



Communicating Research

A beginner's guide for researchers
at the
Vietnamese Academy of Social Science

Ajoy Datta and Arnaldo Pellini

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Overseas Development Institute
111 Westminster Bridge Road
London SE1 7JD, UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 7922 0300
Fax: +44 (0)20 7922 0399
www.odi.org.uk

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1 Introduction

1.1 The aim of this guide

A lot of research is carried out each year by the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (VASS). The research is intended to help policy-makers understand Vietnam's complex problems more clearly and develop better strategies for dealing with them (EC, 2010). But how much of VASS's research does this? Most would agree that the answer is 'not enough'. Part of the problem is that research is poorly communicated. As such, this guide aims to provide VASS researchers, especially those who are mid career, with a reference for improving the way they communicate research findings to policy-makers.

1.2 Background

Barnard et al (2007) cite several studies that have been undertaken, which explore the impact of research on policy. Stemming from different backgrounds, they all have their own perspectives and terminologies, but what stands out is that:

All stress the **complexity of the connections** linking research to policy and practice. The simple linear model, where research results are disseminated to target audiences who assimilate this new knowledge and act upon it, is rejected as far too simplistic. Policy-making is far more complex, and research is just one of many competing factors influencing policy decisions and changes in practice.

All emphasise the importance of **identifying the different actors** or stakeholders involved and trying to understand their different interests and perspectives. This is a fundamental step in appreciating the dynamics and complexity of the change process.

Most stress the importance of **personal contacts and networks** and argue that these are crucial in establishing trust and legitimacy and building consensus around new ideas.

Communication is fundamental to all of them, either implicitly or explicitly. All stress the importance of engaging with stakeholders as early as possible in the research process and communicating in a language that they can understand.

Good communication is thus a key ingredient to maximising the impact of research on policy.

A range of tools and approaches currently exist to help communicate research. The tools provided in this guide have been compiled to help researchers to make research findings more accessible to decision-makers and other research users (IDRC, 2008).

1.3 Where this guide comes from and how it was made

The guide was developed by the Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme under the guidance of VASS and input from VASS researchers. This guide is a key output from a project which focused on building the capacity of VASS to communicate its research more effectively to policy-makers. It draws mainly on international good practices rather than specifically those in Vietnam and discusses three tools which communicate research through the communication channel of 'print media'. The guide draws on materials produced by a range of international funders and research institutes, particularly the International Development Research Centre in Canada (IDRC).

1.4 What's in this guide?

The guide is structured as follows: In the next section we briefly discuss policy processes in Vietnam and the role of research evidence. The third section focuses on communication as a means to inform policy-makers. This outlines key elements that must be considered to ensure researchers get the right message to the right people at the right time. Section four introduces the three communication products that are the focus of this guide: the policy brief; the research brief and the story of change. Section five gives advice on writing clearly. Sections six, seven and eight provide step-by-step guidance on developing policy briefs, research briefs and stories of change respectively. Section nine concludes, while section ten provides an explanation of some of the key words used throughout the guide.

2 Policy processes and research evidence in Vietnam

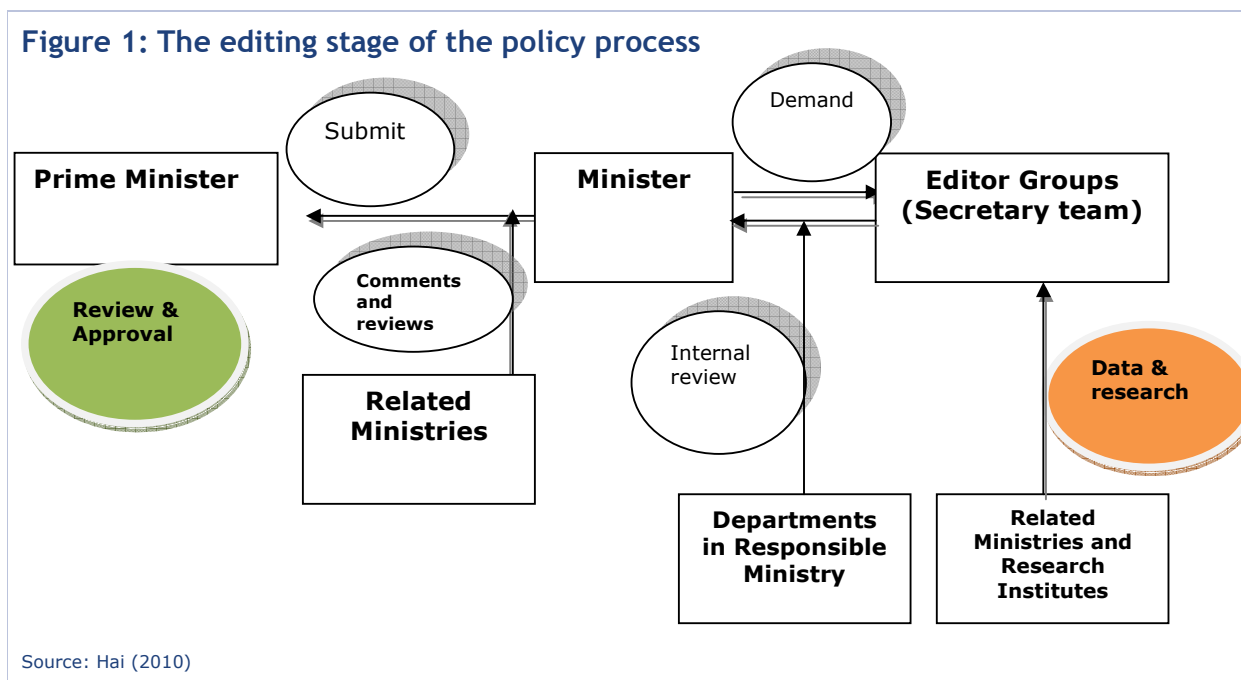
Communication is not an end in itself. The ultimate objective of communication (for policy oriented researchers) is to influence policy processes. This section briefly explores policy processes and the role of research evidence in Vietnam drawing on two case studies commissioned by VASS in 2009: one on administrative decentralisation and another on poverty reduction.

2.1 Case 1: administrative decentralisation

In discussing administrative decentralisation, Hai (2010) suggests that there are seven steps to developing policy in the National Assembly (NA). These are:

1. Analysis and decision-making
2. Editing
3. Appraisal
4. Review by the NA standing committee
5. Public consultation
6. Approval
7. Publication

However, Hai goes on to state that each step of the process is complex (2009:9). In particular, the editing stage is unclear (ibid). This process (in theory) for the editing stage is described in figure 1 below. Research is required at each stage and reviews are undertaken at both ministerial and prime ministerial levels.



In the case of administrative decentralisation, there were several actors involved in policy development with no one agency appointed as 'chief architect' of the process (at least not explicitly). They were the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the

Office of Vietnam Government (GOF), relevant NA committees, as well as a number of political organisations at central level (all of which we call internal actors). Only after detailed analysis of the many events that were organised to develop policy (such as meetings, seminars and workshops) did it become clear that the Institute of State Organisational Sciences (ISOS) of MOHA, the administrative department of the MOJ and the NA Law committee were the most active actors in the policy process.

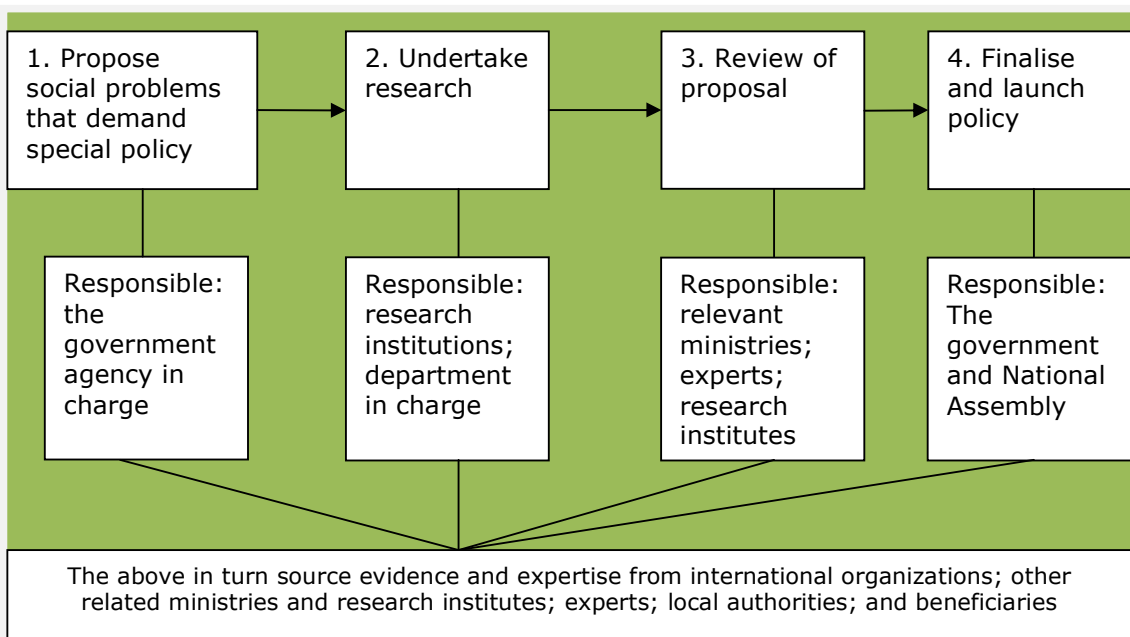
Moreover, key informant interviews suggested that the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Government of Vietnam (GoVN) appeared to make the most of the requests for research evidence. They requested research from a number of actors including both those involved in the process (internal actors) and those who were external such as the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), the Ministry of Finance (MOF), Central Fatherland Front and the Vietnam Union Science Technology Association (VUSTA). 'Internal actors' in turn sourced research and data from within (i.e. specific departments and agencies). Importantly it was the secretary to the policy editors within the 'lead' institutes who would demand research evidence. The key lesson here is to identify the most active actors within the policy process (and the corresponding policy secretaries) and ensure they are supplied with the evidence they need at the right time.

