

**LINKING POLICY WORK TO A BROADER AGENDA FOR CHANGE**  
**Just Associates, 2003**

As advocates, we tend to plan around a single policy opportunity. Since influencing policy can be an intensive, multi-year process in itself, we can forget that policy reform is only one piece of advancing a broader alternative political agenda for people-centered democracy and economic development. Periodically, it's useful to combine short-term planning with long-term analysis and strategizing that includes reviewing the values, assumptions and vision that drive your work, and the changing context.

| Context | Vision and assumptions | Broad goals | Strategies, Objectives | Work plans, Activities |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|         |                        |             |                        |                        |

With many advocacy organizations concentrating solely on **policy hooks** and policy engagement, other crucial social change processes and strategies (media, citizen education and organizing, mobilizing, base-building) are getting short-shrift. Time spent on policy work (research and lobbying) should be balanced with the complementary public education, media, networking and building a constituency for a larger agenda. Policy work is demanding and fast-paced, making it difficult to shift from a reactive strategy to a more proactive strategy that promotes a broader agenda. It's easy to fall down the policy black hole – where invited participation in policy spaces gives the impression of access to power and making something happen when the opposite is true. We rarely evaluate real progress after the fact. The following distinctions between policy spaces from actual political wisdom around the world can help assess whether a policy space is strategic or not. Policy spaces can be strategic initially, and lose their value over time. We need to evaluate every site of action.

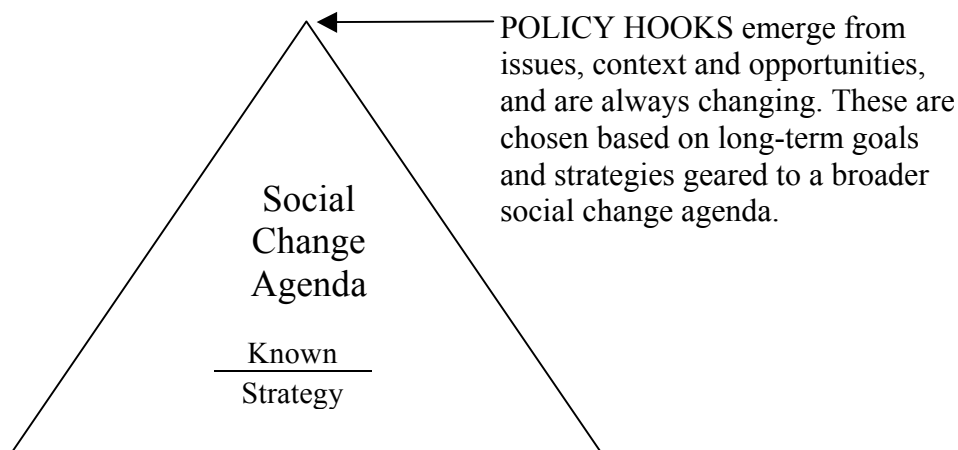
**Invited policy space** – refers to policy processes constructed by policy institutions where civil society is invited to participate, like the PRSP. Typically, the agenda is pre-established and not up for discussion. Also, it is uncertain whether the product of the consultation will be used in the final policy decisions. Nevertheless, invited spaces may create useful opportunities to learn about policy processes, develop direct relationships with policymakers and learn from debate. Often, transforming an invited space into a meaningful engagement beyond the relationship building and learning, requires tactics

that demonstrate clout, such as pressure from the outside. However, citizens' groups often behave like guests at a dinner party who don't like the food but don't want to offend the host.

**Claimed or created policy space** – refers to a moment of policy engagement that is created as a result of sustained political pressure. IN such cases, decisionmakers deems that the costs (political and economic depending on the tactics) of excluding key interests is greater than engagement, and the risk a legitimacy or credibility crisis if the policy agenda does not accommodate the 'outsiders'. Even 'created spaces' tend to eventually become more like 'invited' spaces over time as a result of cooptation or disconnection from the original intentions.

**Policy mirage –**

### Sites of Action



We may decide to focus on a single policy issue or set of policy issues in a given period of time, but the question is – how does it link to our broader agenda for change? So, for example, while we focus on agricultural subsidies as part of trade policy work, how does this fit with our broader agenda for change that links this to healthcare, education, sustainable livelihoods and basic rights?

The broader agenda is critical not only to guide our specific strategic choices about which policy battles to engage in and how, it's the core of what we can communicate to the broader public to excite and inspire people to join us in the process of change.

We need to change **power structures**, but also use the power structures to change the rules of engagement and the agenda. Civil society and trans-national corporations are battling for power and influence in government and other political arenas. We think the way to make change is through engagement with political processes/institutions (ie. the creating and participating in **contested space**), in contrast to doing, for example, consumer boycotts, which are useful for pressuring from the outside to create space.

Long-term change is accomplished by influencing/transforming governance and decision-making processes and outcomes.

**What creates change?**

- Mobilizing and influencing public opinion
- Leadership/elections
- Information and knowledge
- Money
- Participation/being present (I didn't comment on this at the time, but we should be really careful because the mere fact of being present (mute or not) is the World Bank's approach to participation – so it's really the combination of being present with clear demands and critiques)
- Numbers (networks, alliance, outreach, organizing)
- Good alternatives

**Factors to consider** when making strategic choices:

- Impact of policy engagement; the opportunity cost
- Urgency or need
- Balancing engagement/inside with resistance/outside
- Importance of relationships (both building and sustaining relationships)
- Capacity and resources
- Comparative advantage

Being strategic means making tough choices every day; we need to constantly ask ourselves in what ways are we dealing with visible/hidden/invisible power?

---