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ISSA Social Security Research and Policy Manual

MODULE 7

Other forms of evidence – and how to use them?

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ISSA SOCIAL SECURITY RESEARCH AND POLICY MANUAL

The *ISSA Social Security Research and Policy Manual* aims to provide a practical tool to develop and strengthen the research capacity of social security institutions in low- and middle-income countries, to assist managers and directors in social security institutions to improve policy design, and to support research and analysis staff to focus their research on relevant policy issues and to improve the quality and impact of their input.

The International Social Security Association is the world's leading international organization bringing together national social security administrations and agencies.
The ISSA provides information, research, expert advice and platforms for members to build and promote dynamic social security systems and policy worldwide.

All modules of the *ISSA Social Security Research and Policy Manual* are available for download on: www.issa.int

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List of Modules

Module 1: Research and social security decision-making
This module highlights how the impact of research will depend on the way it has been carried out and on the way its results are communicated. Social security organizations need to adapt constantly to realize improvements in organizational performance and programme outcomes. This adaptation may prove necessary in different circumstances, such as social security reform, policy implementation, administrative improvements and the extension of coverage. In this way, it is crucial to build a unifying framework for action to help social security administrations to better realize improvements in performance and desired programme outcomes.

Module 2: The policy-research relationship
This module expounds on how the policy-research relationship functions in social security institutions. Good information is at the heart of all good decision-making. Though the policy-research relationship is challenging, the benefits of a productive relationship more than repay the investment in developing it. Acknowledgement of the different roles and cultures of policy-maker and researcher – and the constraints and opportunities of each – is crucial for a constructive working relationship.

Module 3: Management of the research process
This module discusses the various stages in the management of the research process. An organization needs to know how it can adapt itself to make the whole process of procuring research and using research findings much simpler. This, in turn, will help to ensure that the research delivers useful outputs and that money is well-spent.

Module 4: Statistical research on social security
This module addresses statistical research on social security, including the indicators and data system, the various categories of data required as well the main collection and storage techniques. For achieving good governance, appropriate indicators and accurate, up-to-date and complete data are indispensable. Without them, the design, management, monitoring and reform of social security systems will not work properly.

Module 5: Actuarial research into the future performance of social security
This module focuses on actuarial research, encompassing the questions to be investigated, modelling, social budgets and various actuarial models. Quantitative actuarial research can provide plausible answers to many questions about future national social protection schemes as: How will future income and expenditures of the scheme develop? How does the scheme react to potential future demographic and economic developments? What are the financing and income replacement implications of proposed reforms?

Module 6: Qualitative research
This module outlines the basic concepts, practicalities as well as a variety of tools of qualitative research. Qualitative research is a uniquely useful method of finding out about people, what they think, feel, hope, believe and understand. It enables us to explore beneath the surface and to consider why people do what they do, think how they think and behave the way they behave.

Module 7: Other forms of evidence – and how to use them?
This module covers inclusive approaches to policy-making and other forms of evidence and the ways to use them. While quantitative sources of data are useful in producing some forms of evidence, qualitative sources play an important role, including helping to produce policies that work in practice. Inclusive and " joined up" approaches to policy-making can play an important role in helping policy-makers devise more appropriate policies and achieve more effective policy outcomes.

Module 8: Evaluation research on social security
This module describes the role of diverse types of evaluations in social security research. Good programme and policy evaluations assess the performance of programmes and policies, measure their impacts on individuals, families, communities and national development goals, and document the successes achieved, or the shortcomings. With evaluation information, policy-makers and programme level decision-makers are able to direct limited resources to where they are most needed and most effective for their contributing members and the wider communities.

7.1 Introduction

This module will cover *inclusive approaches* to policy-making; other sources of evidence; collecting and drawing on these sources of evidence; evaluating different sources of evidence; and forward-looking policy-making.