2.2 Case 2: formulating poverty reduction policies for 61 of Vietnam's poorest districts

Trang and Liêm (2010) state that the development of social policy has to comply with the following steps:

1. The government agency in charge (usually MOLISA) suggests policy problem and develops a policy proposal. Responsibility for this is delegated to specific departments.
2. A policy-making group is formed including the lead agency, other ministries and research institutes.
3. The lead agency undertakes research to reinforce their proposal.
4. The policy proposal is reviewed by relevant ministries before being submitted to the government. This can be mapped diagrammatically as follows:

Figure 2: The development of social policy



Source: Trang and Liêm (2010)

However, policy processes are rarely straightforward, as illustrated by the development of a policy to reduce poverty in 61 of Vietnam's poorest districts. The agency in charge of the process (MOLISA) commissioned a survey and convened a workshop. Nevertheless, the initial proposal was rejected by ministries and the prime minister, with further research and reviews conducted before it was finally approved. At the same time, reviews by ministries took longer than the two weeks outlined in law. The process was compromised by the limited time (only nine months to submit the proposal) and budget available, both of which may have affected the quality of the research. Trang and Liem (2010) suggest that while the process for submitting a proposal was strict, the lack of capacity amongst ministries and institutes made compliance challenging. This case did however, illustrate the importance of workshops as a key space to discuss research results and bring to bear expert opinion. The next section looks specifically at how communication can be used effectively to better inform these policy processes.

3 Communication

3.1 Introduction

To inform policy processes, research needs to be communicated effectively to key target audiences (Von Grember et al, 2005). However, communication does not just happen, it must be planned. Therefore, the first step in the process is to develop a communications strategy (IDRC, 2008). This can be a strategy for your institute or it can be a strategy for just one research project. Fortunately you do not have to be a communications expert to develop a solid communications strategy. The strategy should be informed by key important communication principles (see Box 1):

Box 1: Important communication principles

- You can only communicate what you know.
- Communication is a two way process. The better you listen to your audience, the better you will be able to answer their needs and the more your messages will be believed, liked and ultimately acted upon.
- Effective communicators know what their audience needs to know, what 'language' they understand, and what they look at and listen to.
- You should develop tools that fit the channels available for your message.
- You must develop messages that respect the cultural context of your audiences.
- You must understand and respect your communications abilities and limits, as well as your time and resources as communications can be time and skill-intensive work.
- You must learn from your mistakes and your successes to improve your future communications.

Source: IDRC (2008)

IDRC (2008) suggests that a communication strategy have the following components:

Objective: What do you want your communications to achieve?

Audience: Who is your target audience? What information do they need to act upon your message?

Message: What is your message? Do you have one message for multiple audiences or multiple messages for multiple audiences?

Tools and products: What kinds of communication products best capture and deliver your messages?

Channels: What channels will you use to promote and disseminate your products?

Resources: What kind of budget do you have for this? Will this change in future? What communications skills and hardware do you have?

Timing: What is your timeline? What special events or opportunities might arise? Does the work or future work of like-minded organisations or ministries, present opportunities?

Feedback: How will you know when your communications work is successful? What will have changed? How can you assess whether you used the right tools, were on budget and on time, and had any influence?

Defining each of the elements described above is a task that is best carried out as a group. You only need a minimum of one hour to discuss them all. Once you have done this, you have the basic building blocks of your communication strategy and a greater understanding of your own position in the wider scheme of things (ibid). The following section describes each of these elements in more detail, drawing on IDRC (2008) and DFID (2005).

3.2 Objective

What do you want from communications? All strategies must start with an understanding of objectives. Communications can be resource and time intensive, so the more precisely you can state your reasons for communicating, the better you will be able to spend those resources. Your institute may state your main objective as seeking to influence or change a particular policy. Or you may merely want people to understand the significance of your research. There may be a variety of more specific reasons for communicating, but ultimately, influence is typically the central objective of most research institutions.

The SMART acronym is useful here. Your objective should be:

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Results – oriented and

Time-limited

The more SMART your objectives are, the easier it will be to assess progress and adjust activities accordingly.

Box 2: Example

'To change the poverty reduction policy in Hai Duong province in Northern Vietnam by 2016'

This is specific (it is the poverty reduction policy). It is measurable (i.e. did the poverty reduction policy change?). It is arguably attainable and it is results oriented. And '2016' makes it time limited, in line with a rational term – in this case Vietnam's next National Party Congress when the Central Committee of the Communist Party and national congresses develop economic development strategies and launch reforms.

3.3 Audience

Understanding your audience is crucial. The better you know your audience, and what they need to understand your work, the better your chances of influencing them. If you don't see them, appreciate them and listen to them, you will never reach them; research findings need to be presented in a way that is applicable to your audience. Audiences can be identified and prioritised using various tools, including the Alignment Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM) tool developed by ODI. The tool maps actors along three dimensions: the degree of alignment (i.e. agreement) with the proposed policy, their level of interest in the issue, and their ability to exert influence on the policy process. Actors who are very interested and aligned should be natural allies and collaborators, while those who are interested but not aligned are potential obstacles. Their level of interest in and alignment with your objective will have implications on

the types of messages you create, the products you prepare for them and the channels you use to reach them. See appendix one for a detailed 'how to' guide for using the AIIM tool (Mendizabal, 2010).

Box 3: Example

Your audience could be the leaders of the People's Council in Hai Duong Province in Northern Vietnam. From your work with provincial government you know the needs and knowledge base of this audience quite well. As such you consider their understanding of the issue to be very low. You will have to thus prepare much of the communication for this audience in very simple and non-technical terms.

3.4 Messages

There are a number of methods to develop key messages. One way is to use the A.I.D.A rule (IDRC, 2008a). This suggests the message should

- A Attract the attention of the audience
- I Raise the interest in the message or evidence
- D Encourage a desire to act or to know more
- A Prompt action and present a solution

The message should therefore be visible, clear, relevant and actionable. It should also provide a solution to a problem or threat to which your audience can relate.

Alternatively your messages could include the following elements

- Your analysis of the problem
- The cause of the problem
- Who could or should solve it
- Why change is important
- Your proposed solution
- Actions you ask others to take to bring this change about.

Another way is to ensure your messages explain the context, the problem, the possibilities for solving the problem and the potential policy actions you are proposing. The IDRC knowledge translation toolkit suggests that each message should be no longer than 35 words and must be tailored to your specific audience(s). If you haven't done the research yet, you can nonetheless sketch the context, problems, possibilities and policies you anticipate and modify them over the course of the research project.

Box 4: Example

Messages for the leaders of the People’s Council in Hai Duong Province could feature:

Context: changes in land use have affected the livelihoods of people in rural areas of Hai Duong Province.

Problem: farmers have lost their main source of income and while they have been compensated in the short term they lack the skills and opportunities to pursue alternative livelihood strategies.

Solution: research has shown that providing skills training and access to credit can help people find new employment and/or set up their own businesses.

Action: former farmers are likely to be turned away from ‘blue-collar’ work due to their age and background. As well as providing skills and encouraging banks to lend, the People’s Council should encourage businesses to treat farmers equally in the recruitment process.

3.5 Tools and products

The choice of communications products and tools depends on the type and content of the message to deliver, your available resources and, most crucially, on how the audience likes to receive information. Tools and products you could draw on include:

- Articles in scientific journals
- Newspaper articles and editorials
- Press releases
- Policy briefs
- Newsletters
- Brochures and leaflets
- Research briefs
- Stories of Change
- Websites

This guide will focus, in later sections, on how to write three of these tools: the policy brief, the research brief and the story of change.

Box 5: Example

You may want to produce a policy brief for the President of the People’s Council to encourage him to learn more about, for instance, changes in land usage in Hai Duong Province. You may then want to follow this up with a 20-25 page research paper to help persuade the President that action is required.

3.6 Channels

Having the right message for your audience with the right products is one thing. Delivering them is another. Too often, researchers spend too much time on the products and not enough on the channel(s). The channel – be it a scientific journal, workshop, a seminar or a meeting, dictates who receives the message. For instance, if someone must attend a meeting to receive

the message, those who do not attend will not receive it. Your products must be seen and heard by the right people to have any value at all.

In fact, before you develop a tool or product you must identify the right channel to reach your audience, budget for it and have in place a strategy for moving your product through or to your channel. You should find out the key details of selected channels before developing any content. Some quick research may reveal that a particular channel will not work – it may be too expensive, too limited, or just not appropriate.

Box 6: Example

In our example, you realise that the President is unlikely to have access to the internet so you hand deliver the policy brief or (more likely) mail it to them through the post. If resources are available, you could set up a meeting or workshop to present the policy brief and help outline the kinds of actions that the government could take to resolve the problem. Oral presentations and PowerPoint slides are also useful tools to consider.

3.7 Resources

Communications in general can be expensive and often requires high quality methods to create materials (such as software); they require people with the skills to use those methods; and they require dedicated financing. You need to be realistic about what you can actually achieve with the materials, finances and people you have at your disposal and adapt as necessary.

3.8 Timing

It's crucial to think through your timeline. You may opt for a staged strategy. Rather than communicating all your messages at once, you may want to gradually provide more information to your audience over time. Such strategies often let audiences determine their own exposure to your research. Where possible, special events or future opportunities should be mapped out as well. These could be conferences to bring together stakeholders, a change of leadership, the scheduled writing of a government position or strategic plan, or an anticipated policy shift. Every month of every year has an event, to which might be used to 'peg' your communications efforts and the more you are aware of these events, the better you will be able to use them for your own purposes. For example, potential changes in leadership are an opportune time to push for changes in policy with newcomers often wanting to effect a change. These windows of opportunity are not very frequent and you therefore must be ready to act and prepared to supply them with the information and evidence they may need.

