

Influence on Policy Making

Enhancing capacity, knowledge, policies

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In 2006, IDRC completed a wide-ranging evaluation of the support it gave to research networks during the decade 1995-2005. This assessment included a review of IDRC’s documentation, interviews with key players, a learning forum, and a telephone and e-mail questionnaire survey addressed to hundreds of network coordinators and members.

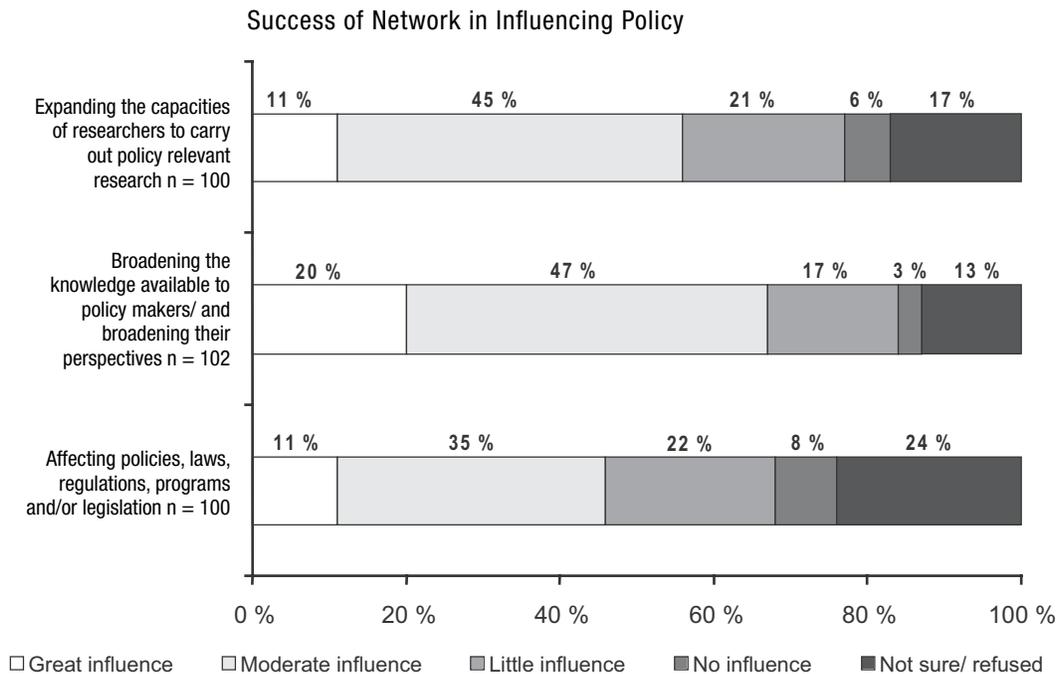
Among its findings, the survey assembled rich and detailed responses from 110 coordinators describing the impact of their networks on the creation of public policy.

THE BIG PICTURE

The survey explored three types of influence on the policy-making process:

- * enhancing the capacity of the network to carry out policy-relevant research; that is, improving the *institutional* framework that supports policy making;
- * broadening the knowledge and perspectives of politicians and other policy-making officials, that is, improving the *intellectual* framework;
- * directly affecting policies, laws, regulations, programs, and government structures.

Overall, the coordinators feel that their networks have had considerable influence on policy, particularly on broadening the knowledge of policy makers. This graph summarizes their responses:



Furthermore, 30 per cent of coordinators report their networks having either “great” or “moderate” influence in all three outcome areas. A second group of 27 per cent describe that level of success in at least two of these areas. Only one-quarter of networks admit to having little or no success in influencing policy outcomes in any area.

When geographic regions are considered, between one-third and two-thirds of networks claim to have had a “great” or “moderate” influence on affecting laws and regulations. The exception is Middle Eastern and North African networks where only 10 per cent cite an impact at those levels.

DIFFERENT TOOLS FOR DIFFERENT JOBS

The survey also investigated whether certain types of networks might be associated with varying levels of success at achieving each of the three policy outcomes.

Expanding research capacity

While a strong level of influence in building the capability of researchers is reported in every subject or topic area, the highest degree (69 per cent) is among *networks that concentrate on economic policy*.

Among *networks that focus on two geographic regions*, 70 per cent claim a positive influence on the ability to carry out research. Only 44 per cent with a single geographic interest do so.

Among *networks with fewer than 10 organizational members*, 57 per cent cite a positive effect on research capability. The size of individual membership, on the other hand, appears to have less impact.

Almost six out of *ten networks where IDRC is “very” involved* boast that the network has increased research ability, while only 46 per cent of networks where IDRC is “somewhat” or “less” involved do so.

Networks with closed membership (57 per cent) slightly more often report “great” or “moderate” success in this outcome area than do networks with open membership (48 per cent).

Networks with at least one frequent channel of communication – that is, monthly or more often – are more likely to testify to success in this area than those with zero modes.

Broadening the perspective of policy makers

Among *networks where IDRC is “very” involved*, over seven out of ten claim to have influenced the outlook of policy makers. In those where IDRC is “somewhat” or “less” involved, only one-half report success in this outcome.

Networks that concentrate on two (71 per cent) or three or more (68 per cent) geographic regions cite more success in this measure than do those with just a single regional focus (59 per cent).

The size of a network seems to bear upon its effectiveness in achieving this outcome. *Networks with more than 10 organizational members and those with more than 100 individual members* describe greater success.

About 70 per cent of *networks with one, two, or three frequent modes of communication* report success in influencing the knowledge base of policy makers, while only 50 per cent of those with no frequent channels of communication do so.

Affecting policy, programs, and legislation

In this part of the survey, the distinguishing factor is whether networks report a “great” impact on policy as opposed to lower levels of influence.

Almost one-fifth of *economic policy networks* say they have “greatly” influenced policy, programs, and legislation. Only six to seven per cent of the networks focusing on other subjects cite this level of influence on this measure.

Almost one-fifth of *networks that focus on a single geographic region* boast of having “great” influence on this measure. Oddly, no network with two foci reports great influence, but 14 per cent with three or more foci make that claim.

Again, the size of a network is a factor in its effectiveness. *Networks with more than 10 organizational members and those with more than 100 individual members* point to more overall success in influencing policy, programs, and legislation.

Networks with closed membership (13 per cent) report more success in this measure than do those with open membership (3 per cent).

Fifteen per cent of *networks where IDRC is “very” involved* state that they have had a “great” influence in this outcome area whereas only five per cent of networks where IDRC is “somewhat” or “less” involved do so.

More than half the *networks with one, two, or three frequent modes of communication* are more likely to cite affecting policy, programs, and legislation. Only 14 per cent of networks without at least one such mode claim success in this area.

Finding the right person

The survey also looked at these questions from the viewpoint of the social characteristics of coordinators, such as age, sex, level of education, field of study, nature of home organization, position in home organization, and remuneration. The survey discovered that these characteristics seem to have little relevance to whether a network has any influence on policy making.

The only trend worth noting is that *coordinators who work for an international organization* are more apt to report success in two areas: broadening the knowledge of policy makers, and influencing legislation.