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# **DEVELOPMENT POLICY CHANGE ODELS THE PRACTITIONERS' VIEW\***

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## **Abstract**

Ideally, policy-makers are swayed by accumulated evidence into changing or enacting policies that are for the public good. The present work aims to disentangle some key aspects of policy making by looking at the role that external development agencies play in supporting reaching consensus in-country to effectuate the needed policy change. Based on a typology of accepted paths towards policy change (Incrementalism, Institutionalism, and Policy Streams and Windows), a survey of development professionals was conducted to assess, from experience, which of these paths was the most relevant and successful in specific instances of recorded policy changes. Preliminary results show that PSW best generalises the complex dynamics of the policy change process, while Incrementalism is suited for culturally and politically sensitive issues (e.g. gender/institutional/etc.), and Institutionalism theory, in the case of Power Elites, is mostly applicable in the context of technical enhancements, such as in the fields of ICT or statistics.

We then focus more specifically on one priority developmental theme — social justice — to see the extent to which the above framework is enough to assess whether there are enabling conditions for policy change. Based on the results obtained, we consider that we have demonstrated a methodology that can be scaled up and call for further research that would more systematically and quantitatively analyse the technical and evidence-based means of influencing local and national policies. Finally, the results of the paper call for further engagement in the follow-up to enacting policy changes.

*Key Words.* Policy change, ESCWA, survey, best practices

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## Introduction

Many observers of economic and social development advocate for describing even more explicitly the path of policy change, which, in the case of the Arab region, has been recently very dynamic. For example, ESCWA's High-Level Meeting On Reform And Transitions To Democracy that was held very soon after the beginning of the Arab Uprisings covered the various outcomes that could be expected depending on the reaction of authorities in place — including peaceful and smooth reform, hardening of authoritarian regimes, or descent into chaos and civil war<sup>1</sup>.

The Arab Region has struggled with the peaceful implementation of policy reforms toward more development and more socio-economic justice from before the Arab uprisings of course (see [Al-Rasheed et al., 2009](#)). Since then, and perhaps prompted by the lack of alternatives to the authoritarian regimes that were being toppled, the interest in how to ensure internal cohesion around specific policy changes is growing. This includes an interest in institutional reforms ([Medani, 2013](#)), the problems of coping with the world financial crisis ([Aidi, 2013](#)), and the new challenges arising from the interaction between social media and public policy ([Coulson, 2013](#)). This call for policy change develops in a context where policy-making is characterized by an unstable political context, a limited research supply, external interference and recent civil society engagement ([Young, 2005](#)).

External providers of advice and support to governments and people of the Region have a particular challenge. They have to tailor their advice in a way that strengthens the ownership of their interlocutors for this advice and allows the decision-makers to be convincing with their respective constituents. An understanding of what works and what doesn't in effectuating policy change in the Arab Region is therefore seen as essential, both for external assistance to be effective and strengthen the dialogue and ownership that are essential in obtaining the required political will in-country, as well as to convey to the authorities the way by which consensus around required changes can be generated in an evidence-based manner.

As [El-Ghali and Yehia \(2014\)](#) summarise, the role of policy research institutes may result determinant as far as they manage to identify the core issues of local and regional stakeholders, by translating knowledge into effective advisory actions.

The present paper is a first layer of a complex issue, an initial exploratory step in the direction of understanding policy change in the Arab States by

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<sup>1</sup> See the full Report at <http://www.escwa.un.org/main/tod/final.html>

focusing, in a “strength-based” manner, on recent past experience with successful policy changes in a variety of development sectors. The fundamental question being addressed is the one around the best way to go from knowledge (research results, studies etc.) to effectuating policy change. We address this question through the following sequence of activities:

- a) A review of the literature, to define an adequate conceptual framework/typology of policy change in general;
- b) A fact-finding inquiry, through a survey of development practitioners entrusted with providing external support to countries of the Region on socio-economic policy matters;
- c) A focus on a subset of the survey related to social justice, given the importance the topic has acquired since the aftermath of the 2012 transition period.

## 1 Conceptual Framework

*“All policy is policy change”*  
(Hogwood & Peters (1983), cited by [Capano, \(2009\)](#))

In conducting an overall review of potential frameworks and typologies for policy analysis, we applied the following three criteria:

- a) *Completeness*. The selected frameworks need to be representative of one or more of the omitted ones, in order to provide a simple, but not simpler, scheme.
- b) *Progressiveness*. The theories can be clustered into different classes of interactions with sociological, political and economic elements. We need to identify at least one theoretical framework for each level of complexity, in order to successfully resume the complete theoretical structure;
- c) *Applicability*. According to the choice of employing the evaluation tools provided by [Capano \(2009\)](#), our selection takes into account the necessity for adaptation to the author’s taxonomy, compatibly with the previous principles.