3.9 Feedback

Collecting and assessing feedback from your communications work can help you determine if you have used the right tools, were on budget and on time, and had any influence. It is important to know which of your products and tools are hitting their targets and which are not. You need to know how your audience receives them and how their perception of you might be changing. This will help you to change both your strategy and your products to reflect your audience's views and experiences. The following tools can help you gauge how well your communications are doing:

- 1 An impact log: this is an informal record that gauges how your communications has been received. The log can comprise stakeholder feedback, a list of references indicating the reach of your communications (e.g. citations in articles); speeches citing your work and so on. This can be a good way to chart which of your communication products is commanding most attention.
- 2 Conducting a formal survey: with a formal survey, you should select a sample of people that could provide you with the type of information you need to reflect upon and improve your communication strategy. The sample could include your own staff and/or members of your audience.
- 3 Conducting key-informant interviews: like a formal survey, this is a technique to gather more in-depth information from stakeholders you feel have a particular insight into your communications. These could also be done through a focus group.
- 4 Conduct an After Action Review (AAR): the AAR works by bringing together a team to discuss a task, event, activity or project, in an open and honest fashion. There are many different ways to conduct an AAR, but the main questions should be focused on what was meant to happen, what actually happened (what worked and why), what would you do differently next time.

Your feedback can help you to write a story of change (see section eight).

3.10 A communications strategy template

See appendix two for a template

3.11 Additional resources

Here are some other resources to help you to develop a communications strategy (taken from the IDRC knowledge translation toolkit):

Baeyaert, P. (2005) 'Developing an External Communications Strategy'. Presentation at Communicating European Research, November 14, 2005.

This is a PowerPoint presentation with several excellent slides. It is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/conferences/2005/cer2005/presentations14_en.html

Media Trust. (no year). 'Developing a Communications Strategy'

This website has a very strong division of core tasks within a communications strategy. Though not as intricate as the Big Eleven Questions, it is very useful in thinking through needs and abilities. It is available at:

http://replay.waybackmachine.org/20071030091241/http://www.mediatrust.org/training-events/training-resources/online-guides-1/guide_developing-a-communications-strategy

The SPIN Project. (2005) 'Strategic Communications Planning'

This brochure is a solid overview of the components needed for strategic communications, with good diagrams and suggestions. Available at:

<http://www.spinproject.org/downloads/StrategicCommunications.pdf>

Perhaps the best way of going about designing a strategy is to copy or modify that of others. To that end, here is a good example of an existing communications strategy:

The International Monetary Fund. (2007) 'The IMF's Communication Strategy'.

This is a superlative example, and easily one of the best available. Its value is particularly in showing how communications can help an organization achieve its core goals. It is extremely well thought out and is well worth a read. Available at:

<https://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/2007/eng/052907.pdf>

4 Some written communication products

This section provides guidance for three communication products in order of importance:

1) The Policy Brief; 2) Research Brief; and 3) Story of Change.

The rationale is as follows:

- Policy briefs are highly regarded by policy-makers who see them as a key input to decision-making processes.
- Research briefs help researchers to communicate research to colleagues, their institute directors and to the department of scientific management (which manages the quality of research in VASS), as well as to technical specialists working for donor agencies.
- Stories of Change help to communicate tangible changes that have occurred as a result of research to research managers and funders.

A brief description and the main target audience for each of the three tools are provided in the table below:

Tool	Who is it for?	What is it?
Policy brief	Decision-makers	This provides information, analysis and key policy recommendations or implications on important policy issues.
Research brief	Researchers	This is a focused summary of a project, a country study or regional analysis or a review of interim research findings. This does not feature policy recommendations.
Story of change	Research managers and funders	These help to communicate tangible changes that have occurred as a result of research to research managers and funders.

The following sections provide guidance on producing each of these three products. Each section is split into three parts: 1) What is the product and who is it for; 2) how is it structured? and 3) how do you develop the product? Since all three products are written media, we first provide some advice on good writing.

5 Written communications: some advice

This section provides advice on good writing and draws heavily from materials developed by Emphasis, a professional business writing skills consultancy (Emphasis, 2009) and the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF, 2010).

Know your audience

To repeat earlier messages, writing that does not consider the audience is unlikely to succeed in its objectives. Make sure you are clear about what action you want your audience to take once they have read the document. In this way you will tailor your writing to your audience with what they need to know, not what you have found out.

Know what you want to say

You need to put your important messages at the beginning, so make sure you know what they are before you begin writing. Test them out aloud before you commit them to paper. Organise your material in a way that is logical and transparent to your reader. Use sub-headings to show readers at a glance how your themes develop.

Say what you mean

It is what you say, not the way that you say it that counts. In policy circles, good writing is invisible. You have failed if you force your reader to concentrate on the words rather than the message. There are specific ways in which you can hone your writing style to highlight what you are saying rather than how you say it. The central readability principles are

- Be direct
- Keep it short, concise and simple
- Use one sentence to explain one idea

Keep it short and simple

Make sure you write what you mean by saying it aloud. Be rigorous in your editing. Ask yourself if you are using the best word for the job or if there is a simpler way to say it. When you think you have finished, try cutting it down. Using jargon is fine for an internal or expert readership, provided you are certain they will understand it, but avoid it when writing for external or non-expert readers. Keep the abbreviations and acronyms to a minimum. And explain to them where they do appear. Use concrete terms rather than abstract generalities. For instance, 'help to give up smoking' rather than 'strategies for smoking cessation'.

Be direct

Where appropriate, be direct by addressing your readers as 'you' and referring to yourself, the writer as 'we' or 'I' wherever possible. For example, in place of 'the writers of this sentence advise readers to adopt this technique,' put 'we advise you to adopt this technique'. This will make your writing and its relevance, easier to understand. 'You' and especially 'we' also make

writing more confident, transparent and more personal. However, it is important to note that you need to tailor your writing style to your audience, so for example, at times being more formal may be more appropriate if required.

Writing paragraphs

Try to stick to one main point per paragraph and avoid long paragraphs. The main point of the paragraph should be used to introduce the paragraph. This should be followed by three to four supporting sentences with examples and illustrations. Use transitions to show how each sentence is related to the previous sentence. These should be followed by a closing sentence that refers to the main idea in the topic sentence but avoids repeating it. End with a transitional sentence that leads to the next paragraph.

One sentence, one idea

Keep your sentences short. Your reader will find it easier to understand what you are saying if you stick to one idea per sentence. If you write a long sentence, with many asides and qualifying clauses, your reader will find it hard to follow and may get distracted from the key message and will likely have to return to the beginning of the sentence in order to make sense of it. Aim for an average of 17 words per sentence and a maximum of 35. Also varying your rhythm is key: try inserting the odd two-or three-word sentence for impact. It is easy and it may well just keep your reader awake. Acronyms should to be employed sparingly and clarified on first reference.

Starting and ending

People tend to remember firsts and lasts more than they remember the 'in between'. Hence introductions and conclusions are perhaps the two most critical parts of any document.

There are four basic ways you can start an introduction (with examples):

News/straightforward

The UK white paper on International Development has been launched amid a global financial crisis and recession.

Anecdotal

When I said I was off to a workshop with some well-known City finance firms, my neighbour said "How can you talk to those terrible hedge fund people?" Fear and distrust of the whole concept of 'hedging' has become widespread following the economic downturn.

Surprise

Poverty in Africa is falling. What's more, if present trends continue, Africa will achieve the first Millennium Development Goal – halving the proportion of people living on less than one dollar a day – by the 2015 deadline.

Historical

Before the global recession, food prices fell in real terms for more than 50 years. Now they are rising, threatening to reverse the gains of the green revolution.

The conclusion gives you an opportunity to keep your reader thinking about what you have written. Here are four basic ways you can consider ending in a conclusion:

Predict the future

Managing risks will become a vital skill for national food security – and if developing countries do not have access to the right 'hedges' they will be at a disadvantage.

Quote

In the words of ODI Director Alison Evans: "the problems facing [growth strategies] in developing countries affect us all. Our prosperity, our security and the future of our environment is tied to theirs. It is in our national interest and our shared interests with others that we address these problems."

Repeat a major issue

Food prices are still relatively high in many countries, and may go up again in 2010-12. So it is important to find out what worked and what did not in 2007/8, and to try to avoid making the same mistakes.

Summarise

Many countries face challenges in forging the link between economic growth and human development. Perhaps a polarisation approach can help them to identify where inequities arise and envisage their future.

Use these techniques to leave a lasting impression. In the next section we will focus on how to write and develop policy briefs.

6 Communication products: policy briefs

6.1 What are policy briefs and who are they for?

Policy briefs will vary from context to context, but are usually stand alone documents focused on a single topic and are usually between two to four pages in length (between 1000 and 2000 words). The main audience are decision-makers.

The aim of the policy brief is to provide a clear and concise overview of a policy problem, followed by a discussion of the problem and potential solutions, and finally suggestions for implementing either a preferred policy option or a range of them, with cost implications for each. The first section outlines the problem, while the last section incorporates the policy recommendations or implications, with the middle section bridges the two (IDRC, 2008; IDRC 2008b).

As highlighted earlier, the objective and specific characteristics of the audience (such as age, gender, education, occupation, language and culture) should determine the format, content and style of any policy brief (ibid).

Bear in mind that the audience may not be familiar with the subject and will probably not have much time to read the policy brief. As such, you need to use plain language and to be succinct in convincing your audience of the importance, relevance and urgency of the issue and the need to adopt particular recommendations (ibid).

6.2 How are policy briefs structured?

We suggest a policy brief should be structured as follows:

Section	Proportion	Content
Introduction	15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlights the issue/problem and its significance. Gives a brief overview of the findings and policy recommendations. Can mention the research methodology. Creates curiosity for the rest of the brief.
Discussion	40%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes the context and problem. Discusses research findings and provides solid arguments for the recommendations.
Recommendations (or implications)	40%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually limited to three. Implications are what could happen, while recommendations are what should happen. These should be informed by evidence presented earlier.

References and useful resources	5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This helps the reader find out more on the issue if they require more information.
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6.3 How to write a policy brief

Step 1: write an outline

Although the policy brief is on one issue, it will likely draw on and synthesise more than one research paper. So writing a policy brief is more than 'translating' a long technical paper into plain language (see research brief for this). A policy brief must weigh up findings from numerous studies and explain what they mean by policy decisions.

