1

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

Providing policy assistance to member countries in the areas of agriculture and rural development is an important part of the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Over the years, a large body of literature has been developed, both within FAO and elsewhere, on analytical approaches, tools and good practices that can be used for formulating policies in agriculture, rural development and food security. For example, the three Rome-based agencies – FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – and their membership have agreed on the need to use a twin-track approach to address food insecurity through policies, programmes and projects: simultaneously promoting broad-based, sustainable agricultural growth and rural development, and targeted programmes to ensure that hungry people, who have neither the capacity to produce their own food nor the means to buy it, can have access to adequate food supplies.

The available literature on best practices for providing policy assistance and effectively influencing national policy processes is insufficient to provide appropriate guidance to those who help countries shape their policies to ensure that their advice has a good chance of being adopted by governments. Experts involved in policy assistance activities often rely only on their experience for ways to influence policy processes. Many believe that their work is essentially technical or analytical in nature. They focus on this aspect of their work and do not give sufficient attention to the process that will enable this technical work to affect national policy. As a result, a considerable number of policy assistance recommendations do not really translate into policy change or modified development programmes, and the advice ends up locked in policy reports or briefs read only by a small number of people.

To address these issues, FAO has conducted a major learning exercise to create a knowledge base that can be used to enhance the effectiveness of its policy assistance activities. The objective is to identify factors that lead to success and failure in providing policy assistance to member countries. The exercise included reviewing experiences and consulting with other agencies involved in policy assistance to draw applicable lessons and pinpoint best practices that can improve the effectiveness of policy assistance. The focus was on providing assistance at the country level and on factors other than the technical quality of the assistance provided. This is not to minimize the importance of the technical content of the policy advice, which is an essential ingredient of effective policy assistance. Global- or regional-level assistance is only discussed briefly as it contributes to national-level processes.

This study was conducted in the framework of the FAO Policy Analysis Cluster – an interdepartmental group of FAO units dealing with policy – and the FAO-Netherlands Partnership Programme (FNPP), which provides advice and support to 16 FAO member countries in the areas of food security, forests and agrobiodiversity policies. This innovative programme follows the recommendations of the evaluation of FAO's Policy Assistance to Member Countries conducted in 2001. It allows for an exchange of lessons learned from other FAO programmes and partners and identifies some of the key factors of success of policy assistance activities.

During the consultations with other agencies in this study, it became apparent that this issue was of increasing interest to people involved in providing policy assistance. Several other agencies had started, or had the intention of starting, similar exercises and they welcomed FAO's initiative. It is hoped that the results of this study will be of use beyond FAO and that it will be a starting point for further collaboration in this field.

This book attempts to synthesize all the information gathered in the study. It tries to identify factors for success and failure in providing policy assistance, outlines some good and bad practices – "dos and don'ts" – and constitutes the basis for eventual policy assistance guidelines. The analysis is qualitative

rather than quantitative, although it reflects some frequency in what was told by interviewees or what was observed in the case studies. The text also has a bias towards the experience of its authors, because they are not neutral observers but are fully engaged in policy assistance activities. The authors hope that this is a first step for those who provide policy assistance to continue to reflect and learn lessons to collectively improve the quality of the service provided to those who request it.

The first part of the book provides some key definitions. It then briefly presents the study methodology and reviews various modalities of policy assistance. It then gives an overview of its findings and draws lessons in four key areas: (i) global, regional and national context for policy assistance; (ii) policy assistance process; (iii) expertise; and (iv) management and coordination of policy assistance activities. The first part also analyses implications for experts and organizations providing policy assistance and sketches possible ways forward to build on the work undertaken in the study. The second part presents the case studies that helped consolidate the synthesis. The third part deals with the analytical framework that was used to carry out all the case studies.

2

KEY DEFINITIONS

Some of the key concepts used in this paper are defined in this section.[1]

Policy

A **policy** is a plan of action to guide decisions and actions based on a set of preferences and choices. The term may apply to the work of government, private sector groups and individuals.

A policy is comprised of two main elements:
• A policy objective.
• One or more policy instruments used to serve the objective and produce specific, related outcomes.

Public policy instruments can be one of two main types:
• Actions taken by the state that affect the rules governing the economy as a whole (macro-economic policy) or governing a particular economic sector (sector policies). These rules affect the behaviour and decisions of the agents operating in the economy and can contribute to establishing conditions favourable to development (e.g. investment, production, provision of services). They usually translate into policy documents, laws or regulations.
• Basic principles that direct action by the government on the economy. This includes specifying the role of government, public organizations, parastatal organizations, private organizations and firms and the principles that guide their operation (i.e. internal regulations).

Implementing policy may require new legal texts and regulations and specific programmes or investments.

Policy process

Policies are formulated through a **policy process** that engages stakeholders in producing new or revised policies within a particular institutional context. An important element of the process is the way in which policy decisions are taken. Policy processes are mainly driven by in-country forces while policy assistance processes are driven mainly by external forces.

Policy assistance

Policy assistance is a process through which an agency seeks to influence policy with government policy-makers and other stakeholders. It may be conducted in "response to a government's request for advice in shaping policy decisions" (Sandford, 1985), buttressing existing policy decisions or attenuating the adverse impacts of positions that have been intuitively adopted. Policy assistance can also be conducted based on an agency's own initiative, when its analysis of the in-county situation suggests the need for policy change.

Policy assistance activities consist mainly of providing expertise to help shape and facilitate the process of inducing a desired policy change at one stage of the policy cycle (see Box 1). Policy assistance is usually provided through projects that include both tangibles and intangibles: tangibles are the visible part of the recommendations and intangibles are the results of human interactions.

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[1] Although the definitions included are specific to policy, it is also important to understand the difference between findings and lessons. **Findings** are statements of fact or evidence that come from assessing key aspects of policy assistance activities or views of individual experts or organizations. **Lessons** are generalizations based on findings.

Given the interactive nature of the assistance, some prefer calling policy assistance "policy partnership".
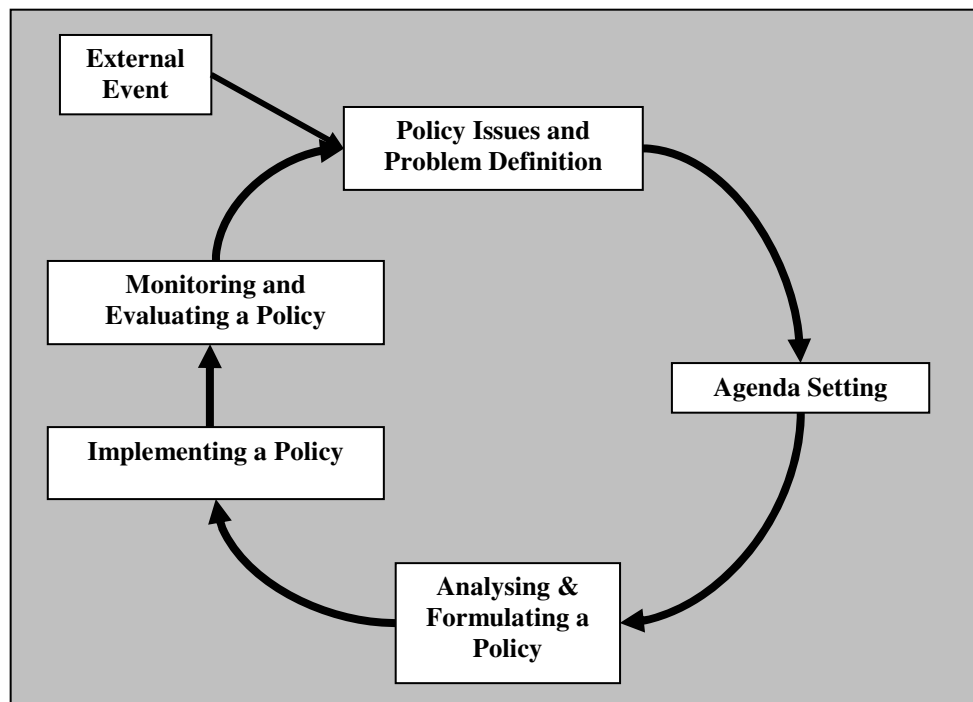
Policy assistance includes:
• Dialogue leading to recommendations that shape policy interventions, make suggestions on policy changes, improve modalities for implementing existing policies and improve ways to monitor and evaluate past or current policies. These recommendations may address organizational and institutional aspects of the policy-making process, and be based on diagnosis and analysis that identify opportunities, constraints and inconsistencies.
• Support to the policy process.
• Technical support for implementing, monitoring and evaluating recommended policy changes.
• Capacity-building to reinforce national capacities to analyse, formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate policies.

The policy assistance process is the way in which different types of policy assistance activities and their outputs are combined, sequenced, managed and coordinated to influence the creation of policies and the policy process.

Policy cycle

The **policy cycle** is the concept, developed from analysing policy, that under normal circumstances, distinctions can be made between different phases in the policy-making process (see Box 1).

Box 1: Schematic Policy Process

Effectiveness of policy assistance

Policy assistance is **effective** if the advice provided is adopted or if policy decisions are implemented. This paper focuses on the process by which advice affects the policy outcome, not on the content of the advice or its usefulness, which is assumed.

Effectiveness can be assessed through indicators. The following four indicators are ranked in order of increasing effectiveness:

1. The assistance helped to better define the policy issue and its dimensions (this includes using methods and tools for policy analysis).
2. Recommendations arising from the assistance have been endorsed by the government and reflected in policy statements.
3. An action plan was developed to implement recommendations and policy instruments were clearly defined.
4. Policy recommendations and related instruments have been implemented (including investments and institutional change).

Because change generally is neither immediate nor directly attributable to a single cause, it is not always easy to measure the extent to which advice is adopted or ignored. In some cases, advice is adopted after some modification, while in others only part of the package of recommendations is adopted. Also, in many cases it is difficult to assess whether a policy change is attributable to the advice provided or whether the change would have occurred anyway. Many actors participate in the policy-making process, and they rely on various sources of information when making or influencing policy decisions (Feldman, 1989; Weiss, 1977). It is "difficult then to attribute effectiveness to any one source, as the many actors, themselves with differential influence on the decision, rely on a multitude of sources." For example, capacity-building is an important component of policy assistance and it is difficult to measure to what extent, and through which process, capacity-building influences policy processes and their outcome.

Effectiveness cannot be totally separated from cost-effectiveness. In some cases where policy assistance was effective, the same result could have been achieved more efficiently with a lower cost.

Some aspects of policy assistance effectiveness have more to do with the content of the advice or knowledge; policy advice may have been used but was not useful. The focus of this paper, however, is on the effectiveness of policy assistance in affecting the policy process and policy change.

Findings

Findings are statements of facts or evidence in assessing key aspects or relations pertaining to specific policy assistance activities or views of individual experts or organizations**.**

Lessons

Lessons are generalizations based on findings pertaining to specific policy assistance activities or views of individual experts or organizations that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths or weaknesses in preparation, design, and implementation that affect performance, outcome and impact." (Adapted from DAC/OECD, 2002).

3

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

This study began with an internal review of literature about policy processes and how to influence them. Then data were collected through a survey of agencies that provide policy assistance and through an in-depth analysis of selected FAO project case studies.

3.1   Survey of Agencies

Three people, including the two authors of this report, surveyed 25 agencies that work in agriculture, food security, rural development and other areas from which relevant lessons could be learned.

The agencies included:

- **Eleven international organizations:** European Commission (EC), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Bank, World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), World Trade Organization (WTO).
- **Nine national governmental or government-related organizations**: Canadian Agency for International Development (CIDA/ACDI), Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD), Department for International Development (DFID), Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), German Reconstruction and Development Bank (KfW), Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (MAE) of France, Ministère de l'Agriculture et de la Pêche (MAP)of France, Overseas Development Institute (ODI).
- **Five non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or consulting companies:** Groupe de Recherche et d'Échanges Technologiques (GRET - France), FarmAfrica (UK), InterAction (US), Oxfam (UK), Oxford Policy Management (OPM).

The questions asked of the agencies included:
- What kind of policy assistance does the agency provide? Typology of modalities?
- How does the agency assess the degree of effectiveness of its policy assistance activities?
- Which are the factors that determine success and failure in providing effective policy assistance, including:
  o   those due to the environment in which the assistance is provided (i.e. exogenous factors);
  o   those due to the modalities of providing assistance (i.e. endogenous factors)?
- What steps has the agency taken, if any, to improve the efficiency of its policy assistance?
- Does the agency have guidelines for providing policy assistance?
- What are future trends in providing policy assistance in the agency's area of work?

3.2   Case Studies

In selecting FAO policy assistance projects for in-depth analysis, the objective was not to select representative projects, but to choose projects that illustrate the diversity of FAO's policy assistance activities.

The selection of FAO projects was based on several criteria:
- Projects that were terminated between 2000 and 2005 (approximately 250 projects were selected from a total of more than 5 000 projects found on FAO's Field Projects Management Information System – FPMIS).

- The scope of the project (e.g. macro, broad/sectoral, sub-sectoral, institutional or specific policies).
- Policy topics (e.g. agriculture policy, rural development, trade, environment, fisheries, forests, food security, processing, poverty reduction).
- Presence or absence of a capacity-building component.
- Regional distribution (e.g. Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and Near East).
- Duration (e.g. less than 3 months, from 3 to 18 months, more than 18 months).

Projects were clustered according to these criteria and 12 projects were selected that were typical of the largest clusters observed. Attention in the selection was also given to the level of the projects' effectiveness, in order to include projects with different degrees of effectiveness.

The characteristics of the selected projects are summarized in Table 1.

To ensure a common approach to conducting the 12 case studies, an analytical framework (see Annex XIII) was developed which was then discussed and refined by the consultants who were to conduct the studies at a two-and-a-half day workshop in Rome from 9 to 11 August 2006. The group developed a common method of analysis and a format for the report and tables to facilitate the analysis and synthesis of these studies.

The analytical framework proposed a step-by-step approach to help consultants conduct the case studies and identify and analyse findings and preliminary lessons. General guidelines for conducting the interviews were also proposed. It was recommended that all consultants follow the same process, however, the analytical framework also offered some flexibility to adapt to local conditions.

The preparation of the case studies was structured in four major phases:

PHASE 1: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

This phase included:

- identifying sources of information;
- identifying all recommendations and other outputs of the policy assistance project (e.g. strengthened capacity);
- assessing the recommendations using seven formulation criteria:
  - availability of information and knowledgeable people;
  - clarity of the what (i.e. is the recommendation self-explanatory?);
  - clarity of the why (i.e. the extent to which the recommendation is relevant to the problem or issue it addressed);
  - clarity of the how (i.e. description of the process for implementing the recommendation);
  - clarity of the who (i.e. information about the authorities responsible for implementing the recommendation);
  - independence (i.e. are the recommendations independent or linked among each other?);
  - degree of originality of the recommendation.

PHASE 2: IDENTIFICATION OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ANALYSE

Some projects generated a large number of recommendations and so a selection process was needed to determine which recommendations to analyse in greater detail. The recommendations to be analysed were selected using the following criteria:

- importance of the recommendation in the eyes of the government and/or the FAO experts involved in the project;
- status of adoption (i.e. more or less adopted);
- topic covered;
- scope of the project (e.g. macro, broad sector, subsector, specific).

Policy recommendations were then labelled as being a:

- policy principle;
- policy objective (i.e. the policy recommendation is guided by achieving a certain purpose which is believed to be attainable); or
- policy instrument (i.e. the policy recommendation pertains to using specific interventions).

PHASE 3: ANALYSIS OF SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

This phase included:
- describing the exogenous factors that affected the process and the policy recommendation (e.g. national policy context, players and issues and the level of influence of each, policy process and dialogue);
- describing the endogenous factors (i.e. factors determining FAO's response to exogenous factors, such as context in the project and, in FAO, the process of the project and expertise);
- describing, assessing and explaining the adoption status of each policy recommendation.

PHASE 4: COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND PRELIMINARY LESSONS

In this phase of the study, the team looked for patterns in the frequency, strength, or significance of reasons for adopting or not adopting recommendations that could serve as general preliminary lessons.

After completing the data collection for this study, the authors analysed the 12 case studies and interview notes from the survey of 25 agencies. To do this, the study team built a matrix to associate key ideas with the source of information. Key ideas were grouped by main topic (e.g. policy assistance modalities, organizational set-up for policy assistance, assessment of policy assistance activities, exogenous factors of success and failure, endogenous factors of success and failure, steps taken by interviewees to improve their policy assistance activities, and future trends in policy assistance). The authors then clustered the findings and frequency of occurrence to determine the plan of synthesis and to start identifying lessons. After the clustering, a draft of the report was prepared and presented to a broad range of experts in an international workshop (held on 19-20 April 2007) to consolidate findings and lessons learned, determine implications for various actors and outline a way forward. The results were widely accepted among the participants and the lessons identified were generally endorsed. Based on the inputs received during the workshop, the report was finalized.

Table 1: Overview of the case studies

Country	Case Study	Criteria 1: Region	Criteria 2: Duration (months)	Criteria 3: Project Scope	Criteria 4: Policy Topic	Effectiveness	Highlights
Angola	Support to a Decentralized Land Management Programme	AF (Africa)	7	Specific issue: Land tenure	Agriculture Policy	High	Promoted a participatory and decentralized process for generating and regulating New Land Law after 2 decades of civil war.
Argentina	Strengthening the National *Codex* Committee and Application of the *Codex* Norm	LA (Latin America)	32	Specific issue: *Codex Alimentarius*	Agriculture Trade	Low	Official adoption of *Codex Alimentarius* regulations would translate into higher quality standards for agricultural products and ease integration into other international organizations such as WTO and the South American Common Market (MERCOSUR).
Bangladesh	Developing a Plan of Action for Implementation of the National Agriculture Policy	AS (Asia)	32	Broad Sectoral	Agriculture Policy	Low	First attempt by FAO to help consolidate the policy documents produced over the past decades in agriculture and poverty reduction in a comprehensive and self-contained agricultural policy with emphasis on the crop subsector.
Burundi	Definition of a Policy for Rural Credit	AF	8	Specific issue: Rural Finance	Agriculture Policy	Medium	Within a post-conflict context and after a general collapse of most of the formal and informal credit systems, FAO took over the task of supporting the formulation of a transitory rural credit policy which was eventually included in a broader microfinance strategy.
Cambodia	Assessment and Localization of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on Poverty Reduction and Food Security	AS	9	Institutional	PRSP / Food Security	Low	Within a multidonor and multidisciplinary environment, FAO had to help identify and shape "implementable" Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) that particularly address poverty reduction and food security objectives.
Cambodia	Preparation of Programmes to Strengthen Professional Organizations and Rural Development Institutions	AS	16	Broad Sectoral	Food Security/ Rural Development	High	After many decades of political and economic instability, FAO was asked to contribute to establishing and building capacity of professional agricultural organizations and village development committees through a decentralization mechanism.
Libya	National Seed Programme, Preparatory Assistance	NE (Near East)	17	Specific issue: National Seed Programme	Agriculture Policy	High	After a long embargo imposed by the United Nations (UN) between 1992 and 2004 that affected partnership and interactions in several ways, FAO was one of the first organizations that provided assistance to the country for the creation of favourable conditions to fund a National Seed Programme.

