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# A Methodology for Policy Process Analysis

## Livelihood-Policy Relationships in South Asia Working Paper 9

Oliver Springate-Baginski and John Soussan



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## **A Methodology for Policy Process Analysis**

### **Summary**

*This paper has been prepared as a contribution to a Department for International Development (DFID) funded research project on the analysis of policy-livelihood relationships in South Asia.*

*This paper presents an overview of a method developed for policy analysis as part of the DFID-funded project on Livelihood-Policy Relationships in South Asia. This method has been developed and tested in an initial phase of policy analysis in four countries across the region, but is still under development as new experiences provide fresh insights. The approach presented here is nevertheless robust enough for circulation, with the hope that it will be reviewed critically and stimulate discussion on what is a challenging and critically important area of research*

*This paper is intended as an introductory guide to analysis of the policy process. It describes the key elements of an approach which embraces both the structural and the contingent aspects of the process, using a dynamic policy process model, developed earlier in this research project in order to achieve this.*



## 1 Introduction to Policy Process Analysis

There are several primary purposes for conducting an analysis of actual policy processes, and these may be summarized as:

- To understand the processes through which policies are developed and are implemented.
- To understand the aims and motives behind policies, and the extent to which they incorporate a livelihood approach and / or a poverty focus
- To understand the ways through which policies impact household livelihoods. The extent to which policies actually fulfil their aims.
- To understand the potential areas of interventions in policy process in order to effect improvements in both policy development and implementation processes and livelihood impacts.

In a paper entitled 'Understanding Policy Processes', (Blaikie and Soussan 2001), - a previous paper from this research project, the basic conceptual approach to understanding the policy process was set out. This paper elaborates a practical methodology for analysis of the policy process based on this conceptual framework. It first discusses the basic elements which can be usefully employed, and then goes on to present a practical method using these elements. Illustrations are provided from experiences of applying the method in the South Asian region.

## 2 Steps, Models and Tools for Policy Process Analysis

In order to analyse the interrelated processes of policy formulation and implementation, six basic steps for policy process analysis have been proposed (Blaikie *et al* 2001), and are briefly summarised here. This section then discusses the importance of employing these steps within a dynamic conceptual framework. The policy process model provides such a framework and is presented here, along with appropriate tools.

### 2.1 Steps

The six key steps in approaching policy process analysis (as identified in Blaikie *et al* 2001 p.10) are as follows:

#### 1. Key Policy Milestones

There are rarely completely *new* policies. Generally particular policies are developments on existing legislation and policies, incorporating new lessons, perspectives or priorities. Likewise policy implementation tends to mobilise existing agencies. Hence it is essential that the policy history (into which the livelihood approach is being or has been fitted) is understood. This is the sum of past events that have been important in defining the present policy process. Key policy milestones are comprised of the policy 'heritage' (past policies), legislation, catalytic events, and significant projects. (This analysis has already been



completed for each of the policies under study in the research programme undertaken by the project).

## *2. Political and Governance Contexts*

The policy process proceeds within the contexts of both the specific bureaucratic styles and capacity of government agencies, and also wider social and political framework and trends of change. For example, the sweeping political changes in Nepal in 1990 had a major impact upon the development of community forestry in the country, whilst the on-going development of coastal zone policy in Bangladesh is closely connected to the wider issues of decentralisation and democratisation at the local level.

## *3. Key Policy Issues and their Relation to a Livelihoods Approach*

Research must identify the key policy issues which have emerged in relation to the policy development debate. These are the main challenges to the pre-existing situation that demand (or have demanded) a policy response. For example, regarding Community Forestry in Nepal concern over loss of forest cover and decline in forest product availability became a key policy issue prompting a policy response, and this led to the emergence of Community Forestry policies. Similarly, the major floods in the late 1980s in Bangladesh catalysed a process that led to a new national water policy, whilst in contemporary Andhra Pradesh concerns over droughts are driving a state-level water policy process that is formalised around a Water Conservation Mission.

## *4. Policy Development Process*

At the centre of policy analysis is analysis of the policy development process. To understand this process we must identify and understand what has actually happened: the interactions and responses of actors around policy formulation, and the outcomes of these actions in terms of the 'macro policy' actually formulated. This requires the following:

- An understanding of the formal organisational structures relating to policy development and implementation.
- An identification of the main actors in the policy development process at all levels, their power and role in the policy process and how it is or has been exercised.
- The strategies used by actors to represent their case in the policy process and to fulfil (or divert) its intentions in implementation.
- The main actors' impacts on the formal processes, and upon the degree and patterns of implementation.
- The degree of collective action by local groups / communities, and their relations with the local and central state.