The ideas presented here highlight the potential benefits to policy-makers of drawing upon different forms of evidence, and the discussion sets out some of the key ideas relevant to each area.

The forms of research and analysis discussed in the other methodological sections of this Guide do not cover all sources of evidence available to policy-makers. There are a number of other sources which are also important and which can help policy-makers at all stages of the policy process.

It is important to recognize that the other forms of evidence considered here draw upon both *quantitative and qualitative* approaches and methods, and that both can produce robust sources of evidence.

Whilst quantitative sources of data are useful in producing some forms of evidence, qualitative sources play an important role, including helping to produce policies that work in practice. Any policy, whether it is concerned with pensions, social security or employment, needs to be underpinned by a clear understanding of people's *motivations and attitudes* to the issues. Robust qualitative research can provide this.

A consideration of the type of evidence being used and whether it is appropriate for that purpose is therefore necessary. Each form of evidence should be judged on its own merits. Policy-makers need to distinguish not only between quantitative and qualitative forms of evidence, but also within these categories, since each particular form is likely to have strengths as well as limitations.

Qualitative forms of evidence, for example, might usefully make a distinction between *consultation* (which is valuable in obtaining the views of a particular population or group, but which may not be representative because respondents self-select themselves by choosing whether or not to participate) and more robust forms of research, such as *public opinion surveys* and *citizens' panels*.

Inclusive and "*joined up*" approaches to policy-making can play an important role in helping policy-makers devise more appropriate policies and achieve more effective policy outcomes.

The use of these other sources of evidence is important for policy-makers and researchers. However, there are difficulties in making judgements about the value and relevance of different sources, which is one of the challenges for evidence-based policy-making and why it is necessary to distinguish between different sources of evidence and to be clear about the contribution each can make.

It may also be possible and desirable to use more than one form of evidence, in order to produce more robust approaches and help address policy gaps and failures.

Social science rarely gives clear-cut answers. In addition, policy-makers will rarely, if ever, have *full* knowledge on which to base decisions. There is sometimes an assumption that evidence leads to policies that work and that it is possible to understand how policies will impact on outcomes, but this is not always the case. What works in one country, at one point in time, or in one policy area, may not work in another.

Also, policy decisions are rarely based purely on rational evidence: *political considerations*, *culture*, *values*, *costs* and the role and influence of *public opinion* and the *media* also play a part.

7.2 Inclusive approaches to policy-making

What is an inclusive approach to policy-making?

An inclusive approach ensures that policy-makers take account of the impact of policies on different groups in society by *listening* to a wide range of voices, taking into account the views expressed.

It can involve the *participation* and/or *consultation* of individuals, groups, institutions, associations and organizations. These might be consumers, users, practitioners, stakeholders, citizens, other policy-makers, academics, politicians, "experts" and pressure or interest groups.

It is *"joined up"*, emphasizing the need for good communication both within and among organizations, institutions, departments, research centres and bodies, so that when policy is developed it *takes account* of what is already happening, does not overlap, or repeat unnecessarily, and is built around *shared goals*.

Why might social security institutions benefit from taking an inclusive approach?

Involving citizens alongside relevant groups and organizations and asking them for their views has the potential to improve both the policy-making process and potentially policy outcomes. The wide range of methods available to policy-makers to do this means that specific types of participation can be tailored to the aims and objectives of policy.

An inclusive approach potentially reduces problems with implementation; results can be used to inform policy; and outcomes are more relevant to target populations.

A wide variety of approaches to inclusive policy-making exist[1], and it is important to be clear about the robustness of the forms of evidence used. Many of these forms generally come under the term "participation". These can range from consultation, where policy-makers simply ask for and receive feedback on, for example, a pre-existing policy proposal, to more robust qualitative research through focus groups, public opinion surveys, citizens' panels and in-depth qualitative interviews. These approaches may also involve different degrees of citizen and stakeholder *empowerment*.