Using the above criteria, we propose the following typology for effectuating change at the policy level:

- Incrementalism;
- Institutionalism (Power Elites and Grassroots);
- Policy Streams and Windows.

The selection of the above typology is further explained in the following

section, which consists of three layers of theoretical complexity, from the simpler to the more advanced.

## 1.1 Roots

Policy analysis has always been a major topic in traditional social studies, but it is with Lindblom (1959) on incremental adjustments that a deeper search on the epistemologic and theoretical aspects of the discipline begins to flourish. Policy change appear to happen through small changes, being policy makers risk averse or given a set of conditions where, for several reasons, it is impossible to implement extensive changes<sup>2</sup>. During this early stage the literature debate on the incrementalist vs paradigmatic dichotomy is pivoted on the clash between the simple and powerful core principles of each approach: marginal deviations from the steady state vs unpredictable shocks.

Hence, we define incrementalism as “small policy change reached with limited understanding” (Calkins, 1965, 552), where innovations follow a smooth path with information asymmetries and gradual improvements, in antithesis to a paradigmatic shift, where sudden and abrupt exogenous agents foster the change<sup>3</sup>.

We select incrementalist over paradigmatic change because the latter, sudden events affecting socio-economic conditions, is deeply rooted in many synthetic framework, which will be covered in the following section. On the contrary, succeeding frameworks related to incrementalism, such as Punctuated Equilibrium or evolutionary theories, can be seen as failures to make relevant advances from the original incrementalist approach and, as such, they can be considered more as deviations rather than progresses.

In conclusion, Incrementalism is the chosen framework to represents the roots level (progressiveness criterion), and encompasses more complex frameworks: Evolutionary Theory and PEF indeed (completeness). Moreover, it shares a number of core elements with the punctuated equilibrium chosen by Capano (2009) (applicability).

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<sup>2</sup> The debate converges to a dichotomy opposing incrementalism and policy paradigm: however, even though the idea of paradigm shift gains popularity since Kuhn (1962), incrementalists dominate the policy debate until 1989, when Hall manages to transpose Kuhn’s intuition into social sciences Hall (1989): policy processes do not necessarily follow a sort of path, yet an abrupt deviation in the thought pattern can lead change.

<sup>3</sup> We leave aside its implications with regards to the dual opposition between the rational/ synoptic method in its theoretical (Lustick, 1980) or epistemological Calkins (1965) aspects, nor we explore the consensus debate (Jones and Baumgartner, 1997): we assert that consensus volatility is better synthesised by institutional and trigger-driven policy change frameworks. For some in-depth analysis on the meaning of political consensus, see Pombeni (2010). A major area of application is the British postwar case: see, among many, Rollings (1994), Kavanagh and Kavanagh (1990), Fraser (2000).

## 1.2 Mainstream Theories

Both incremental and paradigmatic approaches can be included and broadened in the context of more specific tools, which focus on a particular set of hypothesis: following [John \(2003\)](#), we identify five “mainstream” theories: Institutionalism<sup>4</sup>; Socio-economic Change, Rational Choice<sup>5</sup>; Ideas<sup>6</sup>; Networks.

Power Elites and Grassroots can proxy the broad range of institutionalist theories. They both start with the idea of the existence of a “ruling stratum” ([Mills, 1999](#), p.11), a particular group which has the power to drive change, but the two theories diverge under different assumptions. Power Elites stems from the idea that there is a “minority of individuals whose preferences regularly prevail in cases of differences in preference on key political issues” [Dahl \(1958, 464\)](#). In fact, policy-making in developing countries is particularly less linear than in the West- being less based on public opinion and debate, and more on acting as a function of informal private bargaining ([Yom, 2005](#))<sup>7</sup>. Henceforth, it can be assumed that for many practitioners PE appears a natural approach vis-à-vis the legacy of the political processed and the actual social instability.

Instead, as [Papadopoulos and Warin \(2007\)](#) underline, there also exist policy- making processes where a societal movement introduces change: power is not exclusively held by elites, but has a strong horizontal component, making it dynamic and kaleidoscopic.

Institutionalism can successfully represent Sabatier’s Policy Advocacy Coalition framework (included in [Capano’s](#) selection): network and institutional related elements are deeply explored by Power and Grassroots theories, while the trigger aspect of PAC is captured by our next choice.

