Influencing Policy Processes for Sustainable Livelihoods:

strategies for change

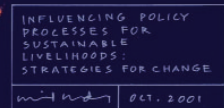## James Keeley

Background

Researchers and practitioners concerned with sustainable livelihoods have identified the need for lesson learning materials on how to understand and engage with policy processes to promote sustainable livelihoods.

This paper responds to these needs.

This work is part of the DFID funded project: 'Transforming bureaucracies and understanding policy processes for sustainable livelihoods'. This project is based on research carried out with Ian Scoones (IDS) on environmental and land management policy processes in sub-Saharan Africa. This study was funded by ESRC and involved fieldwork in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Mali. Research was also informed by participation in two soils management, networking and policy projects - NUTNET (Nutrient Networking in Africa) and Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation in Africa, both funded by NEDA. The author would like to thank participants in these projects for sharing their experiences and insights. Finally, as part of this piece of work, the author carried out fieldwork in Bangladesh with DFID, looking at community based management of inland fisheries.

Case Studies drawn on in this booklet

Natural resource management policy processes in Zimbabwe

An examination of changing policy processes for natural resource management in Zimbabwe, highlighting transformations in formulation and implementation of policy within Agritex, the national agricultural extension agency, and the Department of Natural Resources.

Policies for soils management in Mali

This study looked at the ways in which soils, including soil fertility management, and attempts to tackle desertification, have emerged as key policy issues in Mali, and how efforts to operationalise policy have varied between different regional zones.

Environmental policymaking in Ethiopia

This research has concentrated on agricultural extension policy processes, and processes surrounding environmental rehabilitation. Contrasting the region of Tigray and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region, the research looked at how policy in practice varies at different meso to micro scales.

The Soil Fertility Initiative for Africa

The SFI is a major inter-agency initiative to address an African soil fertility crisis. This research examines the construction and management of this policy problem.

Community based fisheries management in Bangladesh

CBFM began as a largely project-based solution to issues of inland fisheries management, but is now moving to wider policy influence. This research examines this process.

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Lessons for *change* in policy & organisations

Influencing Policy Processes for Sustainable Livelihoods: strategies for change

1 Understanding Policy Processes

Complexity and uncertainty

New types of policy processes

Contested and complex processes

2 Strategies for Shaping Policy Processes

Understanding the governance context

Recognising policy narratives

Mapping actor networks

Identifying policy spaces

James Keeley

Influencing Policy Processes for Sustainable Livelihoods: Strategies for change

This booklet is about policy processes. It suggests a simple, but multi-faceted, framework for understanding the policy process, and tools and ideas for engaging with and influencing policy to promote sustainable livelihoods.

Sustainable livelihoods is an approach in development that seeks to be sensitive to the different ways people make a living and try and improve their well-being. Sustainable, refers to the importance of reducing the vulnerability of livelihoods to shocks and negative trends- environmental, economic, social and political. Policies can have a major impact on livelihoods either directly, or indirectly, through the way they effect the choices people can make.

The term policy process covers several things: it emphasises processes of making policy, of decision-making, and ways of putting issues on the agenda as matters of public concern, along with often rather intangible processes of shaping the way issues are thought and talked about. Policy processes are often thought of as defining problems or goals, coming up with policy solutions or choices, and implementing these. This can be true, but things often don't work in such a neat step-by-step way. Any process of policy change is inherently political, and can include or exclude the interests and perspectives of poor people. This is clearly a key concern when thinking about policy processes for sustainable livelihoods.

Based on research in sub-Saharan Africa and Bangladesh, this booklet provides conceptual tools, along with practical ideas for practitioners, researchers and managers for understanding and engaging with policy. Clearly how one engages with policy processes depends on what one wants to achieve, and where an individual or organisation is coming from. A large donor occupies a different position in a policy process to a small national NGO. A senior bureaucrat is different to a junior researcher. Reflecting on your own position and commitments, and how others perceive you is a useful starting point. Despite these provisos general lessons about policy processes are emerging.

Using these lessons, this booklet aims to answer the following questions:

How do policy processes work?

How do you shape a policy process, and make it more inclusive?

Understanding Policy Processes

Complexity and uncertainty

The essence of sustainable livelihoods thinking is that the world is complex, far more complex than was thought in the past, and probably becoming more so.

Our understanding of **environmental processes** is less clear than it was. In many areas, from forests, soils, and water resources, to climate change and patterns of pollution, it is not obvious what environmental change is happening, how significant it is, what the causes are, where change might be thought of as degradation, and where as simply change.

Economic processes in an era of globalisation and rapid technological change are less predictable than in the past, and subject to the possibility of dramatic changes in direction: witness the East Asian crisis, and collapses of major commodity markets such as coffee. Many of the ramifications of changes in communications, financial and other markets are continuing to play themselves out, and are changing livelihood contexts even in the most remote locales.

Governance processes and institutions are equally in flux in this changing world. Globalisation is happening in a range of areas: management of trade, of financial flows, of the environment. Nation states, some argue, have less capacity and authority than in the past to manage the forces effecting livelihoods. In places, however, governance may also be becoming more localised through processes of decentralisation. The implications of this can vary markedly. As these arrangements change there may also be new spaces for different groups to shape governance processes: actors in the private sector, particularly multinational corporations; but also actors within civil society.

Social processes are again transforming as economic and institutional change occurs. Gender relations, relations to different sources of authority and cultural identities can all take on important new forms.

Understanding how individuals and households support themselves and try to secure and improve their well-being in the face of this complexity is a major challenge. The natural resources upon which people rely are changing, markets and economic processes are shifting, and institutional environments are less stable. Weaving their way through all of this are policy processes, enabling and constraining livelihood choices.

New types of policy process:

Policies shape how people pursue different livelihood strategies. This means that the emphasis in development has increasingly moved towards trying to influence the design and implementation of policy in ways that are representative of the interests of the poor, or by increasing spaces for the poor to articulate their demands within the policy-making process. This requires understanding what policy processes are, and in turn identifying effective ways of engaging with them.

A livelihoods perspective demands a different type of engagement with policy than is usually the case. Several aspects of the interface between SL approaches and policy processes can be identified that are new and different, and demand fresh ways of working:

1. Cross-sectorality

Cross-sectorality means thinking about governance in a so-called 'joined-up' sense, and exploring the ways in which what happens across several different sectors contributes to, or hampers, the realisation of particular policy objectives. Moving outside single sector boundaries requires that for agriculture, for example, the focus of policy should be on more than improving agricultural production, where rural people are viewed in a two-dimensional way as producers of agricultural commodities. In this instance, the SL approach would demand a wider focus and a range of new linkages, such as finance, education and health, and imaginative engagement with the potentially broad and dynamic range of livelihood opportunities and alternatives within which agricultural production can be set. A range of different actors would need to be brought explicitly into the policy process to capture this holism and dynamism. Building such linkages requires conscious effort and incentives where it is not the normal mode of operation.

