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Using Knowledge:

The Dilemmas of 'Bridging Research and Policy'

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Abstract

The 'knowledge agenda' has become a central part of development discourse. This paper addresses one aspect of this discourse – the use of policy research in the social sciences and the dilemmas that have been encountered by both development agencies and researchers in communicating and making use of that research. Development agencies as well as NGOs have initiated work to evaluate and document the effectiveness of research partnerships, knowledge capacity building and (social) science policy impact. As a multilateral initiative, the Global Development Network (GDN), and especially its 'Bridging Research and Policy' project, provides a vehicle to address issues related to research impact. Twelve perspectives on improving research and policy linkages are outlined to reveal that how the problem is defined shapes policy responses. Taken together, these explanations provide a multi-faceted picture of the research-policy nexus indicating that there are many possible routes to 'bridging' research and policy. These diverse perspectives will be categorised into three broad categories of explanation: (i) supply-side, (ii) demand-led and (iii) policy currents. However, knowledge is part of the solution to many development problems but not of itself a panacea.

Using Knowledge:

The Dilemmas of 'Bridging Research and Policy'.

1. **Introduction**

The 'knowledge agenda' has become a central part of development discourse. This paper addresses one aspect of this discourse – the use of policy research in the social sciences and the dilemmas that have been encountered by both development agencies and researchers in communicating and making use of that research. As noted by one Japanese commentator reflecting on the role of Japan International Cooperation Agency, "…knowledge itself does not make any difference; rather the application of knowledge 'on the ground' is what matters'" (Sawamura in NORRAG, 2001: 6). Moreover, given the pervasiveness of mass poverty, resources devoted to the elite activity of research has prompted 'demand for documentation of research impact' by donors (Sverdrup, 2001: 237).

Development agencies – inter alia, Danida (2001), RAWOO (2001) in the Netherlands, IDRC in Canada (Nielson, 2001) and the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countires (KFPE, 2001) – as well as NGOs such as the Northern Policy Research Review and Advisory Network on Education and Training (NORRAG, 2001) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI – Garrett & Islam, 1998) have initiated work to evaluate and document the effectiveness of research partnerships, knowledge capacity building and (social) science policy impact. As a multilateral initiative, the Global Development Network (GDN), and especially its 'Bridging Research and Policy' project, provides a vehicle to address issues related to research impact. The GDN has convened two electronic discussions on the policy uses of research that provide an invaluable range of insight into this issue from a southern perspective. [1] In

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[1] Comments are taken from the electronic dialogue initiated by the World Bank Institute on 'GDN priorities that run for four weeks over November-December 1999. This is archived at : (http://www2.worldbank.org/hm/hmgdn/). The second discussion 'Research to Policy' in 2001 is archived at:
http://www2.ids.ac.uk/gdnet/subpages/projects_underresearch.html

some degree, the GDN project seeks to build upon, integrate with and help synthesise the lessons from these other initiatives. This project is outlined in the following section in the broader context of the irrelevance of social science research in policy making. Section three reveals that policy solutions as to how researchers and policy makers build bridges are shaped by *how the problem is defined* in the first instance. Twelve different interpretations or sets of solutions are outlined. The final section concludes that instrumental conceptions of knowledge utilisation are a necessary but insufficient component of enhancing the policy relevance of research. Of itself, research is not a panacea for development.

2. Development Research in Policy Making

Many governments and international organisations devote considerable financial resources to both in-house and contracted research. For example, the Danish Commission on Development-Related Research states that research can 'safeguard the quality of aid' through both the 'accumulation of experience and scientific knowledge' as well as through 'knowledge management'. This ideal picture is quickly qualified by the Danida Report recounting the perceptions of the two different communities of researchers and policy makers. That is, researchers often consider that there is no political audience for their work despite the important observations they make and policy relevant explanations they develop. By contrast, policy-makers often consider that what researchers contribute is not relevant, too esoteric and asking theoretical questions that do not resonate with the needs of policy makers. 'Where the one group feels nobody listens, the other feels their opposite numbers have little to say' (Danida, 2001: 9).

