

PRACTITIONER'S GUIDEBOOK AND TOOLKIT FOR AGRICULTURAL POLICY REFORM: THE P.M.C.A. APPROACH TO STRATEGIC POLICY ENGAGEMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

This guidebook, and associated tools, is designed to help agricultural policy practitioners improve the effectiveness of their engagement with policy systems in developing countries. It provides practitioners with conceptual tools and practical strategies designed to improve the quality of policy practitioners' efforts to influence complex agricultural policy systems. It develops a strategic approach to policy engagement termed the P.M.C.A. approach, and provides concrete applications and examples of this approach to help users apply the approach to their own policy domains of interest.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Agricultural policies are shaped by complex interactions between political, economic, social, and cultural forces, many of which are not easily understood (Binswanger and Deininger 1997). These forces are particularly magnified in the context of developing, predominantly agrarian countries, where food and agricultural policies can dramatically influence livelihoods outcomes, economic growth prospects, and political fortunes. Because of this, agricultural policy reforms are essential for achieving development objectives, and frequently incredibly difficult to achieve.

While there has been growing interest in influencing agricultural policy reform and enhancing the quality of agricultural policy making in many developing countries, there has been surprisingly little attention paid to identifying effective strategies for doing this. In general terms, policy reform efforts have focused on some combination of generating empirical evidence to inform policy discussions and building the capacity of stakeholder to identify policy alternatives and to advocate for reforms. In many cases, these approaches lack a strategic vision for how to achieve a desired policy outcome, including explicit strategies for linking research or advocacy activities to identified constraints to policy reform. As a result, policy reform efforts frequently duplicate activities already carried out by other stakeholders; focus efforts on superficial rather than more fundamental constraints to change; struggle to attribute observed policy changes to their actions and activities, and; often fail to achieve desired policy outcomes.

This guidebook, and associated [Excel-based tools](#), is motivated by a desire to help agricultural policy practitioners improve the effectiveness of their engagement with policy systems in developing countries. Broadly speaking, this guide provides policy practitioners with conceptual tools and practical strategies designed to improve the quality of policy practitioners' efforts to influence complex agricultural policy systems. More specifically, it presents the PMCA approach to strategic policy engagement. This is an approach is based on three key pillars:

1. Thoroughly understanding the policy system, including the stakeholders involved, their policy interests, and ability to influence policy outcomes;
2. Identifying the key constraints to policy reform, and;
3. Explicitly linking policy reform actions and activities these constraints in order to achieve attributable progress on policy reforms.

The remainder of this guidebook is organized as follows: Section II details the skill sets and resources required to implement this tool. Section III presents a general overview of the PMCA approach. Section IV describes valuable conceptual tools for understanding policy processes and identifying effective strategies for influencing reforms. Section V provides general guidance on methodologies for applying the PMCA approach and anticipated outputs. Section VI then provides a detailed description of the application of the approach. Section VII offers some concluding remarks.

II. SKILL SETS AND RESOURCES

Before moving to the details of the PMCA approach, we first discuss the sorts of resources and skill sets required to carry out the sort of strategic policy analysis and engagement detailed below.

We begin first with skill sets. In order to strategically influence agricultural policy debates and outcomes, policy practitioners need to develop a deep understanding of the policy areas of interest, the underlying motivations and interests of stakeholders involved, and its historical legacy. To achieve this sort of deep understanding, therefore, requires investigative skill. In many cases, practitioners need to develop the ability to conduct impartial interviews, where respondents feel free to express their opinions and are not led to predetermined responses. They must also develop critical thinking skills, in order to move past superficial understandings of constraints to policy reform and identify fundamental issues effecting policy areas. This is not an easy task and often requires considerable practice. We find it useful when implementing these tools to ask the following questions:

- Is the list of stakeholders or respondents to interviewed comprehensive and does it reflect the wide range of opinions on the policy area? Or is it comprised of stakeholders with shared views on the policy area?
- Do you as a practitioner have a predetermined policy outcome in mind? How do your preconceptions influence your understanding of the constraints to policy reform?
- Policy change and reform frequently involves trade-offs, with winners and losers. Examining these issues deeply is important to move toward identifying fundamental constraints to change.

The resources required to carry out the tools presented in this guidebook will vary depending on the depth of analysis and the complexity of the policy issue. Costs and resources also depend on how the tools are implemented. These tools can be implemented in a workshop setting, without interviewing external respondents or through extensive stakeholder interviews. When conducted in a workshop setting, often as part of a normal work planning meeting, we recommend at least one day to complete the guide for a single policy area. When conducted using external interviews the time required is typically 5-7 days.

III. THE PMCA APPROACH TO STRATEGIC POLICY ENGAGEMENT

This guidebook presents a strategic approach for influencing agricultural policy reforms, with particular emphasis on developing country contexts. It is designed for policy reform practitioners, including think tanks, academic researchers, lobbying groups, civil society policy advocates, and others. Utilizing this guidebook and associated tools will help users design a strategic plan for engaging with specific policy areas in ways that link actions to intended policy outcomes and better attributes observed changes in policies to the actions carried out by the user.

The strategy's design and associated tools are the product of both applied experience in designing policy engagement plans in a range of developing country contexts and the insights generated from research on agricultural policy reform carried out by the Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy (FSP) and others.

We refer to our approach as the PMCA approach to strategic policy engagement. The acronym describes the four key steps in our approach:

- **Policy Inventory:** This entails an examination of potential policy areas, thinking carefully about your own institutional objectives within those areas, and choosing focal policy areas to include in subsequent elements of the approach.
- **Mapping of stakeholders:** This entails generating an inventory of key policy actors, their policy objectives, and capacity to influence or resist policy reform.
- **Constraint identification:** This involves identifying the fundamental constraints to achieving policy reform in a particular policy area. In this approach, constraints are usefully categorized as institutional, technical, regulatory, normative/ideological, political economic, and interactive or masked constraints.
- **Actions:** This step involves identifying specific actions to address key constraints to policy reform. Generally, policy practitioners can address constraints to policy reform through some combination of technical support/evidence generation, communication strategies, or capacity building.

For presentation purposes, our approach follows a somewhat linear path, which begins by understanding who is involved in a particular policy area and what their policy objectives are. This is followed by a close examination of what is hindering progress on policy reform. Finally, our strategy aims to explicitly link actions to specific policy constraints, thus providing a clear link between the actions that you and other stakeholders will take to influence policy reform and an identified constraint to reform. This explicit linkage between actions and constraints is important, as it allows users to be systematic about what they are doing and why. In practice, the PMCA approach is interactive and iterative and must be adapted to local contexts and shifting policy landscapes.

IV. CONCEPTUAL TOOLS ON POLICY PROCESSES AND REFORMS

Before delving into the specifics of the PMCA approach and its associated tools, it is useful to begin with a review of some conceptual tools to help understand policy systems, processes, and reforms. Policy processes have been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Generally, the theoretical underpinnings of most conceptual models of policy processes are based on studies from developed countries. Here, we briefly summarize key points from several of the most prominent models and, where possible, highlight their relevance to agricultural policies in developing countries.