2. Paying attention to micro-macro linkages.

Part of the problem with policymaking is that it is often primarily shaped by the knowledge of those who operate predominantly at macro levels. Without an adequate understanding of the local we won't know whether new policy measures are likely to be appropriate, and the perspectives and interests of local people often end up being cut out. This has implications for creating policies and institutions that think about ways of linking across scales.

3. Being people-centred.

Including and involving poor people in decision-making processes are key challenges. Likewise improving the representativeness and accountability of governance processes is important. Where uncertainty becomes more of a theme, the tendency to over-rely on expert knowledge in the policy process becomes more problematic. Including multiple perspectives in decision-making processes, and indeed in the framing of problems, allows us to know more about a complex and uncertain world than if we were to view it rigidly from a single standpoint. It increases the likelihood that policy action will be heading in the right direction, and it can build critical trust in processes of making and implementing policy.

4. Making trade-offs between different aims

Any policy process will have several different objectives at the same time: for instance, tackling poverty, managing natural resources, or increasing economic opportunities. Where aims are multiple there will inevitably be some measure of trade-off between objectives. It will not be possible to pursue and maximise one exclusively. This can be a problem for those who are used to concentrating on a single variable: again, it demands a new way of working.

5. Putting the emphasis on process

A process approach is one that recognises that the world changes fast, and that there is much about the environment in which one is operating that is not known. Given this, policy processes cannot be a simple matter of designing and implementing definitive blueprints. 'Policymakers' need to admit that they are dealing with provisional knowledge, and aims and methods need to be tested and re-evaluated along the way. What looked like the right policy goal and method a year, or a month, ago may not further down the line. New voices and understandings may emerge that require rethinking and redesigning of a process.

Contested & complex processes

Alongside changing understandings of the ways in which complexity and uncertainty effect livelihoods, thinking on policy processes has also shifted dramatically. These new understandings need to be kept in the picture when we are thinking about policy change for sustainable livelihoods.

'Policy is like the elephant: you know it when you see it'

(Cunningham 1963, cited in Hill, 1997

Is 'the whole life of policy a chaos of purposes and accidents' (Clay and Schaffer, 1984)? Two standard assumptions about policy making are that it is rational and linear. The **rational** perspective frames policy processes as a technical matter of 'speaking truth to power'. Clear problems present themselves to policy-makers and these problems are then subjected to the logical gaze of policy analysis. Cost benefit decision-making models, or the delivery of judgements based on 'sound science' - an approach favoured by government scientists during recent food scares in the UK- can be seen to operate in this manner. In this model, improving policy processes is about expanding the effectiveness and scope of inputs of technical knowledge.

truth → power → policy

A **linear** take on the policy process presents policy as a series of stages from broad agenda setting, to discrete moments of decision-making, and then on to technical or administrative processes of implementation. This can be thought of as goals being set out and progressively whittled down to a series of concrete activities. Where policy implementation fails to work the answer is either to improve the mechanics of implementing procedures, or alternatively to go right back to the beginning and change the definition of the problem.

agenda-setting → decision-making → implementation
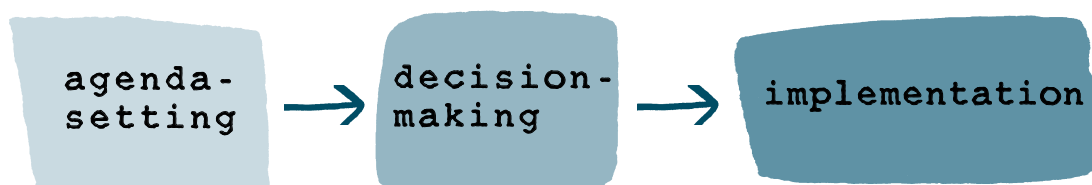
While these approaches have some use, much experience shows that policy processes are often distinctly **non-linear**, inherently **political and contested**, and **more incremental** and **haphazard** than these models suggest.

There are several reasons for this:

■ There are always competing and overlapping **agendas** - so there may not be complete agreement among stakeholders about what the really important policy problem is.

■ Many of the most important **decisions** have often been taken before the formal decision-making process happens.

■ Processes of **implementation** often involve large amounts of discretion, they are often poorly monitored, and they take place in complex and uncertain settings often very different to those envisaged by policymakers. Given this field level workers can often be seen as having far more of an initiation and innovating role than the idea of implementation implies.

■ Technical experts and policymakers mutually frame policy problems: negotiating what questions need to be answered, and what knowledge can be provided to answer them.

This leads us to expand the

POLICY PROCESSES = POLICY FORMULATION + IMPLEMENTATION

formula, and to move towards a view of **policy as practice** - interactive, a mixture of the formal and the informal, taking place in multiple sites, and two-way rather than one-way. The diagram below looks again at the rational and linear schema, and suggests a new fluidity.
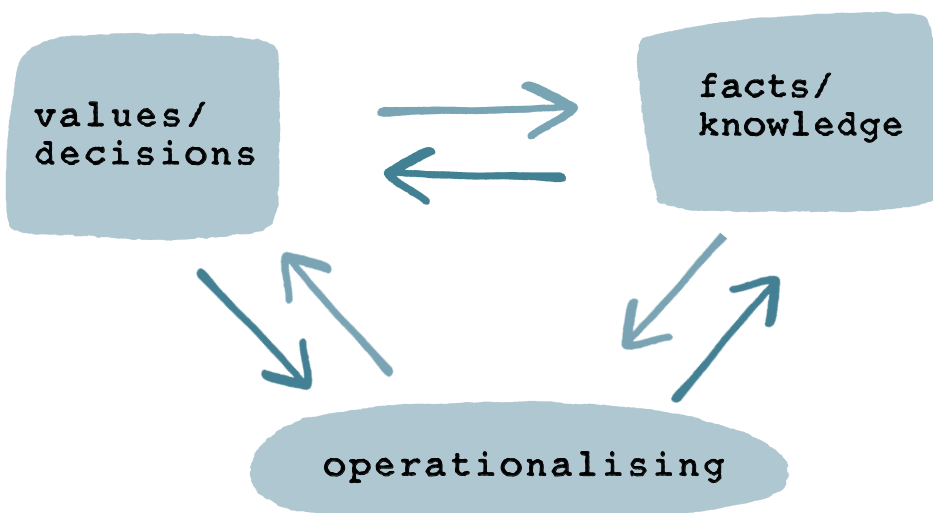
Building on this understanding of the policy process, the next section suggests a four-part process for shaping policy change through an understanding of policy narratives, governance contexts, actor-networks and policy space.

