Nutrition Policy Development and Implementation in Low-Income Countries Challenges, Suggested Improvements, Research Agendas

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Outline
1. Introduction, background, orientation (extended)
   - NPP: A composite case
   - Relevance to recent global initiatives
   - Research focus, goals and orientation
2. NPP Challenges and Suggested Improvements
   - Cross-country study
   - Focal countries
   - Sub-studies on conflict and consensus
3. Conclusions, Policy Implications and Further Research

NPP= Nutrition Policy Process
The Nutrition Policy Process: The Composite Case of Esperanza

NPP: dynamic, contingent, emergent, non-linear, multi-scale, chaordic, open systems ("complexity")

World Bank 2006

"The international nutrition system – made up of international and donor organizations, academia, civil society, and the private sector – is fragmented and dysfunctional."


Recent Global Initiatives

World Bank 2006
Current Initiatives

1. Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN)
2. Global Food Security Initiative (e.g., FTF)
3. Large bilateral initiatives
   - USAID, DFID, Ireland, Spain, Norway, Canada, Denmark, France,
     Commonly Espoused Principles
     • Scale up evidence-based interventions
     • Multisectoral
     • Country-owned, country-led strategies
     • Aligned/harmonized external assistance

Overall Research Focus, Goals and Orientation

The Landscape of Nutrition Policy Research

Why Transdisciplinary?

PUBLIC POLICY

An introduction to the theory and practice of policy analysis

WAYNE PARSONS

Reader in Policy Analysis
Queen Mary and Westfield College
University of London
Frameworks, Theories and Models of the Policy Process

Why Transdisciplinary?

Disciplines: Specialized, Partial, Non-integrative, Non-inclusive, Theory-bound Method-bound vs. Problem-Oriented

Some Transdisciplinary Tools
Locating NPP Research Within Nutritional Sciences

Nutritional Sciences

Organizational

Biological

Chemical

Social

Molecular and Metabolism

Organisms and Cells

Molecules and Metabolites

Population Processes

Systems in Nutritional Sciences

FIGURE 1 Summary of a concept for the nutritional sciences.

Kazarinoff and Habicht, J Nutr: 1498-9, 1991

My Research Goals

Goals

• Understand the dynamics of agenda setting, policy formulation and implementation as they affect policy:
  – Effectiveness (outcomes)
  – Appropriateness (all other criteria, such as equity, unintended consequences, ethics, legal norms, democratic norms, transparency, accountability, etc)
• Promote and evaluate possible improvements in these
• Understand reasons for the support for or resistance to proposed improvements

Realist Ontology: There is a real social world out there (outside the minds of people) but we can only gain approximate understanding of it because there are differences in how social actors and researchers interpret it.

"Within a realist ontology...a participant’s perception is not reality as constructivism and critical theory would suggest. Rather, a participant’s perception for realism is a window to reality through which a picture of reality can be triangulated with other perceptions.”
(Healy and Perry, 2000)

Epistemology:
• Critical realism: seek to understand the social world through the perspectives of social actors and direct engagement (e.g., reconstructing national agenda setting processes)

Purpose:
• In light of contextuality and complexity of NPP:
  • I seek to understand problems in context and make “process recommendations” that will allow policy actors to be more effective and appropriate in their contexts
  • I seek to apply meta-frameworks and theory rather than build or test them
  • The intellectual challenges, insights and contributions lie in the application process

"If you want to truly understand something, try to change it.”
-Kurt Lewin

Current and Recent NPP Research Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Global Agenda Setting</th>
<th>National Agenda Setting</th>
<th>National Policy Formulation</th>
<th>National Policy Implementation</th>
<th>Local Policy Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Health Advocacy and Policy Project</td>
<td>***</td>
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<td>**</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstreaming Nutrition Initiative</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Micronutrient Scaling Up Decision Tools</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Indigenous Adaptive Mgt (Hevy, Botsna)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Facilitated Policy Formulation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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Mainstreaming Nutrition Initiative

- Funded by World Bank nutrition section
- ICDDR,B, Cornell: 2006–B
- Objective: develop approaches and experience in moving nutrition from the status of a marginal issue with time-limited funding to a permanent feature on policy agendas and in McN programs and policies

1. Cross-country study (interviews, written case studies, observations)
   - 30 respondents (nationals, researchers, NGOs, donors)
   - 18 country experiences
2. Focal countries (participant-observer and interviews):
   - Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru
   - Vietnam, Bangladesh
3. Conflict and consensus sub-studies (interviews)
   - Bolivia
   - Guatemala

Cross-country Study

What factors influence the development of the national nutrition agenda?

