

## A guide to monitoring and evaluating policy influence

By Harry Jones

Influencing policy is a central part of much international development work. Donor agencies, for example, must engage in policy dialogue if they channel funds through budget support, to try to ensure that their money is well-spent. Civil society organisations are moving from service delivery to advocacy in order to secure more sustainable, widespread change. And there is an increasing recognition that researchers need to engage with policy-makers if their work is to have wider public value.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E), a central tool to manage interventions, improve practice and ensure accountability, is highly challenging in these contexts. Policy change is a highly complex process shaped by a multitude of interacting forces and actors. ‘Outright success’, in terms of achieving specific, hoped-for changes is rare, and the work that does influence policy is often unique and rarely repeated or replicated, with many incentives working against the sharing of ‘good practice’.

This paper provides an overview of approaches to monitoring and evaluating policy influence, based on an exploratory review of the literature and selected interviews with expert informants, as well as ongoing discussions and advisory projects for policy-makers and practitioners who also face the challenges of monitoring and evaluation. There are a number of lessons that can be learned, and tools that can be used, that provide workable solutions to these challenges. While there is a vast breadth of activities that aim to influence policy, and a great deal of variety in theory and practice according to each different area or type of organisation, there are also some clear similarities and common lessons.

Rather than providing a systematic review of practice, this paper is intended as a guide to the topic,

outlining different challenges and approaches, with some suggestions for further reading. It was developed as part of a number of streams of work carried out by the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) team at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) with the UK Department for International Development (DFID), including developing ‘how-to notes’ on planning an influencing approach to multilateral organisations, and on the M&E of policy influencing interventions (DFID, 2010), reviewing the cost-effectiveness of policy influencing in DFID’s health portfolio (Clarke et al., 2010), and assessing the influence of research and evaluation on DFID (Jones and Mendizabal, 2010).

The paper begins by defining ‘policy’ and policy change, before outlining a typology of approaches to influencing policy. It then sets out the main challenges of monitoring and evaluating this influence on policy, together with the ways in which M&E frameworks respond to these challenges – often by constructing a ‘theory of change’ (ToC). The next section outlines key considerations for developing a ToC. The paper then uses the typology of influencing activities presented earlier, discussing for each the issue of what to measure, and when and how it should be measured. The paper concludes with key recommendations for developing M&E frameworks for policy influencing activities.

### Policy, and approaches to influencing it

This paper looks at how to monitor and evaluate activities that aim to influence policy. A starting point, then, is to look at what ‘policy’ is, and how to understand change (or stasis) in policy. Rather than seeing policy as one single, discrete decision, it is important to broaden one’s view, so that policy is understood as a series of documents and decisions that are best described as a set of processes, activities or actions (Neilson, 2001).

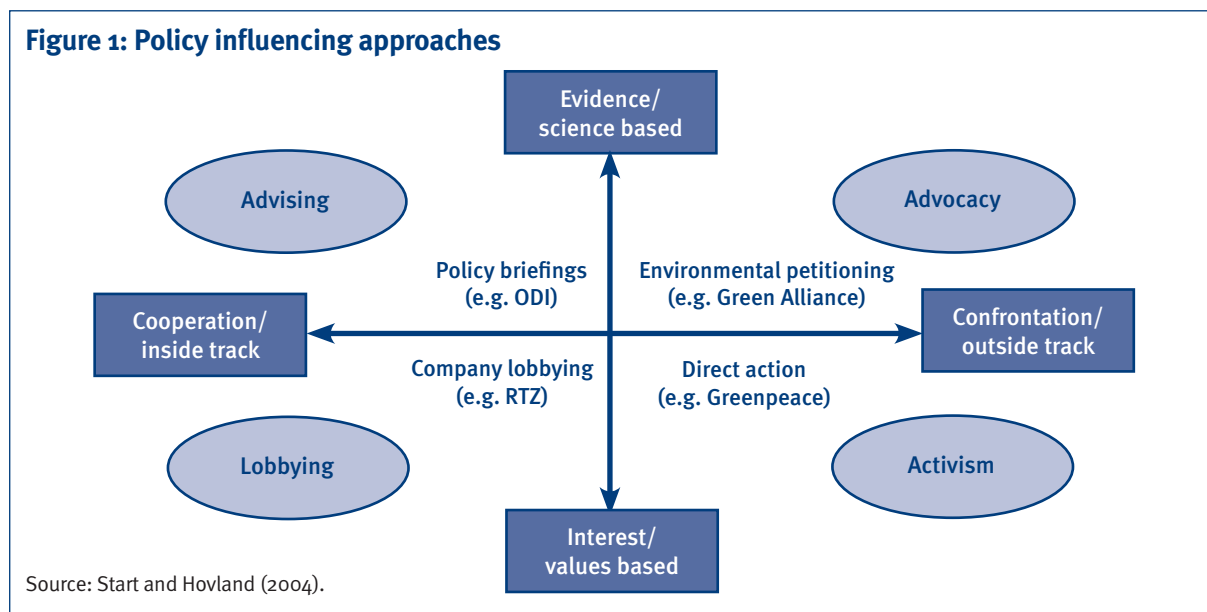
Jones and Villar (2008), for example, draw on the 1998 study by Keck and Sikkink on transnational advocacy and the policy process to highlight five key dimensions of possible policy impact (Jones and Villar, 2008; Keck and Sikkink, 1998):

