

Centre for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH)  
Department of Public Policy

**Evaluating Policy Development and Advocacy**

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### Introduction – Evaluating Policy Development Initiatives

It is very difficult to plan and evaluate initiatives aimed at influencing public policy and documenting policy-related outcomes. One can often get mired while trying to define policy, determine documentable outcomes and design an effective approach. Although the health field is devoting substantial resources to policy research, development and change, policy practitioners sometimes have trouble being clear about the scope of their policy development and advocacy initiatives, and explicit as to their assumptions about why and how their approach to policy change will create their desired outcomes.

#### Background to this paper

Eko Nomos was commissioned by CAMH, Department of Public Policy (January- September 2007) to undertake a literature scan exploring the various approaches to evaluating its policy development and advocacy work, with a particular focus on identifying possible mental health policy development indicators. The scan revealed a substantial body of literature covering various aspects of public policy development and advocacy and the evaluation of these activities, although the literature pertaining to public health policy evaluation in particular was not extensive. The scan also uncovered a wave of new thinking about policy development and advocacy evaluation practice which has emerged in the past three years or so, and which presents exciting opportunities for CAMH to re-examine its policy practice.

The purpose of this exploratory paper is:

- To create a case for adopting an approach to the evaluation of policy development and advocacy that is grounded in an iterative, adaptive, theory of change process.
- To begin to design a framework that clarifies the purpose, scope and outcomes of policy interventions, thus focusing the evaluation process and making it more effective.

The field of practice of policy evaluation is very new, and while the literature scan identified many different steps and processes that could be used, there were no standard approaches specifically developed for policy development evaluation. Indeed, much of the literature emphasized the importance of a customized approach: as Guthrie, Kendall et al conclude, “after conducting 20 interviews with evaluation experts and reviewing a broad sampling of relevant reports, we concur with the consensus from a recent Grantmakers in Health gathering of more than 50 funders of advocacy... [who could find] no particular methodology, set of metrics or tools to measure the efficacy of advocacy grant making in widespread use. In fact, there is not yet a real ‘field’ or ‘community of practice’ in evaluation of policy advocacy.”<sup>1</sup>

The success of policy development and advocacy evaluation seems to depend upon a strong, front-end investment in policy planning, strengthening the connection between actions and desired results. Policy approaches that integrate evaluation into the planning and implementation cycle are better positioned to promote learning, to adapt, and to achieve outcomes. Regular review and assessment of policy formulation and advocacy processes create a cycle of continuous feedback and reorientation of policy interventions. By naming expected policy outcomes in a clear, tangible way, policy developers can become more intentional and self-critical in their work. To this end, some are experimenting with

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<sup>1</sup> Guthrie, Kendall et al. *The challenge of Assessing Advocacy: Strategies for a Prospective Approach to Evaluating Policy Change and Advocacy*, The California Endowment, Woodland Hills, October 2005, pp. 6 - 7.

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innovative evaluation concepts, such as the ‘theory of change’ approach, to ensure that policy development and advocacy is resilient and relevant.

### ‘Adaptive’ policy development approaches offer solutions to evaluation challenges

The concept of ‘adaptive policy’<sup>2</sup> development provides a way of clustering these new concepts, offering policymakers an approach that integrates evaluation at the planning stage of a policy initiative, resolving many of the challenges that face those who seek to evaluate policy. Policies can easily become out of touch with the current context, requiring revision or complete rethinking, so from the outset they have to be sufficiently flexible and resilient to keep pace with a rapidly changing context and policy environment. As Walker and Marchau argue, such ‘adaptive policies’ are “devised not to be optimal for the best estimate future, but robust across a range of futures”. In short, they “respond to changes over time and they make explicit provision for learning”.<sup>3</sup>

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) also stresses the importance of integrating learning and evaluation systems into policy development in order to assist policy makers to move beyond a focus on anticipated conditions, optimizing the capacity of policies to adapt to unanticipated circumstances: “[a]daptive policies have features that enable them to continue to adapt to both anticipated and unanticipated conditions... This enables policies to self-adjust, and be better suited to infinitely complex and dynamic interactions among people, the economy and environment.”<sup>4</sup>

## The challenges of evaluating policy

Based on Eko Nomos’ experience, there are many factors that make it hard to evaluate policy development and advocacy work and to document the changes that result. For a start, how do we define exactly what is meant by ‘policy’, and determine the scope of the intended policy change process? Policy development work is often reactive with many unexpected outcomes. Most policy processes are iterative, navigating a complex, evolving policy environment. Policy is therefore a moving target, which makes it difficult to determine the focus of an evaluation. Finally, evaluations must often accommodate multiple players with different roles and objectives.

Here are some of the main issues that complicate the task of policy evaluation:

### Insufficient investment in planning

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<sup>2</sup> The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) are partnering to implement a research initiative on adaptive policy related to natural resources management and climate change. [http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:MIqTK\\_RJ5aMJ:www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/11564303881Adaptive\\_Policies\\_for\\_Agriculture.DOC+IDRC+IISD&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ca&client=firefox-a](http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:MIqTK_RJ5aMJ:www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/11564303881Adaptive_Policies_for_Agriculture.DOC+IDRC+IISD&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ca&client=firefox-a) (sourced Sept 1, 2007) In their conceptual framework, they note that the notion of adaptive policy first appeared as early as 1927 with Dewey who “put forth an argument proposing that ‘policies be treated as experiments, with the aim of promoting continual learning and adaptation in response to experience over time” (p. 17). The concept re-emerged in the 1970s as a part of an adaptive approach to natural resource management and more recently in literature regarding complex adaptive systems.