Moreover, we choose Institutionalism because rational choice (in its bounded form) is encompassed by incrementalist frameworks, while Socioeconomic change and Ideas are best comprehended by policy stream approaches, which will be presented in the following section.

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<sup>4</sup> See [Perrucci and Pilisuk \(1970\)](#), [Acemoglu and Robinson\(2006\)](#) for further insights

<sup>5</sup> [Cellini and Lambertini \(1996\)](#) provide a beginner approach to game theory examples. An introduction to the concept of “bounded rationality” can be found in [Tversky and Kahneman \(1981\)](#), while [Gershuny \(1978\)](#) applies the same concept specifically on policy professionals

<sup>6</sup> The importance of ideas is significantly due to the research in the field of KTE (Knowledge Transfer and Exchange), which explores the rigidities between research and policymakers. Among many, see the works of [Moorman et al.\(1992\)](#), [Sorian and Baugh \(2002\)](#), [Lavis et al. \(2003\)](#), [Hemsley-Brown \(2004\)](#), [Lavis et al. \(2004\)](#), [Mitton et al. \(2007\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> Regional advisors are generally acknowledged to be one of the best interpreters of this particular know-how

### 1.3 Synthetic Frameworks

In parallel with, and developing the aforementioned theories, richer and more inclusive frameworks have been developed over the last 20 years. Starting from [John \(2003\)](#)'s selection, we choose to expand it with two more recent models, in order to provide a full range of possible interpretation for this particular level of analysis: a) *Punctuated Equilibrium Framework*<sup>8</sup>; b) *Policy Advocacy Coalition*<sup>9</sup>; c) *Path Dependency Framework*<sup>10</sup>; d) *Regime Model*<sup>11</sup>.

Our choice, Policy Streams and Windows ([Kingdon and Thurber, 1984](#)) advocates for a particular conceptualisation of policy making consisting of three main “streams”:

- I- *problem* stream: a set of information moves from society to policy makers and becomes an issue;
- II- *policy* stream: domain experts analyse the problem and propose a range of solutions;
- III- *political* stream: the issue reaches the political environment, meaning that the problem directly concerns relevant actors.

Policy Streams and Windows models a complex and evolutionary system<sup>12</sup>, where policy change happens as a result of the interconnection of the different streams: each outcome is unique, given the singularity of the initial set of conditions<sup>13</sup>.

Why do we include the Policy Streams and Windows framework in our setting? It is trivial to show that PSW is inclusive of diverse policy theories. It clearly encompasses elements of societal studies, knowledge formulation and transfer, networks and power balances; moreover, PSW can be equivalently

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<sup>8</sup> See [Baumgartner and Jones \(1991\)](#) for an extensive discussion of the framework. A simple approach to the quantitative study of deviations from local equilibria, generated by trigger factors, can be found in [Bischi et al. \(2004\)](#).

<sup>9</sup> The main contribution is given by [Sabatier \(1988\)](#). [Bennett and Howlett \(1992\)](#) and [DeVries \(2005\)](#) provide details and examples concerning the nature of the exogenous shocks and their effect on the system of beliefs ([Capano, 2009](#)) via the diverse policy subsystems.

<sup>10</sup> See, for relevant discussions and critiques, [Howlett \(1998\)](#), [Goldstone \(1998\)](#), [Raadschelders \(1998\)](#), [Kay \(2005\)](#), [Howlett and Rayner \(2006\)](#), [Rayner \(2009\)](#).

<sup>11</sup> A polished review can be found in [Wilson \(2000\)](#).

<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the concept of evolution in Punctuated Equilibrium Framework is not explicitly addressed but it is latent, even if it is fully developed by other authors. Among many, see [De Greene \(1994\)](#) and [John \(2000\)](#).

<sup>13</sup> However, as claimed by [Sabatier \(1991\)](#), PSW presents some gaps in the passage from the societal level to the policy one, neglecting the role played by bureaucratic networks.

applied to an incremental or a paradigmatic path.

What is left to explain concerns the reason of this choice among the other synthetic frameworks.

- a) PEF has already been expressed as a function of incrementalism;
- b) The trigger relevance of PAC can be expressed by the first stream;
- c) Despite the fact that Regime models can be seen as a more sophisticated alternative to PSW, we believe that its complexity constitutes an obstacle to our research.
- d) We consider Path Dependency as a basic requirement policy makers should aim to master, but its generality makes it difficult to be empirically assessed.

In conclusion, Policy Streams and Windows framework, which is contained in [Capano \(2009\)](#)'s selection, meets all the requirements of completeness, progressiveness and applicability, and, with the Incrementalist and the Institutional (Power Elites and Grassroots) frameworks, concludes the selection of theories which will undergo the practitioners' assessment.

