Towards Policy Relevant Knowledge in the Mekong: Exploring the links between sustainability research and policy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report discusses the outcome of a project focusing on linkages between sustainability policy and research in the Mekong Region. In the context of a discussion of literature on linkages between research and policy generally, the project examined a number of projects supported by the Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET). Each of these case study projects has been undertaking research concerned with some aspect of sustainable use of resources in the region.

The projects were examined in terms of the policy engagement strategies (implicit or explicit) used by the projects and in the context of some of the characteristics of policy making in each country.

The project was originally conceived as a study of policy-making processes related to sustainability in the Mekong region. It was hoped that the projects would themselves provide useful lessons about such processes and about ways for future projects to improve policy engagement. However, the projects operated under severe time constraints involving a very short project period (nine months or less). For this reason effective policy engagement was very difficult and achieving policy outcomes was virtually impossible within the project timeframe. The focus of this report (and of the research policy linkages project) has shifted from reporting on policy engagement by the projects towards presenting ideas to support improved policy engagement capacity within SUMERNET projects for the future.

Some of the main conclusions of the research and policy linkages project are:

- The projects generally did not have clear policies for strategy engagement from the beginning. These tended to be developed as the project progressed.
- While the projects generally recognised the importance of different stakeholder interests, they took a very “expert-oriented” approach to community interests. These were often studied through surveys or PRA, but were interpreted through an expert lens. Institutional stakeholders were more widely recognised and sometimes involved in the research, but some of the research was dominated by a sectoral perspective.
- While firm policy recommendations are not available from most projects (and may not be forthcoming in the current SUMERNET phase) it seems likely that they will be presented as policy recommendations rather than policy options.

This report suggests a number of strategies and approaches that could assist in enhanced policy engagement for sustainability projects:

- Policy-oriented research projects need to build in strategies for policy engagement as early as possible, ideally at the project design stage.
- Closely related to the early development of a policy engagement strategy is the idea of involving some stakeholders (including “policy makers”) in the research itself, either as active partners in research (as in the case of the floods project in Vietnam) or through regular interaction in the case of more senior people.
- Carry out an analysis of the institutional context (institutional actors and their roles) and a stakeholder analysis before commencing research, or as early as

possible. At the minimum, this would involve identifying stakeholders and considering their perspectives.

- Policy Dialogues
- Action Research
- Policy engagement strategies need to be multi-pronged.
- Communication of research results needs to be targeted.

Perhaps the most important implication of the project is the importance of developing policy engagement strategies from the design stage of a project and for involving “policy makers” throughout the project, not just as it progresses. Ideally policy makers need to be involved in the research design phase as well as being involved in routine reflection on progress as research goes on. This assists the researchers to modify their findings to be more policy relevant and keeps the policy actors aware of the research directions and progressive findings in a way that is more efficient than post-research meetings, reports and policy briefs alone. The continuing engagement of policy actors in research is the flip side of policy engagement by researchers.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Research Problem[1]

Research is frequently carried out with the expectation that it will in some way influence policy. In practice researchers are often frustrated by the way policies are developed and implemented with apparent disregard for research findings. Understanding the role of research and researchers in policy formation requires a clearer understanding of policy processes generally, because efforts to influence policy are often based on dubious assumptions about how policy is actually made. This is nowhere more evident than in the arena of sustainability-oriented research for a number of reasons: the breadth of issues involved in the topic area, the number of agencies involved, and the contested nature of the term "sustainability" itself. The ways in which, and extent to which, research influences policy is highly context-specific and varies from one Mekong country to another. At the same time, what is considered to be policy-relevant research is itself shaped by the policy environment of each country.

Policy-making (often called policy planning) is often seen to be a scientific or rational process. In this view, the process of policy-making involves a more or less linear path from problem identification to analysis of options based on knowledge and research to recommended policy solutions. It is often assumed that the institutions and individuals who carry out the research are neutral players within the policy process. The role of researchers in this model is to provide "objective" policy advice direct to "policy makers". At the same time, research formulation is often assumed to be an independent and critically oriented process independent of the expectations of policy makers or cultural and political constraints.

In contrast to the advocates of scientific policy planning based on data collection and analysis, an alternative school of thought sees policy-making as a process which occurs in the context of competing ideas and values, and whose politicised nature needs to be explicitly recognised. Those who follow this approach generally see policy-making as a process of dialogue and negotiation between people with different viewpoints and different power. They see the whole process as essentially (and necessarily) messy. In this model, influencing policy becomes a matter of engagement in a messy dialogue. Similarly, we can see the formulation, practice and policy outcome of research as similarly politicised.

The countries in the Region are quite variable in terms of their political systems, the contexts within which policy is made and the nature of debate about natural resource management issues. These characteristics are relevant to the way natural resources policies are made:

- Natural resource issues generally are strongly contested in the region, but public debate and criticism are muted in Vietnam and Lao PDR. In Thailand (and to a much lesser extent in Cambodia), public debate is vigorous and the policy process is often politicised and confrontational.

[1] Some of the text in this section is taken from Fisher, 2006.

- There is relatively little input from local NGOs and communities in Vietnam and Lao PDR. Again, in Thailand (and, again, to a lesser extent in Cambodia), NGOs and communities are very active.

- The policy process tends to be highly expert focused in Vietnam and Laos.

The research discussed in this report was proposed as a contribution to understanding the ways that sustainability policy is actually made, and sustainability policy-oriented research is practised, in the Mekong region generally and in individual countries. Is the process the messy process described above? Are there differences in the way policy dialogue occurs in countries with greater involvement of civil society and a more critical research tradition, and the way it occurs in countries without strong civil society? What assumptions do researchers have about the way policy making occurs and what, if any, conscious strategies do they have for participating in the processes? Does awareness of these assumptions help researchers to engage with policy in a more effective way?

The underlying rationale of the research is to contribute to enhanced policy engagement by "sustainability researchers" in future projects.

1.2 The Policy Research Linkages Project

The Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) is a network consisting of twelve institutions based in the Mekong region with focus on research and policy. The network is supported by a programme of applied research (The Sustainable Mekong Programme), consisting of small research grants for projects, which aims "to facilitate a more effective engagement of the network with key policy forums in the region".

This report presents the results of one of the projects funded under the Sustainable Mekong Programme: "Towards Policy Relevant Knowledge in the Mekong: Exploring the links between sustainability research and policy" (subsequently referred to in abbreviated form as "the research policy linkages project"). The research policy linkages project was proposed to explore the role of research in policy planning and policy development in the Mekong Region with the underlying aim of assisting future SUMERNET projects to develop more effective policy engagement strategies. The project was designed to draw both on wider experiences on research policy linkages (through the literature) while focusing on the experience of selected SUMERNET projects. In this sense it was intended to have an "action research role", contributing to the effectiveness of policy engagement within these projects.

The research policy linkages project aimed to contribute to the capacity of SUMERNET-supported research projects to produce "policy-relevant knowledge" by developing an understanding of policy-research linkages and processes in the Mekong Region. It could be seen as complementing other SUMERNET research projects with the underlying goal of informing policy through research and was intended to help identify strategies that assist researchers to better communicate their research findings into policy-making processes.

Originally the project was expected to look for the policy impacts and policy engagement strategies of the SUMERNET projects selected as case studies. However, the projects effectively operated over a time frame of nine months (less in some cases), including time for report writing. For this reason serious policy engagement was clearly impossible. This report reviews the projects more in the manner of a scoping report – looking at the process rather than the outcomes of policy engagement, so that future projects can incorporate a reflexive policy engagement component. Of course it draws as much as possible on the policy engagement strategies of the case study projects

This report does not focus exclusively on the empirical study of the SUMERNET case study projects. It aims to present a broad reflection on the nature of research policy linkages, drawing on the SUMERNET projects as well as on one other example of policy initiative in the region, the NAFRI-IUCN Project in Lao PDR.

1.3 Research Objectives

At the proposal stage the twin goals of the project were to achieve a better understanding of ways in which research is involved in policy making processes and the ways in which policy environments frame and influence research.

The specific objectives of the project were to investigate:

- assumptions researchers have about the research-policy interface and any conscious strategies they adopt to influence policy;

- ways in which research is actually used in policy and decision-making processes;

- the policy environment for research including ways in which policy influences the way research is framed and what research is undertaken.

The research was informed by a list of preliminary indicative questions. The full list of these questions is at Appendix 1.

While the project retained its concerns with these three objectives, the fact that the case study projects were of short duration, led to a reframing of the focus of the research policy linkages project towards an emphasis on identifying ways to improve capacity for policy engagement for future SUMERNET projects.

1.4 Scope and General Method of Investigation

The research-policy linkages project involved case studies of a number of selected policy-oriented research projects relevant to sustainability across the countries in the region. In this report three projects are examined as case studies. In each case an abbreviated title is given after the full title:

- Study on local community institutions to cope with the flood situation of the Mekong Region (Floods and institutions). This project had components in Vietnam and Cambodia.

- Assessment of regional value chains for promoting sustainable fisheries development in the Mekong Delta (Fisheries). Sub-projects in Cambodia and Vietnam.
- Rubber in the GMS: An integrated research exercise on rubber development in Lao PDR (Rubber). This project had three separate components implemented by different agencies:[2]

    - Rubber: Costs or Benefits to the Lao PDR? (WERI). Implemented by the Water and Environmental Research Institute within the Water Resources and Environment Administration of the Prime minister's Office.
    - Meeting regional and global demands: Options for meeting poverty reduction in Laos (NAFRI). Implemented by the Agriculture and Forestry Policy Research Center in the National Forestry and Agriculture Research Institute.
    - Incentives based approaches for sustainability in the Mekong (IUCN). Implemented by the IUCN Lao Country Office.

