



Drivers of chronic poverty policy process

Guidance sheet 2: Actors and Linkages

Purpose

This is the second of three guidance sheets – all underpinned by a summary and implications sheet – that examines the ‘drivers of change’ in the chronic poverty policy process¹. It aims to support researchers, agencies, governments, NGOs and civil society actors to interpret the relevant processes that influence whether or not chronic poverty orientated policies are formally adopted or implemented, with the eventual aim of informing campaign or advocacy strategies.

The drivers presented are drawn from current chronic poverty literature and hypotheses, and as such offer a generic introduction to the range of currents at work in the chronic poverty policy arena. They therefore do not offer a blueprint to ‘what works’, but rather to ‘what works – and what may work - given certain criteria’.

Drawing from Court *et al.* (2005), the links between researchers, policy makers and knowledge intermediaries, as well as the type of relationship, play an important role in determining the degree and nature in which they influence and legitimise each other. Breaking this down further, Box 1 highlights the sub-components that determine the nature of linkages and the way they have been conceived for the purposes of the guidance sheet.

These sub-components can be considered ‘drivers’: factors or processes that can be isolated and determined to significantly prevent or promote change (see overview sheet). However, while the role of some of the drivers

presented remain unknown or uncertain due to evidence-based issues, they also offer an opportunity to think in more complex and pragmatic ways about policy change.

Drivers of change – Strong

Donor and international actors

This variable receives significant attention throughout the literature, although mostly in anecdotal form. Donors are largely represented as actors that influence the policy context due to their institutional agenda and ability to delimit possible alternatives, while NGOs are subject to being upwardly accountable to this (Edwards and Hulme, 1995). For Bebbington (2005), this close relationship has led to an economic and individualistic approach to chronic poverty which leaves the poorest with protective measures that garner little financial and political support. The ranked priorities of donors demonstrates that, despite what was alluded to, social protection approaches have often been considered the ‘last among equals’ to receive attention (Craig and Porter, 2003). Over lengthy exposure to argument and the proliferation of best practice examples (often from NGOs), however, social protection and especially cash transfers have steadily become a ‘hot topic’ in development circles (Farrington and Slater, 2006).

More troubling, however, there is a concern that IFI’s (for instance as evidenced through the World Bank’s



Box 1: Drivers of change

Donor and international actors - Financial institutions may be able to adjust agendas in their favour through the supply or withdrawal of resources, as well as configure discourses using their significant resources. Furthermore, common or globally relevant problems may generate a variety of broad international commitments that can be used to promote agendas.

State and civil society relations - This is linked to the driver of the same name in guidance sheet 1, but here it does not focus on the context creating the balance of power between state and civil society actors, but rather the quality of the relations themselves.

Private sector - Naturally, actors in this sector can support or hamper change depending on the degree to which policy is in alignment or confrontation with their incentives.

Networks - Policy coalitions or epistemic communities have privileged access to information and can use it to influence others or legitimise their activities.

Media - The media provides an interface in which public interests can be discussed and in so doing can provide a method for enabling transparency and accountability.

Technical topics - Complex issues demand greater expertise and collaborative behaviour to be adequately responsive. This may adjust power balances in favour of those that have the capacities to work in such ways, especially technocrats.

World Development Reports) are compartmentalising debates and diverting attention from the critical global structural issues contributing to chronic poverty and transferring focus to regional, national and local scales (Mawdsley and Rigg, 2002, 2003).

To promote appropriate ownership and confront these barriers to alternative thinking and practice, Lockhart and Ghani (2008) propose the building of *international* compacts between states and donors, in the same way that *national* citizen-state compacts are proposed (CPRC, 2008), that recognise and adhere to 'sovereignty strategies' (Green, 2009). There is also a need for studies based on sociological and political economy disciplines to address how donor institutions are able to influence and maintain dominant discourses (Mawdsley and Rigg, 2002,

Box 2: Technical expertise in revising Uganda's Poverty Eradication Plan

The recent activity of revising the priorities of Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (2004-2007) became focused on the issue of health (a critical area for the chronically poor) and divided the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health on the topic of macro-economic stability versus social spending. However, the greater capacity of the MoF to articulate their position (due to greater technical capacities) became clear in meetings, supported by the tendency for the opposition to revert to local issues concerning poverty. This issue constrained policy movement despite the MoH having developed successive and specific policy papers with partners that directly targeted the entrenched dominance of the views of the MoF (Hickey, 2005).