- Framing debates and getting issues on to the political agenda: this is about **attitudinal change**, drawing attention to new issues and affecting the awareness, attitudes or perceptions of key stakeholders.
- Encouraging **discursive commitments** from states and other policy actors: affecting language and rhetoric is important to, for example, promote recognition of specific groups or endorsements of international declarations.
- Securing **procedural change** at domestic or international level: changes in the process whereby policy decisions are made, such as opening new spaces for policy dialogue.
- Affecting **policy content**: while legislative change is not the sum total of policy change, it is an important element.

- Influencing **behaviour change** in key actors: policy change requires changes in behaviour and implementation at various levels in order to be meaningful and sustainable.

There is a very wide variety of activities to influence policy. One way to categorise them is to distinguish between approaches that take the ‘inside track’, working closely with decision-makers, versus ‘outside track’ approaches that seek to influence change through pressure and confrontation. There is also a distinction between approaches that are led by evidence and research versus those that involve, primarily, values and interests. This marks out four possible approaches to policy influencing, set out in Figure 1 below.

The approaches and tools used to manage and measure ‘outside track’ influencing are relatively similar to each other, so we can simplify this to three main types of approaches to influencing policy. The three types of policy influencing activity are: evidence and advice, public campaigns and advocacy, and lobby-



**Table 1: Typology of influencing activities**

Type of influencing	Where? Through what channels?	How? By what means?
Evidence and advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National and international policy discourses/debates</li> <li>• Formal and informal meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and analysis, ‘good practice’</li> <li>• Evidence-based argument</li> <li>• Providing advisory support</li> <li>• Developing and piloting new policy approaches</li> </ul>
Public campaigns and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public and political debates in developing countries</li> <li>• Public meetings, speeches, presentations</li> <li>• Television, newspapers, radio and other media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public communications and campaigns</li> <li>• ‘Public education’</li> <li>• Messaging</li> <li>• Advocacy</li> </ul>
Lobbying and negotiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal meetings</li> <li>• Semi-formal and informal channels</li> <li>• Membership and participation in boards and committees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face-to-face meetings and discussions</li> <li>• Relationships and trust</li> <li>• Direct incentives and diplomacy</li> </ul>

ing and negotiation (see Table 1). These correspond, roughly, to ‘advisory’, ‘advocacy’ and ‘lobbying’ in Figure 1. Each of these typically involve certain sets of activities carried out in certain spaces and through certain channels, and are summarised in Table 1.

## Tackling the challenges of M&E of policy influence

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are widely recognised as being crucial elements of managing and implementing projects, programmes and policies in both public and private sector organisations. The production and use of M&E information during and after an intervention is generally seen as a central plank in systems for reporting and accountability, in demonstrating performance, and/or for learning from experience and improving future work. Monitoring and evaluating policy influencing work, however, presents some particular challenges and complexities. These challenges are, in general, integral to policy influencing work and not specific to one particular sector or approach to policy influence. Although they have been well documented and described elsewhere, they provide a useful starting point for looking at approaches to the M&E of policy influence.

First, there are a range of **conceptual and technical challenges**. It can be very difficult to determine the links between policy influencing activities and outputs, and any change (or stasis) in policy. Policy change is highly complex and proceeds in anything but a ‘linear’ or ‘rational’ fashion, with policy processes shaped by a multitude of interacting forces and actors. This makes it almost impossible to predict with confidence the likely consequences of a set of activities on policy, and extremely difficult to pin down the full effect of actions even after the event.

This is about a difficulty in establishing causality, and is known as the ‘attribution problem’, which has a long history in the field of evaluation (Iverson, 2003). Methodologies such as experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluation that can function to analyse attribution in other circumstances are unsuitable for policy influencing work because it is difficult to establish a plausible counter-factual. Some have argued that there are additional problems in measuring both inputs and outputs of many influencing activities, such as research communication (Ekboir, 2003).

Second, **the nature of policy influencing work** presents further challenges to more traditional M&E approaches. ‘Outright success’ in terms of achieving the specific changes that were sought is rare, with some objectives modified or jettisoned along the way. There is an element of subjectivity in whether gains were significant, consistent with the wider goals of an

organisation or campaign, or co-opted. In other words, the policy context is likely to change of its own accord, and influencing objectives may need to be altered in reaction to this or to other external forces. This means that objectives formulated at the outset of influencing work may not be the best yardstick against which to judge its progress. Policy changes tend to occur over long timeframes that may not be suitable to measurement in the usual rhythms of projects and evaluations in aid agencies. In addition, much influencing work and advocacy is most effective when carried out in alliances, coalitions and networks, which presents difficulties in judging the specific contribution of one organisation to a change (even after some kind of judgement about contribution or attribution has been made).

