those people and know what they can understand, then it is possible to know the language that they speak and to draft it for them. It is not complicated and we had clever people with us like Jo Hanlon who is a journalist (and also in the audience today), who went out and found people to help us to communicate.

It still annoys me that there are elites in both institutions and agencies who work on research and policy issues and do so almost with the intention of being exclusive. They like talking to their peer group about these issues because that is stimulating, but do not want to be forced to talk to someone who is not as knowledgeable about these issues as they are, because they might have to explain A, B and C before they could have a proper conversation about where to go from here. The Bank and the Fund are past masters at inventing language which is incomprehensible and which disguises what is really going on. It is a profoundly anti-democratic instinct. Even in universities, there are very few academics who work on the debt issue. We were perfectly aware that we were up against 3,000 men (they were mostly men), all of whom had one or two PhDs, and that we were just a group of activists trying to take them on and challenge their way of thinking. We would have loved intellectual ballast from people within the universities to help us in running our campaign, but we found that unless you could afford to hire an economist you could not have one.

Worse still, some of the people who worked for us would go to the London School of Economics (LSE) afterwards to do Masters' courses and be told that debt was not a problem and that it would not be covered there, since the LSE agreed with the position of the IMF and, at that time, the Department for International Development (DFID), that debt was not a problem.

The next part was communicating what we were trying to do. What we worked out was that just communicating to people that there was a big problem and making them feel bad about it would not empower them. Poverty reduction has become a hackneyed phrase and some people only get money because they work on poverty reduction. What happened with Jubilee 2000 was that we felt that it was far more an issue of economic justice. We also felt that economic justice was an issue which could fire people up and was the reason our campaigners got out of bed in the morning, because they felt the whole thing was so unfair. Quite a lot of our evidence was mobilised to explain that.

DFID attacked us vehemently throughout the campaign and Clare Short was never supportive, arguing that we had got it wrong. DFID may have had a point in arguing that aid flows had collapsed over the time that the Jubilee 2000 campaign was running, but for us the key issue was the injustice in the relationship between powerful creditors and vulnerable debtors, and the absence of any mechanism whereby that relationship could be resolved or negotiated out of crisis. Some people may not have thought it unfair to lend money and extract enormous amounts of money back in the form of debt repayments and compound interest, but we did find that there was a very imbalanced relationship which allowed the creditor to exploit the debtor and impose other policies on them. That was a vital point in the campaign.

I want to say a word about managing campaigns, general lessons and ensuring legitimacy. We made several key decisions right at the beginning. The first such decision was our resolve never to demand that a bureaucracy change its ways, because we do not believe that the IMF or World Bank are capable of being anything but a bureaucracy. We insisted instead that we would take a massive demonstration to the G7 summit in Birmingham, which we did long before they even thought about doing so in Seattle and it was a much bigger demonstration, even though it never got the same attention. Our target was the decision-makers. We did not particularly want to engage with the IMF (and they did not particularly want to engage with us), who are fundamentally civil servants doing what their shareholders tell them to do. The shareholders had spent the last 20 years hiding behind the cover of their civil servants, so the IMF was taking the brunt of all the attacks, whilst the decision-makers were sat behind their Treasuries and sheltered from blame for IMF policies.

The second thing we resolved was that it would not be possible to have a democratic international campaign and that because there were so many northern creditors, the campaign needed to be international. We aimed instead to develop the autonomy of local and national campaigns. Looking at Simon Maxwell's models of alliances: the Microsoft model, the McDonald's

model and the airline-alliance model, I think we were pretty much the McDonald's model. We had a brand, a style of organising on the basis of a coalition and we had a franchise which we offered to whoever wanted it. To our astonishment, people did like it and it did get picked up. The IMF travelled to over 160 countries around the world and kept coming up against Jubilee 2000 chains. It must have terrorised them and made them think that we were powerful and huge. We were not. We were a coalition of some very wobbly campaigns and some much more effective campaigns (largely because of the churches) in some 60 countries, who shared a single mission statement which was the petition that we wanted the debts cancelled by the year 2000 under a fair process, and who shared a logo, which had been something that honestly had been developed in the most primitive way. When I think about branding and how advertising agencies come up with logos and so on, ours was never so sophisticated. But I am very proud that in four years we turned this simple brand into a global brand and here at headquarters in the United Kingdom, we had spent only £3 million over a four year period.

How effective we were is another discussion. We have already had a discussion with the World Bank at this table about how effective we were, but I wanted to point to some of the methods we used to make the campaign a success.

Meeting 8: International Policies

Speakers: Alex Wilks – Coordinator, The Bretton Woods Project

Lord Desai – Director, Centre for the Study of Global Governance, LSE

Chair: John Young – Programme Manager, RAPID, and Research Fellow, ODI



Meeting Summary

John Young introduced the eighth and last meeting in the Does Evidence Matter? series. The topic of this meeting was the role of evidence in international and transnational development policy processes.

Alex Wilks presented himself as closer to the activist side than the analyst side of the research-policy spectrum. He went on to describe different types of international policy processes that he and other researchers/activists might engage with – including world and regional summits; agency strategies; research by academics and think tanks; and activist publications.

Activist engagement in policy processes can be seen through two different lenses: (i) as a matter of producing and presenting evidence in a ‘truth to power’ manner; or (ii) as a matter of improving the bargaining power of those whose voices are seldom heard.

It is frequently difficult for grassroots organisations to access and influence international high-level policy processes. Perhaps adding to the difficulty of lower-level actors is the fact that, in many respects, the World Bank has a position resembling a monopoly on certain aspects of international development policy. A very high number of development agency staff read and use Bank reports, especially the annual World Development Report (WDR).

What are WDRs? Are they global academic syntheses? Bank policy statements or think pieces? Or are they simply self-promotional exercises? Brendan Martin has commented that ‘[WDRs are] highly leveraged interventions in the policy markets’. Wolfensohn has emphasised that WDRs are not meant to be blueprints but rather documents contributing to international debate.