Country	Case Study	Criteria 1: Region	Criteria 2: Duration (months)	Criteria 3: Project Scope	Criteria 4: Policy Topic	Effectiveness	Highlights
Morocco	Support to the Conseil Général du Développement Agricole	NE	3	Institutional	Agriculture Policy	High	FAO was asked to strengthen the Conseil Général du Développement Agricole (Morocco) (CGDA), the think tank of the Ministry of Agriculture, gathering experts in charge of developing new policy guidelines for agriculture in accordance with the changing political and economic context of the country.
Poland	Rapeseed Sector Review Project 1	EU (Europe)	24	Subsectoral: Rapeseed	Processing	Low	Within the context of European Union (EU) accession negotiations and a significant deterioration of the economic situation of crushing plants, FAO responded to a request of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) backed by the Crusher Association (not formally translated into a government's request) to support a Rapeseed Sector Review.
	Project 2			Subsectoral: Rapeseed		Low	
Saint Lucia	Assistance in Fisheries Legislation	LA	2	Subsectoral: Fisheries	Fishery	High	To put an end to divergences in interpretation, enforcement and management of current fisheries legislation (1979), FAO helped integrate and update the law. This process would allow government institutions, international organizations and NGOs to agree on norms and procedures in the updated legal document.
Serbia	Institutional Development and Capacity-Building for the National Forest Programme of Serbia	EU	23	Subsectoral: Forestry	Forestry	High	This was the first internationally-sponsored development project in the country after the removal of UN sanctions. It consisted of developing an innovative and modern programme of institutional capacity development for the forestry sector in line with EU standards.
Sierra Leone	Agricultural Sector Review and Formulation of Agricultural Development Strategy	AF	10	Broad Sectoral	Agriculture Policy	High	FAO tasks were to support a strategy for agriculture by providing evidence-based information on the status of agriculture and the fisheries sectors, identifying investment options for the transformation of the entire sector and enabling a sufficient discussion of food security and agriculture in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.
South Africa	Formulation of an Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Programme	AF	10	Broad Sectoral	Food Security	Low	Integration of Food Security and Nutrition Programme required harmonization and coordination of three levels of government and several institutions. The project could not obtain the required commitment and contribution of national counterparts.

4

MODALITIES OF POLICY ASSISTANCE

Policy assistance may be provided at the global, regional or national level and with a focus on policy content, policy process, or both. This chapter reviews policy assistance modalities and trends and implications for future policy assistance activities.

While this chapter discusses different modalities, in most cases policy assistance activities combine several because they can be quite complementary. Also, there are strong linkages between national modalities and global modalities which make it impossible to separate national from global or regional processes. For example, as can be seen from the case studies analysed in this book, several national policy assistance programmes are directly linked to global agreements or conventions. Similarly, capacity-building activities or field-level pilots conducted at the national level are based on research or analytical tools developed globally.

4.1 Policy Assistance at Global and Regional Levels

Policy assistance activities at global or regional levels seek mostly to influence the content of policies. The more formal modalities include institutionalized committees and fora that result in declarations, agreements or conventions. UN agencies and OECD, in particular, act as a secretariat to several such institutionalized committees where members discuss global and national policy orientation and sometimes agree to concerted policy change.

Other examples of formal modalities at the global level include:

- **World summits** – The UN system organizes world summits – such as the World Food Summits of 1996 and 2002 organized by FAO – where countries make commitments and/or develop plans of action.
- **Conventions or treaties** – UN agencies sponsor conventions or treaties, such as the International Plan Protection Convention (IPPC) or the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA).
- **The *Codex Alimentarius*** – Countries agree on norms for food products which influence some national policies and regulations.
- **OECD committees** – OECD has a number of committees (e.g. the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) or the Economic and Development Review Committee (EDRC)) where its member countries exchange information about policies or develop agreement about policy principles and practices.

Regional economic groups also have produced agreements and, in some cases, common policies. Examples of these include:

- The Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA) Common Agriculture Policy, which contributes to shaping national policies.
- In the Caribbean, FAO's support to the Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC), has contributed to influence fisheries policies of the countries in the subregion. This is documented by one of the case studies in this book (Renard, 2006).
- The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) seeks to influence resource allocation and policies. FAO has supported this process by helping African countries develop their Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme.

Regional or subregional networks provide opportunities for capacity-building and for exchanging experiences and knowledge. They are less formal than committees, but nevertheless effective as instruments to influence policy thinking and disseminate knowledge. Based on experience, there are

three factors that are key in elevating networks' relevance: (i) composing the network's national research teams to include high-level public servants, sector specialists and researchers; (ii) developing research plans and priorities through national fora; and (iii) using a global and multidisciplinary approach to the research. (Neilson, 2001) Examples of these networks include:

- The GTZ Sector Network Rural Development (SNRD) in Africa has been a key actor since 1996 in establishing the annual Africa forum on agriculture and rural development where African experts (including high-level policy-makers) discuss their successes and failures and exchange ideas on policies and strategies.
- Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural, the France-supported network with more than 3 500 members in Africa, offers opportunities for exchange on policy-related matters, information and contacts in sub-Saharan Africa, methodological and other support for lesson-learning and network management and experts on rural development-related topics.
- UNDP has developed "knowledge networks" that help create and support global communities with shared interests and professional focus. It also conducts advisory and research activities for clusters of country offices.

These global and regional modalities all provide frameworks for policy change at the national level. They are potentially powerful vehicles for triggering and orienting policies and in some cases are legally binding. The process of translating these global or regional frameworks into change at the national level can unfold over years or decades. In areas where global frameworks and rules evolve (e.g. food quality and safety, biosafety), these processes require continual national-level adjustments.

Since the Millennium Summit in 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have provided an overall orientation for national policies and strategies by setting specific targets to be achieved by countries in eight priority areas. Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) aimed to achieve MDG1 (Poverty and Hunger) provide a pro-poor unifying framework for development planning and programming across sectors and subsectors. For example, in Bangladesh, the PRS identify priority areas where policy adjustments are required in the agriculture sector (e.g. restructuring government departments, seed policy, food access, quality and safety and accelerating production of high-value crops for domestic and export markets), legitimizing policy change in those domains.

4.1.1   The influence of research

Research generates new policy-related knowledge and can influence policy if it is well-disseminated. Vehicles for dissemination include:

- fora for dialogue, like those organized by the IFPRI, which provide venues for debate, information-sharing, and consensus-building among policy-makers, researchers, and leaders in NGOs, the private sector, and the media;
- advocacy and capacity-building;
- networks of researchers (e.g. the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA)) which have a specific collaborative program on policy reform;
- collaborative work among research institutions (e.g. IFPRI has a joint program with the Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI) and other Ethiopian institutions – called the Ethiopian Strategy Support Program - that aims to strengthen policy analysis and dialogue in the country);
- flagship publications (e.g. Human Development Report, World Development Report, State of Food and Agriculture);
- publications in peer-review journals.

Knowledge or research is underutilized in decision-making processes. One explanation is the "two communities" theory which describes the dichotomy between two communities – researchers, scientists and experts in a scholarly realm, and politicians, administrators and appointed officials in a political realm. (FAO, 2006) Stone (Stone *et al.*, 2001) provides additional reasons:

- Incremental policy processes reinforce pro-inertia and anti-innovation forces.
- Creativity is discounted and stifled.
- New ideas or research are often discounted as unrealistic.
- Low emphasis is given to developing clear goals and plans.

- Difficult problems requiring radical changes to resolve are ignored.
- Even crucial research findings may be ignored because of costly investments in existing policies.
- Political crises (e.g. scandals or tragedies) are required before a major re-evaluation of policy occurs.

4.1.2   Other means of influencing policy at the global and regional levels

Thematic reviews and studies provide an opportunity to examine policy issues from a new angle, based on analysing experiences and field situations. In the World Bank, for example, these reviews happen every six years and look at the Bank's role in a particular sector (e.g. agriculture or education) and/or issue (e.g. poverty or the environment). FAO conducts and publishes regional thematic studies to identify priority policy issues and ways to resolve them.

Analytical tools, when disseminated and utilized, can help establish evidence that feeds into the policy debate. OECD is trying to adapt several of its analytical tools to the African context, providing some capacity-building and organizing policy dialogue with governments, stakeholders and donors. FAO is disseminating some of its tools through training, utilization at the national level and through its EASYPol website.[2]

Policy-related guidelines have been published to guide policy practitioners. Examples include UNESCO's guidelines for formulating policy with the active participation of stakeholders in the civil society, its institutions and industry and UNDP's guidelines for HIV/AIDS policy development, strategic planning and response management.

Policy advocacy is a means to mobilize attention to a particular policy issue. (Porter, 1995) Systematically mobilizing attention is best achieved through broad-based advocacy coalitions. UN organizations are active in global advocacy. They play an advocacy role for MDGs (e.g. UNDP), advocate in favour of allocating budgets to a particular sector (e.g. UNESCO for education, FAO for agriculture, UNICEF for social services) or draw attention to special issues (e.g. UNDP on HIV/AIDS strategies and the vulnerability of women and girls, FAO on the right to food). Advocacy can also be field-based. For example, Oxfam usually works first with local and grassroots partners and then uses local experience to influence the government through advocacy campaigns.

Box 2: UNICEF and advocacy

UNICEF has developed a strong capacity in policy advocacy and influences policy decision-making at both the national and multilateral levels. These policy-advocacy and dialogue activities have yielded important policy agendas, such as the Bamako initiative, the child rights agenda, and girls' education. UNICEF has also strongly advocated in favour of the "build back better approach" in post-conflict and post-disaster situations. This approach is seeing in post-disaster and post-conflict interventions as opportunities to introduce important policy change. Examples vary from better infrastructure, to better public systems, as well as introduction or modification of legal frameworks.

For example, UNICEF is leading the "20/20 Initiative," which calls for allocating 20 percent of donor aid and 20 percent of the national budget in developing countries to basic social services. Implementing the 20/20 Initiative at the national level is pursued through an effective policy-advocacy strategy to induce policy change in favour of social service investment to benefit children and the poor. In addition to seeking technical assistance from UNICEF, countries now seek UNICEF support to promote a policy agenda through advocacy.

Media (e.g. radio broadcasts and newspaper articles) are used to inform stakeholders and the general population about advocacy, to increase awareness and to sensitize people to key issues.

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2   EASYPol - On-line Resources for Policy: http://www.fao.org/tc/easypol/output/

Involvement in policy assistance activities at the global and regional levels is essential to influencing policy thinking and practice at the national level. It can also contribute to the reputation and credibility of a particular institution that provides policy assistance.

4.2   Policy Assistance at the National Level

Policy assistance modalities at the national level are reviewed here only briefly because the remainder of the paper focuses on national-level policy assistance. Policy assistance at the national level addresses both policy content and process.

When focused on policy content, policy assistance may be either general (e.g. policy reviews, sector or subsector policy formulation) or technically-specialized (e.g. advice on food quality and biosafety or seed policy) and it often includes efforts to align national legislation with modified policies.

When focused on policy process, policy assistance may be in support of a specific policy process. Examples include the process of accession to an international organization (e.g. WTO) or treaty (e.g. ITPGRFA), changing the way policies are formulated (i.e. helping to establish a participatory policy process that includes farmer organizations, the private sector and other stakeholders) or assisting in institutional reform, including establishing a specialized strategic or policy unit. When there is disagreement among stakeholders, there may also be a need for facilitation and brokering services to help stakeholders resolve their disagreements and come to a consensus.

Modalities of advice on process may include promoting leadership methods. For example, UNDP is providing support to processes for democratic transition, with a particular focus on human rights, gender equality, equal access, representation, participation and transparency. Technical advice includes support for legislative, electoral and judicial reforms, civil service reforms, decentralization and participatory local governance, information access, citizen participation and accountability, good practices in anti-corruption strategies and mechanisms for transparency and national capacity-building to negotiate more equitable and participatory rules.

In some cases, support can be provided for coordinating policy implementation. In the case studies prepared for this lesson-learning exercise in South Africa and Sierra Leone, several organizations requested assistance in coordinating their actions.

4.3   Means of influencing policy at the national level

A variety of modalities are used at the national level to provide assistance on both policy content and policy process:

Policy advocacy raises awareness about issues and the need to change policies to address them. This can be linked to a particular national situation or to an important international or global issue. For example, FAO, although reputed to be an independent and neutral organization, does have an agenda and a mandate, determined by its member countries, to fight against hunger and it therefore conducts related policy-advocacy activities.

Policy reviews (e.g. conducted by OECD, FAO, UNCTAD or WTO) analyse existing policies to identify areas where policy improvement or change is needed. Policy reviews usually have a fairly broad scope. In OECD, for example, the Agricultural Directorate has been conducting studies on policy indicators in eight advanced developing countries. The policy review is based on work done by local consultants who spend time at OECD Headquarters in Paris for training and exposure. Towards the end of the review, round-table discussions are held with concerned governments and OECD countries which then leads to an official OECD report that advises on policy changes. This type of work generally leads to broad sectoral or subsectoral policy advice.

Policy projects are probably the most widely-used approach to providing policy assistance. They vary greatly in focus and duration. They are usually conducted based on an agreement with the government of the beneficiary country, or, in some cases, with one of the national stakeholders (e.g. farmer organizations). They are often part of a larger policy assistance process that may be comprised of a series of policy projects or other policy assistance approaches.

Field-level pilots are used to test policies that can be implemented on a small scale (e.g. approaches in natural resources management, extension, research and others). Experience gained through pilots can be reflected in "experience-based" policy advice. Local and regional pilots help test ideas and generate local knowledge that can more effectively convince policy-makers than can theoretical arguments or experience from elsewhere. Pilots have the advantage of being very concrete and showing immediate results, compared to broader policy work which sometimes may seem too "theoretical" to government counterparts. (See Box 3)

Capacity-building is an effective means to influence policy thinking, strengthen capacity to conduct analysis, drive policy processes and implement policy change. The evaluation conducted by CIRAD of France's policy projects conducted under its Fonds de Solidarité Prioritaire (Priority Solidarity Funds or FSP) emphasizes the fundamental need for and role of capacity-building in policy assistance. Capacity-building includes:

- supporting government organizations in managing and coordinating agriculture policy;
- developing the capacity of other actors to participate in the policy process and become co-producers and co-managers of public policies;
- facilitating dialogue among various stakeholders.

The evaluation of FAO's policy assistance activities also stresses the key role of capacity-building. Capacity-building can be conducted through:

- formal or on-the-job training to develop skills;
- institutional development to strengthen the institutional setup within which policy is made;
- modifying the rules governing policy-making.

OECD, for example, has organized internships at its headquarters in Paris for experts of African countries where it was conducting policy reviews and FAO has provided advice on institutional arrangements for policy formulation in many countries. Training is acknowledged as an effective way of disseminating and increasing the use of tools and guidelines for policy analysis and formulation and can be linked to institutional capacity-building.

Box 3: Field-level pilots

Field-level pilots are being increasingly used by a number of organizations:

- **GRET** conducts field activities with policy implications (e.g. about water in Cambodia where drinking water projects are developed within public-private partnerships).
- **UNESCO** implements pilot projects to test ideas before drawing policy implications.
- **UNICEF** sees an important role to be played in policy assistance by scaling up a good NGO practice, replicating local-level experience within and among countries and mutual learning across countries.
- **Oxfam** believes that showing evidence at the field level increases credibility, which is necessary to be heard and able to influence national policy processes. However, the project has to be big enough to be seen as providing significant experience. An example of a project where Oxfam was very influential is the arid land project in Kenya.
- **GTZ** long-term sector programmes combine field activities (often pilots), subnational activities and central policy-advisory activities.

Sector programmes involve formulating policy goals for a particular sector and disbursing pre-established amounts of funds from a common fund upon achievement of committed policy results. The launching of sector programmes is generally preceded by extensive discussions on policy and operational procedures. In spite of initial enthusiasm with this instrument as a means to cut through red-tape and micromanagement, it is proving challenging. This approach requires a degree of flexibility from each participant donor that runs counter to the often increasing number of in-house control mechanisms.

Non-project financial assistance, such as budget support or Non-project Assistance (NPA), (which is currently being tried by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)) is a new policy assistance instrument whereby the donor agrees with the recipient country on a series of policy targets or objectives to be delivered against an overall amount of untied funds that are delivered in tranches upon verification of compliance.

National research institutes or **think tanks** can play an important role in national policy processes. Supporting them and strengthening their capacity may have considerable implications for national policies in the medium and long term. The example of DIE, the German Economic Institute in Bonn (Box 4), illustrates the role that national research institutes can play in the policy process.

Box 4: How research institutes can influence policy

The DIE, in Germany:

- conducts studies or prepares papers on specific topics;
- helps organize or supports policy processes which involve different stakeholders (e.g. government ministries, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs);
- provides a sound basis or arguments for ideas generated within government and helps mainstream them;
- conducts a training programme for government officials and manages a network of alumni in different ministries and national agencies;
- provides resource persons for policy-related work;
- monitors the policy context to identify windows of opportunity to provide advice on new issues;
- exchanges staff with government organizations (i.e. junior government staff and sometimes senior, retired civil servants spend time working in DIE).

4.4   Future Trends in Policy Assistance

Approaches to providing policy assistance have subtly evolved and this evolution can be expected to continue in the future. Capacity is a key factor in the evolution of policy assistance modalities. Many of the future trends can already be seen by comparing the policy assistance modalities used in more advanced countries that have higher capacity with those used in countries that have more limited capacity.

The evolution of aid modalities also will influence relations between countries and their development partners. Less aid will be channelled through projects and more through budget support and sector programmes that create opportunities for policy dialogue. There is an increasing awareness that, at the national level, "soft" skills such as facilitation, negotiation and understanding of the political and social dimensions of policy processes are important for institutions and experts providing policy assistance.

Countries receiving policy assistance are increasingly demanding high-quality content and process advice. Furthermore, as policy assistance gradually becomes more knowledge-based and more geared towards changing people's mindset and attitudes, there will be greater need for and focus on research, dissemination of research results, outreach and capacity-building. Countries' expectations for methods and processes also will increase. For example, more demand is expected for training on facilitation of participatory processes in policy formulation and implementation, conflict resolution and prevention, and negotiation of policy processes. Moreover, the stronger competition and convergence of policy assistance modalities will require agencies to increasingly specialize in their areas of excellence.

Based on these preliminary considerations, it can be expected that in the future there will be less use of long-term resident policy advisors and less policy assistance based on policy projects and direct policy and technical assistance programmes.