7.2.1 Participation

There are many different types of participation. The aims and objectives of participation must be clear to all those involved at the outset. If not, there is potential for confusion which may undermine the ability of the initiative to produce successful outcomes. It may also affect the extent to which participants are willing to get involved in future participatory initiatives.

Policy-makers need to ask the right questions. They have to be clear on:

- who it is they want to involve;
- why it is they want to involve them;
- which methods are most appropriate to fulfil the set aims and objectives;
- whether any groups are being excluded and, if so, why.

Participants need to know:

- why they are being asked to take part, for example, to provide a view on how a particular policy is working in practice;
- whether they are participating to represent themselves or to represent the views of a group or organization;
- in what ways their views will be canvassed – for example, through participating in an interview, taking part in a focus group or completing a written or online questionnaire;

1. See Bochel and Evans (2007).

- what they can expect in return – nothing at all, a meeting or written feedback to explain what particular policy options were selected and why;
- the limits to their participation so that they do not have unrealistic expectations of what their involvement can achieve.

7.2.2 Consultation

This is effectively a subset of participation. It has the potential to inform and influence decisions. Examples include written consultation exercises and questionnaires. This approach does not give participants any decision-making power and may not include any feedback to those who have taken part.

7.2.3 Impact assessment

This is a useful policy-making tool. It recognizes that individuals and groups will have different needs, but also that policies will impact on particular groups differently. Policies which are developed using impact assessment may take into account a whole range of factors including: disability, gender, ethnic, rural and urban dimensions, as well as the views of wider stakeholders. It has the potential to be more inclusive of "hard to reach" groups whose views are less likely to be heard in the policy process, and it also may give policy-makers a greater understanding of what the impacts on particular groups might be.

7.3 Other sources of evidence

There are a variety of different forms of evidence, some qualitative, some quantitative. A range of these are discussed below.

Public opinion

Policies frequently depend on consensus to be effective, so knowledge of what the public as a whole – or particular sections of the public – think is important. Such opinions are not necessarily evidence-based, and people are capable of holding inconsistent views. It is important for policy-makers to be aware of this. However, this does not mean that public opinion is not a valuable source of evidence, especially when used in conjunction with other sources of evidence.

Expert views

There are different types of "expert". These include:

- those who have spent years studying or working in a particular field, perhaps distinguished academics, for example;
- senior managers who may be "experts" by virtue of their long experience;
- non-traditional "experts" such as service users and local people who can contribute knowledge from a different perspective.

All of these types are valuable, but they will also have their limitations. It is worthwhile noting that "experts" do not always agree. This is generally a good thing, since it ensures that a wider range of view-points on particular issues are available for policy-makers and researchers to consider when devising policy, although it may also make the process more time consuming.

Practitioner views

Those responsible for administering a service will have valuable insights into what happens "on the ground" and in various parts of the delivery chain. Policies will only work if they are delivered as intended. This is why it is important to consult, listen to and act on what practitioners have to say at the formulation, implementation and evaluation stages. They can help in identifying potential problems which can then be fed back into the redesign of the policy process.

Consumer views

Those who are in a *target group* for a policy measure or have direct experience of the service or policy measure may have useful perceptions on how the policy will be understood by consumers or how it works or will work in practice. Policies often have unintended consequences or fail to work as intended; consumers can often articulate this.

Pressure and interest group views

These are groups that seek to influence policy-makers and the direction of policy (via, for example, lobbying and the media) in order to promote their own cause. They will bring a different perspective to the policy process, which is coloured by the interests of their particular group. Policy-makers can make use of this, whilst recognizing that it is a particular perspective. These groups may also undertake their own research and thus act as an information source for policy-makers.

Business, professional, employer and trade union views

Businesses, professionals, employers and trade unions can seek to represent the interests of their members in the policy process by exerting pressure on those involved in the decision-making. They may aim to influence the type of issues on the agenda. They may, in some respects, be "experts".