Third, there are further **practical problems that constrain the production and use of knowledge** about influencing activities. Staff carrying out influencing work rarely have the time or resources to conduct robust M&E, and there tend to be further problems of M&E capacity at the individual and institutional level in many organisations that work in advocacy and other influencing activities. This can also result in objectives and goals that are not clearly defined or communicated from the outset. Policy influencing involves political and sometimes highly conflicting processes, leading to difficulties in determining how best to solicit or interpret the accounts of different actors. Influencing work is often unique, rarely repeated or replicated and, even worse, there are incentives against the sharing of ‘good practice’. If one lobby found, for example, some kind of ‘magic bullet’ to influence policy, it would be nullified if they shared the technique publically. Equally, policy-makers are unlikely to be happy with claims that their decisions can be attributed to the influence of another actor.

These challenges present serious difficulties for strategic decisions, for the adaptation of implementation, and for reporting to funders about where their money has gone. There are, however, a number of frameworks and approaches to help users overcome the conceptual and technical difficulties. The vast majority of these involve, either explicitly or implicitly, developing a **‘theory of change’** (ToC). This is referred to in various ways, such as a ‘logical model’, ‘programme theory’ or ‘roadmap’, but it is, basically, a model of how the policy influencing activities are envisaged to result in the desired changes in policy or in people’s lives (Whelan, 2008).

A ToC is an essential tool for the M&E of policy influence, not only for improving policy influencing projects and enhancing decision-making, but also for accountability and reporting to stakeholders external to the programme.

**Improving projects:** literature on planning and M&E in complex settings highlights the importance of M&E to test and reflect on a project’s ToC. This is, for exam-

ple, a key principle of adaptive management, in which projects or programmes are seen as ‘experiments’, examining hypotheses about problems and how they can be addressed, with ongoing cycles of evaluation, assessment, and adjustment of change models and activities. M&E activities must, therefore, focus on ‘making sense’ of the available information and data. Sense-making is defined as ‘a motivated continuous effort to understand connections (which can be among people, places, and events) in order to anticipate their trajectories and act effectively’ (Klein, Moon et al., 2006: 71). Evidence shows that this key activity runs alongside action (rather than preceding it) for contexts and circumstances that are complex, uncertain and ambiguous (Kurtz and Snowden, 2003).

In complex situations project and programme managers face ambiguity, with available knowledge and information supporting several different interpretations at the same time. This means that teams need to come together to question their models of change, their underlying assumptions and the relevance of their goals. It is important to discuss the framing of an issue explicitly, and question whether interpretations truly follow from available data, and what is missing or uncertain.

**Accountability and reporting:** Once a ToC is completed it lays out a number of dimensions and intermediate outcomes against which the project’s influence can be measured. Providing a clear statement of strategy and direction is a central element of accountability practices, and is even more important for policy influencing, where making objectives and strategies explicit is a key ingredient of success (Jones, 2008). Evaluating strategy and direction, and analysing a project’s expectations for change is, then, an important part of evaluating that project. Evaluators often have to construct the ToC from the assumptions and ideas implicit in a project’s conception and implementation if none has already been constructed, but this is not ideal as implementing teams miss out on potential strategic benefits.

## Developing a theory of change

The ToC, often presented in a diagrammatic fashion or a table (such as a log frame), serves as a basis for future planning and M&E activities, as well communication about such activities with partners and funders. It is best to develop such a theory explicitly to cover all aspects of one’s influencing work before undertaking the work, but this is not always possible. Sometimes, teams must react to emerging circumstances by acting in ways that they had not anticipated and that take them outside the original plans. In other situations whole influencing initiatives are carried out without an explicit ToC being constructed. In the former situa-

tion it is best for teams to collect whatever information seems relevant to be incorporated into an improved ToC at a later date. However, this is a challenge in the latter situation, where theories must be reconstructed from available project documents and other sources.

There are three common types of ToC:

- **Causal chain:** perhaps the best-known kind of ToC, which describes a succession or ‘chain’ of elements and the logical or causal connections between them. This usually involves a set of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact, with each element causing or leading to the next one, depending on certain assumptions. For example, a log frame that sets out this sort of chain can be the basis for a ToC, identifying a series of intermediate outcomes that can be measured as determinants of progress or success (as ‘early indicators’ of potential impact, and/or confirmation of a useful influencing approach). The downside is that the actual theoretical content and hypotheses about causal links can remain implicit, rather than explicit (Sridharan and Nakaima, 2010).
- **Dimensions of influence:** this approach looks at the different dimensions of change. This involves a set of areas of outcomes, each of which is presumed to be important in contributing towards policy influence. For example the ‘context-evidence-links’ framework developed by the RAPID team at ODI specifies four key areas that are crucial in shaping the influence of evidence or researchers on policy: the political and policy context, the nature of the evidence, the key actors and the relationships and networks between them, and external factors, such as social structures or international forces (Court et al., 2005). These represent various changes that, taken together, help create the conditions for policy change. Again, they highlight areas that can be monitored or evaluated.
- **Actor-centred theories:** Some frameworks focus on the behaviour change of different actors. Actors are seen as the key driving force for change, with policy-making largely dependent on policy actors and networks, their behaviour, relationships, perspectives and political interests. Gearing ToCs around actors provides a clear, concrete focus for M&E activities, namely the behaviour changes of those actors. One framework that structures M&E in this way is Outcome Mapping, which focuses M&E activities on the behaviour of a programme’s ‘boundary partners’ – ‘those individuals, groups, and organizations with whom the program interacts directly to effect change’ (Smutylo, 2001). Another is Rick Davies’s ‘Social Framework’, which combines elements of the ‘causal chain’, mapping out a pathway to change through a series of actors and their relationships to each other (Davies, 2008).