<sup>3</sup> Walker and Marchau (2003) in a special issue of the *international journal Integrated Assessment* (2003) were quoted in Swanson et al, Swanson, Darren, Henry David Venema, et al, Chapter 2 *Initial conceptual framework and literature review for understanding adaptive policies*, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), p. pp. 17-19 [http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2006/climate\\_designing\\_policies\\_chap2.pdf](http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2006/climate_designing_policies_chap2.pdf) (Referenced August 2007)

<sup>4</sup>Swanson et al, op. cit, p. 13.

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- The process of policy change is not always well understood and is therefore often poorly articulated at the outset of a policy initiative.
- Few seeking to influence policy are able to invest adequately in developing a solid, comprehensive analysis of the context, players and opportunities for change.
- While workplanning for policy-based strategies and activities can be fairly straightforward, it is important at an early stage to provide a rationale and justification for the planned strategy, demonstrating its potential to achieve the initiative's stated policy objectives.
- Many make a leap in their planning from identifying policy activities to naming the assumed outcomes, without identifying the chain of outcomes that connect interventions to desired policy outcomes. As a result, policy objectives may not be clear or realistic, and projected outcomes can be too vague or overly ambitious for the intervention proposed.
- It is also difficult for policy developers to determine what roles, approach and achievements are possible within an institutional context.

### **Traditional approaches to evaluation are often inflexible and controlling, undermining adaptive policy development**

- Summative evaluations, performed at the end of a project or process, can offer too little learning, too late in the process. They do not accommodate and support the iterative nature of policy development and are unable to provide information that will make possible the fine tuning and course corrections required for adaptive policy.
- Experimental research/evaluation design promoting more rigid, control group design and implementation is expensive and can be unworkable in a policy context.
- Hiring an external evaluator can limit the input, learning and analysis of stakeholders who know the initiative best.

"The traditional summative criteria are neither appropriate nor even meaningful for highly volatile environments, systems-change-oriented interventions, and emergent social innovation. Developmentally oriented leaders in organizations or programs don't expect (or even want) to reach the state of 'stabilization' required for summative evaluation."<sup>5</sup>

### **Outcomes are difficult to map**

- Practitioners are more likely to focus on accountability for activities and outputs (the immediate deliverables of planned actions) than the far more difficult task of documenting less tangible, longer-term outcomes.
- Demonstrating the connections between activities and policy outcomes is particularly difficult. For example, practitioners often assume connections between changed knowledge/perception of policy influencers and the implementation of a desired policy change without demonstrating the chain of actions and outcomes that creates that change.
- Many people who seek to influence policy development, propose to affect and take credit for outcomes that are outside their sphere of influence. Responding to pressure to be accountable for their investment in policy activities, policymakers often seek to document the long-term impact of their work on the public without first evaluating the intermediate outcomes of policy design, development and implementation.
- Many practitioners shy away from the use of qualitative indicators, which are so crucial to a good assessment of policy progress and outcomes.

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<sup>5</sup> Caledon Institute, *Developmental Evaluation* - Excerpts from Notes on J.W. McConnell Family Foundation Workshop *Learning and Evaluation for Trail Builder Initiatives in Vibrant Communities*, Spring 2005.

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- Policymaking is very often a collaborative process and it is impossible to claim sole responsibility for outcomes. ActionAid<sup>6</sup> suggests that it is more important to monitor and evaluate in a way that can teach one about what contributes to the effectiveness of collaborative policy development, and to determine the most appropriate role that can be played in this collaborative process:

“While process benchmarks are a useful tool in grant monitoring, they do not demonstrate that an organization’s work has made any impact on the policy environment or advanced the organization’s cause. Evaluation experts, as well as funders and grantees, emphasized the need to develop outcomes benchmarks that would demonstrate the impact of an organization’s work . . . ‘We need to teach program officers how to monitor for change . . . not just monitor activities.’”<sup>7</sup>

### Key elements of an adaptive approach to policymaking

#### Can policy development and advocacy programs or projects be evaluated?

“It is sometimes important to ask whether or not a policy, programme or project can be evaluated at all. Some policy initiatives and programmes can be so complicated and diffuse that they have little prospect of meeting the central requirements of evaluability. These are:

- That the interventions, and the target population, are clear and identifiable;
- That the outcomes are clear, specific and measurable;
- That an appropriate evaluation design can be implemented.”<sup>8</sup>

Without these elements it is tremendously difficult to determine the purpose, scope and results that are to be evaluated. Adaptive policy development encourages the integration of evaluation/outcomes tracking design into the policy planning process, and thus greatly contributes to the evaluability of policy initiatives.

#### Identifying effective practices that support successful policy development and advocacy evaluation

Below are identified four practices that build an adaptive policy development approach and offer solutions to the challenge of evaluating policy development and advocacy.

1. **Develop a clear understanding of policy and the policymaking process:** determining a focused scope of action and strong rationale for the chosen policy approach
2. **Provide an up-front investment in contextual analysis and planning:** ensuring a strong understanding of the complex context and systems within which policy is developed and making an investment in early planning
3. **Build a developmental approach to policymaking,** incorporating learning and evaluation into the process: systematically building a learning culture into the policy development process, establishing a cycle of research, analysis and feedback that results in continuous improvement of policy and policy processes

<sup>6</sup> Chapman, Jennifer and Amboka Wameyo, *Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study*, ActionAid, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Guthrie, Kendall et al. op. cit, p 17.