2 Strategies for shaping policy processes

1 Knowing the governance context

Political and bureaucratic settings for policy processes

Political context:

Differing political contexts shape policymaking in fundamental ways. Depending on the context different strategies will be appropriate for engaging with policy processes. Different types of regime can impose different constraints on what is achievable. Some strategies are possible within a democratic setting, and with an active civil society that are not possible elsewhere: NGO advocacy or experimentation with alternative management approaches, for example. It may be possible to be adversarial in one place, but distinctly not in another. Similarly, where there is effective decentralisation the focus of where it is appropriate to engage in policy processes changes.

A political analysis may be a key step before engaging with policy processes. This might highlight for example the specific nature and processes of marginalisation and exclusion in one setting and the relationship of the elite, or elites to those processes. An understanding of the relationships between the marginalised and elites may suggest where a push for a more inclusive policy processes is likely to incur opposition, or alternatively where proposed change may also offer benefits to elites (or parts of the elite) and so stand better chance of realisation. Geographical variations in governance structures may also be significant.

Bureaucratic context:

Bureaucratic contexts also have an important role in shaping policy processes. Bureaucratic capacity varies between different places with implications for abilities to facilitate and respond to inclusive policy processes, to make useful linkages between micro and macro scales, and to operate with a process oriented approach.

Bureaucratic cultures differ. It can be important to understand how these are reproduced when looking for spaces to reform, or if trying to understand ways to make new connections. People with particular disciplinary backgrounds may dominate key positions, or there may be a concentration of people from one geographic area or academic institution. There may be particular patterns linking the bureaucracy to political parties, or the private sector.

A key demand of livelihoods friendly governance is to move out of sectoral boxes. The way the bureaucracy is organised can have a major effect on how cross-sectoral policy processes are likely to be. Environmental units well-placed in key departments of different ministries, for example, can be far more effective than a separate and poorly connected environment ministry.

bureaucratic change

change in
the political
system
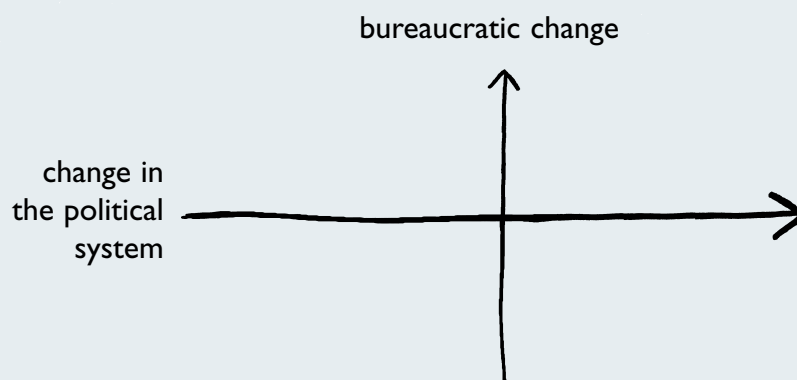
This kind of quadrant can be used to analyse what kind of spaces might appear given different changes in the governance context. For any corner a range of scenarios can be imagined and implications for policy space thought through. The arrowheads indicate positive change. So the top right-hand corner would indicate a future where 'good' political and bureaucratic changes have occurred. A positive political change might be, for example, a new government with some commitment to poverty reduction. A negative change would include political conflict, or the consolidation of an elite coalition resistant to particular pro-poor policy change. Positive bureaucratic change might include improved capacity; or restructuring or reform programmes. An example of a negative change might include a budget cut, or a retrenchment programme. The idea is to think what the future might look like, and what differing constraints and opportunities might be thrown up under different scenarios. (Adapted from OST, 2001).

Voice and responsiveness:

Different political and bureaucratic contexts suggest that the spaces in which engagement in the policy process is like to happen will vary (see the box above). Different balances will need to be struck between building voice at the bottom, and increasing responsiveness at the top. In some places joining in with government programmes may be key, for example, participating in national poverty reduction programmes. This depends on whether there is bureaucratic capacity and political commitment. In one place supporting the organisation of the poor may be possible and an option, in another it may be that more subtle ways of creating voice for the poor within government bureaucracies is the answer.

In some situations 'policy' can be argued not to work effectively at all. This is particularly the case where there is little bureaucratic capacity. It may be less a case of influencing debates, than of forcing debates to happen. This may happen by helping marginalised groups to articulate their concerns, by supporting processes of empowerment, improving awareness of rights, building advocacy and communication skills, increasing knowledge of institutional and legal processes and demanding inclusion in policy debates, or indeed the creation of a policy process. Increasing confidence and building links with other organisations may be a viable strategy. A group supported in coming together at the right moment can have an impact, can raise the profile of an issue, and can suggest that there is solidarity around a position and that concerns can no longer be ignored.

Soils management policies in Ethiopia, Mali and Zimbabwe

Research on soils management policies in Ethiopia, Mali and Zimbabwe suggests that governance contexts shape policy processes in important ways. Likewise, strategies for influencing policy vary depending on the context.

In Ethiopia, the regionalisation policy fundamentally shapes the governance context. Actors seeking to influence soils policy processes suggested concentrating efforts not on the federal level, but at regional level instead. However there is a question of which regions to work in. In the soils arena there has been very little room for manoeuvre to challenge dominant policy narratives in the large Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region. Here NGOs experimenting with new approaches have found it hard to influence the bureaucracy. In Tigray, in the north of the country, there has been far more confidence to suggest new policy directions. Researchers argue that a 'green light' has come on in Tigray when introducing new ideas to policy debates, around issues where there has often been a stop sign elsewhere. This regional variation reflects different bureaucratic and political histories. One legacy of both the Imperial and Derg eras has been a lack of capacity and independence in the South. In contrast, the origins of the current government lie in Tigray, and these continue to give it special status, in the eyes of many observers.