Future trends in policy assistance will likely include:

- knowledge management and capacity-building through activities of regional or global networks;
- intergovernmental fora or advocacy directed at regional or subregional groups and organizations;
- use of national expertise, including national policy centres and institutes or think tanks;
- assistance in negotiating global agreements and conventions and applying them for the benefit of a country;
- involving the private sector (multinational and national) and NGOs in the policy process;
- understanding drivers of change;
- supporting implementation of complex policy programmes;
- continuous policy dialogue with governments for ongoing monitoring of policy context and climate;
- support to sector programmes, including budget support or large technical assistance programmes.

Box 5: Implications for organizations providing policy assistance

Organizations that provide policy assistance in the future will need to:

- be actively involved in new aid modalities to take part in the policy dialogue;
- strengthen their policy capacity by giving opportunities to staff and consultants to develop their skills (e.g. technical, analytical and "soft" skills) and to capitalize on lessons learned from their experiences;
- develop their research activities and publications on focused themes within internationally-recognized networks;
- be actively involved in activities of regional or global networks for knowledge management and capacity-building, to contribute to their reputation and credibility;
- develop their ability to support capacity-building activities in technical and process areas in their policy assistance programmes;
- develop capacity in "soft" skills (e.g. facilitation, negotiation, and understanding the political and social dimensions), as well as "hard" technical skills in their areas of specialization (e.g. agriculture, rural development and food security).

For small organizations, a *sine qua non* is to ensure high-quality, specificity and excellence in the content and process of their policy assistance.

4.5   Conclusions and Lessons on Modalities

i.   There is a great diversity of modalities for providing policy assistance. Global and regional modalities are the main venue where the "dominant" policy thinking and discourse is produced. They increasingly influence both the policy content and process at country level.
ii. With the development of policy-related technical capacity at national level, global and regional modalities gain in importance.
iii. There is an increasing awareness that, at the country level, "soft" skills such as facilitation, negotiation and understanding of the political dimension of policy processes, are important for institutions and experts providing policy assistance.

5

MAIN FINDINGS AND LESSONS

5.1   Global, Regional and National Context

5.1.1   *The international context as driving force of policy change*

Globalization and the increased importance of policy

The evaluation of FAO's policy assistance to member countries (FAO, 2001) "found that policy was an increasingly important area for developing countries". It underscores that "the place of policy on the development agenda has been steadily increasing in importance...the pace of globalization has meant that if countries are to reap its benefits, rather than suffer from its disadvantages, they must restructure their economies to maximize trade opportunities and introduce national measures in line with their international commitments." It continues by advising that "FAO should accord its work in this area greater overall priority".

This trend of giving greater importance and increased priority to policy assistance is acknowledged by most institutions contacted in this study. Even organizations that are known for their field-level activities, such as UNICEF or Oxfam, are now turning more towards policy advocacy and assistance.

The influence of global and regional agreements

Global and regional agreements and conventions often constitute driving forces for policy change at the national level through processes that can span years and even decades. The following examples, selected among many, illustrate how global agreements and processes can act as triggers and determine the nature and content of policy change at the national level. They create opportunities for policy change, contribute to its legitimacy and justification and limit unfettered decision-making and choice by governments. Information or training on these agreements can be a starting point for influencing the policy process. However, in some cases, contradictions among global agreements can become a constraint and create confusion.

Global issues which have not yet led to agreements, either because there is no consensus or because they have gained importance only recently, also can be a source of policy change (e.g. climate change and negotiation processes towards more regional integration).

Box 6: Policy assistance in the fisheries sector in the Caribbean

"Policy assistance in the fisheries sector in a region such as the insular Caribbean (where there is a commitment to promote regional or subregional approaches or instruments) is the process whereby states, regional institutions and other local actors are helped to understand, cope with, minimize the negative impacts of, and, if possible, derive benefits from, a global policy environment that is constantly changing and increasing its power and impacts on small economies and societies." (Renard, 2006) In the fisheries sector in the Caribbean, this process lasted more than two decades and FAO's policy assistance has been effective and beneficial for a number of reasons including:

• the use of a regional institutional set-up. WECAFC was a forum and mechanism for exchanging information and harmonizing policies;
• the integration of FAO's policy assistance into the activities and processes that were led and sponsored by other organizations or partners;
• the provision of explicit and implicit support to strengthen regional institutions and their roles as coordinators and facilitators.

Box 7: The influence of international agreements on policy

In Serbia, the national Serbian leadership's stated strategic objectives of achieving accession to the EU and of transitioning to a market-oriented economy created strong incentives throughout all levels of the Serbian government to adopt international standards and practices. These national objectives created additional support for bringing greater emphasis to private forestry and to complying with international standards of forestry management (including principles of conservation and sustainability), a change that was supported by an FAO policy assistance project.

In Argentina, and in Bangladesh, the need to comply with international standards for export commodities was key factors behind FAO's support. FAO's project in Argentina during the late 1990s aimed to strengthen the national *Codex Alimentarius* committee to better equip it to align Argentina's national food regulations with the international norms established under the WTO's Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement (SPS) and the FAO/WHO *Codex Alimentarius*. Also, because Argentina became the chair of the regional commission for the *Codex Alimentarius* and Bangladesh became actively involved in regional and global agreements and conventions, their governments wished to project a positive image of their countries at regional and international levels.

MDGs as benchmarks for policy change

MDGs have been a useful tool to establish clear benchmarks and quantifiable objectives at the national level. As quantifiable benchmarks, they help governments agree on policy objectives with their partners and provide verifiable quantitative data that facilitate policy advice, monitoring and accountability.

MDGs help set national priorities. UNICEF, for example, sees them as very instrumental in increasing governments' attention to the poor, the excluded and children. MDGs can be a reference for policy-advocacy work or can constitute a starting point for a policy dialogue with governments, particularly in countries emerging from crisis situations which need to re-focus on development objectives.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) increasingly serve as instruments to translate a commitment to achieve MDG1 into an action framework with concrete actions at the national level. They help set priorities and provide a more detailed framework to guide specialized policy assistance.

In Bhutan (FAO, 2006), for example, the preparation of the tenth Five-Year Plan has been an opportunity to debate policy and strategic measures to reduce poverty and hunger, consistent with MDG commitments. This has led to including food security considerations into the Plan and reviewing or formulating strategies or policies, with the help of FAO through its FNPP.

As emphasized by several organizations interviewed during the study, challenges remain on how to monitor and evaluate the achievement of MDGs and the implementation of PRSPs.

New aid modalities change the nature of policy dialogue

With the progressive evolution of aid from project-based aid to new aid modalities (e.g. budget support or sector-wide approaches), strategic and policy discussions between governments and their development partners become more prominent. These modalities affect the policy process at the national level and, in many cases, the content of policies as well.

In Mozambique, for example, the appraisal of the first sector programme for agriculture (PROAGRI I) in 1998 necessitated a two-week policy and strategic dialogue among more than 15 participating development partners and the government. Several areas of discussion led to specific policy and institutional reforms for which policy support was provided by different partners.

In other sectors, such as education or health, sector-wide approaches are even more frequently adopted and appear to be simpler to manage and more successful than in agriculture. Challenges remain, such as the complexity of coordinating among development partners due to differences in their programmatic agendas. As stated by some development partners, it is not easy for the "smaller" agencies to influence programme definition and performance, because these are often dominated by

International Financial Institutions (IFIs) or large donors. Also, it is difficult for each partner to assess its direct contribution and therefore the effectiveness of the assistance it provides.

Non-project financial assistance, particularly when it is large, is a powerful instrument to influence national policies. It can undermine the policy dialogue taking place within the sector, when it is provided outside of the existing sector-programme framework. This was the case, for example, with the MCC in Ghana, where MCC provided large amounts of financial resources for use outside the sector programme and without respect for the principles within the programme. A similar effect may be observed when new donors, such as China, provide funds to boost commercial relations which can replace funds that are provided by other traditional partners under policy conditionality (including criteria such as good governance, human rights, non-child labour, etc.).


Conclusions about the international context

- *High priority must be given to participating in global policy processes.*
- *National-level policy assistance gains legitimacy and credibility when linked to global and regional agreements, conventions and issues.*
- *MDGs can serve as benchmarks for national objectives, facilitate monitoring and accountability, lend legitimacy to policy changes and provide access to resources for implementation of policies since consistency between MDGs and development programmes is sought by donors.*
- *New aid modalities (e.g. budget support, PRSPs and sector programmes) change the nature of policy dialogue and policy assistance can be incorporated in their implementation.*

5.1.2   The national context: a complex arena

The particular cultural, political, and economic environment often referred to as the national context in which decision-making takes place can define issues and determine the range of policy choices. Purposeful analysis of the national context is determined by the understanding of four critical dimensions as shown in Diagram 1. The national context that affects the policy assistance process is influenced by the policy climate and context, political will, development partners and national capacity.

Diagram 1: The National Context

Maetz and Balié, 2008
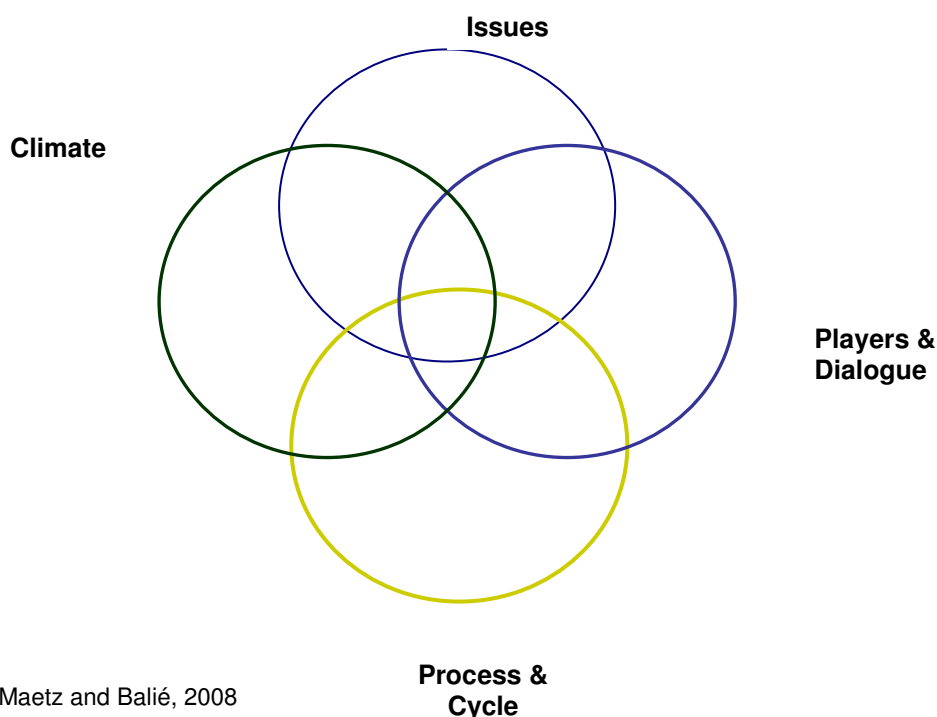
The policy climate and context

A policy climate in favour of policy reform is an important asset for any policy assistance activity. It will contribute to stakeholders' increased receptivity and will help to create "policy windows" (See Box 8). Before policy-making can begin, an issue must come to the attention of policy-makers and a decision must be taken to act on the issue. Moments of change in the cultural, political, or economic environment are important in providing "windows of opportunity" to influence the policy agenda and policy choices. (Kingdon, 1984)

Box 8: Policy windows

Kingdon refers to opportunities for policy change as "policy windows". Policy windows occur because of changes in the political stream. Once the window opens, however, it does not stay open very long. "The window closes for a variety of reasons. First, participants may feel they have addressed the problem through decision or enactment…Second, and closely related, the participants may fail to get action…Third, the event that prompted the window to open may pass from the scene…Fourth, if a change in personnel opens a window, the personnel may change again."

(Kingdon, 1984)

Circumstances that can create conditions for the occurrence of a policy window are represented schematically in Diagram 2.

Diagram 2: Main factors determining the policy climate and the occurrence of policy windows
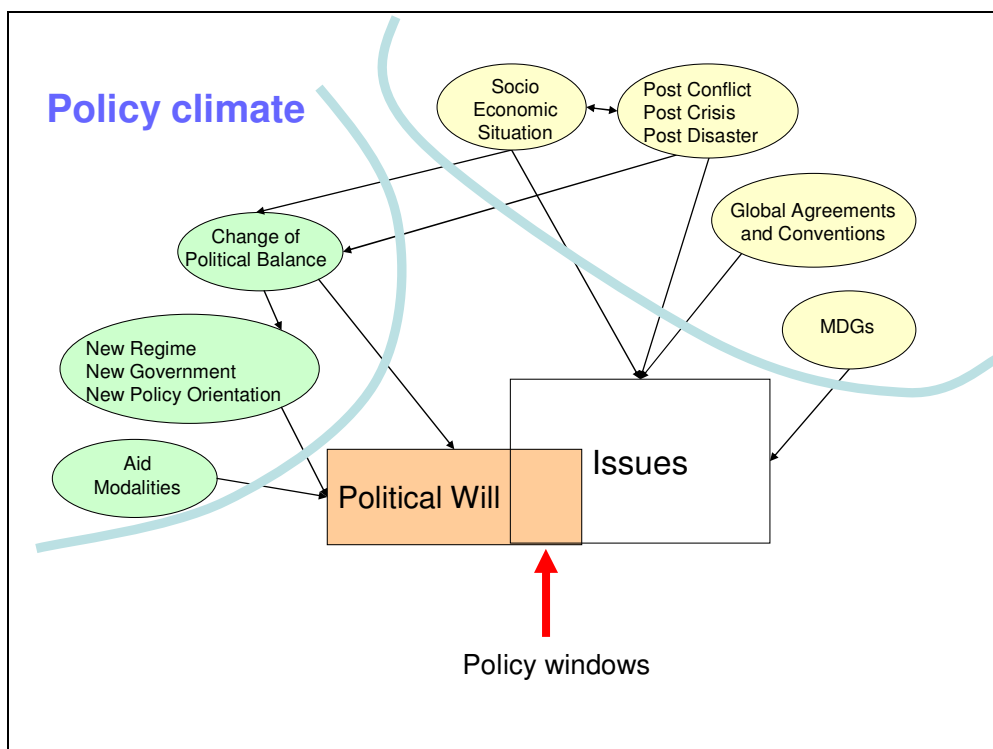
Changes in the policy climate may be caused by:

- **Greater freedoms**

  A greater degree of democracy, or at least of freedom in expression, participation and transparency, can allow stakeholders to express their needs more freely and to feel confident that they can take part more productively in a policy dialogue.

  o   Existing democracy in the country and a level of transparency in national processes are eligibility criteria for budget support from the EC. As pointed out by Alfredson in the Serbia case-study, in 2001, the newly-elected government in Serbia under President Kostunica announced sweeping changes and that Serbia's primary strategic objectives would be accession to the EU and transition to a market economy. A new national agenda of institutional reform and modernization reflected the mood of a population that was eager to break with the past, overcome crippling poverty and resurrect its standing with the world.

- **A new orientation in the policy framework**

  A change in overall policy framework can take the form of a fundamental change in policy references, as was the case in Russia after the fall of the USSR, or in China with its clear preference today for a market-driven economy while other aspects of the society are kept unchanged. It can also represent a shift in policy, as has been the case in Brazil or Argentina since 2002 with more emphasis on macroeconomic stability and cross-cutting policy (e.g. fiscal, education and labour).

  o   Amouri shows that in Morocco the government adopted a new policy orientation to accelerate the process of opening its agriculture sector to world markets. This required an enhanced capacity to analyse issues and prepare strategic decisions consistent with changes in the national and international context. For this, the government wanted to engage in an intellectual partnership with FAO.

- **Specific interest for a particular issue**

  It quite often happens that an issue gains interest in the political agenda under different circumstances, such as when elections come close or when an issue is being actively debated at the international level. The controversy on immigration and the felt need to revise the policy in many European countries followed the enlargement of the EU and the possible accession of new countries. Although this issue was new in Italy, which until very recently has been a country of emigration, immigration was at the cutting-edge in the 2008 general elections. In the meantime, more cultural, traditional and long-lasting controversial issues like abortion or the death penalty remain high on the political agenda irrespective of the evolution of the debate at the international level. Another example could be climate change, an issue that influences most policy debates on the environment and also fiscal, trade and sectoral policies such as agriculture, tourism and transport.

  o   In Sierra Leone, Jawara explains that the policy mood changed after the general elections in 2002, when President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah unveiled a bold commitment to food security and the right to food and pledged, during his inaugural address, that "no Sierra Leonean should go to bed hungry by 2007". This created a "policy window" that could be used to galvanize support for strategic policy development and instil new policy ideas. This was well-received by some within the policy community who were advocating for action in the agriculture sector. The positive reaction of the government created conditions for action and facilitated involvement of other key actors (e.g. the IFIs, donors and other UN agencies) in the process. The problems, solutions and political streams converged at an opportune time for the development of an agricultural transformation and food security strategy.

- **More trust and a stronger leadership**

   It is much more difficult to provide effective policy assistance when the government does not see the opportunity or need for policy change. The presence of forward-thinking personalities who can act as champions for policy change and influence the policy climate can be a key factor in success, as was the case in Morocco and Serbia. However, policy assistance advice must be focused not on the interest of these champions or of the government staff, but on the needs of the entire country.

   o   In Argentina, according to Kerrigan, the government that was elected in May 2003, following the financial and economic crisis was able to develop strong leadership which eased the decision-making process, generated trust and improved the governability of the country. This included being able to revise the regulatory framework, which was the main focus of FAO's policy assistance activity.

- **The situation in post-conflict countries**

   Post-conflict countries offer great opportunities for policy change. Teams are often new and comprised of young experts. However, post-conflict situations also have characteristics that may hamper the smooth implementation of policy assistance activities. Post-conflict countries require support in the short and long term because governance and institutional capacity tend to be at their weakest level. This can hamper decision-making and the delivery of political and technical support required for policy formulation and implementation. Also, the break-up and slow recovery of national consensus and the rotation of people in senior policy positions often make it difficult to establish a reliable, long-term rapport with counterparts needed to adopt and follow-up on policy advice.

   o   In Burundi, Dévé emphasizes that the decision-makers' agenda was dominated by national reconciliation, reconstruction and channelling humanitarian aid. Macroeconomic policies needed to be reconsidered in the context of high inflation and policy-makers were changing. Provisional governments did not have the authority to impose viable, durable, short-, medium- and long-term policies. In the absence of a stable and clear overall policy framework, sectoral ministries addressed issues on an *ad-hoc* basis.
   o   In Serbia, factors that hindered adopting some recommendations included the widespread flux and uncertainty caused by planned or ongoing reforms across all areas of government (e.g. constitutional and legal reforms). Under those conditions, it will take time before a change of policy translates into concrete facts or actions, as was the case with community land-titling in Angola**.**
   o   UNICEF sees an opportunity for important policy change in post-disaster and post-conflict interventions and uses its "build back better" approach in these situations. Examples include creating better infrastructure and public systems and introducing or modifying a legal framework. UNICEF's approaches for water and sanitation, beyond its initial response, are to use methods and technologies that are consistent with international standards, thus reinforcing the long-term sustainability of the intervention. UNICEF defines its long-term involvement as establishing, improving and expanding safe water systems, taking into consideration emerging needs and changing and increasing demand. To convert the post-conflict situation into a window of opportunity, UNICEF is highly dependent on national-level policy-makers' readiness to introduce policy change. Policy advocacy and dialogue at the national level during this phase are essential.

