



CONCEPT NOTE

Strategy: Develop and compare different policy options

1. Background and Purpose

When talking about influencing policymaking process, there is always the question why some of the ideas are picked up and acted on while others are ignored. Or in other words: how can you as a civil society organisation market your ideas so that they are noticed? What do you have to do to influence policies in an evidence-based direction? - The answers to these questions lie in a combination of several determining factors, which can be divided into three areas of a strategic framework.

(A) The evidence, and how it is communicated

Research plays a paramount role in the critical exploration and analysis of issues related to political reforms and the effects of institutional arrangements. In each country, the academic system of social sciences and research is a potential driver for political reform. In most countries, the most relevant limitation of the Social Science Sector can be seen in its weak contribution to evidence-based policy-making processes. The system is not fully developed to provide evidence-based knowledge that can be fed into political decision-making and public debate on reform processes. Social sciences are able to draw attention to alternative policy options, reinforce the necessity of certain political reforms, and nurture public debate. They impact the identification and perception of burning issues, and help to identify possible solutions.

The degree of attention paid to circulating ideas is determined not just by their quality but also by the way and by whom these ideas are communicated. Whether or not an idea is able to elicit an engaged response from actors depends on a range of factors, such as the perceived credibility of the source, the way it's communicated, the language, the timing, etc.

Guiding Question:

Do we have strong and evidence-based arguments in favour of the policy proposal?

(B) The links and relations between the stakeholders involved

New policies emerge from a policy network of interested stakeholders. The quality of relations and interactions among themselves is key for successful negotiation leading to acceptable compromise. This also applies to the political issues which should be connected to make it to the decision-making level. The better the idea is embedded in formal or informal networks and media, among opinion leaders and lobbyists, the higher the chance of it being considered in the policy making process. The best idea at the wrong place, at the wrong moment, with the wrong people - is useless.

Guiding Question:

Do we have the right connections to back up, communicate, and lobby for the policy proposal?

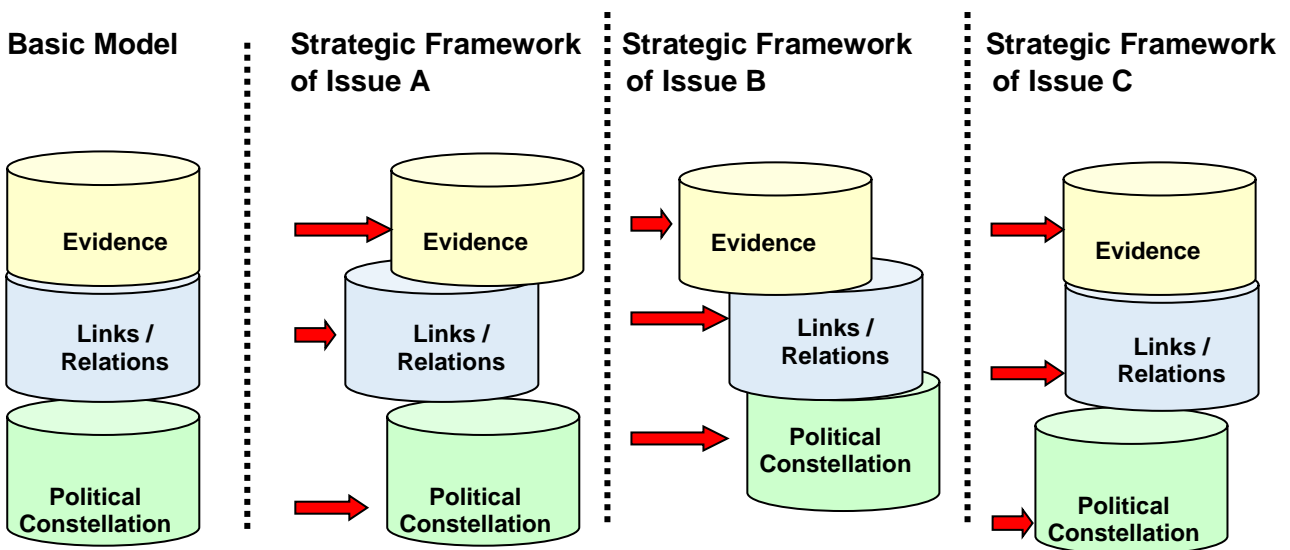
(C) The political constellation

If and what evidence and policy proposal can be pushed or blocked is highly dependent on the actual political constellation. The political climate (i.e., democratic procedures, freedom of association, culture of dialogue, willingness to compromise, respect for diversity, etc.), the policy agenda of the stakeholders involved in negotiation, as well as other political dynamics that may emerge from media

and public debate, have a strong influence on the policymaking process, particularly on the degree of acceptance for new political issues and institutional change. When wanting to influence policies, it is crucial to look out for the political windows of opportunity, i.e., for the political constellation that favours the specific policy change proposal.

Guiding Question:
Is the actual political constellation in favour of the policy proposal?

When looking at these three determining factors, it is important to keep in mind that not all three of them are always of the same importance. Depending on the issue, a stakeholder will focus more on one or the other factor to influence the policymaking process. When different reform options are discussed, the comparison of the strategic frameworks may be a powerful way of assessing different options.



→ The arrow depicts the degree of attention that should be paid to this factor. The longer the arrow, the more critical is the factor.

2. Tool Application

The above discussed strategic framework lends itself to a concrete application in assessing different options, highlighting different strategic options to increase the impact of the policy proposal. The table below may be used as guideline for discussion of possible policy influencing measures.

Guiding Questions	Objectives	Strategic Options
<p>Evidence & Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can the academia and social research contribute? • What are specific research questions? • What are the prevailing narratives about the proposed reform options? • What are the opportunities for knowledge inputs into the negotiation processes? • What are the promising corridors of incidence? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academia and social research institutes provided evidence-based knowledge on different reform options. • Knowledge is adequately communicated and shared with different stakeholders and public audiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build up research partnerships according to the reform agenda work. • Facilitate face-to-face communication and organise informal meetings between stakeholders and research. • Use participatory approaches to disseminate and share evidence. • Share evidence with different audiences?
<p>Links & Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the key stakeholders? Whose side are they on? • What power resources do they have? • What links to formal and informal networks exist? • How are the stakeholders using media and public debate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linkages between stakeholders are strengthened. • The policy network includes all relevant stakeholders? • Relations and communication among stakeholders are improved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure participation by empowering disadvantaged stakeholders. • Work out an agreement on agenda and procedures. • Organise hearings with researchers, experts, affected people of reforms and stakeholders.
<p>Political Constellation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there willingness for a meaningful dialogue? • How is the demand for political reforms expressed? • Is there an explicit recognition of diversity of interests? • Is there an agreed agenda for negotiations? • How far democratic procedures are respected by the stakeholders? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved framework conditions such as democratic procedures, freedom of association, culture of dialogue, willingness to compromise, and respect for diversity) facilitate the negotiation of reform options. • Constraints to meaningful dialogue and negotiations are identified and addressed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work directly with powerful stakeholders to get to know constraints and bottlenecks. • Line up research programmes with the reform agenda. • Organise public debate to increase pressure for action. • Analyse the force field of potential supporters and opponents. • Find the right set of stakeholders and adequate suitable timing for action. • Monitor the process.

Adapted from SDC-GISD and ODI, Tools for Policy Impact, A Handbook for Researchers.

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