ENHANCING SCIENCE-TO-POLICY UPTAKE IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN REGION

QUICK GUIDE

WIOMSA
Coasts Ocean and People
MEERWISSEN
African-German Partners for Ocean Knowledge
On behalf of
Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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1. Introduction

In the realm of policy making, it has been said that *"the good news is that evidence can matter. The bad news is that it often does not"*. Increasingly, researchers accept that promoting policy uptake of their research cannot simply be left to others. Whether driven by pressure from funders, research administrators or peers, or arising from a personal conviction that policy-making and policy evaluation should be evidence-based, researchers are seeking ways to promote policy uptake of their findings.

This document seeks to provide a brief guide for enhanced policy impact to researchers working in the area of ocean governance. The document is based on the report ENHANCING SCIENCE-TO-POLICY UPTAKE IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN REGION: *BACKGROUND DOCUMENT AND GUIDELINES ON EFFECTIVE SCIENCE-TO-POLICY INTERACTION*. Readers are encouraged to engage with the aforementioned report, as many of the themes addressed in this guidance document are elaborated on in the report,

while the report also includes a focus on theoretical frameworks for science-to-policy communication, illustrative case studies and links to relevant resources.

This guidance document and the linked report have been commissioned by the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA) as part of the MeerWissen: *African-German Partners for Ocean Knowledge programme* – a programme funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented with support from GIZ. The researchers involved in MeerWissen projects are the initial intended audience, but it is hoped that the report will be of use to other researchers and policy stakeholders in the Western Indian Ocean region and potentially in other regions too. The MeerWissen Kick-off and Co-design Workshop, hosted from 5-7 March 2019 in Langebaan, South Africa, provided an opportunity for initial discussions on enhancing science-to-policy uptake. MeerWissen project partners and other stakeholders were again engaged at WIOMSA's 11th Scientific Symposium in Mauritius at a special session on *"Building*

Capacities for Knowledge-based Policy Making in the WIO Region", hosted on 5th July 2019. An online survey was conducted as part of this study that assessed common challenges, good practice examples and success factors related to science-to-policy uptake. The guidance also draws on the broader literature on the science-policy interface.

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2. The Science to Policy Interface & the Policy Cycle

Policymakers operate in a complex environment, facing a range of demands, often in a time-constrained setting. Decision-making is shaped by personal or institutional values, the availability of resources, personal experience and expertise, pragmatic political considerations, traditions, habits and a host of other influences. In this environment, evidence is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for decision-making.

Researchers, in turn, may for any number of reasons not consider promoting policy uptake of their research as a personal responsibility or a priority. Some scientists have argued that scientific credibility may be undermined when they are seen to be advocating personal positions on policy

issues. Even where researchers have bought into the need for policy engagement, they often lack training and support, while competing demands related to publication, lecturing and fundraising may mean that promoting policy uptake drops ever lower down their priority list. It is clear, then, that effective communication across the policy-science interface faces a range of challenges. Despite these challenges, there is a growing imperative for researchers to consider ways in which policy uptake of their findings can be promoted.

Researchers can play an active role in engaging in science-to-policy uptake, with a focus on increasing the salience, credibility and legitimacy of the information produced. Credibility speaks to the authority of the evidence and arguments; salience deals with the relevance of the information to the context-specific needs of decision-makers; and legitimacy reflects the perception that the production of information has been unbiased, fair in its treatment of opposing views and respectful of stakeholders' divergent beliefs and/or democratic channels and processes. Consider three important functions of the science-policy interface:

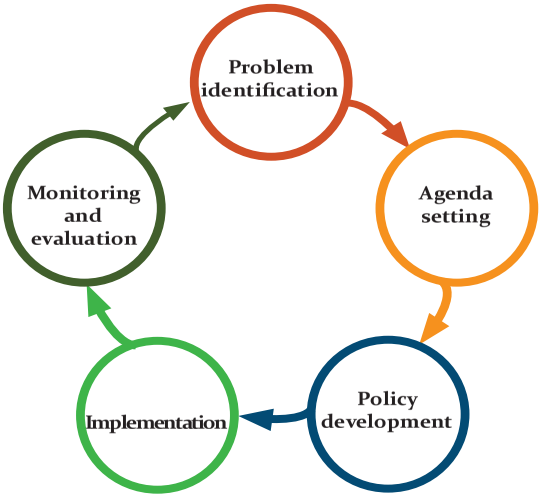
- **Communication** refers to the importance of two-way, active, iterative and inclusive communication between experts and decision-makers, in order to strengthen research-informed policy dialogues;

- **Translation** involves the way that messages, having been communicated via various channels and actors, are framed in the appropriate way to guarantee full comprehension by and benefit to relevant stakeholders;

- Finally, **mediation** is required where the conflicts and trade-offs between different actors in the policy process cannot be resolved by simply improving understanding.

