

Knowledge to Policy: Making the Most of Development Research Reference:

Carden, Fred. 2009. Knowledge to Policy: Making the Most of Development Research. New Delhi: Sage, Ottawa: International Development Research Centre.

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Knowledge is power. Based on this premise, social scientists have engaged in researches with the aim to influence policy making. Indeed one of the primary pursuits of social research is to provide the decision makers with first-hand evidences that can be fed into the policy framework. A question which has intrigued many is how and to what extent does this research influence policy? What is the path which leads to social research culminating into policy actions? While the linkages between the two may appear obvious (why would the policy makers ignore the evidences from the ground?), practical experiences especially in the context of developing countries suggest the contrary. Since its onset, the findings of social researches have not been integrated into the decision making process as one would have expected. Many empirical investigations have been conducted to explore how research percolates into policy in different research arenas and the book Knowledge to Policy: Making the most of Development Research by Fred Carden is one such attempt to assess the impact of research on policy making in the field of international development. It discusses a range of issues that determine how much effect research studies have on the bureaus, legislatures, and administration of governments in developing countries. The author has undertaken an investigation to examine the consequence of 23 research projects funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) which were identified to have influenced the policy making successfully.

The book is divided into three sections. The foreword by Carol H. Weiss provides a befitting start as he introduces the ideas presented in the book and sets the tone for the discussions. Section I entails discussion on policy matters which commences with the distinctive features of governance in developing countries. Carden opines that political causes deeply embedded in a country can do both – favour or inhibit policy making based on sound research findings. He provides an interesting account of characteristic features of governance in the developing countries. He broadens the meaning of influence to include the effect, “that is lasting, that results in real change, draws from research that expands a country's capacity for sound policymaking, broadens the policy horizon with new choices, and improves the ways in which governments make decisions.” There are three ways in which research can influence policy viz. expanding policy capacities, broadening policy horizons, and by affecting decision regimes. He argues that the influence of a development research on public policy decisively depends on its context of time and place. He has categorised the government and policy communities into five categories of research and policy interaction i.e. when (a) there is a clear demand from the government for research, (b) government is interested in research but the leadership is absent, (c) government is interested in research but there is a capacity shortfall, (d) policy makers are uninterested with a new emerging research issue, and (e) government treats the research with hostility. He then provides illustrations from the IDRC project experience for each of the category.

Section II is a compilation of the projects implemented by the IDRC in various countries in the form of 23 case studies and makes a very interesting reading. They are further divided into sections namely poverty monitoring, trade and finance, resource management, water management, health and education reforms, networks & innovation and information & communication technologies for development. The case studies provide deep insights into the practical aspects of policy making and the challenges which researchers have to face in order to ensure that their research finds its way to policy. It is also interesting to read about the characteristics of the policy making regimes world over. For e.g. the section on water management consists of case of cleaning up of the Dnipro river in Ukraine, wastewater recovery and urban farming in the Middle East, use of brackish water for irrigation in Syria, and managing water scarcity in Tunisia. Each section consists of a range of issues diverse in their

approach and each case is followed by the lessons learnt for policy implication which provide invaluable insights into transforming research to policy actions. Section III on technical notes provides the methodology to IDRC's multiple case approaches in the interest of agencies who would like to follow suit.

The book traverses an understudied but nonetheless crucial aspect of development i.e. whether and how research influences decision making? Rather than throwing a set of ideas at the readers, Carden carefully reconstructs the policy implications of research corroborating them with appropriate case studies. The lessons and experiences presented are extremely useful for researchers, policy makers and donor agencies that look forward for research work with practical policy implications. The author puts forth perspicuous arguments and has refrained from the use of jargon making for a simple yet interesting reading. The book with its simplistic style, well placed examples and varied case studies is a worthy resource material. It is a must read for people engaged in research work hoping to create an impact with its policy implications.