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## GUIDE TO PROMOTING PRODUCTIVE POLICY DIALOGUE IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

By

Nicholas J. Sitko



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The importance of effective and appropriate policies in achieving broader development objectives through agriculture is increasingly being recognized by national governments, development agencies, and supranational institutions. Despite increasing attention to improving the quality of agricultural policy discussions and decision-making, in many ways these efforts are proceeding in the absence of a systematic strategy for how to achieve this.

This paper provides a practical guide for applied policy researchers and other stakeholders engaged in agricultural policy reform in developing countries. It draws on a case study from Zambia to provide a set of tools and strategies to improve the effectiveness of policy engagement. This guide consolidates years of practical experiences with agricultural policy dialogue and change garnered primarily through Michigan State University's collaborative research and policy programs in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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## ACRONYMS

CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
EAC	East African Community
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (United Nations)
FRA	Food Reserve Agency
FtF	Feed the Future Initiative
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
MAFAP	Monitoring and Analysis Food and Agricultural Policies
NAIP	National Agricultural Investment Plan
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
ReSAKSS	Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System
SADC	Southern African Development Community
USAID	United States Agency of International Development
ZNFU	Zambia National Farmers Union

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of policies in achieving broader development objectives through agriculture is increasingly being recognized by national governments, development agencies, and supranational institutions. This growing recognition is reflected in number of development strategies, including the African Union’s Malabo Declaration, which reaffirms African governments’ commitment to the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) and the United States Agency of International Development’s (USAID) Feed the Future Initiative (FtF). Yet, while increasing levels of institutional awareness and support are being directed toward improving the quality of agricultural policy discussions and decision-making, in many ways these efforts are proceeding in the absence of a systematic strategy for how to achieve this.

Focusing on improving policy engagement and policy outcomes is certainly not new to international development efforts, or agricultural development more specifically. Aid conditionality and structural adjustment programmes were explicitly about achieving a set of particular policy outcomes. Yet the more recent iteration is distinct in several respects. Current efforts to promote improved policy outcomes emphasize the need for country-level and regional leadership and mutual accountability between stakeholders. This marks an important point of departure from previous efforts, which were often based on economic power differentials between donors, as agents of policy change, and recipient countries as implementers.

As these novel efforts to promote productive policy dialogue and change gain momentum, there is urgent need to think strategically about how best to achieve this. There are numerous places to begin. In particular, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), drawing on years of experiences in influencing development policy debates, has compiled a set of tools—collective called the RAPID (Research and Policy in Development) outcome mapping approach—aimed at promoting a strategic approach to influencing development policy. However, while this set of tools is extremely useful to laying an initial foundation for thinking about policy change, its lack of sectoral focus makes it only partially relevant to policies specific to the agricultural sector.

The agricultural sector in primarily agrarian countries is fundamentally different from other sectors such as education or health. In these countries, which comprise the majority of developing economies, agriculture serves as the primary source of employment and livelihoods. In addition, food expenditures make up a large and often inelastic component of total household expenditure and consumption. As a result, policies effecting the food and agricultural sector are freighted with a host of political economy concerns that are significantly more acute than in other sectors. Moreover, these political economy concerns are fluid and context specific. For example in many African countries political incentives surrounding agriculture have changed in important ways in the context of maturing multiparty democracies. While most African countries once explicitly taxed the agricultural sector in an effort to retain support in urban areas, this is increasingly being replaced with neo-patrimonial systems aimed at securing allegiances with rural and urban elites.

This policy guide seeks to enhance the quality of efforts to promote agricultural policy dialogue and change by providing a set of tools and strategies to improve the effectiveness of policy engagement. This guide consolidates years of practical experiences with agricultural policy dialogue and change garnered primarily through Michigan State University’s collaborative research and policy programs in Sub-Saharan Africa. This guide also draws heavily on existing tools, particularly those developed by ODI, and theories of policy change to better ground our knowledge in existing approaches.



## 2. DEFINITIONS

It is important that we are clear on what we mean when we talk about policy change and policy dialogue. We have identified three areas where policy change strategies can focus. The first is the *standard model*. In this model policy strategy efforts seek to put a policy issue on the policy-making agenda and then move it through to implementation. This process is what people generally have in mind when they talk about promoting policy change.

The second model that is frequently encountered is the *formalization model*. Under this model, the primary goal is to develop policies that take informal, and often ad hoc processes, and make them more predictable and more formalized. This is often the objective for policy strategies aimed at improving food trade.

The final policy strategy model focuses on retracting an existing policy or proclamation. This is a policy change model that is often underappreciated and difficult to report on. Nonetheless, it is one of the most important areas of focus for many policy institutes.

The various tools and strategies presented below are designed to support efforts in each of these policy strategy models, although some may be more relative for a particular model type than others.

### 3. POLICY CHANGE APPROACHES

Agricultural sector policy processes are fundamentally different from many other sectors. In part, this is because food and agricultural is embedded in an array of cultural, political, and economic contexts that may not be as salient in other sectors. People tend to have strong beliefs and interests around food and food systems, which can place limits on the feasibility of changes in a particular policy area. Equally important is that fact that the evidence base in the food and agricultural sector often lacks rigorous counterfactuals, thus allowing for a proliferation of differing interpretations and recommendations (Resnick et al. 2015).

Given the inherent challenges surrounding food and agricultural policy, it is instructive to examine the dominant hypotheses underlying donor efforts to promote policy change in the sector. To this end, we draw from the summary of policy processes in Resnick et al. (2015). The key message we hope to convey through this summary is that most of the hypotheses guiding current and previous efforts to achieve policy change in the agricultural sector have over-emphasized the importance of evidence in guiding policy discussions and underappreciated the political economic context within which agricultural policies are made. In many cases this has led to a failure to achieve long-lasting, meaningful changes in agricultural policy approaches.

Resnick et al. (2015) identify six general hypotheses underlying donor interventions in agricultural policy processes in developing countries, which are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of Hypotheses Underlying Donor Interventions**

Name	Hypothesis	Examples
Monte Carlo	Changing the pay-off structure around a particular policy or approach will lead to long-term systematic changes	Structural Adjustment Programmes (1980s and 1990s) CAAPD investment plans (current)
Sherlock Holmes	Investing in expanding the empirical base will trigger changes in policy approaches	IFPRI ReSAKSS
Contagion Inoculation	Show casing <i>best practices</i> in order to promote emulation	Abuja Fertilizer Summit
Frank Lloyd Wright	Foster greater transparency in spending and policy processes in order to enhance the institutional architecture for agricultural policy	Mutual accountability strategies Joint sector reviews
Hercules	Powerful <i>champions of change</i> can overcome flawed institutional architecture to achieve positive policy change	Africa lead champions of change program AGRA policy champions
Masters of the Universe	Top-down negotiations and high-level commitments enable and enforce policy changes	New Alliance agreements CAAPD regional compacts Regional economic community (COMESA, SADC, EAC) commitments

Source: Author, from Resnick et al. 2015.

In large measure these underlying hypotheses are informed by and reflect the theoretical underpinnings of the well-developed literature on policy processes. This rich literature, which is mostly derived from analyses of industrialized countries, offer differing perspectives of the state, from unitary to diffuse, on the one hand, and the role of actors' preferences and behaviors on the other.