How was the Poverty WDR produced? There were a number of background studies (including ‘Voices of the Poor’), wide consultation in all regions, and an e-conference. In the final stages of preparing the Report, confrontations between the WDR team and the Bank, plus the Bank’s shareholder governments, led to the resignation of the lead-author, Kanbur.

Alex summed up some lessons from the experience:

- Power politics are hard to remove but easier to reveal when outside stakeholders have clear standing in the policy process;
- Final report insulated by controversy over resignation;

- Process improvements have not been maintained in subsequent years;
- WDR status still unclear: all things to all people?
- The ‘Voices of the Poor’ study consulted 60,000 people worldwide. Some of the researchers on the Voices project have published criticisms, pointing out that there were multiple filters before the supposedly ‘unmediated’ voices of these people appeared in the final publication.

Alex discussed the experience of the World Commission on Dams which the World Bank helped initiate following significant and well-organised external pressure. Initially, the Bank reacted to the criticism by producing a desk-based review of dams, which did not satisfy the critics. The Bank subsequently appointed 12 commissioners who represented a broad range of groups. The result was an independent and innovative process that provided an opportunity for dam-affected people to get their voices heard. It is important to note that the independent and innovative nature of the recommendations also meant that the recommendations met with some resistance in the Bank.

In conclusion, Alex showed an excerpt of the World Bank’s staff newsletter which challenged the internal ‘thought police’ in the institution, and cited researchers from the ‘Voices for the Poor’ exercise who called for ‘No generalisation without representation’. Future international policy processes should have purpose and process clarifications and guarantees, including stakeholder co decision-making, not just evidence extraction. This will help insulate the processes from problematic institutional incentives.

Lord Desai stated that in his view, evidence does not matter, but ideas do. To illustrate this he used the example of Keynes’ General Theory. Keynes’ idea was far ahead of the data-collection that was needed to back it up – yet in spite of this lack of ‘evidence’, his idea was hugely influential.

The problem now is that there is no single dominant paradigm, there are a myriad of ideas. We all seem to believe that answers can be found by huge and ongoing public meetings. But the wide participation in public debates has in some respects led to an overcrowded arena with a phantasmagoria of Platonic ideas about development. Moreover, it seems that the more inarticulate the proposition, the greater its authority.

In such an overcrowded and over-intrusive domain, it is difficult to see what function is served by organised policy making. He described himself as a cheerful pessimist – doubting that much of it will make any difference, but believing that development will happen despite our best efforts, rather than because of them. It would be far more effective simply to hand out money to every poor person, than spend billions on aid policies and aid machinery.

Lord Desai then recounted his experience of taking part in the development of the UN's Human Development Index. The need for a new indicator for development was driven by questions about the outcomes of structural adjustment, and whether it was possible to find a better measure for development than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The initial idea used a measure of remaining life-expectancy as a non-monetary indicator of welfare. This simple idea was then developed into the Human Development Index (HDI) which includes only three dimensions and four variables. The value of the index lies in its simplicity. This made it usable by anyone who wanted to use it.

In conclusion, Lord Desai pointed out that development indicators, such as the HDI, are measures and not causes. Moreover, they are not primarily based on evidence but on ideas.

Comments from the floor included the following:

- Even if you have clear and unambiguous evidence that is known by all actors involved in a policy process, this will not necessarily lead to an evidence-based policy. Firstly, political factors and resource prioritisation are more important factors in determining policy formulation and outcomes. Secondly, of course, the evidence is never clear and unambiguous.
- Evidence is never produced in a perfect state of neutrality; it is always interpreted by the different people who use it.
- The politics surrounding policy processes are very important. Even if there is evidence that a project has been successful (such as a couple of projects in Mozambique that aimed to simply hand out money to the poor), the evidence will not automatically be taken into account. If it conflicts with political interests it is more likely to be ignored.
- Policy processes are not necessarily improved through as wide a consultation as possible, because not everyone is competent to comment on everything. We need to be sceptical of the idea that the process matters. What really matters is the outcome.
- Let us try to apply the hypotheses of the speakers to a practical example. If you were Gordon Brown, what evidence, if any, would you need to garner political support for the International Financing Facility?

Alex Wilks



International Policy Processes: Experiences and Lessons

Thank you for inviting me, I am very pleased to be here. I think I am more at the activist than the analyst end of the spectrum. The talks here at ODI have been given by a range of different people and I think I am correct in saying that I have been invited because at the Bretton Woods Project we have been probing and challenging the World Bank's significant role in a number of international policy processes. I am going to run through some of our experiences with such processes; some of the problems that I see with them; some of the lessons; and some suggestions for future practice.

There are of course many types of international policy processes and I am by no means going to be able to discuss all of them. I will focus particularly on the role of the World Bank in these processes. In fact, I could find World Bank roles in many international policy processes, such as World Summits on Sustainable Development, or on Financing for Development, in which the World Bank does play a significant role, as do many others.

There are a large number of analysts of these processes in general and I will not be able to deal with all of those. There are all sorts of regional commissions and all sorts of strategies (new institutional strategies, target strategies and so on) developed by international development agencies, from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) to the World Bank.

Then there is research, which is not necessarily tightly linked to the strategies, policies and programmes of these development agencies, but again there are any number of these research reports being done by agencies, academics and think tanks. There are also many examples of activists' publishing, which is an overlapping category, but which in many ways remains distinct.

I wanted to start by saying that there are two main ways in which I hear people conceiving of the international process. Firstly, it may be viewed as an exercise in producing evidence and presenting it to powerful agencies in a 'truth-to-power' dynamic. In its most simplistic form, this is a case of assuming, hoping and expecting that if you assemble enough material, data and anecdotal evidence and hand it over in a thick report, people in positions of power will simply realise that this was the information they had been lacking and change everything they were doing.

Of course, most people do not see it that simplistically and many people view the international policy processes through the lens not of 'truth-to-power' but of bargaining power: to what extent do these processes in and of themselves, or their results, enhance the

bargaining power of people who generally cannot get their voices heard? These are two ends of the spectrum in conceiving of and understanding international policy processes.

