Knowledge, policy and power in international development: a practical framework for improving policy

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'Information does not belong to one ideology or another, knowledge is not the privilege of one creed or conviction. If information and knowledge are central to democracy, they are the conditions for development. It is that simple... It is our duty and our responsibility to see that gift bestowed on all the world's people, so that all may live lives of knowledge and understanding.'

KOFI ANNAN, UN SECRETARY GENERAL (UNITED NATIONS, 1997)

Kofi Annan's words in 1997 remain as true today as when they were spoken. Indeed many donors are now working on specific programmes to improve the flow of knowledge in international development. The recent launch of a new Knowledge Hub by the World Bank Group and China is just one example.[1] The UK Department for International Development (DFID) plans to fund initiatives to raise the capacity of policy-makers to use research evidence[2], and AusAID and the Government of Indonesia have developed long-term plans to strengthen the Indonesian knowledge sector to ensure that rapid economic growth delivers development benefits for Indonesia's 120 million people living in poverty.[3]

All of these initiatives recognise that good policy is not generated simply by increasing the amount of research on a particular topic; there are complex issues to navigate to ensure that the best available knowledge is sourced, interpreted and used to further development goals. Understanding how to improve this flow of knowledge in policy is the aim of a practical guide published by ODI with Policy Press on *Knowledge, Policy and Power in International Development*.

This background note illustrates our four-fold framework, detailed in our larger guide, for analysing the interface between knowledge, policy and practice. It is designed to be useful to all those who play a role in shaping the content of policies – policy-makers, researchers, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations and donors – and who are challenged by apparently overwhelming complexity.

There are many different incentives to better understand the interaction between knowledge and policy: to influence the content of policy dialogues and documents, to support inclusive policymaking by ensuring that all voices are heard, and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policy processes. Our framework shows that it is not a case of working on only one of these; by working across them it is possible to improve content, process and inclusivity simultaneously.[4]

A practical framework to analyse the knowledge-policy interface

Our starting point is simple: as our understanding of the ways in which knowledge influences policy has grown, so too has the complexity of the policy arena in both developed and developing countries. International development itself has become more complex still, with pressure on donor resources

under the accountability agenda and an increased emphasis on multiple layers of governance rather than delivery by the state alone. Models of the policy process have evolved to address this complexity, though we argue that 'policy-making' is now such a broad term that it cannot be examined using a single model.

In the 1950s, what we now call 'traditional' models cast policy-making as a uniform cycle, proceeding rationally through agenda setting, formulation, implementation and evaluation, no matter what the issue. The next generation of models demonstrated that the process involved pragmatic decisions based on multiple factors in the face of uncertainty; they emphasised how policy change came about when actors capitalise on windows of opportunity in policy-making to feed in knowledge and guidance. While they improved our understanding of policy-making processes, these models were criticised for being apolitical, and missing some of the key dynamics that affected how policies were, ultimately, designed and implemented (see Jones, 2009, for an overview of the evolution of paradigms for understanding the links between knowledge and policy).

More recent models deal more explicitly with how policy-making and implementation emerge from the interaction between knowledge and power (Court et al., 2005; Jones, 2009). These new perspectives bring much-needed nuance to the analysis, but complicate the picture considerably: policy processes vary widely, from country to country, issue to issue, even from one time to another. As a result, they can seem very 'messy', dependent on the nature and timing of interventions. They appear driven by a multitude of factors, including political expediency, public opinion, patronage networks and 'pork barrel' politics, well-placed technocrats and the role of national and transnational advocacy networks.

In other words, defining, selecting and promoting knowledge in policy is an inherently variable and complex process – as much concerned with matters of power and politics as it is with rational debate and problem solving. However, this does not mean that any analysis of the interface is hopelessly context-specific or driven solely by 'political will'. Our work shows that while it is impossible to construct a single one-size-fits-all model, the interface between knowledge and policy is influenced by four common dimensions:

1. political context features that cut across state types to varying degrees and that shape knowledge-policy interactions (including spaces for participation, informal politics, constraints on power, and the ability to absorb change)

2. the relative strength of actors involved in knowledge production and policy-making, the distribution of their interests on the issue and the interplay of values, beliefs and credibility

3. the salience of the different types of knowledge generated and sought

4. processes of knowledge interaction – those processes that mediate between sources of knowledge and policy decisions and that can be facilitated by so-called 'knowledge intermediaries'.

Using our framework helps development actors to make sense of this complexity and draw out grounded, operational implications for action in a systematic way.

We set out the framework in a series of mindmaps, highlighting some key sub-themes of each of the four main components of our analytical framework. These mindmaps are not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive; instead, we see them as a tool to derive insights into what factors might be important at a particular knowledge-policy interface. Some readers may want to work with them in the form of a thought experiment, while others may use them to think through specific steps or processes with which they might want to engage.

Figure 1 shows the four over-arching sets of questions the framework aims to analyse in relation to: the political context; the values, beliefs, interests and credibility of the different actors in the policy-making system; the types of knowledge used in policy

Figure 1: A framework to analyse interactions between knowledge, policy and power in international development

Political context: Who has the strongest voice in policy debates? What checks and balances are in place to ensure that weaker voices can be heard?

Actors' interests, values and beliefs: Actors do not always act in their own self interests. Values and belief systems affect who is seen as credible in policy debates.