According to Resnick et al. (2015), common strands seen in much of the donor hypotheses for policy change are that: 1) the state is a unified entity, albeit one in need of some institutional improvements. This tends to significantly undervalue the role of *field-level bureaucrats* in the policy making; 2) Information and evidence can change beliefs and behaviors. In other words, policies will be improved by providing the appropriate evidence to the appropriate decision-makers. This tends to significantly overestimate the capacity of both institutions and individuals in developing countries to access and effectively utilize information; 3) Academic theory on policy change tends to undertheorize the role of donor organizations in developing country policy processes. This tendency is apparent in the hypotheses of policy change, which, to the extent that the role of donors is recognized, is seen primarily as an agnostic and impartial observer or facilitator. This in turn limits our understanding of how donors shape both the institutions of policy change and the ideas informing policy debates.

As Resnick et al. (2015) suggest, engagement with policy processes in the context of developing country agricultural sectors requires that we move beyond current theories in several practical ways. First, it is important to be attentive to all the various stages of the policy process, rather than focusing solely on outcomes. By engaging with each stage of the process, from agenda setting to implementation, the various power dynamics involved are made more visible and points of policy leverage can be identified. Second, the range of actors that are included in policy processes must be expanded to include both the multinational elements of policy making that characterize developing country policy contexts and the internal dynamics at play within state bureaucracies. Thus, throughout this document we make several important assumptions: 1) the state is not a unified actor. Instead, it is an amalgamation of various institutions and beliefs that are frequently at odds with each other. This nuanced view of the state forces us to be attentive to the points of agreements and disagreements between bureaucratic institutions (i.e., different Ministries, central banks, etc..) and within Ministries or other state institutions; 2) donors are not agnostic actors, but are fundamentally integrated into the policy processes. Donors will often hold differing views on policies and will have differing capacity to promote their ideas and beliefs; 3) Policy making is non-linear and the various *stages* of a policy process frequently involve different sets of actors and ideas. Taking a disaggregated, non-linear view of policy processes focuses attention on different points at which policy change can be fostered or resisted.

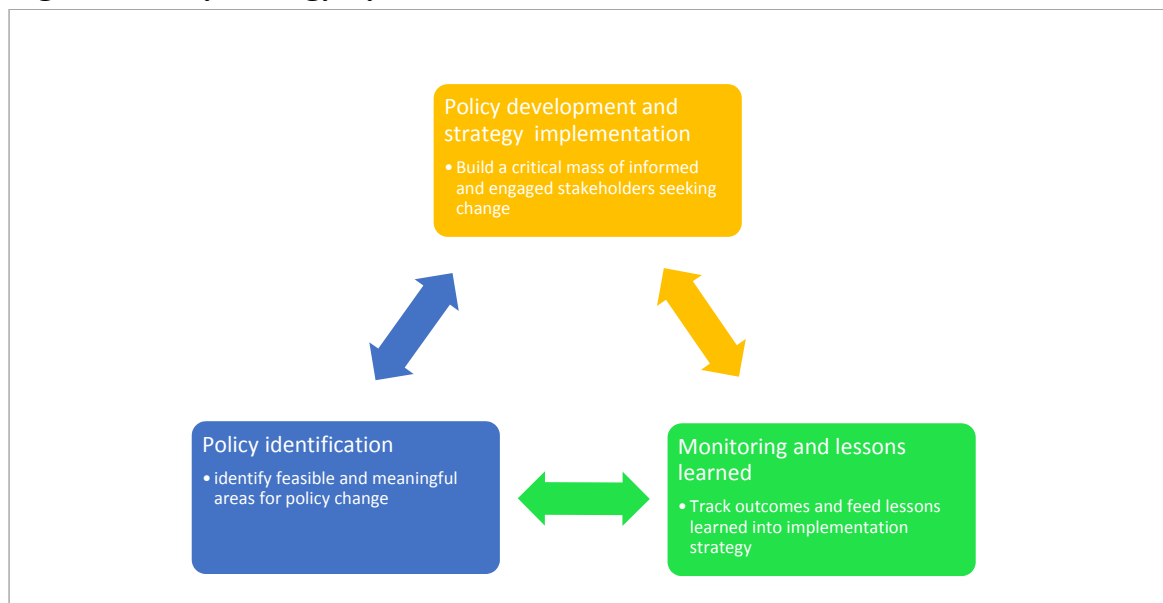
#### 4. STRATEGIC APPROACH TO POLICY CHANGE

This approach to improving policy dialogue and engagements in the agricultural sector revolves around three broadly defined components, which will be examined in greater detail below. In this section we will simply identify and describe the key components of the strategy. These are presented in a somewhat linear, step-wise format. However, it is important to note that in practice each of these components is interlinked with the others, leading to an iterative dynamic in terms of actual implementation.

Figure 1 provides a graphical depiction of the three broad components of this policy dialogue strategy and their associated goal or objective. In general terms the strategy begins by identifying the focal area for policy change. This may be a specific policy or a sector of interest. In many cases, donors and other stakeholders supporting improved policy dialogue want to focus on policy areas where a change can have the greatest beneficial effect on aggregate welfare outcomes. However, while these big ticket policy areas are important, they may also be the most difficult to change due to the entrenched interests surrounding them. Thus, the objective of the policy identification component of this strategy is to identify a policy or policy area that can feasibly be changed within the bounds set by funding timelines, while also contributing to a meaningful improvement in welfare.

Once a policy area has been identified, the next step is to create and implement a policy development strategy aimed at achieving a particular policy objective or improve policy dialogue around a particular policy. The overall objective of this component is to help to build a critical mass of well-informed and engaged stakeholders seeking positive change in the identified policy area. Through this process stakeholders will identify where their incentives for change align with others, and will work for change in those areas.

**Figure 1. Policy Strategy Cycle**



Source: Author.

At the same time they will recognize where disagreements persist and will seek to resolve these without jeopardizing the shared goals and objectives in the particular policy area.

As the strategy unfolds, lessons will be learned, new insights will emerge, and new power dynamics will come to lights that will affect the development and implementation strategy. These must be closely monitored and fed back into the implementation strategy. Moreover, these lessons learned will help further build the foundation of understanding around policy dialogue and change in the agricultural sector.

## 5. POLICY STRATEGY TOOLS

Under each of the policy strategy areas (identification, development and strategy implementation, and monitoring) we have developed a set of tools and processes to maximize the potential for achieving meaningful policy dialogue and outcomes. The tools and processes are detailed below.

