

Bridging the gap

between research and policy
in foodborne disease burden estimation

WHO Department of Food Safety and Zoonoses



World Health
Organization

Background

A series of food scares and crises - such as melamine tainted powdered infant formula or salmonella in peanut butter - have demonstrated, yet again, that food safety touches all our lives. As trade, travel and migration increase, so does the spread of dangerous contaminants and pathogens in

food across borders. Concerted action to reduce and control foodborne diseases is urgently needed to foster international public health security and prevent potentially devastating socio-economic consequences for both, developing and industrialized countries.

Challenges of bringing research into policy

To improve food safety, sound scientific evidence is key. Reliable epidemiological and other relevant data on foodborne diseases are needed to enable policy-makers to:

- appropriately allocate resources to foodborne disease prevention and control efforts;
- monitor and evaluate food safety measures;
- develop new food safety standards;
- assess the cost-effectiveness of interventions; and
- quantify the burden in monetary costs.

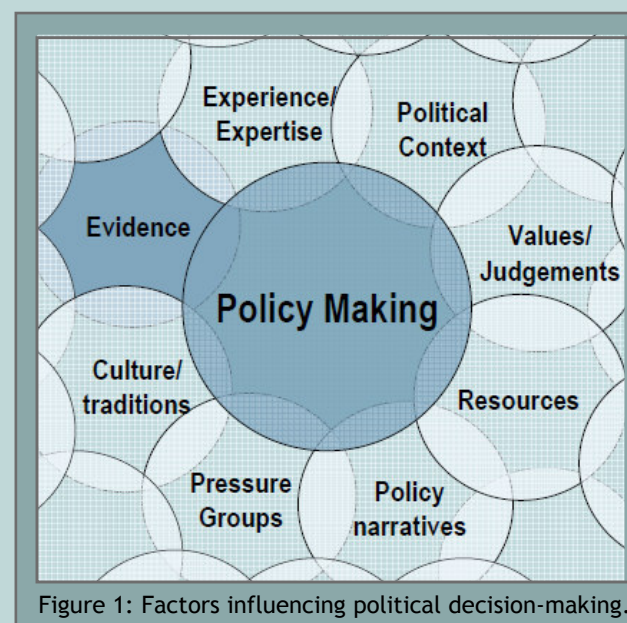
However, scientific evidence often plays only a minor role in policy-making. Decisions are influenced by a wide variety of factors (including policy-makers' values, experience and political judgement) as shown in figure 1.

Knowledge Translation: Bridging the gap between research & policy

Evaluations of research utilization have shown that robust linkages and interaction between researchers and policy-makers are crucial for research processes to influence policy.²

Acknowledging the need of institutionalis-

ing collaboration between researchers and policy-makers, the *WHO Initiative to Estimate the Global Burden of Foodborne Diseases* brought together food safety researchers and policy-makers in the recently established *Country Studies Task Force* of the Initiative's advisory body, the Food-



To change the status quo and catalyse evidence-informed decision making in food safety, the *WHO Initiative to Estimate the Global Burden of Foodborne Diseases*¹ will complement its research efforts with 'Knowledge Translation' activities.

¹ The Initiative aims to provide reliable information on the global extent and cost of foodborne diseases from all major causes by 2012. For more information on the Initiative: http://www.who.int/foodsafety/foodborne_disease/ferg/en/index.html

² Lomas J. 1997. Improving research dissemination and uptake in the health sector: beyond the sound of one hand clapping. McMaster University Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis. Policy Commentary C97-1, November 1997.

borne Disease Burden Epidemiology Reference Group (FERG). This Task Force is mandated to produce protocols that will enable countries to undertake their own burden of foodborne disease assessments while, at the same time, conducting policy situation analyses. The results of the policy situation analyses will feed back into the research cycle, thus ensuring that the burden information gathered is meaningful and useful to the end-users.