## *5. Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts for Livelihoods*

Having considered the policy development process, attention now shifts to the policy implementation process. This may be distinguished into: firstly action for outputs, secondly outcomes, and thirdly livelihood impacts. The implementing agency's actions to produce outputs (for instance handover of forest to local management), should lead in turn to outcomes (for instance effective locals groups improving the resource condition), which can have positive livelihood impacts (such as improved forest product flows). An assessment of

the implementation process allows one to assess whether the eventual impacts actually fulfil the overall objectives of the policy.

Analysis of outcomes and impacts requires local evidence and the use of the livelihood model. This is discussed in more detail in the forthcoming working paper from this research project on the application of indicators to policy-livelihood relationships.

#### **6. *The Future – a Longer Term View***

As we are dealing with a dynamic policy process, a realistic assessment of the future prospects for the policy and how it is likely to proceed is essential. This can help to identify threats and opportunities for the development of the policy and its implementation, and may even help in its further development. This future tense should consider both the direct policy issues and the wider governance and development trends that will influence future prospects for positive policy impacts.

### **2.2 *Policy Process Model***

Policy process analysis works towards a systematic understanding of how the policy process functions in practice. In order to do this the steps presented above are most helpful if structured into a robust and dynamic analytical framework which relates to both policy development and policy implementation. Although the steps have a logical progression and clarify the structures, analysis must also capture the elements of contingency and agency inherent in real-world policy processes.

The following model provides such a framework (Figure 1). For policy process analysis each aspect must be understood, as well as the interactions. Thus the following discussion links the steps of policy analysis detailed above with the main elements of the policy process model.