### 5.1. Policy Identification

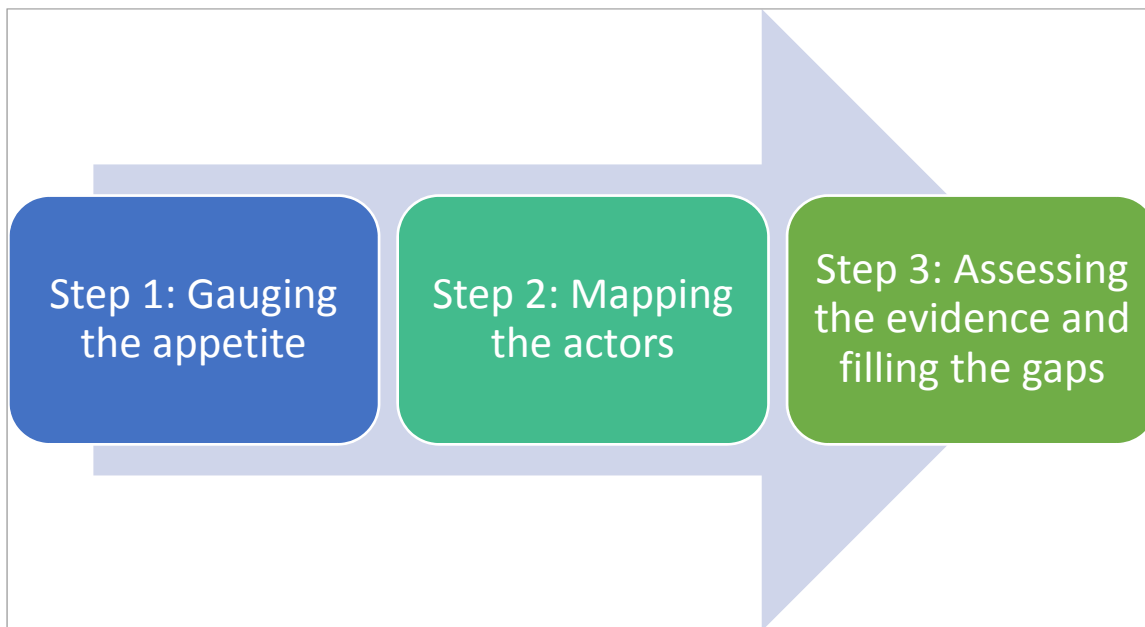
Identifying the priority policy areas around which to develop a policy strategy is critical for its success. Choosing policies for which there is a combination of domestic and regional appetite for change, a constellation of influential actors interested in achieving forward momentum in a particular policy area, and a body of useful empirical evidence to guide policy deliberations will increase the likelihood that a policy plan will lead to positive policy dialogue.

We propose a three-stage process for prioritizing policies around which to develop a policy strategy. While these are laid out in a linear fashion, it is important to recognize that in many cases the process of policy identification is iterative, with information gathered in later stages informing choices identified in earlier stages (Figure 2).

#### 5.1.1. Stage 1: Gauging the Appetite

Identifying policies around which to develop a policy strategy requires first gaining an appreciation of where the greatest domestic interest for change is. Policy change is mostly likely to be successful if dialogue for change already exists and there are identifiable champions for a particular policy.

**Figure 2. Steps to Policy Identification**



Source: Author.

While analysts tend to have tacit knowledge of key policy debates in the countries where they operate, this knowledge may be partial or incomplete. Approaching policy identification in a more systematic way will, therefore, prove valuable. The following steps are recommended:

*Step 1: Review existing agricultural policy commitments and objectives.* A thorough review of existing agricultural policy commitments and objectives provides a useful way of generating a list of potential priority policy areas. Through this review, policy areas for which there is some level of government commitment or interest can be identified. Several useful places to start are:

- CAAPD compact and NAIP documents
- Ruling party manifestos
- National Development Plans

An additional useful source is the FAO, which through its MAFAP group has compiled a database of country-level requests for priority policy areas. It can be found at: <http://dev.mafap.mraccess.nl/>

Through a thorough review of policy commitments and objectives a list of potential policy areas can be generated. It is important to remember that these may be potential policies to be implemented, existing policies that can be modified, or existing policies that can be retracted.

*Step 2: Key informant ranking.* Using the list compiled in Step 1 conduct a series of key informant interviews aimed at ranking and augmenting the list of policy priority areas. Key informants include:

- Government officials from various Ministries including: Agriculture, Finance, and Trade
- Multi-lateral organization representatives
- Bi-lateral donor representatives
- Private sector
  - o Input suppliers
  - o Traders
  - o Processors
  - o Farmers unions
- Civil society actors and researchers

Various actors in the policy arena will likely have differing priority areas. It is therefore critical to identify where there are considerable points of agreement and where there is divergence.

Table 2 provides an example of the policy ranking exercise in Zambia. Through consultation, six key policy areas were identified. Each key stakeholder respondent was asked to rank these six policy areas from highest priority to lowest priority for their organization. The average score for each policy area is presented in the last column. It shows that trade policy for maize has the highest average priority for the nine stakeholder organization presented, this is followed by implementation of the Food Reserve Agency, and the implementation of the electronic voucher for input subsidies. Of course, this ranking exercise does not tell us much about the key institutional objectives stakeholders have in particular policy areas. It may well be that an organization's objective is actually to resist policy change in a particular area. The objectives and motivation will be examined in Step 2 of this process. At this point the purpose is simply to identify where there is significant policy interest.

**Table 2. Policy Ranking Exercise for Zambia**

	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Ag.	EU	World Bank	US AID	Grain traders	Miller	Zambia National Farmers Union	Ministry of Trade	Seed Supplier Assoc.	Fertilizer Assoc.	Avg.
(Rank based on number of policy areas 1-6)	(Rank based on number of policy areas: 1 is lowest priority and 6 highest)											
Implementation of the Agricultural Marketing Bill	1	4	2	3	2	5	3	1	2	4	1	2.5
Implementation of electronic voucher/FISP reform	5	5	6	2	4	2	2	3	1	5	6	3.7
FRA reform	2	6	5	4	5	4	4	6	4	1	2	3.9
Trade policy for cooking oil	3	2	1	1	1	3	6	4	5	2	3	2.8
Trade policy for maize	6	3	3	6	6	6	5	5	6	3	4	4.8
Seed harmonization	4	1	4	2	3	1	1	2	3	6	5	2.9

Source: Author.

*Step 3: Regional priorities.* Continent wide policy objectives for agriculture, particularly those outlined in the Malabo declaration, are likely to attract significant attention as policy discussions around the Malabo declaration develop. Examining the ranked list of policy areas with an eye toward informing policy discussions around the achievement of the Malabo declaration goals will help to further refine the policy ranking. For example, drawing from the Zambia case study above, regional economic groups and regional development strategies tend emphasize the need for policy reform around trade predictability and harmonization, particularly for staple foods and seeds. This places additional weight on the maize, cooking oil, and seed harmonization policy areas.

The end result of this three step process is a short list of 2 to 5 policy areas for which there is demonstrated domestic and regional interest. These priority areas will be used in the mapping exercise below. In the case of Zambia, because there is limited domestic interest in regional objectives around cooking oil trade and seed harmonization, the policies that are likely to have the most stakeholder interest are: 1) Maize trade; 2) Food Reserve Agency (FRA) implementation, and 3). Electronic voucher implementation.

### 5.1.2. Stage 2: Mapping the Actors

Policies for which powerful entrenched interest seek to protect the status quo and opposition is weak and dispersed are unlikely candidates around which to build an effective policy strategy. Conversely, policies for which a broad spectrum of actors have full or partial support offer possibilities for productive dialogue. It is therefore critical to map out the interests, points of agreement, and points of conflict of key actors in a particular policy area.



It is important to note that the interests of actors will vary considerably across different policy areas. For example, farmers unions and grain traders associations may be in agreement over the need for changes in marketing board policies, but be in disagreement over trade policies. Unpacking these points of agreement and disagreement, and systematically identifying policies where a constellation of powerful policy actors exhibit considerable agreement is an essential element of a successful policy action plan.

In this section we detail a three step process for mapping out the actors involved in a policy area, their interests, and relative power to effect change in the system. Through this three step process, we are able to assess the feasibility of achieving change in each of the priority policy areas identified in Stage 1.

