Forestry research uptake in Cameroon: causes and threats of informal communication and knowledge sharing

Sandrine Ebakisse

This article links research (the area in which knowledge is generated) and knowledge management (the area devoted to promoting the value and sharing of knowledge). It results from a study that had as objective to understand the conditions whereby communication and knowledge-sharing strategies contribute to research uptake. The results emerging from a qualitative analysis of data collected from research centres, public administrations, donor agencies and NGOs in the forestry sector in Cameroon allowed us to confirm the link between the effectiveness of these strategies and their consistency with the context and with researchers' theories of change. The analysis also finds disconnections between the official discourse of public decision-makers and what they concede in more informal settings. There are many reasons for this double discourse. Its main consequence is the predominance of informal relationships between researchers and decision-makers. While these informal relationships are effective in influencing policies, they present a number of risks that are also set out in this article.

Keywords: research communication, forestry, Cameroon, knowledge sharing, informal communication

Introduction

One approach of research uptake promotes its influence on public policy—that is, how and to what extent the reliable data, information and analyses it produces are used by public agencies to make decisions (Carden 2011: 1). Some Cameroonian research centres are involved in getting research into use through their communication and knowledge-sharing strategies. When valued for implementing public policies, research for development can have an important contribution to increase peoples quality of life (Schryer-Roy 2005; Wilsdon 2005; Carden 2011)

The link between research communication and public policies is generally analysed in developments related to policy influence by research (Carden 2011) or in literature related to objectives and approaches of research communication (Lewin and Patterson 2012). Concerning methods of research influence, some authors suggest a review of researcher's role, to allow them to gain communications capacities that will enable them to better present their results to

decision-makers (Benequista and Wheeler 2012). Other authors suggest that knowledge translators should intervene as intermediaries between researchers and decision-makers (Schryer-Roy 2005).

This article examines the uptake of forestry research in Cameroon. It links research (area in which knowledge is generated) to knowledge management (area devoted to promoting the value and sharing of knowledge).

It had a special interest to the analysis of communication and knowledge-sharing strategies of two Cameroonian organizations. This analyse purpose was to understand the conditions whereby these strategies contribute to increasing the influence of research on public policy. Its main hypothesis is that the effectiveness of these strategies depends on their consistency with the context (Carden 2009: 11)[1] and with the researchers' theories of change[2]. Qualitative analysis of the data collected from research centres, public administrations, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the forestry sector allowed us to obtain the results presented in this article.

In the following sections, we will briefly present policy and actors of the forestry sector to contextualize. That will allow us to justify our methodology and the choice of interviewees. The main results will follow and we will finally present the risks of informality of relations between researchers and decision makers and recommend some actions to decrease these risks.

Policies and actors of the Cameroon forestry sector

Cameroon's forests are part of Congo Basin rainforest, the world's second largest tropical forest. The contribution of forest and fauna is the country's second highest source of income and accounts (gas contributions excluded) for four percent of its GDP (Eba'a Atyi and *al*. 2013). Governance in this sector faces a number of challenges due to environmental, political and socio-economic issues that need to be taken into consideration when creating and implementing public policies.

The legal framework governing forest management has been strongly influenced by the Earth Summit held in 1992 at Rio and the new requirements concerning sustainable exploitation of natural resources. It is somewhat dynamic because it is constantly changing. The amendment of the country's strategic directions and especially of its development policies resulted on the review of this legal framework, which started since 2010. Several factors specific to Cameroon's context affect the development of forestry policies.

