



Overseas Development  
Institute

# Strengthening Research Policy Linkages: Engaging Researchers in the Policy Process

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**rapid**  
Research and Policy  
in Development

# Overview

- ODI and RAPID
- Definitions
- Policy and policy processes
- The place of evidence
- An analytical and practical framework
- What to know
- What to do

# Overseas Development Institute

- Development Think Tank
- 60 researchers
- Research / Advice / Public Debate
- Rural / Humanitarian / Poverty & Aid / Economics / Policy Processes
- DFID, Parliament, WB, EC
- Civil Society



# RAPID Group

- Promoting evidence-based development policy & practice
- Through
  - Research
  - Advice
  - Public Affairs
  - Capacity-building
- Working with:
  - researchers
  - policymakers
  - parliamentarians
  - southern think tanks
  - Civil society



# Definitions

- Research: *“any systematic effort to increase the stock of knowledge”*
- Policy: *a “purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors”*
- Evidence: *“the available information supporting or otherwise a belief or proposition”*
- Evidence-based Policy: *“public policy informed by rigorously established evidence”*.

# Policy Processes

Identify the problem



Commission research



Analyse the results



Choose the best option



Establish the policy

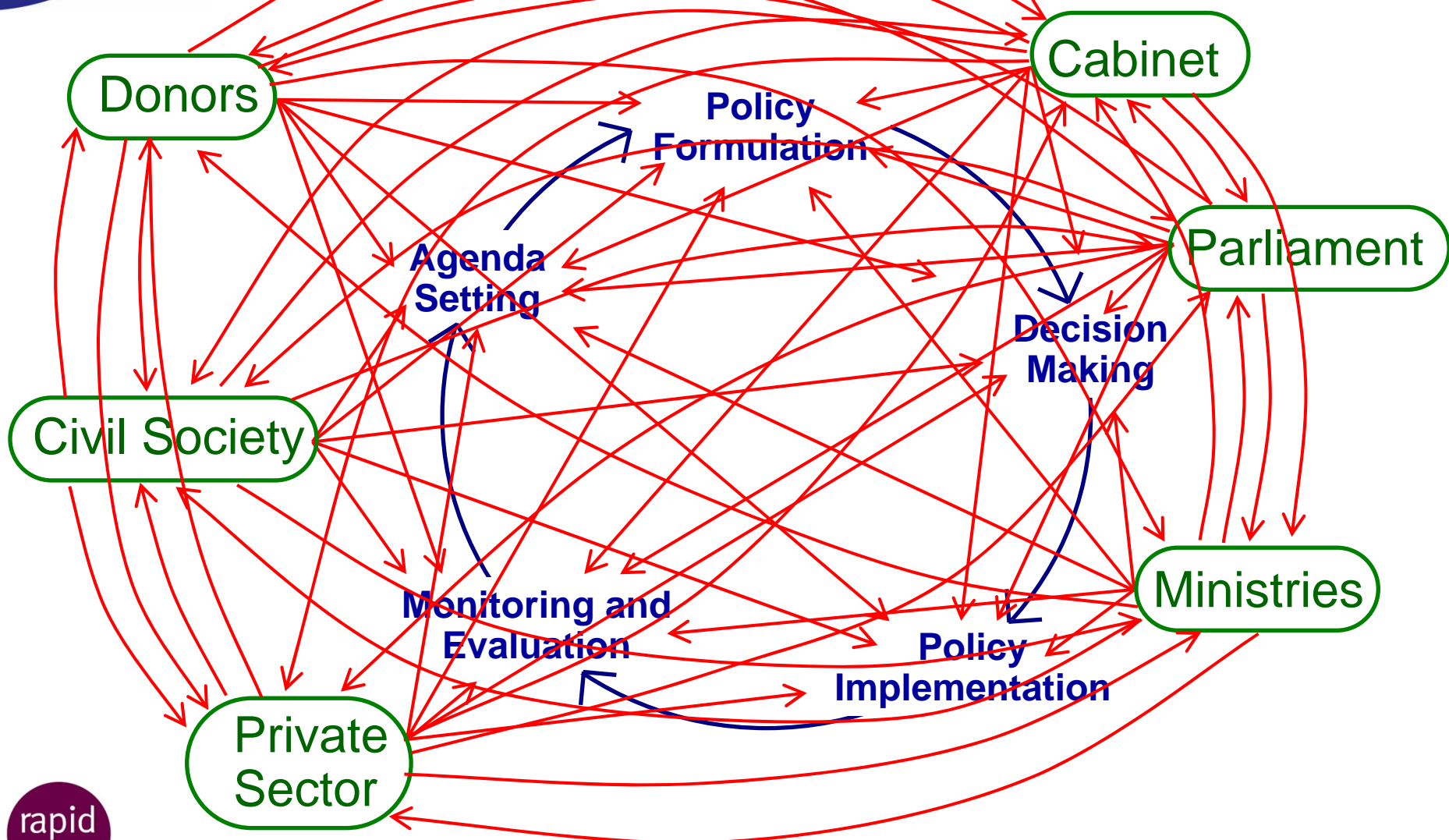


Implement the policy



Evaluation