In Mali, both politics and economy are dominated by cotton, the major export crop. Policy processes within the cotton zone are very different to those in other parts of the country. Farmers are better organised and the government is much more likely to be responsive to the demands of farmers given the strategic importance of cotton. In 2000, the cotton farmers' union refused to grow cotton deeming that the price being offered by the largely government-owned cotton company did not offer a sufficient return. This grassroots action was a serious shock to the government. The union eventually compromised with the cotton company on a marginal price increase, but the majority of farmers in the zone still refused to plant. New democratic spaces that have evolved since the end of military rule were an important precondition for this type of action. This has in turn created space to push for inclusion in other livelihood related policy processes. The niche occupied by the cotton zone has been key to this. Only the Office du Niger, the irrigated rice zone has remotely similar status. Outside these areas it is much harder for rural people to organise, and much harder to get policy makers to listen.

In Zimbabwe, the style of bureaucracy shapes policy processes in a fundamental way. A particular style of technocratic management of rural livelihood policy issues has persisted from the colonial period into the post-independence era. Very technical land management approaches and extension schemes, and a plethora of natural resource management regulations have all aimed at the 'betterment' of farmers. This style has been challenged in recent years, as bureaucratic capacity weakened following structural adjustment policies, retrenchment and economic crisis. NGOs starting out in service delivery roles have found new spaces to promote participatory ideas and methods. Gradually, these are finding some measure of institutionalisation: participatory extension approaches have been adopted by Agritex, the national extension agency, and the Department of Natural Resources is now much more flexible in enforcing land use rules. The very technocratic approach also obscured more basic questions of access to resources. These issues have recently become extremely politicised, which has undermined the technocratic approach to land still further.

Understanding the difference between the political and the technical

'Political technologies advance by taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse, and recasting it in the neutral language of science.' (Dreyfuss and Rabinow, 1982:196, cited in Shore and Wright, 1997)

Governance contexts can help determine the boundaries between the 'political' and the 'technical'. Some issues are seen as being clearly about values and interests and are framed as matters for the political system. Other issues are categorised as being of a different order. They are technical or administrative issues, and so, the preserve of the bureaucracy. It can be important to understand where these boundaries are drawn and how they serve to depoliticise some subjects. Technical approaches to natural resource management issues are often a good example of this. Land management is often framed as a matter of good technical practice in a way that obscures more political and power-laden issues such as land tenure and land reform. Challenging these divides can be central to building new types of policy process.

Different issues, different types of policy process

Policy processes also change depending on the type of issue that is being dealt with. Health and education raise challenges that are different from those in law and order or natural resources. Within the natural resources area it can be argued that forests are very different to soils. Trees are a resource that can - in some circumstances - be easily converted into money, and this may set up particular patterns of vested interests - linked to logging or controlling the sale of permits, for instance. For a policy area like soils this is less obviously the case. Dams too create financial interests. In some policy processes there is relatively little potential for corruption, in others it is going to be a significant driver. Where these interests are organised rather than diffuse the places and ways of pushing for policy change are likely to be different. Understanding these differences is important. In some places, for instance, donors have shied away from engaging with forestry policy processes because of the influence of logging interests. Land is another area where policy can be highly politicised and where successful policy reform can be a major challenge.

Reflecting on the diversity of policy processes can be helpful. The machinations surrounding the Kyoto protocol are very different from the policy process around the land crisis in Zimbabwe, or the management of the foot and mouth outbreak in the UK. An international peace negotiation is different from a legal process around pharmaceutical patents. In the same way, a PRSP process is different from the formulation and implementation of a National Environmental Action Plan. The term policy process can be applied to a range of very different things, and sometimes it can appear that they are unlikely to have anything in common. While generic principles and strategies are useful, it can also help to think through some of the contrasts between different policy processes.

The table below sets out some basic contrasts. It is not comprehensive, but aims to help start a process of clarifying the particular characteristics of a given policy process. A visible issue in the media that is very focussed might require a different approach to one that is low profile, or slow and diffuse. Different questions can be asked: Who is engaged? How many stakeholders are there? Is the process essentially inside a bureaucracy, or outside? The Implications of these types of issues need to be acknowledged for any given process, and thought through.

What type of policy process are you looking at?

VISIBLE	BACKSTAGE
QUICK	SLOW
VIOLENT	PEACEFUL
FEW STAKEHOLDERS	MANY STAKEHOLDERS
FOCUSED	MULTIPLE FOCI/POORLY-FOCUSED
MEDIA	NO MEDIA INTEREST
ONE MINISTRY	MULTIPLE MINISTRIES
BUREAUCRATIC	OUTSIDE BUREAUCRACY
CERTAINTY	UNCERTAINTY
ACUTE	CHRONIC
LEGAL PROCESS	NOT A LEGAL PROCESS
LOCAL/NATIONAL/REGIONAL/GLOBAL	MULTI-SCALE

Looking at the governance context through a livelihoods lens

A focus on livelihoods means looking at the governance context with an eye for aspects that might be missed in conventional development planning or policy management approaches. Looking at how to link up micro and macro, where the bridges for cross-sectoral approaches can be built, how multiple aims and objectives can get negotiated in policy arenas, and how an iterative, processual approach can become accepted practice within bureaucracies and policymaking institutions are new challenges. In addition, awareness of the dynamics of complexity needs to become more a part of the thinking of different stakeholders. Mainstream governance reform agendas often miss this range of issues.

Uncertainty and complexity mean governance contexts themselves are always changing

Dynamic and increasingly complex environments also change governance contexts. New electronic technologies for instance allow new forms of association, and facilitate the spread of alternative storylines -particularly important where information has been controlled. Economic change and political realignments all effect governance arrangements in particular settings. Following and understanding these dynamics and looking at what new opportunities they bring is a key challenge.

2 Recognising policy narratives

'Storytelling is the pre-eminent way people stabilise decision-making in the face of complexity'

(Roe, 2000: 10)

Why do narratives have such appeal?

Narratives are 'a story with a beginning, a middle and an end' (Roe, 1991). They define a problem, explain how it comes about, and suggest courses of action to avoid disaster or further catastrophe. An influential and persistent narrative has shaped perspectives on natural resources in Africa from colonial times. This storyline asserts that because people are poor they don't know how to look after the environment and natural resources around them, or can't afford the luxury of doing so. Policies towards soils, forests and national parks in many parts of Africa have been formulated to avert the dire predictions associated with this narrative. The poor it is argued need to be managed or controlled to stop them exploiting resources. The attraction of narratives is that they simplify and they are programmatic. In many cases it is these qualities that makes them appealing to politicians or managers.

For some narratives it is possible to see particular interest groups having an interest in promoting certain storylines, for instance people who will control resources from which others become excluded. But attributing this type of intentionality to actors is not always valid, policy narratives cannot always be read off from the activities of visible interest groups. Narratives can emerge incrementally: a storyline becomes the way things are thought about over time, as a path through a forest is made and maintained by repeated footsteps. A narrative analysis complements a governance analysis: we cannot know everything about a policy process for a given issue from bureaucratic and political settings alone. In some policy areas narratives will be the primary influence on policy processes.