The sector is riddled with corruption, enabling some public servants to bring in impressive parallel incomes (Cerutti and Lescuyer: 2011). Cameroon's international agreements also play an important role, especially those concerning the legality of timber exploitation and trade, and those addressing the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions due to deforestation. Donors play an important role for the implementation of these agreements and support the forestry sector's reforms. The country's development policies are also relevant, since the choice to invest in large-scale projects that strengthen Cameroon's economy raises the dilemma of having to decide between upgrading the country's infrastructure and preserving forested areas. Because of the involvement of other sectors in forestry policies, governance issues must take into account parameters that depend on other departments, for instance mining and land use ministries. Last, the participatory approach of planning in the forestry sector explains why so many stakeholders, including civil society actors, are involved in policy development.
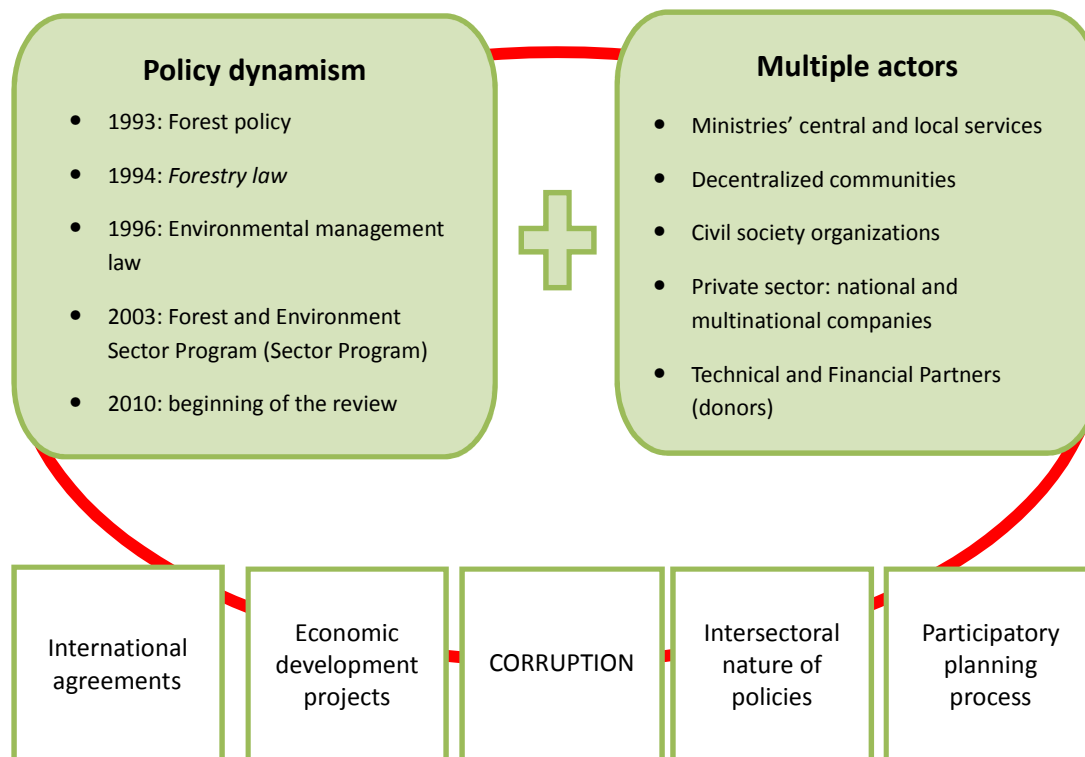
Policy dynamism

- 1993: Forest policy
- 1994: *Forestry law*
- 1996: Environmental management law
- 2003: Forest and Environment Sector Program (Sector Program)
- 2010: beginning of the review

Multiple actors

- Ministries' central and local services
- Decentralized communities
- Civil society organizations
- Private sector: national and multinational companies
- Technical and Financial Partners (donors)

International agreements	Economic development projects	CORRUPTION	Intersectoral nature of policies	Participatory planning process

Figure 1: Cameroon's main forest policies, actors and environment

Concerning the actors in this sector, Cameroon's Ministry of Environment and Protection of Nature administers general environmental matters, while matters related specifically to forest

management and protection fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF). Research can play an important role in the forest sector (Lescuyer and *al*. 2012), and the study identified a few examples where it underpins reforms.[3] Figure 1 presents the main forest policies, the actors involved in developing them and the factors affecting their development.

Objectives and methods

The research topic was chosen based on the finding that the contribution of research to the implementation of public policy is limited because research results are not greatly valued (Lescuyer and *al.* 2012). The main objective was to answer the following question: "How can communication and knowledge-sharing increase the influence of research on public policy?" The main assumption was linking research influence on policy with communication strategies that are suited to a given context and consistent with research institution's theory of change.

The strategic analysis approach[4] seemed appropriate for assessing the various actors' interest in using communication and knowledge-sharing activities to influence policies and practices. In fact, a research implemented with the state of the art and communicated to a receptive government is not enough for this research to be used. The actors of the forestry sector (like in any other system) are independents agents. Their actions depend on their objectives, which are chosen depending on the challenges and opportunities they face (Dion 1993). Understand these objectives and their unrevealed reasons will surely help to better identify factors that contributes to a better contribution of communication and knowledge sharing to research influence.

Two research centres were selected, for regarding their experience in influencing forest policies and practices, and they shared their success stories with us. During our interviews, we tried to answer to these specific questions:
- Did the influence gained by these organizations's research result from their communication and knowledge sharing approaches?
- If yes, what are the conditions for these communication and knowledge sharing approaches to contribute to research uptake?
- And finally, does these approaches adapted to the context in the country and to the Theory of Change supported by these organizations?