## 2 The survey

The purpose of the survey is to increase our understanding of what techniques and strategies are used by practitioners to effectuate policy definition and policy change in the Arab world. In fact, the recent openings in the civil society foster the need for a better understanding of Arab practitioners' point of view on policy change: while the existing frameworks tend to embed a fair degree of generality, the transition period started in 2012 calls for a new role of Arab research and advisory institutes (El-Ghali and Yehia, 2014). We use, through the examples of ESCWA's advisory actions, the concrete applicability of academic theories. This would help practitioners in polishing the existing approach towards research work and getting a better understanding of the general framework needed to actually introduce the recommendations of the research work into adopted policies.

### 2.1 Methods

#### 2.1.1 Question Response Format and Layout

The questionnaire<sup>14</sup> is divided in 2 sections:

- Question 1 is designed to capture an exhaustive summary of one (or more) activity related to policy change within the respondent's areas of responsibility and the change actually happened;
- Question 2 focuses on the evaluation of the four theoretical frameworks selected in the previous section. In the second part of the same question, each interviewee can add details and comments on the choice made in the previous point.

We choose open ended questions over closed or scale response questions as not to limit the respondents, given the complexity of the treated subjects. We do not follow the classic flow<sup>15</sup> neither demographics nor screening and "warm-up" questions are deemed crucial. We are not interested in demographics because each respondent's role is to represent his division at ESCWA, and the latter is believed unnecessary given the wide knowledge of the issue among the interviewees.

#### 2.1.2 Data Collection

**Sampling** The respondent pool is composed by senior ESCWA members.

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>15</sup> See Barisone and Mannheimer (1999) for an introduction to survey methods.

The sampling method is Judgement Sampling<sup>16</sup>. The reason for this methodological stand arises from the need, given time and resources constraints, to focus on the quality of information. The main advantage of such a choice is that we are not bothered by non-response, coverage or response bias, core issues for probability sampling methods.

The limited number of interviewees is functional to the scope of our work, which intends to find preliminary paths between practitioner and the policy change literature in order to better investigate the patterns linked to successful advisory actions.

**Implementation** The implementation of the questionnaire followed two parallel methodologies:

- *Face-to-face interview.*  
The interviewers were chosen among ESCWA's personnel and trained in order to avoid the potential bias that could be prompted by the interviewer herself.
- *Written interview.*  
The questionnaire have been circulated via email, with an attached document providing complementary information especially to the theoretical part of the questionnaire.

A first round was completed via email, while the face-to-face interviews were implemented for those respondents showing a preference for the verbal format<sup>17</sup>.

## 2.2 Results

The survey results in the description of a wide range of policy change actions. Each of them put in place specific tools in order to reach the planned objectives:

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<sup>16</sup> It is a particular non-probability sampling , where the targets are specifically selected by the survey designer, rather than been drafted with methods which try to avoid the arbitrariness of the researcher, e.g. random selection. For a brief summary, see [Marshall \(1996\)](#).

<sup>17</sup> For further methodological issues, see [Hoinville and Jowell \(1982\)](#) and [Marino \(1997\)](#)

**Table 1: Summary of the Results**

Project	Description	Normative Activities that contributed to policy
1 Cyber Legislation	Political and Technical promotion of e-governance	Expert group meetings (EGM); Publications Training programs for practitioners
2 Governmental Development Planning	Improve the donors' understanding of the program cycle management	Regional Forum
3 Conflict	Supporting development efforts in Palestine	Meetings; Publications
4 Conflict	Improve communities relationships via education	EGM; Project Planning
5 Regional Trade and Transport	Evaluate the impact of the regional project	Publications
6 Policy Integration	Improve governance and cooperation	Workshops; Technical Support; Publications
7 Environmental Statistics	Promote environmental awareness	Regional Workshop; Publication
8 Gender Studies	Improve awareness on women, peace and security	Recommendations; Consultancies
9 Economic Statistics	Improve the quality of economic analysis	Fact finding mission; Workshops
10 International Investment Policies	Allow the donor to make independent policies	
11 Digital Content for Industry	Promote work	Publications
12 Knowledge Society	Promote ICT as tool for developmental planning	Regulation; Data collection
13 Cyber Legislation	Increase security	Directives; Advisory Services
14 Food Security	Establish pattern between food and conflict	International Conference
15 Economic Development	Raise attention towards conflict in LDC	International Conference; Publications
16 Financial Negotiations	Increase donors' staff negotiating capacities	Training Workshops
17 Human Development	Influence policies approach	Reports
18 Youth Policies	Empower Youth and foster social cohesion	Consultations; Coaching Policy Design and Implementation
19 Legislation Regularisation	Modernisation of public industrial regulation	Reports
20 Performance Analysis	Assessment of projects design and implementation	
21 Participatory development	Promote civic engagement	Training programmes
22 Labor market	Tackling unemployment	Workshops; Data Collection; Technical studies

