УЧЕБНАЯ ПРОГРАММА ЮНЕСКО

Dendev Badarch,
Director Division
for Social Transformations and Intercultural Dialogue
Social and Human Sciences Sector
e-mail: d.badarch@unesco.org

BRIDGING AND MAPPING SCIENCE AND POLICYMAKING FOR THE 2030 INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA
An Overview of UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Program

Analyzed is the management of social transformations (MOST) program, created for the implementation of UNESCO's mission on intercultural dialogue states and nations. MOST regarded by the author as an intergovernmental science program, that is designed with and implemented by it's member states, both collectively, through mechanisms adopted by intergovernmental council and implemented under supervision, and individually, through policy decisions at national and sub-national levels. The author emphasizes, that work of MOST, focusing on policy advice and capacity-building, makes a direct contribution to supporting member states in achievement of sustainable development goals up to 2030 international development agenda.

Key words: transformations, intercultural dialogue, international development agenda, values.

РАЗРАБАТЫВАЯ ОСНОВЫ НАУКИ И ПОЛИТИКИ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО РАЗВИТИЯ С ПЕРСПЕКТИВОЙ НА 2030 ГОД
Обзор программы ЮНЕСКО по управлению социальными трансформациями (МОСТ)

Дендев Бадарч — директор отдела социальных трансформаций и межкультурного диалога сектора социальных и гуманитарных наук ЮНЕСКО

Представлен анализ программы управления социальными трансформациями (МОСТ), разработанной в целях реализации миссии ЮНЕСКО по развитию межкультурного диалога государств и наций. МОСТ трактуется автором как межправительственная научная программа, сформулированная и реализуемая как коллективно государствами-участниками посредством механизмов, одобренных межправительственным советом и под руководством такового, а также индивидуально посредством политических решений на национальном и субнациональном уровнях. Автор подчеркивает, что деятельность МОСТ сконцентрирована на разработке консультаций и развитии возможностей для непосредственного вклада в поддержку государств-членов в достижение целей стабильного развития программы международного развития с перспективой на 2030 г.

Ключевые слова: трансформации, межкультурный диалог, международная программа развития, ценности.

Introduction

UNESCO's mission is to contribute to "*the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, and sustainable development and intercultural dialogue*" (UNESCO, 2015). In the context of this broad assignment, one specific mission of the organization is to assist member states to improve policymaking processes through a strengthened research-policy interface that uses social science-based knowledge focused on human needs and that contributes to establishing a culture of evidence-informed decision-making. To that end, UNESCO created one specific mechanism in 1994: the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Program.

MOST is an intergovernmental science programme that is designed with and implemented by its Member States, both collectively, through mechanisms adopted by its Intergovernmental Council (IGC) and implemented under its supervision, and individually, through policy decisions at national and sub-national levels. It derives its intellectual legitimacy and credibility from a strong anchor in knowledge production in the social and human sciences, working closely with other sciences.

MOST operates through an action plan with a coherent focus that is periodically re-assessed by its governing bodies and the thematic strategic orientation of the program is

Alma mater

determined by a broadly shared assessment of the dynamics shaping fundamental change in the contemporary world.

MOST's vision is defined by attaining a culture of transformational social and human science in which policy decisions are effectively informed by the systematic assessment of the evidence base that may be relevant to crucial areas of public policy-making. MOST does not regard the social sciences as scientific only. As a program to manage social transformations, MOST takes the lead in making the social sciences transformational.

The work of MOST, focusing on policy advice and capacity-building, makes a direct contribution to supporting member states in achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 16 of the 2030 international development agenda, "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels", particularly in relation to target 16.6 "Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels", and target 16.7 "Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels".

Knowledge and decision making: Filling the gaps through MOST

It is widely assumed that policy practitioners are willing to adopt decisions based on relevant factual information. It is also supposed that ongoing policy implementation is likely to be upgraded by the unbiased evaluation of its outcomes.

