Closing the gap between evidence construction and policy impact.

Summary

- The authors discuss the necessity of embracing a broader view of what constitutes evidence as a pre-requisite for effective policy making.
- An iterative process of mapping, analysis, visualisation and sharing (MASV cycle) in the evidence production is suggested as a pathway to lead a policy ready for implementation.
- They conclude that to help build a more effective science–policy interface, trust between scientists, government and the public should be established.

Scientific evidence has never before been more important to address challenges like climate change, malnutrition, poverty, ageing, etc. Because of this, science advisors and advisory bodies have increased in recent times. However, scientific research defines problems, but often does not identify policy-acceptable, scalable and meaningful solutions. On the other hand, scientists could be non-effective in communicating their findings to audiences outside academia and frequently hold naïve policy assumptions. There is also a view in society that scientific investigation is not clear, elitist and outside the public sphere. All this has sprout intense debate over expertise, evidence and 'post-truth' politics.

The authors suggest that it might be useful for scientist to adopt a common methodology in order to produce evidence, considering that not only science provides solutions. But the political, cultural, economic and social dimensions of these issues should be also considered since these could have validity and worth for society. For example, the continued EU embargo on the use of food from genetically modified (GM) crops shows a serious disconnect between public opinion and the scientific evidence showing minimal environmental and health risks. Another example of the consequences of working with Science facts only is the time lag between the science that proved that greenhouse gas emissions produce climate change and the beginning of climate action in the COP21 Paris Agreement. This illustrates the difficulty of evidence-based policy making.

The question often asked is "can we improve the ways in which scientific evidence is constructed, integrated and communicated, so it can contribute more effectively, efficiently and quickly to policy formulation?" Horton & Brown methodology suggests starting by considering that ideas for a policy intervention of a particular societal problem may come from a variety of organisations and suggest an integrated process called MASV (Map, Analyse, Visualise and Share) Fig 1. This process follows the identification of a particular problem, the consultation, debate, deliberation, analysis, testing and evaluation of all the iterations needed for the stakeholders to clearly understand the evidence. It is worth noticing that hese processes allow to build trust.

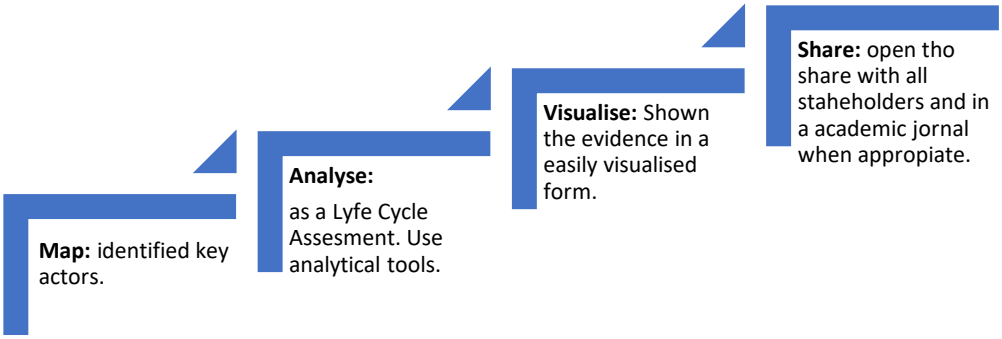

Fig. 1 MASV Process

Reviewed from: Integrating evidence, politics and society: a methodology for the science–policy interface by Peter Horton & Garrett W. Brown.