The most parsimonious model of policy processes is the linear model. As the name suggests, this model understands policy process as occurring in a simple, sequential fashion (Nakamura 1987). In most iterations, this model involves four stages: problem identification, policy analysis/formulation, policy decision-making, and policy implementation (Chokkar *et al* 2014). While this model suffers from a number of short-comings, not least of which is its lack of attention to the iterative nature of actual policy-making (Sabatier 2007), it provides a useful starting point to begin to think about policy processes and change in a more systematic way. In particular, breaking down policy processes into discrete elements is a useful starting point for thinking about the types of stakeholders involved in each stage of the process, the necessary conditions to be met in order to move toward implementation, and the constraints or obstacles that may impede this progress.

More complex policy process models focus attention on the interactive nature of policy systems. Interactive models are useful for disentangling the roles played by various stakeholders in shaping current policy approaches and potential alternatives. These models highlight the fact that within any policy area, and indeed at any point in the policy process, multiple potential policy outcomes exist. The actual policy outcome that emerges is the result of interactions and power dynamics between policy stakeholders, which shapes the terms of policy debate and dialogue (Stone 2002; Omamo 2004).

The multiple stream model of policy change is a useful iteration of the interactive model. It posits that policy processes are shaped by three “streams”: problems, policies, and politics (Kingdon 1984). Each of these streams interacts in important ways to shape policy outcomes and processes. The idea that multiple, often independent, forces shape how policy problems are conceptualized and, therefore, acted upon is a particularly relevant insight as we think about influencing policy reform processes. Agricultural policy problems are often articulated in different ways in different contexts. This can, in turn, dramatically shape the range of policy options or alternatives that can be considered (Ferguson 1990). For example, the problem of food security can be thought of in a number of different ways. In some cases, policy-makers equate food security with national self-sufficiency in staple foods. This conceptualization of food security produces very different sets of policy approaches than a conceptualization that focuses on household-level food access constraints. As we move toward identifying options for addressing specific constraints to policy reforms it is useful to think about the ways in which different communication strategies can shape how policy problems are understood and, therefore, the range of appropriate policy alternatives that can emerge.

An important element of the multiple stream model is the idea of a “policy entrepreneur” (Chokkar *et al.* 2014). These are stakeholders that can effectively bridge the various streams of the policy process in ways that shape policy outcomes. These policy entrepreneurs are important arbiters in the policy process, and help to navigate the conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity that characterize policy systems. In many cases, identifying effective policy entrepreneurs and

developing strategies to support their engagement in a reform process is an important element of an effective policy reform strategy.

Similar to the multiple stream model, Court and Young (2003) have developed a multidimensional policy process model, which highlights the interactions between context (e.g. politics and institutions) and evidence through what they term “links” (e.g. influence and legitimacy). This model is of particular relevance for the evidence-driven approaches to policy reform favored by think tanks and research organizations. Agriculture and food policies are often particularly resistant to evidence driven approaches to reform, due to their important cultural and political dimensions. Court and Young (2003) find that evidence is more frequently utilized in policy processes when it was accompanied with clearly communicated solutions and alternatives, and when the links between researchers and policy makers are strong, particularly informal links. As we begin to move toward identification of policy constraints and policy actions, it is important to think about the linkages between stakeholders (e.g. why they exist as they do and who they can be influenced), as well as the ways in which evidence is incorporated into policy debates.

As the preceding discussion suggests, the linkages between policy stakeholders and how this translates into policy outcomes is not simply a matter of rational, technocratic decision making. A host of institutional and political economic factors shape these relationships. For our purposes two particularly salient elements of this deserve attention.

First, the translation of policy alternatives and strategies into implemented policies and programs requires sufficient institutional capacity to monitor and regulate the actions of a wide range of stakeholders across the public, private, and civil society sectors (Chokkar *et al.* 2014). Differing levels of institutional capacity help explain why similar policies pursued in different contexts can produce differing policy outcomes and impacts. This insight is particularly relevant in the context of developing country agricultural policy-making, due to the multinational nature of the policy system. In many developing countries, donors from a wide range of developed country backgrounds interact within the policy system. These donor actors often have differing objectives and ideologies from domestic stakeholders, and differing financial and political power to act. In the context of this multinational policy making process, the institutional capacity of policy stakeholders to coordinate activities, and regulate and monitor actions is often a key constraint to achieving desired policy reforms.

Second, the political economy of particular policy areas matters for understanding both the feasibility of achieving policy change and the levers to do so. For our purposes, we follow Birner and Resnick (2010), who highlight four important political economic factors that influence smallholder agricultural policies:

1. Interest groups/collective action: This variable draws attention to the relative political power of urban and rural constituencies, explained in terms of the transactions costs of collective action (Bates 1981). It helps to explain policy preferences for urban vs rural groups, as well as policy favoritism for elite rural minorities represented by farmer lobbying groups.
2. Interaction of voters and interest groups with politicians: This variable focuses attention on the interaction between interest groups and politicians, and generally assumes that politicians choose policies that maximize their chances of retain power. An important element of this is the alignment of the policy choices of governments and their voting block support bases, which may include ethnic groups and urban or rural constituencies.

3. Type of political regime: This draws attention to the interplay between political regime type and strategies deployed by the ruling party to retain power within this political structure. In particular, intermediate variables such as the existence of multiparty elections, evidence of opposition party participation in policy making, and changes of ruling parties through competitive elections can help to explain particular policy choices and their timing.
4. Ideas and ideologies: This variable draws attention to the belief, norms, and values that underlie, either explicitly or implicitly, particular policy choices.

As we begin to identify potential constraints to policy reform and actions that can be taken to mitigate or overcome them, paying close attention to the ways in which political economic factor influence current policy systems is critical. Each of these political economy variables can provide useful insights into why certain policies seem to defy technocratic logic and prove so resistant to change.

One particularly useful political economy model for understanding policy change is the advocacy coalition framework. This model recognizes that policy change or reform is often a gradual process of incremental change (Hall 1993; Baumgartner and Jones 1993). The advocacy coalition framework illuminates the role of coalitions of different policy actors in shaping policy processes (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). These coalitions are comprised of actors with shared beliefs that are homogenous and relatively stable over time. Policy change or reform occurs when several coalitions find common ground. As Chokkar *et al.* (2014) suggests, non-political stakeholders can play an important role in policy processes by helping diverse coalitions find common ground, both through the generation of impartial evidence and the development of communication strategies that help these coalitions identify elements of a reform agenda where they have shared objectives.

The final policy process model that influences our thinking on policy reform was developed by researchers involved with the Innovation Lab for Food Security Policy (FSP). Known as the Kaleidoscope model¹ (KM), this model draws insights from a wide range of academic literature and disciplines. The KM was developed to understand how and why food and agricultural policies evolve across a range of policy areas and country contexts. It therefore serves as a broad conceptual lens through which policy process and outcomes can be observed and interpreted.