Types of knowledge: Considering research knowledge, citizen knowledge and implementation knowledge, is one type dominant? What are the implications?

Knowledge intermediaries: How people and organisations work at the intersection of knowledge and policy has implications for how knowledge is taken up and used.

Initial framing of the issue

What are the key aspects that need to be addressed to engage effectively at the knowledge-policy interface?

debates; and the effects of actors working specifically as intermediaries at the knowledge-policy interface. Each of these is then analysed in more detail.

It is important to note that readers can enter the analysis using any of these top-level questions. We begin with the political context but it is equally valid to begin by analysing the types of knowledge, actors, or intermediaries involved in a given policy area or arena. Because the four main issues are closely intertwined, readers will inevitably find that the answer to a question about how different groups of actors behave (for example) will lead them to questions on why the political context has given rise to that behaviour and what this implies for the types of knowledge to be given most weight. Working to redress the balance between the different types of knowledge used in a particular policy process may lead readers to analyse which people and organisations work most effectively as knowledge intermediaries and how they can be more effective in ensuring the marginalised are heard.

We suggest that those using the framework focus on the question that appears to be of most immediate importance, while being aware that a more detailed analysis may reveal that another set of pressures has most impact on how knowledge is, ultimately, used in policy-making.

### Beyond 'political will' – a more systematic approach to mapping political context

The first stage in our analytical approach involves a focus on political context. The shorthand notion of 'political will' is often used to explain why it is so challenging to ensure the uptake of knowledge in policy processes. In reality, however, 'political will' emerges from a specific context, which shapes who has the strongest voices in policy debates and what these actors are incentivised to do with the knowledge they hold.

Many different context factors affect the choices of the various actors in politics and policy-making, generating different opportunities for different groups to be heard at different points in the process. To disentangle the underlying dynamics, our approach identifies five key variables that are applicable across a broad range of state types – from consolidated democracies to more autocratic environments and fragile states. Analysis of how the different variables affect policy-making will help move readers beyond simplistic assumptions about the relationship between state type and function (Figure 2).

To begin with, it is important to sketch out the **separation of powers** between legislative, executive and judicial functions, as well as the other ways in which checks and balances are introduced into governance systems to protect and strengthen weaker voices. This can give rise to counter-intuitive propositions – for example, it is not always the case that more democratic systems encourage a better relationship between knowledge and policy. In more autocratic regimes it may be relatively easier to secure the initial impetus for reform than in more democratic political contexts where consolidating policy change can be more complex, given the need for inputs from the legislature and citizenry.

Figure 2: Analysing the political context of the knowledge-policy interface
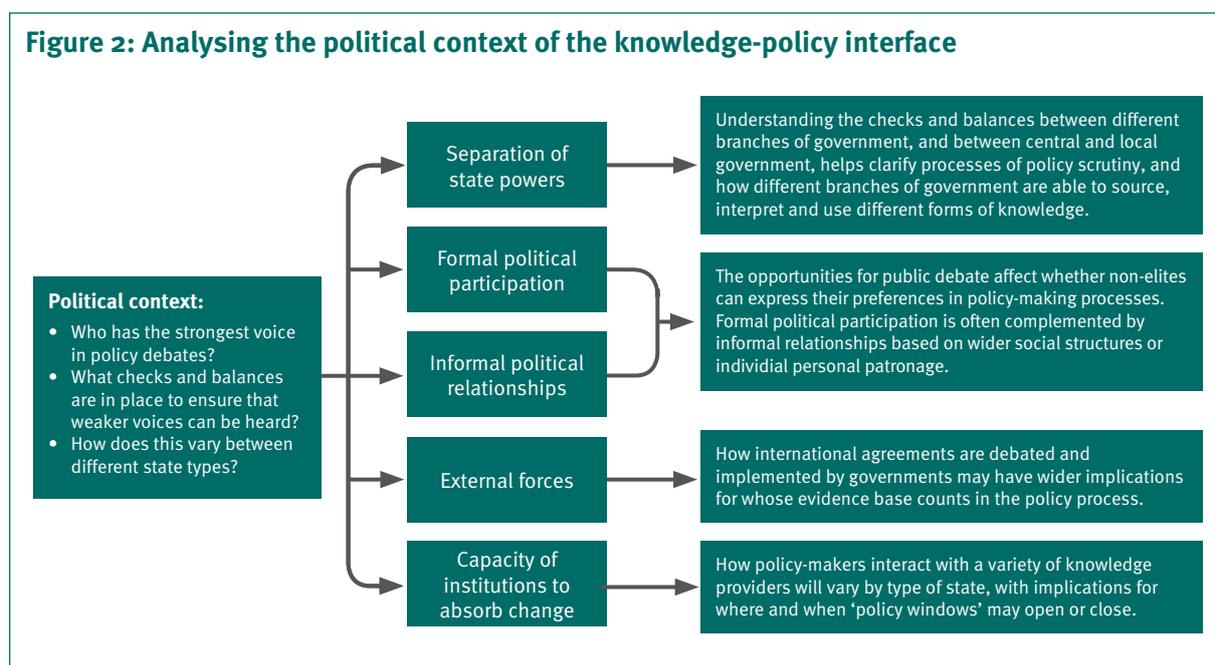
The real locus of power is likely to be shaped by three factors: the processes that encourage policy scrutiny (e.g. via parliamentary select committees or other policy oversight bodies); how well different branches of government are able to source, interpret and use different forms of knowledge (e.g. through in-house research teams or close links with external research bodies); and how decentralisation affects the relationships between knowledge and policy-making.