Soil conservation policy narratives in Zimbabwe

A storyline about soil erosion and soil conservation in Zimbabwe has shaped policy over the last century. Soil conservation narratives can be argued to have begun to have significant influence on policy during the colonial period. In the 1930s colonial scientist administrators returned to what was then Rhodesia from visits to the US where they had observed the legendary dustbowl. A narrative developed that suggested that Zimbabwe had in the past had a pristine natural environment, but that on the evidence of similar levels of desiccation in the drylands to those in the United States, this environment had been mismanaged and degraded by poor farming practices.

The 'narrative' answer to this problem was to transform and modernise agriculture. The means to achieve this was a series of prohibitions on traditional farming practices such as leaving trees in fields or cultivating around wetlands. Right up to the present these are subjects of fierce conflict between farmers and state bureaucrats. Alongside these measures, attempts were made to re-order the rural landscape in a tidy and orderly fashion with huts neatly set out and agricultural and grazing areas neatly demarcated. Simultaneously agricultural extension policy has revolved around the Master Farmer scheme. Farmers are tutored in modern farming, and are rewarded for scoring high marks in the different aspects of the training. In all these approaches narratives ignore or deny the logic of traditional farming practices. Where it has been possible for alternative perspectives to enter the policy process it has become clear that these policy narratives have often worked against livelihood security.

Reframing the problem: trading-off complexity and simplicity

Challenging assumptions and reframing problems is important, and should be an aim of engaging in policy processes from a livelihoods perspective. However, the attractions of a simple and programmatic message should not be underestimated. To effectively engage in policy processes it may be pragmatic to create new simplifying storylines or 'counter-narratives'. These storylines should aim to be pro-poor and inclusionary, and capture the dynamics of change in a complex world better. Equally, a key task may be to facilitate the articulation of existing, but marginal, counter-narratives.

There is a tension here, however. New narratives can be important in strategically bringing new combinations and coalitions of people and interests together. A key function of narratives is to inject momentum and galvanise action. At the same time there is need, when thinking in terms of dynamic livelihoods, to acknowledge that reality will always be complex, and that attempts to explain it and to manage it will always be partial and provisional. It is necessary to negotiate this tension when using narrative tools. One approach is to design new narratives that offer a programme for action and some measure of explanation but which also acknowledge complexity and uncertainty.

Narratives and counter-narratives about inland fisheries in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, increasing fish production to feed expanding populations has long been a key policy priority. A production narrative advocating technical solutions has dominated the management of inland fisheries resources. It reflects the disciplinary concerns and approaches of fisheries scientists and Department of Fisheries economists, planners and extension managers. The emphasis on increasing fish production, however, often regardless of which groups benefit, has potentially missed the ways in which management of fisheries can have important impacts on poverty alleviation. Recently there has also been increasing concern about the efficacy of relying overwhelmingly on technical production approaches. Some have argued that they are not the most effective way of maintaining or increasing fish stocks. At the same time, awareness has increased of the importance of institutional dimensions of resource use, and the historical exclusion of the poor from many inland fisheries.

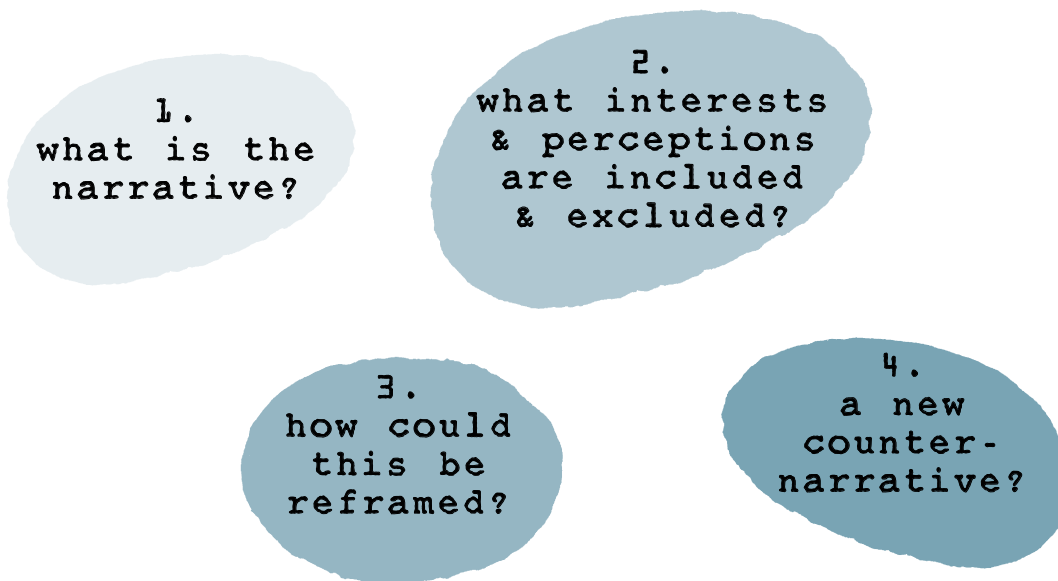A new narrative is emerging around institutions that challenges the exclusive focus on production. This new narrative has reframed the debate: by identifying improved access and management rights for the poor over inland water resources as one way to improve fish stocks, it has also put poverty and livelihood concerns on the agenda. There remain concerns about this 'co-management' counter-narrative, however, in relation to the degree that it effectively deals with the very real local power politics within which fishing communities in Bangladesh exist. Nonetheless, it illustrates a reframing process, and should be seen as a starting point for creating policy processes that engage with complexity and uncertainty.

The battle to frame the GM debate: Golden rice and terminator seeds

The policy process around agricultural biotechnology has been intense and politicised in many countries. Despite many uncertainties and complexities in the GM debate, protagonists on either side adopt strong and conflicting positions. The strategic deployment of narratives by those seeking to halt further commercialisation of GM crops, or conversely to promote the new technology has been important. The promise of 'golden rice' has been a key story for GM advocates. They claim that nutrient enhancement of rice through genetic modification offers a great opportunity to tackle blindness caused by vitamin A deficiency. This narrative has had high symbolic value, and has framed the GM debate in a way that begins with the potential benefits of the technology. While critics can attack on exactly this issue they always appear to be on the defensive. On the other side, the issue of 'terminator technology' has been key for concentrating energies on the potential dangers of GM crops. These technologies would render seeds sterile after flowering, and so force farmers to buy new seed from the multinationals marketing them. Monsanto eventually backed down and promised not to further develop this type of seeds. In both cases, picking an issue, developing a simple narrative, and having a good understanding of symbolic politics have been central to the shape the GM policy process has taken.