Applying a case study approach to research, the research team carried out two rounds of visits to the case study projects, in each case carrying out semi-structured and informal interviews with project researchers. These interviews focused on obtaining an understanding of the research objectives of each project, the research results as policy messages and policy engagement strategies and experiences. The second round of interviews included some interviews with "policy actors" relevant to the research, with a view to obtaining an understanding of the relevance of the research to their requirements and to identify what they would find most useful for research. This can be thought of as linking the "supply" (the research results and messages) with the "demand" (what policy makers needed and found most useful). Interviews with policy makers occurred only in the case of the floods and local institutions project. There were separate interviews for the two institutions and flooding sub-projects in Vietnam and Cambodia.

1.5 Defining Policy and the Policy Arena

There are many definitions of policy. In this report we are interpreting "policy" liberally in terms of strategic plans that guide problem solving. We are assuming that policy is more than a centralised process and is made, implemented and modified at multiple scales and locations. For this reason it is important to understand how policy operates at different levels and how it is modified to suit local needs and priorities.

1.6 Structure of the Report

The next section of this report is the literature review (Section 2) undertaken for the project. The full literature review is included as the project depends heavily on an understanding of the concepts discussed and issues raised. That is followed by a section on methodology (Section 3), which both describes how the research was carried out and reflects on some of the particular issues involved in "research on research".

[2] The three components of the rubber project were effectively separate projects, each with separate grants and with no common lead institution. In the other projects, the separate components were linked through a lead institution as a single project.

The results and discussions section (Section 4) begins with a quick description of the SUMERNET case study projects and then discuss some strategies and strategies for enhanced policy engagement in future projects.

Section 5 presents the conclusions of the research and policy linkages project.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction[3]

In recent years a great deal of research has been carried out on sustainability issues in the Mekong region. Typically such research has been justified, or partly justified, on the basis of its relevance to policy making. However, there are serious doubts about the extent to which all of this research has impacted on policy and the policy process seems not to be well understood by researchers.

This problem is not unique to the Mekong. Seeking policy relevance is a common concern of researchers concerned with environmental issues (see, for example, IHDP 2006). There is a considerable amount of international literature on the linkages between research and policy-making. This review examines some of this literature, both theoretical and empirical, about the nature of the connections, and also literature which suggests better ways to go about making linkages. The literature review does not specifically focus on experiences in the Mekong, although experiences from the Mekong are included. Instead it aims to explore a wider range of literature in order to draw on international experiences that may be able to inform future sustainability research in the region in an effort to achieve a better fit with policy processes.

It is useful to make a distinction between two different types of policy research. One type can be described as “research for policy”. This type of research, usually empirically-based, aims to provide information to inform the policy process. An example might be research which provides data on the extent to which peoples’ livelihoods are dependent on forests in order to influence policy on forest management. The other type is “research on policy”. This type of research explores the way policy is made and implemented. This later is the focus of this review, as research on policy will help better inform research for policy.

There are a number of organisations and programs that focus on policy research. Many of these tend to be “content” oriented. One of these is the RAND Corporation[4] which produces an enormous number of publications, on a wide range of subjects, based on policy research. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)[5] has published many policy-relevant studies on environment and development issues. Much of the work is empirically-based, but IIED has paid a great deal of attention to work on policymaking. Work of this type includes the series “Policy that Works for Forests and People” (of which

[3] Parts of this literature review draw heavily on Fisher (2006).
[4] http://www.rand.org/
[5] http://www.iied.org/

Mayers and Bass 1999 provide an overview volume). The Overseas Development Institute[6] (UK) produces research and policy briefs on a wide range of development and environment-related topics. It has also been engaged in the RAPID (Research and Policy in Development) programme[7], which specifically explores ways to link research with policymaking and engages in "research on policy" as opposed to "research for policy". ODI has produced a large number of reports and working papers on policy process, livelihood and forests in India (e.g. Morrison nd; Springate-Baginski and Soussan nd; Springate-Baginski et al nd). See also the annotated bibliography by de Vibe et al (2002).

2.2 How is Policy Made?

This section reviews some of the literature about the way policy is made. Basically this means identifying two distinct views of the "policy process".

Policy-making (frequently called policy planning) is often seen to be a rather scientific or rational process. This approach can be described as the positivist[8] approach. In this view, the process of policy-making involves a more or less linear path from problem identification, to the analysis of options based on knowledge and research, to recommended policy solutions. Advocates of this approach often recognise that strict rationality may be difficult to achieve in practice, it is nevertheless seen as an ideal to be aimed at. Policy is, in this view, very much a task for "experts", either in specific fields related to the policy under consideration (such as forestry) or in the process of policy planning itself.

The rational/scientific approach is probably the common understanding of policy-making among the public and, indeed, many researchers. The implications of this approach are that good sound arguments based on evidence are the key to affecting policy development. Policies are "designed" rather than being developed through a more iterative development process.

However, in practice, the policy process is almost invariably much more messy. It is much more about competing ideas, competing interests and power. Not only are policy solutions open to debate, but basic questions, like deciding on policy objectives, often cause conflict. For example, in developing forest policy, the issues are not just about how best to achieve forest conservation, but whether forest policy should be aimed at maintaining biodiversity, reducing poverty, or some combination of these objectives. Different policy actors often have different goals.

In contrast to the advocates of scientific policy planning based on data collection and analysis, an alternative school of thought sees policy-making as a "political" process which occurs in the context of competing ideas and values, and which needs to be explicitly recognised. Authors who follow this approach generally see policy-making as a process of dialogue and negotiation between people with different viewpoints and different power. They see the whole process as essentially (and necessarily) messy. In a paper that has become a classic in the policy literature, Lindblom (1959) refers to the whole policy process as "muddling

[6] http://www.odi.org.uk/
[7] http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/
[8] Positivism is "the position that all genuine knowledge is derived from and validated by science" (The Penguin Encyclopedia 2002). Applied to policy research it is the idea that there is a "correct" policy solution for any problem and it can be identified by research.

through". He was perhaps the first to observe explicitly that the typical way administrators make decisions does not follow the methodical approach often advocated.

Lindayati (1999: 43) points out that policy making involves "a struggle of ideas":

> Policy ideas always contain theories which carry (explicitly or implicitly) a set of interrelated premises on what the existing situation (of a particular phenomenon) is and what the desirable ends should be, what conditions (or variables) can be manipulated to achieve the desired state and how, what is considered (un) acceptable behavioural conduct, who should benefit and pay the cost of any resulted change. The types of people and institutions involved in the policy process, the ideas, interests, and normative values these actors bring, and the way the process is exercised shape the content of policy theory.

Lindblom and Waterhouse (1993) examine the limitations of an approach to policy-making which relies too much on gathering information and applying systematic analysis. Among the important points is the observation that making "policy solely by analysis would require a harmony of interests and values among all individuals and groups". They point out that policy-making must always include "politics". Similarly, Mayers and Bass point out that "...policy positions, statements, practices, and even outcomes, are based fundamentally on value judgements..." (1999: iii).

Forsyth and Walker (2008) emphasise the role of "narratives" in setting the environmental policy agenda in diverse areas including deforestation, water and biodiversity. Narratives are storylines about causality and culpability in environmental degradation, based on research that is circumscribed by what the authors refer to as "problem closure" (p 22), so that policy reflects a combination of selective research outputs and normative understandings on the relationship between people and environment.

Thinkers from the policy-making as process school generally recognise that people with power tend to get their objectives incorporated in policies. They propose ways to create opportunities for more democratic approaches which recognise the interests and views of people with limited power and non-experts. Lindblom and Waterhouse describe a democratic political process for policy-making and show how this can work.

It is one thing to say that the policy process is not as rational as it is sometimes assumed to be, but it is another to say, as Lindblom does (1959; Lindblom and Waterhouse 1993) that the rational approach is not the best approach anyhow. One likely response from positivist policy researchers and planners is that the process is not perfect, but that it can be improved and objectivity is a desired goal. In this perspective, improved communication by researchers and better educated/informed policy makers would improve the process.

However, this argument ignores the reality that the objectives of NREM are generally contested. At a gross level the differences may be simply a difference of opinion about whether natural resources (such as forests) should be conserved for global biodiversity values or exploited for economic development. In practice, there are often many subtle variations on the objectives of various stakeholders, making the situation even more complicated. Where objectives are strongly contested,

policies designed to meet the views of one set of stakeholders may be difficult to implement.

There is often uncertainty or lack of agreement about what works (including what policy tools and instruments work) as well as about what policy outcome is desirable. For example the advantages and disadvantages of community-based approaches to natural resource management continue to be debated hotly, with proponents of one or other view citing different examples to prove their case, and even disagreeing about the interpretation of individual cases.

Thus, in summary, there are a number of different types of reasons why the relevance of research findings to policy may be disputed:

- They may be regarded as simply wrong findings, due to poor or incomplete research. (This objection could, in principle, be addressed by better research.)
- They may be regarded as being at least partly irrelevant because they do not take account of local circumstances or changing circumstances.[9] This would imply the need for more adaptable and flexible policies. It certainly suggests that there is some need for less standardised policies.
- Perhaps the most important reason why research findings may be disputed is that, however accurate the findings are, the relevance of the findings to policy depends on values and objectives. It might be possible to identify the impacts of a policy on the environment or particular groups of people, but it is ultimately a matter of norms and values (often disputed) that must decide policy. For example, research on forest clearing may strongly suggest that the clearing will reduce biodiversity, but it will ultimately be a matter of dispute as to whether this is a good or bad thing.