7.3.1 Mediating factors

Policy-makers, researchers and bureaucrats need to take account of the mediating factors because they influence views and may even limit what is possible. These factors include political views, media, customs and values, costs and economic climate.

Political views

All political parties have their own values and ideologies, as do other groups. These may or may not be fully evidence-based, but if a particular view or policy approach is important to those who are likely to be able to exercise power, it needs to be considered. Politicians also often have to take into consideration more and different realities than do researchers. Therefore, to expect a perfect link between research and policy decisions would be naive and unrealistic.

Media

The media (television, newspapers, internet, radio, and so on) play a role in influencing a whole range of these other sources of evidence. They help set the agenda. They are not necessarily a neutral influence. The influence of the media may be affected by factors such as the intensity of media coverage of a particular issue, the existence of alternative sources of information, the extent to which an issue can be politicized along political party lines or associated with powerful groups, and the level of public interest.

Customs and values

People have particular ways of seeing the world and of behaving. These will influence both their perceptions of and responses to a particular policy measure; thus, it is important to get beneath the factual and also the attitudinal. With globalization, some have argued that there has been a tendency for societies to grow more alike. This can be seen as convergence of policy goals, content, instruments, outcomes and style (Bennett, 1991).

Costs

Virtually all policies have a price tag of some sort. Even if a policy is said to be "zero cost", it may mean that programmes elsewhere have to be cut to fund it. Whether that price is worth paying will depend on who is making the judgement (issues of self-interest, such as professional or organizational, may come into play here), the resources available, how high a priority the policy is deemed to be, and

whether it is judged to represent value for money. Policies grounded in robust data/knowledge have the potential to work better. Thus investing resources in research is vital.

Economic climate

The economic climate will affect the level of resources available to invest in research, which in turn will affect the level and quality of information available to policy-makers on which to base their decisions. It will also impact on the type of research methods to be employed (some are more time consuming and costly than others) and on the actual policies that can be afforded.

7.4 Collecting and drawing on these sources of evidence

This section looks at some of the different methods and approaches in gathering evidence to support policy and decision-making. The discussion here is broadly divided into consultative approaches and more robust research methods.[2]

7.4.1 Consultative approaches

Written consultation exercise

These exercises place emphasis on giving all those within a particular target population a chance to comment on an issue or policy.

- *Strengths*: Good for obtaining views on potentially complex policy proposals from relevant stakeholders and individuals.
- *Weaknesses*: Only gains the views of those who choose to respond to the exercise and may exclude the views of those groups or individuals who are "hard to reach".

Open/public meetings

An open invitation is extended to any member of the public to attend a meeting in order to find out about a particular issue. This may be done via newspaper adverts, local magazines, local radio and television, etc.

- *Strengths*: Demonstrates an open and transparent approach to policy-making and enables the organizers to present information and to respond to any questions.
- *Weaknesses*: Likely to only reach smaller numbers and depends who attends as to which views get listened to. Not representative in any way.

Citizens' juries

A group of 12–16 citizens recruited from a particular section of the population is brought together, usually for a number of days, to discuss a particular policy issue. Citizens receive evidence and are guided by trained facilitators.

- *Strengths*: Enables policy-makers to get an in-depth understanding of public perceptions.
- *Weaknesses*: Issues around selection and representation of participants may not have been thought through.

Workshops

An interactive session or sessions lasting up to two days is held which allows policy-makers and researchers to engage in a dialogue with citizens or stakeholders on a specific issue.

2. Sections 7.4.1, 7.4.2 and 7.4.3 are adapted from Cabinet Office (2002), pp. 44-50.

- *Strengths*: Provides an opportunity to explore an issue in depth.
- *Weaknesses*: It is not clear how participants are selected; nor is the degree of representativeness of the target population.

Deliberative polls

Such policies are used to measure the opinions of citizens before and after they have had the opportunity to become informed – via briefings with experts, reading and discussion – about a particular issue.