Claims on the potential for evidence to inform policymaking have been acknowledged for more than two centuries. The recent expansion in the availability of rigorous scientific evidence that, potentially can inform policymaking, particularly in relation to the social and human sciences, tend to reinforce the impression that evidence-informed policymaking has made considerable progress. It is presumed that this would be attuned to a historical moment when democratic demands for accountability and transparency require from governments a clear justification of its public expenditures and reasonable explanations on how policy decisions are adopted.

Institutions involved in international cooperation, notably the UN system but also a broad scope of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other institutions, have made considerable investments in programmes aimed at strengthening evidence-informed policymaking, and a vast "industry" seems to have flourished around the issue. The recent deliberations with regard to the 2030 development agenda offered frequent opportunities to appreciate the vastness of the research-policy endeavor.

It has been widely recognized that scientifically generated evidence can play a positive role in the quality of policy decisions but it is also well documented that the existence of a "culture of demanding evidence" to back up policy is uncommon in today's world, particularly, but not exclusively, in developing countries.

Several recent studies have established that:
- hard pressed decision makers in governments of developing countries often know little about the help that re-

search can offer them, and are therefore indifferent to the value of building local research capacity in the long run. Research activity is discouraged accordingly, even where the country's objective needs are intense and growing" (Carden 2009, p. 6)1;
- recourse to research based evidence is not consistent or uniform. This suggests that research based evidence is not institutionally embedded; rather its employment is somewhat piecemeal and often subject to political motivations, interests and incentives. The cherry picking of evidence is not confined to government actors. Policy debates in Africa are heavily influenced by non-state actors skilled at using evidence for influence as part of advocacy campaigns" (Broadbent 2012, p. 29 & p. 31)2;
- there is a shortage of evidence on policy makers' actual capacity to use research evidence and there is even less evidence on effective strategies to build policy makers' capacity... A lack of capacity to understand research was perceived as beneficial to policy makers since it allowed them to ignore evidence and instead follow their own agenda. Thus, there is not only a lack of capacity but also a disincentive to build capacity" (Newman, et al. 2013, p. 1 & p. 7)3.

The MOST program aims to bring about remedies to that situation by supporting the development of public policy environments where research-based evidence is demanded and appreciated. In doing so, the MOST program adopts a comprehensive, flexible and balanced perspective on policymaking processes based on the premise that public policy is often driven by factors other than research-based evidence, such as practical experience, personal judgment, political constraints, administrative capacity, technical feasibility, time pressures, limited finances, cultural practices, incentives, ideology and even psychological factors.

The MOST program fully assumes the complexity of the relationship between research and policy, including in the recognition that although researchers and policy practitioners constitute two different communities, each working under different sets of incentives and looking at social reality through dissimilar lenses, they do not represent two separate research and policy communities. In fact, the historical co-evolution of both communities has been studied and accredited. The alleged "gap" between the two communities is in fact, occupied by a "fuzzy middle". "This is political terrain. Rather than a neat alignment between the interests of socially concerned researchers and rational, evidence-oriented planners, we find a complex process of struggle." (Du Toit, A. 2012, p. 6)

---

1 The book, authored by Fred Carden, presents the findings of a study conducted by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada that was designed to evaluate and enhance the influence of IDRC's research on public policy in developing countries. It is based on the assessment of 23 case studies covering an analytical timeframe of eight years.

2 The book, edited by Emma Broadbent, presents the conclusions and recommendations of a year-long research project —"The Politics of Research Uptake"— which examined the role of research-based evidence in four case studies on diverse policy debates in sub-Saharan Africa: Ghana, Uganda, Zambia and Sierra Leone.

3 The report, co-edited by Kirsty Newman, summarizes the discussions of a conference held in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 27–29 February 2012, with the participation of more than 50 experts from 18 countries.