An understanding of the policy cycle can help to frame efforts to promote science-to-policy interaction. An important caveat is that the policy cycle model significantly oversimplifies the policy making process, which in reality is a far more complex, nonlinear process than the model suggests. Yet, as long as its limitations are borne in mind, the policy cycle remains a useful model to guide thinking about how research findings may be fed into the policy process. Common stages represented in the policy cycle include problem identification, agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption,

implementation, monitoring and adjustment. The true nature of policy-making is that each stage in the process has the potential to inform previous and following steps in the cycle, e.g., weighing your options to select the best policy option can often help to deepen and widen your problem definition. Therefore, the process should be seen as inherently iterative, i.e., you will recycle through elements of each of the steps until you arrive at an appropriate outcome. It is also important to note the inherently collaborative and interactive nature of all stages of this process. Most effective policy research and analysis is carried out in teams and involves different levels of interaction with various stakeholders throughout the process. For example, such interactions can range from discussions with policy researchers in the problem definition stage, to researching the cost-benefit of policy options with the target groups, to meeting with representatives of government to promote your policy recommendations.



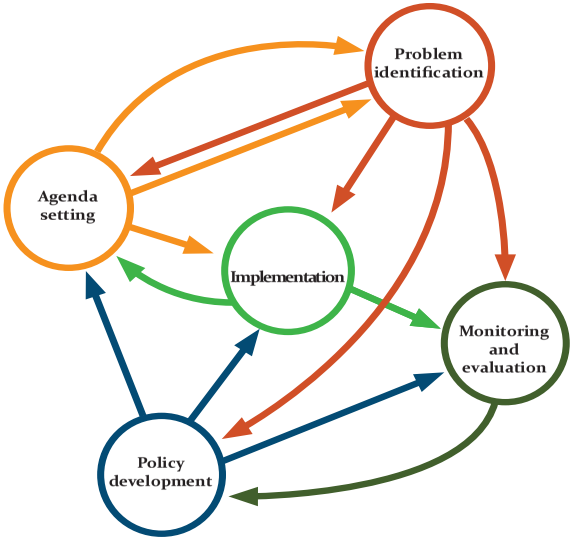


Figure 1: The Policy Cycle: Theory vs. Reality

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3. Guiding Themes and Key Questions

This section provides a simple, ten-point structure to guide thinking on science-to-policy uptake. The original framework was developed by a group of researchers at the Overseas Development Institute. It is supplemented by insights drawn from other science-to-policy resources as well as discussions emerging from workshops and discussions facilitated through the MeerWissen project.

Know what you want to influence

Key messages:

- Being clear about the policy issue, theme or process you want to change is the first step to effective policy influencing.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ Have you clearly conceptualised the change/impact you are seeking to achieve? What are the relevant indicators?
- ☑ Are you looking to influence legislation, or a change in government policy? You might want to encourage greater investment in a certain programme or approach, or a change in practice. You might want to influence perceptions or attitudes, or the language people use around an issue.
- ☑ Have you considered the different stages in the legislative and policy making process and how this relates to your objectives (e.g. a policy green paper as opposed to a white paper)?
- ☑ Have you evaluated your communication strategy to ensure that it is suited for the intended impact?

Know who you want to influence

Key messages:

- You need to be clear about who you want to influence. Be specific and understand the institutional structure and decision-making processes of your target audience.
- Consider who can indirectly influence your target audience – an adviser, a respected commentator, a media outlet, a well-known academic? Know the routes to the people and organisations you need to influence and build relationships with them. And remember that you might not always be the best messenger.
- Consider developing an audience mapping tool.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ Who has the power to enact a change in a policy process or change the debate on an issue? Is it a senior government official, a parliamentarian, a government minister or a head of state, a parliamentary committee, or an advisory panel?

- ☑ What are appropriate mechanisms to communicate with the targeted individuals? Is a direct audience possible, or will messaging require engaging with intermediaries (e.g. an advisor or a researcher supporting the work of a political committee)?

- ☑ What is the political, institutional and administrative context in which these individuals operate? What incentives/disincentives may shape their response to your input? Are there possible synergies between their priorities and your own objectives?

Know when to influence

- Your research needs to reach your target audience at a moment when they can take action. For example, this could be in the leadup to an election, during a budget cycle, as part of a government consultation, ahead of an international decision-making summit, or at a key meeting. Be aware that relationship building well in advance of these cycles can also be important to ensure that one's message is well received during an important policy window.

- Unexpected opportunities will also emerge. Having the flexibility to react and adapt your plans as you go is important. If you can quickly spot policy opportunities as they arise, you may be able to have greater impact.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ What are the key policy windows (opportunities for influence) linked to the targeted policy processes?
- ☑ Are the research results likely to be finalised by the relevant policy window?
- ☑ Are there opportunities to engage ahead of these key windows to strengthen relationships ahead of a key intervention?
- ☑ Are there important events that might delay decisions on the targeted policy process (elections, parliamentary recess, etc.)?