Additional tools and mechanisms will be developed to foster the research-policy link. These so-called 'knowledge translation' tools can be categorised into:

- **push efforts** (e.g. researchers effectively reaching out to policy-makers in e.g. tailoring their message according to user needs).
- **efforts to facilitate pull** (e.g. efforts to train users to access research evidence and enhance their critical appraisal skills).
- **exchange efforts** (e.g. establishment of mutual beneficial partnerships or national policy dialogue).

A strong country-level capacity building and training element will also be to the remit of the Task

Force.

The *Country Studies Task Force* will rely on many of the tools developed and field-tested by WHO's *Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EVIPNet)*³.

The Task Force will also benefit from close working relations with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), member of the steering group of the Initiative's advisory body FERG.

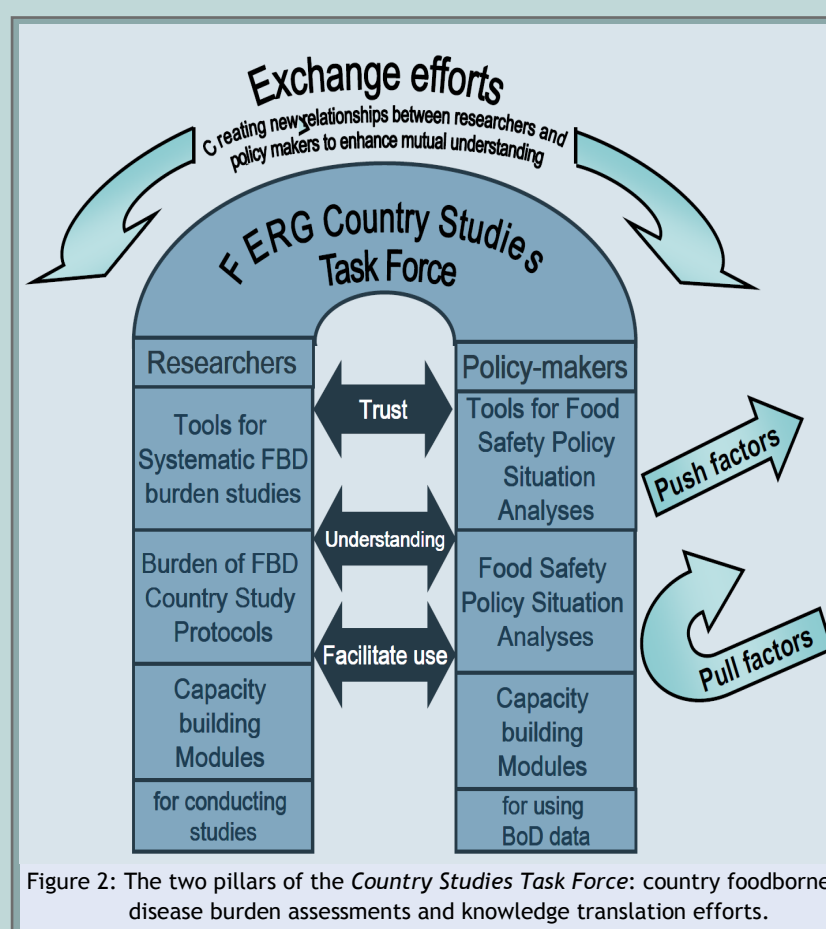


Figure 2: The two pillars of the *Country Studies Task Force*: country foodborne disease burden assessments and knowledge translation efforts.

Budgetary requirements

Although WHO continues to make a considerable financial investment in the *Country Studies Task Force*, additional funding for the proposed policy activities are required. Interested parties can engage with the work of the Country Studies Task Force in a number of ways, such as:

- By providing staff for training and country-level capacity building purposes.
- By linking the Task Force to relevant networks or study sites in their countries.
- By providing financial support to the Country Studies Task Force.

³ EVIPNet is a WHO initiative that encourages policy-makers in low and middle-income countries to use evidence generated by research. It is a collaborative network of researchers, policy makers and civil society to facilitate the use of high quality research evidence. <http://www.who.int/rpc/>

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