MOST adopts a flexible framework and fitting operational mechanisms to assist transformative and inclusive public policies

MOST is defined thematically by the dynamics shaping fundamental change in the contemporary world. The strategic orientation of the programme is determined by a broadly shared assessment of what these dynamics are and what dealing with them might imply for member states and for institutions within member states with specific territorial or sectoral competence.

MOST activities are designed to strengthen the research-policy nexus in its five thematic focus areas: social inclusion, environmental change, migration, peace and dialogue, and digital transformations.

MOST operates through three main programmatic pillars, which reflect the overall logic of the research-policy nexus:

◆ research pillar of MOST networks social science and humanities communities as well as other sciences in order to support the readiness of a systematic and organized body of knowledge acquired through the scientific methods, which can be relevant for policy-making in the context of the 2030 international development agenda;

◆ MOST intergovernmental forums enable MOST to seek the decisive support of Member States. Such initiatives may include MOST Ministerial Forums in those regions where they will be suitable and well-established meeting platforms that exists in other regions, the IGC itself, UNESCO governing bodies and other UN Forums;

◆ MOST knowledge brokering offers positive mechanisms for transferring research evidence into public policy and practice under different contexts. It adopts a broad and flexible notion that includes diverse approaches to knowledge brokering (i.e. knowledge management, linkage agents, and capacity builders) as well as the coexistence of different models of interaction between science and public policy. It may combine policy support to help policymakers to develop policy options and capacity-building mechanisms that strengthen the capacities of national researchers, research institutions, research systems, policymakers and civil society.

It can include, inter alia, MOST schools, UNESCO Chairs on management of social transformations, established within the existing administrative framework as defined by the General Conference, and specific international postgraduate programmes on management of social transformations. MOST pays special attention to the development of young professionals, whether coming from the research, policy or social arena, and provides spaces and mechanisms to support the role of young professionals in terms of innovation and creativity in the policy analysis.

Enhancing "national ownership", the deep commitment of local actors is crucial because the achievement of MOST's strategic objectives depends on broad stakeholder recognition of the distinctive value of the programme and extensive engagement in it's mechanisms and activities.

Researchers, policymakers and other MOST stakeholders will find value in program, that supports knowledge brokering to assist member states to organize the interaction between the producers and users of knowledge so that they can co-produce feasible and research-informed policy options, and that advocates for an articulated understanding of the complex and non-fully predictable ways in which contemporary science can contribute to policy formation.

Conclusion

MOST contributes to enabling environments for public decision-making. Rather than being about "evidence-based policymaking", the MOST program is about "policy-informed policymaking". Evidence, scientific or of any kind is only one part of the decision making process. Evidence is important but it is only as good as the policy context in which it operates.

Policymaking is not a technocratic outcome arising from the interplay of researchers and neutral civil servants. Policy debates represent the crucial arena where legitimate actors interact and from which policies will emerge.

The world's policy challenges cannot be addressed without knowledge of what drives phenomena such as poverty, climate vulnerability and migration. Moreover, even if knowledge is available, it cannot make a difference if it is not effectively used.

UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations Programme (MOST) strengthens the research policy nexus with a view to promote the effective application of knowledge from the social and human sciences in the design and implementation of the type of policies that demands the 2030 international development agenda.

References

1. Broadbent, Emma. 2012. Politics of research-based evidence in African policy debates. Synthesis of case study findings. Evidence-based Policy in Development Network. London, UK.

2. Carden, Fred. 2009. Knowledge to Policy: Making the Most of Development Research. International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada.

3. Du Toit, A. 2012. Making sense of Evidence: Notes on the Discursive Politics of Research and Pro-Poor Policy Making' Working Paper 21. Bellville: PLAAS, UWC.

4. Newman, Kirsty, Antonio Capillo, Akin Famurewa, Chandrika Nath and Willie Siyanbola. 2013. What is the evidence on evidence-informed policy making? Lessons from the International Conference on Evidence-Informed Policy Making. International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP). Oxford, UK.

5. UNESCO. 2015. Draft Program and Budget for 2018-2021 (39 C/5). Paris, France.