Research on the micro-level impacts of macro-economic policies in the Philippines, for example, has shown how tensions between different levels of decentralised governance structures have impeded the institutionalisation of tailored poverty monitoring tools that are critical for the development of effective development programmes (Carden, 2009).

The regulation and competitiveness of **formal political participation** is also important. Consolidated democracies can give rise to a high demand for new knowledge and perspectives, and therefore offer the possibility of multiple entry-points on an issue, but they also mean that high-impact policy windows need to be identified if research messages are to be heard.

Htun (2003) highlights a seeming contradiction here: women's rights were advanced under military authoritarian rule in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s in the name of state modernisation, while women's movements faced more complex challenges in the ensuing democratisation process in ensuring that their demands were coherent and heard by policy actors.

More generally, it is important to assess the extent to which technocratic forces and elite interests in a process are complemented by non-elite perspectives, and what this implies for the level of public debate that is possible.

Informal political relationships can also play a key role. Personality politics, patronage and similar phenomena can differ considerably from country to country and, where they are strong, can override established political procedures. Explaining different actors' incentives, attitudes and abilities to use certain types of knowledge depends on developing a good understanding of the strength of informal relationships and whether they are based on individual patronage or links to wider social groups – in other words, whether they are symbolic or economic. This is not to say that informal relationships are necessarily negative – they can (and do) lead to the delivery of public goods – albeit outside the realm of formal accountability structures.

In Bangalore, India, for example, 'eminent domain' by-laws have been used by councillors to upgrade services in informal settlements – primarily on the basis of informal 'vote banks' (Benjamin, 2000).

The influence of **external forces** also needs to be factored in – the effects of international agreements that must be turned into national legislation or risk moral or economic sanctions. Autocratic contexts are more likely to be protective and closed to these sorts of compacts than more democratic governments – though even in democracies the processes involved in understanding, negotiating and legislating to implement international agreements can be difficult, particularly if they are highly technical (see 'types of knowledge' on page 6).

The challenge for fragile states, in particular, is that they can be susceptible to multiple outside influences that can make it difficult to listen effectively to local voices. This has been the case with reforms to recognise religious and ethnic minorities in post-conflict Nepal, where calls for recognition of full citizenship rights quickly disintegrated into violent dissent (e.g. Jones et al., 2009).

It is important, therefore, to analyse the relative strength of international policies and transnational advocacy, together with how such policy discourses coincide or conflict with national priorities. There are many implications for whose evidence counts.
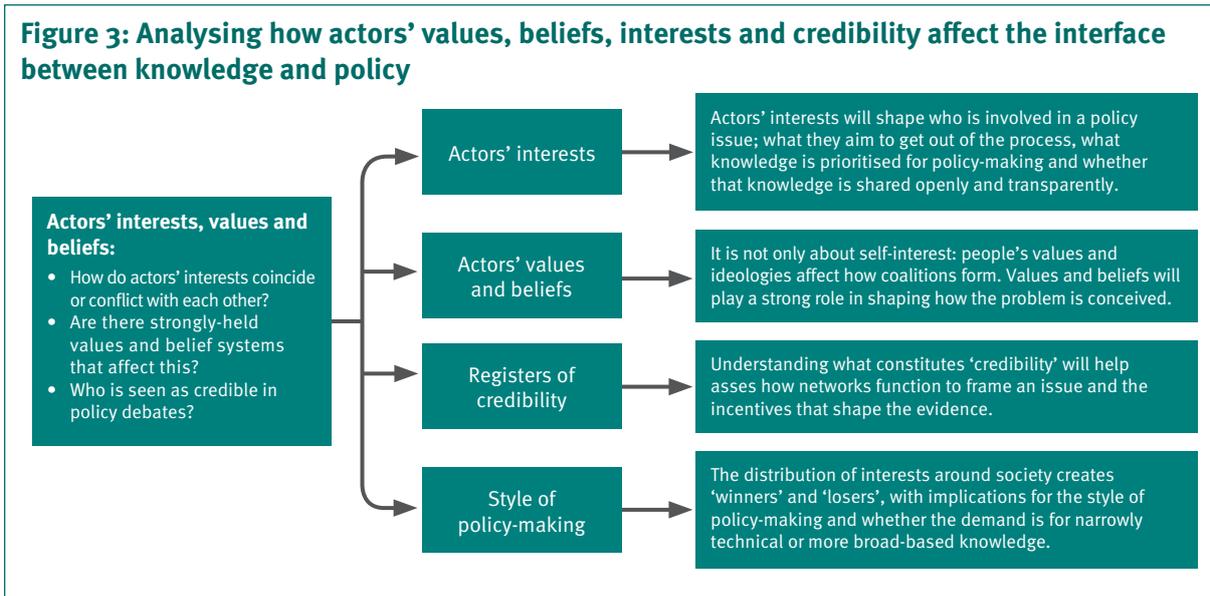
Finally, it is important to look at the extent to which state institutions have the **capacity to absorb change**, particularly regime change. The kinds of changes achievable (and the strategies used to achieve them) will vary across governance contexts. In more consolidated democracies, support for the capacity to absorb change is most likely to succeed when building 'convening capacity', political linkages and trust so that the distribution of knowledge is widespread.