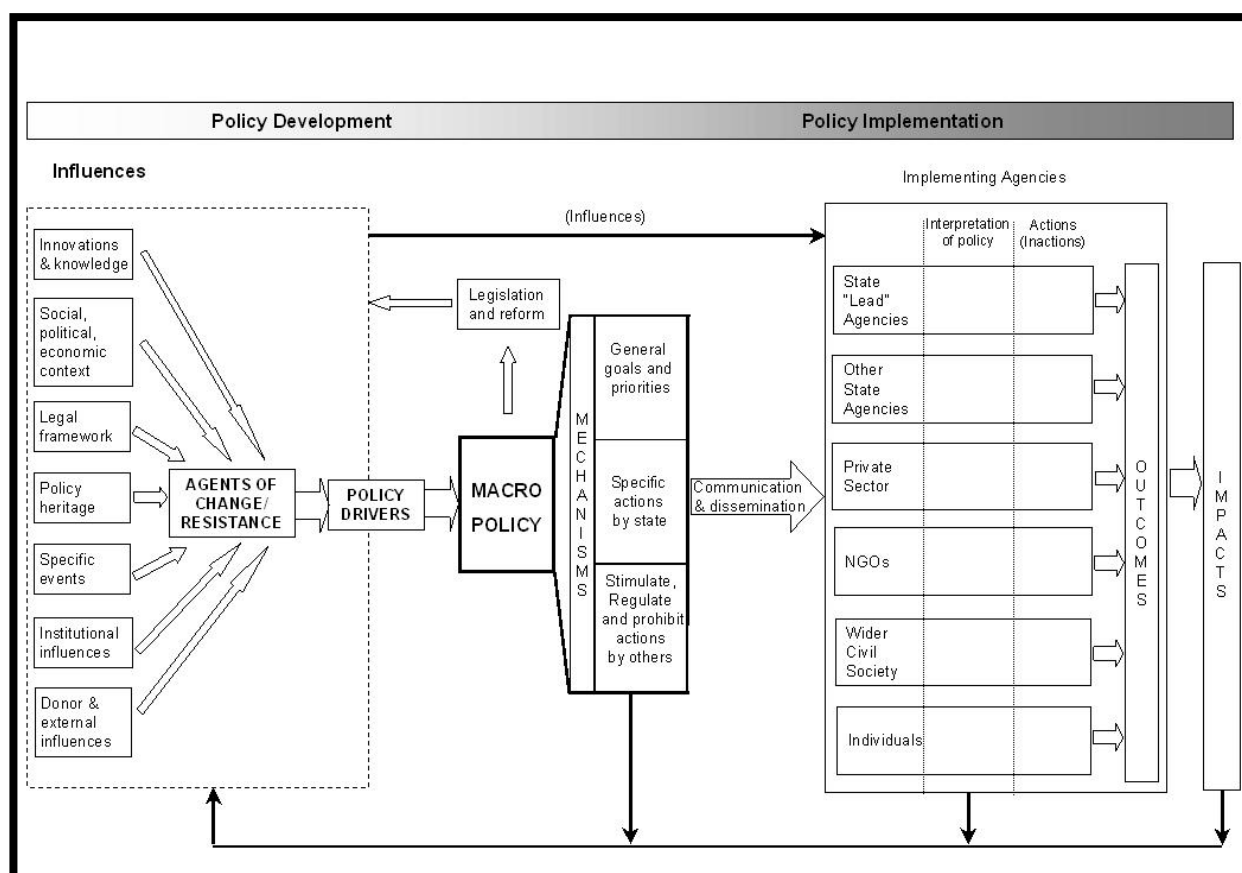


Figure 1: Policy Process Model

Although the above model (from Blaikie et al 2001) combines elements of state and society-oriented accounts of policy development and implementation, it primarily addresses state policies and their implementation. This is because, as these are generally the primary policy agenda of donors, both to strengthen the states capacity for effective policy implementation, and also to provide the enabling environment for decentralisation of policy activity.

Policy processes cannot simply be explained in traditional 'rational' terms, (i.e. that the policy process smoothly generates the most rational policy, and if there are problems it is due to poor implementation). Policy making in reality is of course a complex, messy and contested process, involving negotiation and power play between diverse stakeholders over control and use of limited resources.

One of the most important aspects of the policy process, which the above model illustrates, is that it is an ongoing and iterative process, continually subject to review and new initiatives. At the simplest level there is the ongoing interplay between policy development and policy implementation. Through the attempts to implement the policy, new situations and issues arise, which demand reflection and adjustments, even reformulation, of policy. Within these iterations there are also more complex articulations and feedback loops, which analysis should attempt to capture

An example of this complex iterative process is the development of guidelines for participatory watershed development in Andhra Pradesh, where the guidelines are under continuous review and revision through a concerted effort to learn from the implementation experience. This process is led and 'owned' by the state government (with strong support from the Chief Minister of AP), who provide most of the considerable funds going into watersheds development. Donor (especially but not only DFID) support is used to 'take risks' – to develop innovative approaches that build on but go beyond the restrictions of national watersheds development guidelines that are the existing policy framework.

The main elements of the policy process model are now discussed, in relation to the steps of policy analysis already discussed above.

### *Influences*

There are a diversity of influences affecting policy development, which are illustrated on the left side of the model. They can be summarised as key policy milestones and political and governance context (steps 1 and 2 above). Along with aspects of the key policy milestones (policy heritage, legal framework and specific events) are the contextual aspects (such as social political and economic context, institutional influences, donor and external influences and innovations and knowledge).

### *Agents of Change or Resistance*

These influences act on strategically placed individuals and institutions who become the agents of change or resistance, defining the specific responses to these influences at any time. There may be contradictory responses by different actors depending both on their institutional position and individual views. Even within the same institution 'Young Turks' can be working alongside and jockeying for influence with more conservative elements. Indeed it is often the case that the orientation of the institution concerned fluctuates between conservatism to radicalism as one head replaces another.

### *Policy Drivers*

The diverse influences and agents come together, under heightened pressure from particularly key policy issues (step 3 above) to become *policy drivers*, pushing policy in certain directions at certain times. These drivers may produce sufficient force to actually lead to the breakthroughs in policy - (these relate to steps 2, 3, and 4 above).

### *Macro Policy and Policy Content*

The outcome of the policy development process is the macro-policy, usually enshrined in the policy document at the national or State level. It is likely to relate to a number of other key documents, and almost always contains broad statements of national goals and priorities for the sector. These goals set aspirations and define direction for implementation mechanisms in order to fulfil these – (this corresponds to step 4 above).

The mechanisms generally involve both actions required by state agencies, and also intentions to modify the behaviour of non-state institutions and agents (for instance the facilitation of local community resource management through the state's formation of local

resource user groups or regulations that proscribe actions by the private sector on waste disposal in water bodies).

#### *Communication and Dissemination*

Having approved the macro-policy it is essential that awareness regarding the new policy is raised. If it is to be put into practice the conceptual underpinnings and logic will need to be grasped, both within government agencies and wider society. For instance of Nepal, a weekly radio show has been found to be a highly effective method of raising the public's awareness in rural areas over the basic concepts and legal rights around Community Forestry.