An agency must understand a country's current political and economic context to operate within it effectively. This requires a preliminary identification of stakeholders and other actors who are already involved in policy work in the area to understand their positions and find ways to bring them on board. The problems with the rapeseed policy assistance case in Poland (see Box 9) illustrate this view very eloquently.

Box 9: Understanding the positions of interested parties

In Poland, the request for policy assistance on rapeseed policy came from a party which was not neutral (i.e. a major crushing plant). Many policy-makers and independent analysts regarded the assistance as unjustified because there were other agricultural and food sectors that faced much more severe economic difficulties and required much more attention than the almost-completely privatized and relatively well-functioning rapeseed crushing sector.

When the project was launched, it can be assumed that the EBRD was concerned with improving the economic condition of some of its customers (e.g. the crushing plant). Through the project, opportunities were created to:

- review the rapeseed sector in Poland (similar analyses were conducted by EBRD in other Central European countries);

- contribute to further modernization of the food industry;

- discontinue some of the most distortionary agricultural and trade policies (e.g. export subsidies).

From the start, rapeseed producers did not share the view that the project report would be independent. During the project, they felt they were not adequately consulted and learned about the proposed recommendations at two seminars where, in their view, too little time was allowed for discussion. They felt that they were drawn into signing an agreement with the government – which was desperately seeking to achieve consensus among various groups to calm the quickly-spreading political unrest – without full knowledge of procedures and their implications.

Ministry officials felt they were not involved in project activities, but that the workshops presented opportunities to initiate a dialogue among the key interest groups (i.e. crushers and rapeseed producers), collect additional arguments which could be used during EU negotiations on direct payments and discuss various sectoral implications of Poland's EU accession with different interest groups.

Independent policy analysts felt completely ignored by authors of the FAO report during the sector analysis and formulation of policy recommendations.

At the time of the project, each group of stakeholders appeared to pursue its own agenda. Probably not enough attention was given to the opinions of rapeseed producers, policy-makers and national policy advisors in the analysis and formulation of recommendations. As a result, there was a huge gap between the recommendations and the final position of policy-makers.

(adapted from the Poland case-study by Michalek)

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Conclusions about assessing the policy climate and context

Several activities seem desirable as part of the preparatory work to be conducted prior to starting a policy assistance process:

- *Conduct an assessment of the national policy climate, including the "mood" of key stakeholders, to assess the extent to which they would be open to new ideas or approaches. Check the consistency or compatibility of the envisaged reforms (whether requested by one stakeholder or whether advocated by the organization) with the overall policy framework.*
- *Include an assessment of the degree of transparency of the political and policy processes, if only to take precautionary measures in designing the policy assistance process and managing resources to support it.*
- *Clarify the accountability of national counterparts at the beginning of the assistance process to strengthen their ownership and share responsibility in the whole process. Passive recipients either tend to reject or ignore policy proposals.*
- *Identify dynamics and processes within the main stakeholder organizations, related projects or activities already in place and opportunities for leverage for the issue on which the assistance will focus.*
- *Conduct these assessments on a continuous basis at the national level. They should be conducted by the country office of the organization providing policy assistance or by a group of organizations at the country level. These ongoing assessments would be part of a policy-intelligence function to help identify windows of opportunity for offering policy assistance, generate the information required to design the organization's policy assistance activities and contribute to an enhanced policy-preparedness for the organization(s) providing policy assistance.*

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Political will: a prerequisite that is difficult to assess

The government or non-governmental group to which policy support is provided (e.g. farmer organization) must have political will for policy assistance to be effective. There are innumerable examples where policy assistance activities were not effective in changing policies when the key partner was not really interested or did not consider the area in which advice was provided to be a priority. It is useful to distinguish between the political will necessary to undertake a particular policy process and the will to implement the resulting recommendations. Box 10 provides a clear illustration of this point.

There are several ways in which political will is expressed:

- **Presence of a clear demand**
  First and foremost, there must be a clear demand – a request – for policy assistance. This demand must be precise regarding its purpose, objective and scope.

- **Identification of a priority issue**
  The issue(s) for which assistance is sought should be considered a priority by national policy-makers. Two examples highlight this point:

  o In Poland, the EBRD requested advice from FAO, but national policy-makers were not particularly interested in the issue (i.e. other issues were priorities). As a result, the recommendations were never implemented.
  o In Libya, FAO was the only foreign partner cooperating with the government when it provided policy assistance on the seed sector. Under such conditions, one can question the real motive of the Ministry of Agriculture when it requested FAO support. Was it really to build a comprehensive seed project? Was it due to FAO's reputation of capability and neutrality? Or was it to find a way out of the difficulties of an exceptional situation (i.e. embargo and conflict)?

Box 10: Implementing recommendations that are not priorities

The original request for this policy assistance project in Saint Lucia came from the Department of Fisheries in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and explicitly focused on revising the fisheries legislation, which first had been introduced in 1984 and needed to be updated.

There were a number of factors that converged to make such a review necessary and timely and which encouraged the Department of Fisheries to formulate its request to FAO:

- By 2001, Saint Lucia had almost two decades of experience in implementing the 1984 Fisheries Act and was therefore ready to consider amendments;
- In 1994, the Fisheries Regulations had been introduced to complement the Act and a number of new and specific problems were encountered in implementing and enforcing their provisions. These included the growth of criminal activity linked to the fisheries sector and the emergence and expansion of tourism-related uses of marine resources.

One of the recommendations made by the project (i.e. the introduction of a new High Seas Fishing Act), was not implemented because the recommendation did not respond to a local priority. The local agencies felt that this would represent an additional burden, "another thing that we will have to manage", as expressed by a senior officer.

(adapted from Saint-Lucia case-study by Renard)

- **Allocation of appropriate resources**
  Appropriate resources should be allocated to the policy work. Lack of resources is a clear indication of an insufficient level of priority for the work and a good indication that something is going wrong and that policy assistance is likely not to be effective. This needs to be monitored during the policy assistance process.

  o For McCarthy, the lack of commitment by the government is considered to be the main cause of failure of an FAO policy assistance project in South Africa. The lack of commitment was evidenced by the fact that promised resources and support (e.g. staff, office space, logistical support, day-to-day responsibility for project implementation and comments on input provided by FAO consultants) never materialized. Policy-makers gave priority to other activities.

There are six factors that determine the existence and intensity of political will:

- **Presence of a real problem**
  In Serbia, ministries, local and regional authorities and administrative units all appreciated the scope and severity of problems in the forestry sector. This widespread perception of the problem may have contributed to the acceptance of the idea of developing participatory mechanisms (which was one of the objectives of the FAO project).

- **Interest**
  In Serbia, the forestry sector was underemphasized on the national agenda and resources were greatly needed to improve its conditions. Ministry officials recognized that a formal forestry strategy could give the sector a more prominent position in the national agenda. However, because the respective interests of the main stakeholders were not well analysed, understood and addressed, some of the policy recommendations did not obtain strong government support (e.g. the development of private forestry cooperatives and associations and cutting customs duties for imported wood-processing machinery and equipment to encourage domestic production) and have only been partly implemented, if at all.

- **Policy climate and context**
  In October 2004, Serbia passed the "Government Strategy of Public Administration Reform in the Republic of Serbia" which required reforming public enterprises based on principles of decentralization, depoliticization, professionalism, rationalization and modernization. This gave further impetus to create a comprehensive forestry strategy to address the status of public enterprises in the forestry sector.

- **Presence and allocation of additional resources**
  In Mozambique, when FAO started its programme on food security policy, in the framework of the FNPP, the coordinator, the FAO headquarters focal point and the FAO representative in Mozambique took the informed risk of starting a process that most probably would not be concluded by the end of the programme, hoping that the local context would be favourable for a longer period of time. At the time of designing the programme, the FAO representative was reasonably optimistic about receiving additional funds beyond the expected lifetime of the programme, whether related to emergencies or from a follow-up of the FNPP. Moreover, the partnership established with UNDP was meant to guarantee some sustainability of the programme. It turned out that none of the expected options materialized and both the sustainability and the continuity of the programme now seem compromised.

- **Convergence of stakeholders' views**
  In Morocco, Amouri shows that one of the project recommendations was to create an observatory for Moroccan agriculture within the unit supported by the project (i.e. the CGDA). However, this recommendation was not implemented, probably largely because there is no clear agreement in the Ministry as to whether this system is best located in CGDA or in another directorate which has responsibility for information and statistics.

- **Link with national priorities**
  Linking policy assistance with priority national undertakings helps to strengthen national commitment and political will and opens opportunities for advocating additional policy changes.

  FAO's policy assistance was linked to the formulation of the 10th Five Year Plan in Bhutan, to the National Agricultural Biodiversity Programme in Lao PDR and to the PRSP in Zanzibar. This has been instrumental in getting high-level political attention and support. Moreover, by effectively helping in priority areas, trust is created which may generate conditions favourable to advocating for more change needed in other policy areas. (FNPP, 2007)

Political will and support can be reinforced by ensuring that national policy-makers have an appropriate level of ownership of the policy assistance activity. This can be achieved by involving them directly in the team, particularly when the focus is on a complex and highly-technically specialized area (FNPP, 2007), and having them contribute personally to the design of the policy support.

In cases where the context is not favourable to policy change and there is resistance, political will needs to be generated. The country's policy-intelligence function can help design a strategy to overcome the resistance. The way the policy assistance process unfolds and the modalities used to provide policy assistance will be critical in creating political will and nurturing it.

Conclusions about political will

- *Ensuring that one or more stakeholders has the political will to undertake a particular policy process is a prerequisite to providing policy assistance. In the absence of political will to tackle an issue which the organization deems critical, the organization must first find ways to generate interest based on its knowledge and understanding of the national context and on identifying potential winners and losers of the recommended policy changes.*
- *Alliances with national stakeholders or other development partners in favour of the policy assistance, particularly with those who have resources, can be effective in changing the attitude of political authorities.*
- *Political will must be nurtured and reinforced during the policy process so there is the will to implement the resulting recommendations. Political will should be monitored throughout the process to identify any reluctance and deal with it immediately.*

Development partners: a special subset of policy stakeholders

Policy advice that has the support of a broad alliance of coordinated development partners has a better chance of being effective and having its recommendations implemented. (FAO, 2001) This is easier to achieve in a situation where relations among development partners are good and somewhat coordinated (e.g. within sector programmes, a donor platform and national processes). In recent years there has been a trend towards better coordination and harmonization of development partners (e.g. the Rome and Paris Declarations).

While there is a strong desire to coordinate better among development partners, there are a number of factors that present challenges to doing so. Development partners are often constrained by their own constituencies. Also, the donor community is now comprised of an increasingly heterogeneous set of organizations with different degrees of capacity and commitment. Sometimes, broad alliances of large donors, each with their specific global agenda, may not be the best vehicle for achieving policy assistance effectiveness because the agenda upon which they all can agree may be too vague. Also, the mechanisms needed to coordinate among the partners may become too complex and generate excessive transaction costs.

Cases where development partners duplicate efforts are still frequent:
• In Sierra Leone, the EU and the DFID have recently pledged to assist the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in implementing yet another sector review before committing financial support for fisheries programmes. Reviewing the entire sector for legislative amendments for inland fisheries would be a duplication of effort and a waste of resources because similar work was already conducted under the 2003 Agriculture Sector Review. Also, during the PRSP process, DFID and others allegedly sponsored surveys that had already been conducted for the Agriculture Sector Review documents. Such actions can probably be attributed to the remnants of an ingrained culture of aid conditionality and tied aid. The PRSPs have been designed precisely to minimize these practices.
• In Burundi, a 2001 FAO assistance project on microfinance was being conducted simultaneously with work by the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) in the same area. FAO, AfDB and World Bank projects did not interact enough, worked on separate tracks and produced reports that reached the Council of Ministers simultaneously. The Council of Ministers logically claimed that the studies should have been coordinated.

In many cases, it is easier to coordinate with key partners working on similar policy assistance issues. UNICEF coordinates with other partners both at headquarters and at the national level through country representatives. Interesting synergies can develop around each partner's comparative advantages. For example, in World Bank-UNICEF coordination experiences, the World Bank offers access to high-level decision-makers, funding and technical expertise and UNICEF offers knowledge of the field, in-country experience, and country-level presence.

In the case studies reviewed for this study, there are several cases of such synergies:
• In Sierra Leone, AfDB decided that once the fishery policy supported by FAO assistance had been finalized, it would fund a capacity-building pilot project to support artisanal fisheries. This provided an incentive to the government to finalize the policy.
• In Serbia, two projects, funded by Norway and Finland, provided support to implement recommendations from FAO's policy assistance project in the forest sector.
• In Angola, USAID support on land assessment and legal advice was synergistic with FAO's decentralized land-management project.

In recent years, governments are finding funding outside of the "traditional" donor community. The emergence of new financial partners (e.g. donor countries like China, or large private foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) are changing the scene and incentives, as well as the "rules of the game" in policy dialogue, creating wedges in a government-partner system which was getting tighter and increasingly organized.

Working in coordination with a large donor can increase the chances of policy advice having an impact. However, the opposite may also occur. If effectively implementing the advice is tied to conditions that the government resists, the recommendations may not be adopted. Also, advice that

seems to support the agenda or interest of a large donor will not be credible and may affect the organization's reputation in that country:

• In Poland, FAO obtained strong support from EBRD (which was a not a neutral party) and one crushing company which was an EBRD-borrower. As a result, other stakeholders felt that this adversely affected the objectivity of the analysis. In this case, it appears that FAO may have been used by some specific interest groups as an instrument to promote their own arguments to policy-makers.

• In the case of South Africa, McCarthy believes that "lack of enthusiasm and hence cooperation on the part of the South African government, compared to the situation found in other African countries, can be ascribed to the fact that South Africa is not a borrowing country. An element of this recently surfaced in a totally different context and field. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expressed some negative views on the inflation-targeting policy of the South African Reserve Bank, which promptly elicited a critical response from the Governor of the Bank to the effect that the IMF should not raise such criticism in public since South Africa is not in debt to either the IMF or the World Bank. In South Africa, the intention to borrow is not a carrot that encourages cooperation with international development agencies and consultants".

When they work independently, FAO or IFPRI's reputation as an independent organization (i.e. not being in charge of large development-assistance programmes) gives them an entry point to policy decision-making that other international partners probably do not have.

Within the UN system, a UN Country Team offers great opportunities for coordination and synergies among UN organizations and can help eliminate some overlaps or contradictions. The One-UN Initiative and Joint Programming are further steps towards better integration and effectiveness of the UN system.

Conclusions about development partners

• *Coordination and cooperation among development partners contributes to the effectiveness of policy assistance, particularly in those cases where political will is weak or non-existent. It can also contribute to effectively piloting and implementing policy change.*
• *Care must be taken to create and nurture national ownership of policy recommendations that are supported by the donor community to avoid the impression that they are aligned with the agenda or interests of particular development partners.*

National capacity: a critical element of the national context

National capacity is generally regarded as the critical factor affecting the effectiveness of policy assistance. National capacity needs to be considered when designing policy assistance activities and selecting the most effective modalities to use. National capacity should also affect the content of recommendations. Recommendations must be specific to the context in which they will be applied to improve their chances of being implemented.

• WHO experts interviewed for this study indicated that policy assistance is not a question of what is technically nice to do, but rather what is technically possible, socially and politically acceptable and suitable. In some situations with low capacity (e.g. post-conflict countries), there may be a need to critically assess whether external support should temporarily substitute for government offices (e.g. in Kosovo and Timor Leste). In these cases, there should be plans for capacity-building and a schedule for withdrawing the external support in the short or medium term.

Assessing national capacity is important to being able to implement policy assistance recommendations. There are a number of factors to consider in that assessment:

- **Leadership**
  One important element of national capacity is leadership, both institutional and individual. It is essential to work closely with a strong and credible national partner (e.g. ministry or NGO) that has the strength and the technical and political credibility to guide the policy process so that the recommendations can pass all the necessary tests and steps before they are implemented. There are several examples among the case studies prepared for this study that illustrate how important this factor can be.

  o In Angola, the political strength of the Ministry of Urban and Environment Affairs (MINUA) was not enough to break the resistance of sectoral ministries to merging their cadastres into one national cadastre managed by MINUA.
  o In Libya, the Ministry of Agriculture, which was the counterpart for the FAO seed-policy project, was institutionally weak and faced serious resource constraints. After 2001, its responsibilities were progressively reduced and the ministry was downgraded to a simple production service in 2002. In fact, the real decision-makers for the agriculture sector were the Ministry of Finance and the State Bank, which deal with strategic and long-term issues. However, seed policy was not their priority and they were not involved in the FAO project.

- **Clarity in institutional responsibilities and the decision-making process**
  Clarity in institutional responsibilities and the decision-making process helps to specify the accountability of national counterpart organizations and teams. It is indispensable to know with whom to interact in the policy process. In the absence of this clarity, individuals are not motivated to take initiative. This clarity is a prerequisite for conducting a policy process; if it is not established, the first step of the policy assistance should be to help define roles and responsibilities. Having a good knowledge of the positions and agenda of different institutional stakeholders also helps to anticipate possible conflicts.

  Working with numerous public organizations which are poorly coordinated makes policy processes more complex to manage. In Kenya, several ministries and more than 25 parastatals were involved in the agriculture sector at the turn of the century. (FAO/Moi University, 1999).

  Examples of this issue were noted in several case studies conducted for this study:

  o In Angola, there was a lack of clarity of institutional responsibilities during the transition phase after peace was established in the country. This made it much more difficult to influence policy. Regulations to clarify the situation were still awaiting publication.
  o In Serbia, the lack of an organizational structure for some important stakeholders made it difficult to contact them or to involve them in the policy process.
  o In Argentina, there were several issues and conflicts that affected the policy process. The chair of the National Food Commission (CAN) rotates every two years between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce; these ministries have different views and interests regarding food quality and safety. Furthermore, the National Agriculture and Livestock Health Service (SENASA) had been discredited because of a crisis in certification. Misunderstanding this complex situation made it awkward for the project to operate.