By contrast, in more autocratic settings, authorities may close ranks during times of change and rely heavily on sanctioned or regime-friendly knowledge sources. Working in such contexts may, therefore, require 'working with the grain' to enhance accountability structures, rather than focusing solely on horizontal knowledge-policy linkages (Kelsall, 2008).

Engaging different actors across the knowledge-policy interface

Analysing the position, role and behaviour of the actors involved at the knowledge-policy interface helps us to better understand how to engage with them in a more strategic manner. A broad range

Figure 3: Analysing how actors' values, beliefs, interests and credibility affect the interface between knowledge and policy

Actors' interests, values and beliefs:
- How do actors' interests coincide or conflict with each other?
- Are there strongly-held values and belief systems that affect this?
- Who is seen as credible in policy debates?

Actors' interests → Actors' interests will shape who is involved in a policy issue; what they aim to get out of the process, what knowledge is prioritised for policy-making and whether that knowledge is shared openly and transparently.

Actors' values and beliefs → It is not only about self-interest: people's values and ideologies affect how coalitions form. Values and beliefs will play a strong role in shaping how the problem is conceived.

Registers of credibility → Understanding what constitutes 'credibility' will help asses how networks function to frame an issue and the incentives that shape the evidence.

Style of policy-making → The distribution of interests around society creates 'winners' and 'losers', with implications for the style of policy-making and whether the demand is for narrowly technical or more broad-based knowledge.

of organisations and individuals will often have an influence on policy processes at different junctures. In order to think systematically about the role of each one, our framework takes a realistic and balanced view of what shapes the way in which they produce, broker and use knowledge.

It is unrealistic to approach policy actors in the hope that they might work entirely in an altruistic 'problem-solving' mode, but it is also naïve to presume they will only ever work to protect their self-interest. Instead, readers need to consider the often messy interplay of three different factors.

First, it is important to start by looking at the role of actor **interests** (Figure 3). If the interests of key decision-making actors or networks do not align with proposed policy changes, this is likely to decrease both the search for knowledge and the chance of securing change through dialogue, even though (paradoxically) strong goals with no clear means for their achievement will see a high demand for knowledge. This makes it important to assess how actor interests shape who is involved in a particular policy issue, and the implications for weaker and more fragmented voices.

Evidence deployed in the policy process can often be used as ammunition to help reinforce interests; or elites may try to conduct decision-making processes behind closed doors in order to maintain their grip. In these situations we may see the 'winners' of knowledge contests effectively end up creating a particular reality that accords with their interests and that is presented to the wider world via the principles and reasoning they say lie behind the policy.

This makes it important to assess how actor interests shape the way in which knowledge is commu-

nicated and prioritised in policy debates, and how any idea or piece of information is likely to be used.

Where groups share common interests, they can mobilise broad coalitions against a particular policy change, but this may bring with it a complex set of knowledge demands. In contrast, decision-making elites may try to conceal information from the broader public; using a limited approach to collecting knowledge and making decisions behind closed doors to exclude potential opposition.

Second, there is a growing recognition that actors' **beliefs and values** – ideas about how the world works and what should be valued – play a key part in shaping policy decision-making. Policies that fit with the values of key actors may be taken up even if they appear to go against their self-interest, while actors may refuse to accept arguments that run counter to ideologies and beliefs, even in the face of strong evidence.

In the UK, for example, the government's reaction to the BSE crisis in the 1990s was shown to reflect the prevailing interests regarding agricultural support and limited state intervention, rather than evidence about what was needed to contain the disease (Millstone and van Zwanenberg, 2007).

Values function to bind coalitions as they have a powerful role in building even diverse constituencies and mobilising action, while beliefs and expectations about the behaviour of other actors are often central to explaining problems in and solutions to collective action. This means that how policy questions are framed will reflect certain values and beliefs relating to a particular issue; with implications for which coalitions are likely to be most powerful and how, therefore, the policy process will enable or inhibit access to a broader knowledge base.

Box 1: Mapping key actors in Nepal's petroleum sector

A study carried out in Nepal has assessed the key issues around petroleum in the country, and mapped the knowledge-policy interface for each (Jones and McWilliam, forthcoming, 2013). One central challenge revealed by this study, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), is that petroleum products are subject to a subsidy, with the Government setting prices for diesel and kerosene that are below the cost price paid by the government oil corporation to import them from India. This results in a major drag on public finances, for a subsidy that does not benefit those in greatest need.

Mapping actor interests for and against the removal of the subsidy reveals the reasons for the lack of movement on this issue. The groups with a direct interest in maintaining it (who would, therefore, bear the major cost of any reform) are motorists, who are a large and powerful group, and decision-makers especially in the cabinet, who would suffer major political damage by attempting to take an unpopular move in a period of high instability. The benefits of removing the subsidy would be felt by those who might benefit from higher public spending: a diffuse group who would stand to receive benefits that are, in effect, intangible.

The values and beliefs around petrol further complicate the issue: on the one hand, many see subsidised petrol as a right, and others feel an affinity to Nepal's neighbour India where a number of similar subsidies are in place. Some argue, however, that Nepal needs to reduce its dependence on India, and the subsidy does not fit well with a political discourse dominated by left wing ideologies, as it targets a relatively well-off group.

In a context where there is such fundamental disagreement on values and goals, it is not surprising that technical knowledge about the negative economic effects of subsidies, brokered largely by international agencies, does not 'speak' to most Nepalis. Similarly, political parties have undermined their own credibility by taking populist positions in opposition, and switching their stance once in power.