What this last point means is that policy is ultimately about choices between preferences. These choices can be informed by research, but the research cannot determine the choices. This point is the rationale for advocates of the view that policy making is ultimately about contested ideas and values. If that is how policy is made, then it is probably best to develop strategies that allow for broad and open discussion of alternatives – in other words a democratic process, or a process involving multiple stakeholders.

Of course such democratic notions of policy making are not the only alternative. Debate and discussion are affected by power. We will return to this point.

Although it is fairly clear that the way policy is actually made in practice more often follows the "muddling through" approach than the highly rational and linear "positivist" process, advocates of "postpositivist" approaches do not necessary deny the value of empirical research.

[9] For Weber (1998), in referring to "the rigidity of one-size-fits-all policy", a fundamental question for policy research is "[h]ow do we construct institutions and policies capable of managing the intricate complexities of economy, culture, and the environment effectively, while still maintaining an adequate level of responsiveness to political principals (sic) at the top of the political hierarchy and to the citizenry who are the ultimate recipients of public policy?" (p194)

For example, Fischer (1998, p 129) contributes to the growing critique of policy science's dominant neopositive methodologies. He argues that "neopositive policy science" has not contributed "effective solutions to social problems" and that social sciences generally have been poor at prediction, but have stimulated policy debate, whereas the policy sciences have attempted to "*settle* rather than *stimulate* policy debates" (emphasis in original).

While Fischer's detailed critique of positivism is beyond the scope of this literature review, his conclusion is relevant. He argues for a "discursive approach" in which empirical evidence is included, but "situated in a larger set of normative concerns that give its findings meaning" (p 139). Fischer refers to Majone's (1989) view that "a policy argument... typically is a complex blend of factual statements, interpretations, opinion, and evaluation" (p 63, cited in Fischer 1998, p 140).[10]

The argument presented by both Fischer and Majone is that empirical data does and should *inform* policy debate, but they clearly see that it is only one element.

Vedeld et al (2007) represents an example of research based on the belief in the value of empirical data. Based on an extensive international study of dependence of people in developing countries on "forest environmental income", the paper argues that the fact that such data are missing in poverty assessments may lead to flawed policy. The same issue informed a major research project by PROFOR (the World Bank Programme on Forests) aiming to develop a toolkit to assist in gathering data on forests and poverty, along with a strategy for influencing economic planners to include forest related data in economic planning, especially Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). The PROFOR project developed a three part toolkit (PROFOR 2007) to assist in the process. One part of the toolkit provided advice about building relationships with decision-makers and relevant audiences at the national level. The second part consists of a series of tools for appraisal of forest-poverty linkages at the community level. The third Part documents case studies.

The PROFOR Toolkit is based explicitly on the premise that changing policy requires both good (credible) data as well as engagement in a policy dialogue.

2.3 Power in the Policy Debate

It is clear that, whatever the intentions of authors such as Lindblom and Waterhouse (1993), it is not simple to democratise the policy process as power is unevenly distributed between the various policy stakeholders.

Dharmadhikary (2008), in a highly polemical book, argues that the World Bank, one of the biggest knowledge producers carrying out development research, produces knowledge to justify its policies. Focusing on the World Bank's influence on the water sector in India, he argues that the "common people" are not considered in terms of the impacts of water privatisation policies and that their knowledge is ignored.[11] He notes that inconvenient facts that go against the Bank's policy agenda (privatisation) are simply ignored in its research. The picture that emerges

[10] The title of Majone's book more or less sums up his position: *Evidence, argument, & persuasion in the policy process.*

[11] Notably the fisheries project and the local institutions and flooding project discussed in this report attempted to take into account local knowledge.

here is that the Bank is able to present a powerful orthodoxy, which the decision-makers simply cannot ignore – there's no workable alternative. It seems that what is being argued is that the economic power of the Bank, combined with its status makes its research seem unassailable.

Molle (2008) refers to "informal groups of actors that take up and further propagate a concept" (p 14). He sees them as being something like "epistemic communities", noting Haas' (1992) definition of an epistemic community as "a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area".

Referring to the World Bank's unparalleled "publication power", Molle observes (p 14) that:

> The literature emanating from the Bank is highly self-referential and tends to reproduce the conclusions of (early) key papers which are repeatedly cited, disseminated, and thus passed on to outside academic circles. A recent review of Bank research during the 1998-2005 period issued 'criticisms of the way that this research was used to proselytize on behalf of Bank policy, often without taking a balanced view of the evidence, and without expressing appropriate scepticism. Internal research that was favourable to Bank positions was given great prominence, and unfavourable research ignored' (Banerjee et al 2006).

Hirsch (2001) discusses the history of the Asian Development Bank's efforts to promote regionalised and national processes and perspectives in opposition to the civil society which asserts claims based on local and community interests. Globalisation is a discourse supporting autocratic decision-making on the grounds that "there is no alternative". Looking at case studies of dams in Laos and Thailand, Hirsch shows how the impacts of policies work themselves out at different scales. Again, the implication is that the ADB's discourse works by presenting an orthodoxy that is difficult to question, and which is backed by the power of donor money.

Although it is possible to see policy debates being dominated by particular stakeholders, there are some cases which suggest that properly organised fora may lead to some sort of compromise. On the basis of experience at two meetings held in Ubon Ratchathani in Thailand, Manorom (2008) suggests that consensus building around such issues as the Pak Mun dam might be more likely than she had previously thought. These meetings were conducted in a positive atmosphere of exchange of ideas and experiences. The author highlights the importance of a good chairperson in creating the right atmosphere for positive exchange. She expresses the hope that "with the hard push by local people, NGOs, provincial authorities and academics, the future development of Pak Mun Dam may be about to... enter a new phase that is characterized by reconciliation, consensus and debate that are based on sound data that are accepted by all." (P 5)

She also says that "[a]ny data can be controversial if it has not been collected in an open and participatory manner that is supported by key stakeholders. If the results of a study are to be accepted and used to support decision making it is important to first build consensus on key aspects of the study..." (p 4). Some of the key aspects regarding consensus about research are identified. These include:

- overall objectives and uses of the data (why is it being collected?);
- joint formulation of indicators and key questions;
- areas to be covered;
- "[a]greement on who will participate in data collection";
- "[a]greement on who will be involved in monitoring long-term impacts and who will monitor compensation payments".

An issue which arises from Manorom's work, as well as from several other papers, is the question of the credibility of researchers. Manorom's work is concerned with processes for designing research which has credibility with diverse researchers.

The question of credibility is also evident in the case of the community-based research process in Thailand know as Thai Baan (Baker 2004). The Thai Baan research was undertaken by fishing communities to support their claims that their fishing resources were being damaged by the controversial Pak Mun Dam. Although not mentioned specifically by Baker, an important issue arising from the research is the idea that non-professional researchers have problems claiming credibility. How do "policy-makers" assess the competing claims of one group of researchers against another, particularly in assessing the claims of "local knowledge" against "scientific research"? Where does credibility come from in research? Credibility is, of course, both a source of power and the result of power.

Lebel (2008) discusses three crucial challenges in relation to the governance of knowledge: (1) agendas ("Who defines the research problems?") (2) authority ("When is research-based knowledge acted upon?" and (3) accountability ("How are the impacts of research assessed?").

2.4 Approaches and Strategies for Policy Engagment

So far this review has focused on the two main theories about how policy is made and how it should be made. It has also looked at some arguments as to why a policy dialogue approach is more useful than a positivist approach. If research has the role of informing or stimulating policy debate, then it is important to think of approaches and strategies that researchers can adopt that will make them more effective in stimulating exchange of policy ideas and debate.[12]

[12] Although we have not addressed it in detail here, it is important to note that attributing causality is a difficult issue in understanding the linkages between research and policy, and in assessing the impact of research on policy change. It is always difficult to attribute causality to social changes of any kind. Indeed, as Fisher et al (2007) point out, causality is a problematic philosophical issue for any scientific research. In fact the best procedure is to tell a "compelling story" showing how the impact of research is the best explanation for policy change. Fisher et al (2007) refer to the need to demonstrate "plausible causal connections" between activities (in this case research) and outcomes (policy change).

Communication

Communication is an important aspect in "influencing" policy. Mayers and Bass (1999) discuss the need to identify and communicate with key actors:[13]

> One of the key elements of a policy process that "stays alive" is its ability to link directly to experiments with new ways of making things work on the ground. Local projects allowing stakeholders enough slack to investigate alliances and roles can be vital learning grounds – but they only really become useful on a significant scale if they seize the attention of at least some of the current power-brokers or "policy-holders".

This is an important aspect involved in improving the effectiveness of researchers in their approaches to policy.

A paper on policy briefs by Jones and Walsh (2008) identifies some of the factors that inhibit communications between scientists and "policy-makers". These include factors such as the scientists fear of the "excessive dilution of scientific knowledge" (p 1) and the time constraints and information overload which make policy-makers likely to make quick decisions "by selecting the 'evidence' most appropriate to their political leanings". The concern of scientists about oversimplifying their research flies in the face of the general advice to provide policy suggestions in simple clear language and to avoid too much detail.

Related to the problem of over simplification is the problem of over generalisation. One of the great problems with many policies is that they are over generalised. As Kaimowitz (2002: 125) points out with reference to forest policy:

> Policy-makers and the general public... thrive on over-simplification and broad generalisations. Most policies are blunt instruments, and they get blunter as they go from initial intent to implementation.