I thought I would read a few comments from different participants in international policy processes which to me illuminate these different dimensions.

On the basis of attending a number of United Nations processes such as the UN Habitat and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, an organisation called Shack, Slum-Dwellers International said that, 'the content is alienating, the global discourse bears little relationship to problems on the ground, there is little to be gained immediately for individual participants or federations, and the costs of participation are high. For an organisation which believes that change has to be driven from the bottom up and that a critical factor in successful pro-poor transformation is the centrality of the poor themselves, engagement with the United Nations is fraught with difficulties'. So this is an example of a grass-roots network, based in mainly urban areas across the developing world, reflecting on some of these processes.

In self-reflective mode on another process, the 'Voices of the Poor' exercise (which I will return to again in a moment), Robert Chambers from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) said, 'it is flattering to be invited to Washington. It is great to be able to return to one's institution and write a trip report, as I did, saying that our workshop had been addressed by James Wolfensohn at a time when he was exceptionally busy, and glowing with pleasure that he had said that our work was immensely important to him and that he needed us to help him'. These are two very different responses to flying across the globe and participating in different ways in global policy processes.

Turning now to the World Bank, there is a lot of data if you wanted to chase it down. I am going to present a bit of it and I will argue that the World Bank is a very pre-eminent development knowledge actor. I will also describe how, under pressure, the World Bank has in some ways innovated in some of its approaches to policy processes, in particular around the poverty World Development Report (WDR 2000/2001 *Attacking Poverty*) and the World Commission on Dams.

There are number of ways in which the World Bank as a knowledge actor can be understood. I will give one snapshot example. Nancy Birdsall was a senior researcher who ran one of the research departments in the World Bank for some time and who is now at the Centre for Global Development in Washington DC. She has argued

in a paper about the World Bank that we need to end the analytic near-monopoly which the World Bank has on many details of country policy reform. There are many people who disagree with the way that the World Bank presents evidence, calculates it and forms global conclusions, often tending towards a 'one size fits all' approach with disclaimers that there really is no blueprint, but that this seems the best way forward.

The World Bank did a survey of what it called high-level policy makers. These were largely senior officials in ministries across the developing world plus some others, including people in think tanks etc. The survey asked people to rank different information sources, including sources of data, studies and analysis. The World Bank was rated the most important information source. 84% of the respondents, who were supposedly randomly chosen, said that they used World Bank analytical reports and that the World Bank's work was seen as technically sound, relevant and objective.

At this point I just thought that, although this is a very unscientific survey, it would be interesting to know from the people in this room whether you use World Bank analytical reports. If I ask for a show of hands as to how many people here use World Bank analytical reports, we get an impressive percentage – not dissimilar from 84%. A show of hands on how many people here use ODI analytical reports suggests that a reasonable number do, but not as many.

In terms of a specific product from the World Bank, I think that the pre-eminent one according to many people that I have spoken to and according to the way that the World Bank pitches it, is the World Development Report (WDR). The number of copies varies, but I believe it is normally over 100,000. Many of them are circulated for free and you find them all over the world on policy makers shelves and in research institutes, including those which do not have much of a budget to purchase such publications. The World Bank is obviously able to go beyond dissemination to promote and attract significant attention to these documents.

When the World Bank began to open up consultations on the World Development Report, it was in line with thinking across development that emphasised the need to engage poor people directly in development. This had led to pressure to have them engaged directly in forming these important research pieces which frame development thinking for many different actors. When the World Bank began to think of this there were various experiments which were quite unsatisfactory for all sides.

Alison Evans might want to contribute something here as we had an interesting confrontation when she was with the World Bank on the WDR teams and we were a number of civil society groups challenging aspects of the process.

In brief, the World Bank seemed to be trying to have it all ways. On the one hand, it seemed to be saying that this global policy process and the production of this global report was some sort of academic synthesis of knowledge on a topic and possibly in fact, a World Bank policy statement. Alternatively, it could be seen as an institutional think piece, published and commissioned by the World Bank, but not reflecting anything that the Bank thought, only the thinking of the individuals and the team writing the report. Or perhaps it was just a self-promotional exercise. The World Bank, like many non-governmental organisations and others, needs to have some flagship documents to wave around and draw attention to itself. I very much like Brendan Martin's pithy statement that WDRs are highly leveraged interventions in the policy market. He and others from the outside were saying that the World Development Reports were probably along the lines of the self-promotional exercise and were about buying profile for the World Bank.

Caroline Harper of Save the Children said that by not openly declaring its status, the WDR managed subversively to influence policy, by being taken as both independent and objective, yet also mainstream and accepted within the World Bank.

So my first point is that we need to be clear about what these global policy processes are, because muddled or false expectations can lead to a lot of problems. We sent a lot of sign-on letters (a classic NGO tactic which gets people to sign onto a letter and send it off) to the President of the World Bank and the Chief Economist (at that time, Joseph Stiglitz), asking for clarity about what this thing was all about. They said that the process was as important as the product and James Wolfensohn argued that the WDRs were instruments of dialogue, a two-way process, and were not simply about producing a document and spreading it around the world. He also said that the WDRs are not policy-statements, but are documents for raising the fundamental questions about poverty to which there are no easy answers.

I will not do another show of hands to see whether you think they are delivering on those objectives, but I think that they fall quite short and that there are mixed and muddled expectations. Ravi Kanbur, who was just then taking on the role of being lead author for the Poverty WDR 2000/2001, said that he wanted to stress before he started that he was taking personal responsibility as lead author and he had commitments from the World Bank confirming that that was to be the case (which of course was interesting later on).

I am sure that many people in this room were involved in the Poverty WDR in one way or another. There was a meeting here at ODI about it at one stage. There were some key stages in the process: there were all sorts of background studies commissioned, including the 'Voices of the Poor' exercise (a huge consultation and

qualitative exercise in many countries); there were many consultation meetings in all regions; and there was an electronic conference which, as a tiny NGO based in London, we were very surprised to be asked to run. It had a reasonable number of participants from different countries. In general, Ravi Kanbur and his team made significant efforts to break out from Washington and London, and from some of the small circles where previous consultations had been done on some of these reports, and to get out into the field to try to allow different people to set up meetings, independently moderate fora etc.