The choice of these organizations was based on their success stories, but also on the independent character of their research. These organizations work since more than ten years in the forestry sector and had the time to well understand the context. They shared with us their experiences and to cross-check the information they provided, we met with representatives of the ministry in

charge of forests and some donors. We met around fifteen peoples to realize this work: communicators, strategic people in the organizations we met and researchers.

Organizations studied: CED and CIFOR

The *Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement* (CED) [Centre for the environment and development] is a Cameroonian non-governmental organization working on environmental protection, specifically issues of mining operations, land use, climate change and, of course, forestry. Even though CED is not considered, in a strict point of view, as a research centre, its investigations inform policies and their finance supports relay in what some donors like International Development Research Center (the organism which has financed this study) consider as research activities. Its theory of change is based on the idea that the rights of neighbouring communities are ignored at natural resource exploitation sites because of a disconnection between these communities and the central government. According to the Centre, loopholes in the system—including an insufficiently specific legislative framework and links within the administration to powerful economic groups, often conduct to unpunished fraud. The centre believes that central administrations are the best entry point for influence and acts in two ways to reach them: it supports communities to improve their ability to defend their interests, and it collects data about problems in these communities to make recommendations that are the basis of its advocacy efforts for community rights.

The Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) is an international organization and a member of the Consulting Group on International Agricultural Research. It carries out applied research in several areas related to forest protection. Starting with the finding of the weakness of forest governance, CIFOR has set itself the mission of detecting problems and proposing solutions to inform and guide policy development. Its objective is to carry out forestry research that serves to improve the governance framework, for instance by promoting transparency in forest management. Its ultimate goal is to limit the damages caused by forest exploitation and, of course, to increase the spin-off effects of this exploitation on populations' living conditions.

CIFOR believes that the best approach for influence is to highlight the economic benefits of a good forest management, above and beyond environmental issues. By not restricting itself to these environmental issues and by emphasizing the potential economic and social advantages (e.g., poverty reduction) of good forest governance, CIFOR can target the focus areas of decision-makers and exert influence. CIFOR partners with Cameroon's administration and have a headquarter agreement.

The following diagram is based on the work of Start and Hovland (2004) and situates the approaches used by CIFOR and CED to influence policies.
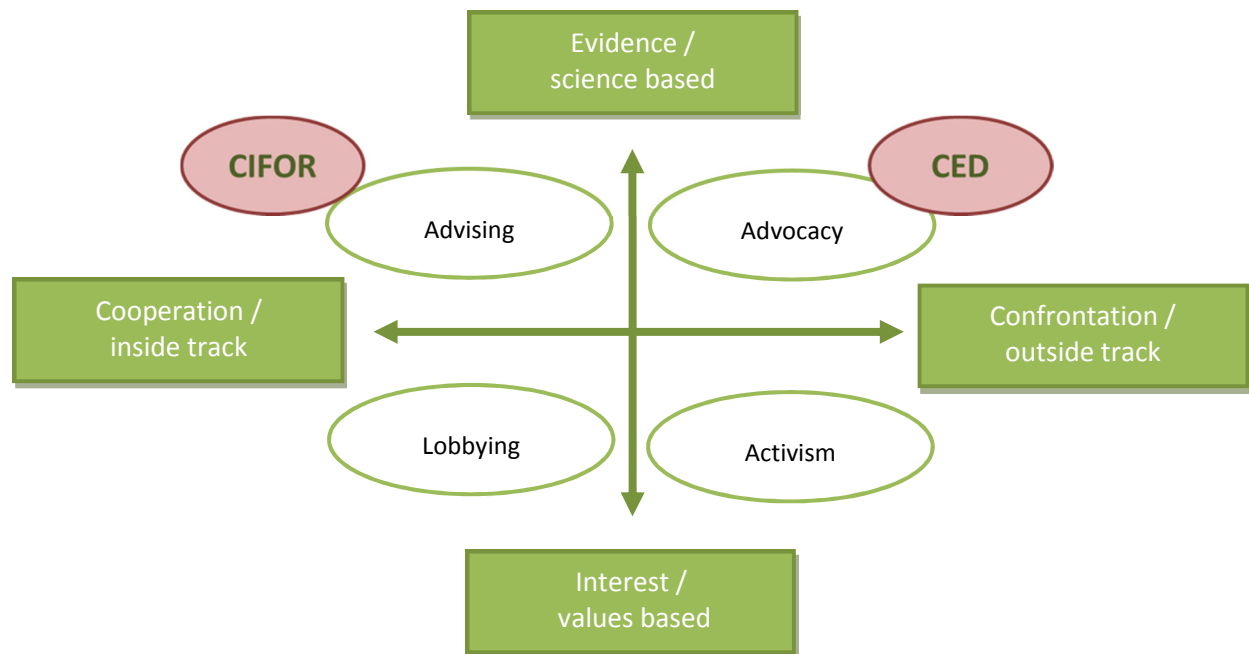

Figure 2: Appraoches used by CED and CIFOR to influence policies
Source: Daniel Start and Ingie Hovland, *Tools for Policy Impact: A Handbook for Researchers* (2004).