- **Opportunity for a stakeholder forum**
  It is essential to be able to hold a stakeholder forum where all stakeholders can meet, discuss their interests and develop a tentative agreement eventually leading to consensus. This is critical to conducting the policy process in a transparent way that can generate the commitment that is indispensable for eventual implementation of the recommendations.

  o In Burundi, stakeholders feel that there is a need for a continuing, permanent collaboration between decentralized financial societies (e.g. Systèmes de Financement Décentralisé (SFD)) and other concerned stakeholders. This kind of neutral forum could include the Ministries of Finance and Agriculture, development partners, Community Development Councils (Comités de Développement Communautaires), the National Development Bank (BNDE) and the rural Microcredit Fund (FMCR).

- **Stability of the counterpart team**
  National capacity also depends on the stability of the counterpart team. In the absence of a stable counterpart team (or set of interlocutors), it becomes much more difficult to ensure ownership of and follow-up on policy recommendations. Even capacity-building efforts will be wasted in the absence of team stability.

  o In South Africa, government departments are still in the process of post-apartheid transformation to meet the needs of a democratic society and to reflect the demographic profile of the country. This transformation has led to high staff turnover, which means that interest in projects may get lost during turnover and also that some managers in government service, although suitably qualified and talented, lack administrative and managerial experience.

- **Capacity of civil society**
  Well-developed capacity of civil society can be vital for bringing in fundamental reforms that government organizations oppose or are reluctant to implement. The evaluation of the French FSP projects shows that in cases where the state is weak, farmer organizations and the political system (i.e. the national assembly) can take the lead. (Ribier, Le Coq and Pesche, 2005)

  o In Angola, some key NGOs (e.g. ADRA, Development Workshop) have organized their advocacy, lobbying, research and intermediation efforts into a new structure called Rede Terra, which is supported by USAID and other donors. The Rede Terra network translated the new land law project into local languages and accessible formats. This enabled creating an awareness-raising and sensitization campaign and gathering concerns, remarks and suggestions from concerned stakeholders. Reports were prepared and transmitted to the relevant Parliamentary Commission. After publication of the 2004 Land Law, Rede Terra conducted sensitization work on land rights with illiterate communities to disseminate knowledge about land administration in the province and to assist in land delimitation and titling.

- **Political governance**
  Political governance is another dimension of national capacity that can help implement policies in the medium to long term. Where the political system allows opposition parties and their representatives to associate at policy fora and consultations, the likelihood of policy reversals when government changes is greatly reduced. This is illustrated by several FAO experiences, particularly in Latin America.

- **Availability of data and baselines**
  If data and baselines are not available, additional effort and resources are required to provide evidence-based advice or advocacy.
  o In Serbia, grossly inadequate sectoral data made it difficult to assess the actual level and characteristics of forest degradation.
  o In Sierra Leone, quantitative data on the progress and impact of the government's effort to diversify crop production are patchy, at best. Also, there is no national data-collection programme to adequately inform advocacy messages in favour of creating a Right to Food Secretariat because the government's data-collection activities were suspended at the height of civil war. This resulted in a serious lack of data during the formulation of policy and planning processes in the post-conflict reconstruction. The destruction of earlier documentation during the civil war compounded the problem.

- **Individual capacity**
  The level of individual capacity, technical expertise and skill available in the country influence the effectiveness of policy assistance and the selection of policy assistance modalities. In countries where capacity is limited, finding highly qualified policy-makers with time to act as counterparts remains a challenge, since there are few of them and they are often overstretched. In a situation where capacity is high, policy assistance may focus more on exchanging experiences with other countries, supporting specific studies that are inputs into the policy process or engaging in an intellectual partnership for knowledge exchange. National experts will be able to use the results of

the studies, adapt experiences from elsewhere and use knowledge about the country's conditions for their own purposes, including drawing policy implications. Two examples illustrate this point:

o   In Poland, despite the low priority given to the rapeseed chain and the suspicion about the lack of objectivity of FAO's study, national policy-makers used the project to attain their own goals, which were to initiate a dialogue among the key interest groups (i.e. crushers and rapeseed producers), collect additional arguments which could be used during EU negotiations and discuss sectoral implications of Poland's EU accession with different interest groups.
o   In Morocco, opening its agriculture sector to world markets requires enhanced capacity to analyse issues and prepare strategic decisions that consider changes in the national and international context. The government would like to cooperate with FAO, but given the high level of Moroccan expertise, this cooperation should be forged through an intellectual partnership where FAO and Moroccan experts would exchange views periodically on issues important for the Moroccan government. This would be mutually beneficial because this partnership would also be an opportunity for FAO to sharpen its methodologies and analytical tools based on interaction with Moroccan experts and increase the effectiveness of its assistance to other countries.

High capacity is generally considered to be a positive influence on policy assistance effectiveness. However, if policy advice proposes a radical change to which civil servants or elites with entrenched interests are opposed, higher national capacity also can mean greater capacity to resist change. This is because anti-reformers are usually the winners of prior contests over policy and, as a consequence, they have colonized institutions of power in the society and government. They use these institutions to ensure that policy favours their interests. (Grindle, 2000) When the capacity is extremely low, political personnel tend to be more open to change.

o   In South Africa, FAO and government officials have noted that since the country has substantial academic and research capacity based at universities and research foundations, some officials believe that national capacity exists to does policy work and that international agencies should assume the role of unbiased facilitators rather than provide advice.
o   In the Serbia case study it is noted that deficits in education, training and technology and a dearth of statistical data about Serbia's forestry sector contributed to the lack of capacity for creating a modern and nationally-relevant forestry strategy. At the same time, the existence of such broad challenges contributed to the Ministry's openness to consider FAO's recommendations and to the eagerness of stakeholders to become active supporters of reform.
o   GTZ experts estimate that low government capacity was a factor in the success in Timor Leste. French experts interviewed for this study also note that, in some cases, a weak state can be a factor for success if farmer organizations and the political system (i.e. the national assembly) can take the lead.

In some of the cases analysed for this study, capacity was lacking at the implementation stage, which jeopardized the final outcome and impact of the policy process. The case of Bangladesh (see Box 11) illustrates this point well and almost all of the dimensions of national capacity are seen in this example. In Bangladesh, policy implementation in the food and agricultural sectors generally had been weak. Factors included a systemic lack of institutional capacity and the complexities of coordinating among the large number of sector and subsector agencies (including 15 agencies in the Ministry of Agriculture alone).

Box 11: Capacity for policy implementation in Bangladesh

The Seed Wing of the Ministry of Agriculture (i.e. the secretariat of the National Seed Board), which is responsible for overseeing the seed subsector, is poorly staffed with little authoritative decision-making capability. Both the Seed Certification Agency (SCA) and the Seed Wing of the Ministry of Agriculture had lacked continuity in leadership and technical capacity and could not exert adequate influence to prioritize departmental budgets to strengthen SCA. Frequent transfers of government personnel within civil service at all levels, including from SCA to other parts of the Department of Agricultural Extension, posed difficulties in continuity and retaining trained personnel.

SCA's critical role as a policy instrument across many development issues was poorly appreciated. These issues included productivity enhancement, biosecurity, marketing and trade, environmental protection and farmer empowerment. SCA had not been championed at a high enough level to secure resource commitments and initiate institutional changes necessary to make it effective. Past projects in this subsector had focused on seed multiplication issues rather than regulatory and certification functions.

To permit SCA to fill its role in seed testing, quality control and certification would require developing human resources and laboratory facilities, creating a separate service cadre and establishing SCA as a regulatory body independent of the Department of Agricultural Extension. The recent inclusion of "SCA Strengthening" as a possible pipeline project in the 2006/07 sectoral block demonstrates some progress towards implementation by the Ministry of Agriculture, but it took many different stimuli and processes since 1999 to get to this stage.

(adapted from the Bangladesh case-study by Lai)

Conclusions about national capacity

- *National capacity can be defined in terms of:*

  o *leadership and strength of the national partner;*
  o *clarity of the decision-making process and delineation of institutional responsibilities;*
  o *existence of a stakeholder forum where policy dialogue can occur;*
  o *the capacity of civil society and its organizations to engage in policy dialogue;*
  o *capacity to implement policy recommendations;*
  o *individual technical capacity, expertise and skills.*

- *Clarity in decision-making and institutional responsibilities should be established before embarking on a policy process.*
- *National capacity should be assessed before designing the policy assistance activity and should constitute a basis for formulating recommendations that can be implemented.*
- *While high capacity is generally considered a positive factor for the effectiveness of policy assistance, high capacity can also mean greater capacity to resist change when the advice proposes a radical change to which civil servants or elites are opposed.*

How the national context affects the choice of policy assistance modalities
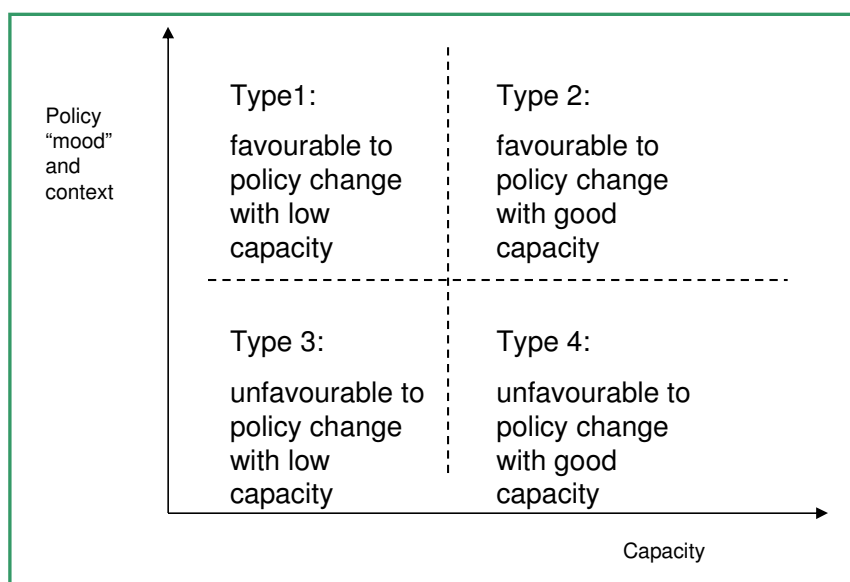
It is possible to identify four types of national contexts and the combinations of policy assistance modalities that are best suited to each (see Box 12).

Type 1: Favourable to policy change with low capacity

This type corresponds to the situation found in many post-conflict or post-emergency countries or to countries which have recently experienced a change of regime or government (e.g. Sierra Leone). Such situations require broad advice and capacity-building for government and civil society to enable them to engage constructively in a policy dialogue.

A preliminary analysis of the current economic situation (i.e. sector review) will help identify issues and establish basic data on the baseline situation. In some cases, it may be necessary to clarify institutional responsibilities before a proper policy process can be initiated. This can be followed by more in-depth policy assistance on some of the priority issues identified. This advice is best provided through policy projects and, in some cases, the advice can be given during discussions of sector programmes. Support in policy coordination also may be needed.

Box 12: Types of National Contexts

Policy "mood" and context	Type1: favourable to policy change with low capacity	Type 2: favourable to policy change with good capacity
	Type 3: unfavourable to policy change with low capacity	Type 4: unfavourable to policy change with good capacity

Capacity

This type of context can also correspond to less-developed countries where capacity is limited but where there is a will to address a particular policy issue (e.g. compliance with a global agreement or convention or considering the extension of rural finance policy). In a situation where governance offers opportunities for stakeholders to raise policy issues, capacity-building would need to focus on these specific areas and include lessons from other experiences. Support could be provided through policy projects with pilots to test alternative options, if possible.

Type 2: Favourable to policy change with good capacity

This type corresponds to the situation found in many middle-level countries that are in a process of transformation (e.g. Morocco) or want to address a particular policy issue driven by domestic problems or groups (e.g. Poland) or by international agreements (e.g. Argentina). National expertise exists and it can be supported by disseminating international knowledge through networks and supporting national policy research centres or think tanks. Some specialized expertise also can be mobilized in those areas where there are local knowledge gaps. External support also may be useful to provide independent brokering services among different national interest groups and stakeholders. These countries are probable candidates for sector programmes, budget support and other forms of non-project financial assistance.

Type 3: Unfavourable to policy change with low capacity

This type corresponds to the situation found in some less-advanced countries with low capacity and where the governance system is opaque and does not offer much opportunity for participation. Policy assistance is greatly required but not necessarily in great demand. Despite its need, policy change is not desired by the political leadership; there is no political will. This is a difficult situation where the agency and the government are not in agreement. There may be a need for continued efforts to negotiate and persuade the government to change its views and to constructively develop and modify policies to make them more effective. (FAO, 2001)

To generate political will and a constituency in favour of change before more traditional policy assistance activities (e.g. policy reviews and policy projects) can be implemented, first may require conducting a good analysis of the national context, drivers of change, advocacy, leadership methods and capacity-building for both government and stakeholders. Linking stakeholders to international or regional networks and conducting small pilots can help convince some champions that change is possible and desirable.

Type 4: Unfavourable to policy change with good capacity

This type corresponds to the situation found in some middle-level countries with good capacity but where the governance system is opaque and does not offer much opportunity for participation. Policy assistance is greatly required but not necessarily in great demand and capacity to resist change is high in leading circles. In this case, an analysis of the policy context is particularly important to identify a potential constituency in favour of change. The best strategy in this case may be to link with global issues (e.g. MDGs, agreements and conventions) and use them as entry points for policy change. Policy pilots can be used to illustrate the benefits of policy changes. Alternatively, non-government stakeholders (e.g. farmer organizations) or some political leaders could be identified as champions for policy change in some areas. National expertise and members of national policy institutes can be sensitized and strengthened through participation in networks**.** When the situation is ripe, some specialized expertise also can be made available in those areas where there are local gaps. Sector programmes, budget support and other forms of non-project financial assistance can be used to convince policy-makers and support change.

Conclusions and lessons about the national context

- *Conduct two kinds of assessments before undertaking policy assistance activities:*
  - *A "Policy Climate Assessment", to assess the extent to which stakeholders are open to new ideas or approaches and to check the consistency or compatibility of the envisaged reforms with the prevailing overall policy framework.*
  - *A "National Capacity Assessment", to assess clarity and transparency of the decision-making process and the delineation of institutional responsibilities, identify appropriate partners, check the existence of an adequate policy forum, inventory local expertise and gauge risks and capacity of resistance to change.*

  These assessments should be performed as a permanent policy-intelligence function rather than on an ad-hoc basis.

- *Help clarify the policy process and institutional responsibilities before embarking on a policy assistance process.*
- *Determine if one or more stakeholders have the political will to undertake the planned policy process and identify a policy champion(s).*
- *If insufficient political will exists, conduct a careful analysis of the national context to identify possible drivers of change. Continuous persuasion and negotiation with the government, advocacy, pilots and alliances with other development partners and national stakeholders will be needed to generate the interest and political will required.*
- *Monitor and reinforce political will during the policy process.*
- *Adapt policy assistance modalities to the national context, particularly to the policy climate and national capacity.*

5.2   Policy Assistance Process

A policy assistance process requires careful assessment of the kinds and duration of assistance modalities to be used. It is of paramount importance that the policy assistance process follow a strategic design and include consideration for human factors, communication, negotiation, participation, ownership, timing and capacity-building. It cannot be limited to providing technical or analytical inputs to the national process, however essential those inputs may be, but must be

designed to influence the way this process unfolds. This view is shared by the overwhelming majority of experts consulted for this study.

To be effective, this strategic approach to the policy assistance process requires credibility, overarching concepts, models and pilots. All the institutions surveyed also indicated that it is critical to provide good references of past successful actions as evidence of legitimacy. These references are often referred to as "models" or "benchmarks" and are built on several key principles detailed in this section.

5.2.1   Establishing trust and a stable relationship

There is general agreement among those consulted in this study that policy assistance processes have a better chance for a good start in countries where mutual trust has been built through repeated interactions. For that reason, it seems important that the agency providing assistance should engage in a continuous policy dialogue with the government and other stakeholders. Actors such as the World Bank could refrain from taking action depending on its level of trust. "The lack of mutual trust or dialogue with a country may lead to the decision not to lend."

Countries also prefer to seek assistance from well-known and trusted partners and turn away from others, even when the latter can provide evidence of appropriate expertise. Several examples demonstrate that trust and reputation take a long time to develop and are difficult to obtain, very easy to lose and almost impossible to recover.

While building strong relationships with partners is critical, it is nevertheless important to be aware of the risk of too much closeness with the government or a specific development partner (particularly if this partner is funding the agency's services, in full or in part) because it may affect the agency's image of independence. The case of Poland, which has been already mentioned, illustrates an example of when things went wrong in this regard.

A large number of the people contacted for this study insisted that establishing a true dialogue and demonstrating listening skills and an interest in people are necessary elements that help establish stable and trustful working relationships with counterparts. The main question is: How can we make people trust us? The answer suggested by the majority is that the process should start by considering the human factor. If a relationship is not solid, the policy assistance activity will likely fail. This may be because it will be impossible for the agency to convince key government decision-makers that there is an opportunity for policy change or that there are benefits to following policy recommendations.

- World Bank experts stated that a good relationship with the "client" is essential and can be demonstrated through the existence of a government team willing to work and/or share values with the Bank.
- In the Moroccan case study, preliminary discussions and useful dialogue with all stakeholders early in the process allowed them to be included in the formulation of final policy recommendations.
- In Sierra Leone, FAO was present in relief and coordination activities during the war; its post-war development efforts were almost unanimously recognized. This certainly helped FAO play a significant role in placing agriculture at the centre of the government's transformation process.
- In Serbia, the lack of any prior dialogue in the forestry sector made it necessary to invest time and energy in explanations and confidence-building that were essential prerequisites for an effective policy process and dialogue in this area.
- In Libya, the absence of an early dialogue impeded the policy assistance process. FAO could not establish the conditions for dialogue with the key decision-makers (i.e. the Ministry of Finance and the State Bank) and other important stakeholders, such as UN agencies active in the country.

Several development partners interviewed for this study indicated that a continuous institutional presence – through a country office or a long-term advisor – is a good practice. Several interviewees argued that advisors "embedded" in the national context may develop greater capacity to assess the local situation through full interactions with stakeholders and policy-makers. They may develop a deeper understanding of key factors and better capture the "drivers of change" (see Box 18). Therefore, these advisors may be the first ones to identify windows of opportunity and could initiate

the policy dialogue right away. For example, Oxfam usually tries to develop projects where it can work with local staff embedded in the national or local context.

Advisors are better able to integrate the policy assistance process in the national context when there has been a longstanding good relationship in the country. For this reason, several case studies indicated that isolated, short interventions by consultants should be avoided.