However, I think that the end-game of writing the report was extremely illustrative of some of the pitfalls and problems with global policy processes. Despite bringing in Ravi Kanbur, and despite all his efforts at building coalitions of interest, commitment and involvement with many outsiders, and bringing in other outsiders to his team, just a couple of months before it was to go to print, the final editing of the report became so messy and confrontational that he resigned as lead author, having put in over 18 months of effort and despite the fact that this had been a prestigious thing to be asked to do.

The reason why he resigned was that there were powerful elements within the World Bank and within World Bank shareholder governments who were worried that some of the language and emphasis in his report was too subversive. They either felt that some stuff should be struck out or that the balance should be changed significantly to favour growth over empowerment. That is a very basic snapshot analysis. After Seattle where the trade discussions were blocked and a lot of people had taken to the streets, there was a lot of sensitivity, particularly in the US Treasury, to the language and points presented in the international policy reports such as the World Development Report from the World Bank.

So for me the World Bank has still not found the right balance in terms of getting independent people to take the lead in running their own report and in getting in different stakeholder views. They are still too tightly controlling the exercise. However, the fact that we had questioned and challenged the Bank before, asking them to make explicit some of these process elements, meant that we could use that later to reveal where the real power dynamics lay. We broke the story internationally to the Financial Times as well as in a number of other places and it was a good moment to illustrate some of these tensions and complexities in global policy making processes.

I think also that the initial statement of process and the controversy over the resignation meant that the final report was not actually as bad as it might have been, because it was insulated and the World Bank was embarrassed to go as far in reworking and rewording it as they would have liked to. Still, I think that it tries to be all things to all people.

I want to move on now to the 'Voices of the Poor' study. This was an exercise which claims to have directly consulted 60,000 poorer people across developing countries, partly by dint of synthesising existing participatory poverty assessments (PPAs), but partly by new consultations in 23 countries. It was marketed as the unmediated voices of the poor at a global level. It was used in the Poverty WDR, by many people including researchers, politicians, etc.

However, in an excellent book *Knowing Poverty*, published by EarthScan, two of the researchers who worked on the synthesis of the PPAs have produced a critique of some of the ways in which the process worked. Like many of the people commenting on these global policies, they wonder whether the cart is sometimes driving the horse, whether the policy process has preconceived answers and then the evidence is mined to find it. In this case they point out that there are multiple filters between the voices of the poor and the production of the final report. I will not go through all of these, many of which may be familiar to you from policy processes which you were involved in, but the main point for me is that there is no such thing as unmediated individual poor people's voices at the global level. There are all sorts of process filters and process elements between them and the final report and dissemination.

I was asked to comment on some good practice or recommendations. I think that the World Commission on Dams is extremely interesting in that respect. The exercise was initiated in response to strong campaigning over many years by civil society which had formed well-organised networks. I need not go into all the different dams and networks which people know about, but there was a strong body of organisation there putting pressure on the World Bank. That strong body of negotiators was then able to remove World Bank control from the final process. It was able to go way beyond having a consultative status whereby groups might have been able to show up to one or two meetings, to actually co-decision-making about the running, execution and final report produced by that commission, so in that respect it is different from many other commissions and global policy processes.

As usual, the World Bank's initial response to all this outside pressure was to do an in-house desk-based number crunching review, where they ran some figures, threw in all sorts of counter-factuals and came up with a classification which said something like: half the dams were generally alright, another third would have been alright if X, and another third look pretty bad but could be fixed if Y. That sort of report did not at all satisfy the outside critics, either in terms of process or in terms of the analysis and the evidence presented, so negotiations were undertaken for a genuinely independent review and not an in-house. The World Bank brought in the World Conservation Union (IUCN) to help facilitate that.

To cut a long story short, after a lot of knife-edge negotiations, 12 commissioners were appointed. The difference between these commissioners and many previous commissioners was that, in the words of someone quoted in the independent evaluation, they were not broad middle-ground worthies, but were people active in networks and practitioners at different ends of the spectrum, for example the leader of a people's movement in India, the Narmada Bachao Andolan. The Chair of the commission was the serving South African Water Minister. So there was a range of different people. Another distinction was that civil society was not represented by NGOs close to the centres of power in Washington, London, etc., but was represented by this activist organisation representing affected peoples, by an indigenous person, himself active in many networks, as well as by an international NGO. Another aspect that gave this review proper independence was that it had multiple sources of finance. I think that there were something like 45 separate contributors, so no one funder could capture it in any way.

In terms of how research fitted in, as opposed to other aspects of the process, a brief schematic of the knowledge base which was built up during the course of the review includes a number of different case studies and a cross-check survey. Whereas the case study was obviously going into more depth, the cross-check survey was to see if there were any other trends missed by the case studies, or to see whether there were other things which could be matched up. The thematic reviews were on sectoral or issues slices and all of this was underpinned by submissions, consultations and field visits. There was some very interesting chemistry and relationships built up between the commissioners, one of whom was also the head of Asea Brown Boveri (a large multinational company active in dam-building), and the affected peoples. They went to field visits and saw that, in some cases, after 30 or 40 years no resettlement had taken place, so the review went way beyond what you can get from reading dry literature, statistics and chewing over data.

The key lesson from this is that it was an innovative process, providing genuine opportunities for those people who tend not to have their voices heard, to participate in running as well as feeding into a global process. However, the fact that it was so genuinely independent and came up with such far reaching conclusions meant that it has not been, by any means, instantly accepted by the World Bank and others. However, it is being used as a benchmark by many different groups in real world situations. It also is interesting that the World Bank, when starting subsequent reviews, has exerted much tighter control and reverted back to the eminent persons model, or if you like, the broad middle-ground worthies model, which the World Commission on Dams broke with.