<sup>8</sup> *Chapter 1: What is Policy Evaluation?* Policy Hub, British Civil Service – HM Treasury, London, England, p. 3 [www.policyhub.gov.uk/evaluating\\_policy/magenta\\_book](http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/evaluating_policy/magenta_book) (sourced January 24, 2007)

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4. **Focus on results:** strengthening the cause/effect relationship between policy interventions and expected outcomes over time, resulting in more tangible, realistic strategies that are more likely to create the expected policy results

### Solution 1: A clear understanding of policy and the policymaking process

It is important for policymakers to have a clear understanding of policy and to locate their work on a policy continuum. Here are some thoughts to assist practitioners to focus their purpose and scope of activity to be evaluated:

#### **What is 'policy'?**

A common theme in the policy literature review was the difficulty of 'naming' the scope of policy development work to be evaluated: should one evaluate policy by issue? By project? By program? By department? What component of the policy process should be evaluated: planning, strategy, tactics, process, and/or implementation? Or should evaluation document results, assessing the policy that has been developed and the extent to which it is adapted and implemented?

Most definitions of policy describe it as an intentional strategy to guide and create changes in informal or formal decisions relating to a specific issue, achieving waves of outcomes at various levels (including the organizational, institutional, regulatory and legal) that ultimately result in positive changes in behaviour, and tangible improvements for individuals, households and populations.

It is important to distinguish between the terms 'policy' and 'advocacy'. Many people use the word 'advocacy' as a proxy for policy work, but it is actually a strategy for accomplishing changes in public policy, and lobbying is a related tactic.

#### **Policy Definitions:**

"Policy is defined as a 'course of action designed to achieve particular goals or targets'. Processes of policy-making are rarely products of rational decision-making, but of history, politics, decision-making and negotiating by different stakeholders."<sup>9</sup>

"Public policy is an attempt to bridge a gap between a situation and a norm – norms differ, perceptions of situations differ, actors differ – hence the whole problem of regulating public policies. ... Public policy is an essential form of exercise or expression of power, i.e. the control over decisions impacting on stakes."<sup>10</sup>

The main point, however, is to avoid getting bogged down defining terms, and to focus on being clear about the results that are expected.

<sup>9</sup> *Livelihoods Connect*, Institute for Development Studies, [http://www.livelihoods.org/pip/pip\\_macro\\_institution.htm#3](http://www.livelihoods.org/pip/pip_macro_institution.htm#3) (sourced August 25, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Ferry de Kerckhove, Director General International Organizations, Canada *Understanding public policy making processes and policy makers* (PowerPoint presentation), [http://www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/11129297231Ferry\\_de\\_Kerckhove.ppt](http://www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/11129297231Ferry_de_Kerckhove.ppt). (sourced August 25, 2007).

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## *Thinking about and categorizing policy*

There are many ways to conceive of policy development and advocacy work, but the literature scan was unable to identify a clear, comprehensive conceptual framework for positioning different options and approaches.

The purpose and targeted level of a proposed policy change can be a good starting point: CAMH's Department of Public Policy is particularly interested in evaluating its work at one key level of policy development and advocacy work:

**'Institutional' or Public Policy:** The Institute for Development Studies explores the notion of policy development as a complex process of changing the institutional 'rules' that govern the connection between the political system and the policy environment (e.g. legislative, judicial, etc.).

Here, 'institutional' has a very specific meaning that sets the broad social context for policy development. It should not be confused with the more common notion of institutions as organizations.

"Policy analysts define *institutions* as the rules, norms and values that shape our behaviour. They can be present at local, organisational, national and international levels. ... analysis can help to identify potential points of contact between policies, institutions and ... [targeted] priorities".<sup>11</sup>

## *What drives policy?*

Public policy development is not an orderly process, and is often driven by crisis. While most policymakers take a deliberate approach to planning policy, change is often accelerated by opportunities arising from a dramatic change in the policy context or in public perception.

"The implementation process of public policies follows, in principle a series of official procedures but, quite often, crisis situations alter profoundly the order of the stage in public policy making – when they don't annul these outright." <sup>12</sup>

It is therefore useful to distinguish between pro-active and opportunistic strategies, and to recognize that a well-situated proactive campaign can more readily leverage the opportunities that these policy 'moments' provide.

- **Pro-active:** Well targeted, organized and multi-faceted campaigns that bring the three components together systematically and intentionally to offer policy solutions, to create the political will for change and to support adoption and implementation of policy.
- **Opportunistic:** In addition to this campaign-based approach, some policy is wholly opportunistic, driven by the opening of 'policy windows'.

"Policy windows appear through unfortunate events that highlight the importance of the need for a policy in a particular area. Organizations that are ready to respond when those windows appear are more likely to be able to influence the direction that the policy takes because government is ready to act because of public pressure brought to bear because of the unfortunate event(s). ...One specific

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<sup>11</sup> *Livelihoods Connect*, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Ferry de Kerckhove, op. cit.

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challenge highlighted by this model is that advocates must identify and enter into not just any window, but the right window.”<sup>13</sup>