2003).

The global relevance of chronic poverty policy processes, although not discussed in any significant depth in the literature, is not indicated to be a central component of this driver of change due to the high demands on capacity in maintaining networks at this level. While issues such as climate change can achieve global awareness relatively quickly, and while the politics of reaching the poorest is being increasingly influenced by global actors and thinking, the current focus on poverty reduction does not pay significant attention to the chronic poor (Hickey, 2006). In the case of the CPRC, engagement experience at international level was easy to initiate, but highly labour intensive in terms of maintenance and exponentially increasing informational demands. This led in turn to the limiting of this approach and an increased focus on more strategic collaborations (Bird and Grant, 2005).

Technical issues

There are a number of threads discussed in the chronic poverty literature that highlight this driver as significant strong. Bird and Pratt (2004) note that the personal incentives and risks in dealing with technically complex and administratively time-demanding policy issues can drive individuals to pursue closer and easier career rewards elsewhere. This is closely related to the issue of capacity, which can seriously affect advocacy strategies. NGOs working on trade policy for instance, have lacked the ability to adapt from traditional campaigning tools and successfully 'demystify' and communicate highly technical issues through media and in negotiations (Tussie and Newell, 2006). This capacity issue



is relevant for dominant parties as well; despite the protection policy process being largely owned and driven by government officials in Malawi, they themselves also lack a nuanced understanding of social protection approaches (Chisinga, 2007). Finally, such capacity issues may entrench the polarisation of parties and hence slow down the policy process, as seen in Uganda's PEAP process (see Box 1).

The presence of technical issues can also be used instrumentally to insulate and isolate participatory activities in order to delimit potential policy requests. During a reform process in Andhra Pradesh, ministers succeeded in depoliticising grassroots consultations through localisation, simplification, and reduction of the agenda to non-economic issues (Mooij, 2003).

Drivers of change – Weak

State and civil society relations

The central point of this driver is that it is important not to confuse civil society vibrancy with the degree to which it has a coupled relationship, or accountability, with state institutions. Altogether, there is sufficient discussion in the chronic poverty literature to intimate that the role civil society has in driving the initial process of policy change, has been overstressed.

The chronic poor rarely have the resources to fulfil a patron-client relationship, participate in fora (Johnson and Start, 2001), or are actively excluded from them through a process of criminalisation (Harris-White, 2005). Although this constituency can be argued to have a 'symbolic power' (Hossain, 2005), they are still politically weak and may even self-exclude from participation in right-based issues due to their confrontational nature. These representational factors are considered to have largely silenced the pro-poor agenda in Zambia in the early 1990s (Burnell, 1995 in Hickey and Bracking, 2005). Even the process of participatory-budgeting, despite its strong auditing frameworks, often overlooks the chronically poor (Brautigam, 2004). Moreover, it can be considered extra-constitutional by sidelining established local political bodies and reducing cross-party collaborative efforts (ibid).

On these premises, Hickey (2006) suggests that emphasis should shift away from civil society as a functional component in policy formation towards an examination of political actors and representative democratic structures. This is not to say the civil society may be weak at this function in all contexts, or that it has no role in policy construction. There are situations, such as in Bangalore for instance, where slum dwellers have been able to form complex alliances to affect a localised 'direct democracy' patronage

process (Benjamin, 2000) or where civil society is able to maintain policy at the implementation stage through established connections with policy actors (Hossain, 2007)².

Unknown/uncertain drivers of change

Private sector interests

The presence and degree of influence that business interests have in the chronic poverty policy processes is difficult to discern due to the remarkable lack of discussion on the topic. This is apparent in contrast to the unsurprising reality that the most influential lobbying bodies are businesses and umbrella groups rather than researchers or civil society (Bird and Grant, 2005).