So to conclude, there are many institutional incentives which the World Bank and probably many other global knowledge actors face. Individual researchers within these institutions face a difficulty in knowing how far to go or how far to be 'political' or 'radical' in what they are listening to and representing in their research findings. They often face a lot of problems in their contracts in terms of funders they negotiate with not giving them enough freedom. The World Bank's staff association newsletter had a special issue on the difficulties for World Bank researchers in being able to really put forward their point of view – and the idea that there is a thought police operating inside the World Bank to prevent them from doing certain things.

We should conceive of these global policy exercises not in terms of their product, the quality of their evidence etc, because quality can be seen and broken down in multiple ways, but we should see it in terms of process: who are these things empowering, who are they not empowering? Raj Patel and Anne Rademacher (the critical 'Voices of the Poor' researchers) have an interesting slogan: 'no generalisation without representation', which means that the processes of abstracting and synthesising all this global data should involve the stakeholders, not just be a process of sucking out and extracting the information on which other people then do the analytical work. I think I am just restating what I have said already, but we need to have clear statements of purpose and process and guarantees about this for these global policy exercises, to insulate from problematic institutional incentives and to ensure co decision-making, not just extracting.

Many civil society groups are concerned that in the absence of such process and purpose guarantees, they may be legitimating processes which place their knowledge and experience at a disadvantage.

Lord Desai

Ideas Matter More Than Evidence



The broad question, ‘Does evidence matter?’ reminds me of a question I used to have to teach about in the 1970s and 1980s, ‘Does money matter?’. It took not just me but a whole profession in economics about 20 years to reach an inconclusive answer, during which time, policy makers had gone off and done all sorts of things that they wanted to do, based on our partial answers. Even while we were still debating about econometric equations, they were going out doing something with the money supply.

So in a sense this is a very unanswerable question. In my view, evidence does not matter, ideas do. Evidence is secondary to generating ideas. My classic example is Keynes’ General Theory, which comes from no evidence whatsoever – there is some data but no evidence there. It is really a piece of cerebral argument in persuading people how the world works and that the world works differently from the way they had thought.

Keynes’ book actually starts by stating in the preface that it is a book addressed to his fellow economists. The process of generating knowledge and ideas is not a democratic one. It is a minority occupation. It then filters down and once you have an idea that spans different research programmes, people may then start gathering evidence. No-one was gathering evidence about consumption functions or investment expectations of businessmen and so on until Keynes said that was the way it worked. It was because of the way he formulated the problem. Of course, there were many lags between that idea and its implementation in detailed policy making. In the early 1950s, people did not have national income data. Those ideas were way ahead of the data. The idea was very important.

I have studied development since the 1950s, I have read it, and in the 1990s I have done some work in development, and changed my mind several times. The problem of development (and I should say it parenthetically) is that there is no viable distinct dominant idea. I do not know, for example, that I could give you a coherent answer in five minutes to the question of what causes poverty and what cures it. That is a central dilemma.

When I was studying development there were sharp paradigms. Actually, they were left-wing paradigms, from the idea that only socialism will help the poor and capitalism will never help the poor, to a kind of middle of the road Keynesian development paradigm. Now I think we have the problem that there is no sharp ideological divide admitted. The poverty theory has become a huge jungle in which a variety of people can grasp a little bit of it. None of it is untrue, that is the problem. But no-one knows whether the truth is a certain combination of perspectives or another combination.

There are three things that we have done. Partly because of this lack of sharp theoretical perspective and partly because of the growth of democracy in the world and so on, we all believe that the answer will be found by having a large public meeting. A huge ongoing meeting used to happen in Mao’s China, a perpetual meeting of different forces, which eventually would generate an answer. What we have done firstly then, is overloaded the agenda. In the old days development was a very simple arena, it would cover income growth or structure or socialism or something. Today we have sustainable development, gender awareness, popular participation, transparency, accountability, good governance and so on.

We had a discussion in the House of Lords recently about the number of questions that are asked of the recipient even for small amounts of money such as £1 million. I do not know of any project in any developed country that has satisfied those criteria. Why we have created this fantasmagoria of ideal development, this platonic model of development, is beyond me. It happened by accretion and, because everyone is powerful – some people are more powerful than others, but everyone is powerful – they can throw in their two-penny’s worth.

This leads to my next idea, which is that we have an overcrowded arena. There are no thresholds as to who can be in a development dialogue – anyone can take part in the dialogue, start a non-governmental organisation or be a policy-advisor. It is very all-inclusive and no matter how absurd an idea a person has, the World Bank says if you write us a paper we will give you some money. The World Bank does not say that the idea is rubbish because that is not the way that development takes place. In a sense (and this may be very unfair), the more inarticulate the proposition, the higher the attention it is given.

My own cynical pessimistic view (I call myself a cheerful pessimist) is that I do not think any improvement in the world is going to happen in my lifetime, but I am resigned to being very cheerful about it. Improvements will happen not because of anything we do, but despite us. It is quite remarkable that there has been reduction of poverty in the world in Asia. What happened in Asia in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, was completely against all the ideas of the 1950s and 1960s. In my view, and people will disagree, development in Asia led to poverty reduction when Asia got into an open economy and a capitalist process, and generated an amazing amount of growth to reduce poverty.

The official or organised way of development policy making is, I think, overcrowded, over-inclusive and overloaded, therefore I do not know

what it does. Lots of money is doled out and I hope some of it does some good, but yesterday in complete frustration I said publicly, 'Look, we are giving \$50 billion of overseas aid. There are a billion poor people in the world. Why don't we just find the poor and give them \$1 a week and do nothing else. No questions asked. What they do with the money is not our concern'. That would probably do more to relieve poverty than anything else. This will not happen so do not worry, we will all still be in business.

I have never actually been a policy advisor to any government, or written a single piece of policy advice. I was once a visiting fellow to the World Bank, but I told them that they should not worry about social capital, it is a disastrous concept and they should not waste any money over it. This was way back in 1996 and they completely ignored my advice. But I did take part in a Human Development Report (HDR), which I would like to describe.