# Policy Processes



# Streams of actions in a policy process

- *A problem stream*: which puts issues onto the agenda and defines their nature
  - *A policy stream*: that identifies and brings to the surface ideas and potential solutions
  - *A political stream*: which mediates the policy process
- 
- Source: Taylor, M. (2003) *Public Policy in the Community*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills

# ...in reality...

- *“The whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents. It is not at all a matter of the rational implementation of the so-called decisions through selected strategies”<sup>1</sup>*
- *“Most policy research on African agriculture is irrelevant to agricultural and overall economic policy in Africa”<sup>2</sup>*
- *“Research is more often regarded as the opposite of action rather than a response to ignorance”<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Clay & Schaffer (1984), Room for Manoeuvre; An Exploration of Public Policy in Agricultural and Rural Development, Heineman Educational Books, London

<sup>2</sup> Omamo (2003), Policy Research on African Agriculture: Trends, Gaps, and Challenges, International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) Research Report No 21

<sup>3</sup> Surr (2003), DFID Research Review



# Policy makers are...

...practically incapable of using research-based evidence because of the 5 Ss...

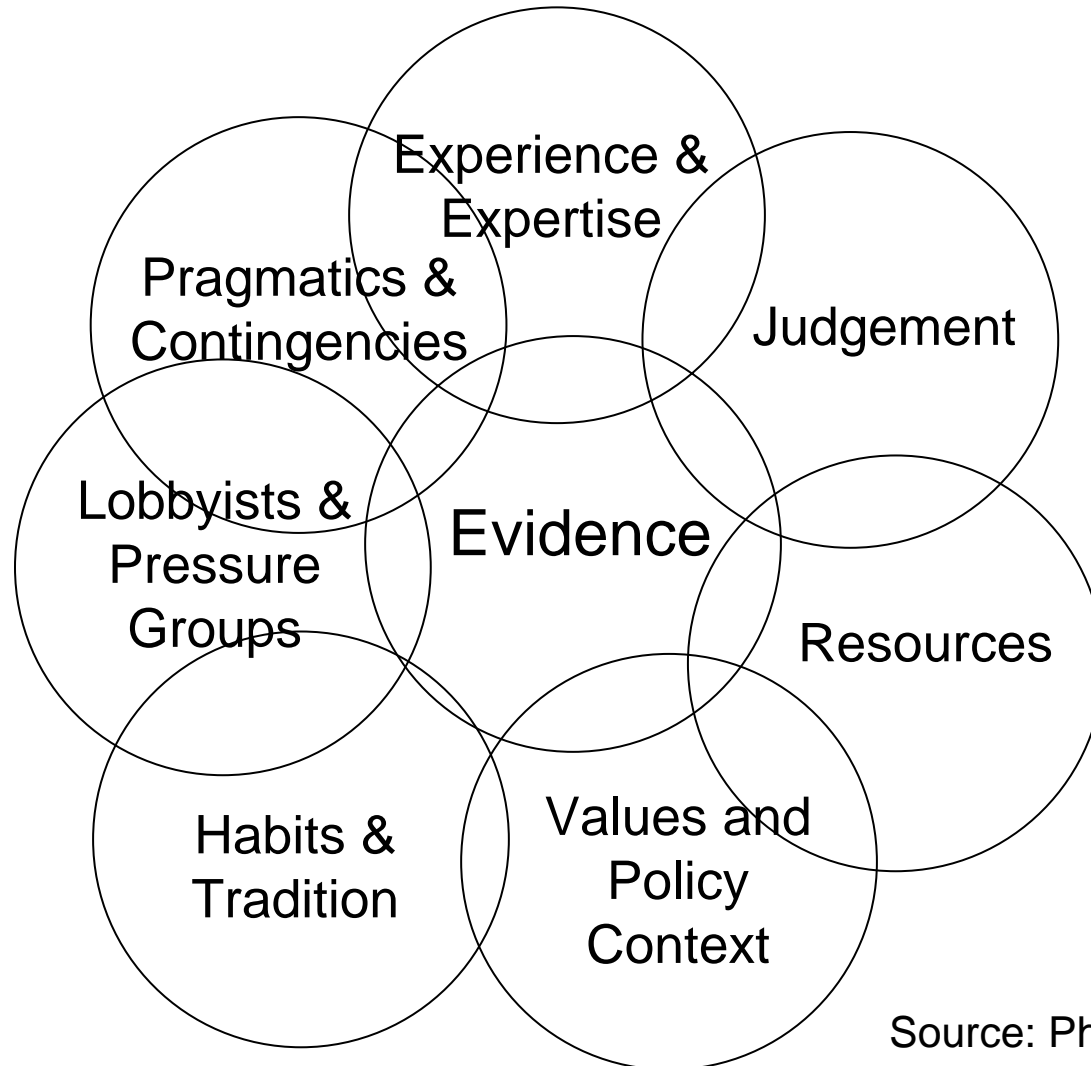
- Speed
- Superficiality
- Spin
- Secrecy
- Scientific Ignorance