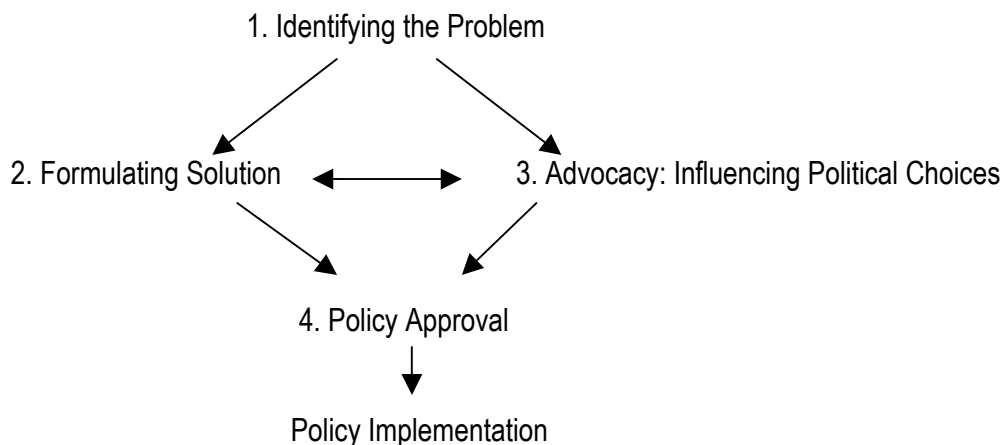
Much of the literature emphasizes the importance of analysis, planning, setting priorities for change and naming both assumptions about how change will happen through policy intervention and the rationale for why interventions are expected to be effective. By integrating proactive, evidence-based, adaptive approaches, policymakers become well equipped to respond to emerging policy windows.

### ***Policy development pathways***

De Kerckhove offers the simple notion of key “flows that contribute to successful policy change: “Public policies result from three “flows” – **problems** (...[relating to] definition), **solutions** (...[relating to] tools or instruments) and **political choices** ([relating to] trends and networks). **Any group of two flows together does not suffice to generate a public policy.** (authors’ emphasis)”<sup>14</sup> In addition, he stresses that “[p]ower relations between stakeholders define the nature of the interactions between the flows and determine the success or the failure of a public policy .”<sup>15</sup>

These policy ‘flows,’ or pathways, combine to offer a framework for understanding the continuum of policymaking strategies and activities.

Below, is a simplified overview of the policymaking process based on the components identified above, offering four pathways to policy making. The entry point is problem identification, which then splits into two interconnected, parallel streams of activity: the formulation of solutions and the mobilization of stakeholders who create policy change and implementation. Evaluation becomes an important process, infused into each of these policy development and advocacy components.



In an adaptive approach to policymaking, each of these pathways must be employed simultaneously to varying degrees, depending on the nature and status of the policy development and advocacy initiative chosen. It is important continually to re-visit each pathway, in order to update on the changing context, revise needs and direction and anticipate new policy windows and opportunities.

<sup>13</sup> Guthrie, Kendall et al. op. cit, pp. 12 - 13.

<sup>14</sup> Ferry de Kerckhove, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

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The policy continuum below may offer practitioners a way to locate any given policy development initiative at a stage of implementation:

## Pathway 1: Identifying the Problem

- Analyze the context
- Develop a problem statement identifying the type of change needed
- Identify associated stakeholders
- Clarify the purpose of the policy development and advocacy initiative
- Assess the most effective strategy and pathways for policy change – e.g. campaign
- Plan activities and outcomes/indicators
- Evaluation and monitoring design

## Pathway 2: Formulating policy development and advocacy solutions

- Refine problem definition
- Gather evidence
- Research and formulate the new policy directions/statements and/or documents
- Structure the debate
- Set the agenda

“Evidence-based policy has been defined as ‘the integration of experience, judgment, and expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic research’. This involves a balance between professional judgment and expertise on the one hand and the use of valid, reliable and relevant research evidence on the other.”<sup>16</sup>

## Pathway 3: Advocacy: Influencing political choices

- Convene
- Mobilize of support for change
- Lobby
- Action

“Public policy advocacy is the effort to influence public policy through various forms of persuasive communication. Public policy includes statements, policies, or prevailing practices imposed by those in authority to guide or control institutional, community, and sometimes individual behaviour.”<sup>17</sup>

## Pathway 4: Policy change and implementation

- Policy change
- Policy approval/adoption
- Policy implementation

“[L]earning and improvement could occur in both policy design and implementation. For example, the institution, which designed the policy might have an internal process of checking whether the intended societal change is actually occurring. If this institution has the discretion to change instrument rules,

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<sup>16</sup> *How research and evaluation evidence contributes to policy making*: Policy Hub, British Civil Service – HM Treasury, London, England. [www.policyhub.gov.uk/evaluating\\_policy/magenta\\_book](http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/evaluating_policy/magenta_book) (sourced March 5, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> “*A Frame for Advocacy*”, Population Communication Services: Center for Communication Programs Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Baltimore.

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such monitoring, evaluation and learning might directly result in an improvement in the instrument design, which would then need to be communicated to those responsible for implementing the policy.”<sup>18</sup>

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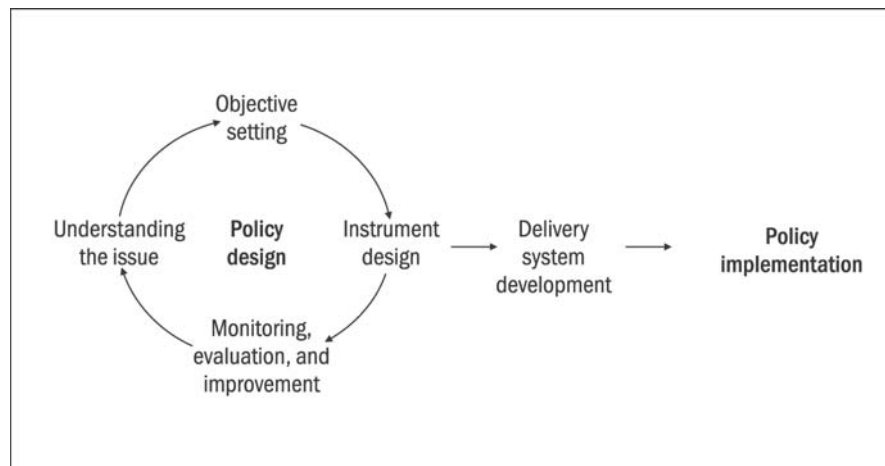
“Policy is implemented via *policy instruments* such as regulatory, economic, expenditure and institutional instruments.”<sup>19</sup>

### A note on the role of evaluation in the policy development cycle

Evaluation is not itself a ‘pathway’ in policymaking, but is rather a practice that supports learning and responsiveness within each of the above policymaking pathways, each of which can be conceived as a separately ‘evaluable’ in the project planning and implementation cycle.

