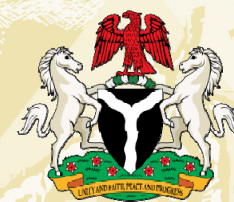




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## Improving Research-Policy Linkages in Nigeria

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When there is disconnect between research and policy, high quality research-based information can be produced without impact on policy dialogue and action. This often results in policy actions lagging far behind scientific and academic knowledge, the presence of avoidable inefficiencies in policy design and implementation, and policies that may not fulfill their purpose. While there is no real consensus on how to successfully improve linkages between research and policy, it is clear that understanding the specific context in which policy decisions take place is critical. To better understand the dynamics between agricultural research and policymaking in Nigeria, we examined the 2006 National Fertilizer Policy for Nigeria and the process that led to its writing and adoption.

### Introduction

A key challenge is how to better integrate research findings into policy. Nigeria offers a useful example, as it is a developing country that has sufficient capacity for research, yet it lacks strong ties between research and policymaking. Examining a particular policy allowed the actual policy process that took place, the actors involved, and the type of links and interactions between them to be traced.

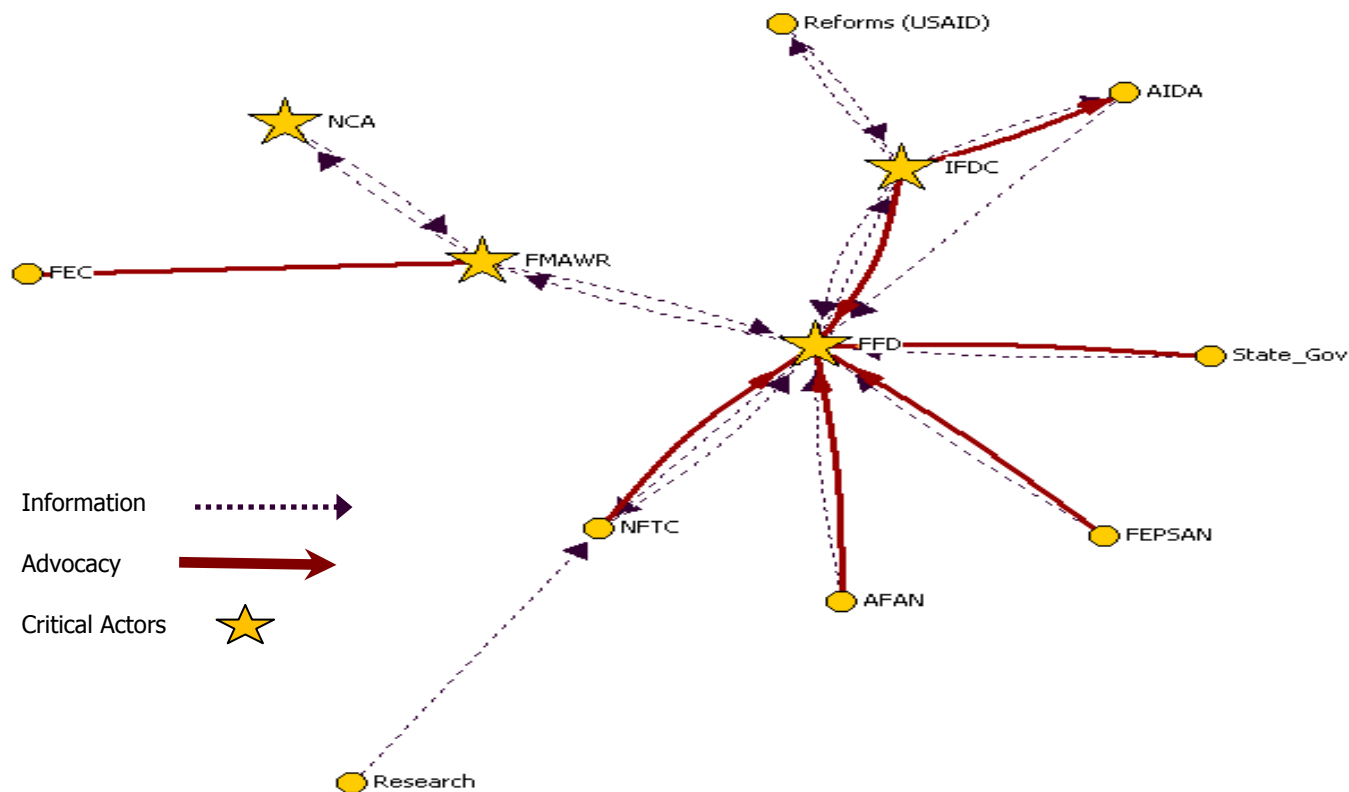
The process leading to the formulation and adoption of Nigeria's 2006 National Fertilizer Policy was an ideal case study for three reasons. First, it is relevant and important for agriculture and rural development in Nigeria. Second, it is a highly debated issue among a diverse group of stakeholders and the success of the policy initiative offered a useful opportunity to examine how it overcame the pressures of vested interests and what role, if any, research-based information played in that process. Third, it was recently formulated, and therefore, the key actors in the process could be easily found.