The relationship between researchers and policy-makers is an uneasy one. Both researchers and policy-makers might be accused of holding unrealistic expectations of the other. Nor is it feasible to generalise either about how research is utilised in policy or why some forms of research are favoured over other sources. Not only is the demand for research, analysis and policy advice extremely diverse but the degree of research use varies across time, country and policy domains. This uncertainty and ambiguity about the

value or relevance of research presents a dilemma for groups and institutions advocating the policy utility of social scientific knowledge.

The Global Development Network is an independent transnational non-governmental organisation with the mission to 'create, share and *apply* knowledge' (www.gdnet.org, my emphasis). GDN is composed primarily of social science university research centres and think tanks but multilateral donors (especially the World Bank), independent foundations and some government bodies play active roles in Network affairs. On the supply-side, many researchers want to improve dissemination and the quality of interaction with policy-makers. On the demand-side, policy-makers are concerned with how to achieve quick, cost-effective and efficient access to a wide range of research advice. The Network works towards greater scope for 'home-grown' policy, information-sharing and enhanced research capacity in and between developing countries. The concern is to incorporate the 'research community' more efficiently into development policy.

In the three annual GDN conferences to-date, the Network has sought to examine the manner whereby research might have an impact on policy making. Indeed, the title of the inaugural conference was 'Bridging Knowledge and Policy'. Likewise, the second conference in Tokyo brought together a number scholars and policy practitioners working on the research-policy nexus (see Stone 2002 and the chapters on Korea and India in Stares and Weaver, 2001). Following the Tokyo conference, the UK Department for International Development (DfID) funded an international workshop – again entitled 'Bridging Research and Policy' – at the University of Warwick to identify ways to make existing knowledge on the policy process available to researchers. Rather than coming to definitive conclusions as to how miscommunication could be resolved or how research could be better utilised, an appreciation of how varying interpretations of policy making provide different parameters of understanding of the research-policy nexus came to the fore. In short, there are no answers or solutions that can be rationally devised. This is not to diminish efforts to improve or 'build bridges' between policy and research. It is to recognise that different policy environments, institutional structures and political

arrangements produce different sets of opportunities and constraints for dialogue, call forth varying strategies for policy researchers and have dramatically diverse implications from one political system and/or policy sector to the next. This is one line of thinking behind post workshop activity advocating the need for co-ordinated case studies that can illustrate the diverse ways that research does or does not influence policy. Consequently, the 'Bridging' project is not simply concerned with improved utilization but also with the relationship between research and policy as well as with understanding the policy process.

Nevertheless, there have been studies of some types of organisations that seek to 'bridge' the policy and research worlds. 'Think tanks', for example, are a form of research organisation that directly seeks to influence policy on which there is an extensive literature (see McGann & Weaver 2000). There is also a wide literature on the development activities of philanthropic foundations in both advancing knowledge and in its utilisation (Parmar, 2002). Universities, in contrast, have often been stereotyped as engaged in the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Yet higher education institutions in most OECD countries and many developing countries are under greater pressure to demonstrate their utility to society and to help advance economic development through education and training (Spaapen, 2001: 98).

Little attention has been paid to other types of research organisation. Consultancy firms, for example, are involved with public policy as a consequence of the international spread of the 'new public management' (Krause Hansen *et al*, 2002). Yet, the preference for foreign consultants, especially by donor agencies that tie technical assistance to the hire of donor-country experts is often regarded as a constraint on the development of in-country research capacity and policy expertise.

> International cooperation in research, … which largely takes the form of research by consultants … tends to displace public funding of research. It also sets new research agendas. The short term needs and compulsions of international research also contribute to negating the value of long-term research on the one hand, and building of sustainable capacities of the

universities and research institutions; and as a corollary to the research conducted or sponsored by international organisations, domestic research generally gets devalued (Tilak, 2001: 259).

As noted in the GDN e-discussions, "This causes resentment among locals and discourages them from active participation" in policy research in Sri Lanka (Stanley Samarasinghe, 2nd November 1999). Another cause for complaint has been the imposition of 'one-size-fits-all' development models and inappropriate application of 'world standards'. In Bulgaria "… it is quite difficult to argue with some foreign consultants in developing projects, especially with foreign donors, that not all research instruments that work in some part of the world also work in the others" (Lilia Dimova, 17th November, 1999). These local experts raise valid questions about both the quality and utility of practical and policy knowledge marketed by the consultancy industry and the interests of donors in demanding such knowledge.