Specifically you will need to:

- Make the evidence brief and understandable
- Explain why the evidence is important
- Set out policy options which are informed by the evidence (ibid)

To help you organise the evidence you may want to draw on specific research methods or mind mapping techniques (see appendix 3 for the latter).

Once you are clear what the evidence is saying, you should develop a short outline of the policy brief. It should start with a single sentence which summarises the evidence and highlights the overarching message of your brief. It should then include a summary of the components highlighted in the table above. Your outline should thus state briefly what the policy problem is, what the solutions are, and what evidence-informed, policy actions you are recommending. It is important you know your messages before you begin writing the brief. You should use the outline as a guide when it comes to filling out each section (ibid).

Step 2: write the introduction

The introduction should explain the importance of the issue or problem. In a few sentences it should give an overview of the discussion (of the possible solutions) and the recommendations or implications of your study. You can also mention briefly the method you used in gathering evidence. Doing so may improve the credibility of your findings. Remember the introduction should grab the reader's attention and create curiosity about the rest of the brief (ibid).

Step 3: write the discussion

The next section, the discussion, should capture the 'talking points,' which describe the complexity of the situation. If the introduction is the problem and the last part is the recommendations, this part must show your audience how to connect the first and the last part. This section could be grouped into three broad subjects (NB: throughout this brief, thoughts and arguments are often grouped into threes, to help you (and your audience) remember and avoid information overload). This section could explore the background to the problem, elaborate on the context and/or describe any pre-existing policies and/or

programmes that have been undertaken to address the problem. The discussion section will provide the arguments, which inform the recommendations in the next section. Remember to support any assertions or statements with examples and supporting facts (ibid).

Step 4: write the recommendations

This section, lays out the recommendations, which decision-makers can choose to select. Here, you should provide an objective assessment of each option, their pros, cons and, if possible, their cost implications. However, if you prefer or are advocating for one particular option or set, you need to outline why your particular recommendations best address the problem or situation. The more specific your recommendations, the more useful they will be. The recommendations should provide details on exactly what actions you are suggesting the reader takes and why, how they do it, when they should take action, and what resources they will require to take action (including money, time, people, skills and infrastructure). You need to decide how open your audience will be to your recommendations as this should determine the tone you take. For example, you may take a soft approach and simply draw implications from your research. Or you may decide that it is best to be more direct and offer advice (ibid).

Step 5: add references and additional resources

When synthesising information from multiple sources, always cite them appropriately and add them to a list of references, using the Harvard system. Seminal works in the area of research should be included so those looking for information can easily find out more on the topic (ibid).

At this stage, to help you visualise what a policy brief looks like, see appendix four for a two page example developed by IDRC.

Step 6: Make your policy brief visually appealing

Since you are trying to entice busy decision-makers to read your policy brief, it should be visually appealing. There are a number of relatively simple tools which could be used to do this:

- a. Titles, sub-titles and headings
- b. Graphical elements such as charts, tables and photographs
- c. Text boxes
- d. Quotations
- e. Sidebars

These five elements are explained in detail below drawing on IDRC (2008b) and Knezovich (2009):

a. Titles, sub-titles and headings:

A good title serves two functions: it identifies the topic and inspires interest. Both are important. Avoid a long-winded title that describes the topic in full, but bores or confuses the reader. Equally undesirable is a very short title that fails to accurately identify the topic or skews the policy brief's character. To avoid either of these extremes, it is common for titles to employ a colon (:) to separate 'word play' from 'substance'. It might take the format:

[Creative title that captures attention]: [Clear explanation of the title].

Box 7: Example

'Political science?: Strengthening science-policy dialogue in developing countries'

'Political science' employs 'wordplay' (it is an academic discipline referring to the study of politics, but in this case it refers to the politicisation of scientific research), while 'Strengthening science-policy dialogue in developing countries' is a clear explanation of what the paper is about.

Source: Jones and Walsh (2008)

Title writing requires imagination and skill. Using headings throughout the text can also help readers quickly find the information they need.

b. Charts, tables and photographs

Charts or tables of any kind may be employed as long as they are relevant and understandable and do not exceed the brief's page or word limit. Original graphics or photographs generated by the project itself are preferred, but those originating outside the project may also be used if they are especially pertinent and properly referenced. In the case of the latter, copyright should be respected. See Figure 3 below for an example.

Figure 3: An example of the use of a text box and graphs



Source: ODI Briefing paper 38: Untangling links between trade, poverty and gender

c. Text boxes

Text boxes provide an opportunity to tell stories to help the reader connect with an issue. These can be very useful if there is only enough room in the main text to remain at a general level. A text box could be used to call attention to a list of bullet points. It is also a good place to add extra information that is not critical to the main text, but adds to the overall understanding of it.

d. Quotations

Quotations from interviews undertaken as part of the research or a sentence from the text, which reiterate key points or messages can be placed in the middle of the text/page itself or placed in a side bar.

Figure 4: A sentence placed in the text

Some 200 million people today—1 in 33—do not live in the country where they were born.

Source: Roodman (2008)

e. Side bars

Side bars, although not necessary, can be a useful way of physically framing the text and giving shape to the document. These can also be used to accommodate extra information such as a description of the project, organisation, or publication; copyright and contact information; quotations and useful resources.

Figure 5: The use of a side bar to accommodate a quotation



Source: Helleiner and Pagliari (2008)

That brings us to the end of this section. To finish, we leave you with some tips for writing policy briefs from IDRC’s knowledge translation toolkit (IDRC, 2008):

- Remain focused from start to finish.
- Keep the audience in mind while writing: use a professional as opposed to an academic tone.
- Ground the argument in strong and reliable evidence.
- Limit the focus to a particular problem or issue.
- Be succinct and to the point, using short sentences and paragraphs.
- Use language that is simple and provide enough information to allow the reader to follow the argument effortlessly.
- Make it accessible by subdividing the text to guide the reader through it.
- Make it interesting and attractive through the use of colours, images, quotes, photographs, boxes, and more.
- Make sure that recommendations are practical and feasible.
- Avoid jargon or acronyms.
- Provide an overview of any and all cost implications for implementing your preferred option.

6.4 Additional resources

For more information on writing policy briefs see the following:

International Development Research Centre (IDRC) (2008) 'Toolkit for researchers: how to write a policy brief'. Training tool developed by IDRC.

Available at http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-131735-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

Nath C. 'How do I Brief Policymakers on Science-related issues?', SciDevNet,

Available at: <http://www.scidev.net/en/practical-guides/how-do-i-brief-policymakers-on-science-related-iss.html>

Hovland I. 2005. 'Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations'.

Available at <http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Tools/Toolkits/Communication/tools.html>

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Available at: <http://www.policy.hu/ipf/fel-pubs/samples/PolicyBrief-described.pdf>

IPF (n.d.) 'The Policy Brief'.

Available at: <http://www.policy.hu/ipf/fel-pubs/samples/PolicyBrief-described.pdf>

In addition to appendix 4 you may also want to view other policy briefs (of varying lengths):

China's Rise – Implications for Low Income Countries, IDS in Focus, Policy Briefing

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/idspublication/china-s-rise--implications-for-low-income-countries>

Grant, U. (2008). Opportunity and exploitation in urban labour markets, Briefing Paper 44, London: ODI

<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1969.pdf>

7 Communication products: research briefs

7.1 What are research briefs and who are they for?

The main aim of a research brief is to summarise the main points of a long research report using plain language, making reference to the original report. The briefs are usually up to two pages in length (or approximately 1000 words) and aim to give the reader the key messages and information from the report, while also encouraging them to read the full report and read further into the subject area. The main audience will largely be other researchers and institute directors, but you need to clearly identify who the audience is before you write the brief to tailor the language as appropriate. If your readers are likely to have a technical background then the content could then feature some technical language.

7.2 How to structure and write a research brief

We suggest that a research brief should follow the same structure as the original report on which it is based. To help you organise the findings from a long research report, you will need to read the document thoroughly yourself and get a good understanding firstly of its main purpose and then key points. Note them down however you prefer. If you cannot write on the document itself, you may want to attach post-it notes to the pages with key information. Alternatively use a notebook to write down the page number where the information is listed and then write a brief summary of the main points found on that page.

If the original document is divided into sections, one method for writing your summary is to summarise each section in the original document. If you are struggling to capture the main points and develop a logical structure, you may want to use mind maps or spider diagrams to help organise this. These are visual aids or diagrams that you can draw to represent ideas (or research issues). See Appendix 3 for detailed guidance.

Remember to write in a narrative structure, just as in the original document. Since you are summarising a larger document your aim is not to write a thorough essay. Rather your aim is to provide the reader with an overview of the original document that highlights the most important points, conclusions and recommendations and the clearer you can make this the better.

Start off by outlining your key overall message. Then pick out your key messages for the rest of the summary and use those to structure your writing with supporting detail. Remember to include the research questions the report was addressing, the motivation for undertaking the research and the methods used to collect and analyse data, if appropriate. You can use headings and bullet points (but not too many). You could also use a carefully chosen graphic to help get your messages across. Please refer to section 6 for further details on how to make your brief look visually appealing, but remember that the text is the most important part of the brief. Keep formatting and design simple, and the text clearly organised to make the brief as easy to read as possible

By reading the research brief, the reader can gain a basic understanding of the original document or study it without having to read the report in full, but if necessary can refer to the original publication for clarification and further detail. See Appendix 5 for an example of a short research brief targeting researchers, which summarises a complicated 94 page report (IDS, 2010), using easy to understand language.

7.3 Additional resources

There is a wealth of information on writing research briefs (also known as research summaries or executive summaries) on the internet. Here are some resources:

How to write a research summary by Emphasis consultancy

<http://www.writing-skills.com/resources/knowledge-bank/259/executive-summaries>

Essay Town Academic writing blog

<http://www.essaytown.com/writing/write-summary>

wikiHow – how to write an executive summary

<http://www.wikihow.com/Write-an-Executive-Summary>

8 Communication products: stories of change

8.1 What are stories of change and who are they for?

Stories of change are one way of learning about the impact that research is having. Limited to two pages (or 1000 words), a story of change does not focus on the research process, but describes where research led to changes in policy, practice, knowledge, behaviour and/or attitudes. Alternatively they can highlight where research was expected to lead to change but did not in reality. The stories provide: a way of sharing information that might otherwise get lost, a space to reflect on key lessons for the organisation as a whole and a means of marketing the work of research institutes to funders.