There are various ways to combine different ideas about ToCs. The straightforward ‘causal chain’ model may be too linear or simplistic for understanding policy influence, and may force M&E into a straightjacket that does not reflect the dynamics of the specific context. Patricia Rogers provides a wealth of guidance about how to fit ToCs to complex challenges, such as incorporating simultaneous causal strands (two or more chains of events that are all required for the intervention to succeed) or alternative causal strands (where a programme could work through one or another path) (Rogers, 2008).

Another area for elaboration is the interaction with various different (potential) contexts. Both Pawson and Tilley argue that evaluation must consider how a programme may function by various different causal mechanisms which would interact with various potential contexts in order to produce an outcome (Pawson, 2002; Tilley, 2000). For example, the literature shows that the influence of research on policy will play out in very different ways depending on whether the government happens to have an interest in the issue, or capacity to respond (Carden, 2009). The emphasis should not be on making things highly intricate, but on trying to provide a realistic and intuitive model that clearly sets out a team’s assumptions and ideas about change.

There are two important considerations for developing a ToC. First, **start with a picture of what drives change in the ‘target’**. A good ToC should, where possible, draw on a realistic understanding of what forces tend to affect the desired target audience or outcome. This is an important opportunity to incorporate social science theory into the planning and M&E of policy influencing, but also crucial to establish realistic expectations about what can be achieved, and what degree of influence a particular programme may have exerted. Stachowiak (2007) presents six theories of policy change:

- *‘Large Leaps’ or Punctuated Equilibrium Theory*, like seismic evolutionary shifts, significant changes in policy and institutions can occur when the right conditions are in place.
- *‘Coalition’ Theory or Advocacy Coalition Framework*, where policy change happens through coordinated activity among a range of individuals with the same core policy beliefs.
- *‘Policy Windows’ or Agenda Setting*, where policy can be changed during a window of opportunity when advocates successfully connect two or more components of the policy process: the way a problem is defined, the policy solution to the problem or the political climate surrounding their issue.
- *‘Messaging and Frameworks’ or Prospect Theory*, where individuals’ policy preferences or willing-

ness to accept them will vary, depending on how options are framed or presented.

- *‘Power Politics’ or Power Elites Theory*, where policy change is made by working directly with those with power to make decisions or influence decision making, and
- *‘Grassroots’ or Community Organising Theory*, where policy change is made through collective action by members of the community who work to change the problems affecting their lives.

Second, **link into this the way(s) that the project aims to influence the target**. A causal chain, or ‘pathway’ can then be linked into the model of what affects the target audience or outcome, to specify how the project or programme hopes to influence it. This could flow from the project outputs, to a chain of intermediate outcomes, to the wider and longer-term outcomes. Alternatively, coming to a case ex-post, the process would try to trace the key chains of events that lead towards final decisions or outcomes. It is likely that certain outcomes required for success are beyond the direct control of the individual project, programme or organisation.

While the project team is in charge of the inputs and resources, local actors will often become involved in activities and outputs, and any policy influencing activity is likely to be only one of a multitude of factors that influence outcomes and impact (Smutylo, 2001). It is also desirable for projects and programmes to gradually reduce their control over changes as the causal chain progresses, as change needs to be owned locally, rather than externally, to be sustainable, especially if these are questions of politics and policy.

In these situations, it may be wise to focus a good deal of the data collection, and accountability measures, on the sphere within which the project/programme has a direct influence when developing a ToC, to provide more useful guidance for reporting and decision-making. Outcome Mapping, for example, focuses on the influence on partners with whom an organisation works directly.

## What to measure and how

There is a wide diversity in terms of what information is collected, when and how for the M&E of policy influence. These specifics will be based on the ToC for any particular policy influencing project.

This section draws on the earlier typology of different approaches to policy influencing to organise the literature on, and recommendations for, M&E. For each approach to influencing, this paper sets out (i) the typical sorts of activity involved, and (ii) typical ToCs, along with associated intermediate outcomes

to assess, and an overview of tools and methods to collect information on these outcomes. Just as these types of influencing are likely to overlap in a variety of situations, so will the relevant tools.