The KM model identifies five key elements of policy processes, each of which is important for thinking about how policy reform can be achieved and understanding factors that hinder this. These elements are: agenda setting, design, adoption, implementation, and evaluation and reform. Following Hall (1993), this model recognizes that policy change is rarely one overarching outcome, but rather is the product of numerous smaller changes that occur at different stages or point in a policy process (Resnick and Mather 2016). By extension, this suggests that a strategy to influence policy reform should not concentrate on moving a policy from one stage of the process to another. Rather, the progress of a policy toward implementation should be understood as the outcome of a range of underlying activities aimed at addressing specific constraints to policy reform. By focusing policy reform strategies on “small” events, activities, or relationships “larger” policy outcomes can be achieved.

The KM identifies 15 common factors, or determinants of policy change, that typically influence policy outcomes at various stages of the policy process. These are summarized in Table 1, along with working hypotheses for the pathways by which these determinants of change influence

¹ For a thorough description of the Kaleidoscope model see Resnick et al 2015: http://fsg.afre.msu.edu/fsp/Resnick_et_al_2015_DP_Branded.2pdf.pdf

policy outcomes. These 15 determinants of change are useful for our purposes for several reasons. First, they help us think strategically about the types of constraints that can typically impede policy progress at different stages of the policy process. In many cases, practitioners involved in influencing policy outcomes are not simply beginning with a policy problem and then seeking ways of implementing a policy solution. Rather, practitioners often attempt to reform existing policies, block implementation of new policies, or institutionalize processes that are currently carried out in an ad hoc manner. The KM helps us to think about where in the policy process our policy of interest currently is, and what sorts of determinants of change are typically most prevalent at that stage. Second, the KM determinants of change offer insights into potential strategies to address constraints to policy reform at different stages of the policy process. For example, evidence generation and technical advice is likely to be particularly important for agenda setting and policy design. However, this approach may be less useful when a reform process is stalled at implementation. Instead, appropriate communication plans designed to influence certain “veto player” or capacity building strategies to improve institutional capacity may be more appropriate.

Table 1: Determinants of Policy Change and Underlying Hypotheses of the Kaleidoscope Model

Policy Stages	Determinants of Policy Change	Hypothesis
Agenda setting	1. Recognized, relevant problem	A relevant problem is identified by a concerned particular constituency with reference to credible evidence or to popular perception
	2. Focusing event	A well-defined event focuses public attention on a problem or creates a window of opportunity for policy change
	3. Powerful advocates	Strong individuals, organizations, or companies support a new or changed policy to key decision makers.
Design	4. Knowledge & research	Evidence-based knowledge shapes feasible design
	5. Norms, biases, ideology & beliefs	Beliefs and biases shape the range of design features that are acceptable
	6. Cost-benefit calculations	Expected costs and expected benefits (political, economic, social) determine preferred design.
Adoption	7. Powerful opponents vs. proponents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •For a policy to be adopted, supporters must be relatively more powerful than opponents. •For a policy to not be adopted, opponents must be relatively more powerful than supporters.
	8. Government veto players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •For a policy to be adopted, government agents with ultimate decision-making power must be supportive or neutral. •For a policy to be vetoed, government agents with ultimate decision-making power must be an opponent.
	9. Propitious timing	Supporters wait for opportune moments (political, economic, social) to push policy change.
Implementation	10. Requisite budget	Government or donors provide fund sufficient to carry out the new policy or program as intended
	11. Institutional capacity	Government, organizations, or companies were available and able to practice and manage the new policy or program as it was intended
	12. Implementing stage veto players	Designated implementers -- from the private sector, NGO or local agencies -- have both incentives and willingness to implement the policy program

	13. Commitment of policy champions	Strong individuals, organizations, or companies continued to publicly support the program
Evaluation & Reform	14. Changing information & beliefs	New learning emerges that impacts how decisionmakers believe the policy/program should be structured
	15. Changing material conditions	Available resources, technology, or policy relevance has changed since the policy was originally implemented
	16. Institutional shifts	New actors enter the policy arena as the result of elections, cabinet reshuffle, or new staffing

Taken together, the conceptual tools presented here help us to think about policy reform in terms of engaging with a policy process comprised of interconnected elements, that are shaped by a range of linkages, including relationship, beliefs, and institutions, to name a few. Thinking of policy reform in this way can help us be strategic about how we engage in influencing policy reform, and can help us set realistic expectations about feasible outcomes.

V. METHODOLOGY AND OUTPUTS

The PMCA approach is designed to help policy practitioners develop strategic plans for influencing food and agriculture policy reforms. Policy practitioners include lobbying groups, civil society actor, think tanks, applied researchers, donors, and public servants. Any individual or institution involved in influencing agricultural and food policy reforms can benefit from the use of this approach.

By following the step by step guide below, and utilizing the associated web-based tools you will develop a strategic policy engagement plan that:

- Prioritizes policy areas to focus your efforts on;
- Identifies key constraints to achieving policy reform and specifies activities to address these;
- Helps you to gain a broader appreciation of the stakeholders involved in various policy areas, their objectives, concerns, and on-going activities, and;
- Enables you to more effectively attribute your efforts and activities to observed policy changes.

Each step of the PMCA approach involves activities designed to help you gain a more nuanced and detailed understanding of your policy areas of interest. These activities include conducting ranking exercises and gathering information about different stakeholders' activities and objectives within different policy areas.

We recommend that information be gathered using a combination of insights from within your institution and key informant interviews. The greater number of stakeholders you can interview, the more accurate the output of the PMCA approach will be. However, interviewing key informants takes time and resources. Different institutions will, therefore, have varying capacity to collect key informant information. At a minimum, we recommend that information be gathered from at least one relevant public, private, and civil society stakeholder at each step of the PMCA approach. This will provide a minimum level of representativeness needed to ensure that the strategic plan you develop objectively reflects issues and opportunities in your policy focal areas.