The outcome of the survey is expressed by the following table, where the percentages express how much the theoretical frameworks are suitable for interpreting the policy change actions mentioned by the interviewees:

**Table 2:** *Percentage results of the survey*

<b>Selected Theories</b>	<b>Percentag</b>
Incrementalism	18.0%
Grassroots	0.0%
Power Elites	4.5%
Policy Streams and Windows	32.0%
<b>Combinations</b>	
PE & PSW	9.0%
All but Grassroots	9.0%
Incrementalism & PSW	4.5%
Incrementalism & Grassroots	4.5%
Grassroots & PSW	4.5%
Other	14.0%
<i>Total</i>	100.0%

We design the table in order to highlight three different elements:

1. In the upper box there are the 4 “standard” frameworks, as a result of our literature choice;
2. In the central box, there are combinations of the others, as explicitly indicated by the respondents. In fact, the open format of the questionnaire let the respondents fully express their convictions<sup>18</sup>;
3. The lower box (Other) contains a miscellaneous of answers: “all the answers”, or when the interviewee adds a possible choice outside the given set of alternatives.

Firstly, best practices at ESCWA appear to be best interpreted through the *Policy Streams and Windows* framework (more than 50% globally). Advisors seem therefore prone to see ESCWA’s projects framed with a complex theoretical structure which underlines the importance of three main streams, namely trigger factors, technical research and political debate.

<sup>18</sup> No grassroots means that that the choice included all the theories except for Grassroots

This outcome advocates for a relevant role of PSW in further research, where it might be useful to disentangle the dynamics of policy change linked with the three core elements of the framework.

*Incrementalism* proves to be a suitable tool for almost a quarter of cases overall: as some of the respondents suggested, an incremental approach could be fundamental for sensitive issues (e.g. core political controversies). In fact, it is important to notice that often the process to policy change is closely linked to the peculiarities of the subject.

*Power Elites* assumes a marginal role, both alone or combined. However, as some respondents suggested, PE represents an entrenched route for policy progress in the Arab area, and consequently the results may underestimate its actual impact. On the other side, the resonance of powerful communication tools shared millions of criticisms and called on policy changes whereby people voiced demands of participation in decision making and public accountability mechanisms (Coulson, 2013). Consequently, practitioners may be adverse to positively weight the PE approach, given the increasing demand for a larger participation in the processes of public administration, and the questioning of the centralisation of the institutions which often characterises the Arab countries (Alberti and Sayed, 2007).

Finally, it emerges how none of the policy change actions can be fully described by *Grassroots* theory, which instead works combined with other frameworks. Therefore, with regard to the object of the analysis (ESCWA's successful advisory actions) an attention on a more horizontal structure of power is useful only in the case it also prompts other paths<sup>19</sup>. We find important to highlight how a certain amount of projects (9%) exclude *Grassroots* from the range of possibilities, as a sort of evidence for Michel's "iron law of oligarchies", and a confirm of our assumption on the latency of *Power Elites*.

The last box represents a symptomatic aspect of the survey: 14% of respondents (the same amount of pure PSW) is the opinion that the proposed frameworks do not suit their successful projects.

Two possibilities arise: in the case the interviewee answers "all theories" it means that we select the best possible frameworks but, being equally applicable, the interviewee is not able to express any specific preference. In the case the interviewee explicitly suggests a different option from the ones in the questionnaire, a deeper critique raises: our models fail to grasp the core of the

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<sup>19</sup> The choices where *Grassroots* is combined with other theories represent 9% on the total.

process, and the respondents feels appropriate to provide an alternative. Fortunately, the second case is more frequent: while an “all theories” choice prevents from any kind of interpretation, the extra proposals still expand the amount of information for our analysis.

There exists a third possibility: the respondents evade to some extent the format of the questionnaire by formulating their opinion through a single answer to all questions. While a certain amount of “standard” information are lost, further details in some areas are extremely helpful.

In conclusion, before we undertake the larger study, we need to improve our theoretical set in order to fully capture the whole range of cases: we need to widen the scope of possible additional type of change by taking into consideration the need, expressed in the comments by the interviewees, to account for complex and dynamic structures of policy change. Moreover, we might adjust the technical part of the survey, by ensuring that the design of the questionnaire will leading to a clear-cut choice on the most determinant theoretical approach to policy change.