*Step 1: Identifying the key actors and their core institutional objectives in the agricultural sector.* In Stage 1, a list of key informants was generated to help identify priority policy areas. This list will serve as the foundation for the next three analytical steps. Yet, before moving on, it is important to emphasize that your list of actors be as detailed as possible. Often times, when talking about policy positions people will use broad categories such as *Government* or *Private Sector*. However, in practice these are not particularly useful, because within these categories there is often a great deal of heterogeneity of opinion. For example, the Ministry of Finance may support changes in marketing board activities for fiscal management reasons, while technocrats managing the program within the Ministry of Agriculture may fiercely defend the current structure. Thus, it is important to be attendant to institutional variations with broad categories such as public or private sector.

In Zambia for example, there are a range of private sector lobby organizations, government ministries, and donor organizations with demonstrated interest in agricultural policy. These key organizations are summarized in Table 3. This list will be used to map the interests, objectives, and power for action of the various organization. Yet, before moving into specific policy areas, we find it useful to provide a bit of institutional detail regarding broad objectives and mandate for each institution in regards to the agricultural sector. This can prove useful in developing a strategy for action later on. In Zambia, a particular point of divergence between actors in the agricultural sector is whether the institution prioritizes growth or poverty reduction. While these are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the prioritization of one over the other is important. Growth focused institutions often believe that focusing on agents of growth, such as larger farmers or agri-businesses, will help *all boats float*. In other words, they often subscribe to a trickle-down view of the relationship between agricultural growth and poverty reduction. On the other hand, poverty reduction focused institutions tend to focus on the barriers to marginalized populations' participation in the growth process. By overcoming these barriers, a larger segment of the population is thought to be able to contribute to the economic growth process.

Understanding who the key organizations are and what their broad mandate is vis a vis the agricultural sector will help you to better refine your policy strategy.

*Step 2: Identify actors' specific motivations/ objectives.* With the list of key institutions and their broad agricultural sector objectives in place, we will now focus in on institutional objectives within a specific policy space. These objectives and motivations can be broadly categorized along a continuum from -5, highly resistant to change to + 5, highly supportive of change.

**Table 3. Key Actors in Zambian Agricultural Policy**

Institution	Agricultural Sector Mandate	Core objective in agricultural sector
Ministry of Finance	Budget oversight	Reduce fiscal spending, maximize returns to scarce funds
Ministry of Agriculture	Policy implementation and design	Improve agricultural growth, maintain low food prices
European Union (EU)	To support public sector efforts to improve agriculture	Reduce poverty and improve smallholder resilience
World Bank	To support public sector efforts to improve agriculture	Primarily growth focused, with spending on irrigation and farm blocks
USAID	Lower poverty through improvements in productivity and market linkages	Value chain development through private sector
Grain traders association	Link supplies to demand	generate profits through grain trading
Millers association	Supply consumer markets	Generate profits through sales of processed food items
Zambia National Farmers Union (ZNFU)	Advocate for interests of surplus producing farmers	Achieve favorable farm gate prices and lower cost of production through trade, tax, and marketing board policy
Ministry of Trade	Enable trade, mostly of finished products	Provide policy guidance for agricultural industries
Seed supplier association	Lobby for the interests of seed suppliers	Maximize seed sales in Zambia and regionally
Fertilizer association	Lobby for the interests of fertilizer importers and blenders	Maximize fertilizer sales in Zambia

Source: Author.

A zero on this continuum means that the institution does not have a specific policy objective within that particular policy space.

In order to effectively rank the motivations/objectives of the various institutions we recommend conducting a series of interviews with key informants within the institution and from outside. This will provide a more thorough perspective on the institution's policy objectives. Through this process you can generate an average policy objective score for each institution in each priority policy space.

It is important to note that there will likely be disagreement between key informants over the motivations of policy actors. These points of disagreement are worth noting and exploring. Understanding why there is disagreement will help you to converge on the true motivations of the policy actors. In some cases the actors will have multiple and even contradictory motivations and

objectives. These are worth highlighting. Once you have achieved some level of saturation in response—that is, key informants are providing the same information as you received from others—you can feel confident that you are effectively identifying the key motivations of the actors in the policy system.

The list of motivations and objectives identified by key informants is likely to be long, and therefore not particularly useful for analytical purposes. This list should therefore be refined into more usable categories through a process of data clustering. This can be done by developing a set of key categories *a priori*, which can then be populated with the various responses generated through the key informant interviews. This *a priori* category list can be expanded if unanticipated responses emerge. Clustering the motivations and objectives of the various policy actor into useable categories enables you to look for places where there is overlap and divergence, including overlapping interests of actors that may disagree on the direction of policy change.

Table 4 below provides a summary of the objective identification and quantification exercise for Zambia. This exercise focused on the three top policy priorities identified in Stage 1. Based on the quantification exercise we see that all policy areas have an average positive policy objective score. What this means is that on average, stakeholders in Zambia want to see change in each of these areas. However, the two highest priority areas, maize trade and FRA implementation, have low average objective scores. This means that in those policy spaces the appetite for actual change is low. Indeed, a quick scan through the individual ranking show that several actors are strongly resistant to change. Alternatively, for e-voucher implementation, which ranked third as a policy priority, there is considerably more interest in change, leading to an average objective score of 2.

In each policy area, clustered remarks on institutional objectives are listed. This provides a more nuanced picture of the particular score ascribed to each institution. It also provides opportunities to identify institutional overlaps. In Zambia, this exercise showed clearly that there was significant divergence around maize trade and FRA implementation across actors. However, in the case of e-vouchers, several actors highlighted the importance of diversification and private sector involvement as reasons for supporting e-voucher implementation.

What this exercise makes clear in the Zambian case is that: 1) the top priority policies may not be the ones for which there is the greatest appetite for change, and; 2) there are several points of institutional convergence that could be leveraged as part of a policy change strategy. However, what this table does not yet show us is the power of the various actors to actually advocate for their position. This is critical, because if there is significant appetite for change among relatively weak actors, and opposition to change among more powerful ones, then the feasibility of achieving a productive policy dialogue may be limited.

*Step 3: Power and influence ranking.* The final step in identifying a policy focal area for a policy strategy is to examine the relative power of each actor within the particular policy space. We recommend using a 1-5 ranking, with one being weak and five being powerful. This power ranking should be gathered during key informant interviews. Taking the average power or influence ranking will give you a sense of where the power to change or resist change is located.