Study results

The study allowed us to notice that despite their different approaches, research organizations use the same conditions to influence policies and practices. It also permitted to discover the double discourse of decision makers, which increase the informality in their relations with researchers. Finally, the study revealed that these informal relations are increased by the weak structure of forestry research.

The same conditions to influence, despite dissimilar approaches
The diagram we just presented illustrates the standings of CIFOR and CED to influence forestry policies and practice. Our analyses allowed us to notice that these different standings result in different communication approaches. If both use familiar channels and tools, each organization makes an emphasis on the most pertinent tools regarding its approach.

Therefore, CIFOR uses a direct communication approach and communicates its research with tools like policy briefs and technical reports. Concerning CED, it uses an indirect communication approach and mobilizes media and other intermediaries to gain the decision-makers attention on matters that involve them.

But at this point, we also noticed that the use of direct or indirect approaches of communication by the researchers is not the main point, since Cameroonian context make researchers use the same tips to reach decision-makers with their research and influence policies and practices. Although CED and CIFOR have different approaches, the success of their communication and knowledge-sharing activities depends on the same influencing conditions or success factors, namely:
-        patience and continuity in communication and knowledge-sharing activities
-        presentation of research results geared to administration interests
-        ability to create or join networks and/or to identify, within those networks, a champion who will promote change, and
-        use of informal communications: they find spontaneous conversations, private meetings and other unofficial channels more informative than official discussions.

Despite these success factors, the study also revealed some weaknesses related to the forestry sector governance.

Public decision-makers found to employ a double discourse
When making statements in public and in the media, decision-makers do not always address the issues researchers consider as priorities for the sector. Our interviewees mentioned that they are well aware of these important issues, but simply avoid bringing them up during official discussions.

The double discourse appears like a way for public decision-makers to achieve their objectives by adapting to the complex context in which forest policies are implemented. The actors we met with brought up several reasons to explain this double discourse. One of the top reasons is that it is a matter of fashion. Public decision-makers are above all political actors, and they use language not only to be effective but to please their audiences (electorate and/or hierarchy) and thus maintain their position and privileges. Therefore, they try to interest and convince by using any and all readily available means. It therefore goes without saying that mentioning trendy topics works because it gives the audience the impression that they are in tune with current developments. Thus, a great deal of the debate focuses on current issues, although they are not necessarily a priority from researcher's perspective. Some of them for instance mentioned that they do not see the relevance of raising the issue of climate change to limit the access of aboriginal peoples to certain natural resources (especially firewood), when there has been no

prior reflection on how to protect these people from the negative impact of large-scale exploitation of wood by forest companies, which also causes global warming.

Alongside the influence of the media and current events, some actors evoked the influence of donor agencies. Many issues attract politicians' attention not because they are important but because they may draw funding from donor agencies. Politicians will thus adapt to the priorities of these donor agencies and foreground issues they know may elicit their support.

Another reason mentioned by interviewees to explain the double discourse is the hidden political agenda. The principle of good governance and the associated requirement for transparency oblige public decision-makers to talk about and justify their actions. Yet they want to protect themselves by refraining from immediately disclosing their overall action plan. The double discourse is therefore a good countermeasure, enabling them to limit public debate to information that will be used only to play to the gallery. They can thus convince their audience that they are abiding by the principle of good governance, even though in fact transparency is lacking.

Finally, the interviewees evoked the prevalence of corruption in the forestry sector to explain the disconnection between official discourse and viewpoints expressed informally. Given the subjective interests of certain actors, public decision-makers will touch publicly only on subjects that pose no threat to their privileges. In actual fact, this is a way of diverting attention to issues that are of no real importance to the sector's development.

In the face of this double discourse, researchers have developed informal relationships with decision-makers in order to exert the desired influence.

Sharing of forest knowledge predominantly informal
Information provided by the actors we met with allowed us to confirm that informal communication with the actors, resulting from personal relations, is a necessary condition for research to influence policies and practices.

Our interviewees reported regular contacts with the sector's actors at meetings that sometimes had different purpose than the ones on which they will request their attention. These meetings provide an opportunity to obtain the right information at the right time and to find out where and when to introduce the topics of the researchers' work. Because they have ready access to the administration and good interpersonal skills, some researchers are able to obtain undisclosed information, which guides most of their official communication and the knowledge-sharing activities resulting from their research. This approach provides them with policy windows[5] (Stachowiak 1985: 8), which are useful for influencing policies and practices.