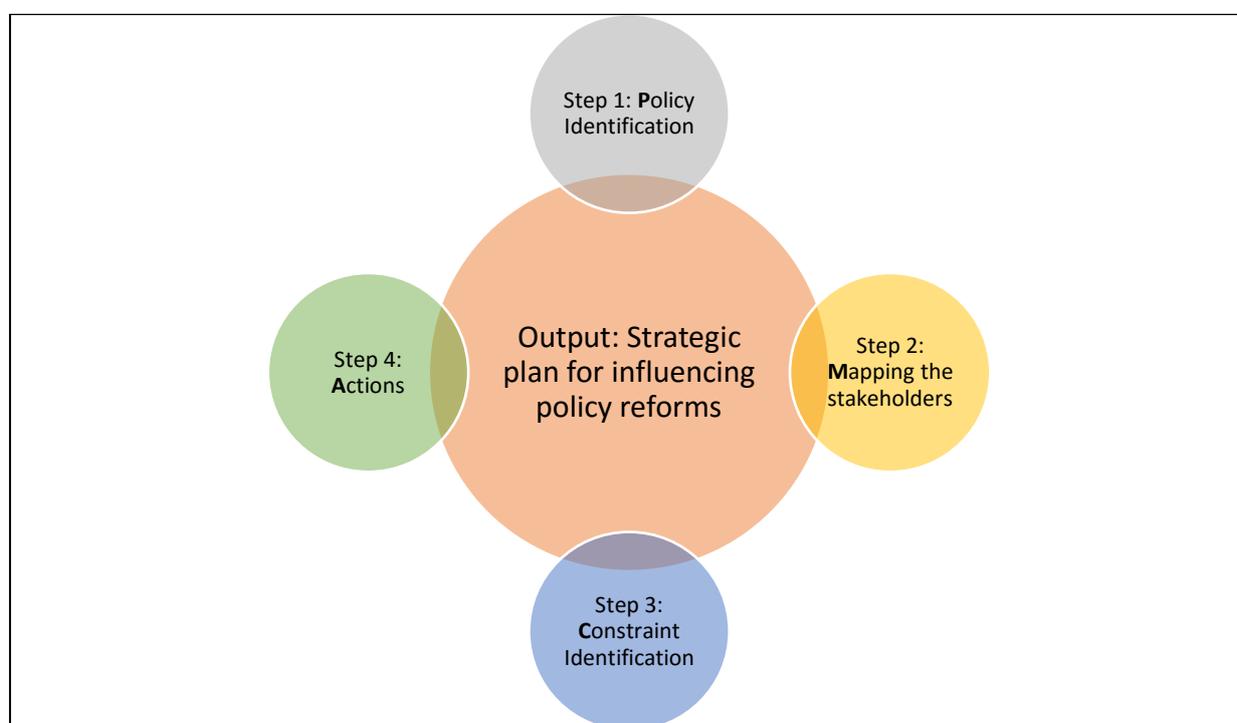
Ideally, data collected from key informants is complemented by information held within your own institution. In most cases, practitioner institutions have a great deal of latent information on policy areas of interest. Conducting a work planning workshop using the PMCA approach and tools is often a good starting point for gathering information held internally by your institutional. This can allow you to evaluate what you know about your policy area of interest and, more importantly, what you don't know.

VI. APPLYING THE PMCA APPROACH

With this background we are now ready to walk step by step through the PMCA approach. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the approach. The approach is comprised of four key steps: Policy identification, Mapping the stakeholders, Constraint identification, and Actions. We present these as sequential steps for the sake of presentation. In practice, however, these steps are often carried out in an iterative fashion. In many cases, new information comes to light during one step that has implications for others. For this reason, we do not visually present the approach in a linear or sequential way. Instead, we find it useful to think about each step of the approach as contributing to the creation of a strategic policy engagement plan.

Each subsection below is dedicated to a step in the PMCA approach. The subsections will provide guidance on why each step is useful or important, how to implement it, and provide relevant examples from different country and institutional contexts.

Figure 1: The PMCA Approach



a. Policy Inventory

The first step of the PMCA approach is to conduct an inventory of relevant policies or policy areas for your institution. This inventory serves as the starting point for all subsequent parts of the approach. It can be as long or as short as you would like. We recommend beginning with 3 to 7 policy areas. In subsequent steps you will closely examine each of these to determine how feasible it is to achieve forward progress on reforms and whether or not your institution is in a position to add value to the reform process. In most cases, subsequent steps will push you towards prioritizing 1 or 2 of these potential policy areas. We recommend that you develop this list in an institutional workshop setting that allows the key members of your organization to have input.

Given the range of potential policy areas within the agriculture and food sector it is often difficult to know where to begin when conducting an inventory. More broadly, it is important to be clear on what exactly constitutes a “policy area?” In many cases, policy practitioners deal with a range of policy issues, including: 1) conducting research in order to put an issue of the legislative agenda; 2) reforming existing laws and policies; 3) formalizing or institutionalizing government practices; 4) developing strategic documents to guide policy decisions, and; 5) developing policy options to address an identified problem.

Given this diversity, it is useful to think in terms of “policy areas” rather than in terms of “policies.” Policy area is a general, encompassing term. It refers to a topical area, rather than to a specific set of laws or public investments. For example, a policy area on “input subsidies” can include both the specifics of a government subsidy program, as well as issues related to private sector investments, trade policies, input utilization, and farm output prices, just to name a few.

In many cases, policy practitioners chose policy focal areas based on some combination of the following:

- Prominence within the sector, often measured in terms of budget allocation: The motivation for this approach is that policies that absorb large budget shares come at significant opportunity costs to other investment areas. Achieving reforms in these big ticket areas, therefore represents an opportunity for significant changes in other policy areas and potentially large welfare gains;
- Academic debates: Think tanks and research organizations often develop work plans based on debates occurring within academic disciplines. From these debates a research topic is identified and then subsequently linked to policy debates;
- Funding opportunities or external priorities: In developing countries, policy practitioners frequently identify focal policy areas based on the priorities of funding agencies or the priorities of external actors, such as regional economic blocks.
- The interest of your institution’s constituents: For example, members of a farmer’s union may want their union to advocate for VAT reform on farm machinery imports or output market price supports.

Each of these has merit, particularly where there are clear linkages to the interests of a significant number of local policy stakeholders. Regardless of how you develop an initial list of potential policy areas, it is important that you pay close attention to what your institutional comparative advantage is. This means being very open and honest about the skill sets that exist within your institution, the relationships your institution has, and the implications this has for potential policy areas.

For example, food trade liberalization is often a prominent and contentious policy issue in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is of importance to regional economic blocks, lobbying groups, and is an important topic in academic debates. However, if your institution does not have staff with skills that can add value to policy debates around trade, or institutional linkages to relevant stakeholders in the area of food trade, then this is not likely a policy area where your institution has a meaningful comparative advantage.

Once you have developed a short list of potential policy areas, the next step in the approach is to clearly articulate what the current status of the policy area is and what your institutional objectives in this policy area are. Being able to clearly articulate what change or reform in this

policy area looks like is critical for subsequent steps in the PMCA approach, as you will be asked to assess the policy objectives of different stakeholders relative your desired reform.

To help guide you as you conduct your own policy inventory we provide the following example in Table 2 of two policy areas identified by a policy institute in Tanzania:

Table 2: Policy Identification examples

Policy Area (#)	List of priority policy areas (describe the policy in as simple of terms as possible. For example: staple food trade, input policy, land policy)	Describe the current status of this policy area, focusing on the key challenges that need to be addressed.	Describe the policy objective in this policy area. What does success look like?
1	Agricultural trade policy	Trade policy is characterized by frequent ad hoc restrictions on exports and changes in import tariff rates. This increases unpredictability in markets, stifles investments, and contributes to food price volatility.	To enhance the contribution of agricultural trade policy – including for crops, livestock, and fish – to Tanzania’s enabling policy environment through institutional reforms that promote and sustain transparent, rules-based decision making in regional and international trade
2	Input policy	Fiscal constraints have forced the government of Tanzania to explore alternatives to the previous input subsidy programme.	To guide government agricultural input policy to improve input market performance and private input market development.