Doing a narrative analysis: four stages

1.
what is the
narrative?

2.
what interests
& perceptions
are included
& excluded?

3.
how could
this be
reframed?

4.
a new
counter-
narrative?

1 Identify the narrative

It can be useful to investigate narrative assumptions through discussions with different actors in a policy process:

• What is the basic problem that they are trying to address in their work? Discussions around this theme can give a good idea of narrative framings.

• It can then be useful to tease out what sources of information or experience helped shape this view. Often this can open up what the basic assumptions are.

• Discussing how a stakeholder thinks policy works and how they go about engaging with it may also offer further insights.

2 Whose interests and perspectives are included and excluded?

Think through who is included and excluded:

• Who does the narrative bring to centre stage?

• Who gets more power, who gets more resources from this narrative?

• Who is left out, or loses power and resources?

•Whose perspectives and interests are ignored?

3 How could this be reframed?

Any framing leaves some issues and problems out of the picture:

• If we set the problem up like this, where will it mean we end up concentrating our energies?

• Which groups need to be repositioned in the narrative?

• Are there other ways of looking at the problem?

• Are there issues that are being left off the map?

• How can we make coherent links between these excluded issues, perspectives and groups?

4. Devising a counter narrative

Narratives, according to Roe, need: 'simplicity, clarity, transparency':

• Is the story clear and simple?

• Does it suggest a course of action?

• Does it acknowledge complexity and uncertainty?

3 Mapping actor-networks

Received wisdoms and narratives, vested interests, or longstanding bureaucratic practices can seem to determine the shape that policy takes. Often things feel stuck, change seems unlikely, and powerful ways of seeing things appear overwhelming. It can feel that individuals make little difference, and the temptation is to give up in despair. This is often the case. However although structuring forces are important, there are many instances where individuals, or networks of actors can also make a critical difference.

It is useful to remember that 'interests' or 'practices' or 'organisations' when looked at under the microscope are just aggregations of individual choices. They can be understood as networks. These networks can reinforce narratives and patterns of interests, but they can also gradually change them. At times actors -understood as both individuals or organisations- can through their choices and strategies make quite a dramatic difference. They can do this by choosing one option over another, or by initiating new practices. New linkages between individuals can contribute to the reconciliation of seemingly contradictory interests. It is in the detail of networks that connections are made from micro to macro, between state and civil society, across departments, or organisations. Through network webs orthodoxies can be reinforced, or new ideas put into circulation.

Building new networks is one of the key ways of constructing more livelihoods sensitive policy processes. In practice the challenge would be to build networks between macro and micro scales, across sectors, and between worlds of politics and administration, building political commitment alongside improved capacity for engagement of different stakeholders.

Actor networks and the Soil Fertility Initiative for Africa

In recent years addressing a soil fertility crisis has become a policy priority for donors and governments in sub-Saharan Africa. An international Soil Fertility Initiative for Africa was launched at the World Food Summit in 1996. The SFI brought together the World Bank, FAO, ICRAF, IFDC and the International Fertiliser Industry Association. As part of the SFI, soil fertility management plans have been developed for several African countries. However, despite the ferment of activity, there remains real doubt for many commentators that Africa does indeed face a widespread soil fertility crisis. Why did this framing of an urgent soil fertility crisis achieve such prominence?

To answer this it is necessary to understand the networks of actors that have driven the soil fertility policy process. Particular scientific studies have been key and these have been taken up and are routinely used in donor and other literature, this despite questions over the validity of extrapolating from farm and district scale data to continental scale. A network can be traced through all the relevant organisations of soils specialists who have now risen to senior positions in the donor and international scientific community. Building an international network around soil fertility has also been of wider interest to different parts of the organisations within which these individuals work. Organisations, or sections within organisations, look for causes that invite roles for themselves, particularly where there has been uncertainty around their mandate, and where funding climates are difficult. Each of the actors involved in the SFI can be understood as having particular interests in the success of the initiative: the fertiliser industry, for example, needed to find a way to get fertilisers back on the agenda after the removal of subsidies following structural adjustment, and the Africa division of the World Bank needed a focus after a period of restructuring.

Actors, both individuals and organisations, can be understood to have made the difference. They brought people together, they strategised, they caught the attention of the right people, and they created a narrative. An international soil fertility process can be seen as something that might easily not have happened, it took policy entrepreneurs to build networks and make a difference.

What is a policy network? Formal models of politics and bureaucracy have tended to see policy as emerging exclusively from the state institutions, often as set out in constitutions. A policy network approach moves beyond this and links up state and society. It recognises that in any given policy domain, parts of the bureaucracy and government will be important, but also potentially, the private sector, donors and actors in civil society, such as journalists, researchers, and NGOs. Policy networks can be quite informal and not match up at all with understandings of who formally should be influential in policy processes, and particularly with what constitutional or bureaucratic procedures suggest. Policy networks may cross national borders and so bring in regional or global dimensions, and they may also include actors from the local level. This criss-crossing of scales can be a key way in which ideas and practices circulate.

# Identifying, analysing, transforming

As an actor thinking about shaping policy processes, it is important to understand the actor-networks in any given area. Understanding policy networks helps explain how things stay in place, and where spaces for change lie. As an actor you can try and systematically understand the networks in the areas you are interested in better, and you can think about how to influence networks, or how to construct new ones.

Key policy process skills include identifying networks, analysing networks, and influencing a network or building new networks. Three tools are set out below:

Identifying
Mapping networks

Networks can be mapped out diagrammatically. Which organisations and institutions are involved in a policy process? Different stakeholders can be clustered around a centre point - the nearer to the centre, the more powerful they are in a policy process.