### Evidence and advice

**Typical activities:** In some situations, policy influencing activities are led by evidence and analysis, by principles of evidence-informed policy-making and providing knowledge-based inputs. An organisation might take the lead to promote innovative new policies and programmes among the donor community based on experiences with a pilot programme, or provide research and advisory support to a southern government to assist with a process of reform. Influencing work might proceed by commissioning or carrying out research, communicating the results of research through policy briefs and seminars, sharing research with decision-makers in face to face meetings and involving them in the design and execution of the work.

For this type of influencing, it is relevant to draw upon the substantial literature about the non-academic impact of science and research and M&E of research communication. Much scientific and policy-oriented research relies on public funds, and there is pressure to demonstrate its impact. As a result, there has been a considerable interest and methodological development in these fields.

**ToC, outcomes and tools:** One important perspective on how research and evidence influences policy uses a ‘causal chain’-type ToC. Here, research activities lead to outputs (tangible goods and services, e.g. briefs, events), which lead to ‘uptake’, direct responses to the research (such as using it or quoting it), and then, further down the line, influence in terms of outcomes or impact – in other words, changes in behaviour and in people’s lives.

Working around a ‘causal chain’ ToC, there are various methods to evaluate outputs, uptake and use. Evaluating **outputs** involves looking at the tangible products that are produced by a project/programme or institution to judge their quality, credibility, relevance, accessibility, and other factors that are associated with evidence that is influential.

- Evaluating outputs can include looking at academic articles, research reports, policy briefs, or websites. Various sets of criteria are available against which they can be judged (Hovland, 2007), and the review could be carried out by consultants and experts who are relatively independent of the influencing project, or using ‘blind’ reviewing methods common in academia. On the other hand, it may be more useful to a project to have reviews carried out by people who are part of, or who represent, the ‘target audience’ for their work.

Evaluating **uptake and use** involves looking at the extent to which research or advice is visibly ‘picked up’ and used by others, such as being cited in a government policy paper or mentioned in a newspaper.

- *Uptake logs:* this is simply a log (perhaps an email inbox or database) where comments, anecdotes and examples of ‘uptake’ or influence are recorded. This would be, essentially, a collection of informal and anecdotal evidence about the use of research or advice, but could provide useful ongoing monitoring and contribute to deeper analyses once a number of instances are accumulated.
- *New areas for citation analysis:* a more proactive approach to understanding uptake and use is citation analysis. In the academic field, this involves tracking citations in academic journals, but this can be expanded to cover other more policy-relevant areas such as websites, newspapers, international standards, training manuals, policy documents and operational guidelines.
- *User surveys:* large-scale questionnaires or smaller scale focus groups can be used to ascertain how much, and in what way, target audiences use and value the outputs provided.

While these tools can provide useful indications of the influence of evidence and advice, they will not always be reliable. First, analysing outputs may not always be the most useful way forward, because the quality and presentation of evidence may be only one small factor in determining its influence. Second, relying on indicators such as citations and references presents two problems. On the one hand, research will rarely be used directly, but often influences policy-makers more gradually and in an amorphous way through ‘enlightenment’, by providing concepts and ideas. On the other hand, where research is quoted this may be tactical, to justify a political decision that has already been made and over which the actual research, in fact, had no actual influence.

For this reason, it will often be valuable to carry out more in-depth studies, using frameworks built around a more suitable framework for understanding the messy, political interactions that influence the use of knowledge in the policy process. These will generally involve carrying out interviews and participatory exercises with a variety of stakeholders, drawing on available grey and published literature, and carrying out a significant level of analysis on this ‘raw data’:

- *RAPID Outcome Assessment (ROA):* drawing on the outcome mapping tool and the RAPID group’s framework for understanding the influence of research on policy, this tool helps assess the contribution of a project’s research and other activities on a policy or the policy environment. This is

done by: describing the context, the project, the key actors and their behaviour; how this changed over time; and what influence the project had over key behaviour changes. It requires an intensive workshop with team members and, ideally, project partners, as well as analysis and write-up.

- *Episode studies*: these involve ‘tracking back’ from a policy change, understanding the multitude of forces, events, documents and decisions involved in producing that change. This requires constructing a narrative about what led to the policy change in question, before assessing the relative role of research in that narrative.
- *Most significant change (MSC)*: this involves the collection of significant change stories from a variety of stakeholders, and the systematic selection of the most significant stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. This encourages a form of ongoing and indirect monitoring of the work carried out. MSC also gives a project, programme or institution a better understanding of whether and how it is achieving its purposes.

### Public campaigns and advocacy

**Typical activities:** Some approaches to policy influencing target large numbers of individuals, or the political debate on an issue, through public messaging and campaigning. They might try to build up public support for a new policy, using public meetings and speeches to communicate the rationale for a proposed reform, or using television and radio to raise public awareness of an issue. This is about trying to influence change from the ‘outside’ track, rather than in closed meetings with decision-makers. An organisation might work through messaging in the media, public events, speeches and meetings and building national and sub-national coalitions. Such approaches often mobilise a number of initiatives at the same time.