8.2 How are stories of change structured?

We suggest that stories of change be structured as just that – a story – with a beginning, middle and an end, with the following headings:

Section	Proportion	Summary
Introduction	20%	Start by describing the key message from the story in one or two sentences. Describe the policy issue at the time the story begins including the date, location, and key actors involved.
Action	25%	Explain the research and other activities (such as meetings, seminars and workshops) that were undertaken to address the challenge.
Result	20%	State the success or failure of the course of action itself on the immediate policy process and in the longer term. If possible describe the impact amongst beneficiaries.
Conclusion	30%	Suggest what were the critical success/failure factors? Describe the lessons for your research institute.
Further information	5%	Reference the research that was undertaken and other useful papers and/or web links.

8.3 How to write a story of change

Step 1: choose a story

The first step is to select a story. This might be an occasion where a research report was perceived to have led to change or where efforts were made to use research findings to persuade policy-makers to make a change. Changes include changes in policy content, policy processes, the language policy-makers and officials are using, their behaviour and their attitudes.

Step 2: gather evidence

You will need to collect the following information:

1. The policy issue at the time the story begins, as well as the date, location, and key actors.
2. A description of the policy problem.
3. The course of action taken (including the research done and any follow up activities) and the change(s) that the research team was seeking.
4. Success or failure of the course of action itself on the immediate policy process and in the longer term. Also, if possible, the impact on beneficiaries.
5. The success or failure factors (this could include type/quality of evidence; political context; framing of key messages; timing of actions; differential strategies with diverse stakeholders – forging alliances, neutralising, critiquing etc.
6. Lessons for your research institute (what does this story tell us about how we could change the way we work to increase our impact?).

Gathering such data is not straightforward. You will need to talk to a range of actors including other researchers who worked on the research, institute directors, research managers, clients who commissioned the research and relevant policy-makers. Since most researchers should be familiar with interview techniques we will not cover them here.

Step 3: write an outline

Once you have collected the data, draw out in one sentence a summary for each of the components outlined in the structure above. This will be your outline.

Step 4: write the story

Once you have your outline, writing the story should be easier. Remember that this is a short piece written in plain language, targeting non-specialist audiences such as funders. Once you have drafted the story, take a break and then return to it and redraft it. Consult the section on advice for good writing for further tips. Also see Appendix 6 for a good example of a story of change from ODI.

8.4 Additional resources

Ramalingam, B. (2006) 'Tools for Knowledge and Learning A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organisations' ODI: London

<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/153.pdf>>> See the tool called 'Stories'

Several examples of stories of change exist on the Overseas Development Institute website

Growth: Seeing where the shoe pinches

<http://www.odi.org.uk/work/stories-change/2009-growth-economic-partnership-agreements.asp>

The future of aid: Telling the truth about aid

<http://www.odi.org.uk/work/stories-change/2009-future-aid.asp>

MDGs: Shifting the debate on poverty reduction

<http://www.odi.org.uk/work/stories-change/2009-mdgs-poverty-reduction.asp>

Climate change: Poor people, forests and climate change mitigation

<http://www.odi.org.uk/work/stories-change/2009-climate-change-forests.asp>

The 21st Century Think Tank: How major change happens

<http://www.odi.org.uk/work/stories-change/2009-think-tanks.asp>

Communications: Changing the development story

<http://www.odi.org.uk/work/stories-change/2009-communications.asp>

9 Conclusion

We have provided VASS researchers with an introduction to communicating research by focusing on three key written products – the policy brief, the research brief and the story of change. This is only a guide and we suggest that by far the best way to improve your writing is to experiment and practice. There are many other resources you can consult for advice. We strongly recommend reading the IDRC knowledge translation toolkit, which provides more comprehensive advice on communicating research, as well as referring to the ODI website.

Despite the rigorous process that underlies the development of the guide, it does, however, suffer from a drawback: decision-makers, institute directors, research managers and funders in the Vietnamese context (who are the main audiences for the three communication products highlighted in this guide) were not consulted. There is hence a risk that this guide does not fully appreciate their needs and requirements. But this is a 'working document'. And we hope that the guide will be evaluated and will incorporate their views in further editions.

We leave you by re-stating some important communication principles (IDRC, 2008):

- You can only communicate what you know.
- Communication is a two-way process. The better you listen to your audience, the better you will be able to answer their needs and the more your messages will be believed, liked and ultimately acted on.
- Effective communicators know what their audience needs to know, what 'language' they understand, and what they look at and listen to.
- You should develop tools that fit the channels available for your message.
- You must develop messages that respect the cultural context of your audiences.
- You must understand and respect your communications abilities and limits, as well as your time and resources as communications can be time and skill-intensive work.
- You must learn from your mistakes and your successes to improve your future communications.

10 Glossary¹

Policy A plan, course of action, or set of regulations adopted by government, businesses, or other institutions designed to influence and determine decisions or procedures.

Influencing Trying to persuade others of a position or point of view.

Policy engagement Establishing relationships with policy-makers (direct, preferably personal dialogue, building trust, understanding policy-maker's agenda and needs) and using these relationships to transmit messages based on evidence and application of evidence to policy.

Communication Communication is about bridging understanding within a human community by exchanging messages to enrich meaning and common knowledge, often with the purpose of embracing change.

Any imparting or exchange of information between two or more people. Communication may be verbal, non-verbal, intentional, or unintentional.

Target Audience(s) People who are intended to use the products of the research both during and beyond the term of the research programme or project.

The person (or group of people) who can help bring about the policy or practice change that you hope to achieve.

¹ This draws on the Glossary from DFID (2005)

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Available at <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/details.asp?id=1011&title=untangling-links-trade-poverty-gender>

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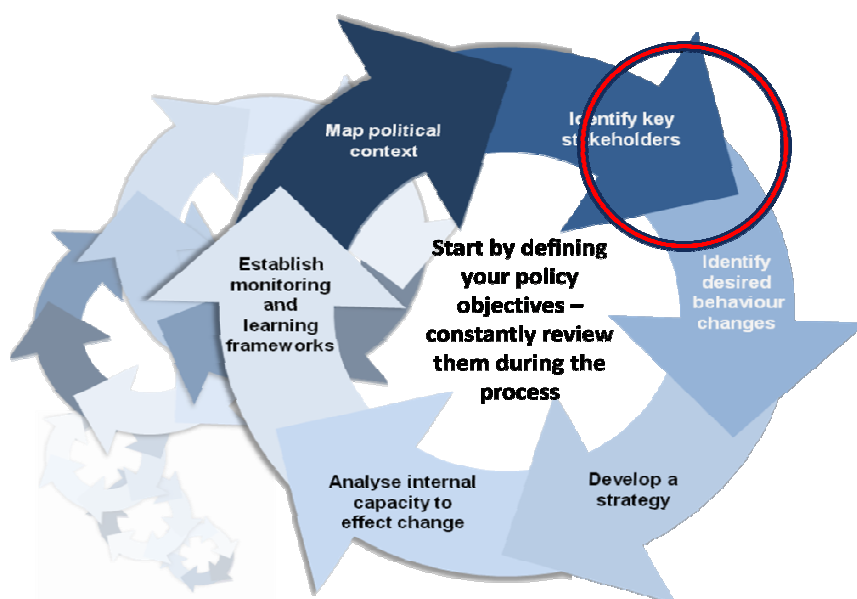
http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/toolkit/BOOKS/Communicating_Food_Policy_Results_a_Guidebook.pdf

12 Appendix 1: Identifying and prioritising target audiences

Written by Enrique Mendizabal (2010)

Background

The RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA) draws from the Outcome Mapping methodology to support the planning, monitoring and evaluation of policy influencing interventions. It is used, in various forms, by ODI, DFID and a variety of other projects and organisations. The ROMA process can help develop strategies that involve a number of intervention types. At the core of the approach, as with the planning of capacity development, knowledge management, communications and networking strategies, is the identification of the intervention's audiences.



Traditionally, RAPID had used a standard Stakeholder Analysis tool to identify the audiences of research-based, policy influencing interventions. However, in 2007, on the eve of a workshop to introduce a new version of the RAPID approach to DFID policy teams, Enrique Mendizabal and Ben Ramalingam decided to look for a tool that would not only help to identify the main stakeholders, but also suggest a possible course of action towards them.

The Alignment, Interest and Influence Matrix (AIIM) was designed to do precisely that.

Using the tool

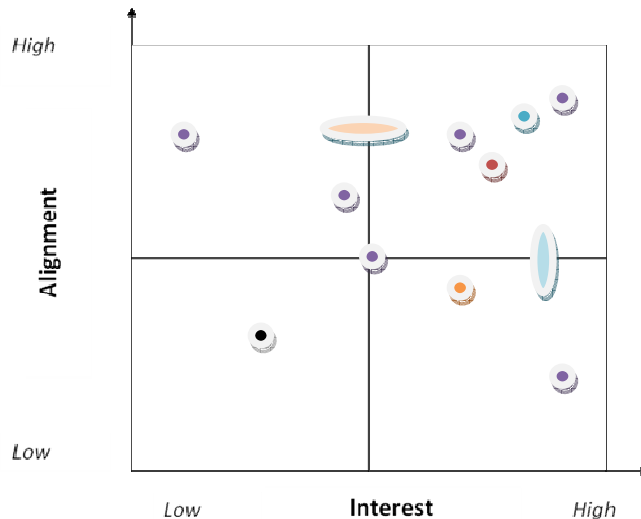
The AIIM tool is often used in a workshop setting and involves a diverse group of participants –each with insights into different actors or parts of the policy space. After defining the objectives of the intervention and carrying out some background context analysis (or in-depth research depending on the degree of complexity of the challenge), AIIM can help to clarify where some of the interventions' main policy audiences and targets stand in relation to its objectives and possible influencing approaches.