Policy Briefs

One approach to communicating research for policy is the use of policy briefs. These have become very common, yet relatively little has been done to assess their effectiveness.

Jones and Walsh (2008) have reviewed the use of policy briefs as communication tools between researchers and "policy makers". They found that policy briefs were considered important by policy-makers. They also observed that "there may be a need for separate tailored versions of policy briefs for different policy actors" (p 6). In other words, policy briefs need to be targeted at specific audiences.

The paper identifies "key ingredients of effective policy briefs" (Table 1 in their paper). These include evidence (persuasive argument and the authority of the researcher), policy context (the extent to which the brief addresses the context of the specific audience and the extent to which recommendations are "actionable")

[13] Although it is common to talk about "policy-makers", analysts increasingly avoid this term as it implies that specific individuals are somehow the sole decision-makers about policy. This runs counter to the idea of
policy-making as a messy process. We agree with this point, although, for convenience, we continue to use the term more or less interchangeably with "policy actors" in this report.

and engagement (presentation of evidence informed opinions, clear language and engaging appearance). These "ingredients" are discussed in detail. The table is reproduced here because it provides very useful suggestions about how to prepare a policy brief.

One extremely important finding of Jones and Walsh's study of the effectiveness of policy briefs was "that greater opportunities for interaction, discussion and deliberation between researchers and policy-makers would significantly improve the uptake of research findings" (p 3). In other words, there is an unmet need. All this demonstrates that occasional briefings are not enough and that looking for opportunities for social interaction, formal and informal discussion and the like are an important part of the process.[14] This is a very important point, one which underlines the importance of multiple communication strategies (and, more broadly, multiple policy engagement strategies).

Evidence	**Persuasive argument**	• Clear purpose • Cohesive argument • Quality of evidence • Transparency of evidence underpinning policy recommendations (e.g. a single study, a synthesis of available evidence, etc.)
	Authority	• Messenger (individual or organisation) has credibility in eyes of policy-maker
Policy context	**Audience context specificity**	• Addresses specific context › national and sub-national • Addresses needs of target audience › social vs economic policy
	Actionable recommendations	• Information linked to specific policy processes • Clear and feasible recommendations on policy steps to be taken
Engagement	**Presentation of evidence-informed opinions**	• Presentation of author's own views about policy implications of research findings • But clear identification of argument components that are opinion-based
	Clear language/writing style	• Easily understood by educated, non-specialist
	Appearance/design	• Visually engaging • Presentation of information through charts, graphs, photos

Table 1: Key ingredients of effective policy briefs (from Jones and Walsh 2008).

Some of the key points which emerge from the literature on the communication of research to policy audiences are:

- The need to have credible messages both in terms of the quality of the argument and the credibility of the researchers.
- The need to address different audiences differently, both in terms of the amount of detail in the message and the specific messages relevant to the audience.
- The need to complement communications tools such as policy briefs with informal and structured discussion

Policy Dialogue

We have discussed the fact that different people and different groups of stakeholders may have quite different ideas about what policy needs to achieve. They also have different ways of framing policy questions. Although policy decisions are often unlikely to meet all different objectives, an important part of

[14] The Vietnam component of the local institutions and flooding project (discussed below) illustrates the importance of this type of ongoing interaction.

policy process is to at least consider the views of various stakeholders.[15] There are different ways of obtaining such views. One way is for researchers to assess the views of various groups as part of the research process, through interviews, questionnaires or other approaches. This approach tends to be expert-centred, in that the experts interpret the views of diverse stakeholders. (This was the approach taken by the fisheries project in Vietnam and Cambodia – see below.)

Another way is to hold formal dialogues involving various stakeholders on particular issues. This goes further than stakeholder interviews in that it aims to ensure that different actors at least hear (and hopefully discuss) the views of others. An example of this approach is the Mekong Region Waters Dialogue held in Vientiane in July 2006 and convened by IUCN, the Thailand Environment Institute (TEI), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and the Mekong Program on Water Environment and Resilience (M-POWER). (See IUCN et al 2007a and 2007b.) The Vientiane meeting was intended to be the first stage of a series of water dialogues to be held in the region.

The Mekong Region Waters Dialogue did not attempt to develop a consensus on policy. It was not about making policy decisions, but about "the articulation of different perspectives about water-related development in the Mekong Region *for consideration in decision-making*" (IUCN et al 2007a: 10, emphasis added). The main report sums up nicely the idea of "multi-stakeholder platforms":

> Multi-stakeholder platforms usually lack a mandate, and resources for concrete collaborative action are constrained by local power differences. In addition, they take a very long time to develop "ownership". Multi-stakeholder processes do not necessarily solve problems, but they do help disputing parties to understand at least partly other stakeholders' views and interests. Those involved have stressed repeatedly the crucial importance of the process itself as a communication and visioning process, especially in low-trust societies such as post-violence, post-dictatorship, post-apartheid societies.
>
> (IUCN et al 2007a: 9)

Learning Approaches and Policy Experiments

This tendency of policies to be overgeneralised contrasts with the importance of "complexity and location-specificity" in effective local action. An implication of this is that learning-based approaches to policy development may be appropriate. Such approaches can include policy experiments and participatory research.

One excellent example of a policy experiment comes from Laos. It is the case of a joint project by the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) and IUCN The World Conservation Union. The project was established to explore ways in which the collection and marketing of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) could contribute to rural income and, at the same time, provide incentives that promoted forest conservation. Gradually, based on project experience, the approach shifted from conservation by incentives to conservation by removing constraints such as the food insecurity driving over-explotiation of NTFPs, or poor

[15] We define stakeholders as those who can affect the outcome of a policy or those who are affected by a policy.

planning for NTFP management (Morris et al 2008). The project is discussed in more detail as a case study at the beginning of section 4 in this report.

The project was essentially a policy experiment. As it showed evidence of success, it was gradually copied by others, including NGOs and the approach became very credible within government, largely because government staff were actively involved in the project and its learning activities. The policy experiment provided credibility for an approach to NREM. It also demonstrates the value of collaborative learning involving both "researchers" (the project staff) and government staff responsible for implementing policy. A follow up study of the project's policy influence, several years after its completion (Ingles et al 2006) examined the policy impacts of the project. Interestingly, while it demonstrated that the project was widely recognised as having contributed to policy and practice at the national level, the study also showed that many aspects of the project had been copied (and modified to suit local conditions) by communities and other projects. While a number of factors are seen as being behind this "scaling sideways", informal contacts such as interactions between village leaders and the interest of passers-by, had significant impact.

This is at least a partial response to the common argument that project approaches to development are problematic because they tend not to persist after projects end and are rarely scaled up. It seems that, in order to make policy experiments work, it is useful if the project activities actively involve policy makers in the learning process.

Given that NREM issues are often perceived very differently by different actors and given that they impact differently on these actors, even the way that policy questions are framed can be problematic. There is scope for collaborative research and learning activities that attempt to bring different stakeholders together so that they can understand the perspectives and needs of other stakeholders and potentially attempt to formulate policy questions differently.

Emadi (2005) describes an action research project with nomadic pastoralists in Iran.[16] A key issue was that nomadism was perceived by many policy makers as being responsible for degradation of the natural resource base.[17] Other issues were the low productivity of nomadism and poverty and social welfare. Emadi argues that:

> The relatively limited achievements in nomadic development and natural resource management stem from the fact that policies are based on a reductionist viewpoint and analysis, which... neglects the diversity, complexity and recursiveness of the different dimensions of nomadic life. These policies are also developed on the basis of government perceptions of the nature of the issues confronting nomads rather than on the basis of shared concerns with the nomads themselves.

[16] The work was carried out in the early 1990s as part of his PhD research at the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury. One of the authors (Fisher) was a member of his PhD committee and some of the comments in this review arise from his personal observations.

[17] Largely this was a result of the fact that nomads were being forced to use smaller pastures for longer each year rather than spreading grazing pressure over space and time. The land use issue was more than just an issue about the appropriateness and sustainability of nomadic pastoralism. It also involved government policies on the control of ethnic minorities and the increasing presence of agriculture on marginal lands in competition with pastoralism.

The first phase of the research was an ethnographic phase which explored the social context of a nomadic group including the issues of concern to the nomads. For them, the natural resource issues could not be separated from their wider concerns about the continued viability of their lifestyle and economy. In the second phase of research Emadi worked with officials from government departments who in turn worked with nomads to understand their mutually differing perspectives and to explore ways to resolve the issues concerning the nomads. There was a shift in thinking from a focus on the nomads as a problem to a focus on the need to address the "problems being faced by the nomads". In other words the policy problem was reframed.

The third phase of the workshop involved facilitating change within the government agencies. A major part of this was a thirteen day seminar involving government staff in an action learning process facilitated by Emadi and two academics from the University of Western Sydney. This was supported by the head of the Forest and Range Organisation and attended by staff from central (national) down to local level. The workshop involved facilitation of learning involving critical reflection on experience, not a didactic exercise involving transfer of technical knowledge. The emphasis was on seeing problems from different points of view and the workshop introduced multiple perspectives and included interviews with different stakeholders.

This action research project contributed significantly to ongoing policy dialogue in Iran. The policy dialogue about nomadism has been significantly altered and remains so. At least there is now an alternative policy discourse about nomadism within government agencies. The lesson here is that collaborative learning approaches, by actively engaging different stakeholders, can assist in having policy issues and solutions better defined and more locally relevant.