Country Experiences


Societal Conditions

- Disasters
- War
- Civil unrest
- Economic downturns
- Sector reforms
- Elections
- HIV, etc.

Catalytic Events

- Food crises
- Nut surveys
- Small-scale projects
- Positive experiences
- Salt iodination
- Vitamin A suppl
- PRSP windows
- Nut or internal
- Conferences
- Visits by high profile actors
- MDG-1
- Lantel series
- etc.

Structural Factors

- Institut arrangements for leadership
- coordination
- implementation
- Limited authority & budget control
- Divergent mandates
- Interests and power
- Fragmentation, shifting & short-term funding
- Weak capacity & credibility of nutrition units
- Competition & rivalry
- Avoidance and weak accountability
- Deinstitutionalisation
- etc.

Points of Contention

- Food programs targeting micronutrient strategies
- GAMT
- Stunting vs underweight
- RUTF
- for moderate
- UI2 vs US
- school feeding
- vertical vs integrated
- long vs short routes
- etc.

Strategies & Tactics

- Thematic coding
- Interviews
- Written accounts
- Observations

Respondents: 12 nationals, 12 donor/NGO, 6 nationals in donor/NGO

Benin, Burkina, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, The Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Chile, Guatemala, Haiti, Peru

The Nutrition Policy Process:
The Composite Case of Experience

- Ed Sec & Nut
  - Unit in MoH
  - Office
- Ed Sec Use in PM’s Office
- NGOs
- MNCH (Child Protection)
- HSC (Based on Nut Ed)
- Early childhood
- Uncoordinated
- and competitive
- MNCH/Comm based programs
- VITA capsules
- IFA
- in clinics
- Unified Nut.
- Nurt Strategy
- Core objectives
- Diverse implements

1970
1985
1990
2000
2010

Societal Conditions

- Economic
- Crisis
- Urban food
  - price spike
- Weak
  - Commitment
- in MNCH, MGE, MEG
- Weak networking
  - Skills in PRSP
  - USAID Bf Program
- World Bank nutrition
  - health sector reforms

Donor

- Micronutrient
- Agendas
- Short
  - conflicts
- NGO, UNFAL
- MNCH donor
  - reports
- Shared
  - credit
- Strategic
  - advance
- for
- Nut

Conflicts

- Resume
- Donor
- Conflicts

Respondents: 12 nationals, 12 donor/NGO, 6 nationals in donor/NGO

2010
2010

2. NPP Challenges and Suggestions
**Points of Contention**

"[...] the donors and NGOs basically could not get their act together because they were all arguing for their own special interest or their own view of how things ought to be handled for nutrition." (International researcher and consultant to countries)

**Strategies and Tactics**

"[...] they had a lot of disagreements but they always went ahead with one voice. They sat behind closed doors and didn’t get out, but then they put on a good face when they came out and had one recommendation. (Donor agency)

**Strategic Capacity**

The human and institutional capacity to:
- build commitment, vision and consensus towards a long-term national nutrition agenda,
- broker agreements,
- resolve conflicts,
- respond to recurring challenges and opportunities,
- build relationships,
- undertake strategic communications,
- strengthen operational capacities and implementation as part of the national nutrition agenda
### Findings from Focal Countries

**Agenda setting: generating policy attention**

- Many routes
  - Electoral (Bolivia, Peru, Guatemala)
  - Bureaucratic (Vietnam, Bangladesh)

### Findings from Focal Countries

**Policy formulation: deciding interventions, strategies, roles & responsibilities**

- Multisectoral: Bolivia, Peru, Guatemala
- Sectoral: MOH vs others
- Biomedical: anemia versus stunting

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### Findings from Focal Countries

**Commitment: translating attention into effective action**

Political attention vs political commitment vs system commitment (Bolivia, Peru, Guatemala)