In a sense the HDR is like the Mother Teresa of development, it is not like the World Development Report at all. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the poor body, it does not have any money, it is somewhat scrappy and they cannot get large conferences or give out free HDRs, and their budget is quite modest. But I think that the Human Development Index (HDI) worked in its initial phase. It was driven by a very powerful research entrepreneur, a policy entrepreneur Mahbub ul Haq who sadly died unrecognised. He did not get the alternative Nobel prize for which he was proposed. I think it was also driven by what was then a fairly precise question which arose out of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) following the debt-crisis of the early 1980s and when people saw what was happening in Latin America, especially regarding public expenditure, and the outcomes in macro-economic dimensions which were the International Monetary Fund's focus (balance of trade, inflation, etc.) and outcomes in development goals.

There was a contrast there, so quite a lot of people were saying that there must be a better measure of development than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Back in 1988 the Latin American branch of the UNDP went to Amartya Sen and asked for an alternative to the GDP. He was very busy at the time for various reasons and suggested that his friend Meghnad Desai might do it. I said I would not do it unless he acted as a consultant to the consultant. We met and we thought that we would be able to think about it and do it. When I got back it did not take me long to realise that we would find an answer.

I think it is important to explain why that was. It is important that the view that is put forward is both sharp and communicable, and also fairly robust to criticism, but also not so complex that it becomes diffuse. My measure was very simple. When a politician says that under his government

the growth rate is going to go up by 5%, everyone applauds thinking that their own income will go up by 5%. We all know that this is a fallacy. GDP is itself a very dubious notion, but it is a powerful signal and policy makers have not found a better signal to talk about well-being. What is it about GDP that is so powerful that people who do not know anything about economics know about GDP? You need a welfare measure which is relateable to individual experience, as well as being a systematic economic concept. Income is very powerful because of that, everyone thinks they know what income is and what an increase in it would mean.

So I proposed that the best non-monetary indicator of welfare was the number of years I had left to live. I called it 'potential lifetime'. That is an indicator of welfare because if I have time I can do a variety of things which may give me well-being. It is an individual measure, it is linear, and it can be added up, across people. It is very simple. Immediately that gives us a reason for why high infant mortality is a bad thing: because a lot of people will have very low potential lifetime. So you can immediately say that longevity is a good thing. I was very precise about not wanting to include resources or quality or anything else, just time. Time as an alternative to money as a measure of welfare. It turned out that some people were very unhappy with it nonetheless.

The power of HDI is that it is simple, it only has three dimensions and four variables. Secondly, it has been kept simple all these years. That is hard work. The most difficult thing in economics is to keep things simple, because it is not just education and health that matter but social deprivation and nutrition etc. In the first HDR, we had certain measures of over-development: when development becomes dysfunctional. But we kept HDI simple and the fact that it is a very simple measure makes it explainable to everyone and usable by them. It is not as simple as national income but it is simple enough to compute, at national level and at district level. You can have HDI for groups, so it is disaggregable, it is quantitative and it ranks, which is important because people like league tables. There were other ranks such as the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), which had a kind of ranking system, but everyone forgot about it, partly because it was not disseminated and partly because it was not computed again and again.

Two things had happened, firstly Mahbubul Haq was able to disseminate and act as an ambassador for the idea across the world, but before he did that he wanted to make sure that as far as the theoretical foundations were concerned, it was based on sound economics. He had good economists working with him and he told them to make it as theoretically complex as they liked, to make it theoretically rigorous, and he would explain it in a simple way.

Theoretical rigour is very important because it makes for conceptual simplicity and I think that the HDI does not actually say how high human development would be achieved. It is a measure not a causal story. The causal story of what enhances the HDI falls back into what Frances Stewart called the 'meta-production function of human development' which we have not found. Because it is only a measure and it is an indicator rather than policy advice, it performed this role by changing the way that people thought about development in the 1990s. It even influenced the World Bank. The World Bank fought against the HDI for a while but finally gave up because if you really want an indicator to measure development, there is not anything better.

The UNDP went on developing various poverty indices and so on, and there is a whole proliferation of indices now, but none of them have ever had the appeal of the HDI because none of them have been that simple. The fact that HDI was used as a measure is not due to evidence as such, but to a priori thinking, mainly by Amartya Sen, but also by people like Frances Stewart, Keith Griffin, Paul Streeten – they were all there at the one-day meeting in which HDI was formulated. We started at 11am and by 4.30pm we had done it, but that was because the people sitting there brought a lot of knowledge to it.

So I would say that the lessons of HDI are: simplify, simplify, simplify. Do not overload the agenda. HDI is not a perfect indicator, but do not spoil it by adding dimensions to it, which is what happened to UNRISD, which had a huge number of indices for development in the 1960s. Then you disseminate and you come back to it again and again and recalculate it, so that people can always use it and can repeat it themselves. What use they make of it then is not your concern.

Brief Biographies of Speakers and Chairs

John Borton recently completed an assignment as Director of the Learning Support Office in Malawi. The LSO is a new approach to improve the quality of emergency response in the field, through the promotion and facilitation of three-way learning activities: learning in, lateral learning, and learning out. He has 20 years experience in the emergency/humanitarian sector as a researcher/network manager/evaluator. He worked for the Government of Botswana in the early 1980s as Planning Officer for the National Drought Relief Programme, and was a Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute in London during the 1990s. During this time he founded and was the first Coordinator of the Humanitarian Practice Network; led the team conducting the humanitarian component of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda; and was one of ALNAP's founders and served as its Coordinator for its first five years. John spoke at the sixth meeting: Putting Knowledge into Practice.