- The Argentina case study illustrates that the duration of the contract matters. The experts were in the field for only a short time and they could not influence the policy process. One major reason was that the Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) only allowed short contracts and recruitment of national experts, which were not the most effective ways to obtain the expertise needed for the specific topic for which the assistance was provided.
- In Libya, the project did not have an FAO office with an in-country representative. This made it difficult for FAO to fully understand the national context which was characterized by political difficulties (i.e. embargo), budget restrictions (i.e. low oil prices) and scarcity of experienced technicians and policy analysts.

GTZ indicated that capacity-building contributes to developing trust and is a reason why governments give preference to agencies who giver more importance to capacity-building in their interventions. This is another reason why short interventions are not desirable; short interventions by contracted consultants usually do not leave sufficient time for capacity-building. (FNPP, 2006)

The stability of the expert team contributes to creating a favourable, long-term relationship (Stone *et al*, 2001). The stability of the counterpart team is also important; it should be staffed with persons who have the skills to communicate well with partners and who get along well to ensure smooth internal communication.

Having a continuous institutional presence with experienced staff living and working in the country helps to establish trust and build mutual confidence and understanding. This presence ensures continuity of dialogue, flow of information and accumulation of knowledge and experience.

5.2.2   Communication is key

"Good research alone is insufficient. To have impact, it must be communicated to the right people." (K. Grebmer, S. Babu, V. Roeh and M. Rubinstein, 2005). This is true also for policy advice. To enhance effectiveness, policy assistance activities should have a clear communication strategy. If appropriate information is readily available at the time when policy-makers need it, it can help frame the debate and affect policy-makers' choices. Moreover, recommendations that are communicated well will be more effectively adopted.

Communication must be continuous throughout the policy process. It is essential to communicate about the policy assistance process, including its different phases and intermediate results, to avoid any surprises or a dwindling of interest, political will and support.

- In Lao PDR, where FAO is providing assistance to the government to mainstream agricultural biodiversity concerns into agriculture policies, senior policy-makers have expressed concern about not being sufficiently informed about progress in the policy assistance programme and have shown some signs of dwindling interest.
- DFID and ODI stressed that proper communication is required from the very beginning of the process and needs to be sustained throughout. There are several ways to publicize an activity, including meetings, seminars or workshops, press releases, short reports and policy briefs.

Several sources interviewed in this study felt that poor or inadequate communication may lead to failure of the policy assistance process. One factor that can make communication difficult is a language barrier. In Arab or Portuguese speaking countries, for example, the language barrier has to be addressed because it may be difficult to mobilize the required capacities in the appropriate language. English and French may be "universal" languages among top-level policy-makers, but mid- and low-level public servants in charge of implementation may speak other languages. Translation costs are also an issue.

- In Libya, there is no real tradition of communication and the administration pays little attention to the flow of communication. During the policy project, important information was not distributed to key actors, the project issues were not widely-disseminated and project reports and recommendations were not read. In this case, the project's communication approach conflicted with the local, strong oral tradition and suffered also from the language issue.
- In Serbia, there had been poor intra- and inter-sector communication at the time of the assistance request and during the early phases of the project. The policy process and dialogue was hindered by lack of information and poor and misleading information by stakeholders. This created additional sources of conflict and tension.

Communication management should be addressed to strategically-identified targets. ODI believes it is critically important to target opinion leaders because they may have the potential to support or adversely affect the message. Likewise, research carried out by ODI and Oxfam suggests using "shadow networks" to get out the message. Identifying these networks should be done as part of the situation analysis. An example of such "shadow networks", which may be difficult to include in the policy process, are secret societies in Liberia that play an important role in any major decision and therefore cannot be neglected.

Experiences suggest that communication strategies (e.g. the packaging of information, the channel and level of communication) must be adapted to the culture and educational level of the targeted audience. Long reports with long lists of recommendations generally should be avoided.

ODI, DFID, IFPRI and OPM consider that good packaging of recommendations at the end of the policy assistance project is important. Packaging has two key aspects: format and style. Format refers to the form or layout of the research product (i.e. is the product a hefty report, a policy brief, or a video?). Style is the way in which the material is presented. Clarity of exposition, use of technical jargon and comprehension level are all aspects of style. Format and style must be geared towards satisfying the intended, and clearly identified, audience. The packaging will determine how "user-friendly" the product is perceived to be and hence the likelihood that it will attract the audience's attention.

Timeliness of communication cannot be neglected either, as illustrated by the case of Sierra Leone. In this case, the very late delivery of the agriculture sector review report certainly was a constraint to the implementation of some of its recommendations. This aspect was also stressed by IFPRI.

5.2.3   Investing in policy intelligence, diagnosis and follow-up

There is consensus that resources have to be mobilized at all stages of the policy assistance process. Two essential phases in which financial and human resources are needed, but which are generally neglected, are diagnosis and follow-up.

Diagnosis

As mentioned in the description of the national context, prior to designing a policy assistance activity it is important to conduct an analysis of the national context, including an analysis of the capacity of counterpart institutions and of available national expertise. For several agencies surveyed for this study, finding highly-qualified national policy-makers or experienced technical advisors with time to interact as counterparts at the national level remains a challenge in many countries.

As already mentioned, having a policy-intelligence mechanism at the country level helps in performing an in-depth situation analysis. Investing resources in conducting a comprehensive situation analysis is the preferred approach for most agencies surveyed. For ODI, for example, the challenge in the diagnosis phase consists of investing resources to understand the "drivers of change" (see Box 18). Policy assistance projects sometimes do not pay enough attention to addressing this as part of the policy assistance process.

- In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Agriculture's planning units had limited capacity in policy design and implementation, including monitoring and evaluation of the policy cycle. This was a limiting factor that received scant attention by the policy project and other earlier FAO policy assistance activities.

- The case of Sierra Leone showed that at the time the request for assistance was made, nothing could ensure that relevant government line ministries had the human resources capacity for proper post-project coordination.

Follow-up

Almost all of the people interviewed for this exercise stated that following up after the recommendations are made in a policy assistance project is as critical as supporting the implementation of policy change. In several case studies, this phase is considered weak because the policy assistance process actually ended with the recommendations. Most case studies suggest that it should be the role of FAO's representation in the country to ensure that policy intelligence is conducted prior to the intervention and that follow-up and implementation of the recommendations are addressed after it. As stated by UNESCO, continuity and persistence of policy assistance and presence matter.

- In Burundi, assistance aimed to establish a rural credit mechanism, however, FAO's lack of adequate follow-up meant that some of the crucial recommendations received no attention. For example, the recommendation that a committee on rural credit be created with a specific mandate and functions was never adopted. Recommendations for which follow-up was secured (e.g. the promulgation of the decree on microfinance) were implemented. The decree was promulgated largely because of the pressure created by the opportunity to get approval of a USD 5million Netherlands-supported project to reinforce and support microfinance in the country.

Implementation of policy recommendations requires funding which, ideally, should be predictable. This funding could come either from the government budget or from development partners or from a mix of both. This is another reason to have stakeholders involved in the policy process – so that they are ready to invest in implementing its outcomes.

5.2.4   Facilitating participatory interactions

Encouraging participation

A broadly-shared view is that process facilitation is of primary importance and, in some cases, even more important than technical inputs (although the quality of technical inputs is essential). Indeed, technical inputs can be brought in at a strategic point in time, whereas facilitation has to be mobilized from the beginning and throughout the process. This is well-demonstrated in the Angola case study, where FAO was recognized for its capacity to convene all stakeholders for dialogue which contributed towards facilitating the policy-making process.

There is also a general consensus that the first task in the policy assistance process is to stimulate the participation of members of the policy community through facilitation, in cases where this participation is found to be lacking. Policy assistance literature defines policy communities as stable networks of policy actors, both from inside and outside the government, which are highly integrated with the policy-making process and are the most institutionalized kind of policy networks. (Stone *et al.*, 2001)

There is consensus about the value of seeking wide participation by including all stakeholders that have vested interests in the issues being addressed. Many consider it critical to build a diagnosis with the participation of counterparts. However, participation has associated costs and demands and requires specific facilitation skills, and the proliferation of participatory processes may make it increasingly difficult to mobilize stakeholders. It is therefore important to be selective. Participation can be achieved in several ways:

- In Burundi, the text of the proposed policy was distributed to all participants in the National Roundtable which had been created to discuss the transitory rural credit policy and its organization. The text was the result of a policy assistance process which involved local stakeholders in three regional seminars and which sent several national consultants to African countries for study tours.
- In Serbia, an FAO consultant created a draft strategy document that provided participants in the drafting process with a framework for debate and discussion. Then a (pre-final) draft National

Forestry Strategy was formulated with sector-wide participation and was later adopted by the Serbian Government.

Participation must be well-organized and take place in the appropriate institutional context or venue. Task forces have proven to be an effective way to mobilize national talents and organize participation in policy formulation, provided their membership is carefully selected (i.e, includes key stakeholders and those with competence) and their governance is adequate (i.e. includes working and decision-making procedures). Task forces can enable the emergence of spokespersons for civil society. (Norton, 2004) They also can be linked to existing relevant coordinating mechanisms (e.g. councils or committees).

- Oxfam and WHO believe that since policy- and decision-makers are central actors, it is good to engage them early in the process because this can facilitate good articulation of the policy assistance programme in the long run. The case of Serbia provides an illustration: the decision was taken early to involve key people from the concerned ministry to secure successful implementation of the recommendations.

The facilitator's role

The first priority of the person who plays the role of the facilitator should be to have stakeholders agree on the purpose and process of the policy assistance project. This is generally achieved through effective communication and facilitated participation.

- In the South Africa case study, the different expectations that FAO and the Government had for the project was a reason for its failure.
- In Serbia, the majority of stakeholders interviewed cited the development of a forestry sector based on stakeholder participation as a major innovation and as the most important contribution of the FAO project.

The facilitator's neutral and catalytic role is often emphasized. Building on the experience of Angola, Devé describes the role of FAO in the policy process as eminently that of a facilitator and catalyst. The facilitator can ease the process and create an environment and sequence of activities that will favour quality interactions. This role sometimes may be combined with providing technical content to contribute to the policy debate. The characteristics of the facilitator are further described later in this publication. Adopting a facilitator's role may be more appropriate in cases where the environment is already favourable for change, as in the case of Types 1 and 2 outlined earlier in this section.

However, there is a limit for an agency like FAO to remain neutral when the situation is less favourable to change (e.g. Types 3 or 4 detailed earlier in this section). UN agencies like FAO promote policy principles globally (e.g. food security, human rights, the right to food, poverty reduction, sustainable development and good agricultural practices) through advocacy and policy and technical advice at the national level. They will be inclined to support actors at the national level who best serve these principles, or to engage in alliances with some stakeholders identified through their policy-intelligence work. As a result, they will be perceived as lacking neutrality and providing" external interference". This may lead to tension which sometimes may be a cost of effective policy advice.

Being neutral and playing a coordinating role does not mean being passive or reactive. On the contrary, in the opinion of several of those interviewed for this study, it is important to take initiative. In the project on microfinance in Burundi, for example, the path chosen by FAO (i.e. promoting a rather bottom-up process and waiting for national initiative) was totally different from the more vigorous attitude adopted by UNDP, which consisted of activating the government to obtain an early decision on the same issue.

There is a consensus that the best approach for the agency delivering the policy assistance is to become involved progressively in facilitating the process and establishing a dialogue. This progressive involvement allows recognition, buy-in and legitimacy. The progressive involvement also allows for one of the key roles of the facilitator, which is to design the process with a sequence of events to keep stakeholders involved and committed.

The role of coordination also includes coordinating external partners. In several case studies, FAO was perceived as coordinating development partners and even, in some cases, national partners (e.g. ministries).

- According to Zouaoui, in Libya, if FAO had paid more attention to other agencies' programmes in the country, it could have facilitated the implementation and funding of policy assistance initiatives by building consensus. The fact that recommendations were not adopted can be explained by the lack of synchronization between coordinating organizations (e.g. Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and State Bank) and the Ministry of Agriculture.

5.2.5   Targeting key stakeholders

Policy-makers are naturally one of the target audiences for policy assistance, but an effective strategy should identify the right policy-makers to involve and to whom critical information should be delivered. Stakeholders could be beneficiaries, advocacy groups, policy advisors, policy analysts, political parties, members of Parliament or the media. Two, usually overlapping, sets of actors need to be identified during the diagnosis phase: those with a substantive interest in the issue and those with influence and official standing in the decision arena.

Decisions are not made by a single person. Policies and programmes are the cumulative result of conflict and cooperation among many government actors, principally politicians and bureaucrats, as well as members of national or foreign interest groups and external partners. Of course, interaction among these actors may result in either policy stasis or change. (Garrett and Islam, 1998) The question that arises here is how to bring the "right" people and institutions on board. More generally, what really matters is to get people on board because they have vested interests. These players must be identified in the diagnosis phase and mobilized through effective communication and adequate facilitation.

Interest groups can exert significant influence on policy choices; the impact that a group has depends on how powerful the group is. Powerful interest groups need not be rich or large. A decision-maker's interest in advancing a group's cause may be sufficient to give the group access to the policy process. The decision by policy-makers to take up, champion, or oppose an issue depends to a large extent on whether they believe furthering a particular group's concerns will advance their own interests.

Targeting key stakeholders is essential, but not necessarily easy to achieve. Stakeholders are institutions that sometimes can ease the process or, if they are not adequately understood, approached and involved, have the potential to put the process at risk. Process failure in economic policy implementation is often associated with inadequate appreciation of the importance of institutions and the role that they play.

- In Bangladesh, the content and format of the policy assistance project did not clearly identify or facilitate accurate targeting of key players.
- In Libya, the right ministries were not involved and neither in Liberia, secret societies.

The most important reasons for selecting an institution for a particular policy issue are its clarity in the policy process and in institutional responsibilities, credibility and leadership. A broadly-shared view is that for agriculture, rural development and food security policies, interaction with the line ministries in charge of agriculture and rural development is not sufficient. Policy processes need to involve other actors, such as coordinating ministries (e.g. Finance, Planning, Prime Minister's Office or Office of the President), Parliament, provincial authorities, NGO networks and the media, while mobilizing strong interest and commitment from development partners.

- In Mozambique under FNPP, the posting of a national consultant in the Ministry of Planning has been quite instrumental in integrating food security concerns in the country's second PRSP (the so-called PARPA II), triggering a review of the existing food security policy and mainstreaming food security in programmes at the provincial level.

Box 13: Role of institutions

In recent years, there has been a growing appreciation for the contribution of institutions to economic growth and development, defined as "the rules of the game in a society". (North, 1990:3) Institutions must be distinguished from the organizations that are developed to organize individuals to achieve defined objectives. North used the analogy of sport to illustrate the difference. (North, 1990: 4-7) There are rules (institutions) and players (organizations) in society. The rules define how the game is to be played, while the objective of the team – the organization – is to play by the rules to win the game.

In an authoritative account of the development experience of selected countries, Rodrik (2003:10) felt sufficiently confident to proclaim as follows: "Institutions that provide dependable property rights, manage conflict, maintain law and order, and align economic incentives with social costs and benefits are the foundation of long-term growth".

In UNCTAD's Trade and Development Report, 2006, Rodrik is quoted to the effect that the disappointing results of developing country policy reforms during the 1980s and 1990s illustrated the importance of the institutional underpinnings of market economies. (UNCTAD, 2006, p. 50) Market-based policy reform, in the absence of a rule of the game such as dependable property rights and those that manage conflict, did not produce the desired outcome.

(based on the South Africa case study by McCarthy)

In many case studies of FAO policy assistance activities, authors lament that FAO always had the Ministry of Agriculture as its counterpart, while it would have been more efficient and productive to work with others too. The Ministry of Agriculture often has only limited influence and political clout and this affects the credibility of the results of policy programmes and the effective implementation of recommendations. This could even backfire on FAO's reputation. For several authors, broadening FAO's contacts with a larger array of government institutions would certainly enhance the effectiveness of the assistance it provides.

- In Bangladesh, Lai explains that the counterpart agency had a limited mandate and limited authority in food-safety issues, particularly in legislative, regulatory and standard-setting roles. For action to occur, the government must be engaged at a high enough level (i.e. supra-ministerial and cross-sectoral) to secure the required degree of commitment, coordination and cooperation across sectors and subsectors. Future initiatives will need greater efforts in identifying and targeting key players and determining suitable entry-points for policy assistance.

The ability to identify and mobilize a "policy champion" in the national context who can fully support or even drive the initiative appears to be critical. The choice of the policy champion sometimes is a difficult and sensitive task. Analysts have found that organizations are more receptive to information if it is produced internally. A legitimate inside sponsor or champion can improve the likelihood that the recommendations will be owned, agreed and acted upon.

Key stakeholders may also be identified on the basis of their potential blocking power. Opponents often expect to be potential losers whereas supporters are either promoters or potential winners. Losers are clearly aware of their potential losses and quick to oppose change, while winners are much less aware that they are likely to benefit from the change in the short or the long term. Losers have incentives to organize to protect the *status quo*; winners may lack clear incentives to organize for change and therefore face some problems of collective action such as building coalitions, lobbying and advocating to support policy change.

Some case studies illustrate the critical role of key political players or eminent personalities who, because of their power, can jeopardize the whole process if not involved. The recommended analysis and diagnosis of the national context can help avoid deadlocks later in the policy assistance process if it includes a careful and focused institutional and stakeholder analysis which understands the public and private interests, roles, mandates and power relations of the various stakeholders, including consumer perspectives.

Box 14: The role of the policy champion

Policy entrepreneurs, or policy champions, generally match a particular problem with a particular solution and push for its attention on the political agenda. Because of this, the policy entrepreneur is considered to be central to the entire process.

According to Kingdon, an individual must possess three critical qualities to be considered a successful policy entrepreneur:

- expertise, including an ability to speak for others, as in the case of the leader of a powerful interest group or an authoritative decision-maker;
- political connections or negotiating skill;
- persistence. (Kingdon, 1984).

As Kingdon explains, "many potentially influential people might have expertise and political skill, but sheer tenacity pays off".

A policy champion, or policy entrepreneur, is a visionary advocate who clears the field for the triumph of the new policy. Policy champions at a high level of government are crucial to playing necessary advocacy roles in the executive and legislative arms. Although theoretically one may question the wisdom of having a national as leader of an international team because of the political pressures that might be brought to bear on him or her, it seems that this doesn't prevent achieving significant process benefits and impact.

(Ryan and Garrett, 2003)

5.2.6   Creating ownership

Creating ownership of the policy process and its results is critically important and requires a well-designed process. Ownership may be the best way to ensure an adequate degree of commitment, accountability and implementation. If ownership does not exist, most believe that the whole process may end in failure.

Ownership cannot be dictated but should be the result of exposure and voluntary commitment. As suggested by the case studies, participation is central for building ownership because it allows individual stakeholders, or coalitions formed during the process, to voice their views and interests.