How are they joined up? Different colours or different types of line can indicate different types of relationship within the network. The diagram below is a very schematic representation of policy networks for soil fertility in Mali. Two networks are identifiable, with the network between the Ministry of Rural Development, the World Bank, and the CMDT (the cotton parastatal) dominant. The relationship between the CMDT and the Ministry of Rural Development, for example, is important. The second network around the Ministry of Environment contains strong relationships, but the narratives and interests of these actors are less well located in the policy process. Relationships between the Ministry of Environment and international NGOs are important, but between this ministry and the local NGOs slightly less so. Relationships between the Ministry of Rural Development, and both local NGOs and the Ministry of Environment are weaker again. Where there are no arrows, no clear relationships are discernible.
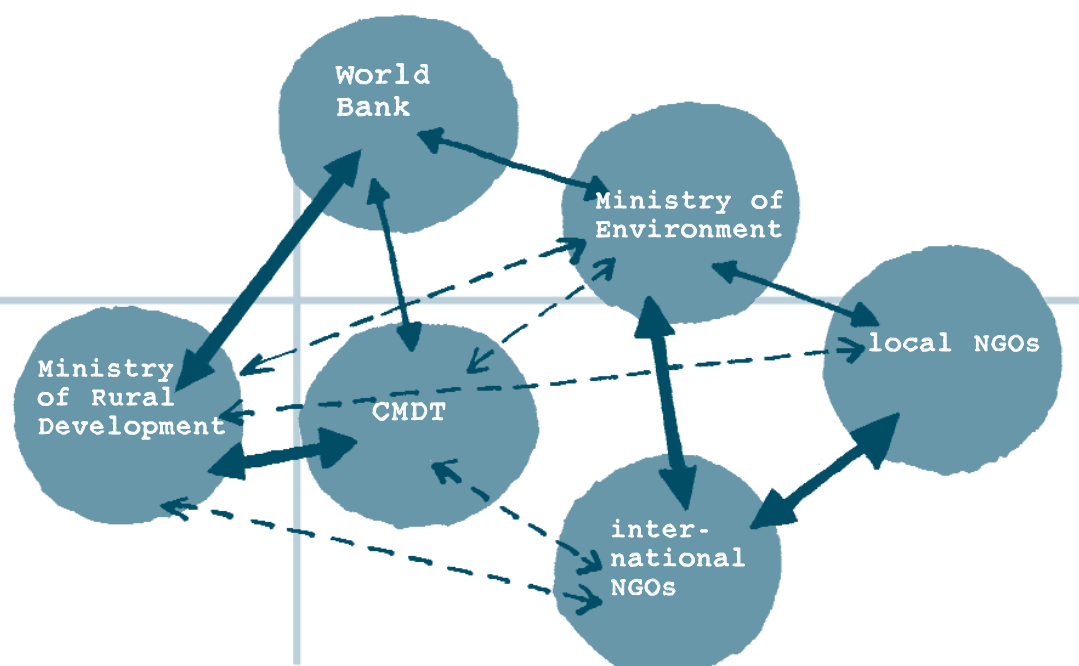
Analysing

The following questions may be helpful in doing a policy process network analysis:

Who is inside a policy network and who is outside?

Are there alternative networks outside the mainstream?

Would it make sense to join these up?

Where is the network weak, where is it strong?

How do people or institutions become enrolled into networks?

How penetrable is the network?

How do ideas circulate through the network?

What are core beliefs?

Transforming networks

When you have identified a network you can think about joining it, or strengthening your place within it. You can try to influence it, to change its core ideas, and use it to build and share new narratives. Alternatively you can build a new network, strengthening it to the point that it becomes influential in the policy process.

How do you do this?

Exactly how to influence networks will vary depending on the issue area. However, in general it is important to have a clear message, and preferably something to show that illustrates the message. Strategically inviting key people to workshops, or onto project advisory groups are successful techniques used in African natural resource management settings. These can be complemented by exposure visits to project or pilot sites, documentation of lessons and experiences, and skilful understanding and use of the media.

Demonstrating success stories

Projects and pilots still have an important contribution to make in complimenting 'upstream' work. Informing and influencing is hard with nothing to show.

One way of capitalising on policy space is to have a clear and visible success story to present to policymakers. The case of Zephaniah Phiri and other resource poor farmers in Midlands province in the south of Zimbabwe illustrates how dynamic experiments can be taken up into policy networks and achieve new degrees of influence on policy and institutional practice. This farmer had been arrested on several occasions for not respecting Zimbabwe's strict natural resource regulations. But his intensive cultivation around prohibited streambanks, and his experimentation with new forms of fertility management and soil and water harvesting have now won support from Agritex, the extension agency, and the Department of Natural Resources. Indeed they are now praised as a model of farmer innovation and harnessing of 'indigenous knowledge'

Sensitivity is, of course, needed in using farmers to illustrate success stories on the ground. There is a danger that farmers can be enrolled in networks in what might be judged as a manipulative sense, as has happened to some degree in the debate around GM crops, where farmers have been brought to Europe to speak out either for or against GM.

Documentation

A common experience in the Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation and NUTNET soils management projects was that production of a range of diverse targeted outputs documenting experiences was a way of reaching policymakers. These included short briefing papers, alongside longer research reports. In places developing a media strategy was successful, this included getting to know journalists and getting articles into papers. In Tunisia, a weekly radio show was started on farmer innovation. Elsewhere television and video have been useful tools. Having good quality documentation of success stories ready can help when it comes to making use of policy spaces. In a similar vein, the Deccan Development Community, an NGO in Andhra Pradesh, India, has been involved in training communities to use video to document their experiences- this has helped build up an interested network and engage policymakers. (Sateesh, 2001).

Participatory policy process tools

One way of bringing new actors into policy networks can be through the use of participatory policy process tools. Examples of these inclusionary processes are citizens' juries, consensus conferences and visioning exercises. Action Aid has been conducting citizens' juries around the issue of GM crops in India. A range of stakeholders from poor farmers, to NGO activists, and representatives from the private sector and government were brought to together to offer and hear evidence on the potential role of GM crops in agricultural futures. This innovative jury process has received considerable media coverage, and has helped bring about reflection on some of the narratives espoused by actors in the policy process. While there are limitations to this type of practice, it can be argued that new space has been created for citizen voice in the policy process. This was borne out by the recent unexpected refusal of Indian policymakers to commercialise GM cotton. The citizen jury process here may have helped to extend existing policy networks, and have strengthened alternative networks.

(See *www.ids.ac.uk/ids/env/citizenjury*)

4 Identifying policy spaces

Influencing policy is all about identifying moments for change. Often there can appear to be very little flexibility in policy processes. It can be difficult to challenge received wisdoms about policy problems. The governance setting may offer little room for manoeuvre in terms of either increasing state responsiveness around demands for inclusion or facilitation of voice from below. Particular actor-networks associated with dominant perceptions and interests can also seem to be firmly entrenched.

At other times circumstances offer opportunities. While policy and institutions can often appear to be stuck fast, the world is changing all the time. The dynamics of this change are complex and often uncertain. Participation in WTO and other new institutional arrangements, an economic downturn, a conflict, a price collapse, or the arrival of new technologies may be key variables. The very things that make livelihood strategies complex can also be the things that offer opportunities. This chaotic element can throw up opportunities, and development professionals need to learn how to identify the right moment, or policy space, to push for change.