Vincent Cable, MP for Twickenham, is the Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and he also speaks for his party on issues of Finance, European Economic and Monetary Union and the City. He has been an MP since 1997 and was a Labour Councillor in Glasgow between 1971 and 1974, focusing on transport and strategic planning for the city. In between he has been Chief Economist of Shell International; Head of Economics, Royal Institute of International Affairs; Special Adviser to the Commonwealth Secretary-General Sonny Ramphal; Deputy Director of the Overseas Development Institute; a Lecturer in Economics, University of Glasgow; and a Treasury Official, in the Government of Kenya. He has an MA (Natural Sciences) from Cambridge University and Ph.D. (Economics) from the University of Glasgow. He has written several books on Trade Policy and International Finance including an in depth study of international telecommunications: *Global Superhighways* and in 1999 a major book on *Globalisation and Global Governance* for Chatham House and Brookings. Vincent spoke at the second meeting: The Political Context.

Bonnie Cheuk joined the British Council early in 2003 as Chief Knowledge Officer. She has worked in knowledge management roles in the US, Singapore and Hong Kong and has a particular interest in workplace information literacy. She will shortly be presenting a paper on workplace information literacy at UNESCO's Information Literacy World Summit. Bonnie spoke at the sixth meeting: Putting Knowledge into Practice.

Julius Court is a Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute. He has experience as a researcher (with a range of publications on governance and development issues) and in

management (at the United Nations University). He specialises in bridging research and policy; governance and development; and surveys. He worked as an Executive Officer in the Office of the Rector at the United Nations University in Tokyo, Japan (1996-2002). Before joining UNU, he was a researcher at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. His main publications include *Making Sense of Governance: Empirical Evidence from Sixteen Transitional Societies* (with G. Hyden and K. Mease, 2004); and co-edited volumes on *Asia and Africa in the Global Economy* (2003) and *Human Development and the Environment: Challenges for the United Nations in the New Millennium* (2002). He was born and grew up in Kenya. Julius spoke at the second meeting: The Political Context.

Lord Desai has been a Professor of Economics at the LSE since 1983 and Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance since 1992. He received an MA from the University of Bombay and a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. His areas of expertise include applied macroeconometrics; inflation; unemployment; monetary theory; problems of political economy and Marxian economics; international economic development; economic history; and financial innovation. His publications include: *Marxian Economic Theory* (1974); *Applied Econometrics* (1976); *Marxian Economics* (1979); *Testing Monetarism* (1981); *The Cambridge Economic History of India 1757* (1970, 1983) (Assistant Editor to Professor Dharma Kumar); *Macroeconomics and Monetary Theory: Selected Essays, Vol. 1* (1995); *Globalization, Growth and Sustainability* (1997); *Measuring Political Freedom, LSE on Freedom* (1995). He has also contributed articles to *Econometrica*, *Economica* and the *Economic History Review*. Lord Desai spoke at the eighth meeting: International Policies.

Larry Elliott joined the Guardian as an industrial reporter from the Press Association in 1988. He became Economics Correspondent in 1989 and Economics Editor in 1995. Larry chaired the fifth meeting: Think Tanks.

Justin Forsyth is Policy Director of Oxfam GB. He has a BA (Hons) in History and Politics, Oxford Brookes University. He has worked for Oxfam for over 10 years. His main interests and responsibilities include international policy issues; lobbying and campaigning; managing global campaigns; and the media. Justin spoke at the fourth meeting: NGO Campaigns.

David Halpern is a Senior Policy Advisor in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (PMSU). He was seconded to the Unit immediately after the 2001 election from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Cambridge, and has previously held posts at Nuffield College, Oxford; the Centre for



John Borton



Vincent Cable



Bonnie Cheuk



Julius Court



Lord Desai



Justin Forsyth



David Halpern



Simon Maxwell



Erik Millstone



Ann Pettifor



Paul Spray



Alex Wilks



John Young

European Studies, Harvard; and the Policy Studies Institute, London. He is a teamleader within the PMSU and has worked on several major strategic policy reviews for the Prime Minister; has authored SU think-pieces on social capital (2002) and life satisfaction (2003); and is currently lead advisor to the Strategic Audit. David has published extensively including on cross-national differences and trends in values; citizenship; mental health and the built environment; crime; social capital; and strategic policy, notably the influential *Options for Britain: a strategic policy review* (Dartmouth, 1996). Outside of his work for the PMSU, he has completed a book on *Social Capital* (Polity Press, 2003) and has a growing interest in research on happiness and the policy implications. David spoke at the first meeting: Does Evidence Matter?

Margaret Jay is a former Leader of the House of Lords and Minister for Women, with a previous career in television journalism. She has a strong interest in development issues, particularly in the area of health, and served previously on the Overseas Development Institute Council between 1993 and 1997. Margaret chaired the seventh meeting: Policy Entrepreneurship.

Simon Maxwell became Director of the Overseas Development Institute in 1997. He is an economist who worked overseas for 10 years, in Kenya and India for UNDP, and in Bolivia for UKODA; and then for 16 years at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, latterly as Programme Manager for Poverty, Food Security and the Environment. He has written widely on poverty; food security; agricultural development; and aid. His current research interests include: global governance; economic and social rights; social exclusion; and the dissolving boundary between North and South. Simon chaired the fourth meeting: NGO Campaigns and spoke at the fifth meeting: Think Tanks; and at the seventh meeting: Policy Entrepreneurship.

Erik Millstone is the Director of Studies for the MSc in Science and Technology Policy at the Science Policy Research Unit, University of Brighton. He teaches on the Social Institution of Science and on Environmental Policy. He has a first degree in Physics, and three postgraduate degrees in Philosophy, culminating in a doctorate on epistemological scepticism. He taught philosophy and the history and social impact of studies of science before joining SPRU in 1987. His main research interest is on how policy makers balance the complex mixture of scientific and technical considerations on the one hand, and economic, political and social considerations on the other. The methodology he adopts involves deconstructing policy decisions by identifying the contributions made by each of these considerations. Recent publications include *The Painful Lessons of BSE*, on the *Financial Times* website. Erik spoke at the first meeting: Does Evidence Matter?