There are examples where policy frameworks have been undermined through the lack of participation of the private sector, but they do not offer advice on how such actors can be internalised through incentives or become otherwise committed. For example, it is notable that Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) have often failed to clearly define, and thus respond to, the links between commercial agricultural policy, labour markets and the poorest producers, such as in Ethiopia and Rwanda, where the poorest are either geographically isolated or have withdrawn from the agricultural market altogether (CPRC, 2008). Similarly, a review of the involvement of the private sector in the World Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework process, provides evidence that by 2001, two-thirds of countries failed to include the private sector in discussions at all (Brautigam, 2004). Further specific information on the pragmatic implications of private sector linkages for chronic poverty, however, is lacking in the literature.

Role of the media

Systematic evaluations of the impact on policy processes from media coverage are limited (Panos, 2005) and this is indeed reflected in the chronic poverty literature. However, there are fragments of evidence and discussions that indicate the media has a significant role to play.

State governments, for instance, have been reliably shown to be more responsive to food security shortfalls and flood damage where newspaper circulation is higher and electoral accountability greater (Besley and Burgess, 2002). The Panos Institute (2005) also discusses how policies concerning social expenditure and the issue of pavement dwellers in India were publicised, enabling increased citizen awareness and accountability demands (Jenkins and Goetz, 1999,

Patel 2001).

In general, the media has opened up over the last few decades and become more crowded, complex, liberal and commercial, thereby allowing increased space for civil engagement in the public sphere, particularly through radio (Panos, 2005). On the other hand, the commercialisation of interests has led to an increased focus on entertainment and superficial issues while poor capacities have forced a reliance on external input (often international) thereby limiting contact with national and local issues (ibid).

Ultimately, the role of the media is strongly dependent on a number of country-specific factors such as freedom of expression, media capacity, local relevance and the framing of the debate – a strong reason why media strategies need critical planning in order to fulfil their potential to be a strong driver of change. Chronic poverty in particular, is complex and faces challenges in confronting established messages on PRSPs and MDGs. One suggestion (Panos, 2005) is to find alternative entry-points, such as working on widely-held attitudes of the non-deserving poor amongst middle-classes (see guidance sheet 1).

Networks

It makes sense that policy change, agenda setting and improvements in implementation performance can be driven through a united front of 'actor-networks' and 'epistemic communities'. However, within the literature examining chronic poverty policy processes there are only fleeting accounts of deep and rigorous analysis of how this can be accomplished.

Nevertheless, one important aspect that can be gathered is the need to identify and maintain the particular roles of parties in networks in order for goals to be achieved. Harriss-White (2005) emphasises, for instance, that it is only the more politicised social movements in India (e.g. those working on rights-based issues) that have been able to represent the destitute.

On the other hand, Hickey and Braunholtz-Speight (2007) note that while social movements may be able to legitimise networks, they do not necessarily add power-value in policy formation – a stage dependent more on 'political society' inputs rather than 'civil society' inputs – but rather add-value at the implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages. In other words, the parties involved in a policy coalition (NGOs, social movements, research institutions, think-tanks) must recognise the roles of each party in order to develop as an effective driver of change.

Another significant factor in determining the driving potential of a network is its strategy. For instance, efforts to mainstream pro-poor policy agendas in the national development plans in Uganda and Zambia revealed both strengths and weaknesses of employing 'cross-cutting' and 'standalone' approaches (Hickey, 2006). The former approach requires that multiple high-level champions in ministries be convinced of a need to change, while the latter can target a single ministry, with the goal of developing technical competence and disseminating good practice. The benefits of each approach depend on the compilation of the actors in the network, thus determining strategy. Unfortunately, 'what works' in terms of network approaches for the chronic poverty policy agenda has not been actively investigated. Some illustrative examples have been presented by Bird and Grant (2005) regarding the capacity challenges of broader global engagements, but these cannot be considered conclusive.

What comes next?

The Summary and Implications Sheet of this package provides an overview of the drivers addressed here, as well as their relationship with the drivers situated in the other categories (context and evidence) and the implications for generating influencing strategies that capitalise on available drivers.

Endnotes

- 1 The term 'Drivers of Change' emerged from the UK's Department for International Development in 2001 as a new method for conducting political economy analysis.
- 2 See Guidance Sheet 1, Box 1, for a case study of the Bangladesh Vulnerable Group Development Programme.



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The **Chronic Poverty Research Centre** (CPRC) is an international partnership of universities, research institutes and NGOs, with the central aim of creating knowledge that contributes to both the speed and quality of poverty reduction, and a focus on assisting those who are trapped in poverty, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.