RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE BASED POLICY MAKING FOR INNOVATION

INTRODUCTION

This policy brief aims to draw attention to the importance of policy research in policy making. Policies, whether social or economic, are essential elements in development goals. They are tools used by governments to correct market failures in the allocation of resources in the market economy. These failures can be things such as externalities, inadequate provision of desired goods, lack of competition and information problems, which can most likely hamper pre-determined development goals and visions.

The policy brief draws specific attention to the importance of evidence based policy making, and within this, delineate the role of policy research in the process. This brief especially emphasizes the place of policy research in innovation policy making for least developed countries such as Tanzania. Finally current practices in science, technology and innovation (STI) policy making in Tanzania are briefly indicated, and broad policy options proposed.

POLICY RESEARCH FOR INFORMED INNOVATION POLICIES IN TANZANIA

What do we mean by informed policy making?

Informed policy making means that the policy is based on evidence derived from research, which helps in framing and understanding problems that demand policy interventions, and in evaluating the ultimate impact of any measure that is put into effect.

Innovation policy is unique

The process of public policy making is more or less the same with all public policies. However, specific policies within specific contexts have some specific requirements including research inputs that will shape the kind of actions to be considered. The innovation policy making process, especially for least developed countries, is unique for following major reasons that make in-depth policy research highly indispensable.

1. Lack of innovation capacities

Least developed countries such as Tanzania lack significant innovation capacities as well as especially the demand for these capacities, which tend to amplify market failures in the allocation of resources in these areas.

2. Innovation is a complex phenomenon

Innovation is complex, involving a large variety of interactions between and among several actors within and outside national boundaries. Uncovering all these complexities requires in depth and rigorous research.

3. Innovation is context specific.

Currently existing theories on factors that facilitate innovation, which are very important for policy, are to a large extent derived from research carried out in developed countries. Since innovation is context specific, these theories need to be empirically tested through policy research before they are employed in the context of least developed countries such as the Sub-Saharan Africa, Tanzania inclusive. This is important because the African context is radically different from the contexts of developed countries. For instance the African context is characterized by fragile economies and small and underdeveloped markets. Furthermore, while to a large extent consumers in more developed countries can largely express their needs through clear cut market mechanisms, most of those in least developed countries are not economically or otherwise empowered to do so. In addition, while there is a more or less organic relationship between science and technology in most developed countries, science and technology in least developed countries are largely divorced from each other. Such tremendous

differences in the two contexts radically reduces the extent of policy learning from developed countries, requiring innovation studies in the very context of Tanzania.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF RESEARCH AND THEIR USES IN THE POLICY PROCESS

i) *Surveillance/ Monitoring Research*

This type of research is designed to systematically and constantly track development in the economy and society with a view to identify potential STI opportunities and challenges well in advance of their emergency to allow for the design of appropriate policies and programmes to effectively deal with the situation.

ii) *Evaluative Research*

This is normally a research designed to analyze and evaluate the impact of specific policies and programs against the background of the intended effects and identify the unintended but desirable effects which should be consolidated, while also identifying the unintended and undesirable effects that must be ameliorated. This kind of research helps in monitoring STI programs and policies.

iii) *Prognostic/Prospective Research*

This research is designed to analyze the developments in the relevant aspects of the economy and society at regular intervals with a view to predict the future direction the system may take under alternative policy regimes and/or evolving circumstances. Examples of this can be regular R&D and innovation surveys.

INDIRECT CONTRIBUTION OF POLICY RESEARCH

Policy research also contributes to the policy process indirectly. Some of the common ways that policy research indirectly contributes to innovation policy are as follows:

- Feeding new ideas and concepts in the policy arena. Good example in relation to innovation is the whole issue of understanding conceptual issues related to innovation, without which it would be difficult to design any meaningful innovation policy

- Policy research improves decision makers' understanding of many policy issues, especially complex ones. Researchers have the time and skills that policy-makers lack to

investigate in great depth issues behind policies

- Capacity Building: Researchers who work on innovation policy issues for a long period of time develop capacities from which decision makers can draw and benefit through joint participation on various technical committees.

CURRENT PRACTICES IN STI POLICY MAKING IN TANZANIA

To a large extent, STI policy making and learning in Tanzania have been driven by the forces outside the requirements of the economic system. As a result STI policies had little impact on the socio and economic development of the country. Two problems exist: First is borrowing best practices from elsewhere to solve local problems without really looking into the nature of the causes of the underlying problems through policy research – in the spirit of what worked/works elsewhere will also work for Tanzania. Second, even when the realities on the ground are closely looked at, incorrect solutions emanating from misplaced conceptual lenses can be observed. A good example is a wide spread believe that the problem of lack of competitiveness of the Tanzanian productive sector stem from the lack of investment in science. This has led to the over emphasis on the need to increase amount of resources committed to R&D in a top down and linear manner that does not take into account requirements and opinions of the productive sectors that are supposed to be users of the R&D outputs.

SOME PROPOSED POLICY OPTIONS

We propose the following two major broad options

1. Since expertise for STI policy research is largely scarce, not only in Tanzania, but phenomena of the whole of the African region, there is an immediate need for capacity building in this very crucial area.

2. The existence of expertise in STI policy research is not a panacea: experience elsewhere, especially the Sub Saharan Africa, shows that even when the capacity for policy research exists - as in the social and economic policy

- public policy decisions seem not to have benefited from relevant research outputs. We therefore propose concrete measures be taken (by both the government and STI policy researchers) to solidify the research-policy partnership and strengthen the influence of research on STI policy decisions.

For more information on this policy brief contact.

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