Conclusions[18]

We have reviewed some of the literature relevant to an understanding of the linkages between research and policymaking. The emphasis has been on identifying the two main approaches to understanding the relationship between research and policy (the linear "positivist" approach and the dialogue of ideas approach).

We have also looked at some of the approaches and strategies that have been suggested to support improved involvement of researchers in the policy dialogue. Building on this literature review, we will expand on lessons for improved policy engagement later in the report, after discussing the SUMERNET projects.

[18] Although we will not review them in detail here, there are a number of other useful documents which contain specific suggestions on "research-policy" tools. ODI (nd) is a useful paper on preparing policy briefs (a brief on briefs). Ramalingam (2006) contains a variety of policy relevant tools.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH POLICY LINKAGES PROJECT

This section describes the research methodology for the Research policy linkages project. Later in the report (in section 4) there is a separate methodology section concerned with methodological suggestions for enhanced policy engagement for future SUMERNET projects or similar projects.

3.1 Researching on Research

The current research is conceived at three main levels of the policy-research interface. First is the set of projects undertaken concurrently with the research policy linkages project that are part of the SUMERNET program. SUMERNET was conceived as a means of bringing cutting edge research on sustainability into the policy arena. The research and policy linkages project was designed both to reflect on, and to support self-reflection by, each of these projects as they unfolded from project design, to implementation, to reporting phases. The concurrent aspect of these exercises allows for process observation, but also brings with it challenges associated with reporting on incomplete work.

The second level of analysis is based on secondary literature on the mutual influences of research and policy in the field of sustainable development in the Mekong and further afield. The literature review addresses such influences, showing both the two-way and non-linear aspect of the relationship.

A third, and intermediate, level of analysis is the set of research-policy interactions with which the three co-authors have been associated in the Mekong Region and further afield. These are part of a complex set of initiatives, networks and programs that seek to contribute to policy debates on development, environment and natural resource management in the Mekong Region. All three authors are researchers with a strong policy orientation and who are involved in engaged, collaborative, applied research on development, natural resource management and environmental policy and practice. Bob Fisher has worked with IUCN The International Union for Conservation of Nature and the Regional Community Forestry Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC) on issues such as community forestry, forest decentralisation, poverty reduction and conservation and resource rights. Bach Tan Sinh has been involved in the **M**ekong **P**rogram **o**n **W**ater, **E**nvironment and **R**esilience (MPOWER) – a program of action research that aims to improve the quality of water governance in ways which support sustainable livelihoods in the Mekong Region and in the SUMERNET as Policy Engagement Coordinator. Apart from these two research networks, Sinh has been conducting a number of research projects on research policy and its links to development as senior research fellow at the National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies – a Governmental think tank in the fields of science, technology and innovation policy. Philip Hirsch has been involved with IDRC-supported research on community-based natural resource management in catchment management, decentralised forest land management and fisheries management with relevant government agencies and National University of Laos in Lao PDR; with water governance in Cambodia together with the Cambodia Development Resource Institute and the Royal University of Phnom Penh; and on transboundary basin management in the Mekong River Basin context with DANIDA.

3.2 Project Methodology

The project methodology was based on a case study approach, using semi-structured and informal interviews to obtain perspectives on research/policy interactions and strategies for policy engagement from researchers. A number of policy actors were also interviewed to obtain their perspectives as users of research for policy purposes.

Literature review

A literature review was undertaken to examine literature on theories of the policy process and to identify experiences on useful tools of policy engagement. Individual case study projects also undertook literature reviews. However these were project specific. Where they dealt with policy it was in terms of documenting policy rather than analysing policy processes. For this reason they are not discussed in the literature review in this report.

The Case Studies

The use of a case study approach was based on the view that research/policy linkages could be best understood through examining the interactions between researchers and policy actors in context. In order to understand the variety of ways that policy works in a variety of different national contexts, the case study projects covered a range of countries.

Interviews

Interviews were carried out with both researchers and "policy actors" in order to understand their views as to how research contributes to policy, how it could contribute better to policy and how policy affects research agenda. In this context the term "policy actors" includes advisors to decision-makers, not only political leaders and senior agency officials.

Thus, the interviewees included:

- Researchers from the case study project, interviewed to obtain their understanding of the policy aspects of their projects and their strategies for policy engagement;
- A small number of policy actors, interviewed to obtain their perspectives on the policy implications of the particular project and their views on the type of research most likely to be useful to them.

There were two rounds of project visits with interviews. The first was in June 2008. In this round the main objective was to obtain a clear picture of what each project was about and understanding of the emerging policy message and policy engagement strategy. The second round of visits (November 2008) occurred as the projects were being finalised. The focus was on the final policy messages and assessing what policy engagement had occurred. A small number of interviews with "policy actors" occurred in this round.

The initial interviews with project staff used Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI). This method was chosen because qualitative interviews enable the perspectives and

assumptions of interviewees to be drawn out in conversation in ways that structured surveys cannot achieve (as they tend to presuppose the types of answers that interviewees will give and thus narrow the type of information available.

In practice, during the interviews, while covering the key questions, the process was very informal. Interviews were generally group interviews, involving more than one researcher from each project.

Particular focus was placed in the interviews with researchers on understanding (and getting them to be explicit about) their research messages. Clarity of message and audience was stressed and discussion focused on the "who", "what" and "how" of policy messages: who is the audience, what is the message and how will it be presented.

Before the first round of project visits, three questions were sent to each project for consideration in preparation for the interviews.

1. What do you understand by way of the policy influence strategy of your project?
2. Who do you aim to influence? Who are in your mind the policy makers in your project?
3. How do you want to influence the policy with your research project? What is your strategy to engage with policy makers in your research project?

The second round of interviews involved interviews with researchers and group interviews with policy actors, although such interviews were only possible in the case of the flood project. In that case two group interviews were undertaken, one for each of the sub-projects (in Vietnam and Cambodia). These group interviews included both researchers and policy actors and were intended to draw out information through dialogue involving both.

Although it was originally intended to hold such dialogues/interviews in relation to all case study projects, in practice this was not possible due to time constraints. It was also intended that these dialogues would consolidate or initiate (depending on past interactions) longer time engagement between the two types of actors.

Action Research

It was originally intended that the research policy linkages project would have an action research component, with the aim that the project would both provide an understanding of policy processes and assist projects to improve their policy engagement at the same time. In principle, the research policy linkages project required a nominated researcher from each selected project to assist with this integration. Unfortunately, due to severe time constraints affecting all the case study projects, this did not occur. The research policy linkages project thus became more extractive than originally intended. However, there was a process of reflection associated with the interactions with the project which will ideally lead to improved policy engagement in the future. This report can be seen as a reflection on previous experiences intended to inform planning for future SUMERNET project activities.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 The NAFRI-IUCN NTFP Project in Lao PDR. A Case Study with a Longer Time Frame

We have mentioned that the SUMERNET projects operated in very short time frame. This has made it virtually impossible for them to be engaged in substantive policy engagement and certainly has made it impossible to achieve policy impacts in the project time frame. For this reason we wish to present an analysis of a sustainable resource management project which was undertaken some time ago, which operated for several years and for which an assessment of policy engagement was undertaken several years after the project ended.

The NAFRI-IUCN NTFP project operated in the Lao PDR between 1995 and 2001. It was originally conceived as an effort to contribute to conservation by providing incentives for sustainable management in the form of increased income from NTFP collection and marketing. Over time, the project shifted its focus towards "removing constraints" to conservation and income generation. It is widely regarded as a successful model for income generation through NTFP management and has had a substantial impact on NTFP policy in Lao PDR. The project developed a package of interventions consisting of:

- Rice banks to address food insecurity that drives over-exploitation of NTFP rsources
- Forest land allocation and planning for sustainable NTFP use and management
- NTFP Marketing groups and a village development fund created by a local tax on sales
- NTFP processing and grading
- Domestication of NTFP species with high market demand

(Ingles et al 2006)

Several years after the project ended a follow-up study investigated the continued influence of the project in terms of "local replication of interventions [representing] a **scaling sideways** of the project's impacts" and influences "on development policy within the forest sector [representing] a **scaling up-ways** of the project's work" (Ingles et al 2006).

It was found that the interventions developed by the project had been fairly widely replicated across the country, by both projects and local community initiatives. Interestingly, the interventions seem to have been copied individually rather than as a package. The following factors were seen as contributing to the replication ("scaling sideways"):

- The movement and reemployment of project staff by other projects after the NTFP project ended.
- Training programs by ex-project staff.
- Project sponsored visits and study tours to pilot villages.

- Private visits by individuals to pilot villages.
- Information spread by various means including media and "gossip".

"Scaling up-ways" (influence on policy) resulted from a number of factors, including:

- "The involvement of Division and Departmental Directors in the NAFRI/IUCN Project activities facilitated the flow and exchange of Project outcomes during and after the life of the Project. This created a lasting impact on national policy as they were the key people involved in drafting subsequent sector policy and strategy papers." (Ingles et al 2006)
- Involvement of researchers from the National University of Laos as project consultants had contributed to awareness of the project's approach.
- A large number of publications were widely circulated and read. Significantly these were regarded as "convincing" by the readers.

We would like to stress that there are two very important lessons from the project in terms of policy engagement:

1. Although the term is not used by Ingles et al, a major factor behind the project's policy influence was the cultivation of "champions" in the policy arena, either by involving key policy actors in project activities and planning, or by continual interaction in various informal and formal fora. These "champions" were involved in the project's learning process.