This type of approach to policy influence has been undertaken by civil society groups worldwide for decades, working to influence national policy debates and public will. There is also a wealth of experience in public communication campaigns aimed at individual behaviour change and ‘public education’. There are many ways to solicit relevant information for the running of these campaigns, but it is not easy to ascertain the precise amount of influence that a particular programme has had. With factors as multifaceted as the public dialogue on an issue, and for outcomes such as ‘public attitudes and beliefs’, which are affected by so many factors, distinguishing the effects of one single campaign is still extremely difficult, and there are few rigorous methods for this.

**ToC, outcomes and tools:** In general, public campaigns

hope to achieve influence either through delivering messages directly to an audience, or through placement in the media.

The importance of monitoring and understanding **target audiences** cannot be underestimated for this sort of work, and is crucial for the planning of a project, for strategic adaptations during the project, and for evaluation afterwards. Based on various models of behaviour change and public interest in political issues, a number of outcomes may be of relevance: awareness of an issue or campaign, perception of saliency or importance of an issue, attitudes, norms and standards of behaviour, and actual behaviour. There are a number of ways to ascertain this information:

- *Surveys* can be used to gauge attitudes of particular audiences, and to make judgements about how these change over time and the influence of a project over them. Because of the large number of people targeted by campaigns, quasi-experimental methods can sometimes be used, given the large number of people targeted by campaigns. This would include, for example, cases where the same people are targeted a number of times, where a campaign has a staged implementation or roll-out, or where there is a clear way to determine the exposure of segments of the population (e.g. the number of people who have televisions, in the case of a television broadcast). Rolling sample surveys, where a random selection of people in the target audience are surveyed at regular intervals, are another way to keep track of changes over time (although less useful for determining attribution).
- *Focus group discussions* are a key tool for understanding the perspectives of a target audience on an issue, idea or event, and what drives that audience. If facilitated effectively, they can provide richer and deeper information than surveys, although with less information about ‘coverage’. While there are less sophisticated methods to determine influence or attribution, attitudes can be assessed at different points in time, or groups could be asked for their specific opinions about a campaign.
- *Direct responses and informants* represent a ‘light touch’ way to track influence on a target audience. One method is to track the number of enquiries received from the audience, or the number attending public meetings. Another could be to interview individuals who are judged to be ‘well placed’ to assess a particular target audience.

It is often crucial to monitor **the media**. Increased coverage in the media is likely to help messages to get through to the target audience more consistently or more frequently, and there are a number of ways to

measure this. In addition, the way in which the media presents or discusses certain issues can be crucial, as this is thought to be a strong determinant of the public attitudes on the issue. The following tools may be useful:

- *Media tracking logs* can be simple forms that allow project staff to record how campaigns or issues are covered in the media quickly and easily. This could mean keeping quotes, newspaper cuttings, and information about date and time of reference, for example.
- *Media assessments* are more pro-active, assessing the extent to which an issue/campaign is covered. This could involve tracking column inches in newspapers, air time on television or radio, or monitoring hits on a website. These could be combined with additional information to get a richer understanding of the influence on the media, such as calculating the estimated audience figures for a programme that features the campaign, or the amount of money column inches would have cost if paid for through advertising.

Understanding the **link between the information presented** in the media and the **effect on the target audience** is an extremely difficult area. This is about understanding how people receive information in their everyday lives or in their jobs, and what determines how it affects them. There is plenty of social science theory in this area, such as Tversky and Kahneman's 'framing theory' (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981), which shows how the way in which the media communicates information triggers certain meanings and interpretations, but it is difficult to test these causal links and processes robustly. The possible approaches include:

- *Exposure*: measuring exposure means looking at the degree to which the target audience has encountered a campaign, how many times they were exposed, and whether they paid attention. Interviews and surveys could be used to see whether people recall a particular message or campaign, and simple figures about readership of papers, and ownership of televisions/radios can be a useful guide.
- *Framing analysis*: this means looking at how issues are presented or discussed, by reviewing the key themes, metaphors, arguments and descriptions in a given media (newspaper, websites, etc.). This is based on framing theory, which indicates that these issues are a key component of the way in which people are influenced by the media. This can then be compared to the campaign's take on an issue, and the language it uses, and the change in framing over time can give important M&E information. Aside

from exposure and framing analyses, there are very few tools that can give information about the link between media coverage and public attitudes.

### Lobbying approaches

**Typical activities:** The primary means of influencing policy is often direct interaction with decision-makers, allies and other key players. This might include participation in negotiations or meetings, direct communications with government ministers, or informal discussions with partners and other contacts. Teams will work to influence through persuasion, negotiation and lobbying. In more formal spaces this may be conducted through evidence-based dialogue, while in other channels this will require more informal discussions and debate. Projects will draw on the relationships staff have with various contacts, and will use budget support and other material incentives to influence proceedings directly or, more often, indirectly.