As you can see from these examples, the policy objectives as defined by this institution are somewhat general, but signal important areas where it seeks to influence change. In terms of trade, for example, key terms in the objective include “institutional reforms,” “rules-based decision making,” and “transparent.” Being clear about what change looks like is important for subsequent steps in the PMCA approach.

b. Mapping the stakeholders

Effective engagement with policy reform depends fundamentally on first understanding the historical legacy of a particular policy and then correctly identifying all of the stakeholders that are involved (or could be involved) in the policy area of interest, their specific interests in the policy, and their capacity to influence policy outcomes (Resnick et al, 2015; Babu, 2014). To this end, it is useful to first begin with a simple chronology of the policy area, and then subsequently building a visual map of the stakeholder involved. Table 3 provides an example of how to carry out a policy chronology, drawing on an example of micronutrient fortification in Zambia, carried out by Haggblade *et al* (2016).

Table 3: Policy Chronology of Vitamin A Fortification in Zambia

	Date	Actor	Action
	1978	parliament	mandates Vitamin A fortification of margerine
	1990	MOH	Vitamin A supplementation begins to children 6-72 months and lactating mothers
	1992	NFNC	initiates discussions with MOH on effectiveness of supplementation
	1993	Fortification Task Force	National Task Force for the Control of Micro-nutrient Malnutrition established (VAD, iodine, iron)
	1995	Zambia Sugar	Privatized by GOZ and purchased by Tate and Lyle
	1996	DHS survey	Findings: 68% population Vitamin A deficient
	1996	NFNC	Consensus forms that supplementation is insufficient due to high cost, low coverage
	1996	USAID	funds National Survey on Vitamin A Deficiency in Zambia
	1996	NFNC	finds supplementation reaches only 28% of under-five children and 14% post-partum mothers yet 65% supplementation coverage necessary to reduce Vitamin A deficiencies
May	1996	NFNC	convenes workshop on options for combatting Vitamin A deficiency maize fortification is primary focus; ultimately determined infeasible due to thousands of hammer mills
Oct	2000	NFNC	establishes and coordinates Sugar Fortification Technical Committee
	1997	USAID consultant (Dr. Dary)	Examines case for sugar fortification; compares prior successful program in Guatemala
	1997	Zambia Sugar Zambia Sugar	expresses willingness to participate in VA fortification of sugar demands public funding for necessary equipment, 1 year fortificant, legislation protecting national market from unfortified sugar
Sept	1997	MOH	national baseline survey on VAD
	1997	MOH	Expresses concern that mandatory fortification will leave a single monopoly supplier of sugar
	1998	Malawi Sugar	Supplies 25% of Zambia's sugar needs
	1998	Fortification Task Force	5 members visit Guatemala to investigation sugar fortification experience there; USAID funds travel
Dec	1998	parliament	Passes legislation mandating Vitamin A fortification of sugar (SI No. 155, December 18)
	2000	MOH	implements fortification requirement
May	2000	Zambia Sugar	launches fortified Whitespoon Sugar
July	2000	Zambia Sugar	expresses concern of 7 month delay implementing legislation: lack of legal protection (gazetting) against unfortified sugar
March	2000	Kalungwishi Estate	begins fortified sugar production; accounts of 1% of Zambian production fortification reduces profit by 20%
Dec	2000	Zambia Sugar	complains that Kalungwishi fortificant (from Roche) does not comply with regulations
Sept	2000	donors	express concerns about promoting sugar advertising as a "healthy" product
Oct	2000	USAID MOST project	sponsors training workshop on inspection procedures
Dec	2000	MOST project	tests Ilovo sugar; concludes most samples failed to meet minimum requirements
June	2000	TDRC	study of VAD; concludes only 7% of children receiving supplements or fortified sugar had VAD

Feb	2001	Zambia Sugar	Ilovo purchases Zambia Sugar PLC, supports mandatory VA fortification of sugar
	2001	Zambia Sugar	Raises sugar price 70%
	2001	traders	Smuggle large quantities of cheap (unfortified) sugar from Malawi
	2001	ZNFU	Patrols borders to prevent sugar smuggling
	2013	IAPRI researchers	study of sugar market concludes that VA fortification has led to monopoly control, high and rising sugar prices recommends study of alternative options such as biofortification of maize and sweet potatoes

Source: Haggblade *et al* 2016

Once a thorough understanding of the policy history is developed, or in some cases concurrent with it, a stakeholder list is developed, which is used to examine who is involved in the policy area, what is their interest or objective, and what is their level of influence.

It is important to note that when developing this list to include a wide range of stakeholders. Remember that the range of potential stakeholders is not confined to just political players and government ministries and agencies. Important stakeholders also include civil society organizations, private sector enterprises, media, policy committees, academia, development partners, and the international community (Grindle, 2004; Freeman, 2005).

For each of the potential policy areas identified during the policy inventory exercise it is, therefore, critical to map out the various stakeholder. This is the most intensive and time consuming step in the PMCA approach, but if done well can substantially improve the effectiveness of policy engagement and reform efforts.

The attached [excel-based](#) PMCA tool will generate separate stakeholder mapping templates for each of the policy areas you identified in the policy inventory. This mapping template includes five columns where you will enter the following information:

1). Stakeholder name: This is the name of all relevant stakeholders that are active or have potential interest in this policy area. The initial list of stakeholders can be populated based on your institutional knowledge of the policy area and then subsequently expanded during key informant interviews. It is important when identifying stakeholders to be as specific as possible. Terms like “the government,” “the private sector,” and “civil society” are not particularly useful because within those categories there are often competing interests and objectives within the policy area. In some cases, you may want to be as specific as identifying a key directorate within a ministry of agriculture, while in other cases simply listing the Ministry of Agriculture is sufficient. For example, in Zambia the implementation of the country’s input subsidy program is carried out within a single directorate, which wields significant influence over the policy process. In this case it is appropriate to include that directorate as a separate stakeholder from the Ministry of Agriculture. Alternatively, even with a single Ministry, offices within it may hold divergent views. If there are multiple centers of power within a Ministry, you should plot each one. Donors may also not be a homogeneous constituency. For example, the application of the PMCA approach in Malawi showed that donors hold opposing views for reforms they support to improve markets for agricultural output.

2) Type of institution or individual: Select from a drop down choose the most appropriate designation for each stakeholder. This includes public, private, civil society, non-governmental, donor, multilateral, traditional, and academic stakeholders.

3) Objectives in this policy area: This is a narrative description of what this stakeholder seeks to achieve in this policy area. This includes the stakeholder's stated objective, as well as perceived objectives based on key informant interviews. To identify the objectives through key informant interviews we recommend asking the question "what does (stakeholder name) hope to achieve in this policy area and why?" Successful use of the tool hinges on an accurate statement of the reform objective(s). Insufficiently clear reforms and/or lack of reform specificity undermines the capacity of the PMCA approach to identify clear coalitions in support of or against certain reforms.