- *Strengths*: Allows a larger number of people (250–600) to express an informed view on a particular topic and they are selected to participate as a representative sample of the population.
- *Weaknesses*: As people become more informed, they may become less "typical" of the population.

Consensus conferences

A panel of between 10 and 20 people, recruited by random selection techniques, develop an understanding of a specific topic through briefing materials and through questioning experts or witnesses. They set out their views in a public session at the conference.

- *Strengths*: Allows the panel to be the key actor, deciding which issues to focus on, the selection of witnesses, and to come to its own conclusions; policy-making is therefore open to greater public scrutiny.
- *Weaknesses*: Panels are too small to be statistically representative.

Issue forums

The forums are ongoing bodies with regular meetings which focus on a particular topic or issue.

- *Strengths*: Enables ongoing dialogue with participants, particularly with regard to the formulation of policies.
- *Weaknesses*: Involvement may mean that the views of participants become less "typical" as they become more informed.

Working groups

These involve different groups such as social security organizations, pressure groups, welfare bodies, researchers, policy-makers, "experts" of all types, representatives from civil society and citizens in developing policy.

- *Strengths*: Develops policy by drawing on a range of "expert" sources.
- *Weaknesses*: Only the views of those who are selected to participate will be represented.

Visioning exercises

Stakeholders take part in a structured meeting, where they develop a shared vision for the future and agree to action to achieve this.

- *Strengths*: Helps to create consensus among a range of different stakeholders.
- *Weaknesses*: Only the views of those stakeholders who have been asked to participate are represented.

7.4.2 Other approaches

Impact assessments

The aim of this approach is to improve both the quality of the policy process and the quality of policy outcomes. It should take place at the stage where policy-makers are beginning to think about devising a policy proposal.

There are a variety of approaches, but most involve policy-makers working through a structured checklist in order to assess the possible impacts and outcomes of a particular policy on target groups.

Types of impact assessment include *regulatory impact assessment* (RIA), *health impact assessment* (HIA) and *environmental impact assessment* (EIA). When undertaken properly, an impact assessment can be both time consuming and costly. Because of this, there is a risk that policy-makers will only use it in a superficial way.

Policy transfers

These transfers are the adoption of programmes or policies from one state or organization by another. This can take place internally, within a country, or externally, from other states or organizations.

Social security organizations confront many common policy problems, so it makes sense to utilize existing research and experience. This means that policy-makers do not have to start from scratch when confronted with a policy problem, but can look to other organizations or states to see how they have dealt with a similar policy problem.

It is necessary when transferring a policy from elsewhere to take a range of factors into consideration. These include: the likely impact on the target population; the level of resources available; cultural differences; the fact that policies are being transferred from and to like institutions and that a continuous process of evaluation takes place, so that new programmes or policies can be adapted if necessary.

Lesson learning

Lesson learning means drawing lessons from the experiences of others. It is a dimension of *policy transfer*. Policy-makers can learn lessons from other organizations, institutions, states and individuals in respect of current and past policies. This might be learning what not to do by observing the mistakes of others, as well as learning what to do.

It is therefore important that, when drawing on the experiences of others, to not only talk and listen to a wide range of both traditional "experts" and non-traditional "experts", such as local people or users of services, but also to take into account issues around the transfer of policy (see *Policy transfer* above).

7.4.3 Research methods

Good qualitative research is robust. For example, proper *purposive sampling* will generate a full range and diversity of views. It can therefore be a valuable tool for exploring attitudes, understanding beliefs and behaviour.

Public opinion surveys

Such surveys aim to obtain information from a representative sample of the population. There are different forms of surveys: for example, self-completion questionnaires, and questionnaires and checklists administered by an interviewer.

- *Strengths*: A relatively quick and cheap method of collecting data.
- *Weaknesses*: A tendency to produce numerical data which may not always explain the feelings and values that underpin the views expressed.