#### *Implementation: Implementing Agencies, Actions & Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts* (corresponding to step 5 above)

The mechanisms specified in the macro policy are the starting point for implementation by the government agencies and, in some cases, by non-government bodies (and these can be linked – NGOs are the main 'project implementation agency' for community-level actions in the watersheds programme in Andhra Pradesh).

One of the critical issues here is how the policy is interpreted by the implementing agencies. Few organisations can or will adopt all aspects of a policy in a complete and balanced manner, indeed this is rarely possible. Any existing agency (and especially government departments) will have an existing set of activities, a certain pattern of capabilities and a set of administrative procedures into which the policy is introduced. These agencies will make choices (both conscious and unconscious, by default) over which aspects of the new policy to implement at which levels. For example, the new water policy in Bangladesh defines a process of subsidiarity that is linked to decentralisation in the country and aims towards far greater levels of participation in water development. These policy goals have been introduced into existing highly-centralised and technically-oriented government agencies that have traditionally dominated the sector and which are struggling to develop capabilities and administrative procedures to enact them and which contain many professionals who are yet to be convinced of their veracity. They are also being frustrated by major problems in the development of capabilities in local government which reflects wider problems with decentralisation.

Linked to the issue of interpretation is that of institutional culture and institutional change. The (perhaps radical) aims of the policy must first be adopted by the implementing agency before they can transform the ground reality in the field, and institutional change within government agencies is therefore critical for progress. The entrenched silviculture-oriented institutional culture within many State Forest Departments in India has become recognised as one of the key constraints to the progress of Joint Forest Management, as has the engineering orientation of most water sector agencies in Bangladesh.

A connected issue is the transformation of working relationships between government agencies and local people. Local participation in resource management has become an avowed policy aim across the South Asian region. However working relationships between the state agencies and local people over resource management have often been difficult in

the past. Particularly in the case of forest management the situation has been highly polarised, with mutual suspicion, a lack of trust and even a sense of lack of legitimacy. Transforming these relationships is certainly not easy and takes time.

The first step for agencies, having interpreted the policy is to take actions in order to generate desired outputs. These should lead to outcomes at the local level, such as improved resource condition, which in turn should lead to household livelihood impacts.

Assessment of outputs, outcomes and impacts requires detailed field assessment, and this is discussed in a separate forthcoming working paper from this research project on the application of indicators to policy-livelihood relationships.

## **2.3 Tools**

Having surveyed the steps for policy analysis and the policy process model through which they can be mobilised, the tools required are here discussed. There are 3 fundamental research tools which should be used in combination: documentary reviews, key stakeholder interviews and field verification.

### **1. Documentary Reviews**

This requires identification, collection and analysis of documentary policy outputs and related materials:

- Policy documents (acts, guidelines, directives)
- Policy review documents and drafts (white papers, technical reviews etc.)
- Related papers (academic papers, conference papers, books etc.)
- Grey literature (project reports etc.)

### **2. Key Stakeholder Interviews**

The key stakeholders in the policy process need to be identified and interviewed. In any policy process there are a range of stakeholders from the different institutions and interest groups. It is likely that there are a small number of 'key informants' – the most important or influential stakeholders who directly affect policy formation and implementation. These should be identified and interviewed at length.

- Government policy makers and implementers: politicians, civil servants, practitioners at every level (e.g. Director General of Dept. of Forests, District Forest Officers, Ranger, Forest Guards)
- Civil society – NGO leaders, CBOs, journalists, public interest litigators
- Academics
- Donor community, including both project-level professional and donor office staff at country, regional and central levels.
- Retired staff and other opinion formers who were previously actively involved.

It is also important to identify 'constituencies' within the policy process where these exist, as policies can emerge from partial or broader consensus across constituencies. These constituencies clearly include groups such as farmers or rural women, but in policy

development they can relate to 'epistemic groups' such as the forestry community in Nepal or water engineers in Bangladesh. The leaders, formal and informal, of these epistemic groups often have great knowledge of the real internal dynamics of a sector and can be key 'movers and shakers' in that sector.