This task is more challenging for other researchers whose organizations do not have a formal partnership with the administration, because the representatives of ministry of forest are less interested in being in the public eye with them. These researchers take advantage of the various events in which public servants participate (sector meetings, conferences and the like) to approach them and establish contact with them. Subsequent private meetings give them a chance to obtain information that some actors would never provide officially.

Informal communication is a response not only to actors' double discourse, but also to the difficult access to some forest information, caused by the weak structure of forestry research.

The vacuum created by the weak structure of forestry research
According to the actors we met with, the forestry sector could better boost the country's economic growth if forestry research was producing evidences which, better integrated into policy development, could supply to sector's priorities. But to reach to this objective, forestry research need first to be well structured.

During the interviews, representatives of the ministry of forests acknowledged the importance of research. However, the data related to this aspect highlight the administration's dwindling interest in forestry research (Lescuyer and *al*. 2012). Well taken into account into the Forest and Environment Sector Program (PSFE), forestry research has been completely eliminated from the new forest subsector strategy, despite the fact that all the budgets from witch government's financial provision comes from depend of this strategy. This lack of planning and finances from the government for the forestry research creates many consequences that weaken its structures.

As first consequence, government-funded research structures operate with limited human and financial resources. They do not receive any real support to improve their technical or organizational capacities, and their human resources are severely underutilized (Lescuyer et *al*. 2012:10). As for independent research, it is supported mainly by technical and financial partners (TFPs) through grants or calls for proposals under thematic programs. This support enables TFPs to orient the research of these organizations depending on their priorities and limits longevity of research on some issues despite the need of long term approaches they require (Lescuyer and *al*. 2012 :10) .

Another important consequence is related to the fact that guidelines from the government are almost non-existent for both public agencies and independent research organizations, to provide its priorities for forestry research (Lescuyer et *al*. 2012). Several meetings dealing with forestry research have been organized. Each acknowledged the importance of research uptake activities, but it is taking a long time for this lip service to be translated into implementation.

Finally, the last consequence is related to the limited availability of forestry information, which makes it difficult to produce reliable analyses. Researchers mainly rely on their personal networks to access to data, which increase the informal character of relations. Thus, it is hardly surprising, then, that national research organizations underperform when it comes to analyzing policies and practices[6] in the forestry sector (Lescuyer and *al*. 2012). And even when some of them strive to produce such analyses, they are given very little importance in the decision-making process. As an illustration, there is no comprehensive index of the research results available, nor of the fields covered by forestry research or the aspects it fails to cover in sufficient depth.

However, there is an external impetus that regularly draws attention to this problem through various funding for research organizations. Think tanks focusing on the issue have also been organized and are gaining a foothold at the sub regional level, thanks to the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC), because forestry research is part of its planning. However, the proposals advanced to date have not yet elicited a national response, which is a precondition for their effective implementation.

Discussion

Interviews with various actors of the forestry sector confirmed that communication and knowledge-sharing strategies do promote research uptake. These strategies are more efficient when they are aligned with the context and respect the theories of changes of research organizations that are carrying them.

But, informal relations between researchers and decision makers rise up some threats related to research objectivity and to its contribution to evidence-based decision-making process.

Importance of context and change theories confirmed
Influence experiences of CED and CIFOR allowed us to confirm that context matters and that changes theories are also important in research uptake.

About the coherence to the context for research uptake activities, it is clear that these organizations knew their working environment. They adapted their communications and knowledge sharing approaches to this context and succeeded to reach their objectives. This confirms the importance of knowledge about political, economic, social, and cultural environment when planning research uptake activities (Carden 2011:11).

The similarity in conditions of influence revealed by these research organizations illustrates as well the coherence of their research uptake activities to the context. They used the same tips despite different approaches to influence policies and practices. So, patience and continual communication, networking, communication based on the interest of decision-makers as well as informal communication were evoked both by CED and CIFOR researchers as the recipe of influence on public policies and practices.

Concerning the coherence of communication strategies to the research organisms 'theories of change, we notice that even though they generally use the same communication tools, each organization uses more some tools and less the others. The inside track adopted by CIFOR allows the centre to use a direct communication for it's advises to the administration, when CED relies on indirect communication in other to advocate in front of this same administration.

As a consequence, even though CIFOR often use media and public debates for its activities, it would not be as important as for CED which mainly uses this media channels before any other complementary tools, because of its outside track approach.

Despite the fact that our analyses allowed us to confirm our main hypothesis, they also drive us to underline the threats created by the informal relationships between researchers and public decision-makers.