Understanding narratives, the governance context and actor-networks can make it clear where room for manoeuvre exists to push for different ways of doing things. The example from Ethiopia, below, illustrates an effective strategy for making use of policy space.

Policy spaces can arrive unexpectedly, and often it seems can only be identified with hindsight. After all where the world is complex and uncertain is it not impossible to predict where spaces will emerge? While this is true to some extent, it is possible to anticipate future scenarios, and to devise strategies appropriate to potential moments of movement in particular areas. It may be possible to be smart about potential future spaces.

Learning to anticipate policy spaces involves bringing together the three approaches set out above. Recognising spaces in the governance context, as in the Ethiopian case discussed below, or where spaces may emerge under different scenarios is a starting point. Understanding political and bureaucratic contexts provides a setting for narratives that define policy problems. Where there is space in the governance context, there may also be weaknesses in the articulation of a dominant narrative. This can then offer an opportunity to challenge some of the assumptions of the narrative, and articulate an alternative. The articulation of alternative narratives, requires identification of spaces within networks, be that spaces to join networks, or key actors in a network that can be enrolled into an alternative network.

Filling in the gaps to promote alternative approaches to soil and water conservation in Tigray, Ethiopia

Understanding narratives, the governance context and actor-networks can make it clear where policy spaces exist to push for different ways of doing things.

Soil and water conservation policies in Ethiopia through the 1980s and 1990s were often developed in a very top-down style: emphasising technical structures and exclusion of communities from resources, such as areas of pasture or forests. There was very little participation in many of these initiatives. Criticism of official approaches has been a matter of political sensitivity, one reason for this was that some of the largest food-aid programmes in history were tied to such patterns of land management.

This presented a challenge for researchers involved in the Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation project in Tigray. They were interested in institutionalising new ways of managing natural resources better suited to complex dryland conditions. A participatory technology development style would be much better at harnessing the energy and knowledge of poor communities, and would mean land management worked with people rather than against them, as has often been the case.

When it came to pushing for change, it was not possible to directly lobby federal or regional government. A better way was to look for incremental change by 'filling in the gaps', as researchers at Mekelle University College put it, and gradually building support. This meant going for 'complementarity': getting official approval to experiment with new methods on the understanding that these were not presented as being in opposition to the government's policy. With this negotiated space at the top secured, it was possible to build space at the bottom in parallel. Researchers built up a portfolio of experience that showed the validity of new approaches. It was possible to show that experimenting with farmer led innovation was more popular with communities, and critically also had the backing of grassroots extension staff. The Tigrayan government has also prided itself on its close understanding of rural needs, based on its long experience of working with communities in the areas it held in the long civil war of the 1980s.

Understanding how to present activities in a way that resonated with these populist narratives, while building a new storyline using the idiom of the dominant policy network was key to reframing land management policy.

The critical part was to avoid being adversarial, and emphasise that new ideas were adding value. Tackling conventional methods head on would have guaranteed a 'rough landing'. In addition to having a feel for particular Tigrayan policy narratives, the MUC strategy relied on a careful understanding of actor-networks within the regional government, and between regional and federal government. Given the sensitivity of soil conservation in Tigray it was vital to know where the nodes in the network were, who were the key people to get on board, and to invite to workshops and onto project advisory committees, and to take to field sites. The strategy has been remarkably successful. Now participatory technology development approaches, with far greater sensitivity to local livelihood concerns than blueprint land management are policy for large areas of dryland Tigray. Interest has also been captured in other regions, and at the federal level.

Conclusion

The type of approach this booklet has advocated requires new ways of looking at policy. Understanding policy as neither particularly rational or linear, but rather as complex and uncertain has a range of implications for the way development professionals engage in policy analysis and policy change. These include:

• Looking for spaces at a range of scales, beginning with the bottom in many cases, and not only concentrating on 'upstream' entry points.

• Investigating how policy is mediated, circumvented, refashioned and created at many more sites in a process than conventional models of policy analysis assume.

• Looking more laterally at the framing of policy problems. The often taken-for-granted storylines, and metaphors that limit thinking about particular issues should more routinely be brought into the framework of policy debates.

• Looking at networks of actors, breaks the bigger picture with which policy often deals into detailed webs of micro actors. Understanding these, how they are connected, what shapes their understandings and decisions, is where the possibilities of reshaping overarching policy framings may emerge.

This booklet has offered some tools for addressing these challenges. Inevitably, doing this effectively will require new types of work practice, new types of training, and new patterns of learning. These will be essential requirements for ensuring effective policies for sustainable livelihoods in the future.

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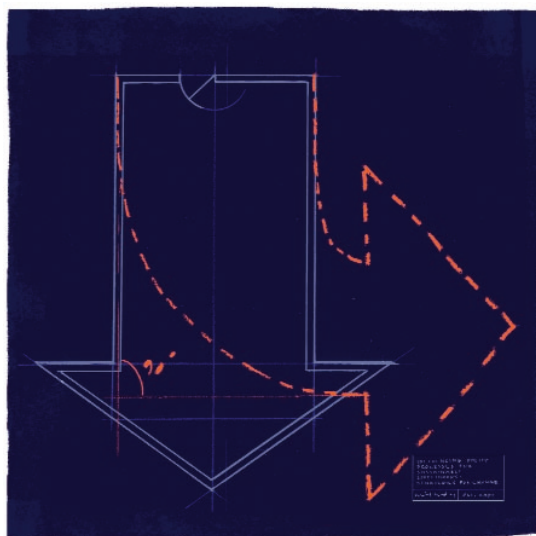
Influencing Policy Processes for Sustainable Livelihoods:
strategies for change

James Keeley

This booklet offers a framework for understanding and engaging with policy processes.

Sensitivity to complexity and uncertainty lies at the heart of livelihoods approaches.

Policy processes need to respond to these dynamics, rather than try - without success - to deny them.

Four key challenges for engaging with policy flow from this analysis. These are:

• To understand different governance contexts, and how they offer varying types of space for voice in policy processes.

• To identify policy narratives, or cause-and-effect storylines, and how they reinforce particular framings of policy problems. Where these exclude the livelihood interests and perspectives of the poor, it becomes important to build equally effective counter-narratives.

• To map the networks of policy actors that determine different policy positions. Transforming policy is essentially about transforming policy networks, and enrolling actors in new networks.

• To identify and make use of policy spaces. Change is all about identifying opportunities. These spaces may be located and anticipated through policy process analysis. On other occasions they emerge unexpectedly. Being ready to make use of policy space is key to successful policy change.

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