Also overlooked are many large non-governmental organisations and pressure groups (such as Oxfam and Transparency International) which both undertake research and attempt to use the findings to influence policy-making. More select gatherings of experts and policy practitioners such as the World Economic Forum and the (World Trade Organisation related) Evian Group engineer policy dialogue between corporate, government and intellectual leaders. In sum, many policy researchers in think tanks, universities and consultancy interact more or less regularly with counterparts in government research bureaux, both those within departments, and autonomous non-departmental public bodies (quangos) (see Stares and Weaver, 2001) as well as researchers in international organisations. Collectively, they create diverse development perspectives in research partnerships and in more informal intellectual communities, professional associations and knowledge networks that cross borders and institutions.

The extending research roles of these different organisations, the 'knowledge management' policy agendas of most large organisations and projects like 'Bridging Research and Policy' would seem to provide a basis for contesting the commonly held view articulated by Danida and others that researchers and policy makers live in different

worlds. Increasingly, a capacity not only to understand but also to *undertake* rigorous research is a professional requirement for NGO leaders, officers of professional associations and government bureaucrats. More researchers are becoming practitioners – co-opted onto advisory committees, joining government for limited terms or acting as consultants to international organisations. Knowledge networks and policy communities overlap (Stone, 2002). The dividing line is very blurred in many policy instances.

Nevertheless, the common wisdom is that there is a lack of dialogue between researchers and policy makers and that inadequate or insufficient use is made of research findings. The non-use of research has been largely explained as a cultural gap between researchers and policy makers in relation to their values, language, time-frames, reward systems and professional affiliations to such an extent that they live in separate worlds (Nielson, 2001: 5). Hence, the metaphor and donor desire to 'build bridges'.

3. The 'Push' and 'Pull' of Research-Policy Dynamics

There are a number of different perspectives and explanations as to why research is or is not utilised in policy making. Taken together, they provide a multi-faceted picture of the research-policy nexus indicating that there are many possible routes to 'bridging' research and policy. These diverse perspectives will be categorised into three broad categories of explanation: (i) supply-side, (ii) demand-led and (iii) policy currents.

The first set of explanation focus researchers wanting to be heard in policy circles and identify problems in the character of research supply. This necessitates building bridges to improve the flow of data, analysis and information into the policy-makers world. Supply-side explanations that 'push' research exhibit at least four strands of argument.

1. The *public goods problem*, where there is an inadequate supply of policy relevant research (Squire 2000). One solution is intervention with capacity building programmes and public support for the *creation* of policy relevant research. This approach is grounded in the belief that there is currently insufficient information for

policy planning (see World Bank, 1998/99). The incorporation of research into policy deliberations once it is generated tends to be assumed. In other words an increase in supply will generate its own demand. Implicit in GDN motto – 'better research\better policy\better world' – is the assumption that the weight of research results and data has inherent force and policy relevance

2. Rather than a lack of research, there is *lack of access* to research, data and analysis for both researchers and policy makers. Although there is a wealth of research and analysis available, there is differential or inequitable access to knowledge. Recommendations to improve both access to and the diffusion of knowledge follow. This could include 'technical fixes' such as making material available through web-sites and email distribution lists. Prominent examples include the Development Gateway, OneWorld (www.oneworld.net), GDNet or Eldis (www.eldis.org). More traditional measures involve scholarships, training programmes and staff exchanges to facilitate access to knowledge for developing country scholars and leaders. The differential distribution of knowledge resources has also prompted programmes facilitating research collaboration such as North-South partnerships (KFPE, 2001).

3. Alternatively, the supply of research is flawed due to the *poor policy comprehension of researchers* about both the policy process and how research might be relevant to this process. Research recommendations can be impossible to implement because political realities (such as cost-effectiveness) are not addressed. Overcoming this lack of understanding requires researchers to study the policy process, to find approaches to demonstrate the relevance of research, and to build methodologies for evaluating research relevance (see Garrett & Islam, 1998). Methodologies include case studies, examples of 'best practice', and targeting research at different points in the policy process. Much of the GDN 'Bridging' project is cast in this frame.

