

## Policy Makers are Not Monolithic – and We Need Different Forms of Evidence for Different Types of Policy Makers

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### How can evidence be best prepared, packaged and made available so it has the highest chance of impact?

Reflecting on the work MEAS has done over the past four years and thinking about evidence for influencing policy processes two points stand out:

#### 1. Policy makers are not monolithic.

There are a lot of different types of policy makers that are important and whom we are trying to influence. But to influence them, we need to think about how their differences affect the way we package our messages and what type of messages they're able to receive. For example, think about policy that is made in Washington, D.C. that affects ministries of agriculture all around the world. In the World Bank; in bilateral donors; in international organizations like the Inter-American Development Bank: All of these kinds of organizations, those are policy makers. Their ability to handle information, to assess the quality of information is different than policy makers at the local level and so we need to formulate different kinds of messages. There are three categories that I think we need to keep in mind.

The first is the international level. These are thought leaders in international agriculture extension and RAS and many of them are not convinced of the value of investments in RAS and so we need to step up the quality of the information about what is working. We need to be honest about what's not working and try to understand why it's not working, but communicate it at a level they can understand. They're looking for high-quality evidence. That means peer-reviewed journal articles, high-impact books, conferences; these types of things. They hire consultants so that PhDs can criticize each other's work and they listen to those people. We need to influence them. So that's the first level.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is based on comments made by Paul McNamara as part of Key Note Panel at the 5th annual GFRAS meeting, September 23, 2014.

Second, there are the national level policy makers. Again, they're not monolithic. We often think of the minister of agriculture but I would contend that actually the minister of finance is the policy maker that we need to be thinking about the most. How do we get the minister of finance to understand that the programs we're talking about are about poverty abnegation and economic development and growing the economic face? Have we made the case? Have we presented information that can convince people who are not convinced because they're getting a paycheck through our programs? That's the standard at the national level. And we are not there yet. There are many skeptics that we need to convince. Also, in many countries the local level is critical for policy making. In decentralized government systems, local governments control budgets. In many countries we've seen money that did go into agriculture, but shifted into other sectors because local assembly men and local assembly women were not convinced of the value of these programs for their own people. We need to put information in front of them that helps.

So first thing is that policy makers are not monolithic. We need to appreciate that when we think about evidence. Everybody may not be able to understand the research report from when and RCT, but many of those people might hire a consultant who was influenced by the research report on the RCT.

**2. We need a variety of forms of evidence to meet the needs of the different policy makers.** We need this rigorous type of evidence that David Spielman<sup>2</sup> from IFPRI was talking about. That's essential. It's really lacking when I think of other fields I have worked in health and education. The standards of evidence and quality are different and we need that kind of summited impact and evidence. Second thing, we need very transparent monitoring information within our own agencies, the Ministry of Agriculture. It has to be accessible. It has to be accepted as valid and reliable. That's talking about the program that affects the amount of services delivered that has to be available. The monitoring and impact and it has to be high quality and if it's not, we need third party verification.

The third thing on information is sometimes the most impactful information is not from a report, but it's because somebody is aware of a program, they've been affected by it and they tell their representative in congress or senate or in the national assembly and those are farmer associations, farmer leaders, especially the ones who are not getting money from projects or receiving direct services. These are extremely valuable pieces of information that convince policy makers.

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<sup>2</sup> See proceedings of the 5th GFRAS Annual Meeting at [www.g-fras.org/en/events/gfras-events/annual-meeting-2014-argentina.html](http://www.g-fras.org/en/events/gfras-events/annual-meeting-2014-argentina.html)