The **first** step of the process is to identify and list all the actors that may affect the policy outcome –if you do not have enough time then you should focus your attention on the most relevant or well known policy actors. These may be organisations, networks, groups, departments or teams within these bodies or even individual members. The level of detail will depend, in part, on how specific the policy objective is.

The **second** step of the process is to map these actors onto the matrix according to their level of alignment and interest. This should be based on evidence about their current behaviours and therefore it is important to consider their discourse, attitudes, the procedures they follow, and the content of their formal and informal policy expressions.

Alignment: Do they agree with our approach? Do they agree with our assumptions? Do they want to do the same things that we think need to be done? Are they thinking what we are thinking?

Interest: Are they committing time and money to this issue? Do they want something to happen (whether it is for or against what we propose)? Are they going to events on the subject? Are they publicly speaking about this?

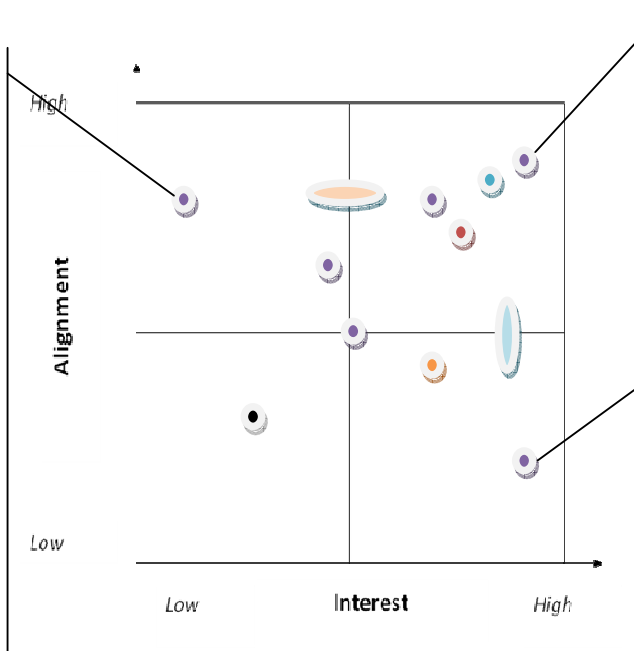


If the answers to these questions are positive then both the level of alignment and interest would be high.

You may use names or symbols to plot the actors; in some cases, shapes have been used to describe actors that may belong to more than one quadrant depending on a few contextual issues. (More tips are described in the section below). When mapping them onto the matrix you should consider the positions of the actors in relation to others.

You should also ensure that the positions are backed up by evidence –which may come from background studies, interviews, direct knowledge of the actors, observation, etc. (opinions should be corroborated as soon as possible). You should note the reasons for the location, for instance:

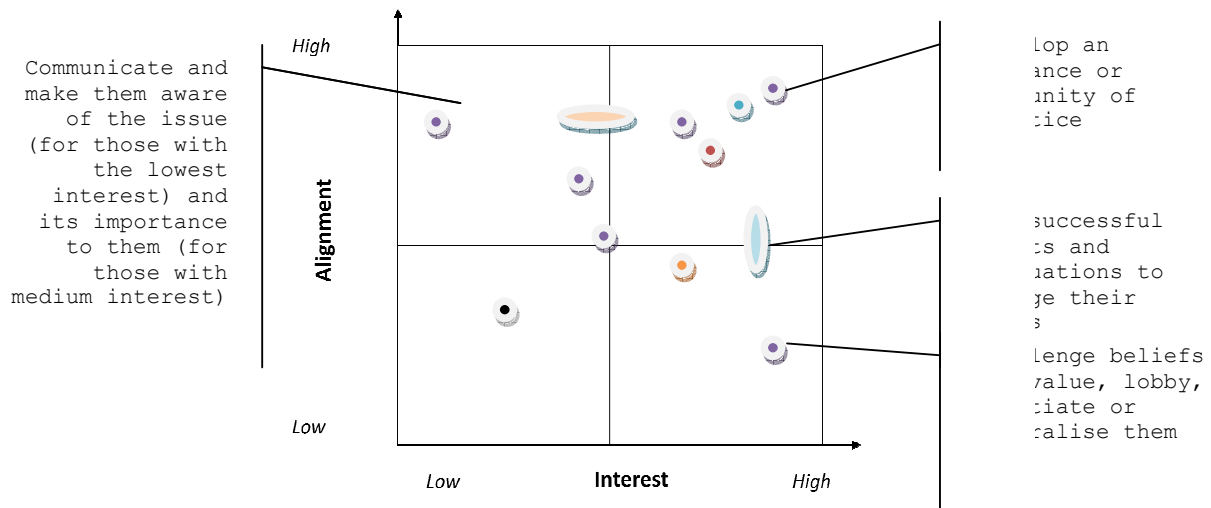
This actor agrees with the intervention (objectives and approach) but does not commit time or resources towards the achievement of its objectives; it does not show up at meetings, does not make its views public - it is not on its agenda, etc.



This actor regularly participates in meetings on the subject, publicly (or privately) supports the objectives of the intervention, commits funds towards achieving them, etc.

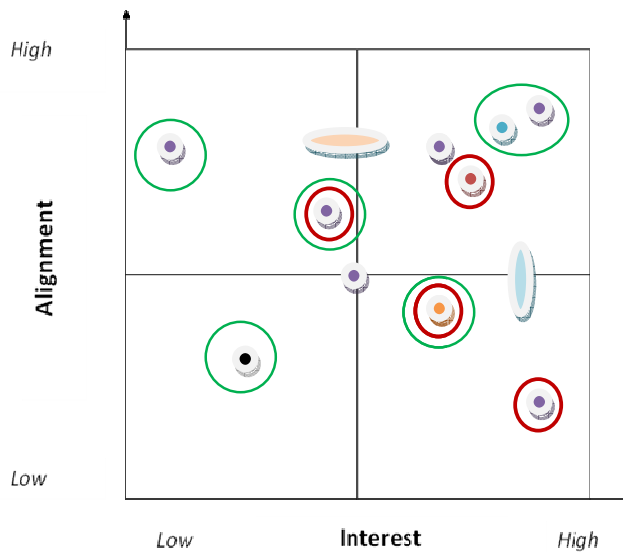
This actor publicly (or privately) opposes the intervention's objectives, has its own initiative to achieve different results or through different means, disagrees with the intervention's assumptions and theories, etc.

The **third** step is to start to consider what to do. This initial analysis should provide you with an idea about what to do. For example, in the figure below:



In some cases, this decision-making process may be affected by the presence of too many relevant actors. Therefore, the **fourth** step is to prioritise and consider which of the actors identified are the most **influential** on the policy process. This additional dimension can be noted by marking the main actors with a circle or maybe a star, as shown in the figure below –in this case using red circles.

In a few cases, this will not be enough and it will be necessary to identify those actors with which the organisation or intervention has a direct relationship, much like the concept of boundary partners, proposed by Outcome Mapping. In the figure below, this direct relationship has been represented by using a green circle.

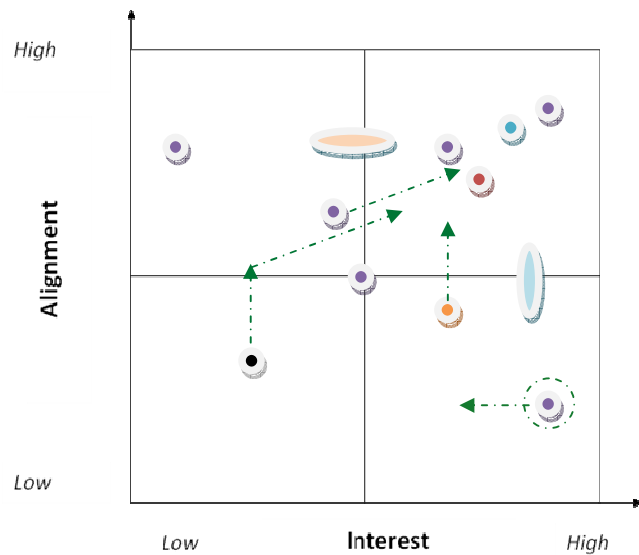


The diagram on the right then suggests that the main effort should be focused on the two actors which are both influential and accessible to the intervention's team.

However, this is not the only course of action. You might find it entirely relevant to focus on non-influential but highly accessible actors (green circle only); or to allocate all of your resources to tackle the 'opposing' actor (red circle only). This tool is intended to support this type of decision-making process where arguments for and against particular courses of action can be developed.

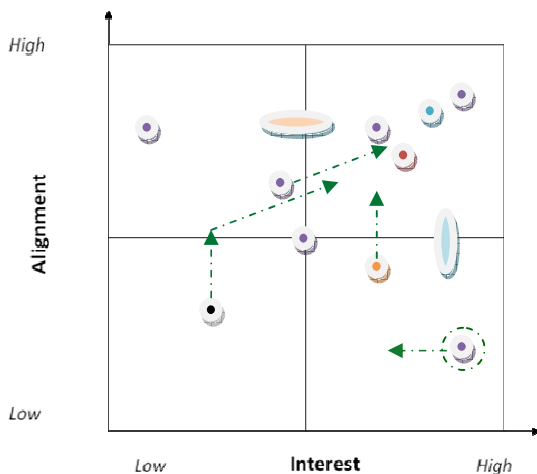
A **fifth** step involves the development of a pathway of change for your target audiences. This step can be supported by other steps of the ROMA process, but in essence it involves suggesting the trajectory that you expect and hope that each actor will follow. Each point along this context-sensitive pathway must describe a specific change in behaviour. In the diagram to the right we have removed the influence and access circles (for clarity) but added arrows suggesting desired change pathways for key actors.

To reflect the decisions of the previous step, the pathways which this particular intervention will attempt to influence are presented in green. The proposed pathway for the highly influential but out-of-reach actor in the lower right quadrant suggests that the intervention expects it to either remain in its place (circle) or lose interest (arrow). As it is deemed in this example, to be too difficult to tackle, the intervention will, for the time being, only monitor its position. If it changed to become more influential and actively opposed then the team might have to develop an explicit strategy towards it. Again, the matrix, with the possible pathways of change for the key target audiences, can help to decide the most appropriate course of action (your influencing actions) for each actor.