Threats of the informal nature of relation between researchers and decision-makers
The double discourse of decision-makers and the poor structure of forestry research badly impacts communication and knowledge-sharing of forestry research: informal relationships take precedence over formal channels because they prove more effective in influencing policy.

It is important to clarify that there is nothing inherently negative about informal relationships between actors. Informality simplifies a number of processes and allows participants to move beyond the superficial; it can be found in any type of decision-making system. What appears to be negative is that the influence exerted by research is more heavily based on these informal relationships than on any other factor of influence. This informality jeopardizes the objectivity of forest research and its contribution to the development of evidence-based policies.

Informality has the potential to undermine research objectivity. While research tends to generate knowledge, the political domain is an application field for this knowledge. However, application of this knowledge is not a matter of course, because researchers and politicians have different frames of reference: researchers act first and foremost on the basis of evidence, whereas political action is interest-based (ODI 2004; Weiss 1979, 429).

The willingness to establish an influence link between research and policy is intended to ensure that public decision-makers' choices are more objective, since they are evidence-based. However, the informal basis of relationships between researchers and politicians may have the opposite effect in that it may jeopardize research objectivity.

The grey area resulting from informal exchanges can make researchers' choices just as difficult to control as decision-makers' choices. If determination of what must and what must not be communicated is based on these informal exchanges, it will be difficult to prevent researchers from becoming political agents in turn. On the contrary, given the opportunities available to them, they can easily choose to govern their actions more by their interests than by the relevance of the facts to be presented. What about the role research plays in development, which should consist of analyzing the data and sharing the resulting knowledge in order to promote change? Given the current weak governance in the sector, researchers would easily be lured by fame or money. Informality provides an opportunity to satisfy these subjective interests; for instance, researchers can agree to adopt courses that will benefit the administration or its representatives.

The above-mentioned risk of co-opting research and the ethical issues it raises apply just as much to relationships with donor agencies as to relationships between researchers and public decision-makers. It is an opportunity for these agencies to providing more supports to orientations they consider relevant, especially as they are the ones funding the research.

This is why we have to consider not only product influence, but process influence[7] *and choose between influencing by all means or contributing to an evidence-based decision-making process.*

Informal communication weakens control over forest administration choices and the processes behind them. The principles of democracy and good governance that underlie transparent decision-making demand that research-based evidence not only inform decision-making, but explain why the forest administration chose one option over another at a particular time. While informal communication may reveal the underlying reasons for certain choices of public decision-makers, it does not promote more transparent communication of these factors.

It must be remembered that the ultimate purpose of communication and research-based knowledge-sharing activities is not merely to factor research results into the implementation of public policy. The scope is much wider, because influence is a process and not a product (Lomas, 2000; Carden 2011). The methods decision-makers use to consider research proposals are just as important as how those proposals are used. Influencing politicians means presenting them with a solution and strengthening the process whereby this solution can be taken into consideration.

This is why, while it is important for the policies to integrate research results, it is just as important to keep an eye on how this integration takes place.

The informal nature of relationships between researchers and decision-makers hampers the achievement of this second objective. How can one speak of evidence-based policies and practices if the decision-making process is strongly based on informal relationships? And more to the point, how can one speak of transparency?

We do not attempt to answer these questions; we merely draw attention to the fact that research centres must not content themselves with achieving their objectives by all possible means. The way they conduct their research and share the knowledge it generates should also improve the process by which public policies are developed and implemented.

Recommendations: Re-establish formality and move beyond communication

We suggest a returning into formal relationships between researchers and decision-makers. In addition, the link between pertinence of communication and knowledge-sharing strategies in one hand and consideration of context and changes theories in other hand allows us to take a look at the institutional capacities of research organisms, which depend among other factors on the structure of forestry research.

A safer option: re-establish a degree of formality
Re-establishing more formal relationships between researchers and decision-makers is a safer option because, as we have already indicated, the ultimate objective is not only to ensure that research results are considered, but to optimize the process whereby they are taken into consideration. In short, we must strive for both effectiveness and efficiency.

Thus, in addition to promoting the consideration of research results, communication and knowledge-sharing will also help facilitate this process without tainting the nature of researchers' or politicians' work. This involves clarifying research uptake methods by ensuring that the ultimate goal of research remains the production of evidence, and that the ultimate goal of politicians is still decision-making, based on various interests and different sources of information, including research-based information. Figure 3 illustrates the various elements that can contribute to political decision-making. It is clear that research is only one of many factors, hence the importance of organizing its contribution so that it can have real influence.

Figure 3: Elements contributing to political decisionmaking
Source: Philip Davies, *Is Evidence-Based Government Possible*? Jerry Lee Lecture 2004, Washington, DC.