4. Finally, instead of lacking comprehension, researchers may be *ineffective communicators*. Researchers usually cannot and often do not want to provide the unequivocal answers or solutions of the kind policy-makers demand. Again, the problem is located in the quality of supply but where the emphasis is on style of

presentation and the development of 'narratives' that help 'sell' research (Keeley and Scoones, 1999: 24-27). Improved communications strategies are consequently encouraged. A more sophisticated approach emphasises the agency of 'policy entrepreneurs' – people who have a talent for creating 'narratives' or story lines that simplify complicated research findings for public consumption.

On the latter two points, there have been numerous capacity building workshops and programmes for think tanks sponsored by the World Bank Institute and, in Africa, for instance, for university and think tank researchers via the Senegal based Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research (see Seck & Phillips, 2001). Rather than research being seen as inherently persuasive or powerful, research is re-packaged to meet the specific needs of policy makes. However, in the world of policy makers, there are also problems in the nature of demand for research. Improved research communication and policy entrepreneurship will amount to nought without a receptive political audience that 'pulls' in research. A further four sets of explanation outline why the 'pull' of policy makers can be weak.

5. Research uptake is undermined by the *ignorance of politicians* or over-stretched bureaucrats about the existence of policy relevant research. Decision-makers have limited time and resources. Consequently, they employ information from trusted sources – usually in-house or close to the centre of power – to help generate simple and understandable recommendations about complex problems. They may be unaware of cutting-edge research. One solution takes shape in, for example, the appointment of specialists to government committees or as a NORAD representative advised, creating links via the establishment of research councils and research foundations (Sverdrup, 2000: 239). However, this is primarily a one-way 'conveyor-belt' process of feeding research into policy assuming decision-makers will be receptive to the best available information.

6. There is a tendency for *anti-intellectualism in government* that mitigates against the use of research in policy-making, while the policy process itself is riddled with a fear

of the critical power of ideas (ESRC/DfEE 2000: 16). This problem can be exacerbated in developing countries, where "official information is usually deliberately kept out of reach of researchers", making it difficult for them to provide research that is relevant to current policy issues (Kwabia Boateng, GDN Priorities, 3rd November 1999). More extreme conditions (such as the censorship and oppression of researchers) are not uncommon in some developing and/or undemocratic states. The imprisonment of Saad Eddin Ibrahim of the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies is one of the more extreme examples of how social research can be perceived as politically disruptive. In such circumstances, for research to have impact changes in political culture may also be necessitated. Solutions to this – freedom of information/speech – are problematically dependent on the significant strengthening of democratic institutions.

7. Rather than ignorant or censorious, policy makers and leaders may be incapable of absorbing and using research. Research is a lengthy process, whereas political problems usually require immediate attention. Politicians are driven by immediate political concerns in "a 'pressure cooker' environment". In this scenario, the character of demand is flawed. This problem requires improvement in *governmental capacity* to absorb research, as well as in the capacities, personnel and resources of the state structure more generally. More generally, 'research editors' are needed in government to sort out the welter of useful, rigorous and high quality research from poor standard or irrelevant research. Increasingly, public agencies need to have strong administrative capacity for effective evaluation and policy analysis. This necessitates training programmes to help bureaucrats or political leaders become 'intelligent customers' of research.

8. Problems arise from the *politicisation of research*. Research findings are easy to abuse, either through selective use, de-contextualisation, or misquotation. Decision-makers might do this in order to reinforce existing policy preferences or prejudices. Alternatively, they gather and utilise information to support their policy positions as well as to legitimise decision outcomes. Research often produces information that is

unintelligible, irrelevant or strongly discrepant – and will be either discarded by decision-makers or construed by them in ways that are consistent with their preconceptions. Moreover, multiple sources of policy advice compete for the attention of policy-makers. Governments, for example, face departmental policy advice, analysis from cabinet office and executive agencies, party-political advice, the research findings and 'best practice' from donors, political advice from policy units inside government as well as international organisations, the recommendations of parliamentary committees or blue ribbon commissions, and outside advice from think tanks and universities. It all generates conflicting information necessitating political choice over competing claims.