**Table 4. Policy Objective Ranking and Clustered Remarks for Zambia**

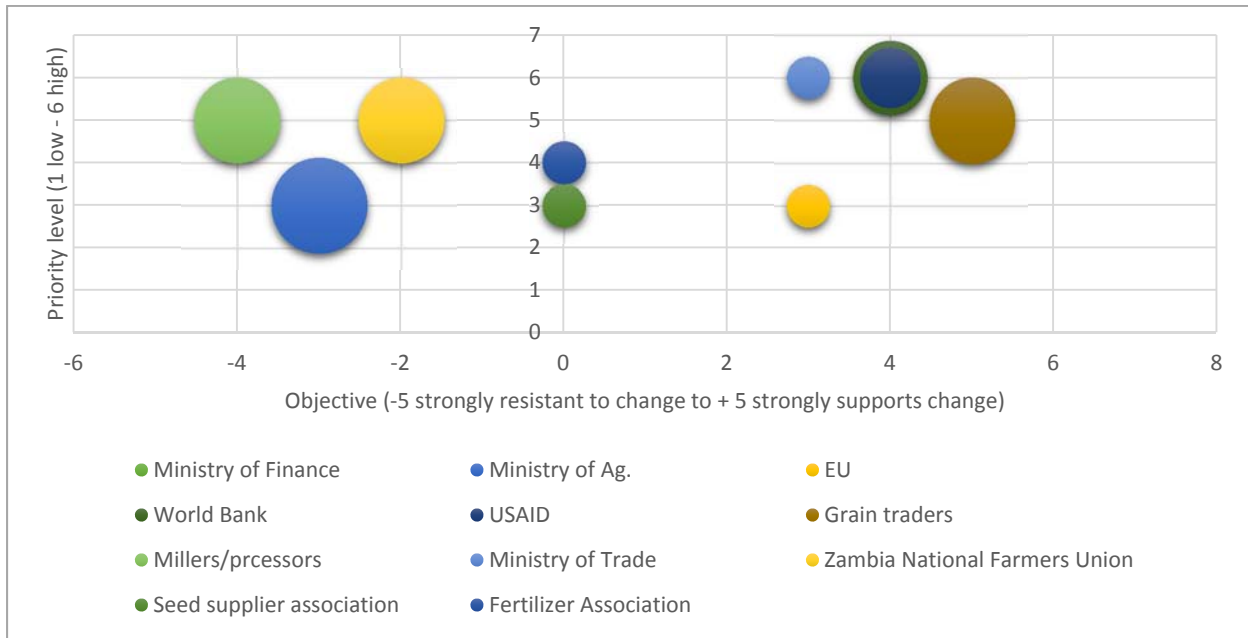
Priority ranking	Policy	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Ag.	EU	World Bank	USAID	Grain traders	Millers	ZNFU	Ministry of Trade	Seed Supplier Assoc.	Fertilizer Assoc.	Avg
		(-5 strongly resist change, 0 agnostic, 5 strongly support change)											
1	Trade policy for maize	4	-3	3	4	4	5	-4	-2	3	0	0	1.27
	Remarks	Interested in generating more foreign exchange, diversifying foreign exchange	Worried that by changing current ad hoc trade policy approach will lose control over food prices	Interested in supporting ag growth through trade	Interested in making Zambia a regional breadbasket	Interested in supporting value chain investment through trade predictability	Need predictable trade policy to make investments and develop trade partnerships	Benefit from the ability to influence trade of maize through back room discussions with Minister	Like to support farm gate prices through controls on maize trade, but recognizing that this harms investments	Interested in supporting more trade in ag products	No significant interest	No significant interest	
2	FRA reform	4	-3	4	4	4	5	-5	-1	2	0	0	1.27
	Remarks	Interested in lowering expenditure on FRA	Ministry personnel benefiting from large FRA (employment, transport contracts), also believe large FRA helps them control food prices	FRA reform is major part of direct budgetary support negotiations	Restricting FRA seen as key to unlock other investments	Large FRA undermining value chain investments in Eastern Province	Large FRA crowds traders out of the market	Large mills benefit from subsidized maize sold to them from FRA, others are excluded.	FRA helps pull up farm gate prices for large surplus producers	Large FRA undermines trade options for maize	No significant interest	No significant interest	

Priority ranking	Policy	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Ag.	EU	World Bank	USAID	Grain traders	Millers	ZNFU	Ministry of Trade	Seed Supplier Assoc.	Fertilizer Assoc.	Avg
(-5 strongly resist change, 0 agnostic, 5 strongly support change)													
3	Implementation of electronic voucher/FISP reform	3	2	5	4	5	0	0	3	0	3	-3	2
	Remarks	E-vouchers provide potential cost savings for input subsidies	While some resist, Ministry is increasingly seeing benefits of vouchers, mostly to aid diversification agenda	E-voucher has long been a policy objective, mostly for diversification and private sector development reasons	E-vouchers seen to support private sector development	Interested in private sector development and farm level diversification	Mostly agnostic about e-vouchers	Mostly agnostic	Interested in supporting agro-dealer development and farmer choice of inputs		E-voucher seen as a way to expand the range of seeds available to farmers and to expand sales networks	Strong actors in the fertilizer sector see e-vouchers as a threat. Powerful members benefit from traditional FISP	

Source: Author.

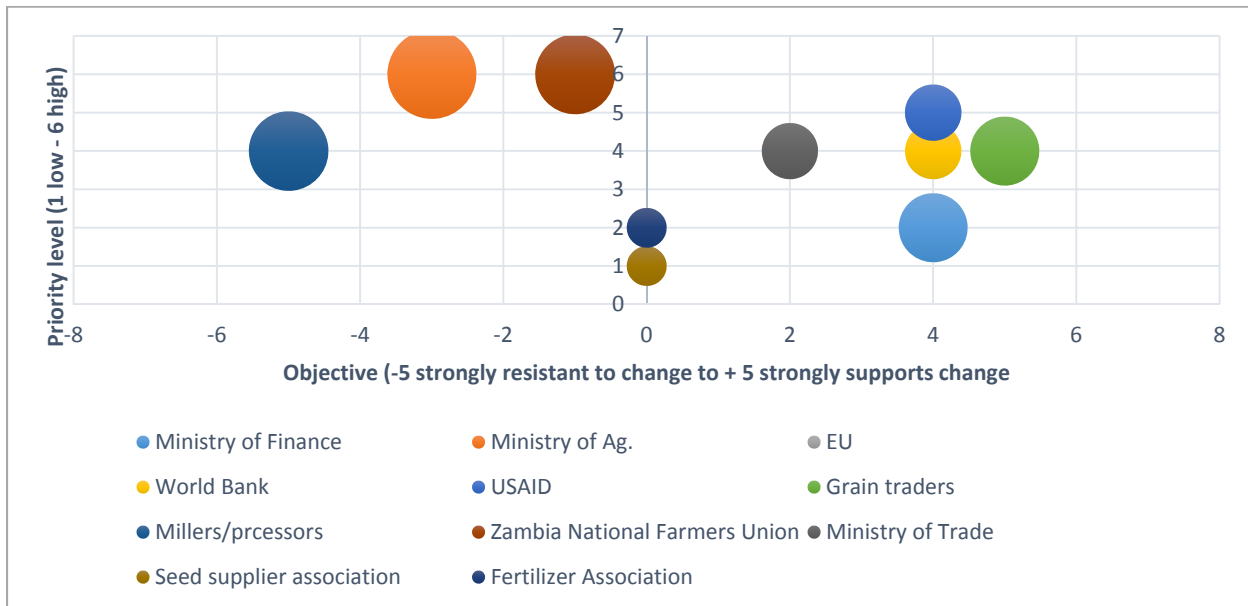
Through this three step process you have gathered a significant amount of data for each policy area. These data can be expressed visually in a way that tells a compelling story about the relative feasibility of achieving short-term change in specific policy spaces. Using a simple bubble graph, Figures 3 to 5 present data on the three priority policy areas identified in Stage 1 of the policy identification strategy. The x-axis of these figures show the overall objective of each actor, the y-axis ranks the relative priority of the policy, and the size of the bubble presents the relative power of each actor within the particular policy space.