### **3. *Field Verification***

The implementation of policy in the field must be assessed as has been discussed, at the levels of firstly actions to produce desired outputs, secondly outcomes, and lastly household livelihood impacts. These require detailed field assessment using an assortment of field research tools such as:

- Household surveys
- Resource assessments
- Participatory Rural Assessment and Action Research tools and methods

Throughout the research process it is essential to distinguish between objective and subjective information. Events and documents can be objectively verified. Interpretations and perceptions on the other hand pertain to the positions to particular stakeholders or groups of stakeholders, and are likely to change over time.

## **3 Doing Policy Process Analysis - The Stages**

Having introduced the different elements of policy process analysis we now bring them together into a coherent methodology, and discuss its practical application.

The 6 steps to approaching policy can be combined with the policy model in a matrix format as follows:

Stage of Policy Analysis		Related Elements of the Policy Process Model		Appropriate Research Tools		
				Documentary Reviews	Stakeholder Interviews	Field Verification
1.Key Policy Milestones	Influences	Agents of Change & Policy Drivers	√	√		
2. Political and Governance Contexts			√	√		
3. Key Policy Issues and their Relation to a Livelihoods Approach				√	√	√
4. Policy Development Process	Macro Policy, Content, Mechanisms	Implement-ation	√	√	√	
5. Implementation Process: Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts for Livelihoods				√	√	√
6. The Future – a Longer Term View					√	√

**Figure 2: Policy Process Analysis Matrix**

Figure 2 gives a simple guide to the policy process analysis. The method follows the basic stages presented on the left, combined with the related elements from the policy process model. The columns on the right indicate the appropriate research tools to employ at each stage.

Overall we have six basic analytical stages to follow, with a recognition of the nature of their fluid interconnections. The method for policy analysis follows a logical sequence through these steps as follows.

The **first stage** is to define clearly the **key policy milestones**. This is the what and the why from the past – the policy history, legislation, specific events and so. This can be helpfully summarised into a periodisation or time-line.

The appropriate research tools to use at this stage are documentary reviews and stakeholder interviews.

Already at this stage information comes to light on issues, processes and questions relating to the later steps and this helps to start defining what will be investigated subsequently.

From Nepal the examination of the extensive documentary record of forest legislation provides evidence for the gradual evolution of policy, (as presented in ‘Community Forestry in Nepal - a Policy Review’ Springate-Baginski *et al* 2001). The 1967 so called ‘Shoot the Bullet’ Act reflected the last gasp of the ‘command and control’ style of legislation, and subsequently



policies moved towards the more inclusive approach, most fully expressed in the 1993 Forest Act.

This first stage begins the examination of the *influences* on the policy development process. It also initiates identification of the agents of change and the previous policy drivers. These explorations are continued in the next stage.

The **second stage** looks at the wider **political and governance context**. This comprises consideration of institutional influences, donor and external influences, the state of innovations and knowledge and so on.

Appropriate research tools at this stage are documentary reviews and stakeholder interviews.

At this stage of investigation it should be possible to further recognise the *agents of change* or resistance who have been and continue to be active, as well as developing an understanding of the structures within which they operate. Stakeholder interviews can confirm these initial assessments, and furthermore start to clarify the *policy drivers*. For example, in the development of water policies in Bangladesh, the key agents of change were active and vocal NGOs, key donors (organised through a sector donor co-ordination group), a number of key reform-minded senior government officials and a small group of academics and researchers, both local and international, who helped develop new thinking on how to achieve change. Resistance, at least initially, came mostly from an alliance of the majority of government officials in the sector and many international consultants who were reluctant to see the 'gravity train' of big construction projects end.

The **third stage** is an examination of the **key policy issues**, and how these relate to a livelihoods approach. Whilst on the one hand the logic of the policy issues will need to be independently assessed through a rational approach, it is also essential that the *realpolitik* of how they become employed in policy process negotiations must also be understood. An example of this is the 'theory of Himalayan environmental degradation' narrative, which exerted a powerful effect on Himalayan regional policy over the 1970s and 1980s, although subsequently, with rational assessment, the theory became recognised as fundamentally flawed (Thompson and Warburton 1986, Ives and Messerli 1989).

Key policy issues may be seen as the fuel which is used (or 'spun') by *agents of change* to create *policy drivers*. These drivers determine the ways particular influences and individuals interact to push policy in certain directions at certain times.

The appropriate research tools at this stage are documentary reviews and stakeholder interviews, complemented where helpful by some field verification, particularly to assess the veracity of the key policy issues.

The **fourth stage** is the **policy development process and its outcome** - the macro policy. The actual 'horse-trading' or negotiation over policy is complex, amorphous, and often highly contingent. Gaining an understanding of it requires insight into the local specifics of the negotiations, and understanding the nature of the supportive constituencies, alliances,

compromises and so on. This is perhaps the most elusive, but in many ways the most important, aspect of the policy process to analyse.