It has long been recognised that this sort of activity is crucial to shape the course of policy. Some research has found that face-to-face personal interaction is the strongest factor in facilitating the use of particular policy ideas or evidence (Innvaer et al., 2002). However, there is little literature on M&E for this interaction. There are, in general, strong incentives against the sharing of good practice in this area, as well as obstacles to recording related knowledge and information. However, some guidance can be drawn from professional lobbyists and negotiators, and 'good practice' for systematically managing work (and reporting to clients) in these fields. While M&E tends to be carried out informally, if at all, this work relies on seeking out and reacting to information on some key factors. Expectations about what kind of M&E can be carried out in these contexts need to be adjusted accordingly.

**ToC, outcomes and tools:** ToCs for this kind of influencing activity are based on actors, the relationships between them, and the institutions within which they work. One review of successful lobbying has found that, in addition to clear and focused policy goals, the key strategic capacities required are identifying natural allies, developing relationships and credibility with policy actors, and understanding the nature of the policy process and institutional access (Coen, 2002). McGrath, however, argues that the lobbyist's key working tools are: the monitoring of key players and decision-makers, including their personal history, perspectives and interests; and building coalitions and alliances (often highly temporary) around particular policy goals (McGrath, 2002).

Another example comes from Gladwell, who argues that the spread of influence relies on three types of people: connectors -- networkers who know who to



pass information to and who are respected enough to influence key players; mavens – information specialists, who acquire information and educate others; and salespeople – powerful, charismatic and persuasive individuals who are trusted, believed and listened to (Gladwell, 2000).

Therefore, **keeping systematic track of the various actors**, their interests, ideologies, capacities, their alignment with programme goals, and their relationships with other players, and how all of these change, **is central to managing this type of influencing**, and should be the **basis for measuring and understanding one's influence**. And understanding the key institutions and spaces, and how they affect decision-making is also crucial – different spaces may shape what kind of policy outcome will occur, based on the structure and rules of dialogue and decision-making.

It is not easy. This work takes place in highly fluid contexts, based very much on tacit knowledge and experience, and split-second subjective judgements about, and reactions to, people's attitudes, emotions, positions and perspectives. Expectations about how formalised and standardised M&E can be in such situations must be duly adjusted, and determining attribution is simply not feasible in these contexts. Having said this, there are some tools and approaches that can help:

- *Recording observations from meetings and negotiations* is a useful and low-cost activity. This could be done simply by storing emails, meeting minutes or back-to-office reports, or using meeting observation checklists to record how particular issues are covered, or how different actors behaved. For a slightly more in-depth analysis, an 'after action review' (a tool designed to help teams come together to reflect on a task, activity or project in an open and honest fashion) could be carried out with the project team to discuss what happened, why, and what can be learned.
- *Tracking people and relationships* and the project's interactions with them is another key area. Literature on policy networks shows the importance of 'policy champions' and 'opinion leaders' who can facilitate the uptake of certain policies (Greenhalgh et al., 2004). Simple tracking forms could be used to record what actions have been taken with them and when. Tracking the quality of relationships and access to such people provides important information for managing influencing work as well as indications about the credibility and influence of the project. A more comprehensive approach could be to keep spreadsheets or a database on various key actors (including more than just champions), including political intelligence information about

their job, their position in decision-making processes, and their perspectives and interests, as well as recording interactions with them.

- *Interviewing informants*. Building up an 'information network' is seen as essential to effective lobbying (Lehmann, 2003), and is a useful avenue for understanding a project's influence on policy. Interviewing people with knowledge about the institutions and processes, or particular actors with whom the project is working, can provide invaluable guidance. These could be people with technical expertise on an institution, who have years of experience with a particular individual or organisation, or who are well-placed in terms of their role in decision-making processes. Identifying who may be able to provide information relevant for the project should be done as early as possible, and relationships built up, as the project may need to rely on them to be their 'eyes and ears' in many situations where knowledge is quite politicised. Natural allies in lobbying efforts could be used this way, and tools for 'horizontal evaluation' may be effective or simply surveys about advocacy efforts.
- *In-depth analysis*: a variety of tools could provide richer information about the influence of lobbying efforts: the alignment-interests-influence matrix (AIIM) synthesises perspectives and evidence on different actors' relationship to project goals (and how this changes over time). Social network analysis could function as a way of measuring and understanding actors' relationships with each other and how they share information or resources. And power analysis or political economy analysis provides tools to look into the workings of decision-making institutions. Three promising tools that have been used in the EU context could provide interesting avenues here: process tracing, which attempts to uncover the steps through which meetings and other events led to, and caused, outcomes; attributed influence, where observers of key spaces in the policy process are surveyed on their judgement of the influence of a particular actor or action; and preference attainment, where the influence of actors is judged by the extent to which final policy outcomes reflect their 'ideal' positions (Duer, 2008).