Focus groups

These groups are led by a trained *facilitator*. They bring together a small group of people (typically 8–10) to discuss a particular issue.

- *Strengths*: They enable issues to be explored in greater depth.
- *Weaknesses*: Views obtained are based on small numbers of people and potentially raise issues around selection and representation.

Reconvening groups

These groups are similar to focus groups except that participants are invited to convene on more than one occasion. They are given information to read, time to debate the topic under discussion with others outside the group and time to reflect and refine their views.

- *Strengths*: Enables participants to develop their thinking.
- *Weaknesses*: As with focus groups, this method can raise issues around the selection and representation of the participants.

Citizens' panels

Citizens' panels are made up of a statistically representative sample of the population (ranging from 500 to 5,000 people). Their views are sought on a regular basis using methods such as interviews, focus groups and surveys.

- *Strengths*: Panels are statistically representative.
- *Weaknesses*: The representativeness of panels can be affected by attrition.

In-depth qualitative interviews

These interviews are good for gaining people's opinions, attitudes and experiences. They can be semi-structured or unstructured.

- *Strengths*: Generate rich in-depth material and enable researchers to gain a fuller understanding of the participant's perspective.
- *Weaknesses*: Time consuming and generate large volumes of data, which require analysis; they may not be statistically representative.

Action research

This type of research is a participatory practical problem-solving approach. Researchers, policy-makers, community groups and individuals are actively involved in identifying a problem, which they then work towards improving over a period of time. It is a robust approach and requires systematic planning. The methods for gathering information will depend on the nature of the information required. Monitoring and evaluation of the policy change are key aspects of this.

- *Strengths*: Can help in providing practical solutions to communities.
- *Weaknesses*: Time consuming and requires skilled management of the process.

Case studies

These are in-depth studies which may be on a particular issue, community, group, household, individual, policy or event. They may involve in-depth interviews and observations, as well as other methods appropriate for the particular task. Case studies can be a means of identifying key issues for further investigation or may be a one-off exercise to illuminate how, for example, the implementation of a policy affects a group or organization. They are frequently associated with ethnographic approaches.

- *Strengths*: They provide rich data to illuminate the policy or issue under investigation.
- *Weaknesses*: They cannot make any claims to be representative. The information gained cannot be generalized to a wider population or area.

Appreciative inquiries

These inquiries seek to engage with the research environment to promote change. They emphasize what is best about a situation or organization, in order to understand the process underpinning this and to build upon these positive aspects.

- *Strengths*: This method *builds upon what works*. It can be a way of contributing to community development and may involve harder-to-reach groups in the process.
- *Weaknesses*: The lack of direct concern with problems is sometimes viewed as a shortcoming.

Delphi techniques

These are structured group interview techniques for seeking consensus about policy ideas and proposals. After a flow of information, ideas and analysis, a view is fed back for further discussion and ultimately a judgement.

- *Strengths*: This method is an iterative process which provides a good way of developing understanding as the research progresses.
- *Weaknesses*: It is dependent upon the ability of the group to come to some degree of consensus.

7.5 Evaluating different sources of evidence

The previous section has highlighted the range of different sources of "evidence" that can be called upon. However, evaluating the quality of such evidence and the weight that should be given to it is not without problems, with the very idea of what constitutes "evidence" subject to different interpretations.

The process of *triangulation*, using a range of different sources of evidence, may be helpful here because it can provide different perspectives which together create a fuller and potentially more robust picture. Nevertheless, there are a variety of assessments that might be made to help assist in evaluating these sources.

- Are policy-makers asking the right questions?
- How directly does the evidence gathered relate to the questions being asked?
- How appropriate are the methods used, and do they fit with the aims and objectives of the policy proposal? (The policy-makers need to be clear at the outset what the aims and objectives of the participatory exercise are, and they have to think about this when selecting methods and approaches.)
- Which groups have been included in the policy process, and have any groups been excluded or ignored?
  - Why have particular groups, individuals and organizations, as opposed to others, been included in the policy process?
  - Why is it important to listen to and to take into consideration the views of these groups?
  - How will their views help inform the policy process?
  - Have any groups been excluded from the process, and if so why is this? (The exclusion of people from participating in the policy process, for whatever reason, may have important effects and mean that the policy does not fully meet the intended aims.)