Bolivian President Evo Morales aways Ministers to the Zero Malnutrition Program

### Findings from Focal Countries

**Contention in Policy Formulation:**

The Case of Growth Monitoring Indicators in Bolivia

- National Zero Malnutrition Program
- Wt-for-Age and MEWG (Min Exp Wt Gain) both in use in years prior
- New WHO Growth References, Priority on Stunting, Obesity concern
- ZM program is "opportunity to switch to a uniform national standard based on current international evidence and norms"
- Three-year conflict among MOH, NGOs, donors
- 4 interviews with MOH actors (favoring stunting indicator)
- 4 interviews with NGOs (favoring MEWG)

### Conclusions

- "Understanding stakeholder values, interests, and perceived trade-offs, therefore, and knowing how to negotiate those effectively, turns out to be as important as being clear and 'data-driven' about one's own interests and action-agenda" (Briggs, 2008 p. 228).
- "Though there is ample evidence that conflicting parties can listen, learn, and act together, doing so is anything but a natural achievement" (Forester, 2009 p. 35).
- "Greater intentionality around decision-making strategies is needed at all stages of the nutrition policy process – from agenda setting to implementation decisions – and with all types of policy choices, even those that look deceptively simple and technical like growth monitoring."

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### Anatomy of a Contentious Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MDH</th>
<th>NGOs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Position</strong></td>
<td>Use HA indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>Align with WHO norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Claims</strong></td>
<td>MEWG not feasible, too costly, confusing to caregivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEWG may increase obesity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HA can help distinguish stunting, obesity and wasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HA has excessive measurement error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MEWG indicators &lt;2 years do not cause obesity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Types of Support**

- International norms
- Programmatic experience
- Experiences in other countries
- Interpretation of Lancet2
- Logical inferences and conjectures

- External eval of MEWG programs
- Programmatic experience
- Experiences in other countries
- Interpretation of Lancet2
- Logical inferences and conjectures

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Conclusions and Implications

- Strong interest in the fidelity of decision processes (emphasis on “evidence-based”)
- Strong agreement on core principles, willing to participate and willing to accept decisions
- Actual behavior may vary from interview responses, will depend heavily on the actual quality of the process and must be studied in a real-world context
- Countries embarking on “country-owned, country-led” initiatives would do well to first seek stakeholder agreement on the design and implementation of an explicit, inclusive and transparent decision process

References:


Guatemala Case Study:
From “Successful Agenda Setting”
To Consensus in Policy Formulation

- Policy formulation encountered deep disagreements
- Sub-study explored stakeholder views re. “Good Process”
- 20 semi-structured interviews (Govt, donor, NGO, academic)
- 60-90 min interviews; 250 pp transcribed data
- Prompted and unprompted views on:
  - Key principles for “good process”
  - Desired outcomes
  - Feasibility in Guatemala
  - Willingness to participate
  - Willingness to accept decisions

“Good Process:” Summary Findings

1. Key principles for good process: Strong resonance with literature
2. Desired outcomes: have impact on decisions, build trust, be inclusive
3. Feasibility in Guatemala: difficult, but yes
4. Willingness to participate: yes (all 20)
5. Willingness to accept decisions yes (all 20)

6. Are others willing to participate? Yes: 15 of 19
7. Are others willing to accept decisions? Yes: 11 of 18

References:

Further Research

"If you want to truly understand something, try to change it."  Kurt Lewin

1. Stimulate and evaluate:
   a) deliberation on the design, and
   b) the implementation of “good process” for policy formulation in real-world settings (incl. integration of values, interests, contextual realities along with ‘evidence’ based interventions

2. (Not discussed here) Develop and evaluate methods for strengthening program implementation and adaptive management based on real-time feedback on bottlenecks and innovative solutions (Hoey’s and Isabelle M-L’s research)

3. Stimulate and evaluate efforts to strengthen strategic capacity at national level (as part of #1 and #2 above)

Emerging Opportunities:
• TOPS/USAID ("Technical and Operations Performance Strengthening")
• GHAPP, SCN, REACH, SUN
• Additional applications of the Program Assessment Guide

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