Build relationships and networks

Key messages:

- Find and work with other people and organisations who share your policy influencing objective – your allies and collaborators. Working together, building trust and developing a joint plan will increase your impact.
- This includes building relationships and trust within the policy community itself.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ Who are the key policy stakeholders?
- ☑ Who are the partners that can amplify our message, facilitate access to key policy makers?
- ☑ Are you systematic in investing in these relationships and networks?

Policy development is not a linear process

Key messages:

- Policy-making is complex, dynamic and involves a lot of different people and moving parts. Nonetheless, policy formulation does have its own formal and informal rhythms. If you understand these, you'll know where your evidence will be most useful and have greatest impact.
- Be flexible and constantly monitor policy processes so that you are up to date on any delays, reversals or other shifts.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ Are there existing relationships with key policy stakeholders that could provide periodic updates on any changes/delays in timeframes related to targeted policy processes?
- ☑ Have risks related to uncertainty around timelines of policy processes been communicated to relevant stakeholders and incorporated into monitoring and evaluation frameworks (e.g. research partners, managers, research partners, funders, etc)?
- ☑ Where possible, have contingency plans been put in place to address potential disruptions to the policy process?

Policy-making is inherently political

Key messages:

- Policy-making is often a very political process. Alongside research, policy-makers' own values, experience and expertise play an important role in influencing how they make decisions.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ What broader political trends/processes may shape the targeted policy process?
- ☑ What worldviews and incentive structures shape the thinking of the targeted policy stakeholders?
- ☑ Are there possible synergies between the political priorities of targeted policy stakeholders and your own objectives?

Plan your engagement

Key messages:

- You need to think carefully about how to communicate your research. Policymakers are busy so won't always have time to read a long report. A short, sharp executive summary or policy brief can be a powerful tool.
- Focus on clear messages and avoid overly technical language.
- Infographics can also help to make your data accessible. Consider other outreach activities too, such as press releases, public events, bilateral meetings, presentations or side events at summits and conferences.
- Sometimes longer formats can engage the imagination and then be effectively paired with a shorter, more focused medium. For example, a short film with strong visuals and narrative can be paired with a policy briefing that delivers concise policy recommendations.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ Have we carefully considered various communication tools and modalities in light of our policy uptake objectives?
- ☑ Are multiple communication tools/modalities appropriate, and if so, how can the relative strengths of each of these be maximized?
- ☑ Is the language and framing used in our communication products appropriate for our intended policy audience?

Focus on ideas and be propositional

Key messages:

- Policymakers don't need to be told the problem; they need constructive ideas, so be propositional. Based on your research, tell them what should happen, who could take action, when and how.
- Frame your recommendations within the realms of what is possible, both technically and politically. Be ambitious, but realistic.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ Are you clear about the change you want to achieve?
- ☑ Do your recommendations take into consideration the technical and political realities that constrain policy stakeholders? Are you being ambitious, yet realistic?
- ☑ Can you anticipate and potentially reframe some of the envisioned political/technical constraints, thereby expanding opportunities for change?

It takes time, stick at it

Key messages:

- Influencing policy takes time and commitment. Make a plan, break it down, and be realistic about what you can do. Often it can be a slow process with no obvious impact in the short term. But stick with it, recognise that policy influencing is usually a marathon not a sprint, and be sure to set milestones and capture the small successes as you go.
- Continue to engage with your target audience and stay updated on the decision-making process.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ Have systems been put in place to actively monitor targeted policy processes for any delays?
- ☑ Have risks related to uncertainty around timelines of policy processes been communicated to relevant stakeholders and incorporated into monitoring and evaluation frameworks (e.g. research partners, managers, research partners, funders, etc)?
- ☑ Is the current research project aligned with broader institutional programmes and priorities, so that it may support policy engagement well after the lifetime of the current research project?

Monitor, learn and adjust along the way

Key messages:

- External factors will affect your plans along the way so it's important to remain flexible and adapt to new contexts and opportunities. You should also seek feedback from allies, partners, and even your target audience. Ask them what they need and when, as well as what format they prefer and adjust your plans accordingly. If you find an approach is not working, you should stop, assess and try something new.
- Continuously review, and capture your learning as you go so you can apply it to future influencing plans. And, be willing to share your learning with key partners.

Guiding questions:

- ☑ What monitoring systems have been put in place to ensure feedback that could inform appropriate adjustments to the communication strategy or larger project?
- ☑ Have learnings from past interventions been integrated into current project design and communication strategies?

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4. Conclusion

The guiding questions outlined in this document are intended to stimulate thinking and inform planning, both in the design and implementation phases of research and associated communication strategies. The questions are not exhaustive, but they do provide a framework for reflection and discussion. Research teams are encouraged to engage in such reflection, discussion and planning collectively, where appropriate also drawing on external expertise from associates, technical experts, research administrators and other relevant stakeholders. The relevance of this process in the early stages of research design (including development of a monitoring and evaluation framework and risk analysis) is evident, yet continuous monitoring, reflection, learning and adjustment throughout the lifetime of the research process. The pathway to policy influence is rarely linear and simple, yet appropriate planning can certainly increase the odds that policy making decisions are evidence-based.

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