The importance of institutional capacities of research centres
Apart from communication, influence depends above all on the institutional capacities of research centres. The complexity of public decision-making (Datta and Jones 2011) imposes adjustment from researchers, for them to adapt to this complexity by developing suitable intervention strategies that will enable them to position themselves clearly in order to achieve their influence objectives.

The organizations we met with believe achievement of their influence objectives depends on factors that go beyond communication, whether formal or informal. They believe a wider perspective is required before communication takes place—that is, a solid intervention strategy on which to base communication and knowledge-sharing. Their common concern is the importance of identifying very specific objectives for their actions because, while they are aware that much remains to be done in the area of forestry research, each is only interested in very specific aspects. Because of this specialization, they do not claim to do everything.

Institutional capacities also include the organizational skills required to implement intervention strategies. Research organizations should foster an organizational culture that incorporates the theory of change as an identifying element within the organization.

The teams we met with have the same understanding of their organizations' vision, objectives, missions and work approaches. This has been to their benefit. They share the same values and pool their efforts to perform their work. This finding was based on the similar attitudes of the various people we met with in these organizations, whether managers, researchers or communicators. The quality of the staff and the distribution of duties seemed to reflect the willingness to conduct research properly and perform the activities that enhance its value.

Efforts required for improvement of forestry research structuring
In the developments that preceed, we noticed the contribution of weak structure of forestry research to informal relations between researchers and decision-makers.

The weak structure of forestry research results in a difficult access to information and explains personal relationships used by researchers to access to data useful for their analyses. Therefore, a better structure of forestry research will enable the access to these information and contribute to the decrease of informal relations which are nowadays the only way to access to some forestry information.

This better structure depends on many factors related to the planning, financing and support of research and a working environment that allows a fluid flux of information between actors of the forestry sector. Then, the expectations of the government (the demand related to forestry research) will be better known, the coordination of interventions of research centres will be eased and the contribution of research better integrated to public decision-making.

It is surely for these reasons that some of the public agents we interviewed suggested that the administration should create positions for the monitoring of forestry research. They believe research is unlikely to be of use to the forestry administration if it maintains a defensive posture (reacting to what is presented) and if nobody in the administration pays any attention to the evidences created by research. Finally, above a well organized forestry research, promotion of transparency in forest sector decision-making processes and maintaining the fight against corruption are other factors that may reduce informal communication.

Conclusion

The analyses made in this article aimed to clarify the role of communication and knowledge-sharing in the influence exerted by research on forest policies and practices in Cameroon. This study permitted to identify the conditions required for communication to contribute effectively to influencing policies and practices. However, the interviews carried out for this study also showed predominantly informal relationships between researchers and decision-makers, which reduce forestry research uptake. This informality was mainly resulting from the double discourse of public decision-makers and from the weak structure of forestry research. It seemed to be the main mean by which researchers acquire influence over forestry policies and practices. The discursive portion of the article confirmed the hypothesis of the effectiveness of communication that is suited to the context and to research organizations' theories of change. It has also enabled us to criticize informal relationships between researchers and decision-makers, because they jeopardize research objectivity and limits control over the decision-making process.

The solutions we foresee to improve the contribution of communication and knowledge sharing to research uptake focus on re-establishing a degree of formality. They also propose moving beyond communication by examining the institutional capacities of research centres, by ensuring a better structuring of forestry research and, more broadly, by improving forest governance. These proposals are based on the experience of two research organizations, and their consideration will certainly require more in-depth analyses in other contexts and quite possibly in other sectors, in order to confirm or rule out the connection between the double discourse of public decision-makers and the predominance of informality in their relationships with researchers.

References

Benequista, Nicholas, and Johanna Wheeler (2012). "Cartographers, Conciliators and Catalysts: Understanding the Communicative Roles of Researchers," *IDS Bulletin* 43, no. 5 (September 2012): 45–72. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

Carden, Fred (2009). *Des connaissances aux politiques, tirer le meilleur parti possible de la recherche en développement* (*Knowledge to Policy: Making the Most of Development Research*), p. 37–47. Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval and Ottawa: International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

Cerutti, Paolo Omar, and Guillaume Lescuyer (2011). *Le marché domestique du sciage artisanal au Cameroun: état des lieux, opportunités et défis* (*The domestic market for small-scale chainsaw milling in Cameroon: Present situation, opportunities and challenges*). Occasional Paper 59 (French), 61 (English). Bogor, Indonesia: Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).

Crozier, Michel, and Erhard Friedberg (1992, first published 1977). *L'acteur et le système : Les contraintes de l'action collective*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, coll. Points Essais.