So far, the most credible voices on this issue have been those emerging from the press, who have undertaken and publicised detailed research in the sector. Future action may depend on such apolitical and trusted sources combining with a home-grown movement to shape key aspects of energy policy to settle important conflicts about policy goals.

Third, actors' abilities to make **credible** knowledge claims, either individually or as part of broader networks, also shape their role in the knowledge-policy interface and the policy process more broadly.

Credibility is a function of how we and our 'expertise' are viewed by others. Different actors give certain weight to particular kinds of arguments or information, or to people with certain kinds of qualifications or experience. This will privilege certain groups, networks or 'epistemic communities' who become well-integrated with policy processes, developing and applying technical knowledge on specific issues and interpreting problems or promoting common practices. The formation and incentives of these groups can be central to how policy is made or implemented.

Triangulating different types of knowledge

The third central tenet of our framework is that the term 'knowledge' itself should not be conceived of only in terms of research and formal analysis. While research can play an important role in policy-making, it needs to be complemented by other forms of knowledge. Policy-makers draw on much more than strictly 'scientific' knowledge, including political judgement, cultural traditions and perspectives, and professional experience. The definition of what counts as 'legitimate knowledge' on an issue is itself politically determined, and particular types of knowledge can sometimes

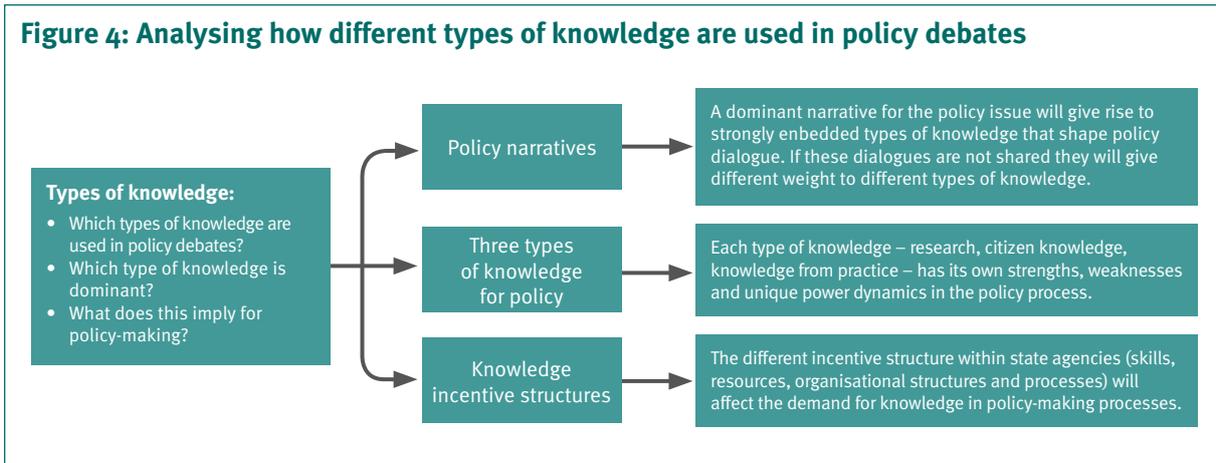become strongly embedded in the knowledge-policy interface.

There are dominant policy narratives on some issues, and these can be useful in helping decision-makers interpret problems and frame solutions. They can also, however, constrict action and make it unresponsive to context, as organisational imperatives and career incentives mean that knowledge is produced to confirm the preferences of interested organisations, and policy models can survive even in the face of considerable evidence of major downsides.

For example, Molle (2008) argues that the 'free water' narrative, which argued for irrigation price-based incentives, generated a vast swathe of literature and led to the formation of an embedded epistemic community, taking on a hegemonic character in the development establishment despite limited evidence of success.

Different types of knowledge each have their own strengths, weaknesses and unique power dynamics when brokered into policy. Our framework highlights three key types: research-based knowledge, practice-informed knowledge and citizen (or participatory) knowledge.

Research-based knowledge is produced by scientists, academics and professional groups. While it has the potential to be an extremely valuable resource for policy dialogue, debates that are strongly couched in technical terms serve (intentionally or not) to exclude large groups

Figure 4: Analysing how different types of knowledge are used in policy debates

Types of knowledge:		
• Which types of knowledge are used in policy debates? • Which type of knowledge is dominant? • What does this imply for policy-making?	**Policy narratives**	A dominant narrative for the policy issue will give rise to strongly enbedded types of knowledge that shape policy dialogue. If these dialogues are not shared they will give different weight to different types of knowledge.
	Three types of knowledge for policy	Each type of knowledge – research, citizen knowledge, knowledge from practice – has its own strengths, weaknesses and unique power dynamics in the policy process.
	Knowledge incentive structures	The different incentive structure within state agencies (skills, resources, organisational structures and processes) will affect the demand for knowledge in policy-making processes.

of stakeholders from the process, and particular disciplines and perspectives can dominate understandings of possible actions and policy responses. It also means that actors who 'translate' research-based knowledge for non-expert audiences wield significant power to frame messages and steer debates.

It is important to assess where the supply of research-based knowledge to policy needs to be built, and how it should be communicated and integrated into policy processes.