4) Objective ranking: This ranking exercise is designed to give you a sense of the level to which a stakeholder is supportive of policy reform or resistant. To conduct this ranking exercise we recommend asking a sample of key informants to provide their input and then take the mean score. This will give you a more objective assessment than if you conduct this exercise individually or as an institution. **Note that what you are ranking is the relative support or resistance the stakeholder has to the desired policy reform you articulated in the Policy Identification.**

The ranking is on a scale of -3 to 3, with each score corresponding to the following definitions:

-3= Highly resistant to proposed reform. Stakeholders in this group will visibly and actively work to oppose change

-2= Moderately resistant to proposed reform. Stakeholders in this group do not want to see change, but their resistance will be passive and less visible

-1= Minimally resistant to proposed reform. Stakeholder in this group do not want to see policy change, but will not expend effort to actively resist change.

0= Neutral to proposed reform: Stakeholder in this group are ambivalent to change and will likely not take a position on the proposed policy change.

1= Minimally supportive to proposed reform: Stakeholders in this group support some or all elements of the proposed change, but cannot be reliably counted on to push for change.

2= Moderately supportive of reform: Stakeholders in this group support most elements of the proposed policy change. They can be counted on to support activities aimed at fostering change, but will not play a leading role

3= Highly supportive of reform: Stakeholders in this group are the champions for change and will play a leading role in advocating for this change.

5) Influence ranking: This ranking exercise is designed to assess the relative ability of each of the key stakeholders to influence the reform process and their own institutional objective in the policy area. Again, we recommend that you collect the perspectives of a range of stakeholders in order to objectives determine influence levels. Influence ranking is done on a scale of 0 to 4, with each score corresponding to the following definition:

0= No influence: This stakeholder has no regulatory, financial, technical, institutional or other forms of political power to influence outcomes in this policy area

1= Minimal influence: This stakeholder has very limited regulatory, financial, technical, institutional or other forms of political power to influence outcomes in this policy area. Stakeholders in this group operate on the fringes of policy discussions in this policy area.

2= Moderate influence: This stakeholder has moderate regulatory, financial, technical, institutional or other forms of political power to influence outcomes in this policy area. Stakeholders in this group are important to the policy discussions in this policy area, but cannot unilaterally influence policy outcomes.

3= High influence: This stakeholder has a high level of regulatory, financial, technical, institutional or other forms of political power to influence outcomes in this policy area. Stakeholders in this group are critical to policy discussions in this area. Veto players are influenced by these stakeholders, but these stakeholders cannot change policy outcomes without support from more powerful stakeholders.

4= Veto players: Policy change in this policy area cannot occur without the support (explicit or tacit) of this stakeholder. They have “veto power” over this policy area. These veto players will often change depending on the policy area.

Since objective and influence rankings are, to a certain extent, subjective, it is useful to use an iterative approach by reviewing the scores as you collect additional information and map stakeholders relative to each other.

Below is a partial example of this mapping exercise from Zambia. The policy area of interest in this case is maize output market reform, where the objective is to limit the role of the Food Reserve Agency to managing strategic grain stocks and withdrawing from efforts to influence market outcomes. In Table 4, we only list four stakeholders in this example in order to save space.

It is very common for key stakeholders to have multiple, and sometimes contradictory objectives within a policy area. As Resnick and Mathers (2016) show, in case of Ghana’s input subsidy program the objectives of the program varied from year to year, with important implications on targeting, program design, and scale. Shifting and contradictory objectives is indicative of a lack of institutional coherence in a policy area, and may suggest that the underlying objective is motivated more by political considerations than social or economic objectives. This is a common and important constraint to policy reform and one that should be considered in the next step on constraint identification.

Table 4: Example of objective and influence ranking

Name of stakeholder	Type of institution/ individual	Objectives in this policy area (narrative)	Objective ranking (-3 resistant to change or neutral to 3 supportive) See definitions below	Ability to influence policy outcome (0 no ability to 4 major veto player) See definitions below
Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	Public institution	Multiple and often competing objectives: 1) elevate farm gate prices; 2) ensure food security; 3) lower poverty; 4) support agricultural commercialization	-3	4
Food Reserve Agency	Public institution	Stated objective is to support maize market development and ensure national food security. Other identified objectives include: remain politically influential and maintain large labor force.	-3	3
Grain traders association	Lobbying organization/industry representative body	Seeks to achieve a more transparent and more liberal trade environment for its members	3	2
Millers association of Zambia	Lobbying organization/industry representative body	Advocate for low into mill maize prices, but resists restrictions on maize meal prices. Members often benefit from access to low cost maize from the FRA	-3	2

Visualizing the policy area: The information that you have entered on the various stakeholders can be expressed visually. As you enter information in the excel tools a graph is generated. This graph locates where each stakeholder sits in terms of their policy objective along the x-axis and their level of influence along the y-axis.

Policy areas that have one or more stakeholders located in the upper left of the graph (ie influential stakeholders that are resistant to change) often face significant constraints to reform. In many cases, strong resistance to change from a powerful stakeholder is the result of political economic constraints rather than other types of constraints, such as technical or regulatory constraints.

When reforms contain multiple components and/or there is more than one reform option, it is useful to create individual maps for each reform component and/or option. The graphs below show this by considering two reforms the Agricultural and Development Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) in Malawi. ADMARC is an agricultural parastatal in Malawi whose responsibilities include, among other areas, to serve as the buyer of last resort of maize and a supplier of maize, especially when shortages emerge. ADMARC has not been performing these functions very effectively lately and two reform options exist: dismantling ADMARC and improving its performance to meet its mandated functions. The stakeholder maps below show that the

coalitions for reform vary substantially by the two reform options (figures 2 and 3). They also show that the coalition in support of improving ADMARC's operations is much stronger than the one in favor of dismantling them.

Figure 2: Dismatle ADMARC



Figure 3: Improve ADMARCs Performance



c. Constraint Inventory

Having developed a detailed understanding of the stakeholders involved in each of the identified policy areas, we now turn to detailing the key constraints to achieving policy reforms in line with objectives identified in the policy area. To help think systematically about constraints to policy reform we divide potential constraints into six categories: Political economic, institutional, technical, ideological/normative, regulatory, and interactive or masked constraints.

There are three elements to this constraint inventory:

- 1) **Identification of the specific constraint:** Identifying constraints is best achieved in a triangulated way. This includes drawing on key informant information and information generated during the stakeholder mapping. For example, if you found during your stakeholder mapping exercise that a potentially important stakeholder is not involved in the policy area, but should be, then this is a useful institutional constraint to include. Literature reviews and stakeholder interviews are also useful for identifying constraints to policy reforms.
- 2) **Ranking the importance of the constraint:** In order to help you to prioritize and sequence your efforts to achieve policy reform, it is useful to rank the relative importance of each constraint. In the PMCA approach we do this ranking on a scale of 1 to 3. Like previous ranking exercises, it is useful to take the mean ranking score of a range of stakeholders to ensure that the constraint ranking is reasonably objective. The ranking is based on the following:

1= Low priority constraint: Policy change can be achieved without addressing this constraint
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2= Middle-priority constraint: Not effectively addressing this constraint poses a serious challenge to achieving change

3= High-priority constraint: This is a non-negotiable constraint. Change in this policy area cannot be achieved without this
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- 3) **Key stakeholder:** If a policy stakeholder is involved in efforts to address the identified constraint it is useful to indicate who is involved and what they are doing. The web-based tool allows you to select stakeholders identified in the mapping exercise and to indicate what activities they are carrying out to address the constraint.