#### Example for the advocacy pathway

“The pathways of influence approach is similar to the process evaluation approach in that it helps teams develop conceptual clarity about whom they are trying to influence how they will go about this (given the activities and strengths of partners and other agents) and what they should monitor to assess progress.”<sup>20</sup> (See also Appendix 2 for a list of questions supporting a stakeholder analysis)



Idealized illustration of policy design and implementation

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### Solution 1: An up-front investment in contextual analysis and planning

To ensure that the above policy development pathways promote adaptive policy, it is important to design an iterative approach to policy that enables regular reflection, assessment and evaluation by key policy stakeholders and influencers. Policy planning and evaluation design become integrally linked in successful policymaking: “effective policy making must be a learning process which involves

<sup>18</sup>Swanson et al, op. cit, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Chapman, op. cit, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Adapted from Swanson et al, op. cit, p. 16.

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finding out from experience what works and what does not and making sure that others can learn from it too. This means that new policies must have evaluation of their effectiveness build into them from the start”.<sup>22</sup>

The ‘Problem Identification’ and planning pathway is critical to the success of both the policy initiative and of the evaluation; it determines the context, structure, scope, methods and outcomes of policymaking and becomes the foundation for an adaptive, results-based approach to policy development.

Traditional logic models are essential tools that provide a structure for policy initiatives and their evaluation, identifying different levels of learning and inquiry, setting objectives and priorities, and specifying expected outcomes. Logic models are most useful, however, when ‘naming’ a static initiative. It is challenging to formulate logic models for projects that are developmental and iterative. More effective in grounding evaluations are flexible, less structured planning processes based on a theory of how the desired policy change will come about. The ‘theory of change’ approach emerged in response to the inflexibility and linearity of logic modelling, helping to identify inherent strategies, assumptions and expected waves of outcomes over time. By using theories of change before developing a logic model, it is possible to clarify and strengthen the planning process.

### A theory of change approach to policy planning

“Weiss popularized the term ‘Theory of Change’ as a way to describe the set of assumptions that explain both the mini-steps that lead to the long-term goal of interest and the connections between program activities and outcomes that occur at each step of the way. She challenged designers of complex community-based initiatives to be specific about the theories of change guiding their work and suggested that doing so would improve their overall evaluation plans and would strengthen their ability to claim credit for outcomes that were predicted in their theory.”<sup>23</sup>

A theory of change process brings new rigour to policy planning by pushing practitioners to state a program theory that makes explicit the connections between their proposed investments and activities, and the longer-term policy effects of those activities. In addition, it “provides a common language and consensus on outcomes and activities in a multi-organization initiative.”<sup>24</sup>

Theory-based evaluation offers clues for developing an approach that identifies the pathways of change, as well as waves of outcomes connecting current activities to long-term policy outcomes: “[t]heory-based evaluation strategies have been developed as tools to help test and explain complex change processes. *Theories of change* seek to identify the interlocking assumptions that drive the need or desire for change. Through clearly defining and understanding these assumptions, it is easier to develop a road map that effectively lays out the processes and actions required to reach the agreed-upon destination.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Guidance Notes on Policy Evaluation*: Policy Hub, British Civil Service – HM Treasury, London, England. [www.policyhub.gov.uk/magenta\\_book/index.asp](http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/magenta_book/index.asp), (sourced January 24, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> “Origins”, *Theory of Change Website*, Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change and ActKnowledge, <http://www.theoryofchange.org/html/origins.html> (sourced January, 2007)

<sup>24</sup> Guthrie, Kendall et al. op cit, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Bruner, Charles. “*The Build Initiative’s Theory of Change*”, *Summary of Toward a Theory of Change for the Build Initiative: A Discussion Paper*, Build Strong Foundations for Our Youngest Children, p. 1.

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This process of mapping outcomes involves working backwards from the change one wants to create, and connecting outcomes to the planned interventions: “[a] theory of change, no matter what it is officially called, is central to prospective policy change evaluation. In any prospective, forward-looking evaluation, a program’s theory guides the evaluation plan. Reciprocally, the evaluation provides feedback to a program as it evolves; it becomes a key resource in program refinement”.<sup>26</sup>

### Steps in developing a theory of change

A theory of change process is generally facilitated as an ongoing collaborative inquiry bringing together key stakeholders. Eko Nomos’ experience suggests that once the scope of an initiative is identified, an initial theory of change can be developed in two or three 3-hour working sessions.

Theories of change vary in format and structure: some are narrative, while others are presented in creative visual frameworks that are easier to understand conceptually. Yet, regardless of the form, theories of change tend to answer the following questions:

- “State the issue of problem you are trying to address
  - What factors are thought to be causing the problem
  - Which of these factors will your project address
  - What is your target audience and their status at the onset
- Propose a strategy for intervening
- Prepare a rationale about how the strategy should work
- Make a statement of assumptions about the strategy and why are they correct
- Establish a hypothetical sequence of ‘waves’ of expected results including early deliverables (or outputs), then process benchmarks and finally, longer-term outcomes
- Identify documentable indicators of outcomes”<sup>27</sup>

### What is policy evaluation?

Adaptive approaches to policy development invest heavily in evaluation and learning, and are still fundamentally grounded in traditional evaluation practice, even though they are part of an emerging field:

“Policy evaluation uses a range of research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of policy interventions, implementation, and processes, and to determine their merit, worth, or value in terms of improving the social and economic conditions of different stakeholders. Policy evaluation uses quantitative and qualitative methods, experimental and non-experimental designs, descriptive and experiential methods, theory based approaches, research synthesis methods, and economic evaluation methods.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Guthrie, Kendall et al., op. cit, pp. 13 – 14.