### The Net-Map Approach

To study the policy process that led to the formulation and adoption of the National Fertilizer Policy for Nigeria, the tool Net-Map was used. The tool highlights the actors' formal and informal interactions involved in the policy process, and examines the flows of information from researchers to distinguish the pathways of research-based information. The tool goes further by including principles of power mapping and stakeholder analysis approaches. The methodology enables concrete discussion of complex and even sensitive topics.

In support of the Net-Map method, a content analysis of published and grey literature on fertilizer policies in Nigeria, in the years prior to the passing of the fertilizer bill, was conducted. This provided a context for the knowledge-based and policy discussions, who was involved in them, and who funded or drove them.

Figure 1: Net-Map showing information flows and critical actors<sup>2</sup>



## Research-Policy Linkages: the Nigerian Context

The research-policy linkages in Nigeria have been generally described as weak for three potential reasons:

1. Lack of high-quality research, despite having one of the largest numbers of policy research institutions and think tanks in Africa.
2. Lack of interaction between policymakers and researchers, thereby, limiting meaningful discussion on research findings and their suitability to policy-related problems, as well as limiting identification of policy areas requiring additional research.
3. Insufficient use of available research-based information in public policymaking, creating disenchantment by policy researchers.

The return to civil rule in 1999 ushered in a stronger role for research in policymaking by facilitating the inclusion of more academic and policy expertise into the policy process. Beginning with President Obasanjo's administration, from 1999 to 2007, technocrats with sound academic backgrounds, who were strong advocates for the inclusion of research output in the policymaking process, formed part of the cabinet. This effort has started to create an interface between researchers and policymakers, but its impact on the use of high-

quality evidence to support policymaking is unclear<sup>6</sup>.

## Results

Key findings from the Net-Map analysis shed light on the nature of research and policy linkages that influenced the outcomes of the initiative to develop a comprehensive fertilizer policy for Nigeria. First, the presence of an *advocacy coalition* along with strong political support, ensured that the policy was successfully formulated and adopted. Second, "champions" in government and research proved to be critical players throughout the process (Figure 1). Third, existing strong ties between researchers, who maintained an acceptably low profile, and government technocrats, helped to maintain credibility and government ownership during the formulation of the policy. Fourth, the final adoption of the fertilizer policy by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (FMAWR) in 2006 has yet to translate into substantive action.

In the years leading up to the fertilizer policy initiative, donors, often in collaboration with development partners, hired Nigerian technocrats to undertake research on fertilizer policy, resulting in an *advocacy coalition* of key individuals throughout government and research institutions with similar perspectives (Table 1). This allowed support for fertilizer reform to develop in an iterative manner, and from the inside, as technocrats, in favor of reform, have been embedded within

various government bodies even as they worked as consultants. The Africa Fertilizer Summit, hosted by Nigeria in cooperation with NEPAD, helped captivate and elevate the interest of Nigerian policymakers and civil servants to support the development of a comprehensive national fertilizer policy prior to the summit.