You will carry out this constraint inventory in five constraint areas. Below we provide descriptions of each of these as well as some useful examples to help you think about the sorts of constraints you might identify in each of these constraint areas.

Political Economic Constraints to Policy Reform

Change in agricultural policies often involve changes in the distribution resources. Thus potential losers of any policy change may seek to prevent change through political and economic influence. The mapping exercise conducted earlier helps to provide a visual representation of who supports policy change and who resists it and their relative power to achieve their desired policy outcome. This is a useful starting point for identifying important political economic constraints to policy reform and can be built on through stakeholder interviews and analysis.

Some illustrative examples of political economy constraints to agricultural policy reform:

- Input subsidy programs often generate significant profit opportunities for input supply firms that are awarded tenders to supply inputs. These firms, therefore, have incentives to influence policy-makers' choices of which firms to award tenders to through cash or in-kind payments. This in turn creates incentives for policy-makers to maintain input subsidy programs, thus making reforms difficult.
- Trade restrictions influence supply and demand conditions, and therefore prices. In many countries these are carried out in seemingly ad hoc ways. Given the effects these restrictions have on prices, having prior knowledge of when restrictions will be imposed creates opportunities for rents (profits). In many cases, politically connected individuals and firms benefit from ad hoc trade policies and will therefore resist efforts to make these more predictable.
- The benefits of output market subsidies and price supports typically accrue to larger, better-off farmers that have surpluses to sell. These larger farmers are also frequently able to organize into farm lobbying groups to influence policy choices. Politically active farmers' organizations that advocate for the interests of large farms create political economic conditions that often favor the interests of large farms over those of small farms.

Institutional Constraints to Policy Reform

Institutional constraints to policy reform encompass a wide range of issues. These include: missing institutions, such as the lack of a necessary institutions required to enforce or oversee some element of the reform process; weak institutions that are unable to carry out key functions needed to achieve reforms, or; lack of a coordination between relevant institutions.

Below are some illustrative examples of institutional constraints to agricultural policy reform:

- Lack of independent and objective research institutions: The existence of institutions capable of generating impartial analyses of policy outcomes and policy options is a critical institutional element of a functional policy system. Policy reform is difficult to achieve in cases where research units inside and outside the government are unable or unwilling to critically assess favored government policies for fear of reprisals.
- Lack of a coordinating platform or institution facilitate policy dialogue among diverse stakeholders: Within many agricultural policy areas there are a diverse range of actors advocating for specific policy outcomes. This includes government agencies or institutions, private sector actors, donors, and civil society. If there is little dialogue or understanding between relevant stakeholders, achieving policy reform is often difficult.
- Weak, non-existent, or non-representative industry or producer associations: Achieving policy reform often entails increasing the visibility and influence of certain stakeholder segments that have been excluded from policy processes. For example, farmers' organizations are often weak or do not effectively represent the interests of small-scale producers. Similarly, certain commodities or segments of supply chains may lack industry associations capable of advocating for policy reforms. Under these conditions, dominant and better organized stakeholders can monopolize policy processes and stifle reform efforts.

Technical Constraints to Reform

Real or perceived technical constraints can impede policy reform efforts. These technical constraints can include a range of issues including informational deficiencies or the lack of technical infrastructure needed to achieve reform.

Illustrative examples of technical constraints to policy reform include:

- Lack of adequate price and supply information: Efforts to reform agricultural trade policies or marketing board policies are frequently stifled by a lack of accurate data on prices, production levels, and regional supply and demand conditions. Without this information, policy makers perceive high levels of risk to more a more market and private sector-led approach to food markets.
- Lack of necessary equipment to test and ensure food quality compliance: Policy reform efforts aimed at increasing export market engagement can be stymied by a lack of technical expertise and necessary equipment to ensure necessary sanitary and phytosanitary standards.
- Limited or poorly attributed geospatial information: The rapid expansion in geospatial information creates new opportunities to inform agricultural policy and guide agricultural service delivery, including improving input use recommendation, clarifying land use and access conditions, and developing weather indexed insurance systems. However, these efforts are often stymied by a lack of commonly agreed upon and well attributed spatial data sets. Technical support to collect and vet these data sources can be an important contribute to a range of policy reforms.

Regulatory Constraints to Reform

Regulatory constraints include missing regulations needed to implement elements of the proposed changes to policy, outdated laws that hinder policy advancement, or overlapping or contradictory regulations.

Examples of regulatory constraints to policy reform include:

- Antiquated banking and finance laws: agricultural policy reform aimed at increasing credit access in agricultural systems often focus on developing mobile banking platforms or collateralizing moveable assets, such as grain stocks, through instruments such as warehouse receipts. These efforts often face important regulatory constraints that slow or stifle reform efforts.
- Overlapping land laws and authorities: Land policy reform frequently confronts significant barriers due to the multitude of overlapping regulatory authorities charged with administering land. Land utilized for agricultural production is often simultaneously under the administrative control of a range of ministries or government agencies, such as forest departments, national park authorities, ministry of mining, energy, land or agriculture, as well as customary or traditional authorities. The lack of clear regulatory authority and responsibility can make land policy reform extremely difficult.

- Seed certification law: The rapid identification and multiplication of seed varieties that are appropriate for change agro-climatic conditions is an important element of agricultural development policies. However, seed certification policies, many of which were developed decades ago, frequently hinder this process. Without addressing regulatory barriers to seed certification, other associated investments in germ plasm development or the promotion of crop diversification can fail to achieve their intended results.

Normative or Ideological Constraints to Policy Reform

Although difficult to empirically identify, dominant ideologies, norms and beliefs of policy-makers and other policy stakeholders often hold significant sway over policy choices. Many policy beliefs and ideologies are embedded within broader historical legacies and experiences, including Cold War era political systems and experiences with structural adjustment programs.

Illustrative examples of normative constraints to policy reform include:

- Widespread distrust of private sector stakeholders by government officials: This is a common constraint in many countries and tends to hinder productive dialogue between public and private sector actors, particularly in the areas of input, output market, and trade policy;
- Gendered norms: Beliefs about the roles of men and women can create policy structures that limit women's ability to control and transfer assets and income, as well as participate in markets. These gendered norms frequently appear in areas such as land policy and inheritance policies, and can stifle policy reform efforts aimed improving the economic growth and poverty reduction through agriculture.
- Reductive understanding of food security: The term food security entails dimensions of food access, availability, and utilization. However, in many countries food security policies are guided availability objectives, and often ignore actual access conditions. This is often the ideological foundation for imposing trading restrictions in order to achieve food security objectives, despite its negative effects on prices.