Practice-informed knowledge is knowledge from experience of implementing policy and practice, or gained more generally through hands-on action. Often highly tacit in nature, it is held by individuals and organisations with long histories of tackling an issue, and has its roots in built-up work experience and an understanding of what works and does not in specific contexts.

Careful attention needs to be paid as to how practice-informed knowledge can best be identified and shared, through formal processes such as

Box 2: From research-based to citizen-derived knowledge: the evolution of gender-sensitive data collection

The history of debates around gender-sensitive data harks back to the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975. A general plea was made for governments to invest in the collection and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data so as to better support gender-sensitive policy and programme development. Without sex-disaggregated information, it was argued, analysts and practitioners faced significant constraints in understanding gender-specific vulnerabilities and needs, as well as the relative impacts of diverse policies and programmes on men and women, boys and girls.

By 2005, as a result of ongoing advocacy efforts, the UN noted that most countries were producing sex-disaggregated data on a burgeoning array of demographic, human development and service use indicators at least once every decade, while a number were also undertaking gender budgeting (analyses of government budgets from a gender perspective to highlight the gendered impacts of public expenditure decisions).

These national efforts have been complemented by the creation of a variety of internationally comparable gender indices, measuring women's human development (the Gender Development Index), political and economic empowerment (the Gender Empowerment Measure) and gendered socio-cultural norms through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI).

Nevertheless, many gender-related data from the developing world – including those on gender-based violence, informal sector employment and time poverty – are still collected in an, at best, ad hoc manner outside national statistics offices, where capacity for both collection and dissemination is often limited. The lack of rigorous data impedes advocacy on many women's rights issues, with arguments too often seen as 'feminist advocacy, rather than objective/scientific arguments backed by facts and figures' (Razavi, 1997, p.1117).

Some analysts, however, argue that the reasons behind the uptake of some types of evidence and not others are more political and ideological in nature. Certain methodologies of knowledge production, such as those of neoclassical economics, can easily legitimise the status quo and are, therefore, more acceptable to those in power (Folbre, 2001). Accordingly, feminist scholars have increasingly turned to qualitative and participatory methods to help plug some of the data gaps, in part because quantitative data in some issue areas are simply not available and partly as a commitment to go beyond headcounts and include indicators that reflect qualitative change in gender power relations. Such processes are also seen as a key means to adjust the power balance between technocratic and citizen knowledge, and to democratise knowledge production processes (Ackerly and True, 2010).

project reports and evaluations, or informal spaces for learning. It is also important to understand how organisational and broader incentive systems shape what information is shared, and how it is framed, as this will privilege certain tools, or the achievement of some goals, ahead of others.

Citizen (or participatory) knowledge is held by citizens, both individually and collectively, drawing on their daily lives; it is knowledge of a place, a culture, a people, and their challenges, gained through direct experience. It can be difficult for outsiders to access without considerable sensitivity, but is often brokered into policy dialogues through representatives, such as civil society organisations or indigenous groups. All too often the actual influence of peoples' expressed voice is minimal or tokenistic, as certain actors hold the power to frame and even marginalise it. It is important, therefore, to consider how citizens and key groups in society can best be linked to policy-makers, for example through democratic norms and participatory processes, such as social audits of government programmes.

Careful attention needs to be paid to balancing these three types of knowledge; an over-reliance on technical knowledge can lead to technocratic policy-making with little citizen involvement in framing the problem and little understanding of what has worked in the past. Citizen knowledge may need to be balanced with technical analyses to prevent more populist approaches to policy-making; and policies based solely on what has been shown to be effective may be slow to innovate.

Finally, it is important to understand how different incentive structures within policy-making organisations operate to help or hinder the flow of knowledge. There are three important factors: the capacity of individual policy-makers to use different types of knowledge and the level of resources available are the most obvious, but it is also important to consider how organisational structures and processes affect the way policy-makers scope, procure and interpret the knowledge that is available to them (Harvey et al., 2012).

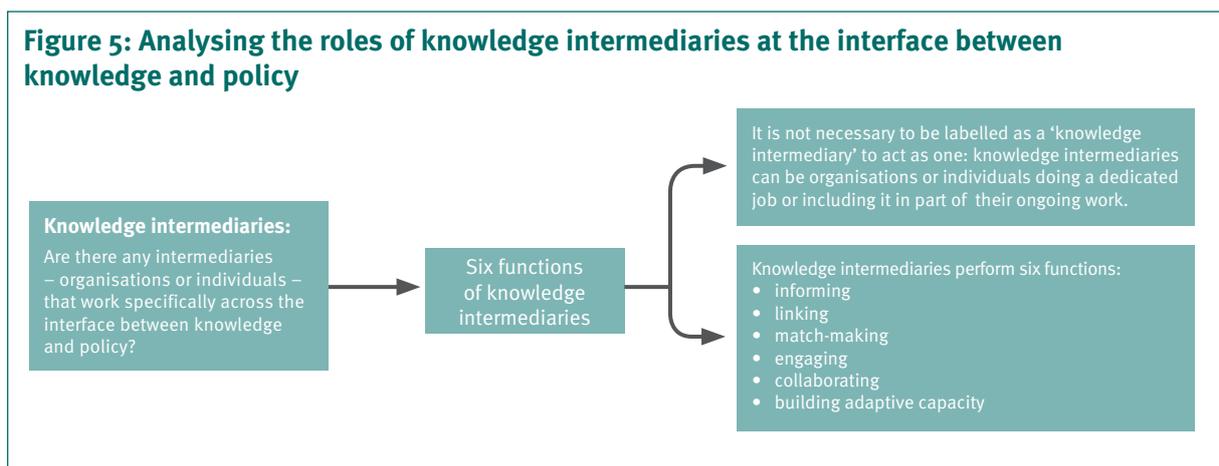## Broadening the spectrum of knowledge interaction processes

The final element that our framework considers is the processes and channels through which knowledge and policy interact. Different policy windows and decision processes construct different opportunities for drawing on information and expertise. How this happens is mediated by a variety of actors and processes that affect the quality of communication, the chance of messages being taken on board and the opportunities to embed learning throughout the policy process.