Beyond simply having a coalition to support the initiative, it was critical that “champions” of the reform process emerged. Three individuals from the Federal Fertilizer Department (FFD) and the International Center for Fertilizer Development (IFDC) actively drove the process forward and did the necessary work to support it. The existing and strong relationship between the IFDC and the government actors, particularly the FFD champion, supported the success of the initiative. The IFDC was seen as credible by the government and thus was relied on for research-based input, but it also maintained an acceptably low profile to ensure full government ownership of the process.

Finally, it is important to note that in spite of successful drafting and formal acceptance of the policy, we were unable to discern much concrete action that had been taken towards implementation, at the time of this study.

### Implications for High-Impact Policy Research

This study began with the assumption that policy researchers want their work to have an impact on the policy landscapes they study. However, the link between research and policy actors has been shown to be inherently complex. Some suggestions based on both the literature review and the results of our Net-Map analysis are offered on how researchers can maximize the effectiveness of their research given such complexities.

Firstly, for an initiative to change policy or otherwise gain official government support, it must have “champions” fully invested in the outcomes who will drive the process forward. Secondly, the engagement of key stakeholders in government, research institutions, and civil society is necessary. Returning to the argument of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999), researchers can view themselves as part of an advocacy coalition through which they can engage in an ongoing policy discourse with policymakers and other stakeholders, learning from and contributing to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the knowledge base required to contribute towards current policy challenges. Finally, for external research

organizations, it is recommended to not only channel policy briefs to political decisionmakers, but also to become more aware of their interests, inherent policy processes, and the political context within which they operate, as well as to establish strong ties with key stakeholders and “champions” linked with the policy process.

**Table 1: Relevant reports written in the years leading up to the development of the National Fertilizer Policy**

Component of Policy	Reports	Year
To promote the domestic fertilizer sector	IFDC (under USAID, DAIMINA project) showed that Nigeria was losing efficiency by not taking advantage of domestic resources for fertilizer production.	2005
To promote privatization and liberalization of fertilizer procurement and distribution	IFDC report, funded by USAID, developed report on fertilizer sector reform.	2002
	The FFD, funded by FAO, wrote a report on the socioeconomic issues related to fertilizer in Nigeria.	2006-2007
Fertilizer vouchers and other mechanisms that support “market-friendly” subsidy administration	Technocrats of the Ministry of Agriculture were contracted by IFDC, and funded by USAID, to develop a confidential report on fertilizer sector reform.	2002
	IFDC (under USAID, DAIMINA project) implemented a fertilizer voucher scheme and reported positive results.	2005
To develop a legal and regulatory framework for the quality control of fertilizer	IFDC (under USAID, DAIMINA project) worked with the government to develop an effective fertilizer regulatory system after a policy report showed the need.	2004
To place the responsibility of the import and export of fertilizer exclusively in the hands of the private sector	Federal Government of Nigeria, in “new thrust for agriculture” report	2005
To guard against environmental degradation and pollution from fertilizer and to promote complementary use of inorganic and organic fertilizers	The FFD, funded by FAO, wrote a report on the socioeconomic issues related to fertilizer in Nigeria.	2006-2007
To promote the domestic fertilizer sector	IFDC (under USAID, DAIMINA project) showed that Nigeria was losing efficiency by not taking advantage of domestic resources for fertilizer production.	2005

Guided by the above suggestions, a longer-term view on policy impact must be taken as researchers consider that they can contribute to policy perspectives in an iterative manner. One effective way to accomplish this is to establish strong

working relationships with local research partners who are highly respected by policymakers and often invited to contribute to the policy process. Another is to establish strong ties with governmental or nongovernmental bodies that often serve as connectors between the research and policy process, as the FFD did in this case study.

*This brief is excerpted from the background paper on "Mapping the Policy Process in Nigeria: Examining Linkages between Research and Policy." This brief was written with the assistance of Valerie Rhoe and James Sackey. It is intended to promote discussion; it has not been formally peer reviewed, but it has been reviewed by at least one internal and/or external reviewer.*

*The Nigeria Strategy Support Program (NSSP) of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) supports the Agricultural Policy Support Facility (APSF), an initiative to strengthen evidence-based policymaking in Nigeria in the areas of rural and agricultural development. In collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), APSF supports the implementation of Nigeria's national development plans by strengthening agricultural-sector policies and strategies.*

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