<sup>27</sup> Eko Nomos, *Introduction to preparing a theory of change*, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Chapter 1: What is Policy Evaluation: Policy Hub, op. cit, pp. 1 - 2.

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## Clarity of scope and purpose of evaluation are critical

From Eko Nomos' experience, evaluations are done for three general purposes: accountability; learning and effective practice; and program design/justification. Most evaluations answer seven broad questions, the relative importance of which determines the focus of the evaluation:

### Process Evaluation

- Did we do what we planned?
- Did we do it well?
- Were these the right strategies and activities?

### Outcomes Evaluation

- What approaches work?
- What resulted from our work?

### Program design/justification

- Should we continue with this approach?
- How can our approach be refined?

In addition to these general questions, adaptive policy explores unconventional priorities and dimensions that strongly influence evaluation directions:

- "Uncover a range of possibilities
- Predict from experience with aggregate responses
- Embrace alternatives
- Highlight difficult trade-offs
- Promote long-term objectives
- Evaluate future feedback and learning
- Seek imagination in new options
- Expect and profit from change"<sup>29</sup>

## Traditional evaluation practice provides the underpinnings of policy development evaluation

Learning and evaluation should be considered an integral part of the project management cycle, intimately related to the success of results-based management approaches. Below are outlined these general steps and components of a conventional evaluation which fit well with the planning, implementation and project assessment stages of the standard program development cycle. These steps to evaluation are particularly useful in the annual process of planning and evaluating initiatives aimed at influencing the design and implementation of public policy.

### Phase I: Evaluation design and planning

1. Logic model development identifies the purpose, scope, activities and expected outcomes of the project

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<sup>29</sup> Swanson, et al., op. cit, p. 21.

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2. Evaluation framework identifies key evaluation questions and methodologies emerging from the logic model

### Phase 2: Establish accountability systems

3. Output indicators and documentation systems identified
4. Management information systems established to track deliverables and outputs

### Phase 3: Ongoing research and evaluation activities

5. Benchmarking indicators identified and prioritized (both for process and achievements)
6. Methodologies explored and selected for researching and documenting qualitative and quantitative outcomes over time
7. Evaluation methodologies designed and implemented (interviews, questionnaires, focus groups etc.)

### Phase 4: Analysis and refinement

8. Process identified for regular reflection, analysis and assessment of the initiative
9. Decisionmaking about possible changes in direction and redesign

The evaluation of policy development and advocacy initiatives continues to employ traditional tools and approaches that are very effective in promoting learning and assessment. There is no need to revise the fundamentals. It is during the planning stage that innovative techniques are being adopted which connect policy strategy, activities, outcomes and evaluation. Once the evaluation planning is done, documentation, research and assessment become more routine.

## What is Theory-Based Evaluation?

Evaluation becomes a way of testing the theory of change and ensuring that policy interventions are the most effective: “[t]heory-based evaluations focus on unpacking the theoretical or logical sequence by which a policy intervention is expected to bring about its desired effects. For instance, a theory-based evaluation might ask about the steps that are implicit between a policy initiative... and the policy outcome).”<sup>30</sup>

## Solution 2: A developmental approach to evaluation connects the theory of change to adaptive policy development and advocacy

The theory of change approach is greatly complemented by a developmental approach to evaluation. This combination supports adaptive policy by incorporating ongoing theory-driven and outcomes-oriented learning and redesign into program implementation: “[d]evelopmental evaluation refers to long-term, partnering relationships between evaluators and those engaged in innovative initiatives and development. Developmental evaluation processes include asking evaluative questions and gathering information to provide feedback and support developmental decision-making and course corrections along the emergent path”.<sup>31</sup>

This changes the role of the evaluator from objective outsider offering assessments and judgements about an initiative, to that of animator and facilitator of collaborative inquiry. Evaluators are heavily

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<sup>30</sup> Chapter 1: What is Policy Evaluation? Policy Hub, op. cit, pp. 1 - 2.

<sup>31</sup> Caledon Institute, op. cit.

## Evaluating Policy Development and Advocacy

engaged as a participant in an adaptive policy process: “[t]he evaluator is part of a team whose members collaborate to conceptualize, design and test new approaches in a long-term, ongoing process of continuous improvement, adaptation and intentional change. The evaluator’s primary function in the team is to elucidate team discussions with evaluative questions, data and logic, and to facilitate data-based assessments of where things are, how are things unfolding, what directions hold promise, what directions ought to be abandoned, what new experiments should be tried – in other words, data-based decision-making in the unfolding and developmental processes of innovation.”<sup>32</sup>

### Solution 3: A focus on results

Theory of change process provides assistance in exploring and identifying trackable outcomes – setting progress markers that show that progress has been made.

“A theory of change makes the evaluation effort more transparent and efficient . . . [I]t breaks up the evaluation into both process implementation and outcomes. It also forces you to be specific about what kind of change you want in what period of time. . . . A program officer from another foundation notes that, ‘Without a theory of change, use of indicators will lead to activity-driven monitoring.’<sup>33</sup>

OXFAM offers an approachable list that establishes a simplified theory of change and a sequence of policy outcomes:

“In the past the Oxfam Policy Department has tended to focus on the **policy outcomes** of its work, distinguishing between six different stages of the advocacy process which appear as a rather linear progression.