The difficulties encountered by both researchers and policy-makers – presented in binary terms of supply and demand – contribute to the making of the 'bridge' metaphor. These accounts tend to focus on clearly determined sets of producers (researchers) and consumers (policy-makers). However, a third set of perspectives complicate the simplicity of the metaphor and its technocratic problem solving origins. For want of a better term, this broad school of thinking will be labelled 'policy currents' (or what Nielson, 2001 refers to as 'political models'). Persisting with the bridge metaphor, the societal river below provides the wider context in which research is undertaken, sometimes flooding both the researcher's and policy-maker's worlds. In such explanations, the concept of research 'user' becomes more blurred and is reflected in the use of the term 'stakeholder' for those who have an interest in policy research (see Spaapen, 2001).

9. There is a *societal disconnection* of both researchers and decision-makers from each other and from those who the research is about or intended for, to the extent that effective implementation is undermined. In particular, decision-makers are more likely to use internal sources of information. External sources of research are likely to be discounted. In some scenarios, 'group think' may result in government and a 'ivory tower' culture in research communities. Yet, even where there is a constructive dialogue between decision-makers and experts, there may be joint

technocratic distance from the general public. The recommendations lead to a focus on, for example, 'participatory rural analysis' (Cooke & Kothari, 2001), 'street-level bureaucracy' and encouraging 'public understanding of science'.

10. Instead of asking about how research can acquire direct policy impact, the question is decentred to address broader patterns of socio-political, economic and cultural influence. This leads to questioning of the *domains of research relevance*, impact and influence. For instance, an organisation or group of researchers may have huge impact on the media or among non-governmental organisations but little or no input into policy development. Similarly, research institutions can have some medium term impact on government in the sense that they may be a stepping stone in political careers. In other words, think tanks, universities and other research institutions can serve as political training grounds, grooming emerging political leaders in policy debates prior to an opportunity arising for them to move into formal political sphere. One example is the spread of ideas or paradigms through the US education system such as the 'Chicago Boys' who influenced Latin American policy-making with monetarist ideas (Valdes 1995). This requires a longer-term perspective where research use may take a generation to reveal its cultural influence.

11. Building bridges does not necessarily resolve conflict over policy choices. Instead, the improved flow of knowledge and use of research can highlight the *contested validity of knowledge(s)*. Ideology plays a role and points to the close relation that exists between knowledge and power. The social and political context is important to understanding up take of research. Institutional arrangements, the nature of regime in power, the culture of public debate (or lack of it) and prevailing idea of truth or hegemony, structure what is considered 'relevant' or 'useful' knowledge. From this vantage, a certain type of knowledge, a particular way of looking at and interpreting the world, and the best practices as determined by the international financial institutions, corporations and worlds leading governments are mobilised through research partnerships and capacity building programmes.

12. There are deeper questions about what is knowable? Attention is then focused on different epistemologies and 'ways of knowing'. The most common distinction is drawn between indigenous understandings of the world, and Western rationalist (scientific) approaches. This perspective prompts more participatory approaches to research, and emphasises multiple domains and types of knowledge, with differing logics and epistemologies.

The way in which research-policy dynamics is understood and interpreted has implications for the methods adopted to improve the relationship. If the problem is located on the supply side, as in points 1-4, then approaches to improve research communication and dissemination are adopted. This could involve initiatives such as the establishment of research reporting services (on web-sites and traditional media); encouraging 'policy entrepreneur' styles in research institutions and training activities for researchers such as media workshops and exercises in public speaking; how to write policy briefs and so forth. The product of the researcher is not usually in a format that can be used by policy makers. Consequently, an intermediary – a 'research broker' or 'policy entrepreneur'— with a flair for interpreting and communicating the technical or theoretical work is needed. This is usually an individual but sometimes an organisation such as think tank or a network like GDN plays a similar role in marketing knowledge or synthesizing and popularising research. In this vein, the Overseas Development Institute – a London based think tank – has been a strong advocate of the need for policy entrepreneurs skills among researchers (see Maxwell, 200l; Sutton, 2000).