- Who has participated?
  - Have the full range of "voices" been included and listened to?
  - Does this include people from "hard-to-reach" groups?
  - Are a wide range of views being accessed?
- Have views been represented fairly/accurately?
  - How representative of the target population are the people who participate?
  - Are those who participate clear whether they are participating to represent their own views or the views of particular groups or organizations?
- How are the views/data collected used?
  - Who decides what to use and what to discard?
  - How is the evidence interpreted? (This could have consequences for the policy process.)
  - Is the selection or exclusion of evidence based on robust decision-making structures?

At a more general level, it is important to reflect upon some of the "softer" ideas:
- their potential impact on policy-making, implementation and outcomes;
- the circularity of the policy process. The sources of evidence contribute to policy which is evidence-based. This is policy which has been informed by evidence. Programmes or policies that are successful can provide evidence of "what works" in practice;
- the legitimacy of policy decisions;
- the transparency of the decision-making process.

7.6 A long-term view? Forward-looking policy-making

What is forward-looking policy-making?

Forward-looking policy-making involves understanding issues which might affect populations ten, twenty or even more years into the future and the sort of timescales over which the impacts of changes to pensions or social security arrangements take effect.

Forward-looking policy-making therefore involves a consideration of decisions which will affect the lives of future generations. However, it is not simply about predicting the future. A forward-looking approach can help create a greater awareness of the context within which decisions are made. It can also help policy-makers understand possible alternative futures, help develop the capacity for change, and even encourage attempts to seek to shape the future (Bochel and Shaxson (2007).
- *Benefits*: This is strongly linked to "rational" approaches to the policy process. It arguably should be, but is not necessarily of itself, inclusive. It can help policy-makers make judgements about the assessment and management of risks.
- *Drawbacks*: While evidence can be problematic in short-term policy-making, considering what constitutes robust "evidence" in future work raises additional questions. There may also be tensions between short-term political imperatives and longer-term policy objectives, and it is necessary to be aware of and manage these.

Techniques

Approaches used to inform forward-looking policy-making can be broadly divided into projections and extrapolations from current trends and judgements or predictions about the future.
- Projections. These can involve:
  - *Extrapolation* – using past and present data, such as the age of populations, to forecast future developments. However, the starting point, the time period, and the measures used may affect both the shape and trajectory of a forecast.

- *Modelling* – such as models of states' economies, which set out a series of assumptions based upon available knowledge and theoretical models, allowing a variety of options to be developed, tested and compared.

Strengths: These approaches can help policy-makers gauge levels of uncertainty and risk in given situations.
Weaknesses: Models are unable to take into account the fact that policy decisions continue to be affected by *values*, *political imperatives* and *bureaucratic and other factors*.

- Judgemental techniques. These can include:
  - *Scenario writing* – developing plausible descriptions of possible futures can help to understand them and the possible consequences of different choices;
  - *Delphi analysis;*
  - *Cross-impact analysis* – developing a list of events and possible outcomes which are then assessed by a panel of experts who consider what might happen and in what sequence. This can be helpful in showing how one situation might impact upon another.

Strengths: These techniques can have a value in helping to explore relationships or examining developments that might not be considered by more numerically based analyses.
Weaknesses: There is no way of estimating their likely accuracy.

In reality, no method – and in particular *no individual approach* – can guarantee an accurate picture of the future. Instead, arguably the major benefit is the *process of thinking* about the future and the skills and perspectives that can emerge from it, including the *ability to respond to uncertainty and change* and to consider how the future might be shaped (Bochel and Shaxson, 2007).

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