1. Heightened awareness about an issue
2. Contribution to debate
3. Changed opinions
4. Changed behaviour
5. Changed policy
6. Policy change is implemented
7. Positive change in people’s lives”<sup>34</sup>

### Outcomes and Indicators

“Using an outcome map, you can visually lay out a pathway of change. Outcomes can be ‘mapped’ in a linear or causal sequence, though change is typically more complex than a simple cause-and-effect relationship. In some cases, outcomes occur sequentially, while other times they occur simultaneously. Outcomes may occur independently from each other or be highly interrelated. Outcomes may result from a single strategy or multiple ones. They may lead to common goals or separate ones.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Caledon Institute, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Guthrie, Kendall et al., op. cit., pp. 13 – 14.

<sup>34</sup> Chapman et al., op. cit, pp. 28 – 29.

<sup>35</sup> Organizational Research Services, *Theory of Change: A Practical Tool for Action, Results and Learning*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004, p. 12. [http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/aecf\\_theory\\_of\\_change\\_manual.pdf](http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications/aecf_theory_of_change_manual.pdf) (sourced Sept. 1)

## Evaluating Policy Development and Advocacy

To simplify, outcomes evaluation can be split into two initial categories, which focus on two general areas of results: 1) the process and 2) the outcomes of a policy intervention.

1. **Process indicators** – exploring the effectiveness and progress of policy development and advocacy for each pathway:

- Outputs – the immediate, concrete deliverables of an initiative
- Benchmarks – intermediate accomplishments in the policy process

The literature offers benchmarks as useful process markers that document the waves of change hypothesized in a theory of change: “[g]enerally, the policy change goals in a theory of change are long-term and can take many years. Therefore, developing relevant benchmarks to track progress along the way is vital to an effective and useful policy change evaluation. A benchmark is a standard used to measure the progress of a project. ... Process benchmarks refer to an organization’s activities or efforts to make change happen. ... Outcomes benchmarks refer to a change that occurred, ideally due in part to an organization’s efforts”.<sup>36</sup>

2. **Results indicators** – exploring the waves of outcomes that result from the activities implemented by different policy development pathways.

- Influence outcomes/indicators
- Leverage outcomes/indicators<sup>37</sup>
- Impact indicators

Those evaluating policy development and advocacy must be familiar and comfortable with the use of qualitative indicators. Qualitative indicators make it possible to explore less tangible outcomes that give much more texture and depth to policymakers’ understanding of the policy process and its outcomes. Consequently, less ‘precise’ and ‘objective’ forms of qualitative research (e.g. key informant interviews) should always be a central component of adaptive policy development evaluation. The challenge is to identify qualitative indicators that become realistic, trackable ‘proxies’ for the outcome being documented.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation charts a detailed range of sample, generic qualitative and quantitative outcomes and indicators that is an excellent reference for those seeking to evaluate policy development and advocacy outcomes. Some examples are:

### **Influence Outcome**

Change in political will:

### **Indicator**

- Political leaders increase awareness of issue
- Political leaders increase willingness to take action on issues

### **Leverage Outcome**

Change in public funding:

### **Indicator**

- New public funds allocated toward issue/policy
- Redistribution of existing public funds to issue/policy
- New funding methods (pooled, matched, blended) increase allocations
- Public funding practices (RFP process, selection criteria) change to increase availability of funds

<sup>36</sup> Guthrie, Kendall et al., op. cit, p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Organizational Research Services, op. cit, pp. 6-8.

## Evaluating Policy Development and Advocacy

Adaptive policy development provides interesting additional forms of indicators designed to ensure that policies are kept up-to-date and relevant. Yet “a policy need not be static over time. When monitoring reveals that conditions have changed and design assumptions invalidated, this can trigger an improvement in the policy. From the definitions of Walker, Rahman, and Cave (2001) it is clear that from a pragmatic perspective, aspects of indicators and assessment play an important role in adaptive policies. Of particular relevance are their ideas related to the following.

- *Signposts* – information that should be tracked in order to determine whether defensive or corrective actions, or a policy reassessment is needed
- *Triggers* – critical values of the signpost variables that lead to implementation of corrective actions.”<sup>38</sup>

The further ‘downstream’ from the policy intervention that a projected outcome is, the more difficult it is to connect cause and effect. By using the theory of change approach, it is possible to establish ongoing connections between evolving actions and interventions and their onward effects. These results chains have been used in various ways to build a strong case to justify the policy direction and investment.

### **Conclusion: A framework for an adaptive approach to policy evaluation**

All of these concepts combine to create a generic theory of change for policymaking, complete with suggested outcomes. As a part of this exploratory process, Eko Nomos has developed a Generic Theory of Change and Results chart below that can support CAMH to locate its policy development and advocacy work on a continuum of possible types of policy work. The chart (immediately below) supports CAMH to be more realistic about its expectations of outcomes, identifying chains of connected outcomes that are likely to be created by different stages of policy development work.

In a context of multiple priorities/levels and differing views as to the best way one should navigate the complex process of policy development, an organization’s policy work is not always well coordinated. It is also important to recognize “that advocacy can work at different levels which may, but do not necessarily reinforce each other.”<sup>39</sup>

This tool can also be used as a framework for ‘mapping’ the overall policy development and advocacy work of an organization or department.

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<sup>38</sup>Swanson et al., op. cit, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Chapman et al., op. cit, p. 3.