Interactive/Masked Constraints

It is also possible that opponents to reform may couch their resistance along multiple dimensions simultaneously. For example, in Malawi, the Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS) opposes seed policy reforms to facilitate trade in seeds and move seed regulatory systems to a semi-autonomous seed commission because it fears loss of power and revenue. Yet it couches its objectives along institutional and ideological constraints by arguing the semi-autonomous agency is too expensive and that relaxing regulations on seed trade will subject Malawian farmers to sub-standard seed. Opponents of reform due to the narrow losses they might suffer often have a strong incentive to portray their objections in ways that appear less self-serving. When using the constraint inventory, it is important to be cognizant that opponents of reform may have incentives to hide their true motivations.

d. Actions

The final step in the PMCA approach is to identify specific actions that your institution can take to aid the policy reform process in each identified policy areas. Having completed the Constraints Inventory, the web-based tools will generate a ranked list, from highest priority to lowest, of the constraints you identified and the stakeholders you identified as being involved in addressing them (if any). With this list, you can now begin to think strategically about the activities your institution can carry-out to address these constraints, either directly or by supporting the on-going efforts of other stakeholders.

You will be promoted in the web-based tool to propose actions for each constraint. These actions are divided into three types: technical, communications, and capacity building. To aid your thinking on potential actions we provide descriptions and illustrative examples:

- **Technical Actions:** Technical actions primarily involve evidence generation, analysis, and other forms of technical support. Constraints that typically require technical responses include those that are characterized by a lack of information or where a pressing problem is not on the policy agenda due a lack of analysis. There are a wide range of potential technical responses to policy constraints. The choice of technical action is a function of the policy constraint and the technical comparative advantage of your institution. Key elements of an effective technical action that you should consider are:
 - Analyses that offer evidence of policy trade-offs, such as cost-benefit analyses, are often more effective than studies that focus on the negative consequences of a particular policy choice.
 - The simpler the methodology the greater policy impact it will likely have. Policy-makers often struggle to understand the results of complicated economic models. To the extent possible, complicated models should be used to bolster more simplistic, descriptive evidence.
 - Supporting the developing of data collection systems is often an important first step in policy reform. Without accurate data, policy makers often perceive a high level of risk in reforming existing policies.

- **Communication Actions:** How information is presented, who is included in the policy conversation, and what sorts of policy linkages are developed are all important elements of an effective communication strategy to influence policy reform. In many cases, effective communication is the most important element of a policy reform plan. Some important considerations to make in developing communication actions include:
 - How to package research findings: How research findings are presented are as important as the results themselves, if not more so, in influencing policy reforms. We have found that results should be presented in simple ways, relying more on descriptive evidence. Policy oriented papers, such as policy briefs, must be short (no longer than 4 pages) and presented in simple language. It is useful to present research in terms of tradeoffs and alternatives. Research evidence that focuses on the failures of a policy approach often generates resistance and resentment, rather than dialogue.
 - How to communicate with different types of stakeholders: Being explicit about how you intend to communicate with different stakeholders and to what purpose is useful. Workshops and conferences can be useful communication avenues for

some stakeholders, but are often ineffective at achieving meaningful change for higher level policy makers, such as Ministers. For higher-level policy makers, one on one or peer to peer approaches are often more effective.

- How to link in potential stakeholders: Often times, developing a communication strategy to incorporate stakeholders who should be involved in a policy area but currently are not is a valuable reform action. As part of your strategic assessment of the policy area, identifying who is not involved in the debate is important. Once you have done this, developing a strategy to bring them into the debate can be extremely useful.
- **Capacity Building Actions:** Supporting the development of stakeholders' capacity is often an important action that can be taken to address a wide range of policy constraints. While capacity building often takes time, if done well it offers a sustainable way to strengthen the policy architecture of a country. The types of capacity building that can be done vary greatly, from technical capacity building to institutional development capacity building. Some examples include:
 - Supporting the development of local institutions to carry out policy relevant research and outreach: Often external research institutions lack the local understanding of the political economic factors driving policy decisions. Local institutions are often better placed to understand local policy making processes and influencing policy outcomes.
 - Supporting the capacity of local university: Local universities are often the primary conduit for future civil servants and policy makers. These universities often struggle under restrictive budgets and limited faculty capacity. Effective support to universities through collaborative research, course development, and incorporation into policy debates can be useful for addressing long-term human capital constraints to policy reform.
 - Developing the capacity of public servants to carry out policy research and analysis: One effective approach to addressing a range of key policy constraints is to support civil servants to carry out policy research and generate policy recommendation and alternatives.
 - Media training: The role of media and public opinion on policy reform can be important. Yet in many cases, local media lacks the capacity to carry out investigative studies and to make use of available evidence. Capacity building efforts to improve the quality of agricultural sector reporting can have important long-term effects on policy reform processes.

PMCA Approach in Action: Agricultural Subsidies in Malawi

A second pilot test of the PMCA Approach to Strategic Policy Engagement occurred with reforms to agricultural subsidies in Malawi. Since the mid-2000s, Malawi's main policy to support the agricultural sector was subsidies for seeds and fertilizer under its Farmer Input Subsidy Program (FISP). FISP typically reaches between 1 million and 2 million households out of the approximately 5 million households in Malawi that engage primarily in farming.

For many years, FISP had been operating both as a program to support productive farmers as well as a social safety net program that targeted, in part, vulnerable populations. Many Development Partners (DPs) criticized the social safety net aspect of the program arguing that the Government of Malawi (GOM) was inefficiently using its limited resources to support agricultural development by giving subsidized inputs to households that lacked the land and/or labor to engage in farming. The GOM, and especially the Ministry of Agriculture, resisted this change to FISP, in part, because of reasonable fears that the government would seem uncaring if redirected support from vulnerable populations to those that are comparatively better off.

During stakeholder consultation, the team learned that the GOM had recently reversed its position against social cash transfers and was now actively advocating for them. It also discovered that the Department of Economic Planning and Development in the Ministry of Finance was in the process of developing a comprehensive social safety net program for Malawi. The team met with the officials in the Department of Economic Planning and Development and learned that the Ministry of Finance's official position was to phase out input subsidies in exchange for cash transfers for vulnerable populations and target FISP only to more productive farmers. The team also determined that the Ministry of Agriculture was resisting these efforts. The team recommended that DPs work with the Department of Economic Planning and Development to support its development of a comprehensive social safety net program that combined cash transfers targeted at populations that would benefit the most from each.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The huge diversity in practitioner institutions, policy areas, and country contexts complicates a straightforward set of guidelines for engaging with a policy reform process. Given this diversity, the utility of different elements of the PMCA approach will vary. We hope that users will find ways of using the parts of the approach that work for them and modifying or skipping those that don't. These tools should be used flexibly.

Ultimately, we believe that the real value in this approach lies in its intentionality. By simply being more intentional, strategic, and systematic about the policy areas that you focus on, the constraints and stakeholders you identify, and the actions you take to achieve reform will lead to more productive policy reform outcomes.

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