As discussed previously, if local capacity exists, the analytical phase of the context analysis should be conducted jointly with counterparts to promote ownership and allow them to buy-in to the entire process from the beginning. Joint analysis during project preparation also helps establish a common understanding of policy problems and their possible solutions.

For Oxfam, the general rule to achieve a high degree of ownership is to never take the government by surprise. One way to achieve this is to design the policy assistance project with counterparts, as illustrated by the Morocco case study.

The scenario was quite different in South Africa where FAO's enthusiasm was not matched by the Government, which, as time proceeded, did not see the need to request any additional work that would not go along the lines of its own thinking. This brought the project to a standstill.

An effective way to promote ownership is to build upon national initiatives or processes so that priorities are set by the government. However, if the advice contradicts government orientations or law, it is likely to fail. As suggested earlier, seeking periodic official confirmation of the project's direction and ensuring relevance with the national context strengthens ownership. Building on earlier work done in the country can also contribute to ownership; however repeating earlier recommendations which have not been implemented without analysing the reasons for this is generally unproductive.

Box 15: Close cooperation for ownership in Morocco

The assistance was planned in close cooperation with the CGDA. A first consultant submitted a proposed structure for the CGDA. Another consultant, who had already worked in Morocco on similar topics, was recruited to provide a second opinion on the organization scheme for CGDA. He also detailed the proposals made by the first consultant with respect to the methodology and working modalities with national counterparts.

The sequencing of the consultants' intervention was excellent and FAO's follow-up both in Headquarters and at the Regional Office was well-conducted. Both the consultants worked in Rabat and could interact closely with all key stakeholders. They could also react to, include and build upon the proposals made by the national counterparts and by other structures in the Ministry of Agriculture. The national counterparts felt that they really owned the assistance project and could drive the process.

(Based on the Morocco case-study by Amouri)

5.2.7   Timeliness and time matter

Time is perceived as an essential factor of success or failure. Time can be considered from two perspectives:

* Timeliness refers to whether the assistance was provided in a timely manner at the "right place" and "right time".
* Time refers to the amount of time required for policy change to occur and to the crucial importance of time management.

Timeliness

A timely response to a request for policy assistance is often mentioned as critical. Timeliness depends largely on the agency's degree of responsiveness, which in turn depends on its internal procedures and the availability of funding. A long period of time between a request for assistance and the delivery of assistance may affect the relevance of the whole policy assistance project because the national process may have proceeded in the absence of support or another source of support may have been used. In the Libya case study, Zouaoui shows that a lag time of one year made it difficult to keep seed issues at the forefront of the Government's priorities and interest.

There is also a consensus that bad timing is a "process killer" and this is illustrated by several case studies. FAO country representatives regularly identify delays and difficulty in providing a timely response to a request for assistance as the greatest impediment, along with limited resources, to the effectiveness of FAO policy work. (FAO, 2001) Countries and donors also frequently raise this as a major problem.

The ability to answer pressing needs affects credibility significantly. It is also important to provide advice when a "policy window" opens in the national context. Providing a timely response is easier if the agency already has been proactive by placing an advisor in the country and monitoring the context and if financial and administrative procedures are agile.

Time

Policy change takes time and good time management is crucial. Time is required for planning the process, for the work of experts in the country and for the wrap-up phase.

Policy change takes time mainly because changing institutions takes time. Several cases illustrate the fact that policy assistance projects require long-term interventions when institutional reforms are at stake. Specific situations (e.g. post-conflict contexts) or difficult issues (e.g. land-policy reforms) need time to be addressed properly and require continuing assistance and support. Several cases highlighted that the continuity of assistance sometimes is affected by changes in representatives, new

donor priorities or modified strategies over time. The immediate consequence and lesson is that persistence matters.

However, for processes of long duration, it is important to maintain momentum and the interest of counterparts, as illustrated by FAO's experience in Bangladesh. This can be achieved through seminars, common progress reports and workshops that keep concerned actors actively mobilized in the assistance programme.

5.2.8 Capacity-building is central to policy assistance

Including a capacity-building component in all policy assistance activities is important to many experts and institutions surveyed for this study. It is a condition for sustainability and its importance will grow in the future, compared with more traditional assistance modalities.

For example, long-standing training programmes have helped facilitate the process in Angola. Compared with other agencies (except perhaps GTZ), FAO's policy assistance probably includes more capacity-building to reinforce human competence in the country. This aspect of FAO intervention is appreciated by the countries and has been highlighted as essential in the 2001 Evaluation of FAO's policy assistance. (FAO, 2001) Capacity-building can also empower farmers and their organizations (see Box 16).

In addition to the frequently used in-service capacity-building modalities like workshops, seminars and on-the-job training, movement of staff between academia and government also contributes to capacity-building. However, some modalities of capacity-building are being revisited. For USAID, for example, it is no longer clear that funding long-term education abroad (e.g. funding Masters and PhD degrees) as a means of investing in capacity-building for better future policy assistance processes is a factor of success for bringing policy change.

Box 16: Empowering farmers through policy assistance: the USAID experience

In its new approach, USAID learns from farmers as part of its process of designing policy advice. It disaggregates research and analysis supporting policy assistance below the macro level to examine information at the regional, village and household levels, paying attention to implementation in the real-world setting of a particular country.

To do that, it uses a collaborative approach that promotes farmer empowerment and mobilization to give them a voice in policy decision-making and uses their knowledge and information to better adapt policy to local conditions. Experiences seek an exchange in training, as opposed to a one-way traditional training experience. These experiences include market extension training to farmer and trader associations in countries such as Zambia, market information systems teams in Mozambique, Zambia and Mali, and other, more specific capacity-building examples geared toward technical issues for cultivating specific commodities, such as in the case of the Mozambique sweet potato team.

(USAID survey, 2007)

Several of the experts interviewed for this study argue that including capacity-building in policy assistance projects also is a strategic decision because the training context can be used as a safe environment to start, promote and strengthen open dialogue, particularly on sensitive issues.

- In Serbia, Alfredson shows that workshops and training programs helped create stakeholder understanding and investment in the notion of participatory forestry, while also building necessary supporting capacities. Consultations with stakeholders from across the forestry sector revealed very high confidence, enthusiasm and satisfaction with the progress that has been achieved to date.

Based on the findings of this study, it seems that capacity-building generally provided by multilateral or bilateral agencies (including FAO) is biased too much in favour of technical skills and is equated to training. The findings of this study suggest that "soft" skills (e.g. facilitation, negotiation and political economy analysis) should be given more importance in capacity-building activities, whether addressed

to national staff or to the staff of agencies providing policy assistance. Institutional development also should be considered more because it is a precondition for individuals to implement the skills they may have acquired through training.

Conclusions about the policy assistance process

- *Policy assistance is not only a technical matter. Process matters. It needs to be carefully and strategically designed, taking into account human factors, communication, participation, ownership, timing and capacity-building.*
- *To be effective, policy assistance must rest on trust. Trust is supported by reputation as well as tangible and credible references of past successful action.*
- *Trust takes time to build and a continuous institutional in-country presence helps.*
- *To be effective, policy assistance needs good communication about what is being done and about partial results. It should call for feedback to measure whether the process is on track and owned by stakeholders. Communication must be timely, targeted to the right people and packaged to be easily accessible and understandable.*
- *A good policy assistance process needs prior knowledge of the context (e.g. institutional context, capacity, "drivers of change" and stakeholders) and should include follow-up activities that will lead to effective implementation of recommendations.*
- *A smooth process requires facilitation, consensus-building and conflict resolution. Task forces have been effective venues for this purpose. Facilitation requires neutrality in cases where the conditions are favourable to change. In less favourable conditions, advocacy and alliance-building may be needed. Stakeholders with blocking power need to be identified and brought on board.*
- *For the agency providing policy assistance, the choice of the right counterpart is essential; the counterpart must have responsibility, credibility and leadership. Identifying a national policy champion(s) with expertise, authority, political skill and tenacity is critical. Caution is required to ensure that advice is not focused on the interests of the counterpart organization or the champion(s), but rather on the country as a whole.*
- *Ownership is essential for success and it is largely affected, both positively and negatively, by the policy assistance process. Building on past successful initiatives helps.*
- *Policy assistance inputs should be provided in a timely manner and should allow for time, because policy change can be a slow and sometimes erratic process.*
- *Capacity-building helps build trust, contributes to ownership and can offer a safe environment to discuss issues which are too sensitive to be discussed in a more formal setting. Its focus should not be exclusively on technical and analytical topics, but also on institutional development and on "soft" skills needed to design and manage the policy process.*

5.2.9   Implications

These conclusions about the policy assistance process have concrete implications for experts and organizations providing policy assistance:

For the experts

Before undertaking the assignment:
- Check the degree of trust and assess the reputation and credibility of the organization and its agents. These are factors in the effectiveness of the planned intervention.
- Check the extent to which information is available and disseminated. Assess whether initial documents about the policy assistance project were shared and circulated within the country to stakeholders.
- Request time and resources to initiate research on previous interventions conducted by other agencies or donors.
- Check responsiveness of the organization to the country's demand.
- Request clear indications on foreseeable follow-up activities.

During the assignment:
- Conduct extensive consultations with stakeholders in the government, private sector, academia and civil society to develop a sense of what is needed and by whom, what is available, who will support which options and how these issues will be monitored.

- Promote participation and ownership through national workshops, close association with national counterparts and follow-up meetings.
- Ensure donor and agency coordination.
- Identify difficulties and constraints for the organization on a timely basis.

After the assignment:
- Request resources in the organization to ensure adequate follow-up activities.

For the organization providing the policy assistance

Before the policy assistance intervention:
- Ensure a continuous in-country institutional presence.[3] This in-country presence ideally should be in place prior to the policy assistance intervention. Its roles are to perform policy-intelligence activities, network and dialogue with official and shadow players and identify policy windows for forthcoming policy changes.
- If an in-country presence does not exist, make arrangements for the requested policy assistance.
- Encourage agencies' country offices to work with national ministries other than the line ministries dealing with their own sector of specialization.
- Urge the policy assistance project formulators to deliver a timely response.

During the policy assistance intervention:
- Engage in continuous policy dialogue with key stakeholders.
- Offer training opportunities to national experts at the national, regional and international levels.
- Include institutional development to strengthen national capacity in an effective way and ensure its sustainability.
- Include "soft" topics, other than technical and analytical topics, in capacity-building for policy work. Use negotiation skills extensively to overcome deadlocks and help all stakeholders understand their underlying interests (i.e. as opposed to their apparent positions).

After the policy assistance intervention:
- Mobilize resources to follow-up implementation of recommendations.
- Continue and maintain in-country policy intelligence.
- Liaise with institutions in charge of policy advice implementation.

5.3   Expertise

5.3.1   A multidisciplinary team with technical and "soft" skills

The composition of the expert team for the policy assistance programme will depend on the policy issue being addressed and the existing capacity within the country. Conducting an analysis of existing national capacities, which was discussed earlier, will be important to identify what expertise needs to be mobilized from outside the country. It is desirable to combine national, regional and international experts on the team. National experts, in addition to their specific technical abilities, possess good knowledge of the national context and its dynamics and a network of contacts that can help gain access to high-level decision-makers. National experts can also access the existing institutional memory. Regional and international experts bring technical skills, direct knowledge and experience and lessons learned worldwide or in neighbouring countries. However, over-reliance on international experts may interfere with creating national dynamics, enhancing ownership and building local capacities.

The complexity of policy work and policy processes requires mobilizing many skills and abilities. There is broad agreement that in addition to having sound technical and analytical skills in the areas related to the policy issues (e.g. economics, agriculture, forestry, trade or rural development), it is also critical

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3   For an individual organization or a group of "allied" organizations. This presence does not need to be residential, but also could be ensured through regular contacts or missions.

for the team to possess skills required for the "soft" aspects of policy work (e.g. developing profiles on the political economy, political science, sociology, negotiating and facilitating). In all cases, flexibility is required to select the appropriate expertise and team composition that is well-suited to the national context and the type of policy assistance envisaged.

Box 17: Composition of the team in Bangladesh

In the case study conducted in Bangladesh, the size and structure of the project team was problematic. Besides the team leader, who was present intermittently and only for short periods of time to provide inputs, there were 14 national consultants and only one international consultant. The large number of national consultants was possibly in response to recent evaluations regarding the excessive use of international consultants and inadequate national participation in earlier FAO policy assistance interventions. Nevertheless, the large number of consultants presented challenges for the resident principal national consultant, who was responsible for team management, quality control and integration of individual inputs.

The size of this project team also appears to have been an attempt to provide subject matter specialists for the large number of programme areas (i.e. 18 in all). However, despite the size of the team, there were gaps and inadequacies in technical expertise for the type of policy assistance required (e.g. in nutrition and food safety). The limited project budget required a vast reduction in the number of international consultants. Also the team was missing key inputs for institutional and stakeholder analysis, action planning, monitoring and evaluation. A smaller team of carefully selected individuals and a better balance of experienced national and international consultants would have been preferable under the circumstances.

(based on the Bangladesh case-study by Lai)

The ability to understand the decision-making process is an important "soft" skill that was stressed by several organizations (i.e. DFID, EC, ODI and OPM). This refers to the ability to capture local and internal dynamics, describe power relations and understand influential networks. If the team does not possess the ability to understand the informal politics, the policy assistance project may have difficulty moving matters forward effectively.

Box 18: Drivers of Change

Failure of development programmes is often explained by a lack of political will within the country. However, it is rare to find attempts to deal directly with the sources of this problem or to conduct serious analysis of where the country is, where it is coming from, or where it is heading.

"Drivers of Change" is the name of a learning exercise at the national level that recognizes these weaknesses and tries to overcome them by reversing the relationship between country-focused understanding and programme design. It is an effort to adopt a more historically-informed, less technocratic approach to assistance. The exercise focuses on the way change happens and how economic, social and political factors interact over the long term.

(Based on Drivers of Change and Development in Malawi, David Booth, Diana Cammack, Jane Harrigan, Edge Kanyongolo, Mike Mataure and Naomi Ngwira, 2005-2006)

Other "soft" skills that are required throughout the process are facilitation and negotiation. These skills are particularly important in cases where conditions are not favourable to policy change or where there are strong disagreements or conflicts about the policy issue. Negotiation and conflict-resolution skills are of paramount importance because most policy assistance projects involve dealing with people and organizations with different attitudes, opinions, interests and working practices. Some contributors expressed the view that policy change is ultimately the outcome of a process in which coalitions form blocks to exclude or minimize the gains of other coalitions with diverging interests.

Box 19: Negotiation skills

Negotiation skills enable people with differing objectives or perceptions of these objectives to communicate, discuss and agree on something. Negotiation skills are required when it is recognized that either visible or hidden conflicts may threaten an entire process.

Conflicts of interests are very often part of policy formulation processes because of interactions between potential winners and losers. What really matters is not whether one group may actually lose, but whether a group *perceives* that it may lose something with the introduction of the policy change. For this reason, policy analysts must possess skills to overcome existing, growing or potential conflicts.

Negotiation skills are useful for experts who must facilitate the process among stakeholders who may have incompatible or opposite positions on a particular issue. By using these skills, policy analysts help stakeholders go beyond bargaining their positions to negotiating based on their interests. People may then recognize underlying motivations and needs that are compatible with those of other parties in the long run.

5.3.2   Mobilizing high-level technical capacity

While "soft" skills are important, sound technical and analytical expertise also are required in all policy assistance initiatives. Experience and high-level technical and analytical expertise give more strength and credibility to recommendations. Sound technical capabilities can help unravel complex issues and ensure that the assistance is relevant to the context, meets the identified needs and is based on the latest knowledge and world experience. High-level expertise also is critical for simplifying complex issues and offering credible narratives or "stories" that policy-makers can use to form their decisions. As stated by Keeley, "The effect of narratives is to close down policy space, policy space being understood as the room to pursue different approaches to policy". (Keeley, 1997)

Policy narratives affect policy-making in several ways. They:
- name and classify (i.e. "label") groups;
- "frame" issues to be tackled;
- make policy solutions seem obvious and unquestionable;
- "depoliticize" policy decisions and recast them in the (supposedly) neutral language of science. (based on Salvatici and Quieti, 2003)

The major drawback associated with high-level expertise is overconfidence, which can occur in both the "provider" and "receiver" of policy assistance. As stated by experts interviewed in WTO and WHO, overconfidence can kill the process.

5.3.3   Building on credibility and reputation

Almost all those consulted for this study mentioned the need for references or for a credible basis for experts' advice. This is referred to as a need for evidence-based policy assistance. Adding new information to a policy-maker's understanding can be key to persuading him or her to adopt advice. However, research has also shown the value of confirmatory research that reinforces current understanding and policies. (Weiss, 1980) Justification and criteria of legitimacy could come from:

- sound analysis of the context using proven analytical tools and techniques;
- empirical research, field activities and models through published material;
- experiences from elsewhere or from pilots conducted in-country.

Process-oriented criteria of adequacy are also necessary, although not sufficient, to assess the quality of policy analysis and policy assistance. Different criteria apply to each element of the analysis, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Criteria of adequacy

ANALYTIC COMPONENT	CRITERIA OF ADEQUACY
Data	Reliability, reproducibility, credibility (for exogenous data)
Information	Relevance, sufficiency, goodness of fit, robustness
Evidence	Reliability, admissibility, strength
Argument	Cogency, persuasiveness, clarity
Conclusion	Plausibility, feasibility, acceptability

Source: Majone, 1989

Agencies that rely excessively on contracting out activities to consultancy firms or individual experts run the risk of not capitalizing on the experience that could otherwise be gained. It is partly because of this reason that USAID changed its policy from relying heavily on competing private firms to provide consultancy services to a system of partnering with several US academic institutions that allows for learning and capitalizing on knowledge.

Credibility is sometimes difficult to obtain but very easy to lose. This is particularly the case when there is no shared, common position on a specific issue and contradictory messages are sent by experts from different parts of the same organization. This tends to undermine the reputation of the organization as a reliable source of consistent advice. This can affect the overall credibility of the organization's advice, even in areas where there is consensus. Transparent internal processes of review and quality performance appraisal mechanisms also contribute to strengthen credibility.

Policy-makers seem to respond better to advice that comes from institutions with a reputation for quality, credibility and objectivity. In an environment where interest groups bring their own views to influence major policy questions, a reputed independent view from an institution of standing can have a strong impact on decisions.

