The Role of Research in Advocacy

Policy Influence and Advocacy Training

MS-TCDC

Why carry out social research?

- ➤ To inform policies
- ➤ To explore reality, to enhance understanding
- ➤ To explain with valid and reliable information
- ➤ To evaluate the status of social issues and their effects in society
- ➤ To monitor existing policies
- ➤ To develop new policies
- ➤ To make prediction of social events
- ➤ To empower people to manage and change their lives
- ➤ To shock/Provoke

Why does research matter for advocacy?

- You can't talk without evidence

- Research can help identify problems, understand their causes, develop policy solutions and improve How a policy is implemented

Why does it matter?

Credibility with those we are seeking to influence

eg Malawi : Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education

In 2002, 51 schools sampled.

Results of 2002 analysis not welcomed – Government said sample was too small to make any generalizations

In 2003, more scientific approach, 411 schools sampled.

Schools randomly selected but districts chosen to give representation over the whole country – Assistance received from National Statistics Office.

- Research enhances CSO's legitimacy, and legitimacy matters in policy influence.

- Policy makers think in numbers, and the magnitude of the issue. If evidence shows only a few are affected by an issue, then it will not appear in their agenda.

If CSO's are to use evidence for pro poor policy, they need to:

* Identify gaps and develop opportunities
* Inspire support for the issue
* Inform the view of others and share expertise (do it alone verses coalitions?)
* Depending on the issue, be ready for any impact it may have on the organization

Use of research in the Policy Making Cycle

- Agenda Setting: Research can help put issues on the agenda and ensure that they are recognized as significant problems which require policymaker responses.
  - (concrete evidence at this stage is needed. Numbers play a big role in proving the magnitude of the problem).

Policy Formulation: At this stage, CSO's may present evidence of their political position, as well as their competence so that they can be included in the formulation discussions

Implementation stage: Research does not necessarily raise an issue, but it is also meant to come up with concrete answers to the issues.

- To influence implementation of policy CSO's need to have solutions that are realistic and generalizable across different contexts
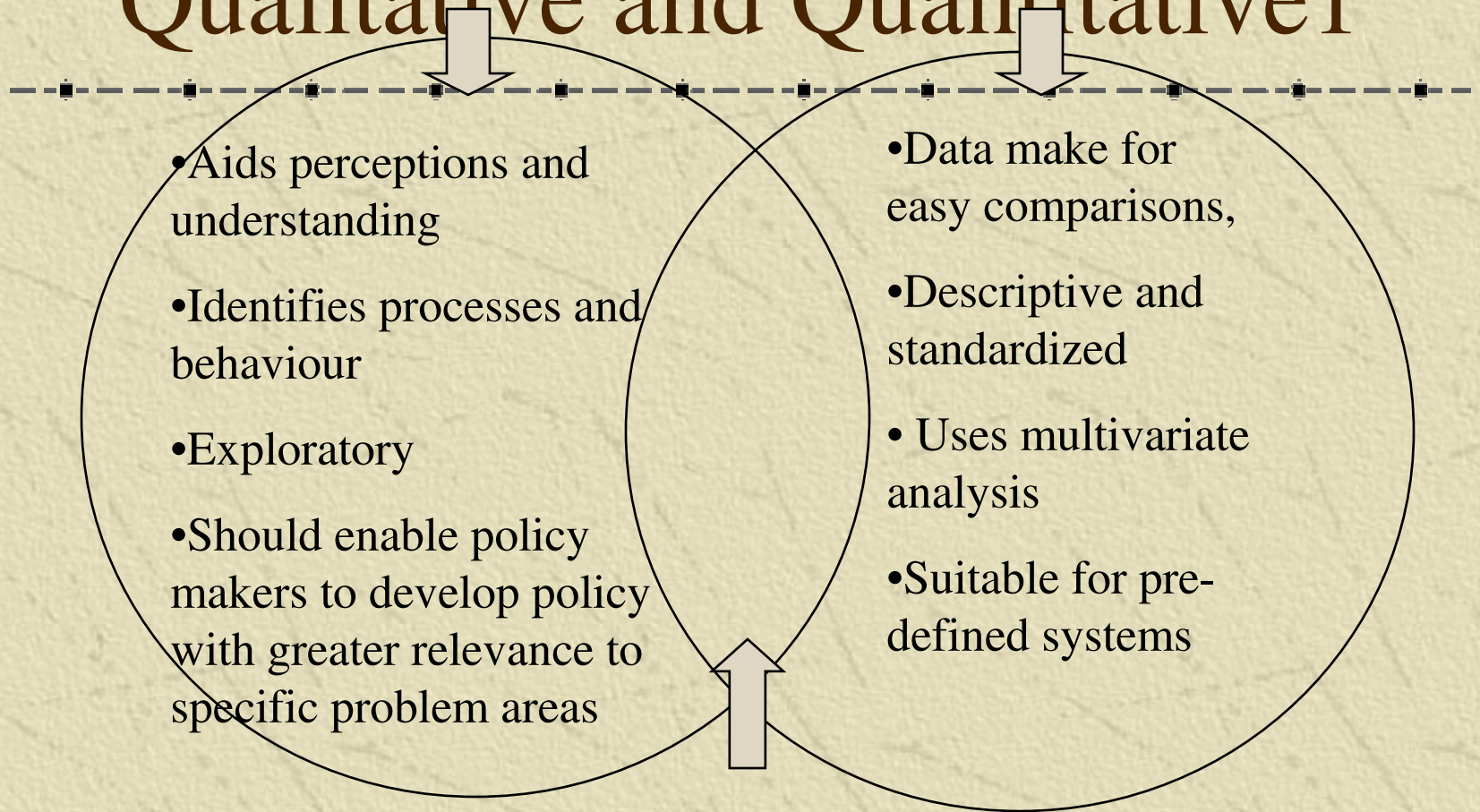
Monitoring and Evaluation: research helps identify whether a policy is working/improving the lives of the intended beneficiaries.

