Belling ‘Policy Cats’: How Can Communication Help?

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Asking a few Questions...

- What DO policy makers want?
- What role for ‘knowledge brokers’ in S&T outreach?
- How to get heard – and noted amidst the Global Cacophony?
- How to know if/when we have influenced debate/policy?
- Why do some kites fly better?
- Examples
Cartoon by Justin Bilicki
http://www.justinbilicki.com/#Political-Cartoons
Could you kindly rephrase that in equivocal, inaccurate, vague, self-serving and roundabout terms that we can all understand?
The Bigger Picture...

- Research is but one voice in the knowledge ‘ecology’ relating to policy & practice
- Research isn’t something ‘we’ do and then communicate to ‘them’
- Search for answers & solutions has become more participatory & nuanced...

Improving the impact of development research through better research communications and uptake
AusAID, DFID & UKCDS funded global workshop in London, Nov 29 – 30, 2010
Full Report: http://tiny.cc/R4DCom
The Bigger Picture...

- Need to improve the SUPPLY of robust research...to guide both policy & practice
- Value of NEUTRALITY of evidence amidst so many lobby & advocacy groups

Improving the impact of development research through better research communications and uptake
AusAID, DFID & UKCDS funded global workshop in London, Nov 29 – 30, 2010
Free access website journalistically covering science & technology for global development

News, views & analysis

Focus on developing countries & regions

Backed by *Nature, Science* & TWAS + aid agencies & foundations

www.scidev.net
What DO policy makers want?

- To understand how to mainstream science evidence & tech innovation for development
- Global survey by SciDev.Net, LSE & partners: 3,000 responses + 600 interviews + focus groups in SEAsia
- Probing how ‘knowledge brokers’ in S&T operate in different developing regions
- Many insights from policy makers & policy influencers on how they seek, find & use evidence 4 policy

Full Report: tiny.cc/SDNGR12
Among key findings...

- 70% respondents use evidence for 'personal knowledge building, keeping up to date with certain topics’, than only for delivering specific activities
- Harder to discern impact!

Report: tiny.cc/SDNGR12
Among key findings...

Challenges of policy-makers:

- Lack of human or financial resources to act
- Lack of economic implications of research findings
- Lack of sources that offer S&T info in readily usable manner for public engagement
- Perception that public lacks interest in S&T

Report: tiny.cc/SDNGR12
“My policy-maker doesn’t understand me!”
Making Your Voice Heard: Engaging Policy Makers (+Public)

- **Direct outreach**
  - Producing newsletters
  - Writing to newspapers or news magazines
  - Own websites (free public access)
  - Social media: Own/group blog, Twitter, etc.

- **Collaborative outreach:**
  - Work with journalists, filmmakers, TV producers
  - Sharing with mass media rights-free material (with remixing allowed)
  - Allowing privileged access to science journalists
TVE Asia Pacific (TVEAP): A ‘knowledge intermediary’

- Asian regional non-profit media foundation, est. 1996
- Using broadcast TV, video & web to communicate development
- **Journalistic story-tellers: work with researchers, educators & civil society**
- Helping them engage audiences (peers, policy makers, wider public)
- Anchored in Sri Lanka, covering developing countries in Asia Pacific

www.tveap.org
Communication
Many methods, processes, strategies, channels & technologies

Mass Media
Print: text-based
Radio: audio-based
TV/Video: audio-visual
New media
Convergent media
Media-based communication...

- Necessary but not sufficient
- This alone may not lead to policy or social change
- BUT...it’s very useful to:
  - Trigger discussion/debates
  - Create ‘ripples’
  - Inspire chain reactions
- Not an end by itself...
- ...but a useful beginning
Information Society marches on...
TVE Asia Pacific approach: Make them well & set them free!

- Co-produce authentic & accessible science & development content
- Short & slick preferred
- Based on science -- but not too immersed in it!
- Let them free: no copyright restrictions at all!
- Peddle them on multiple platforms & outlets
Example 1: Research leader distils findings & links them to policy
Colin’s StraightTalk

- Dr Colin Chartres, former DG, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), CGIAR network
- Web videos on policy implications of IWMI’s research in Asia & Africa
- Colin’s StraightTalks: all 5-7 mins each
- www.youtube.com/user/iwmimimedia
Colin’s StraightTalk: Our learning from 2009-11

- Scripted yet presented in an informal style
- Field-based talks visually more appealing
- Accepting uncertainty is fine: limits of knowledge
- Some topics gain more traction than others online: how to predict?
- Practice makes it better!
Example 2: Evidence-based advocacy in ICT policy & regulation

- **LIRNEasia**: regional think tank studying ICT policy & regulation in emerging Asian economies

- Looking at (among others):
  - Telephone use at bottom of (income) pyramid [BOP]
  - Broadband quality of service: telcos promises vs. users’ reality

Dr Rohan Samarajiva, Chair & Founder CEO
Fraudband or Broadband?

- Summing up essence of 2 yr research project to monitor & evaluate quality of service of broadband services in selected Asian economies
- Research leader looks at communications experience
Fraudband or Broadband? (2011)
Asia’s Telephone Revolution @Bottom of the Pyramid

Multi-country (South & Southeast Asia), Multi-year
Large sample surveys: Quantitative + qualitative
By LIRNEasia & partners

http://lirneasia.net
Teleuse@BOP: Poonam Devi
Samasthipur, Bihar, India (2011)
LIRNEasia’s efforts to change policy

Examples of successful engagements with policymakers & regulators (not all were successful)

India
Changing universal service policy

Sri Lanka
Rolling back regressive tax on mobile charges

Indonesia
Lowering leased-line prices

Bangladesh
Contributing to rules on broadband quality of service
Modifying terms of mobile license renewal

Courtesy: Dr Rohan Samarajiva, LIRNEasia
From presentation at CPRSouth in Mauritius, Sep 2012
What can be learned?

• Matching supply and demand for policy research
  – Do the reward systems of the academy mesh with what policymakers & regulators want?
• Policy-relevant research may not be the most valued in academic settings
• Having research ready for when policy windows open
  – Is the academic production cycle conducive to this?
• How can new media be used in both push and pull modes to increase access to research?
• Is the research ➔ policy nexus fundamentally different in developed & developing countries?

Courtesy: Dr Rohan Samarajiva, LIRNEasia
From presentation at CPRSouth in Mauritius, Sep 2012
TVE Asia Pacific’s own learning: Communicating 4 Policy Change

- One size doesn’t fit all: need to customise!
- Influencing public/policy minds: slow, incremental process
- Keep turning up, speaking out
- Under-rated value of PASSION!
- Debate everyone with courtesy
- Acknowledge uncertainties & gaps in knowledge
Communicating 4 Policy Change: Learnings – contd.

- Mass media proliferation + new media rise → audiences fragmented & distracted
- Niche outreach possible, but harder to catch lots of eyeballs
- Like kite-flying: after investing all creativity & effort, it all depends on winds!
- Web is like a 24/7 kite festival...
My favourite Questions to researchers...

- What drives you?
- What keeps you awake at night?
- What happens next?
Thanks!

Blog: nalakagunawardene.com
Sunday newspaper column: http://collidecolumn.wordpress.com
Twitter: NalakaG
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TVE Asia Pacific: www.tveap.org

Opinions all personal
Images used in good faith