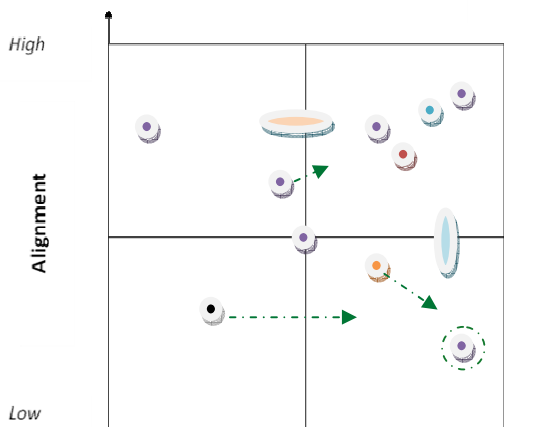


Using AIIM for Monitoring and Adapting

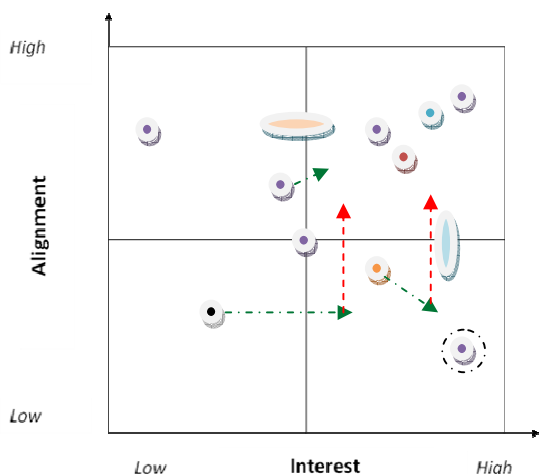
This tool, like others included in the ROMA process, can also be useful for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Having defined the proposed direction of travel and the influencing actions for the intervention for a smaller set of priority actors, it should be possible to track progress using this tool.



The original AIIM can be used to develop the strategy for the entire intervention -this is made up of the individual change pathways (in green) and the proposed actions to contribute towards this change.



A follow up AIIM, may be developed during a review meeting, an After Action Review (AAR), or as part of preparing a back to office report (BTOR), and can show progress in relation to these pathways. In the diagram on the left, for example, only one of the actors seems to be moving in the expected direction, one remains unchanged and two have become more antagonistic to the intervention's objectives.

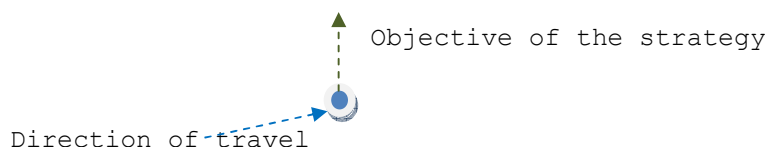


This review can now be used to rethink the change pathways for these actors and the strategy for the intervention. It is possible that the original analysis made some mistakes, or was based on unreliable evidence about the actors' actual behaviours, or that unexpected changes in the context have precipitated unexpected behaviour changes. In the diagram on the left the red arrows suggest the new change pathways for two of the actors.

Some practical advice and tips

The tool has been designed to support decision-making, but it can also facilitate discussions and communication with internal and external audiences. Since it was developed in 2007, users have added innovations that we present here:

- Always attempt to state the policy objective or policy issue being addressed before listing and plotting the actors –it will make the process more manageable and give a clear and tangible reference against which the axes can be defined.
- Always make sure that the two main axes (alignment and interest) are clearly understood by all those involved in the process.
- If when plotting a particular actor you find it difficult to find a position that all the participants can agree with, try to break it down into smaller parts (maybe into the divisions of an organisation or even individual policy-makers) and see where different teams or people can be plotted –it is possible that a donor or government department does not always behave as a whole. If this does not work, it is possible that the policy objective is still too broad and general.
- If you do not have enough evidence about a particular actor's current behaviour do not forget about it, plot it outside of the matrix to remind yourself and others that you may need to find out about them.
- Try to add direction of travel arrows to illustrate an actor's own agency –remember that they are not static and are, just like you, trying to influence policy outcomes:



- Make sure that subsequent steps in the ROMA process follow from the AIIM analysis –or that, if contradictory findings emerge, you revise the matrix accordingly.
- If you use the matrix in a workshop, use post-its on a flip-chart sheet to plot the actors (they can be moved) –write the name of the actor on the front and evidence of its behaviour on the back.

- In a workshop it is best to brainstorm the actors on the flip-chart and then discuss the evidence for their suggested positions rather than spend too much time listing them or talking about them in a group. Once the actors are plotted you will be able to challenge positions or identify gaps more easily.
- Consider how some actors might be related to others. It is possible that targeting an actor that you have significant influence over (but who is not very influential on the policy process) might have an influence over another influential –yet inaccessible– actor.

13 Appendix 2: Communication strategy template

1. **Objectives:** *What do we want our communications to achieve? Are our objectives SMART?*
2. **Audience:** *Who is our audience? What information do they need to act upon our work?*
3. **Message:** *What is our message? Do we have one message for multiple audiences or multiple messages for multiple audiences?*
4. **Basket:** *What kinds of communications "products" will best capture and deliver our messages?*
5. **Channels:** *How will we promote and disseminate our products? What channels will we use?*
6. **Resources:** *What kind of budget do we have for this? Will this change in the future? What communications hardware and skills do we have?*
7. **Timing:** *What is our timeline? Would a staged strategy be the most appropriate? What special events or opportunities might arise? Does the work of like-minded organizations present possible opportunities?*
8. **Feedback:** *Did our communications influence our audiences? How can we assess whether we used the right tools, were on budget and on time, and had any influence?*

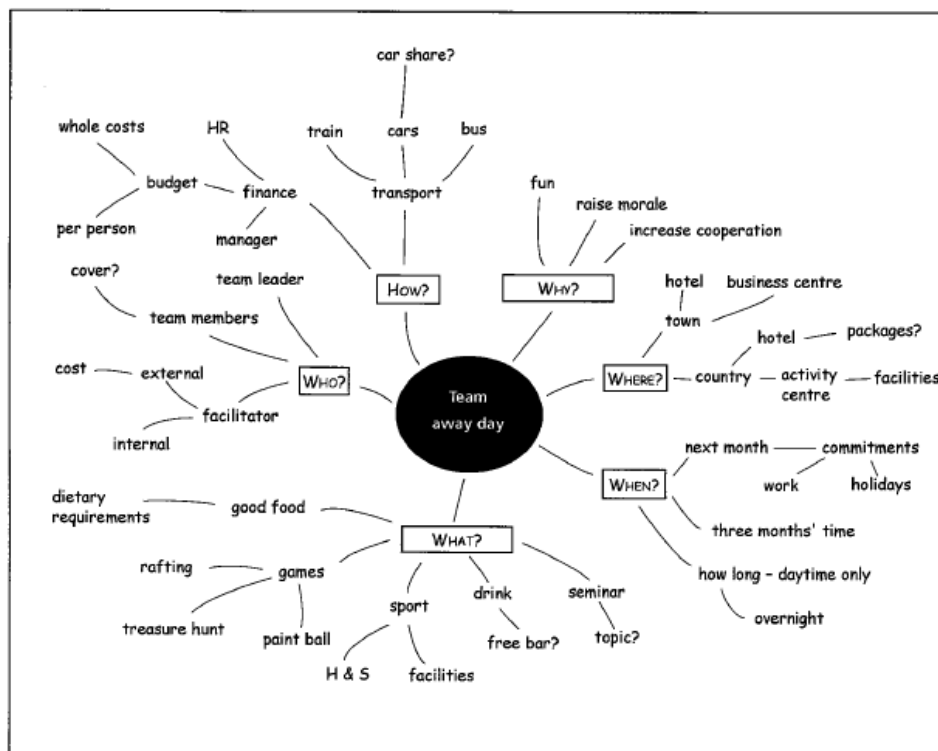
14 Appendix 3: Using mind mapping techniques

From Emphasis, 2009

Picking out the main points from a long report or a number of different reports is not an easy task. One technique to help you do this is the use of mind maps (also known as spider diagrams). This can help get down on paper all the possible aspects of the research topic that you might cover. To create a spider diagram, take the following steps:

1. First write the subject in the middle of the page
2. Then draw lines radiating from this word for every aspect of the subject. At the end of each line, write the name of one of the aspects. This unlocks the folders in your brain.
3. Look at each folder and think about what it should include. Draw a line for each new idea or piece of information. Continue this process, radiating outwards.
4. Keep asking questions such as Why, How and What until you are satisfied you have put down everything included in the research paper.

The example below in figure X is a mind map on the subject of a team 'away day' (or retreat). However, this doesn't give you the logical structure. You still have to work that out.



The next step is to filter the information. To identify the key points and help develop a structure for your research summary, you can do the following:

- Classify each item in the mind map as an A (essential to everybody), B (essential just to some readers, or important information) and C (not important)

- Then pick on the A's as your starting point. Take a different coloured pen and number the remaining As in a logical order
- Do the same for the Bs
- Cross out the Cs

Once you have done this, you are ready to form your ideas into a structure that your reader will find logical and easy to follow. Use the As for the body text, and the Bs for your boxouts, appendices, sidebars and graphics. You can also put some As in boxes, but do not put Bs in the main body text. See Table 1 below for reference.

Table 1: Classifying: what goes where?

Category	Function	Where
A	Essential to all readers	Body (or box)
B	Essential to some readers (or important supporting information if one reader)	Box, table, graphic, appendix footnote, separate chapter
C	Not important	LEAVE IT OUT

15 Appendix 4: Example of a policy brief

Male circumcision and HIV/AIDS: What are the policy options?