2. Impact on policy was the result of a package of different activities including: continual interaction with policy actors informally and formally, dissemination of credible research publications and involvement of government staff in the project's learning approach.

4.2 The Case Study Projects

In this section, we will present a brief description of each of the SUMERNET case study projects, summarising its policy relevance and its policy engagement strategy.

The timing of the SUMERNET research rounds has imposed major constraints in presenting detailed comments on the content (the "what") of policy messages. None of the projects had been finalised at the time of the second round of visits and the research policy linkages project completion deadline was the same as for the other projects. Consequently our comments are mostly based on discussion with researchers before final reports were completed (and, in some cases, before research itself was finalised). We have revised the comments to some extent on the basis of draft final reports, but these generally do not deal with policy engagement strategies.[19]

[19] Our judgements and interpretations of aspects of the projects and their policy engagement to some extent draw on internal project progress reports and other documents. Where these documents are either in draft form, or internal documents, we do not generally cite them specifically here.

Floods and Local Institutions[20]

Floods bring benefits to the people in the Mekong region as they contributes to soil fertility, higher crop production, aquaculture productivity and abundant aquatic resources, but they also cause damage to vulnerable groups, especially poor rural farmers. Research results from Danida and Oxfam UK show that poverty is an important driver of vulnerability during peak flood periods. The methods of implementation of flood reduction efforts vary from place to place due to different forms of local governance and the capacity of local communities.

In the case of Vietnam, the government has many activities in the promotion of grassroot democracy that stipulate the rights of people to be informed and involved in decision-making and activities of flood control. These bring positive effects but have not yet been evaluated and brought into the mainstream. Families living in the most flood affected communes, with limited or no resources, can face real risks even during "normal" flood times.

The Floods and Local Institutions Project is hosted by Can Tho University and has components in Vietnam and Cambodia. The study aims to ensure that the response is locally based in terms of organization and management, and that policies, other services and relief delivery are more effective and responsive to the needs of communities in flood zones

The goal of the project was to evaluate and enhance the capacity of grass root communities in dealing with the flood damage reduction processes. The purpose of the project was to evaluate and enhance the current institutional framework, and policies for planning and responding to floods that contribute to the reduction of flood damage and improvments in people's livelihoods within flood zones.

The role of local community institutions in responding to flood risk and events is a policy relevant issue which is being recognised gradually by stakeholders and addressed in the overall governance of flood risk management in Vietnam and Cambodia. It is especially relevant in light of administrative reforms to decentralise policy and decision-making to the lower level.

The project aimed to engage local authorities and communities in discussing the strategic plans that guide problem solving in their locations.

Although both components of the floods and institutions project (Vietnam and Lao PDR) shared goals and objectives, they each had somewhat different policy engagement strategies.

The Vietnam component was particularly interesting in terms of the way the research agenda was framed and developed. The research focus seems to have originated in a dialogue between the provincial authorities in An Giang, particularly in the Department of Water Resources (in charge of flood and storm control) and researchers from Can Tho University. These actors seem to have recognised the importance of local institutions in managing floods at about the same time and it is not easy to say who first identified the problem. The concern was certainly shared and motivated the development of the SUMERNET research proposal. The research was very much a collaborative process involving local authorities outside

[20] Some of the text in this section consists from verbatim extracts from internal project documents.

the formal research team. Further, the close collaboration between the team and local authorities has led to research results influencing local policy implementation even in the short time frame of the project.

There are some specifics of Vietnamese context that may have influenced this close cooperation and mutual responsiveness between research agendas and agency practice.

In Vietnam, there is considerable scope for policy experiment and policy learning. It is clear that much of the policy reform in the forestry sector, for example, has been driven by experiences at the Provincial level. While policy is promulgated at the National level, it is implemented at the Provincial level and there is considerable flexibility and scope for adaptation. The case of the Floods and Local Institutions Project exemplifies the role of adaptation in policy making at the local level.

Another feature of research and policy linkages in Vietnam is that Universities have a prominent role in policy research and in applied research generally. The government looks to universities for direct contribution to solve national issues. In the Mekong Delta especially, Universities have close relations with Provincial and District government departments (especially agriculture) and this strengthens opportunities for adaptive and collaborative research. Partly these connections relate to university alumni networks, as many government staff are former students of the regional universities. In the case of the Vietnam component of the floods and institutions project, this collaboration meant that the project had “built-in” project champions.

Thus two major characteristics of policy-relevant research in Vietnam are the potential for adaptive research and policy development at the Provincial level and the potential for collaborative research based on long term relationships between researchers and officials.

In both countries, the project actively sought the views of various stakeholders (including the communities) through a PRA process.

The Vietnam component of the floods and institutions project involved a high degree of collaboration between local authorities and researchers as well as what was clearly a learning process approach. Although no evaluation has been done, it seems likely that the policy impacts will be significant at least at the provincial level.

The Cambodian partners for the floods and local institutions project are the Cambodian National Mekong Committee CNMC), the Department of Agricultural Extension (in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries) and the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MOWRAM). For the case study project the Department of Agricultural Extension carried out the field study seeing how agriculture is related to floods and MOWRAM was carrying out a review of national flood mitigation strategies. Thus in this case, the research was very much embedded within the agencies involved in water and agriculture policy and, in fact, senior officers within the agencies were managing the research.

The CNMC acts as link between the Mekong River Commission and the various line ministries in Cambodia. The MRC, with its Flood Management and Mitigation Programme, is an important institutional actor in the policy context for the floods and institutions project.

The direct linkages between the researchers from the Department of Agricultural Extension and MOWRAM with the policy agencies suggests a rather linear connection between research and policy. However, the policy environment in Cambodia is perhaps not so linear as the structure of the case study might suggest. In Cambodia, the influence of foreign donor organisations is heavy in the rhetorical orientation and commitment to sustainability of several ministries and in a number of key fields including forestry, fisheries, water resources management and agriculture. The actual political milieu is much more complex, making it quite difficult to state firmly at what level effective policy is made, implemented or undermined. Powerful state-linked actors have vested interests in the natural resources sector.[21]

In both components of the floods and institutions project there was an apparently high degree of involvement of institutional actors (assumed to be policy decision-makers). In Vietnam this was especially true at the provincial level and in Cambodia at the national level. In both countries the project sought the views of communities through a PRA process, and both sub-projects showed an awareness of these stakeholders. Nevertheless it would appear that the framing of the research questions and policy issues occurred very much at an institutional level and that the research was driven by research and policy "experts".

The planned policy fora were conceived mainly as consultations between the researchers and institutional actors. This is consistent with the findings of a study on policy dialogue on research and technology in Vietnam (Sinh, 1999) which noted that policy dialogues focus on invited experts and institutions and exclude NGOs and non-expert individuals. There appears to be an opportunity for an expanded policy dialogue involving institutional actors as well as NGOs and communities/individuals, although this would need to be carefully facilitated as a forum for discussion and sharing ideas.

[21] The poverty of Cambodia and its relatively abundant natural resources combine to give a heavy emphasis to development and poverty-alleviation. In the water resources sector, for example, a priority is irrigation development by construction of new schemes and rehabilitation of old ones. University researchers play a relatively minor role in informing policy, and universities remain mainly teaching institutions. A large amount of the knowledge generation behind projects and programs is conducted by consultants. The main research-oriented development policy institute in Cambodia is the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), which has a natural resources and environment program, and there is also a governance program that has a component on water resources management. CDRI makes a special effort to bring policy makers on board through program structures that include senior ministry representation on the consultative committees of larger initiatives. This includes the Technical Working Group on Agriculture and Water, an inter-ministerial body established with donor assistance – and some would say donor prodding – to improve coordination in the agriculture sector.

Fisheries[22]

The fisheries project had components in Vietnam and Cambodia. It was hosted by Can Tho University. In this report we limit most of the discussion to the Vietnam component as we were unable to meet with researchers from the Cambodian component.

Since 2000 the fisheries sector in Cambodia and Vietnam has undergone substantial restructuring and contributed to the expansion of economic growth and rural development. However, the further development of fisheries production throughout the Delta still faces a number of constraints limiting the efficiency of fishers, fish farmers, processors and traders alike.

The economic value and livelihood importance of fisheries in both countries are closely linked, in terms of trade, shared water resources and fish stocks. The further development and management of the fisheries sector is therefore reliant on a shared understanding of the use of fisheries resources and both domestic and regional value chains.

Establishing a common understanding of the influence of regional value chains in Cambodia and Vietnam is a fundamental step to promoting sustainable livelihoods and sustainable fisheries resources use and management in the Mekong Delta. The project aimed to provide an opportunity for further collaboration between two countries on a trans-boundary resource management and development issue of regional significance.

The project aimed to understand and analyse the function and effectiveness of domestic and regional fisheries product value-chains and to identify key policy interventions at local, national and regional scales to further improve small-scale rural livelihoods, the competitive advantages of fisheries products and the management and development of the aquatic resource-base.

The views of fishers, fish farmers and other stakeholders along the “market chain” were sought through interviews/questionnaires dealing with topics including knowledge about and perceptions of policy and regulations.

Although an explicit objective to identify key policy interventions at various levels had been designed in the project, the actual interaction between the research team and policy actors in the field of fisheries was rather limited especially at the national level. The research team has been to some extent able to organise workshops to share their initial research findings and contribute to better understanding of concerned stakeholders regarding their benefits in the value-chains. However, the workshops held before the end of the project were not specifically policy fora. While the draft project final report (Loc et al 2008) discussed perceptions of policy issues (including awareness of existing policy) by stakeholders and calls for a number of poliy changes. There are as yet no detailed policy proposals and the draft report does not deal with a policy engagement strategy post-project or in a possible Phase 2.

