An Address at the

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Good afternoon to you all. It is a personal pleasure, and a great privilege, to take part in this remarkable conference on bridging research and policy for development. And to begin, let me join others in thanking our hosts—for the energy, ingenuity and hospitality that they have provided so generously to all of us.

We have already enjoyed a busy day, rich and stimulating, so I will not speak long. In the next few minutes, however, I would like to reflect on a single question: What determines the influence that research has on policy-making? I will rely mainly on the experience of my own organization, the International Development Research Centre. And for the most part, I will draw on a recently concluded formal evaluation of some 22 IDRC-supported research projects in developing countries—an evaluation that specifically examined the dynamic interactions of development research with policy-making in those countries.

The first conclusion that I can report—no surprise here—is that there are no universal solutions applicable to every research and policy circumstance. On the contrary, the influence that research has on policy is determined in the particulars of time and place—both in the character of the research (and of the researcher) and in the politics and processes of making and conducting policy.

Nevertheless, our own assessments—and 34 years of IDRC experience in the field—lead me to propose three essential elements of policy influence for development research.

The first essential element is intent: the determination, among researchers, to do their work and report their results so as to inform policy decisions and improve policy outcomes.

The second element of influence is direct engagement by researchers with the policy community. This means more than communicating information. It means forming relationships with policy-makers that can endure over many years.

The third essential element of influence is public participation. To have real and lasting influence on policy, members of the research community must become participants in

democratic governance, active at every level—from community deliberation and decision-making to national and international policy-making.

Allow me to explore briefly each of these elements in turn.

First, intent. This might seem a rather fragile proposition—that practical influence on policy depends in large degree on the state of mind of researchers. But the hard evidence of many cases supports the claim that intent matters.

Intent matters precisely because the confusions, tensions and accidents of the policy process itself turn out to be so complicated and unpredictable. I'm reminded of that telling line from *Yes Minister*, when someone predicts "a clash between the political will and the administrative won't."

Research will only have a reliable influence on policy if it can survive that clash, and all the other collisions of policy-making. And research influence will only survive if research is designed from the start, and carried out, and translated to the policy people, with a resolute and explicit intent. This is acutely true where the policy community itself is indifferent or even hostile to the research or its findings.

To repeat: Intent matters—in framing the right research question, in devising the right research methods, and in propelling research results into policy and action. Where intent at any stage is weak, influence is nearly always compromised.

That brings me to the second element of influence: engagement by researchers in and with the policy community. Here again, the evidence is compelling. Where researchers form personal relationships with people in policy-making, their influence on policy is both more immediate and more lasting. Where those relationships fail to develop, influence is precarious or non-existent.

Let me cite just one confirming example.

In the Philippine province of Palawan, IDRC has supported a multi-country project known as MIMAP—for Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic and Adjustment Policies. The object is to monitor real household and community attributes of poverty, and gauge their responses to policy changes. There has been strong local participation by Palawan authorities from the beginning—and as a result, research findings have directly informed policy.

MIMAP has experienced similar successes in Bangladesh and Senegal, again in part because researchers have engaged personally with policy-makers. In Bangladesh, MIMAP research has routinely informed the government's budget process. In Senegal, MIMAP has reinforced the government's PRSP approaches. In these and other cases, research and researchers have become integrated into the policy community.

Negative examples, lamentably enough, have also emerged. In Peru, for instance, IDRC supported research into the special health problems suffered by miners at high altitudes. The research found links between altitude and illness. But researchers had little direct contact with policy-makers (who were anyway resistant to their findings), and the research itself has had scarcely any influence on policy.

Engaging with the policy community is not effortless. And it seldom comes easily to those in the research community. Science takes the long view. It contemplates ambiguity, and generally measures progress with slow care. Politicians and their policy advisers want fast answers. They abhor complexity and uncertainty. And they much prefer action to reflection.

So researchers have to speak to the policy community in language that policy understands. They must address policy problems as policy people see those problems. And researchers must stand ready to give informing advice at strategically opportune moments in the policy process—even if the advice consists only of preliminary best guesses.

In fact, the researcher will have to adopt the pragmatic responses of the physician in the old Henny Youngman joke: "I saw my doctor, and he told me I had six months to live. When I told him I couldn't pay his bill, he gave me another six months." Sometimes, science will have to accommodate the capricious and demanding schedules of policy and politics.

I will only add one other observation on this crucial matter of policy engagement. Quite often, in IDRC's experience, the researchers we have supported have themselves migrated into the policy community. For a researcher, one way to influence policy is simply to become a policy-maker.

The third essential element of policy influence that I will address here is public participation. This can mean engaging village women and men in the very earliest phases of research design—asking local people for their advice about what the right questions are, about what kinds of answers would actually prove useful to them, and about how to gather the information needed to find and test those answers.

But public participation in research for policy can also mean informing and mobilizing public opinion at a larger scale. In all the contending pressures and stresses of governmental policy-making, successful influence can often hang on the support of an energized and articulate constituency advocating a certain policy option. This becomes especially true as more countries achieve the noisy and disorderly quality of genuinely democratic governance.

This is, of course, an important point of principle: People are entitled to participate in the policy decisions that will govern their future. And public participation will not count for much if it is not well informed. Indeed, public-policy controversies around science-

related issues—not least, the disputes about biotechnologies—are increasingly and properly resolved (or not) in public argument. By informing democratic deliberation, research contributes to policy that is wiser, more legitimate, and more effective.

But besides principle, research that informs and mobilizes public support is more likely to influence policy in ways that are reliable and durable. A good idea is more likely to attract the notice of policy-makers if they notice that it already attracts public support.

Let me illustrate.

SRISTI—the Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions—was established 11 years ago in the Indian state of Gujarat. Its purpose is to promote traditional agricultural knowledge in India, particularly in the interests of those left behind by the Green Revolution. Within a few years, more than 1,000 groups were members of SRISTI, and more than 5,000 innovative practices had been documented and disseminated. SRISTI is now in its third phase, defined by the theme "women, wisdom and well-being."

What is striking about SRISTI is the extraordinary and creative extent of popular participation in its work. SRISTI has developed a lively and sophisticated media strategy. But it has also installed a network of picture-based computer kiosks, so that illiterate villagers can take part in its activities and discoveries. SRISTI attends to high policy on issues like intellectual property rights, and circulates CD-ROMs to politicians and policy bureaucrats. But it also engages local farmers and women's NGOs on the application of herbal pesticides or on family health or livestock care.

As a consequence, communities of poor people are building new capacities for learning, organization and action. And research-based policy proposals win support from an informed and mobilized public.

So these, in summary, are three essential elements of policy influence for development research: *Intent*, to influence policy from the first phases of research design. *Engagement*, by researchers, with the policy community, to answer policy problems with practical solutions. And *public participation*, empowering people through research to inform and advance democratic policy processes.

In closing, I will only say again that it has been an honour, and an education, to join you here today.

Thank you.