Conclusions about expertise

- *Expertise in policy assistance programmes should be multidisciplinary and combine sound technical and analytical skills (e.g. economics, agriculture, forestry, trade or rural development), with skills for the "soft" aspects of policy work (e.g. political economy, sociology, negotiation and facilitation).*
- *Teams of experts should include a mix of national and regional or international experts.*
- *Experience and high-level technical and analytical expertise give more strength and credibility to recommendations. However, high-level experts may exude overconfidence, which can kill the process.*
- *Advice must be based on evidence (e.g. analysis, research, lessons from elsewhere and/or pilots) and its effectiveness is supported by the reputation of the agency providing the assistance.*
- *To be more effective, organizations providing policy assistance need to strengthen their "soft" skills required to design and manage the policy process, either by recruiting staff with those skills or by capacity-building.*

5.3.4   Implications

The importance of expertise in policy assistance has the following implications for experts and organizations:

For the experts

Before undertaking the assignment:

- Request time to build a well-composed team including both national and international experts who can understand the drivers of change and local dynamics. The presence of one prominent figure in the team can help strengthen credibility.
- Assess the team's and organization's reputation and credibility and, if necessary, strengthen them (e.g. through dissemination of academic references, networks, etc).
- Ensure that team members demonstrate real knowledge and understanding of the national policy debate and local dynamics.
- Work out ideas and suggestions within the team and, prior to intervention, promote policy dialogue about the issues for which the policy assistance is requested.
- Request clear indications of foreseeable follow-up activities from the technical agency providing policy assistance.

During the assignment:

- Spend time developing an in-depth understanding of the decision-making process, including the influence of in-country policy networks and shadow networks.
- Communicate your organization's experience and references through evidence (e.g. analysis, research, lessons from elsewhere and/or pilots). Use credible references to support recommendations and influence the policy process.

For the team leader

- Demonstrate specific skills including:
  - management capacity to ensure coherence and unity of the team;
  - ability to enhance the authority and credibility of the team as a whole;
  - capacity to facilitate communication and practice negotiation within the team and with government officials or decision-makers.
- Be aware of the need to balance sound analytical and technical skills with "soft" skills and use those skills at critical stages in the policy assistance process.

For the organization providing policy assistance

Before the policy assistance intervention:
- Avoid the "one size fits all" approach to providing expertise.
- Mobilize multidisciplinary teams:
  - Build a specific team for each case of policy assistance and adapt a combination of experts to the local conditions and context.
  - Include a mix of national and regional or international experts.
  - Include facilitation- and negotiation-related tasks in the experts' terms of reference.

During the policy assistance intervention:
- Invest in monitoring contacts and networking at national, regional and international levels:
  - Use country intelligence to identify policy priorities and adapt regional and global contexts.
  - Identify and mobilize policy champions.
  - Capitalize on every success, including using media, to strengthen the reputation of the process.

After the policy assistance intervention:

- Assess the performance of experts.

5.4   Management and Coordination

5.4.1   Good design

One factor for success in policy assistance is to have a well-designed activity. Good design includes the following characteristics:

- a process that includes consulting with the main actors and formulating a detailed work plan, including a realistic schedule and clear responsibilities, that fosters national ownership and anticipates progressive handover to the national authorities;
- clear objectives, outcomes, outputs and assigned responsibilities;
- flexibility to adapt to changing national conditions, priorities and needs;
- willingness to take risk in innovations and accept the consequences for mistakes or failures;
- resources sufficient to achieve expected outputs and outcomes and to conduct the analyses required to understand the context of the policy assistance activity and to identify key stakeholders;
- a monitoring and evaluation mechanism that allows for the possibility of making adjustments or reformulating the activity if needed.

Flexibility

Policy processes require time and may become more complex as they proceed. Flexibility is important in managing policy assistance activities to be able to adapt to a changing environment and respond to changes required in the content or duration of the activity. This does not eliminate the need for precise work plans with clear responsibilities, benchmark outputs and deadlines which form the basis for the accountability of all those involved in the process (FNPP Food Security, 2007).

Box 20: FAO-Netherlands Partnership Programme (FNPP)

The FNPP is a policy-oriented programme characterized by:

- Flexibility; its design is based on clearly-specified outputs and outcomes and on a series of ten basic principles. This allows for the possibility of adapting to local needs and conditions.
- A medium-term perspective; the programme is designed to last for a period of three years with possible extensions. This allows activities to be planned over a time horizon that is sufficient to generate outputs and some policy outcomes.
- Being supportive of innovation; one of the three main objectives of this policy-oriented programme is "to support the reform within FAO by substance-driven innovations, including FAO's working method at the country level". It therefore encourages innovation and risk-taking.
- Emphasis on learning from the experience generated by its activities.

The second phase of the programme (2004-2008) is currently active in more than 15 countries, providing policy assistance in three thematic areas: food security, forests and agrobiodiversity. The total budget is EURO 20 million (or USD 30 million at current exchange rate). The programme has demonstrated how it can be responsive to government needs and generate policy outcomes at the country level, by using the knowledge and expertise in the Organization.

The risk of innovations

Pilots that test new policy modalities can be instrumental in generating information to convince policy-makers of the value of proposed policy changes. Pilots contain a certain element of risk (such as testing new approaches or methodologies, for example) which governments and technical and funding agencies must be ready to accept. At UNICEF, experts interviewed for this study recognize that

donors are willing to innovate and pay for the consequences of possible failures. This is strong encouragement for UNICEF to try new approaches.

Sufficient resources

The duration and budget of policy projects often are not commensurate with the objectives of the policy assistance activity or the national policy process. This is particularly the case for the frequently utilized FAO Technical Cooperation Projects (TCPs) which are characterized by short durations (i.e. maximum of two years) and relatively modest budgets (i.e. less than USD 400 000). The inadequacy of these projects for many policy assistance situations was identified during the evaluation of FAO's policy assistance activities. (FAO, 2001) FAO has fewer financial resources now than before and countries feel that the response time is much longer than it was a decade or two ago. This affects FAO's capacity to support national and subregional policy processes.

- In Argentina, Kerrigan shows that the objectives and ambitions of the project were above what could be expected to be achieved by a project like an FAO TCP with its limited duration and budget.
- In Saint Lucia, Renard raised a similar point although the fisheries policy project was part of a longer process and benefited over a long period of time from support from the FAO Fisheries Officer working in the FAO subregional office in Barbados.

Evaluation mechanisms

Several of the agencies consulted in this study emphasized the importance of evaluation mechanisms. What is still lacking in most organizations is a systematic use of evaluations to draw lessons that can help improve the way policy assistance activities are managed.

- At FAO, experience shows that ongoing evaluation and quality control should be more systematic to ensure that analysis of issues is comprehensive, well-grounded in theory and practice, objective and adheres to high quality standards.
- At USAID, evaluation is seen as an activity accompanying the policy assistance process and it is therefore conducted throughout the life span of the process. The "mid-life evaluation", conducted half way through the project, enables mid-course adjustments and highlights elements of policy assistance that have yielded good results and which could be replicated in similar policy assistance projects. In some cases, it can also lead to closing down unsuccessful programmes. The final evaluation helps to crystallize experiences and provides inputs for cross-country learning.
- At UNDP and FAO, evaluation results increasingly require a "management response" where managers are asked to react to evaluation recommendations and lessons learned and indicate what kind of follow-up action they will take.
- At the World Bank, quality control and evaluation are omni-present (see Box 21) to the extent that some staff members believe that control and evaluation requirements have become excessive and tend to stall some Bank operations.

The results of policy assistance projects can be seen only after a long period of time which is usually beyond the duration of a project. This is particularly true for projects with a large capacity-building component. The result may be that long-term projects may prove very effective at the end of their process but may reflect poorly in short-term evaluations. This is why it is important to conduct assessments of policy outcome some time after completion of the project. As suggested by Jawara in the case of FAO in Sierra-Leone, country offices should continue to monitor the adoption of policy recommendations and provide feedback to relevant units in Regional Offices or Headquarters.

Box 21: Evaluation and quality control at the World Bank

At the World Bank, there are several internal mechanisms to increase the quality of the Bank's overall performance, including its policy assistance activites. Two of these mechanisms are the Quality Assurance Group (QAG) and the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG).

Established a decade ago, the QAG is part of the office of the Managing Director of Operations. It was established to ameliorate the Bank's performance, with special emphasis on the quality of its operations and their results, and to facilitate internal learning from the Bank's own experience in defining and implementing its policies, programs and general activities.

QAG selects projects, policies or operations in a random manner to render a study sample large enough to be able to generalize conclusions. However, all activities in the Bank are encouraged to be prepared for the possibility of being studied, which in itself can work as a quality-assurance incentive. Projects considered to be at risk of not complying with their development objectives are paid particular attention.

An assessment is conducted by a team of from three to five members, comprised of internal and external operations personnel and experts – including a country expert – for each exercise. These teams follow a series of quality standards and assessment methodologies. Focus areas include project relevance, approach, implementation, risk assessment and management and examine aspects of the project including technical, financial and economic, poverty and social, environmental, fiduciary and policy and institutional aspects.

The IEG is an independent group that evaluates the Bank's main activities and projects at the end of their life-span. The IEG has a double function: On the one hand, evaluation by IEG exerts pressure on project teams to perform better. On the other IEG evaluations add on the Bank's experience by analyzing overlooked factors and extracting important lessons – i.e. what works, what does not. Sometimes it examines the performance of a portfolio of projects both finalized and on-going in a "performance assessment". IEG's evaluation tools used in promoting accountability and learning are project reviews, country assistance evaluations, sector and thematic reviews and process reviews.

(based on the World Bank survey by Gonzalez, 2006)

5.4.2   Operation of policy assistance interventions

Problems of bureaucracy

There is a broad agreement that the flexibility and agility required for policy assistance does not coexist well with complex administrative and bureaucratic rules.

In several of the projects reviewed, complex bureaucratic procedures and centralized decision-making in administrative and financial matters were felt to be a hindrance to effective operations because they were a source of delays and frustration, particularly in national counterpart agencies. However, as stated by ODI, there is a clear need for safeguards in the use of resources, particularly in countries where transparency is not guaranteed and corruption is present. Requests for numerous and lengthy reports are not recommended. Unnecessary bureaucracy affects the reputation of the technical agency providing the support. This type of problem is present in larger organizations such as FAO, the World Bank, WHO and the EC.

On-going monitoring

Effective operational management should monitor the status of project delivery and can serve as an early-warning system of project failure. In case of project failure, procedures should be in place to close an activity. FAO's Field Programme Management Information System (FPMIS) offers a good example of such a system where all information relevant to a particular project can be kept and compared with information that keeps track of progress and alerts to problems of delivery. Links between information systems and actual decision-making need to be strong.

- In Sierra Leone, several operational problems that could have been avoided created some dissatisfaction for the government.

o   While the project formulation phase of the Agriculture Sector Review was very good and consultations with the Government and the creation of an Agriculture Sector Review National Steering Committee were commended, the choice of some specialists was questioned.
o   The time frame and arena were appropriate, but there were some concerns about time management once the process began because some international specialists left before completing their tasks. International specialists arrived at poorly synchronized times as the project unfolded, causing planning and coordination bottlenecks.

Some of these problems could have been avoided if personnel procedures were more flexible and decentralized or if there was more flexibility in budgets. In the case of FNPP (FNPP, 2006), some activities were postponed or aborted when it was realized that there were no prospects for achieving outcomes due to institutional dysfunctions or in case too many donors were involved. Other activities benefited from additional resources because they were particularly successful, presented opportunities for follow-up or additional work, or generated additional demand for support from governments. Flexible delivery of inputs is also critical to fit with the pace of the policy process.

Responsiveness

Another important aspect of the operations of policy assistance activities is the responsiveness of the institution. (FAO, 2001) Good responsiveness enables the organization to seize opportunities and respond effectively to requests for assistance. Responsiveness is made possible by the rapid availability of funds and procedures for approving administrative actions.

•   The FNPP offers an interesting case where a fund has been made available to FAO based on a very broad policy framework which stipulates the focus area of the programme (e.g. food security, forests and agrobiodiversity), ten basic principles and the broad outcomes the programme is expected to generate. The authority to approve activities is left to theme coordinators who can mobilize resources very rapidly; several activities were initiated in three months compared to a "normal" average response time of more than six months. Annual programme reporting and evaluation (i.e. mid-term and final) will check whether principles were respected and expected outcomes were generated.

5.4.3   Internal organization of the policy assistance provider

Certain factors about the internal organization of the agency providing policy assistance appear to be important for the effectiveness of the support provided. These include:

•   strong country-level leadership capable of dialoguing with the government and other stakeholders in the process of setting the policy agenda;
•   clear delineation of responsibilities, coordination and dialogue within the organization to avoid conflicts;
•   focus on outcomes rather than outputs or activities;
•   good technical support by regional or central offices for country-level activities to ensure quality;
•   allocation of resources for monitoring the policy context and climate to identify opportunities for proposing timely policy assistance and for follow-up during the post-project period.

Strong Leadership

A strong country office and leadership is essential to identify possible needs for policy assistance, engage in a high-level policy dialogue with government and monitor implementation of policy recommendations.

•   The EC promotes policy dialogue at the country level to identify needs and monitor assistance programmes and projects. It reviews national strategies when they exist and identifies ways of supporting them. Staff members of EC delegations prepare country strategy papers which define priority areas for action in two selected focal sectors. EC money is then channelled to these focal sectors. A similar approach is adopted at the regional level, in cooperation with regional economic organizations.

- The Morocco case study also emphasizes the potential role of the FAO representative in conducting initial consultations with the government at the time of identifying or formulating policy assistance activities and during implementation, when the representative should monitor progress and ensure follow-up. Identifying needs for policy assistance could be conducted through periodic workshops.

Skills development

Country offices need to develop the skills to engage in a policy dialogue. Skills development can also be supported by decentralization of resources (as in the case of UNICEF) to allow for experimentation and policy innovation. This in-country capacity does not need to be developed by each organization but could be developed more efficiently jointly by the organizations in the country, or by a subset of them (e.g. the UN Country Team) to avoid duplication and waste of resources.

- UNICEF has taken steps to improve policy dialogue and assistance. One step has been a learning process to engage in dialogue with finance ministries. It has also identified the need to make its staff more knowledgeable in finance and public accounts and to give them the tools to press for "socially responsible" budget-making. It is therefore currently training its staff in economic and finance principles and analysis of public expenditures.
- FAO is training its country representatives in the area of policies and strategies; its first course was organized in May/June 2007. The organization is also implementing a training programme to develop staff's negotiation skills.

Clear responsibilities

Delineation of responsibilities and coordination is needed in the institution providing policy assistance to prevent any risk of cacophony, competition or even conflicts among units involved in a particular activity. In the absence of clear responsibilities, there is a risk of reduced effectiveness and damage to the institution's credibility. Often several units of the same agency intervene and this requires coordination to avoid overlaps or even conflicts.

Conclusions about management of policy assistance

- *Good management of policy assistance starts with good design of policy projects or programmes, where stakeholders are consulted, flexibility is allowed to adapt to changing circumstances and resources are sufficient to analyse the policy context and include monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Good management also includes closing down activities when there are no prospects for achieving outcomes.*

- *Administrative and financial procedures should allow for initiative (e.g. responsiveness to requests for assistance, rapid recruitment procedures and flexibility in budget lines, programme duration and scheduling of delivery of inputs), while safeguarding the proper use of resources.*

- *Management should be decentralized, while maintaining a strong country office and leadership able to monitor the policy climate and engage in high-level policy dialogue.*

6

CONCLUSIONS

Policy is a complex and difficult topic. Policy assistance is even more challenging because it entails interaction between "insiders" – those who are responsible for developing policies – and "outsiders" – those who can provide assistance or are willing to engage in a policy partnership. This interaction, while deliberate and welcomed by those involved, is complex because it involves people with different backgrounds, cultures, visions and interests who aim to achieve change that can be perceived as a success by all players. Framed like this, policy assistance appears to be a very challenging field of work.

The only two factors that external players can manage in providing policy assistance are selecting the expertise and designing a process to influence the national policy process. All the other factors that influence the context in which external players operate (e.g. national and international dimensions, competition, culture, history, reputation, visible and hidden local dynamics, etc.), are beyond their control. Fortunately, expertise and process are critical factors that can make policy assistance effective and the context can be dealt with creatively through good management of these two factors. This study clearly highlights the central role of the policy assistance process and if observed trends in policy assistance continue, they will likely reinforce the critical importance that process plays in policy assistance effectiveness.

As a consequence, the major lesson for international or bilateral agencies is that the way policy assistance has been regarded for decades has to be significantly amended. If technical soundness traditionally has been given prominence in determining the effectiveness of policy assistance, this is no longer sufficient; technical skills must be complemented and preceded by "soft" skills.

In this paper, implications have been identified for experts and organizations providing policy assistance. One major question remains: If the suggested "good practices" are applied, will it be sufficient to make successful policy assistance projects? It is very important for organizations that provide policy assistance to elaborate on the implications identified here and put them into practice in their future activities, so that once these implications are evaluated, conclusions made here will be either reinforced or challenged and thus contribute to the ultimate production of authoritative guidelines.

To move forward with this endeavour, several steps could be implemented in the wake of this study:

- **Disseminate the results of this study and identify their implications in the context of each individual organization providing policy assistance.**
  At FAO, this would entail organizing a series of internal workshops at headquarters and possibly in regional offices to further elaborate the implications highlighted in this report and put them in context for FAO. This process would generate recommendations on how policy assistance could be improved and those recommendations could be implemented in new policy assistance activities. If these good practices led to success, then the next step would be to draft policy assistance guidelines.

- **Develop a method of policy intelligence and test it in a few countries.**
  The participants of the FAO workshop in Rome in April 2007 agreed on the usefulness of establishing country policy-intelligence systems to contribute to improving the effectiveness of policy assistance. The interest of several partners, such as CIRAD, FAO, ODI and OXFAM, was confirmed in March 2008 during a workshop on policy intelligence held at FAO headquarters. The challenge in designing these systems is to find a balance between the information needed and the resources required to develop and maintain that information.

The immediate step would be to design a prototype of an intelligence system that would provide the essential information without necessitating tools for information collection and analysis that would be too elaborate and costly.

The second step then would be to test this prototype in one or two countries, possibly as a cooperative endeavour. One possibility would be to try it out as a common system for all UN agencies in one of the One-UN countries. Another possibility would be to test it in a country where other multilateral or bilateral agencies or NGOs which were actively involved in this study (e.g. CIRAD, GTZ, Oxfam or DFID) would be interested in working with FAO.

- **Reinforce the results of this study by analysing some further experiences.**
  The framework used in this study to analyse selected FAO policy assistance projects could be applied to projects of other cooperating partners to cross-check, validate or challenge findings. CIRAD staff at the Rome workshop suggested conducting a comparison of projects conducted by FAO and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs because it potentially would allow for more lessons to be learned on both sides. Another way would be to analyse the outcomes of newly-launched activities that would adopt the practices recommended in this report.

- **Network.**
  The informal network created through consultations during this study and participation in the Rome workshop could be strengthened. There is considerable interest in the international community about issues related to the effectiveness of policy assistance. The group constituted in Rome, perhaps reinforced by other organizations that could not make it to the April workshop, could liaise and cooperate together. The group could have periodic meetings to review progress made on suggestions included here and others that will be formulated as work progresses.