

Learning guide

Mutual learning for policy impact: Insights from CORE

Sharing experience and learning on approaches to influence policy and practice

Background

On 23 June 2021, Southern Voice and the Institute of Development Studies co-hosted an online dialogue which aimed to enhance efforts to inform and influence policy by sharing learning between CORE projects, at different stages in their policy engagement activities, on their approaches and experiences at sub-national, national, and regional levels.

The event was attended by over 70 participants from across the CORE cohort and highlighted the experiences of CORE partners, Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP), International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), and Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE).

This learning guide captures the practical insights and advice from the event to help inform the practice of both participants and other projects across the portfolio.

The guide is structured around the key challenges identified in influencing policy, particularly within the changing parameters of the current pandemic, highlighting key messages and examples from the three partners.

Challenge: Lack of, or reduced access to policy makers due to the pandemic

Key message: Be flexible and adaptive

- *Adapt your objectives to meet the needs of policy makers*

Due to the pressures of the pandemic, many policy makers have reduced time and competing priorities, and so access to these actors is harder than ever. It is becoming increasingly important to understand the needs of these actors (what challenges are they facing? what are their current priorities?) and to adapt engagement strategies to respond to these needs.

In Peru the GRADE project applied a new approach to focus not on “this is what we want to do” but “what do you need?” Listening to the ministries, they tried to slowly adapt the objectives of the project to meet their needs, whilst still maintaining their key objectives and providing new evidence.

- *Find alternative platforms for engagement*

When the traditional routes to engagement are not effective, it is important to take a step back and look for alternative actors and platforms through which you may achieve impact.

In India, it was a struggle to identify *who* the key stakeholders were to focus on. Just as ICRW were making headway, the second wave of the pandemic hit. Now they are starting to re-build their strategy and have learned that they need to find alternative platforms for policy engagement. The initial focus was primarily on government actors, but these actors are so preoccupied with pandemic response they had no time to engage. The pandemic has led to the rise of civil society actors, so ICRW has shifted their focus to working with these groups.

- *Link with existing advocacy channels instead of creating new ones*

It is becoming more important to consider how to link in with existing advocacy channels instead of creating new ones and vying for attention. In India, ICRW have linked with a platform on informal women workers, invested in making living in Delhi more sustainable and inclusive.

Challenge: Changes in government / staff turnover

Key message: Expand your stakeholder analysis

- *Engage mid-level staff and other actors*

Changes in government or the turnover of those in high-level positions can be a huge challenge in engaging policy makers with your research. Expanding your stakeholder analysis and engaging with those in mid-level roles or other actors outside of this space can build a strong network and set of allies around your work.

In Pakistan, the PEP project started engagement from the beginning of the project at a high level. But during Covid-19, the focus has shifted to the mid-tier colleagues as they have less turnover and eventually they will rise to higher levels. The policy maker ecosystem in Pakistan expanded during Covid-19, as the ruling party was so busy, meaning it was often other actors who brought in evidence – for example, the opposition party and research institutions. The PEP stakeholder analysis expanded beyond the traditional set of stakeholders.

- *Create a partnership to increase your visibility*

By working with sector experts who are also close to government, or partnering with an ally, you can increase the visibility of your work.

In Peru, GRADE looked for other, more stable actors outside the government. For example, GRADE worked with the Municipality of Lima to understand the issues they were facing and create a protocol. Next, they approached the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion as a partnership and presented these solutions, which created more interest at the higher level.

GRADE also partnered with the association of banks to design and test digital wallets for food markets, to reduce money exchange for Covid-19 transmission. They worked together and piloted a study on the adoption of this technology, then went to the Ministry of Production with this evidence. They now have a platform of different actors working on this along with the ministry.

Challenge: Engaging actors with timely evidence in a rapidly changing situation

Key message: Use non-traditional methods of communication

During the pandemic, the situation has been changing so rapidly that often more traditional methods of communication fail to reach the right actors at the right time. Using a wide range of non-traditional communication methods can help to reach your audience with up to date evidence and increase your impact.

In India, ICRW have worked to create issue specific infographics which condense key messages. They are also exploring using podcasts as a platform, as this is popular with the youth.

In Pakistan, PEP have been using policy briefs and infographics on social media, whilst tagging senior civil servants as a nudge to the policy briefs – balancing the formal with the informal.

In Peru, GRADE have expanded their communications strategy to focus on social media instead of the slower writing of findings or briefs. They have been using Twitter as the main communications tool to highlight problems to be improved, and have also used TV interviews and newspaper articles.

About this report

This learning guide was produced as part of the Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Knowledge Translation Programme, which supports the translation of knowledge emerging from the CORE initiative. Supported by the International Development Research Centre, CORE brings together 21 projects to understand the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic, improve existing responses, and generate better policy options for recovery.

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