A common position in 'supply-side' perspectives is that initiative and action comes from the research end in efforts to customise research for policy – the consumers tend to be portrayed as relatively passive absorbers of research. However, if the problem is located on the demand side, as in points 5-8, then strategies focus on improved awareness and absorption of research inside government, expanding research management expertise and developing a culture of 'policy learning'. Measures that allow government agencies to become 'intelligent consumers' of research include: establishment of in-house policy evaluation units; sabbaticals for civil servants in a university or research institute; the

creation of civil service colleges; in-house training on research management and 'evidence based policy' as well as patronage of 'public sector MBAs'. Such measures often assume that knowledge utilisation in government is a technical problem that can be resolved with technical 'fixes' and improved knowledge management.

However, a larger part of the problem lies in understanding flaws and imperfections in the policy process, especially the 'implementation gap'. This gap in the execution of policy is the difference between the policy-makers objectives and what actually happens at the point of policy delivery. In the 'aftermath' of policy formulation the 'appropriate research and evidence-based policies may be put in place but their proper implementation is a different story altogether' (Jennifer Liguton, 21st November 2001). Policy-makers have a 'control deficit' that results from not implementing the policies themselves but being reliant upon local government officials, NGOs or others. Consequently, a simple top-down hierarchical view of policy implementation from executive down through ministries or departmental agencies cannot be assumed. Policy is thrown off course by factors such as bureaucratic incompetence and/or resistance as well as inadequate resources or inaccurate or incomplete research resulting in flawed policy design. Modification of policy is inevitable in the implementation phase where 'street level' bureaucrats play an important role mediating policy between the centre and the local environment, between decision-making elites and the public, and in their discretionary powers.

Rather than a matter of developing appropriate research dissemination techniques, 'bridging' strategies or improving governmental policy analysis capacity that identify problems in supply and demand for research, explanations 8-12 see the problem rooted in wider social and political context. For example, the capacity to absorb research is not simply one faced by government but by societies as a whole. As globalisation, information technology and the development of knowledge accelerate, increasing demands will be made on societies to become 'knowledge societies'. This becomes increasingly difficult for developing countries with low literacy, poorly resourced education systems and problems of 'brain drain'.

Policy current explanations stress the need for long term engagement of researchers with policy makers that create common understandings and identities. This implies developing practices that take researchers beyond supplying and/or brokering research in a one-way direction and allow a more productive exchange between decision-makers and implementers on what does and does not work in the transition from theory to practice. Practices could include mechanisms that bring researchers into government such as through internships, co-option onto advisory committees and official patronage of policy research networks as well as broader practices that encourage societal interaction. There is a 'capacity building' element to knowledge utilisation but 'policy current' approaches see knowledge-in-policy as a more organic process and focus on the social construction of policy problems, policy belief systems and political identities. The emphasis is on shared problem definition within policy communities of researchers, policy makers and other key stakeholders as the dynamic for effective change. Researchers are only one set of stake holders producing and articulating shared sets of meaning that help form increased propensity for co-operation and collective action.

Similarly, the scientific status and 'truth claims' of research are contextualised in post-modern accounts of the socio-political impact of knowledge. Cultural and historical context determine the character of truth. Knowledge is not only bound to time and place but the person or agency that created it. Rationalist understandings of scientific objectivity that underpin research are not regarded as 'truth' but as contingent and contestable knowledge claims. Social power relations have elevated rationalism and the 'expert discourses' of university, think tank and consultant researchers over other modes of knowledge in modern contexts. These (social) scientific discourses help shape not only policy agendas but also perception. The policy language and development discourses mark out arenas where people 'take up subject positions and identities, create relations to one another and construct worldviews'. These discourses generate 'effects of truth'; that is, 'normalizing or naturalizing specific ways of thinking and doing things, often with a claim to scientific or other expertise' (Krause Hansen et al, 2002).