[22] Some of the text in this section consists from verbatim extracts from project documents.

There would appear to be a strong justification for a policy dialogue at the national level, or at a Transboundary level (Cambodia and Vietnam) to be convened in the future.

The Rubber Project

In recent years there has been a rapid increase in commercial rubber concessions in Laos. This has largely been in the form of contract tree farming in which contractors from China and Vietnam contract Lao farmers to grow trees for them on their land. While this economic activity has been seductive in terms of potential contribution to national income, there have been increasing expressions of concern about the negative environmental effects of rubber monoculture, the encroachment of rubber plantations into protected areas and the expropriation of farmers' land rights through adverse contractual arrangements. Serious questions have been raised as to whether the benefits of the expansion of rubber outweigh the social, economic and environmental costs. The Government of Lao PDR has imposed a moratorium on all large plantation and mining concessions and concerns about the socio-economic impacts have prompted the Luang Namtha Government to suspend rubber development.

The three sub-components of the rubber project aim to research various aspects of rubber concessions.

The sub-component "Rubber: Costs or Benefits to the Lao PDR?" is implemented by the Water and Environmental Research Institute (WERI) within the Water Resources and Environment Administration of the Prime minister's Office. The aim of this project is to examine the costs and benefits of rubber, based on field studies from sites in northern and southern Lao in order to make clear what the benefits of rubber really are. While the sub-project looks at social, economic and environmental impacts, a major concern is the extent to which current rubber policy has negative impacts on poorer farmers. The project will present cost benefit analysis of rubber both in comparison with other cash crops and ecotourism.

WERI is part of the Prime Minister's Office and reports directly to the National Environment Committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. It has a specific mandate for policy research in the environment field and carries out research in response to government requests. According to the Director of WERI, the Prime Minister himself takes a strong interest in environmental and scientific matters and seeks quality science based advice on policy issues. Given that it is a policy research instrument of the government the "who" questions of policy engagement are fairly straightforward. The answer to the "how" question is that WERI aims to present Cost Benefit Analysis to government as a way to assess alternative policy options.

The sub-component "Meeting regional and global demands: Options for meeting poverty reduction in Laos" is implemented by the Agriculture and Forestry Policy Research Center (PRC), which is part of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute and has a specific policy research role within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. It thus advises the government on agriculture and forestry through the Minister. Like WERI, it has a mandated role in providing research supported advice on policy, but, unlike WERI, it has a specifically sectoral role.

The purpose of the PRC project is "To identify policy support for those in rubber production in Laos to optimize the gains". It differs from the WERI project in that it seems to presuppose that rubber production must continue, and aims to look at policy options or improve the performance, whereas the WERI project looks at rubber in comparison with other policy options. The PRC operates in the agriculture and forests sector. It is especially concerned with obtaining income for the nation through agriculture and forestry. As rubber is considered an important source of national income, then the policy issue becomes how to improve rubber production without challenging the underlying need for rubber. On the other hand WERI, which has a much broader mandate, cross-sectoral as well as environment focused, seems to have greater scope to examine alternative options and policies.

The PRC policy audience ("who") is the government through the Director-General of NAFRI and the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. The "how", as expressed by the Director of the PRC, is to prepare a comprehensive report for the government on the impacts of rubber production on farmers' income, livelihoods and environment, long with recommendations to various stakeholders. PRC recognises that large reports need to be reduced into smaller documents for a government audience. Overall the policy engagement strategy seems to be essentially based on presenting sound research results in a form acceptable for the audience.

The research-policy linkages described by both WERI and PRC researchers imply a rather linear relationship between research and policy-making, but both lines ultimately lead to the same point (cabinet) and the actual decision-making process at that point is rather opaque. Two conflicting sets of policy recommendations may reach the highest government decision-makers by different paths. This is one way that the apparent direct connections between policy and research in Laos can lead to varied perspectives reaching "policy makers". What is not really clear is how the final decisions are made

The third sub-component is "Incentives based approaches for sustainability in the Mekong, which is implemented by the IUCN Lao Country Office.[23] The purpose of this project is to assess the "current trend of trade and investment in rubber, and raise awareness of linkages between governance and natural resources outcomes and thus the need to reconcile the trade/investment and environmental agendas". This project includes both Lao based and regional aspects. The regional aspects include an examination of various aspects of the rubber trade and trends in corporate social responsibility, focusing on Vietnam and China.

The proposed activities in Laos focused on rubber investments and Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility (CSER). Proposed local partners for these

[23] IUCN is an exception to the picture of specialist government appointed policy research institutes in Laos. Unlike WERI and the PRC, IUCN Lao PDR is not a government agency. It is a country office for an international conservation organisation. However, IUCN differs from most other conservation NGOs. It is a member organisation – a union – with a membership consisting of government members and NGO members. (All members are organisations or states. There are no individual members.) IUCN takes on projects (including research projects) consistent with policies approved by four-yearly assemblies of global membership. The Government of Laos is a state member of IUCN. In fact it is the only Lao member organisation. Over recent years IUCN has developed very good relationships with the Lao government and seems to have an unusual level of policy influence. IUCN specifically sees itself as having a role in fostering dialogue between actors in environment/NRM policy issues.

two elements were the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LNCCI) and the Lao National Economic Research Institute (NERI) respectively. These partners were chosen in order to maximise the policy influences of the project outcomes. While the international work in Vietnam and China was reported to be proceeding, the Lao elements were delayed and required modification for a number of reasons including the sensitivity of the research project in Lao PDR, the lack of familiarity of the partners with a project outside their usual mandate and capacity constraints. NERI has since agreed to join the project and began collecting information in Luang Namtha and Champassak provinces. According to IUCN, although the LNCCI expressed interest for several months it ultimately decided not to be involved in a planned CSER survey due to problems of mobilising resources in such a short timeframe.

It seems likely that the delays experienced in engaging LNCCI and NERI were a result of a feeling on their part that the research project should have been directly related to the key ministries involved, such as MAF (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) and MPI (Ministry of Primary Industry). A key issue for IUCN was how to enhance understanding in MPI of the important role that they played in improving investments in the agriculture sector. NERI and MPI were both considered to be primary actors, given the component's focus on trade and investment models and linkages.

While there are clear logical connections between the three sub-projects, there seems to be little discussion between them on policy implications (at least up till the time of our final visit in early November). Both WERI and PRC researchers acknowledge the importance of engaging various institutional actors in their policy deliberations[24], but it is not clear how much this has occurred.

The separate nature of the three components of the rubber project is certainly related to the fact that SUMERNET budget did not include funds for linking the projects or for any particular leadership role. However it seems likely that this suited the rather independent way the two government agencies tend to operate. This is not to say there was no cooperation. Apparently there were overlaps in some of the field sites and some discussions, but both agencies see the rubber project as a whole as something they initiated and there seems to be a level of competition. It also seems that the findings and policy recommendations will be presented separately to the specific institutional policy audiences.

A priority for following up the three Lao PDR rubber projects must be the need to broaden the discussion (dialogue) on rubber policy to include a broader range of actors in one major forum. Given the potential for confrontation a first step would probably be to get the three sub-projects and their partners together to discuss their findings and ways to "harmonise' them.

[24] The other actors would include the National Land Management Authority (concerned with the impacts of large scale concessions on small farmers and responsible for the Land Titling Program), the Agricultural Promotion Bank, the Ministry for Planning and Investment and the Department of Labour.)

4.3 Towards Enhanced Policy Engagement in Mekong Sustainability Research

The purpose of this section of the report is to identify and summarise some strategies and approaches for enhanced policy engagement for sustainability research in the Mekong Region. While these suggested strategies are initially aimed to inform projects in the next stage of SUMERNET, we believe they have broader applicability. Nevertheless the suggested strategies are general principles and the application of some (such as "policy dialogues") would need to be planned very carefully in some contexts.

- *Policy-oriented research projects need to build in strategies for policy engagement as early as possible, ideally at the project design stage.*
- *Closely related to the early development of a policy engagement strategy is the idea of involving some stakeholders (including "policy makers") in the research itself, either as active partners in research (as in the case of the floods project in Vietnam) or through regular interaction in the case of more senior people.*

There are several reasons why the early development of a policy engagement strategy is important. One key reason is that planning for policy engagement assists in identifying *strategically* useful research partners. The case of the Lao NTFP project emphasises the value of working closely with staff from relevant line agencies who can influence policy makers or may themselves be involved in policy development. In the Lao NTFP project some of these staff were involved in the project itself. The project also spent considerable time in dialogue with senior officials, ensuring that they were aware of the nature of the "policy experiment" and had ownership of the activities. This facilitated incorporation of project lessons into national policy.

The floods and institutions project in Vietnam has utilised this strategy effectively.

- *Carry out an analysis of the institutional context (institutional actors and their roles) and a stakeholder analysis before commencing research, or as early as possible. At the minimum, this would involve identifying stakeholders and considering their perspectives.*
- *Policy Dialogues*

Policy dialogues (of the type discussed in the literature review) may be useful, especially if preliminary stakeholder analysis suggests that policy objectives and/or policy framing are likely to be contentious. Generally a policy dialogue early in the process is likely to be most useful, especially as it may contribute to alternative framing of policy questions. Under some circumstances a series of dialogues at different stages in the research may be desirable.