# Generic Theory of Change for Public Policy CAMH

Process evaluation		
Pathways to policy change	Evaluation Priorities	Sample Outputs <sup>40</sup>
1. Problem identification		
<b>Analysis</b>	Focus of rationale Clarity of purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem statement</li> <li>• Contextual analysis</li> <li>• Scope and nature of desired change</li> <li>• Formulation of options</li> </ul>
<b>Planning purpose and strategy</b>	Design and Program Justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal setting</li> <li>• Targeting</li> <li>• Determine approach</li> <li>• Review assumptions</li> <li>• Identify pathways to change: connect outcomes to activities</li> </ul>
<b>Mobilization of resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizing people and building support – internal to organization, alliances/partnerships, connections to policy influencers</li> <li>• Information – accessing and interpreting data, contextual information, opinion etc.</li> <li>• Communications/marketing</li> <li>• Identifying funding</li> </ul>	Effectiveness of Implementation  Capacity of organization to do policy work  Relationships/ Partnerships  Communications/ Branding  Financial resources	Indicators of policy capacity <sup>41</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational commitment to public policy</li> <li>• Decision-making structures</li> <li>• Policy agendas</li> <li>• Relationships with nonprofits, government agencies, and policymakers</li> <li>• Organizational resources to engage in public policy</li> <li>• Communication skills and infrastructure</li> <li>• Knowledge of state, local and national politics</li> <li>• Technical expertise related to public policy</li> </ul>

<sup>40</sup> Sample outputs and outcomes have been sourced variously from the following documents:  
Organizational Research Services, *Theory of Change: A Practical Tool for Action, Results and Learning*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004, pp. 6 - 8.

Innovation Network, "Advocacy Evaluation Project: Articles & References", [www.innonet.org/index.php?section\\_id=101&content\\_id=441](http://www.innonet.org/index.php?section_id=101&content_id=441), (sourced March 13, 2007).

Innovation Network: Transforming Evaluation for Social Change, "8 Steps to Develop a Policy Advocacy Evaluation Plan", Washington, 2005, pp. 1-2.

<sup>41</sup> Innovation Network, "Advocacy Evaluation Project: Articles & References", [www.innonet.org/index.php?section\\_id=101&content\\_id=441](http://www.innonet.org/index.php?section_id=101&content_id=441), (sourced March 13, 2007).

# Generic Theory of Change for Public Policy CAMH

Outcomes Evaluation		
Pathways to policy change	Evaluation Priorities	Sample leverage/influencing outcomes
<b>2. Formulating solutions</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem Definition</li> <li>• Policy Formulation – research and debate, policy analysis, jurisdictional studies, evidence</li> <li>• Agenda Setting</li> <li>• Policy design and development</li> </ul>	Policy definition and formulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly defined policy context</li> <li>• Policy agenda established</li> <li>• Policy design</li> </ul>
	Level and quality of debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased debate</li> <li>• Increased understanding of the issues</li> <li>• Stakeholders conversant with key arguments and issues</li> </ul>
<b>3. Advocacy – Influencing political choices</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convening</li> <li>• Mobilization of support for change</li> <li>• Lobbying decision influencers</li> </ul>	Change in public perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in visibility of issue</li> <li>• Changes in community norms</li> </ul>
	Changed awareness of policy influencers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in attitudes, e.g. perceptions and beliefs</li> <li>• Changes in knowledge</li> <li>• Changes in awareness</li> <li>• Changes in skills</li> </ul>
	Behavioural change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in partnerships</li> <li>• Change in public will</li> <li>• Change in political will</li> </ul>
<b>4. Policy change and Implementation</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy change</li> <li>• Policy approval/adoption</li> <li>• Policy Implementation</li> </ul>	Policy change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in policies, practices, programs</li> <li>• Policy approval</li> <li>• Changes in institutional behaviour</li> <li>• Change in regulations, laws, standards</li> </ul>
	Policy implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in service practice(s)</li> <li>• Change in business practice(s)</li> </ul>

## Generic Theory of Change for Public Policy CAMH

Impact Assessment		
Pathways to policy change	Evaluation Priorities	Sample Impacts
<b>Assumed connection between chosen policy recommendations and onward impact</b>	Positive change in people's lives Individual/household levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in attitudes, e.g. perceptions and beliefs</li> <li>• Changes in knowledge, awareness, skills, behaviour family relationships etc.</li> <li>• Changes in health</li> </ul>
	Population Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in safety and health</li> <li>• Changes in educational, social and economic conditions</li> </ul>
	Civil society outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strengthened capacity of organizations to continue the work and / or undertake new advocacy</li> <li>• Democratic outcomes: new channels for organizations to be involved in future policymaking / public decisions</li> <li>• Citizen empowerment / citizenship building / people-centred outcomes: improved abilities of marginalized or disadvantaged people to organize to affect policymaking / public decisions</li> </ul>

## Appendix 1: Exploring pathways of influence

### Explore ways of influencing those with the power to make and implement policy

Success hinges on understanding the human dynamics of policy change:

- “Who are the stakeholders associated with the desired policy change?”
  - Who are the advocates and supporters?
  - Who are the opponents?
  - Who are the decision-makers?
  - Who are the undecided or swing voters?
- How are changes in policies made at different levels?
- Who and what influences the key decision-makers?
  - Whom do they believe?
  - Who are their influential constituents and co-workers?
  - What arguments are they most likely to respond to?
  - What are their priorities – rational, emotional, personal?
- What is the communication structure related to policy-making?
  - What are the channels that reach policy-makers?
  - What is a credible message for policy-makers?”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Population Communication Services: Center for Communication Programs Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, “‘A’ Frame for Advocacy”, Baltimore.