### **2.2.1 Proposed action**

The quantitative intuitions showed in the previous section lead to some qualitative generalisations, which might be useful for policy advisors, from both a methodological and a theoretical perspective.

1. Sensitive issues might be better dealt following an incrementalist approach. Sensitive issues are fully explored in documents such as [UN-ESCWA \(2006\)](#) and [UN-ESCAP and UN-ESCWA \(2013\)](#) related topics, are specifically addressed at ESCWA. The proposal may sound obvious, but the awareness of the problem turns out to be an influential element in the initial steps of the planning of a project, especially as for the setting of the tempo, the speed of policy change.
2. Change in technical aspects of national administrative issues seem to be captured using the Power Elites approach. Examples can be found, among many, in the fields of statistics and technology (see [OECD \(2010\)](#) for a wide range of cases). Hence, there is no need to wait for an opening emanating from the society (the first stream), nor an incremental solution is required<sup>20</sup>, but it recommended to direct the advisory effort towards the core aspects of the ruling group involved with the policy change. The same path seems to be effective in cases where the policy arena is bounded within a short period of time and a finite number of

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<sup>20</sup> We remember that, for the sake of the survey, we consider Incrementalism as representative of a set of frameworks, and therefore the connotation it acquires moves from its original meaning.

participants (e.g. EGMs, regional workshops/conferences).

3. Policy processes balancing a more complex set of powers closely follow PSW streams.

Among the wide range of possible stressors, Grassroots may be one of the possible ways the first stream can be expressed, especially in dealing with diverse and interlinked social actors. As some respondents suggested, the policy stream (experts researching on the topic), is fundamental in order for the issue or the institution itself to obtain both visibility and credibility. The third stream, the political one, is often directly in the hands of national leaders: even when the policy advisor is not able to fully define the outputs and outcomes of the project, monitoring and evaluation necessitate a deep knowledge of the political arena.

Lastly, we synthesise a wide range of issues raised in the second part of the questionnaires, which could serve as the basis for further follow-up studies. The questions and the themes expressed in the comments of the interviewees chiefly focus on some core aspects:

- Demand vs supply-driven. Should the practitioners act on the needs of its donors or should it try to promote its own solutions?
- Research and knowledge dissemination. An institution able to generate relevant pieces of research gains in reputation and competence<sup>21</sup>, but is bounded by resources and mandate constraints.
- Participation in the political process. Some commentators highlight the existence of a cleavage in the knowledge of the practitioners involved, who might be unaware of the whole policy change path.
- Internal and External Coordination. They both raise the quality of the advisory action, with the latter being generally a more demanding task: both inter-agency and country-related relationships arouse administrative and political competition<sup>22</sup>.
- National vs Regional focus. The comments raised the need to evaluate the trade-off of promoting policy change on a national and/or a regional level, in terms of both resources and political constraints<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> The importance of scientific production in the Arab region has been widely addressed, see [Hanafi \(2012\)](#), and [Mrad et al. \(2013\)](#).

<sup>22</sup> In many cases the role of the “champion”, a person with a extremely positive reputation, may also facilitate the change by capitalising policy openings. In the specific case, it is important to remember that Regional advisors often play the role advocated by this idea of policy process.

<sup>23</sup> On the interactions of different geopolitical levels of action, see the Report resulting from a combined effort of UN agencies ([UN-ESCWA, 2013](#)) for Regional Development in general. For a specific focus on

### 3 Case Study: Social Justice

Social justice can be defined as “social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” (UN-DESA, 2006, p.14). The increasing attention on social justice has been formalised with the institution of the World Day of Social Justice, every 20<sup>th</sup> February, with the resolution 62/10 approved by the General Assembly, where it is strongly underlined that “social development and social justice are indispensable for the achievement and maintenance of peace and security within and among nations and that, in turn, social development and social justice cannot be attained in the absence of peace and security or in the absence of respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

Rising inequalities among and within countries fostered a cohesive action in order to “achieve equality and equity in our countries, eradicating poverty, securing environmental sustainability and building partnerships for development” UN-ESCWA (2014b)<sup>24</sup>. For each of these elements, we present one concrete example of a project contained in our information set. We will, along the way, report the criteria of success as reported from the interviews. The five cases can be summarised in the following table:

**Table 3:** *Subset of cases related to Social Justice*

Case	Policy Change	Framework
1	Equality	PSW
2	Equity	Incrementalism
3	Eradicate Poverty	PSW
4	Environmental Sustainability	PSW
5	Partnerships for Development	Incrementalism

#### Case 1: Equality

The case focused on the need to tackle unemployment, fostered by the uprising in 2011/2012, by integrating the economic and labour market. The activity in question consisted of workshops, collection of a wide range of statistics, development of three technical studies and finally production of a

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the MENA area, see the provided by ESCWA with the recent Report on Arab Integration (UN-ESCWA, 2014a).