What are Research Limitations?

- Quality has to stand up to scrutiny!
- Research alone not enough – its how the information is used, and by whom
- Its competing with government monitoring systems – how much space is there outside of these?

Qualitative and Quantitative1

•Aids perceptions and understanding

•Identifies processes and behaviour

•Exploratory

•Should enable policy makers to develop policy with greater relevance to specific problem areas

•Data make for easy comparisons,

•Descriptive and standardized

• Uses multivariate analysis

•Suitable for pre-defined systems

Area of overlap and mutual concern where both approaches operate

Identifying and defining the problem

Identifying a problem for research will usually depend upon what area of work the organization deals with, perceptions of a problem, a real need for information and the viability of the project (financially, legally, etc). Research will be useful:

- When there is a lack of information about an issue;
- When a community or group feel that their opinions have not been heard;
- When policy-makers are considering a policy and the likely impact is not known clearly;
- When there is need to monitor a process.

Planning for Research

In planning to carry out policy research, several questions need to be taken into consideration:

Research Planning

❖How relevant is the research question to the priority of other issues in the country?

❖How significant is the research question in relation to other priority questions?

❖

What linkages and partnerships exists between the researchers and stakeholders?

- (the closer the links, the better the communication between the interested parties and the higher the chances of the research being utilized)

Are the interventions to emerge from the research cost-effective?

- (it is vital to take a long term view of the cost implications involved in the suggested interventions)---focus should be on less expensive alternatives

What level of credibility does the research team enjoy among it's peers and other stakeholders?

- (the higher the credibility, the greater the likelihood that policymakers will buy into the research findings)

✳ Is there interest in the research on the part of the beneficiary community?

✳ What is the potential for involving advocacy champions?

◆ (such groups are well equipped to do advocacy work)

Have plans been made for the dissemination of the research findings during the life of the research and beyond?

• (keeping stakeholders interested in the findings)

Upon Completion of the Research consider the following:

- Have steps been taken to ensure that reports have been written in a timely manner?

- What steps have been taken to ensure that the findings are communicated to policy makers and the public?

- Who will communicate the findings?

- Are the findings presented in the local context?

- How compatible are the research findings with the existing system?

- How will advocacy for change be managed and who will be involved?

* Is the evidence strong enough to suggest change in (policy, practices etc)?

* Will the resources be available and sustainable to make the suggested changes?

* Are the recommendations action oriented?