> By seeing policy as discourse, analytical attention is turned to the webs of
> power underlying practices of different actors in the policy process, as

well as the discursive and non-discursive practices which are invested in policy negotiation and contestation. Thus linguistic and textual styles, classificatory systems and particular discursive formations can be seen to empower some and silence others (Keeley & Scoones, 1999: 5)

The 'bridge' metaphor includes researchers and policy-makers, excluding other modes of knowledge production. Importantly, power resides not simply in research and advice that is synchronised with the policy preferences of political leaders, but also in the way that research can provide a foundation for 'counter-discourses' and the formation of alternative identities and resistance.

These approaches do not separate the world of research and the world of policy making but see knowledge and power as inter-related. The very idea of 'bridging research and policy' is a false one as it presents a biased view of two autonomous communities. As a consequence, there is less agonising in these perspectives about the 'weak link between research and policy'. Instead, research and policy are viewed as mutually constitutive in the sense that knowledge is power. Indeed, there is less concern for how knowledge is used, and the instrumentalism that that position entails, and greater interest in the longer term, diffuse or atmospheric character of dominant thinking.

4. Research Irrelevance and the Limits to Policy.

Returning to the three goals of the GDN – to create, share and apply knowledge – the third goal remains more an ambition rather than a reality. It is the case that many researchers associated with the GDN are applying their knowledge to pressing development questions and hoping to inform policy. However, for the reasons outlined earlier, it is less apparent whether policy research is being incorporated in policy formulation.

This paper does not seek to present a negative view of research utilisation. As one of the first contributors to the 'GDN bridging policy and research e-discussion' noted, 'there are enlightened bureaucrats, planners and politicians who want to link research and policy

making' (Sakti Pal, 25th October, 2001). Other e-contributors considered that the administrative setting can positively influence the uptake of research, especially the presence of in-house governmental research units (Nijinkeu, 30th October 2001) and many recounted instances where research had made a difference in policy making and implementation.

However, the stories in the e-discussion and elsewhere cannot be boiled down to an essence or set of steps that will ensure policy research success. As one e-contributor put it: '"policy" and "research" cannot be defined very specifically nor can the nexus between them' (Gul Najam Jamy, 6th November 2001). Too many factors come into play making general statements about how to bridge policy and research a risky endeavour. In varying degree, the twelve perspectives outlined above employ different theoretical assumptions about either the relationship of knowledge to state and society, the nature of political communication or the economic forces of supply and demand. The GDN 'Bridging' project is designed mainly around the first eight perspectives. Indeed, the metaphor signifies the problem in terms of linking two worlds or separate communities. It also establishes an agenda that can be translated into concrete capacity building initiatives or case-study programs. The remaining perspectives are also heard in the GDN e-discussions and debates but are less amenable to project related activity. Furthermore, to incorporate concerns about ideology or the social construction of expert discourse would also necessitate a self-reflective impulse in the Network. It would require questioning about: first, its own elite, expert and technocratic status; second, the exclusion of indigenous, practitioner and NGO knowledges in reifying rationalist research; and third, the development research agenda that largely concords with that of its main sponsor – the World Bank. However, these issues are not exclusive to the GDN but could also be asked of North-South research partnerships and networks elsewhere.

Finally, research is not a panacea for policy. Social and economic problems will persist. It is a 'romantic notion that if research and policy work together from the onset one can see better results' (Gul Najam Jamy, 6th November 2001). Politics, values and ideology are an inevitable part of policy making and are reflected in the funding/commissioning of

research, the values of the researcher, and the political selection and application of research results. Research has social consequences beyond that which is examined. Research legitimises those who commissioned or funded it. Expert knowledge also legitimises certain social and economic issues as 'public policy problems'. Moreover, the researcher or research group also gains policy credibility and some authority.

The normative dimension of research and policy making cannot be ignored. Reference to 'knowledge' or 'research' does not signify a single body of thinking, data or literature that is commonly recognised and accepted. To the contrary, it implies a struggle between different 'knowledges' or what are often described here as 'discourses', 'worldviews' and 'regimes of truth'. Accordingly, the issue is not simply how to apply knowledge, but the kind of knowledge that is produced and the kind of knowledge that dominates and structures development policy.

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