For example despite strenuous attempts at understanding the emergence of the National-level 1990 JFM Order there is still only limited clarity over why the Order (and the 1988 Forest Act which it followed) emerged when they did, and how the fragile coalition of interests which was able to push it through succeeded with such limited support. (Bass *et al* 1999)

Similarly, the reasons why there has suddenly emerged a major push for coastal development policies in Bangladesh after a long period of neglect are elusive and complex (though our close engagement in this process is giving real insights in this area).

The macro policy which emerges from the negotiation process will contain implicitly or explicitly stated mechanisms through which the overarching policy goals are to be realised.

These mechanisms commonly involve both specific actions by state (such as agencies' actions to produce outputs, budgetary allocation and institutional reform packages) as well as legislative actions to stimulate, regulate or prohibit actions by others - (for instance the legal basis for Forest User Groups in Nepal established through 1993 Forest Act and 1995 Byelaws.)

The **fifth stage** is analysis of the **implementation process**. This involves an assessment of the actions taken towards achieving outputs, the outcomes as effects of these and livelihood impacts. Although only covered in brief here this is a very broad area, which is dealt with in more detail in a forthcoming paper in this project, on the application of indicators to policy-livelihood relationships.

Imaginative and radical policies on paper are meaningless without the concomitant ability to manifest them in practice. The implementation process reflects the extent of commitment to ensuring the policy is realised, or whether it is sabotaged and treated as an aberration from 'business as usual'.

Many of the policies relating to improved natural resource management implicitly carry very long time-frames and are also very demanding in terms of institutional transformation, financial commitment, changes in professional roles and so on. The implementation process is thus fraught with challenges.

Prior even to implementation, the communication and dissemination of the policy is essential to raise awareness at all levels of the new initiative.

Thus firstly, the actions to achieve intended outputs need to be assessed. This involves a close look at the implementation mechanism and agencies. Issues relate to the internal culture and level of enthusiasm or resistance to the policy, the ways the policy is re-interpreted, the pace of implementation, the level of funding commitment and development of field capacity, needed changes to internal procedures and authorities in government agencies and so on.

Guidelines and internal government documents are invaluable sources here as to the critical details of how policy is given shape in the field. Obtaining and understanding these needs close collaboration with government agencies, which can only be based on a careful process to establish trust and demonstrate the value of the work. In this and other aspects of the process, successful policy analysis needs to strike a careful balance between being, on the one hand, penetrating, independent and (constructively) critical, whilst on the other hand not alienating key constituencies and creating 'ownership' within government. There will always be circumstances where there is a very closed attitude to any analysis of this sort: this in itself is very revealing about how real commitments to policies are.

Secondly, the outcomes or local effects of policy are assessed. This involves assessment of the manifestations of policy such as the formation and functioning of local resource management groups. This needs to be analytical in character. For example, past research has shown that the large-scale development of Forest User Groups in Nepal is leading to real and effective local institutions in many places, whilst in contrast the 'development' (on paper) of thousands of water user groups under the SRP project in Bangladesh in the late 1990s was a completely cosmetic exercise to satisfy donor concerns.

Lastly, the livelihood impacts must be assessed. The assessment of livelihood impacts involves detailed field-level assessment of households. This stage links to work on identifying livelihood impact indicators.

The **sixth stage** considers **the future: a longer-term view**. This stage involves a brief assessment of the current trends affecting the further development of the policy, in order to understand prospects for the future. Different key policy stakeholders are able to give details of the key future issues.

## **4 Conclusions: The Use of Policy Process Analysis**

This paper has presented a brief discussion on how to undertake policy analysis, including why this is important and some illustrations of the points made from the field. The approach is still under development, but what is clear is that this or a similar method that analyses the whole policy process is essential if we are to both understand the impacts of policies on livelihoods and, perhaps more importantly, influence future policy processes to enhance their impacts. Creating any policy is challenging. Developing ones that are pro-poor (especially where this challenges the interests of powerful groups) and that have tangible livelihood benefits is even more so. But this is the challenge to which we must rise. Achieving change will not come from pious statements on poverty or livelihoods that are seen as external (and often not clearly understood or impractical) agendas. A policy analysis that helps understand how and where policy can be influenced is the key for moving from rhetoric to reality. It is believed that the approach set out here can help.

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