



Building capacity for policy research

Stephen Yeo



Framework for thinking about policy research capacity

- ◆ The 'supply' of policy research
- ◆ The 'demand' for policy research
- ◆ "Intermediation"
 - fancy term for the institutions or mechanisms for bringing together supply and demand)

The 'supply' of policy research

◆ Human capital

- How would you measure it?
- number of researchers, their formal qualifications, and current engagement in research activities

◆ Focus is on individuals, not institutions (they appear below)

- this is what AERC has always focused on

The 'demand' for policy research

- ◆ Awareness of the need for policy research
- ◆ But whose awareness?
- ◆ Government or others?
- ◆ Large scale, retrospective IDRC study by Carden and others suggests this is the key factor in research uptake

What interventions are possible?

- ◆ Supply
- ◆ Demand
- ◆ Intermediation
- ◆ Others

Supply

- ◆ Strengthening existing or creating new programs of formal training
- ◆ Grants programs involving individual researchers in 'learning research by doing'
- ◆ Policy analysis units within government itself
- ◆ Making better use of scholars from the Diaspora

Programmes of formal training

- ◆ TRAPCA, AERC collaborative MA
- ◆ MPP programmes – new DFID initiative based in Nairobi
- ◆ This is my bet for the most promising intervention over the next 5 to 20 years
- ◆ Why don't more of these exist already?
- ◆ Why does trade attract so much capacity building?

Involving individual researchers in 'learning research by doing'

- ◆ AERC thematic workshops
- ◆ SADRN, SATRN
- ◆ Focuses more on junior researchers – harder to tell senior established researchers how to do research
- ◆ Requires time, intensive mentoring if it is going to be successful
- ◆ Doesn't necessarily yield research of interest to policy-makers, as AERC experience shows

Policy analysis units within government itself

- ◆ "Islands of excellence"
- ◆ You can view this as either a form of supply (policy analysis units do the policy relevant research themselves) or as an increase in demand (the unit contracts out research to think tanks)
- ◆ Hard to make these work within an underfunded and underperforming civil service
- ◆ Issues of pay, who is appointed, subsequent career paths
- ◆ Most donors have shied away from this, except as part of a large civil service restructuring

The 'demand' for policy research

- ◆ Awareness of the need for policy research, willingness to commission and pay for such research
- ◆ IDRC study showed government "demand" was the most important factor in determining whether an IDRC project had "influence"
- ◆ Most of the discussion revolves around government
 - Regional, sub-regional, national or sub-national levels
 - Clearly the focus of TRAPCA training programmes described yesterday
- ◆ We've heard a lot over the past day about the difficulties of engaging government policy-makers in the region
- ◆ Given these problems perhaps the strategy should address a broader set of actors
- ◆ Private sector
- ◆ Civil society
- ◆ Media

Intermediation

- ◆ Institutional strengthening of existing policy research institutes
 - IDRC support for TIPS
 - Think Tank Initiative
- ◆ This strategy carries a risk – what if there is no demand for policy research
 - Not the case with TIPS back in 1996

Things that haven't been tried

- ◆ Partnerships
- ◆ Entrepreneurship
- ◆ Partnerships could be horizontal or vertical
 - 'Horizontal partnerships' involving collaboration between policy research institutes in different countries
 - ◆ Might work, but matching interests and capacities between institutions is difficult
 - Improve intermediation through 'vertical partnerships'
 - ◆ between policy research institutes (either based in universities or free standing) and users of research in government, the private sector or civil society
 - ◆ Build trust, longer term relationships?
- ◆ Supporting leadership and innovation
- ◆ Policy entrepreneurs leading research institutes
- ◆ Academic entrepreneurs capable of improving the quality of graduate education