In December of 2006, randomised controlled trials of male circumcision in Kenya and Uganda showed such a strong protective benefit against HIV infection – 53% and 51% respectively – that the research was stopped. This suggests that male circumcision (MC) could become a frontline intervention in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The findings in Kenya and Uganda confirm the landmark findings of a similar study in South Africa, which also reported circumcision as a strong protective factor against HIV for men. Research evidence makes clear that MC may well be a cost-effective tool not only in the fight against HIV but also against other hazards in sexual and reproductive health. Beyond any doubt, the evidence demonstrates that MC leads to a dramatic drop in HIV infection in men, and this has strong implications for those involved in research, policy and implementation.

Implementing MC as an HIV-prevention intervention will have a number of effects on the health system and cultural practices. To be effective, it must be accompanied by safety measures and public-awareness campaigns. While the science is sound, implementation and operationalisation require high-level attention to a range of complex issues.

1. Health Systems.

The intervention may strain the human and financial resources of health systems. In Kenya, the MC research findings led to a spike in demand for elective MC. Central to this intervention are the key questions of: who will pay for it? Who will deliver it? Will increased attention to one intervention affect other disease prevention strategies? And how will this intervention be integrated into existing HIV-prevention strategies?

Financial Implications

- The cost of circumcision is US\$10, borne by the patient.
- Given the efficacy of the intervention, should the government absorb some or all of these costs? What other systemic implications would this have?

Human Resource Implications

Similar issues around who should deliver it (physicians and/or nurses and/or traditional healers/surgeons) and how (training required) arose several years ago with anti-retrovirals (ARVs), and there are strong lessons to be taken from that experience.

- Have basic **competency** levels in delivering this intervention been established?
- Is male circumcision a “clinical practice” and thus **not** to be performed by traditional healers/surgeons?
- If it is deemed to be a “clinical practice,” how will this affect traditional beliefs and practices? Will restricting its availability to the formal system affect who can access the treatment?

2. Cultural Responses.

MC carries major religious, social and cultural meanings for large parts of the population. There are significant levels of stigma around the practice, both positive and negative. No national MC policy could realistically proceed without first **mapping the context** of existing practices and existing research on those practices. There is need for more multidisciplinary research; anthropologists or sociologists who may have already studied MC should now contribute their knowledge in the context of HIV prevention. National consultations could bring together religious and cultural leaders to discuss their views of the intervention.

3. Safety and Education.

While circumcision does provide certain medical benefits, it is not without risk and must be accompanied by safety measures and public-awareness campaigns. Safety issues include **who** is delivering the intervention, **how** they're delivering it, and **when** it's delivered. While circumcising male infants or children may raise cultural issues, for adults the procedure is more complex, results in more complications, and generates additional HIV concerns. For instance, if freshly circumcised men engage in sexual behaviour before they are healed, their risks to acquiring HIV soar. MC does not make one "immune" to the disease and thus the procedure must be placed within the wider HIV-prevention context.

Policy Options

It is incumbent upon the Ministry to address these findings and act upon them. There is high demand among males for this procedure, and it could represent a significant step towards achieving lower rates of HIV acquisition. From a range of policy options, three recommendations seem the most viable:

1. Form a multi-stakeholder Task Force to discuss and map the context of male circumcision both culturally and scientifically. The Task Force should include community members, religious leaders, researchers, Ministry staff, and any other concerned groups. Within a Ministry-mandated framework, the Task Force will devise viable policy options within a tight timeframe. Time costs would be high, but financial costs low.

2. Commission multi-disciplinary research into male circumcision and HIV, emphasizing financing options, the broader socio-cultural and HIV-prevention context, and potential delivery mechanisms. While the scientific evidence is compelling, a comprehensive plan for its implementation is essential. At present, little is known in terms of how implementing MC might actually work in different contexts. Time costs could be up to two years, and financial costs would depend on the study method selected.

3. Make male circumcision free and immediately available to all. Given the importance of the findings, the Ministry will be under pressure to provide the intervention to all who want it. Making it free would show the Ministry's commitment to the health and safety of its citizens, and also to reducing the spread of HIV. Financial costs of this procedure would be significant and recurring – but then, so are those associated with the high rates of HIV/AIDS. In light of the above options, we believe the Ministry should proceed with a combination of the first and second recommendations. This intervention requires careful planning and an in-depth examination of current health system capabilities, cultural practices and responses, and an investigation into the safety and public-awareness campaigns that must accompany such an intervention for successful implementation. Above all, the Ministry must respond quickly – but responsibly – and requires a more robust evidence-base upon which to base further action.

For more information on this, see the full article at <www....> or directly contact <name> at <phone number> and <email>.

This policy brief example is from the IDRC knowledge translation toolkit (IDRC, 2008)

16 Appendix 5: Example of a research brief

An Upside-down View of Governance

New art students are often advised to close off their pre-existing knowledge about the objects they are trying to draw, and instead focus on angles, spaces, lines, proportions and relationships. Development practitioners similarly need to close off their mental models about governance and development that are rooted in OECD experience. Instead of prioritising reform of formal institutions, they should look at the structures, relationships, interests and incentives that underpin them. This does not mean rejecting the longer-term goal of helping poor countries to build inclusive, rules-based public authority. But in the short-to-medium term it may be more useful to explore whether relationship-based arrangements could offer a way to make progress.

This paper draws together findings from a five-year research programme by the Centre for the Future State. It explores in an open-minded way how elements of public authority are being created through complex processes of bargaining between state and society actors, and the interaction of formal and informal institutions. For example, a study in Egypt shows how informal relations between politicians and investors that build on common interests can compensate for weak formal property rights and contract enforcement, and boost investment in the short-to medium term. Studies of successful public sector reform in São Paulo suggest that formal participatory mechanisms may be less important as channels for policy influence than informal networks and relationships. Research in South Asia shows that informal village-level councils remain very influential, and can complement or undermine formal institutions. Studies in Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia show how governments' need for tax revenue has driven implicit or explicit bargaining with citizens, with the potential to enhance accountability.

Informal institutions and personalised relationships are usually seen as governance problems, but the research suggests that they can also be part of the solution. All the findings have implications for policymakers. For example, they should prioritise international action to improve financial regulation and constrain criminal activity, thus counteracting perverse incentives for political elites to perpetuate fragile states. Instead of focusing exclusively on improving the formal investment climate, they could do more to facilitate dialogue between politicians and investors and support collective action by business associations. Policymakers should be more alert to ways in which the design of public programmes influences opportunities and incentives for collective action to demand better services. Efforts to improve local governance need to take more account of informal village-level institutions. Tax reforms should prioritise equity, transparency and improved collection.

But the value of this research for policymakers does not reside only – or even primarily – in a list of policy messages. It makes a more important, broader point. Programmes to improve the investment climate, strengthen the rule of law, or fight corruption do not fail just for lack of 'ownership' or attention to politics. They fail because they make the wrong starting assumption: that progressive change consists in, and can be achieved through, strengthening formal, rules-based institutions that reflect a clear division between public and private spheres of life. The key to making progress in the short-to medium term may not be direct external intervention to orchestrate and support rules-based reform, but more indirect strategies to shift or influence the incentives and interests of local actors.

With this in mind, the research suggests a list of questions that seem particularly salient in understanding causes of bad governance and identifying ways of supporting more constructive bargaining between public and private actors. They are likely to be relevant in a great variety of circumstances. What is shaping the interests of political elites? (Sources of revenue are likely to be critical.) What is shaping relations between politicians and investors, and might they have common interests in supporting productive investment? What might stimulate and

sustain collective action by social groups to demand better services? What informal local institutions are at work, and how are they shaping development outcomes? Where does government get its revenue from, and how is that shaping its relationships with citizens?

This way of thinking about governance and development implies that donors need to reassess their own role in the process, and their traditional approaches to managing 'donor-recipient' relationships. But the first step is for them to change their mental models, and to stop viewing the world through an OECD lens. Without this they will not make the necessary investment in understanding local political dynamics, or make the (often uncomfortable) changes needed to their own organisation, values, practices and behaviour.

Full paper available at <http://www.ntd.co.uk/idsbookshop/details.asp?id=1159>

17 Appendix 6: Example of a story of change

Risk: The long road home in Sudan

'The ODI study has laid out the critical issues for addressing and sustaining peaceful reintegration of the displaced within the overall implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement' Dr. Luka Biong Deng, Minister of Presidential Affairs, Office of the President, Government of Southern Sudan

An ODI study in Southern Sudan has changed policy debate on reintegration at the national and international levels.

Worldwide, efforts to return people to their homes after conflicts tend to focus on headcounts and logistics. The ODI study on Southern Sudan has shown the importance of looking beyond the numbers to address underlying issues that can, if neglected, threaten hard-won peace agreements. Some two million people have returned to Southern Sudan since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 and peace has paved the way for lasting development. But the scale of the return has stretched basic services – such as health, education and water – to breaking point, with some areas unable to cope with the influx.



ODI has worked with the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) since 2007 to analyse reintegration, with funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the Canadian and Danish International Development Agencies. A team of international and Sudanese experts met people in more than 40 communities across Southern Sudan to hear their views, as well as key players from the Government, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations.

Land emerged as one of the biggest issues, with unresolved questions over who owns what. Conflict over land was cited as the biggest risk to returnees and local communities in Southern Kordofan, and lack of access to land was preventing access to housing and services in Juba. Yet land issues were not being addressed, even in areas where tensions over land were extremely high. The ODI study picked out the most urgent issues, including multiple occupation of land and housing, illegal building and the seizure of land by opportunists, as well as the lack of appropriate legislation and coherent mechanisms to address land problems. People also cited unemployment, urbanisation and insecurity as key challenges. Add to these serious language issues, with many returnees speaking English rather than Arabic, and the potential for friction remains. The study also revealed that scarce resources can be flashpoints for tensions between those who have returned and those who never left. A 'hierarchy' can even be seen in water queues, with former refugee women expected to wait at the back of the line.

The study carried these concerns to the highest policy circles. As a result, the Government of Southern Sudan took the lead on a series of workshops in January 2009 to develop an action plan based on its results – a rare chance for ministries, UN agencies, donors and NGOs to work together. And the study prompted a reflection on the need for a policy shift within UNMIS, with underlying issues – including land – being placed at the heart of its debate and the development of a renewed strategy.