Some questions may be raised about the potential for policy dialogues which go beyond recognised institutions and experts in countries with limited roles for civil society (such as Vietnam or Lao PDR). This is a significant issue. We suggest, however, that it can be possible, providing that the fora are not presented as being potentially confrontational. Having trusted convenors and facilitators can help and it is probably desirable to start at a local level rather than a national. It is essential to establish from the outcome what the scope of the policy dialogue will be. If there is

no intention of it leading to some sort of consensual or majority-led decision-making, it should be made clear from the beginning that it is about sharing ideas and developing understanding not about deciding policy.

While policy dialogues might be difficult in Vietnam and Lao PDR due to the limited space for civil society, vigorous dialogue already occurs in Thailand (see Box 1).

- *Action Research*

  Action research, or other types of learning approach (involving regular reflection on activities and their implications) can be very useful in two ways:

- In policy experiments to test and modify possible policy interventions;
- As a way of managing policy engagement itself. Through constantly re-evaluating policy engagement as a project evolves in response to changing circumstances and emerging research results, new startegies can be used, new messages developed and new partners identified.
- *Policy engagement strategies need to be multi-pronged*.

Limiting efforts at policy engagement to preparation of research reports or policy briefs at the end of research is not likely to be effective. Continuing engagement with “policy actors” (in various fora including formal meetings, informal interaction, field trips etc) is a useful part of a multi-pronged strategy.

Communication of research results needs to be targetted.

Research will normally need to have one or a few clear messages. However, these often need to be communicated in different ways to different audiences, sometimes a s research reports, other times as policy briefs, and sometimes through other media, or fora. A useful rule of thumb is to identify messages in terms of three questions:

- Who is the audience?
- What is the message?
- How will it be communicated?

BOX 1: A Note on the Policy Process in Thailand

Although we have not included a case study project from Thailand, it is important to point out some differences in the policy process in Thailand compared to the other countries in the region (especially Vietnam and Laos). Policy processes in Thailand are characterised by a multiplicity of actors, public debate in media*, the involvement of NGOs, the involvement of academics and quite strong advocacy movements that often openly criticise government policy. Unlike any of the other three countries, active criticism of and demonstration against, government policies is extremely common and vigorous debate and criticism in the press is a norm.

Debates over natural resource issues such as the long-running debate over the still-stalled community forestry bill and the impacts of dams have stimulated peoples' movements and demonstrations. The clash between competing knowledge claims (and the legitimacy of competing systems of knowledge) has been a major factor in "policy dialogue". The local fishers' Thai Baan research (referred to in the literature review), attempted to present competing knowledge claims against the "scientific" evidence presented by institutional supporters of the Pak Mun Dam. At a recent conference held in Bangkok,** a speaker claimed that the Mekong River Commission, in supporting dam construction, disputed the validity of non-expert knowledge. Campaigns in favour of the rights of people to live within Protected Areas often base arguments for the sustainable nature of local forest management practices on claims of "traditional wisdom".

Thailand represents a country where the positivist/linear notion of policy-making clearly does not work and where the idea of a dialogue of ideas, or a conflict between ideas, clearly describes the policy process.

*It is no accident that the SUMERNET migration project is attempting to build a policy constituency through a television documentary in Thailand.

** Mekong Public Forum. The International Conference on "Mekong Mainstream Dams: People's Voices Across Borders", 12-13 November 2008, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

4.4 How does policy frame research?

One of the issues that was of concern for this research was that of the "reverse linkage" from policy to research. Much of the literature about research policy linkages is about the ways in which research affects on policy. But there is, of course, a reverse relationship. Policy can impact on research, both in terms of the research topics and type of research undertaken and in terms of the way specific research questions are framed. These types of linkages were very evident in this project.

The most obvious way policy influences research is through funding. Research policies encourage certain types of research, simply by funding them and not others.

Initially there is a policy influence on all of the case study projects. They were funded as part of the SUMERNET research program. The policies and priorities of both SUMERNET generally and its research program are broadly set by the donor (SIDA) which provided funding for sustainability focused research in the Mekong region. Another aspect of the SUMERNET policy framework is the emphasis on collaborative work across countries. These priorities and policies influence both the

type of work that is undertaken and the way it is undertaken (through transnational partners).

In addition to this most obvious influence of policy on research there are more subtle ways in which policy operates to shape research.

- Institutional priorities can impose a sectoral perspective and priorities which affect the type of policy options that are considered.

This is very clear in the case of the WERI and PRC rubber projects.

- Cultural and political contexts may impact on the way policy is approached.

There may be differences in political culture which impact on the ways that policy questions are rasied and researched. We have already discussed the very competitive nature of the policy debate in Thailand. It is evident that there is an instinct to challenge policy and policy priorities in this context. The fact that there is a variety of potential researchers and a variety of sources of research funding implies that the framing of questions for policy research will be much more varied.

In Laos, on the other hand, the tendency is to frame questions in a way that do not challenge government policy. The tendency is to frame questions about how to implement policy.

In Vietnam, there tends to be a rather open attitude, with more of an instinct to get at “truth”. An example is the finding of the fisheries project that the processors obtain most of the profits from the “value chain”. However, research tends to be very much solution oriented.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this section we will focus mainly on what can be learned from the case study projects and, particularly how policy engagement can be better built into future policy research projects.

It is very clear from the case studies that, except those that started with a clear policy mandate as policy research institutions, most did not have a deliberate policy engagement strategy from the beginning of the project. They had thought little about the “how” and “who” of policy communication. Of course, the “what” (the message itself) necessarily will be developed as the research goes on. Ideally continual reflection will progressively identify and modify the policy message. For the most part we found that projects seemed to begin to articulate their strategy only after we raised the issue. Prior to that, policy engagement strategies seem to have been implicit rather than explicit.

Several of the case study projects referred to the role of stakeholders in research. It is important to differentiate between research that involves collaboration between stakeholders and research which takes into account the varied interests of different stakeholders (defined as groups who are affected by a policy or issue and groups that can affect the outcome of a policy) without directly involving them in the research. Although many of the projects involved institutional collaboration, they seem not to have involved stakeholders beyond the institutions involved in the research itself, apart from as sources of information.

One of the characteristics of most of the case study projects is that their research was framed by researchers responding to policy issues, either at the request of policy actors or because there appeared to be a need for the research. The research was framed by the researchers and "policy makers". There is little evidence that alternative framing of policy issues by other stakeholders was considered, either in research design or during the research itself. As we pointed out in the literature review, one limitation of "positivist" approaches to policy making is that they tend to assume there is one "correct" answer and the policy question is assumed. The problem is that policy objectives are matters of preference.

All of this suggests that there is a general need to explore alternative policy objectives (and policy questions) early in policy oriented research projects.

In summary, crucial issues for projects such as the SUMERNET projects are:

- Much earlier identification and initiation of policy engagement strategies;
- The need for active exploration of alternative policy objectives and ways of framing policy questions.

Given the muted quality of opposition to policy in Vietnam and Lao PDR, the latter point is particularly relevant in those two countries.

The main concern of this report was to provide some suggestions for improved policy engagement capacity for future SUMERNET projects and similar projects. The key ideas are listed below:

- Policy-oriented research projects need to build in strategies for policy engagement as early as possible, ideally at the project design stage.
- Closely related to the early development of a policy engagement strategy is the idea of involving some stakeholders (including "policy makers") in the research itself, either as active partners in research (as in the case of the floods project in Vietnam) or through regular interaction in the case of more senior people.
- Carry out an analysis of the institutional context (institutional actors and their roles) and a stakeholder analysis before commencing research, or as early as possible. At the minimum, this would involve identifying stakeholders and considering their perspectives.
- Policy Dialogues
- Action Research
- Policy engagement strategies need to be multi-pronged.
- Communication of research results needs to be targeted.

In this report we have examined the case study projects in a reflective way. We are aware that, due to the timing, our analysis of project policy recommendations and policy relevant findings, is incomplete and provisional, just as it has been impossible to assess policy impacts. In this spirit of "constructive reflection" we hope that out dialogues with the researchers may contribute to a better understanding of the policy contexts for sustainability in the Mekong countries and thus to improved strategies for policy engagement by sustainability researchers.

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APPENDICES

Preliminary/indicative list of research questions

(a) General questions

What assumptions about the research-policy interface are held by policy makers and researchers?

(b) How are research findings transferred into the policy making process?

What stories can researchers and policy makers tell to illustrate the way particular policies have been made?

What kind of research does (or does not) have an impact on policy? (considering research products, existing relationships/partnerships, timing, manner in which it is produced, who it is by?)

How is research consumed, utilised, employed by policy makers?

Is research directly available to policy makers, and if so in what form? (dialogues, relationships, conferences, informal, reports, websites, media)

What conscious strategies do researchers adopt to engage in the policy process? Do researchers attempt to influence policy be working with diverse actors/stakeholders apart from the supposed “policy makers”.

What opportunities or windows exist for research-policy engagement? (dialogues, conferences, inquiries, informal, commissioned studies)

What form is research best communicated to/utilised by policy makers? (research products, types of engagements, languages, content)

What issues have seen rapid policy change and why?

(c) How does policy influence research formulation and implementation?

What expectations do policy makers have of researchers and their research?

What research is directly commissioned/funded by governments?

What research is seen as credible and useful?

How has the policy environment for research changed? (funding, political space, actors)

What are researchers’ views on the influence of the policy (political, pedagogic, economic) environment on research?

Is there a difference, in terms of impact, between research that is directly commissioned by government (i.e., through research institutes) versus independent research (e.g., by universities, international research collaborations, consultants)?

What individuals and organisations do agencies particularly rely upon for policy advice/information?