## Conclusions

Monitoring and evaluating policy influencing activities presents a number of unique and significant challenges. Certain factors cannot be overcome – the process of policy-making will never be simple enough to be amenable to the statistical methods required to

**Table 2: Tools for M&E of policy influencing**

influencing approach	Outcomes; what to measure	How; tools
Evidence and advice	Outputs	Evaluating research reports, policy briefs and websites
	Uptake and use	Logs; new areas for citation analysis; user surveys
	Influence	RAPID outcome assessment; Episode studies; Most Significant Change
Public campaigns and advocacy	Target audience attitudes, behaviour, etc	Surveys, focus groups, direct responses
	Media attention	Media tracking logs, media assessment
	Media framing and influence	Framing analysis; coverage
Lobbying approaches	Actors; relationships; policy process and institutions	Recording meetings; tracking people; interviewing key informants; probing influence

rigorously prove the ‘impact’ of a particular intervention. However there are many ways to overcome most of the challenges in a way that allows useful information to be generated, that can be used to good effect to improve programmes, and provide accountability for funds.

‘This is not rocket science’, to use a common saying, and many approaches involve quite straightforward tools that do not require high levels of technical skill to use. The key is for policy influencing teams to recognise the value of M&E to their work, and to incorporate it into their practices from the beginning of a project or programme.

Some general recommendations can be made for the M&E of policy influence:

- Collecting information, monitoring target audiences, making judgements about level of influence (and so on) are time-consuming and tricky activities, while staff carrying out policy influencing activities tend to already be overstretched and under-resourced. It is crucial, therefore, to ensure that any effort spent carrying out this M&E is time well spent. Any systems developed should ensure that information collected can have multiple uses (e.g. both for decision-making and, later, reporting), and that it is integrated with, and draws on, any information or knowledge produced during the planning stage of a project.

- It is important to develop some kind of theory of change (ToC) as early as possible in the planning stage of an influencing project. This sets the overall framework for M&E, giving teams a way to categorise and make sense of available information throughout the project, and a basis for more in-depth studies by external evaluators during or after the intervention.
- A number of well-known tools can be used to collect relevant data opportunistically or at periodic intervals throughout the policy influencing work. If these can be selected and integrated into programme management from the outset, they will be useful for decision-making throughout the work, and become a useful resource to be visited after the end of a project. The tools listed in Table 2 are useful for each influencing approach.

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## Useful resources

### Useful resources: developing a theory of change

Outcome mapping: [www.outcomemapping.ca](http://www.outcomemapping.ca)

Social framework: <http://mandenews.blogspot.com/2008/02/social-frameworks-improvement-on.html> Impact pathways: <http://boru.pbworks.com/>

A general guide for developing a theory of change (ToC): [www.keystoneaccountability.org/node/215](http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/node/215)

Additional resources for developing TOCs: [www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&pageId=1542](http://www.grantcraft.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&pageId=1542), <http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/cc2977k440.pdf>

For further reading, see 3ie's working paper: [www.3ieimpact.org/admin/pdfs\\_papers/48.pdf](http://www.3ieimpact.org/admin/pdfs_papers/48.pdf)

Patricia Rogers' article: <http://evi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/short/14/1/29>

Tilley's discussion of context and mechanisms: <http://fm8-10042.nt.uniz.dk/pdf/Nick%20Tilley.pdf>

The work of Carol Weiss, including: [www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/109751740/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/109751740/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0)

### Useful resources: evidence and advice

For an introduction to a variety of tools, including many of these mentioned above, see Hovland, I. *Making a difference: M&E of policy research*, ODI working paper 281, [www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1751.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1751.pdf)

Another overview can be found in Rick Davies' review of NGO approaches to evaluation of advocacy work: [www.mandeco.uk/docs/EEDIMreport.doc](http://www.mandeco.uk/docs/EEDIMreport.doc)

### Useful resources: public campaigns

A useful compendium of tools can be found in the following handbook prepared by Organisational Research Services: [www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/a\\_handbook\\_of\\_data\\_collection\\_tools.pdf](http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/a_handbook_of_data_collection_tools.pdf)

Chapman and Mancini's guide takes a participatory, actor-centric approach [http://moodle.vsoint.org/file.php/1/moddata/data/6/10/166/CRITICAL\\_WEBS\\_booklet.pdf](http://moodle.vsoint.org/file.php/1/moddata/data/6/10/166/CRITICAL_WEBS_booklet.pdf)

Further reading and information can be found in this literature review [www.mediaevaluationproject.org/HFRP.pdf](http://www.mediaevaluationproject.org/HFRP.pdf)

### Useful resources: lobbying approaches

After action reviews: [www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Tools/Toolkits/KM/AAR.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Tools/Toolkits/KM/AAR.html)

Information on AllM: [www.odi.org.uk/events/2008/07/09/428-presentation-4-method-alignment-interest-influence-matrix.ppt](http://www.odi.org.uk/events/2008/07/09/428-presentation-4-method-alignment-interest-influence-matrix.ppt)

Social network analysis: [www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Tools/Toolkits/KM/Social\\_network\\_analysis.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Tools/Toolkits/KM/Social_network_analysis.html) Process-tracing, attributed influence and preference attainment: [http://andduer.googlepages.com/Duer\\_MeasurementInfluence.pdf](http://andduer.googlepages.com/Duer_MeasurementInfluence.pdf)



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