Datta, Ajoy and Jones, Nicola (2011). *Linkages between researchers and legislators in developing countries. A scoping study.* London, UK: Overseas Development Institute (ODI) working paper. July 2011.

Davies, Philip (2004). "Is Evidence-based Government Possible?" 2004 Jerry Lee Lecture, presented at the 4th Annual Campbell Collaboration Colloquium, Washington, DC, February 19, 2004.

Dion, Stéphane (1993) *Erhard Friedberg et l'analyse stratégique,* Revue française de science politique, 43e année, n°6, 1993. pp. 994-1008.
http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/rfsp_0035-2950_1993_num_43_6_394797

Eba'a Atyi, Richard, Lescuyer, Guillaume, Ngouhouo Poufoun, Jonas and Moulendè Fouda, Thérèse (2013). Étude de l'importance économique et sociale du secteur forestier et faunique au Cameroun. CIFOR, Bogor

Gami, Norbert, and Charles Doumenge (2006). "Les acteurs de la gestion forestière en Afrique centrale." In *Les Forêts du Bassin du Congo: État des Forêts 2006*, Didier Devers and Jean Pierre Vande weghe, eds. Observatoire des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (OFAC). http://www.observatoire-comifac.net/edf2006.php.

Lescuyer, Guillaume, Youssoufa Bele, and Samuel Assembe Mvondo (2012). *Rapport synthétique, atelier sur "la recherche sur les écosystèmes forestiers" dans la zone COMIFAC.* Summary report on a workshop held in Douala, Cameroon, February 27 & 28, 2012. Cameroon: COMIFAC, CIRAD and CIFOR.

Lewin, Tessa, and Zachary Patterson (2012). "Approaches to development research communication," *IDS Bulletin* 43, no. 5 (September 2012). Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

Lomas, Jonathan (2000), *connecting research and policy*. Policy Commentary series, Centre for Health Economics & Policy Analysis. Mc Master University, Hamilton.

ODI (2004). *Bridging Research and Policy in International Development. An analytical and practical framework.* Briefing Paper. London, UK: Overseas Development Institute (ODI). October 2004.

Schryer-Roy, Anne-Marie (2005). *Knowledge Translation: Basic Theories, Approaches and Applications*. Canada: International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Switzerland: Direction du Développement et de la Coopération (DDC), October 2005.

Stachowiak, Sarah (1985). "Pathways for change: 6 theories about how policy change happens." In Jean-Claude Thoenig, "L'analyse des politiques publiques." In *Traité de science politique,* Jean Leca and Madeleine Grawitz, eds. Paris: PUF.

Start, Daniel, and Ingie Hovland (2004). *Tools for Policy Impact: A Handbook for Researchers*. London, UK: Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

Weiss, Carol (1979). *The Many Meanings of Research Utilization,*Reviewed work(s). Public Administration Review, Vol. 39, No. 5 (Sep. - Oct., 1979), pp. 426-431.

Wilsdon, James, Wynne Brian and Stilgoe Jack (2005). *The Public Value of Science Or how to ensure that science really matters*. Demos, www.demos.co.uk

About the author
Sandrine Ebakisse works as a knowledge manager in Cameroon, her country of origin. Her work experience has allowed her to compare approaches of knowledge management in a number of contexts, including Benin, Cameroon, Canada and Germany, and to apply it in several topics: decentralization public policies, international cooperation of local governments, environmental management and research uptake. Sandrine Ebakisse is a law and international relations graduate.
E-mail: sandy_ida@hotmail.fr

---

[1] According to Carden (2009), "researchers must design and conduct their studies taking into account the country's political, social and economic conditions."

[2] Researchers' theory of change is based on their understanding of the context and their positioning in relation to it, that is, how they propose to intervene in this context.

[3] Most of the players we met with mentioned the contribution of research to the institutional reviews that led to the reorganization of the sector after the Rio Conference, and in particular to the development of the forestry policy in 1993 and of various laws in the following years.

[4] As demonstrated by French sociologists Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg, this analytical approach studies a system of interdependent actors by examining the motives/objectives of their individual actions in the system.

[5] The policy window theory formulated by Sarah Stachowiak in her article "Pathways for change: 6 theories about how policy change happens" (1985) allows researchers to use their relationships and their good reputation to trigger and benefit from policy windows.

[6] Lescuyer, Bele, and Mvondo's 2012 conference report (referenced in this article) explains the reason for the poor performance of forest research and highlights the difficulties faced by research organizations.

[7] *Process influence* refers to Carden (2009)'s position, which is also supported by this article. The sharing of research-based knowledge must not boil down to a product, namely, the consideration of the research proposals. The methods used must also favour the policy development process and promote the use of research-based evidence.