**Figure 3. Priority, Objective, and Power Map for Maize Trade Reform in Zambia**



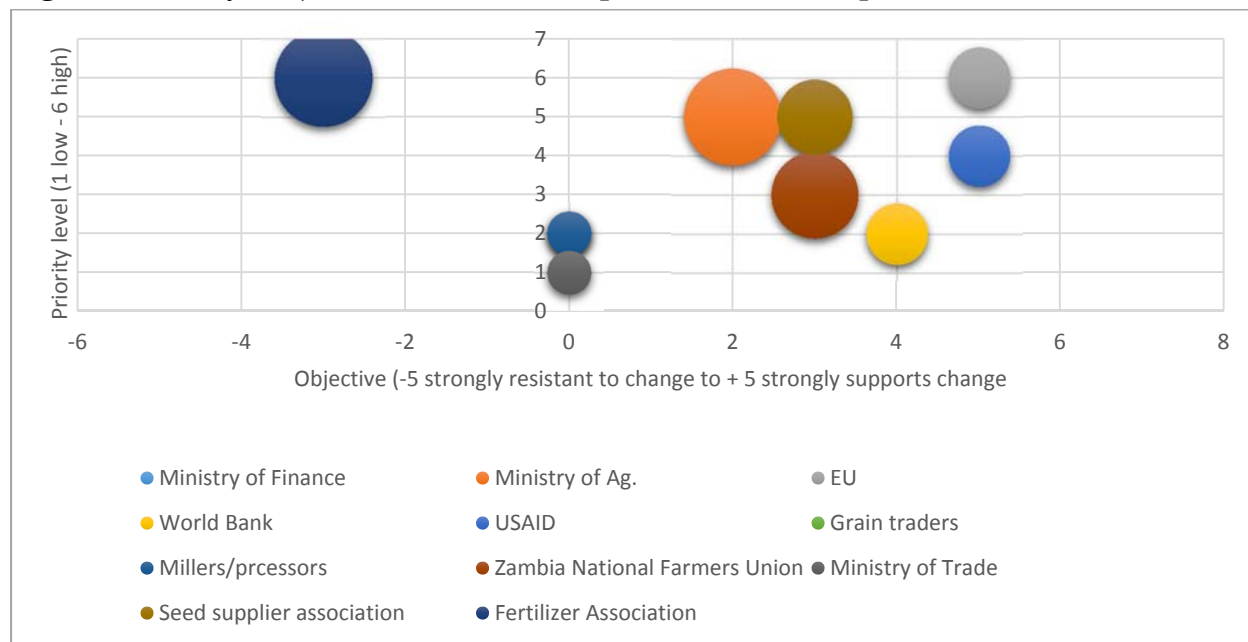
Source: Author.

**Figure 4. Priority, Objective, and Power Map for FRA Policy Reform in Zambia**



Source: Author.

**Figure 5. Priority, Objective, and Power Map for E-voucher Implementation in Zambia**



Source: Author.

What we see from these figures is that very powerful actors are resistant to policy change around FRA implementation reform and maize trade reform, while less powerful actor favor change. This suggests that achieving positive results in terms of policy change in these areas is a major uphill battle. This does not mean that these areas should be abandoned by policy analysts. As major policy priorities, policy analysts should continue to generate evidence in these areas and circulate this evidence to stakeholders. However, the time for change may not be right in these areas. It is, therefore, advisable to develop a specific plan for policy change in a different policy space.

As shown in Figure 5, developing a policy strategy around e-voucher implementation appears to hold the greatest potential of the three priority areas. While the fertilizer association appears resistant to change, most of the powerful actors in this policy space favor some level of policy change in this area. This policy focal area would not a have been apparent if the policy analyst had focused solely on potential the impact of change or ranking of priorities.

### 5.1.3. Stage 3: Assessing the Evidence and Filling the Gaps

Through the systematic policy identification process outlined in Stages 1 and 2, a particular policy area to build a policy action plan around is identified. Once this is done, a systematic review of the evidence surrounding this policy area should be conducted. This review will provide a sense of where the empirical debates are and what the specific knowledge gaps are. In order to usefully contribute to positive policy dialogue, a research agenda should be put in place to address the existing knowledge gaps and to update the evidence base.

## 5.2. Policy Development and Strategy Implementation

A common complaint from agricultural policy makers is that applied researchers and research institutions tend to dedicate a lot of time to pointing out the flaws of a particular policy or challenges affecting food systems, while providing very little thought to alternatives. In some ways, this is a product of institutional objectives and incentives. Many policy researchers hold university positions that require a robust publication record for advancement. This leads to a concentration on publishable empirical analyses; there is limited incentive to invest considerable time developing alternative recommendations, for which there is limited existing evidence.

Think tanks tend to approach policy discussions differently from research institutions. Think tanks generally start with a policy objective, rather than an empirical question, and then develop a plan around that objective. An important element of this approach that is often overlooked by research institutes is what we will call policy development. Policy development is the process of identifying an objective and then developing actual policy proposals around this objective. E-vouchers in Zambia provide a practical example of this. The research institute approach in Zambia focused empirical attention on all of the various shortcomings of the traditional input subsidy program. These became well established and understood, but did not achieve meaningful policy change. Only once e-vouchers were articulated as a strategy to achieve specific policy objectives and key implementation challenges were thought through and discussed did policy momentum occur. Below we propose a set of tools to take an identified policy area and develop a policy development and implementation strategy around it.

We recommend creating policy development strategy through an integrated four part process (Figure 6). First, involves mapping out key objectives, both broad objectives and institution-specific objectives. Second, generate a strategy for change that links policy objectives to outcomes by managing points of leverage and resistance in the policy network. Third, develop a communication strategy around key aspects of the policy debate. Fourth, develop specific timelines for action that is cognizant of both the planning and budgeting horizons of stakeholders and the agricultural calendar.

### 5.2.1. Objective Identification

The actors involved in making and implementing policy are linked together in the policy space through what can best be described as a network. Within policy networks, actors have their individual objectives, which are linked to their ideas and beliefs about how a specific policy fits into their broader goals and vision for the agricultural sector.

**Figure 6. Integrated Four-Part Process to Utilize When Developing Policy Strategy**



Source: Author.



Understanding these networks, and the ideas and beliefs that hold them together, is critical for identifying actionable objectives for a particular policy. Aligning policy strategy objectives with stakeholders' own ideas and objectives in an explicit way will help to ensure greater levels of buy-in from stakeholders and will allow policy strategy planners to set realistic goals and objectives around a particular policy.

To strategically examine and identify institutional policy objectives we recommend developing an *objective matrix* for each institutional stakeholder within the particular policy space using key informant interviews. This objective matrix seeks to identify the macro-level objectives and mandates the institution has within the agricultural sector, and then trace these to the specific policy-level objectives the institution has. This matrix allow for a vertical assessment of the linkages between an institution's broad mandate and its policy-level objectives, and horizontal linkages at the policy level between stakeholder institutions. To examine the linkages in objectives within the matrix we recommend using a coding system. A colored coding system works well in many cases.

Table 5 below provides an example objective matrix from our Zambia case study. Based on key informant responses we identified five broad stakeholder objectives in the e-voucher policy space. These are: 1) political gain; 2) costs, both to government and farmers; 3) Diversification, which is linked to broad goals of livelihoods resilience through farm level crop diversification, business diversification, and foreign exchange diversification (linked to export of a wider range of agricultural commodities); 4) Private sector development, and; 5). Productivity, which includes farm level productivity and business income.