<sup>24</sup> See Burchardt and Vizard (2007), Goodland (1995) and Walster and Walster (1975) for some useful definitions.

full report.

The advisory action was found to be relevant, given the pertinence of opening the policy window on the need to self-independence and thus fostering human dignity. Effectiveness can be assessed by the number of member countries participating in the program: Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. All countries increased the minimum wage, while unemployment benefits were introduced only in Saudi Arabia, and programmes for job creation were initiated in Bahrain and Oman. The settled network between the agency and the governments assure a significant impact of the project, while efficiency and sustainable cannot be assessed by the information content at our disposal.

What about the policy cycle? From the questionnaire it seems that the process reaches the state of policy implementation. However, there are no reasons for which we can positively state that the project was monitored, evaluated, and that the feedbacks reached the strategy step again.

### **Case 2: Equity**

Intercommunal arose in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. ESCWA promoted a consultative project with local experts leading to the identification of education as the engine fostering the solution of the donor's issue.

The project was relevant and effective because it tackled an equity issue, security, using as an instrument an equity issue itself: better equity and security through education. Sustainability was assured via the engagement of local teachers and youths, in a train-the-trainer approach. Efficiency would need further details while it is not clear whether the project had a relevant impact.

An encompassing approach was adopted: other UN agencies helped in organising the meetings at the strategy planning and policy adoption step, and the Iraqi Ministry of Education played a crucial role in the implementation of the project.

### **Case 3: Eradicate Poverty**

The case regarding the tackling of poverty was the participation at the LDC conference in Istanbul in 2011, where the link between food security and conflict was laid for the first time. As a result, countries affected by situations of conflict were included in the final declaration. This case was found to be relevant, but it was possibly too early to assess the other elements. In

particular, it was not possible to ascertain whether the activity actually had an impact on policies on food security or other related topic.

#### **Case 4: Environmental Sustainability**

In this case, the activity focused on the building of environmental information, through the collection and analysis of statistics. This was promoted with workshops, technical and study missions, and IT support.

Relevance and immediate impact we found to be satisfactory, given that many member countries established units or departments for environment statistics which produce official documents. However, it is unclear whether this outcome at the institutional response level had an impact on overall policies or implementation of environmental protections and conservations.

#### **Case 5: Partnerships for Development**

The activity in this fifth case aimed at training governmental officials for the designing of international investment policies in Sudan. It started from a fact finding mission and led to a series of workshops building an investment model for the country. The fact that the advisory action took place at a ministerial level demonstrates the relevance and the effectiveness on the project. The sustainability was initially assured by a decree issued by the Minister of Justice establishing the team working on investment policies and treaties on permanent basis. However, while we would need more information to evaluate its efficiency, the impact greatly depends whether the Sudanese government continued to finance the group and, especially, if the team on investments had a significant impact on the partnerships for development implemented by the policy-makers.

What can be learned from this preliminary focus on a subset of the questionnaires? First, the prevalence of the PSW and Incrementalism approaches indicates that, other than the former, Incrementalism should be probably developed in detail in any upcoming research.

Second, with the existence of some variation, there is nevertheless a general impression among the interviewees that the phase of attention and assessment of success is rather limited at the production of what in the monitoring of activities could be described as “products” (workshops, publications, etc.) and perhaps up to “outcomes” (establishment of a unit, etc.), but rarely does this includes the other key elements of impact, such as difference on the ground, improvement of people’s social justice.

Third, especially in delicate topics such as social justice, the role of external support agencies is particularly difficult as it needs to ensure that

change is “owned” by internal stakeholders, further reinforcing the need for follow-up beyond the initial stages of policy change, and also the need to have a discreet but effective understanding of the political economy around the particular reform in question.

## 4 Conclusions

*Essentially, all models are wrong, but some are useful.*  
*George E. P. Box (1987)*

The complexity of the policy process hinders the development of a “commonly accepted, clearly articulated, and empirically verified body of theory” (Sabatier, 1991, 153). However, both advisors and policymakers have the possibility to exploit the tools the literature provides in order to have a greater level of critical analysis and achieve better results.