Our key message here is that it is not necessary to be labelled as a 'knowledge intermediary' to play an important intermediary and brokering role. In policy processes, a variety of individuals and organisations broker, translate and communicate knowledge from a variety of sources; sometimes as part of their ongoing jobs, sometimes as dedicated professionals. This means it is more important to assess the different intermediary *functions* and how they strengthen the knowledge-policy interface than it is to focus on specific actors.

It is critical to identify where intermediary functions are being carried out, and by whom. Drawing from Michaels (2009), our framework lays out six functions that help to clarify how actors can add value when performing intermediary roles: these help to elucidate how they work, the incentives that influence their behaviour and the impact they might have (Figure 5).

Informing is the process of disseminating content to targeted decision-makers and decision-influencers, making information easily accessible

Figure 5: Analysing the roles of knowledge intermediaries at the interface between knowledge and policy

Knowledge intermediaries:
Are there any intermediaries – organisations or individuals – that work specifically across the interface between knowledge and policy?

Six functions of knowledge intermediaries

It is not necessary to be labelled as a 'knowledge intermediary' to act as one: knowledge intermediaries can be organisations or individuals doing a dedicated job or including it in part of their ongoing work.

Knowledge intermediaries perform six functions:
- informing
- linking
- match-making
- engaging
- collaborating
- building adaptive capacity

and digestible. The actors who carry out 'informing' functions have the strength of a wide reach, since disseminating content through the Internet allows a very large number of stakeholders to have access to the knowledge. On the other hand, since information is presented 'pre-digested', what is also disseminated is a certain frame or approach to an issue, and it assumes that the communicator has understood the problem correctly in the first place. There is also limited exchange between the producers and users of the knowledge: stakeholders are made aware of the information but the intermediary is not otherwise involved in the decision-making process.

Linking policy-makers with the expertise needed for a particular policy area or within a particular discipline helps them address a specific policy issue through structured inputs from specific experts. In many processes there are commissioned research consultancies, advisory committees, or focus groups that can constitute a relatively cheap and quick way to channel necessary knowledge into set points of a policy process.

Box 3: Building adaptive capacity by promoting local innovation

Initiated by a group of southern and northern non-governmental organisations in 1999, PROLINNOVA is an international learning and advocacy network that, as its name suggests, promotes local innovation in ecologically-oriented agriculture and natural resource management. Its focus is on recognising the dynamics of indigenous knowledge and enhancing the capacities of farmers (including forest dwellers, pastoralists and fisherfolk) to adjust to change. It supports their efforts to develop their own site-appropriate systems and institutions of resource management so as to gain food security, sustain their livelihoods and safeguard the environment.

PROLINNOVA's thesis is that the essence of sustainability lies in the capacity to adapt. In Ghana, for example, identifying farmers' innovation with a clay-like earth called *siella* led to a collaboration with researchers and other PROLINNOVA Ghana partners to formulate and produce affordable mineral dietary supplements for domestic animals and, ultimately, to develop a business to produce them.

As well as fostering social learning about important local issues and disseminating local innovations, PROLINNOVA's country partners are working on several fronts: piloting decentralised funding mechanisms to promote local innovation and farmer-led participatory research, stimulating national and regional policy dialogue to favour local participatory innovation processes and integrating this approach into formal agricultural research, development and extension institutions.

Source: Wettasinha and Waters-Bayer, 2010, in Jones et al., 2012.

It is important to recognise, however, that the 'users' of such knowledge tend to remain in control, setting the parameters by which experts are consulted, how to frame questions and how much budget to allocate. Decisions can still be made behind closed doors, and the participation of some actors can be tokenistic, even if they are formally consulted.

Match-making is active networking and facilitation to match expertise to need across issues and disciplines. It may also entail finding experts with relevant knowledge from another discipline to help policy-makers take a strategic overview or address the issue in full. Intermediaries who match-make can help to build relationships between decision-makers and others who work with different types of knowledge.

An effective match-maker can bring together these different perspectives on an issue and encourage rich communication. This is a challenging role as match-makers must command the trust of all those involved and, in some situations, without careful supervision, relationships can fall into pre-established structures that reflect the prevailing power dynamics.

Engaging involves the inclusive framing of issues to generate a common understanding. Intermediaries who practice 'engagement' contract people or organisations to provide knowledge on an as-needed basis; opening the decision-making process to encourage genuine participation and ownership. Examples might include contracted research programmes, working groups or citizen juries, all of which are constituted to provide knowledge for a specific purpose.

Potential barriers to engagement include the overly-technical framing of issues or questions, or logistical and financial barriers that can exclude those such as the disenfranchised or people in remote areas from providing appropriate inputs. Because the intermediary is increasingly involved in defining the shape and scope of the issue, understanding the power relationships becomes increasingly important.