Through this exercise of identifying and clustering policy objectives several important insights emerged. Six institutions listed diversification, either at a farm level of at a more macro-level, as a key objective. This objective cut across broad categories of public, private, and donor sectors. The development of the private sector also figures prominently, however this objective is confined to donors and private industry. The government institutions did not list this as a major objective. Yet government institutions did list administrative time and cost savings associated with the vouchers as important. This suggests that building objectives and messaging around how private sector involvement in voucher systems can help save public funds and resources is a potentially valuable way to bridge this divide.

Issues of productivity and poverty reduction are important objectives from a donor perspective, yet were not seen as major objectives for the e-voucher by public entities. Yet, poverty reduction and productivity are broad objectives for all government institutions. Therefore, finding ways of linking e-voucher implementation directly to poverty reduction provides a potential way to bridge this gap.

Based on this matrix key focal areas for messaging and action are identified, as are key policy objectives. In the case of the e-vouchers in Zambia the primary area of consensus was diversification. As such, the policy development process and associated programmatic objectives and communications strategies prioritized diversification. Private sector development was identified as critical, but messaging and objectives aimed at linking private sector development to fiscal savings. This helped to bridge the gap between government institutions and other stakeholders. Finally, developing empirical linkages between e-vouchers and poverty reduction potential relative to traditional subsidy programs was seen as an important way of using e-vouchers as a programmatic vehicle toward achieving broader donor and government objectives around rural poverty.

**Table 5. Objective Matrix for E-Vouchers**

	<b>Agricultural Sector Mandate</b>	<b>Core objective in agricultural sector</b>	<b>Specific objectives for e-voucher implementation</b>		
Ministry of Finance	Budget oversight	Reduce fiscal spending, maximize returns to scarce funds	garner political support in rural areas	cut fiscal cost of inputs	improve agricultural diversification
Ministry of Ag.	Policy implementation and design	Improve agricultural growth, maintain low food prices	improve agricultural diversification	lower administrative cost/time of FISP implementation	lower cost of FISP implementation
EU	To support public sector efforts to improve agriculture	Reduce poverty and improve smallholder resilience	Promote agricultural diversification	support private sector development	Lower rural poverty
World Bank	To support public sector efforts to improve agriculture	Primarily growth focused, with spending on irrigation and farm blocks	Support private sector development	Improve agricultural productivity	lower rural poverty
USAID	Lower poverty through improvements in productivity and market linkages	Value chain development through private sector	Support private sector development	lower rural poverty	improve agricultural productivity
Grain traders	Link supplies to demand	generate profits through grain trading	Support private sector development	improve diversity of agricultural production	lower cost of production for farmers
Millers/processors	Supply consumer markets	Generate profits through sales of processed food items	Increase production of oilseeds		
Zambia National Farmers Union	Advocate for interests of surplus producing farmers	Achieve favorable farm gate prices and lower cost of production through trade, tax, and marketing board policy	Lower cost of production for farmers	Improve agricultural productivity	increase diversification
Ministry of Trade	Enable trade, mostly of finished products	Provide policy guidance for agricultural industries	Support private sector development	Increase diversification	
Seed supplier association	Lobby for the interests of seed suppliers	Maximize seed sales in Zambia and regionally	Increase seed sales	seed demand diversification	Increase smallholder incomes
Fertilizer association	Lobby for the interests of fertilizer importers and blenders	Maximize fertilizer sales in Zambia	Increase fertilizer use	business diversification	Increase smallholder productivity
	Political gains: lower cost way of having visible government presence in input markets				
	Cost: to farmers and to government				
	Diversification: livelihoods resilience, business diversification, foreign exchange diversification				
	Private sector development: linked to costs and business diversification				
	Productivity: poverty reduction, business expansion,				

Source: Author.

### 5.2.2. Strategy for Change: Identifying and Managing Points of Leverage and Resistance

Having identified the key strategic objectives to build the policy development strategy around, the next step is to look more specifically at what the key points of leverage and resistance are to achieving these. The goal of this exercise is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the policy space and identify how to leverage existing interest areas and capabilities in order to address specific points of resistance. The first step in this process is to map out the key points of resistance to a particular policy and the key point of policy leverage offered by the major stakeholders. A tool that we use for this purpose is a simple resistance and leverage matrix.

Points of resistance often include logistical challenges, financial challenges, or challenges associated with political will. Knowledge or evidence gaps are also critical points of resistance. Table 6 below provides an example of a resistance and leverage matrix from our Zambia case study.

**Table 6. Resistance and Leverage Matrix for E-Vouchers in Zambia**

Overall objective: Utilize e-vouchers to distribute input subsidies among some segment of the smallholder population in Zambia		
	Points of resistance	Points of Leverage
Ministry of Finance	E-voucher requires timely release of funds from finance ministry. Requires agreement to create special fund	Using dedicated budgetary support funds to finance the pilot program
Ministry of Ag.	Entrenched interest protecting traditional subsidy program. Active effort to frustrate promote efforts	Interest by the Minister in changing the input subsidy program
EU	E-voucher targeting must be improved. Requires farmer registry	Willing to provide direct budget support for e-voucher fund
World Bank	Financial linkage between suppliers and agro-dealers needs to be formalized	Willing to support agro-dealer training
USAID	Concern about the capacity of technology	Willing to fund M&E
Grain traders	No major point of resistance	Investments by some traders in input retailing. These could serve as voucher redemption points
Millers/processors	No major point of resistance	None
Zambia National Farmers Union	Concern that agro-dealers lack the capacity to reach farmers	Farmer registries and experience with visa swipe technology
Ministry of Trade	No major point of resistance	None
Seed Suppliers Association	Concern about the financial and repayment arrangements with agro-dealers	Willingness to take more risk in distribution if information on demand is communicated
Fertilizer Association	Concern about capacity of agro-dealers	Established network of distribution in some smallholder areas

Source: Author.

With this list of key points of policy resistance, the next step is to develop an action plan to address them. In some cases it may be impossible to address each point of resistance. In these cases, prioritization based on whether or not it is essential, important, or useful to achieving forward progress should be undertaken. Once the key points of resistance are prioritized, we recommend setting a particular goal for that point of resistance. This goal will help you to articulate what *success* in that area looks like and will provide a means for monitoring and evaluating progress. In other words, these become proximate objectives necessary for achieving the broader policy objective identified under objective identification. Finally, a specific action plan or item needs to be identified in order to achieve the proximate objective. We find it useful to also list potential stakeholders that need to be engaged to achieve this. This list of stakeholders is based in part the assessment of the points of leverage identified in the first part of this exercise.