Vincent Cable – Lib. Democrat MP & Shadow Minister of Finance

More at: [www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Meetings/Evidence](http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Meetings/Evidence)

# Factors influencing policy making



Source: Phil Davies Impact to  
Insight Meeting, ODI, 2005

# Different Notions of Evidence

## Researchers' Evidence

- 'Scientific' (Context free)
- Proven empirically
- Theoretically driven
- As long as it takes
- Caveats and qualifications

## Policy Makers' Evidence

- Colloquial (Contextual)
- Anything that seems reasonable
- Policy relevant
- Timely
- Clear Message

# An Analytical Framework

## External Influences

Socio-economic and cultural influences, donor policies etc

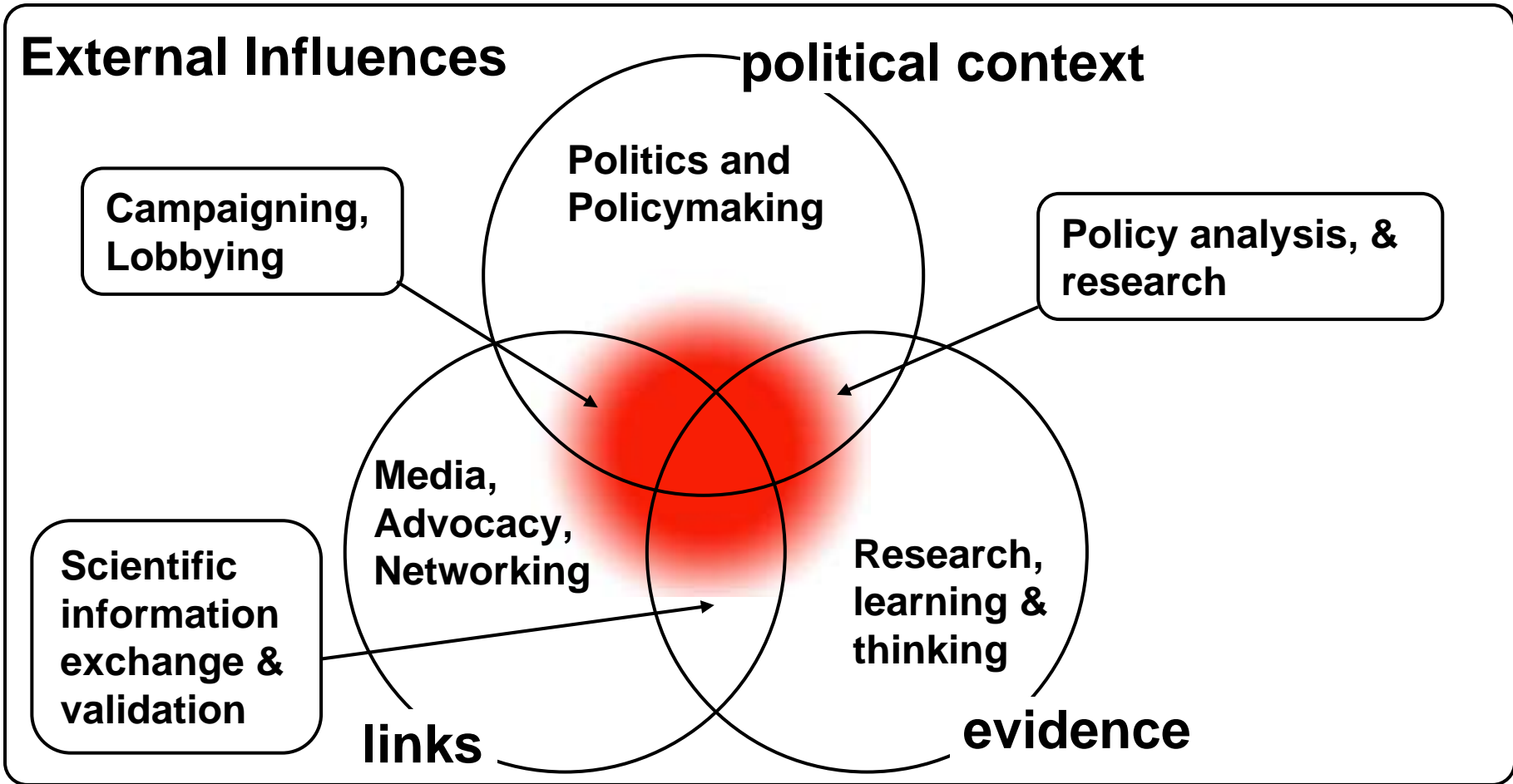
## The **political context** –

political and economic structures and processes, culture, institutional pressures, incremental vs radical change etc.

The **links** between policy and research communities – networks, relationships, power, competing discourses, trust, knowledge etc.

The **evidence** – credibility, the degree it challenges received wisdom, research approaches and methodology, simplicity of the message, how it is packaged etc

# A Practical Framework



# What you need to do

What need to know	What need to do	How to do it
<p><b>Political Context:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the policymakers?</li> <li>• Is there demand for ideas?</li> <li>• What is the policy process?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get to know the policymakers.</li> <li>• Identify friends and foes.</li> <li>• Prepare for policy opportunities.</li> <li>• Look out for policy windows.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with them – seek commissions</li> <li>• Strategic opportunism – prepare for known events + resources for others</li> </ul>