Collaborating involves helping both sides of the discussion jointly frame the process and negotiate the substance of the issue to address a particular problem, for example in communities of practice. Where there are joint agreements between the different actors and where intermediaries are able to lengthen and balance relationships they can help deepen the collaborative process. In doing this they help strengthen relationships and offer the chance to transform understandings of, and approaches to, an issue. This may well mean

working to alter the balance of relationships: collaboration may need large investments in terms of time and money, particularly if the aim is to create an equitable relationship from an unbalanced starting point.

Building adaptive capacity involves stewarding long-term relationships, fostering organisational learning, and co-producing knowledge through, for example, co-management. Some intermediaries build self-sustaining arrangements in terms of both funding and function. These processes of joint 'learning-by-doing' have the benefit of improving the ability of key stakeholders to react to multiple and emerging issues, and to maintain the institutions required to respond to their needs.

The challenge for intermediaries is to retain a degree of separation from the prevailing power structures so that they are able to overcome any imbalances that arise as the capacity of different groups is strengthened.

Conclusions: broader policy and practice implications

The four-fold framework we have presented here – involving the definition and unpacking of political context, actors' interests, values and beliefs, diverse knowledge types and a wide spectrum of knowledge interaction processes – offers insights into how to systematically conceptualise and approach the interface between knowledge and policy, teasing out practical suggestions for promoting policy and practice change.

We conclude by reflecting on implications for knowledge producers, users and intermediaries to help development thinkers and practitioners negotiate the challenge of unpacking and engaging with complex policy debates and processes more effectively.

First, our analysis highlights that *those producing knowledge* must resist the temptation to fall back on the mantra that 'it's all about political will' to explain a lack of impact or justify a simplistic policy influencing strategy. Understanding possible pathways of policy change and the role of formal and informal institutional checks and balances on power can help develop a clear roadmap for policy advocacy. This also means that knowledge producers need to be more self-aware of the political nature of their engagement in policy processes.

Any act of producing knowledge is, by definition, a political one; and those producing knowledge need to engage with the policy process with their eyes wide open.

Different actors use knowledge in different ways: it is important to understand who else is involved in the knowledge network for any issue and how different actors' values and beliefs, interests and credibility will affect the way in which knowledge is likely to be used.

Policy-making is a dynamic process of understanding what a particular piece of knowledge means in relation to what needs to be done. Engaging with those who produce different types of knowledge (research, citizen knowledge, or knowledge from implementation and practice) could give better results than a focus on any single type alone.

Knowledge producers must also be able to engage with policy-making at multiple levels depending on where the spaces for decisions are (whether internationally, nationally or locally) and where the need is greatest. A focus on decision spaces is important because identifying the issue without considering where decisions are actually taken can render an issue too broadly identified for meaningful analysis.

Second, our framework underscores that *knowledge users* such as policy-makers or donors are also political actors at the interface between knowledge and policy, not merely neutral facilitators. This means they have a role to play in strengthening policy processes, not just improving policy content.

Rather than being passive recipients of whatever knowledge is given to them, policy-makers can develop strategies to engage systematically with different groups of actors and different types of knowledge; with systematic thinking about where and from whom they should seek the knowledge they need. Policy-makers and donors who engage in wide dialogue and debate are able to develop a richer evidence base than those who rely on a smaller group with limited scope.

While the incentive structures within policy-making departments often favour research over other forms of knowledge (citizen knowledge, or knowledge from practice and implementation), it is increasingly important to engage with organisations that can articulate the more marginalised voices, placing as much emphasis on how to source knowledge as on what knowledge is being used. Policy-makers can themselves act as knowledge intermediaries, defining the types of relationship they need to form with other actors who are producing or synthesising knowledge.

Third, the message for *knowledge intermediaries* is that it is not necessary to be labelled as a knowledge 'intermediary' to act as one: what matters is developing a clear understanding of

the different intermediary functions that could be used and the resource implications of each. An understanding of this will help intermediaries devise different strategies for different contexts, helping them to select the most appropriate ways of dealing with the tensions that arise between the demand from policy-makers for immediate knowledge to solve pressing policy issues, and the more gradual process of building a broad, robust knowledge base for the future.

A recognition of how actors' different values, beliefs, interests and credibility shape their behaviour will help intermediaries shape strategies to ensure that the provision of knowledge matches policy's need. Ensuring that all types of knowledge are provided to policy-makers requires a variety of intermediaries: some to broker research knowledge, some to ensure that citizen voices are heard and some to press the need to learn from experience and practice.

The key to any successful intermediation process will be understanding when and how to step in and – perhaps even more importantly – when to step back and let the system sustain itself.

In sum, improving the flow of knowledge in policy is as much about strengthening the processes of policy-making – inside and outside government – as it is about improving the content of specific policy issues. The framework presented here demonstrates the importance of understanding how power relations mediate these processes, affecting how policies are conceived, designed and implemented. It should help the reader identify concrete, practical actions to take as a result.

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Endnotes

1. http://bit.ly/V16Lgl
2. http://bit.ly/11KZTL0
3. http://bit.ly/V1736Q
4. See also the accompanying ODI background note: 'Providing practical guidance for in-country programming: the value of analysing knowledge, policy and power', which outlines how to use this framework to guide in-country programming. Available from: http://bit.ly/T8O4Me