Table 7 provides an example of a way of approaching this using the Zambia e-voucher case study. Based on this exercise we identified 6 key proximate objectives in this policy space that need to be achieved in order to move the e-voucher toward policy implementation. These are specifically targeted at the key points of resistance identified above. The policy actions and stakeholders identified under each of these areas is derived from the assessment of leverage points identified above. For example, timely program financing was identified as an essential pre-condition for policy movement. A proposed action item is to create a dedicated fund for financing e-voucher payments and other costs of implementation. This fund must necessarily be housed in the Ministry of Finance, but the funds could well come from other sources. In this case, the European Union indicated a willingness to provide direct budgetary support to e-vouchers, to cover certain elements of the costs. This funding would be provided as part of their broader objective of promoting smallholder livelihoods resilience. USAID also indicated a willingness to support monitoring and evaluation efforts for the program. Based on this assessment, facilitating dialogue between these three stakeholders appeared to be the most likely way of addressing this critical programmatic challenge. This sort of action planning is a clear example of successful policy development, where tangible alternatives are created to achieve proximate and longer-range policy goals.

### 5.2.3. Communication Strategy

Thinking strategically about how to communicate specific messages around specific areas of a policy debate is an important and often neglected part of a strategic policy development process. Too often, engagement and communication in a policy space is reactive and ad hoc. In many cases the *strategy* is simply to hold a workshop or meeting, without clearly thinking about whether or not this is an effective way to achieve a proximate objective for the policy area. We recommend that rather than generating ideas or evidence and then thinking about how to communicate these, a communication strategy for any policy should be developed in tandem with the action plans and evidence generation.

ODI uses the terminology of *inside track* and *outside track* communication strategies. This is a useful way of conceptualizing different strategies to achieve change. Inside track strategies are collaborative communication strategies that involve primarily direct interaction with key stakeholders, including: one on one interactions including informal conversations with stakeholders; participation in meetings, and; negotiations. Conversely outside track strategies are often more confrontational communication strategies aimed at shaping opinions and discussions through activities such as: opinion pieces in newspapers; TV events; public meetings; and radio campaigns.

**Table 7. Proximate Objectives and Actions**

Prioritization	Major points of resistance	Key Objectives	Priority Actions	Key Stakeholders
essential	Agro-dealer capacity building	Develop a catalog of agro-dealers, ranked by capacity. Will allow a determination of the location and quantity of agro-dealers able to meet e-voucher requirements.	Agro-dealer training and assessment.	World Bank, Min. of Ag., and ZNFU
important	Overcoming entrenched interest	Gain the support of the Minister of Ag and Minister of Finance	Build consortium of e-voucher supporters, with focus on high-level decision makers.	Donors and industry lobbying groups
essential	Agro-dealer financing	Agreed upon payment platform and system for players	Develop a payment system to link suppliers with agro dealers	EU, World Bank, Min. Ag
essential	Program financing	A pool of funds available to ensure timely repayment to agro-dealers and suppliers	Ensure a dedicated funding stream for e-voucher implementation	Min. of Finance, EU, USAID
essential	Technology capacity	Platform in place that allows for tracking and repayment	Develop a digital platform for payment and tracking	EU, Min. Ag. Digital provider
essential	Farmer registration	Completed list of farmers prior to implementation	Register beneficiary farmers in implementation areas	Min of ag. ZNFU, USAID

Source: Author.

Thinking clearly about who needs to be influenced and how to achieve a particular result is important for achieving real change in policy debates. In many cases, there is need to work out particular nuts and bolts associated with a policy. This requires mostly inside track sorts of communication strategies. However, where powerful interests may be entrenched soliciting public support for change is often useful. In our Zambia case study, the entrenched interests supporting the traditional input subsidy program maintained public support, because the traditional subsidy was framed as supporting the poor. Overcoming these entrenched interests required changing public opinion and debate. In this case, an outside track communication strategy was seen as important. In addition to this sort of strategic thinking around communication, our experience shows highlights three additional communication issues to bear in mind when engaging in policy discussions:

*Avoid asymmetric access to information:* Empirical evidence to inform policy discussions should not be confined to a few well positioned actors. Effective policy change requires that a broad range of stakeholders understand the evidence and trade-offs involved in various policy options. As such, evidence that is fed into policy debates should be:

- Packaged in simple, easy to understand ways. Simple descriptive statistics, tables, figures, and maps are far more easily understood than the outputs of more rigorous modelling exercises. While the analysis supporting specific recommendations may draw on sophisticated modelling, the evidence shared with policy actors should be simpler.
- The dissemination of evidence must reach a wide range of actors and not be confined to a handful of policy-makers. Keeping the results simple and sharing these results widely is useful.

*Relationships matter:* Investing time and energy into cultivating relationship of trust with key policy makers is critical for the success of a policy action plan. These relationships of trust help to ensure that as policy challenges emerge, policy makers will turn to you for guidance. Moreover, these relationships allow for frank conversations about policy outcomes, which would not be well received without a personal relationship between the provider of information and the recipient.

*Consensus building:* Focusing a policy plan on government policy makers alone rarely yields productive dialogue or policy action. Agricultural policies tend to have a host of entrenched interests in supporting and, at time, opposing the status quo. Incremental improvements in policy debates can occur by looking for points around which considerable consensus among various actors is or can be achieved.

*Menu of options rather than recommendations:* The packaging of policy recommendations matters. Policy recommendations are often treated as an afterthought in applied academic writing. Moreover, these recommendations often come across as dictates rather than suggestions. Policy-makers tend to be more receptive to approaches that provide a menu of policy options and present this menu in terms of the policy tradeoffs involved.

#### 5.2.4. Strategy Timeline

More so than in other sectors, the timing of actions and outcome matters for the success of an agricultural policy strategy. Not only does timing matter in terms of the political schedule (e.g., when parliament is sitting, when elections are held, or when budgets are developed and approved), it matters for the agricultural cycle. Being cognizant of these cycles and building key actions and objectives around this is important.

For example, for policies that require budgetary allocations and parliamentary approval it is essential that all policy drafts and financing arrangements are conducted with reference to when parliament sits and when budgets are developed. The agricultural cycle can be even more challenging to manage. The case of the e-voucher in Zambia is a good case in point. If all of the financing, logistical, and political concerns are not addressed with sufficient time to allow for implementation prior to the farming season, the implementation of the policy will fail. This means that a policy strategy affecting farm inputs or output markets must allow sufficient lag time to enable timely implementation. This also has important implications for donors, who's budgetary and reporting timelines are often too short relative to the agricultural policy process. In the Zambia e-voucher case, an initial survey of the feasibility of e-vouchers was initiated in 2011, which served as the empirical base for discussions, but actual implementation did not occur until 2015.

### **5.3. Monitoring: What Is Progress and How Do We Monitor It?**

Influencing policy in a strategic way is necessarily inductive. Engagement in the policy process generates new information and new understandings of the situation. Moreover, as the policy space changes, power structures and networks also change. Stakeholder that were once opposed to change may become strong supporters of a policy change, and vice versa. For these reasons it is important to consistently monitor and track progress.

In addition, as regional bodies, such as the African Union through CAAPD, and donors increase their support for policy system strengthen, it is critical to be able to track progress in a useful way. Many funders think of policy tracking in a linear way that is consistent with the *standard model* of policy change described under definitions. Given the complexity of what policy change and influencing looks like in practice, this type of monitoring is misguided.

We propose an alternative strategy for both monitoring change in a policy space and reporting on it to funders. This strategy focuses on tracking progress toward the proximate objectives identified in the policy development strategy, rather than tracking where or not a policy is moving up or down some sort of legislative structure. By tracking proximate objectives, and the shifting beliefs and interests of relevant stakeholders, the policy development strategy can be altered to meet these changes. These proximate objectives also serve as more effective policy change indicators for donors interested in monitoring their investments.



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