<p><b>Evidence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the current theory?</li> <li>• What are the narratives?</li> <li>• How divergent is it?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish credibility</li> <li>• Provide practical solutions</li> <li>• Establish legitimacy.</li> <li>• Present clear options</li> <li>• Use familiar narratives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a reputation</li> <li>• Action-research</li> <li>• Pilot projects to generate legitimacy</li> <li>• Good communication</li> </ul>
<p><b>Links</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the stakeholders?</li> <li>• What networks exist?</li> <li>• Who are the connectors, mavens and salesmen?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get to know the others</li> <li>• Work through existing networks.</li> <li>• Build coalitions.</li> <li>• Build new policy networks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build partnerships.</li> <li>• Identify key networkers, mavens and salesmen.</li> <li>• Use informal contacts</li> </ul>

# The 5 rules for effective influence of research on policy

- Win the argument about what the problem is before you try to win the argument about the solution
- The political context is vital
- Balance persistence and opportunism
- Focus on application
- Always be strategic

Source: Taylor, Mathew (2006), 'Bridging Research and Policy: A UK Perspective', in J. Court and S. Maxwell (eds), *Policy Entrepreneurship for Poverty Reduction*, Practical Action Publishing

# Conclusions

If you want your research to influence policy you need to:

- Understand the political context
- Have the right evidence
- Engage with the policy makers to
  - know who's making the decisions
  - know what evidence will convince them
  - identify practical solutions to their problems
  - present the evidence in the right way, at the right time
  - help them to develop the policies