Ann Pettifor is Director of Jubilee Research at NEF. She gained a degree in Politics and Economics from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, then worked in Tanzania before coming to Britain in the mid 1970s. She first worked at the Headquarters of the British Labour Party, then moved into the private sector and worked as an adviser to chief executives in the energy, retail and property sectors. Since 1994, first as director of the Debt Crisis Network, then with the Jubilee 2000 movement, she has campaigned for the cancellation of the debts of the poorest countries. As well as her work with Jubilee Research she is an advisor for the United Nation's *Human Development Report* (2003) on the Millennium Development Goals. Ann spoke at the seventh meeting: Policy Entrepreneurship.

Paul Spray is the recently-appointed Head of Research in the Policy Division at the UK Department for International Development (DFID). His team has been established to pull together all the research centrally commissioned by DFID, moving from its previous separate sectoral programmes. He will be producing a new research strategy for DFID. He was previously head of DFID's Nigeria office, and before that worked as an Economic Adviser on DFID's relations with the IMF and the World Bank focussing on debt and the (then new) PRSPs. Before joining DFID in 1997, he was Policy and Campaigns Director of Christian Aid. Paul spoke at the third meeting: The Role of Research.

Diane Stone is Reader in Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick. She has also taught at the Australian National University where she gained her Masters (1989) and PhD (1993) degrees in Political Science and International Relations, Murdoch University in Western Australia (BA, 1987) and Manchester Metropolitan University. For the past decade, Diane Stone has researched the role of think tanks and research institutes in public policy making. A recent research interest concerns the World Bank, especially in its guise as the 'knowledge bank'. She is working on a book which addresses the transnationalisation of knowledge elites – think tanks, consultants, foundations, academics – especially their interactions with international organisations. Other research interests include the influence of ideas and expertise on policy; the political economy of higher education; the role of non-state actors in domestic, regional and global affairs; conceptual developments in the study of policy networks; and the political process of lesson-drawing and policy transfer. Diane chaired the third meeting: The Role of Research.

Alex Wilks is an activist and analyst on development issues. He studied at Oxford University and has been involved with diverse campaigns and movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan in India. Since 1995 he has been Coordinator of the Bretton Woods Project,

working with non-governmental organisations to monitor and advocate on the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. In his previous work as Campaigns Editor for The Ecologist magazine he also wrote about and campaigned on World Bank issues, helping organise some of the alternative events around the Bank/Fund 50th anniversary. As part of this he carried out extensive work to challenge the roles of the World Bank as the predominant development 'knowledge bank'. Alex spoke at the eighth meeting: International Policies.

John Young is a Research Fellow at the Overseas Development Institute and Head of the RAPID programme, focusing on research-policy linkages and communications. He has been involved in action-research, policy development and government service reform projects in Africa and Asia for the last 15 years. He joined ODI after five years in Indonesia managing the DFID Decentralised Livestock Services in the Eastern Regions of Indonesia (DELIVERI) Project – an action-research project to promote more decentralised and client-oriented livestock services. Prior to that he was ITDG's Country Director in Kenya, responsible for managing the group's practical project and research work on a wide range of technologies, to ensure that lessons were effectively communicated to government and non-government policy makers. Since joining ODI he has been involved in projects on decentralisation and rural services; information and information systems; and strengthening southern research capacity. John chaired the first meeting: Does Evidence Matter?; the second meeting: The Political Context; the sixth meeting: Putting Knowledge into Practice; the eighth meeting: International Policies; and spoke at the third meeting: The Role of Research.

RAPID Publications

How Civil Society Organisations use Evidence to Influence Policy Processes: A Literature Review

Amy Pollard and Julius Court (ODI), ODI Working Paper, forthcoming 2004

Networks and Policy Processes in International Development: An Annotated Bibliography

Emily Perkin and Julius Court (ODI), ODI Working Paper, forthcoming 2004

Bridging Research and Policy in International Development

Julius Court, Ingie Hovland and John Young, ITDG Publishing, 2004

'Bridging Research and Policy in International Development: Context, Evidence and Links' *Julius Court and John Young*, in **The Challenge of Transnational Knowledge Networks: Bridging Research and Policy in a Globalising World**, edited by *Diane Stone and Simon Maxwell*, Routledge, 2004

Livelihoods Approaches to Information and Communication in Support of Rural Poverty Elimination and Food Security

Robert Chapman, Tom Slaymaker and John Young (ODI), November 2003

Communication of Research for Poverty Reduction: A Literature Review

Ingie Hovland (ODI), ODI Working Paper 227, October 2003

Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning, An International Development Perspective: An Annotated Bibliography

Ingie Hovland (ODI), ODI Working Paper 224, August 2003

Good News when Researchers and Politicians Work Together

John Young and Julius Court (ODI), Panos Features, July 2003

Sustainable Livelihoods: A Case Study of the Evolution of DFID Policy

William Solesbury (ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice), ODI Working Paper 217, June 2003

The PRSP Initiative: Multilateral Policy Change and the Relative Role of Research

Karin Christiansen with Ingie Hovland (ODI), ODI Working Paper 216, August 2003

How the Sphere Project Came into Being: A Case Study of Policy-making in the Humanitarian Aid Sector, and the Relative Influence of Research

Margie Buchanan-Smith (Independent consultant), ODI Working Paper 215, July 2003

Animal Health Care in Kenya: The Road to Community-Based Animal Health Service Delivery

John Young (ODI), *Julius Kajume* (DVS Kenya) and *Jacob Wanyama* (ITDG Kenya), ODI Working Paper 214, May 2003

Bridging Research and Policy: Insights from 50 Case Studies

Julius Court and John Young (ODI), ODI Working Paper 213, August 2003

Bridging Research and Policy: An Annotated Bibliography

Maja de Vibe, Ingie Hovland and John Young (ODI), ODI Working Paper 174, September 2002

Bridging Research and Policy: Context, Evidence and Links

Emma Crewe (UCL) and *John Young* (ODI), ODI Working Paper 173, June 2002

For more information contact:

John Young (j.young@odi.org.uk) or Julius Court (j.court@odi.org.uk)
at the Overseas Development Institute, 111 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JD, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7922 0300 or visit www.odi.org.uk/rapid/publications