To help in the analysis, the existence of a common over-arching and relevant typology is essential. Among many possibilities, we have critically selected three possible models for policy change: the Incrementalist framework, Institutional theories (Power Elites and Grassroots) and a synthetic framework (Policy Streams and Windows). A survey was introduced to both test the above framework, and identify key issues in policy change in the Arab Region as observed by policy advice practitioners. The participants in the survey (all experienced external support professionals) were asked to describe one or more successful advisory action. Secondly, they were required to choose the framework they believed best descriptive of the cases they previously illustrated; a final part was left for comments and suggestions.

Considering the “dry-run” preliminary nature of the present work, the lessons learned thus far would point at the following inputs in the preparation and the design of a follow-up, “full-scale” research on policy change in the Arab Countries:

- The empirical survey pointed to the relevance of the Policy Streams and Windows framework. In fact, it turned out to best explain the complexity of policy change dynamics and, via the trigger factor, it can fairly model both incremental and paradigmatic change. In the “full-scale” study, a deeper focus on the three core elements of this theory should be taken.
- The Incrementalist approach does appear to be most appropriate to key/sensitive developmental issues in the Region -this hypothesis needs full-fledged validation as well as a deeper understanding of the content of an Incrementalist approach, especially in the face of rapid changes in

the Region;

- There were indications that technical aspects of administrative issues can best dealt via the Power Elites channel - in addition to the need for further validation of this result, it would be important to ensure a “political economy” reading of these findings in order for future research to focus on the effective/substantive changes sought, and not focus entirely on the institutional/administrative aspects;
- There were additional findings from the survey results that were not necessarily part of the initial study design and may warrant follow-up assessment in a future “full-fledged” study. In particular, there was no consensus among practitioners on what is considered successful policy advice and external support. For this, two specific suggestions are made:
  - a)The cyclical nature of policy-making: there is no linear trajectory to policy change, it is more of a cyclical phenomenon for two mutually reinforcing reasons: (i) policies, once enacted, need to be implemented and implementation needs to be monitored evaluated and fed back into better policy definition; and (ii) circumstances change and may lead to a need for additional policy changes - sometimes in the opposite direction (see e.g. the cases of privatisation, deregulation, etc.), or as a result of changes of political direction in countries. Practitioners should consequently aware of these “pendulum” changes in policies, what in the environmental literature is called dynamic adaptive policy pathways (See [McLain and Lee \(1996\)](#) and [Haasnoot et al. \(2013\)](#)). This would mean that there is an important role for external assistance in policy work beyond the “first” step of getting policies approved. Policy implementation, impact, etc. are to be included in the assistance that external advisers provide to countries;
  - b)The fundamentals and methodology of the evaluation of “normative work” ([UNEG, 2013](#)), in order to assess that policy recommendation actually translate into successful actions especially in terms of impact and transparent implementation;
- There exists a large amount of documentation on policy change processes, either concluded or ongoing works. Recent developments in computer science raise the possibility of a quantitative analysis of the full documentation: by using text mining techniques, it is possible to find patters delivering useful insights of the policy change process.

The preliminary conclusions of this initial “issues paper” on the topic of policy change processes in the Arab Region points to the need for more in-depth research on the topic and identified the key conceptual and

methodological elements to guarantee the success and relevance of such research. Key among those is to adopt a common framework and standard for what is considered “successful’ policy work and to have an adequate typology for how policies change. The paper discussed specific findings in these areas of work.

## A Questionnaire

### Question 1

- a) Please describe briefly one case where your work or your department/section/division's work significantly contributed to policy change within one or more ESCWA member states.
- b) Illustrate the overall process, from the ESCWA starting point (fieldwork/research/EGM) to final results.

Please specify why and/or how the policy change support has been relevant, effective, efficient and sustainable.

### Question 2

1. Please find below four theories/frameworks that explain how policy change occurs.  
Based on your success story (from question 1), which model/models do you believe best describe(s) the policy change achieved?
  - A) *Incrementalism*. Policy change happens slowly through small changes, being policy makers risk averse or given a set of conditions where, for several reasons, it's impossible to implement extensive changes.
  - B) *Power Elites*. The power to influence policy is concentrated in the hands of a few: policy change occurs depending on the elites' will.
  - C) *Grassroots*. Policy change is supported and driven by natural and spontaneous political and social movements.
  - D) *Policy window*. The likelihood of an issue receiving serious attention and being placed on the policy agenda increases when there is a convergence between:
    - i) Policymakers define an issue as a problem;
    - ii) Policies, ideas are formulated to address the problem;
    - iii) Most of the political actors (public opinion, interest groups, government, etc) are concerned with the topic.
2. From your experience and the evidence you presented in this questionnaire, should ESCWA consider that for certain issues there are different policy change paths from the ones presented above?  
If yes, please explain.

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